

# **CHAPTER FIVE - ENVIRONMENT AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT**

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## **CHAPTER FIVE-A: ENVIRONMENT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Protecting natural environmental systems and sensitive areas within the City of Sequim and its Urban Growth Area is still an essential component of maintaining a high quality of life for our community. How the City and its residents tend to that environment has a great deal to do with the quality of life for all of us who live in this greater community of the Sequim-Dungeness Valley.

A City that requires development practices to preserve and protect its natural resources, local ecosystems and native habitats will ensure the health and well-being of that community. Carefully crafted environmental and land use regulations can actually enhance development opportunities, while protecting the “small town and rural atmosphere” of this City. These goals should not be considered to be mutually exclusive or even incompatible with the development goals of our landowners and business owners.

Project proponents can look at the preservation of wetlands, streams, and lush, native vegetation, and protection of the fish and wildlife that inhabit [these] wetlands, streams and vegetative buffers as amenities for their development, and also recognize that the preservation of natural ecological systems can:

- Reduce costs to the community by establishing stormwater management systems, incorporating low impact development (LID) techniques and project designs sensitive to the natural landscape.
- Reduce future utilities costs by protecting groundwater supplies and ensuring clean and plentiful water for the future.
- Provide greenbelts and interconnected open space, preserve habitat and maintain a natural diversity in the Sequim area through the provision of streamside and wetland buffers, and ensuring the protection of unstable slopes and ravines.
- Encourage developers to consider using low impact development (LID) techniques where appropriate. These LID methodologies are designed to minimize the impact of construction on the surrounding natural environment. They include such components and construction processes as reducing street widths (less impervious surface) using bio-swales/rain gardens instead of concrete/asphalt gutters and less “hard-scape” more plantings.

## CRITICAL AREAS PROTECTION

The Growth Management Act (GMA), acknowledging the statewide importance of maintaining natural systems, mandated that Cities and Counties would implement protections for wetlands, steep slopes, stream corridors, floodplains and aquifer recharge areas. In addition, communities were given the opportunity to identify locally significant plant and animal species, and unique natural features, which were environmentally important, and should be preserved when and where feasible.

The Growth Management Act has a goal of protecting critical areas, but in a manner that also does the following:

- a. encourages urban growth;
- b. reduces sprawl
- c. provides [efficient] transportation systems
- d. assures availability of affordable housing
- e. gives support for economic development; protects property rights;
- f. ensures efficient regulatory processing of permits;
- g. provides for natural resource industries [where appropriate];
- h. allows for adequate open space for recreation;
- i. protects the environment;
- j. invites citizen participation;
- k. offers adequate public facilities and services;
- l. secures historic and cultural preservation.

The Growth Management Act also requires the Land Use Element of the *City of Sequim's Comprehensive Plan* include policies that address water quality and runoff. The GMA further requires the *Comprehensive Plan* to include a Capital Facilities Element and define within it and within the Utilities Element storm drainage systems as part of "public facilities." These measures, when integrated with the goals and policies of this Chapter are intended to provide for the long-term protection of environmentally sensitive areas and natural systems within the City of Sequim and its Urban Growth Area.

The "Wetlands Protection" (Section 18.70) and the "Environmentally Sensitive Areas Protection" (Section 18.80) sections of the Sequim Municipal Code have identified the following natural systems for protection:

1. Geologically Hazardous Areas
2. Streams and Stream Corridor.
3. Frequently-Flooded Corridors
4. Wetlands
5. Significant Fish and Wildlife Habitat Areas
6. Locally Unique Features

## **1. GEOLOGICALLY HAZARDOUS AREAS**

Geologically hazardous areas include areas susceptible to landslide, erosion, earthquake or other geological events. Because of their susceptibility, these areas may not be suitable for new development. In many cases, hazards can be reduced or mitigated by engineering, design or modified construction practices.

*Landslide* is a rapid down slope movement of a mass of material such as rocks, soil, or other debris. The speed and distance of movement, as well as the amount of material, vary greatly and depend on a combination of geologic, topographic and hydrologic factors. Especially susceptible to landslide hazards are marine bluffs and unconsolidated glacial deposits on steep hillsides (greater than 40 percent).

*Erosion* is a natural process in which the land surface is worn away by the action of water, wind, ice or other geologic processes. The most common cause of erosion is water falling or flowing across the land. Factors contributing to erosion hazard are soil type and slope. Erosion hazards generally occur on erosive soils where slopes exceed 15 percent.

*Seismic Hazards* occur in areas subject to severe risk of earthquake damage as a result of seismic movement, seismically-induced settlement or soil liquefaction. These areas include soils containing high organic content (e.g., wetland soils), areas of loose sand and gravel, artificial fills, landslide deposits, and fine-grained soils with high water tables.

## **2. STREAMS AND STREAM CORRIDORS**

Streams that flow through our community, and that may be adversely impacted by development within the City, include Bell Creek, Johnson Creek and Guerin Creek. All three creeks have varying widths for their buffer zones, which protect the streams and the riparian habitats, as well as the habitat for other wildlife.

Development near these stream corridors, and their related buffers is restricted according to the Sequim Municipal Code, Development Regulations and this *Comprehensive Plan*. The Departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, and the Puget Sound Action Team also provide guidance and regulation as to how development can and should occur near these valuable wetlands.

## **3. FREQUENTLY-FLOODED AREAS**

Frequently-flooded areas include those lands located in the floodplain that may be subject to a one-percent or greater chance of flooding in any given year (the 100-year storm event). These areas are found near streams, rivers, lakes coastal areas and wetlands. Within the City of Sequim, floodplains are located primarily along the Bell Creek corridor. Floodplain locations and sizes are defined by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

## **4. WETLANDS**

Wetlands are natural ecosystems, which serve a number of important beneficial functions. They assist in reducing erosion, siltation, flooding, and ground and surface water pollution. Wetlands provide habitat for wildlife, plants, and fish. They may also assist in

recharging groundwater supplies. In addition, wetlands provide opportunities for recreation and education.

In wetlands, the soil is at least periodically saturated or covered with water. These water conditions support special kinds of plants called *hydrophytes* (Greek for "water loving"). Soils that have been saturated for a sufficient length of time develop special properties, and are called *hydric*. In order to be classified a "wetland," an area must exhibit all three of the following characteristics:

- A. Inundation or saturation of the soil by water.
- B. The presence of wetland plants (hydrophytes).
- C. The presence of hydric soils.

The Washington State Department of Ecology (DOE) and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) also regulate wetlands within the City of Sequim.

## **5. SIGNIFICANT FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT AREAS**

Loss of wetlands, riparian areas and adjacent fields may adversely affect the overall number and variety of wildlife and waterfowl. Loss of riparian vegetation could also adversely affect migrating or nesting areas. Plant and animal species can also be adversely impacted by erosion and sedimentation of streams, coastal waters and wetlands. Shoreline and related over-water development can harm valuable kelp and eelgrass beds.

The impacts of development to habitat include the replacement of woodlands, pastures and other undeveloped areas with buildings, roads, parking lots, landscaping, and other structures. Depending on the location, density and intensity of uses, this may result in the removal and displacement of habitat and cause some wildlife species to relocate to other areas. Since most habitats are assumed to be at or near their carrying capacity, displaced animals may perish.

The City's Design Standards, Development Regulations and the Sequim Municipal Code provide adequate guidance for the property owner and the developer on how to protect the local environments that they may be developing. Construction methods are also spelled out to prevent any debris and detritus to erode offsite.

## **6. LOCALLY UNIQUE FEATURES AND SPECIES OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE.**

Locally unique features are those features and/or landforms that are important to the character of the city. Recognition and preservation of biological species of regional significance is an essential ingredient to the preservation of the community's regional identity and local character. These features may contain one or more critical areas.

Locally unique features in the Sequim – Dungeness Valley region include ravines, marine bluffs and beaches, and "locally-significant" biological species such as Brittle Prickly Pear Cactus, Garry Oaks and Roosevelt Elk.

Development of parcels proximate to these locally-unique features can result in disruption of the natural functioning or region-wide surface drainage systems and the aquatic and terrestrial wildlife that depend on any of these habitats. There may be a potential for disruption of the natural long-shore drift process ( a system of ebb and flows cause by tidal movements along shorelines) that helps maintain existing tideland beach systems, if development practices called out in the Sequim Municipal Code are not followed.

Development of locally-significant features also may cause the loss of natural greenbelts that serve to enhance the visual character of the community, and may reduce opportunities for expansions of the City's trail systems and other forms of passive recreation.

Because of the GMA mandate to create denser residential community within the City, it is increasingly difficult to protect and accommodate the large mammals that may migrate through the area. The City has continued to work with Federal, State, and Tribal governments and various organizations that have region-wide responsibility for the protection of these various species, and has supported the efforts of the Dungeness Elk Working Team (DEWT).

The DEWT is an advisory committee to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe. It is charged with making recommendations as to the future disposition of the local herd of elk to the two co-managers: the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe. The ultimate goal is to sustain the herd in a healthy environment that protects their ability to forage, breed and survive, outside the boundaries of the City and its UGA.

DEWT has recommended that the agencies responsible for the herd implement the recommendation of the co-managers to relocate the herd to locations south of SR101 and east of the City. This would put the elk back into their normal and healthier environment on either State or Federal forestlands. However, there are continuing regional negotiations regarding the future relocation plans for this elk herd.

## **DUNGENESS RIVER AND BUFFERS**

The City shall continue to support the protection of the Dungeness River, and its buffers, for the insurance of its healthy watershed, for the preservation of its wildlife and riparian habitats, for the health and safety of its residents, to prevent adverse stormwater management, and to assure adequate supply for the recharge of its aquifer. The City shall continue to closely monitor any development that the County permits in these areas adjacent to the River and its buffers.

Requests for expansion of the Urban Growth Area boundaries towards the Dungeness River will not receive the City's support if there is any potential for adverse effects on the River or its buffers.

Residents of the City and its UGA, as well as the many businesses within the community rely upon the Dungeness River watershed. Approximately eighty (80%) percent of bird populations of the regional and migratory bird populations rely on the riparian areas associated with the River and its buffers for their survival.

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## **CHAPTER FIVE-A:**

### **ENVIRONMENT ELEMENT GOALS**

“Goals” are measurable and observable outcomes that the *Comprehensive Plan* anticipates in conformance with the Growth Management Act.

#### **ENVG-1**

Require that new development within the City of Sequim and its Urban Growth Area protect the environment; preserve critical areas; minimize development of hazardous slopes; and enhance the area’s high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.

#### **ENVG-2**

Preserve the quality of life that Sequim’s residents enjoy, by maintaining its rural character according to the *Vision Statement* through the creation, where feasible, of open spaces, and by protecting and maintaining the critical areas and their buffers.

#### **ENVG-3**

Preserve the scenic qualities of the City of Sequim and its UGA, including local and regional views and vistas. Preserve, where feasible, those views and vistas of local horizons such as the Hurricane Ridge area and the front range of the Olympic Mountains.

#### **ENVG-4**

Preserve Garry Oaks, cactus, and other plants and animals designated and identified as being significant and indigenous to Sequim’s distinctive climate, where feasible and when it does not endanger the citizens and residents of the City and its UGA or unreasonably conflict with the City’s GMA duties to accommodate growth.

#### **ENVG-5**

Preserve and enhance existing natural vegetation and encourage the addition of native drought-tolerant species to developed areas; minimize hardscape; and encourage “green” landscaping and green-belts.

#### **ENVG - 6**

Periodically review all adopted wetland regulations for consistency in coordination with County regulations in the Urban Growth Area.

#### **ENVG-7**

Continue various City programs that promote energy conservation; and encourage the use of alternative energy sources through proper permitting processes.

#### **ENVG-8**

Include appropriate siting of infrastructure [urban services] that avoids critical areas, does not bisect wildlife corridors and allows for fish and wildlife passage when feasible and when it does not deny an appropriate use by an individual property owner.

## **CHAPTER FIVE-A:**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL ELEMENT POLICIES**

“Policies” are the guidelines as to how the staff and the readers of the *Comprehensive Plan* shall achieve the goals of the Environmental Element of this *Comprehensive Plan*.

#### **ENVP-1**

Promote “innovative lot design” and “low impact development” techniques, which provides protection of critical areas and buffers while allowing for reasonable use and development of property.

#### **ENVP-2**

Continue to identify and regulate the land uses which could have a potential significant impact on groundwater quality and/or quantity within the potential aquifer recharge areas.

#### **ENVP-3**

Continue to implement regulations to protect designated critical area habitats for fish and wildlife by enforcing protective buffers and regulating construction practices.

#### **ENVP-4**

Continue to cooperate with Clallam County to identify and designate areas of geological hazards within the Urban Growth Area, including landslide, erosion, and seismic hazards, based on the “best available science” at the time of the evaluation.

#### **ENVP-5**

Encourage environmental regulations that stipulate the use of qualified plant and animal biologists, using “best available science” methods, and requires City staff to periodically review the labeling of a “Species of Local Significance” for the recognition and preservation of a species of local significance.

#### **ENVP-6**

Protect Sequim’s existing rural character.

#### **ENVP-7**

Continue to provide for protection of the groundwater resources (and its aquifer recharge areas) through effective stormwater management and erosion control methods, water quality education programs and other best management practices.

#### **ENVP-8**

Continue to promote the efficient and effective use of “innovative lot design” to reduce impervious surfaces so as to preserve critical areas, wetlands and the groundwater resources.

#### **ENVP-9**

Promote “low impact development” and “green construction methods” as another way to reduce impervious surfaces, protect the aquifer and conserve natural resources.

**ENVP-10**

Continue to require the use of “best available science” methodologies when assessing the impacts of proposed development on the surrounding environment and ecosystems.

**ENVP-11**

Continue to coordinate with the Clallam County staff to protect designated critical areas, wetlands and Sequim Bay tidelands, using “best available science” to protect fisheries and all other wildlife habitats within the City and its UGA.

**ENVP-12**

Encourage non-potable water uses of the City’s Class “A” waters that are generated through its water treatment facility for landscaping and for sources of gray water in office buildings and hotel/motel buildings.

**ENVP-13**

Continue to create an “interconnectedness of open spaces” when reviewing new development applications, and where it is feasible with adjoining properties/developments.

**ENVP-14**

Support developers and homeowners’ efforts to develop/implement the State’s Fish and Wildlife Dept program “Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program” that will provide voluntary wildlife habitats within new developments and existing neighborhoods.

**ENVP-15**

Encourage/suggest the periodic presentation of a “Watchable Wildlife” program that educates the public and promotes non-consumptive uses of fish and wildlife resources

## CHAPTER FIVE-B: : OPEN SPACE

### INTRODUCTION

“Open Space” *is any space without buildings, pavement or other imposing structures (from GMA 2005)*. Often, open space is merely what remains in between areas of development. An example would be the buffers associated with the Bell Creek corridor. Open space also encompasses those areas that are intentionally set aside because they enhance our quality of life: residential and commercial building setbacks and the Planned Unit Development set-asides are good examples. Passive parks (e.g., Water Re-use Demonstration Park) and other recreational areas (trails) are classic examples of “planned open space.”

More specifically, planning ahead for open space assures the City of Sequim a future complete with places devoted to relaxation and play; safe and accessible rights-of way for bicycles, foot traffic and other forms of alternative transportation; the enduring presence of wildlife; lasting historic and rural character; and, a general atmosphere of natural beauty.

The City of Sequim has committed itself not only to preserving existing open space, but to proactively provide for it throughout our future as we continue to grow. *The Growth Management Act mandates that we identify/inventory all of our open space that is used for any purpose such as recreation, wildlife habitat, trails, critical areas and open spaces of large developments.*

The fabric of our City and its Urban Growth Area is very rural in character; thus it requires a network of diverse and quality open spaces. With careful planning and thoughtful design the *rural atmosphere* that has defined this community for over 100 years can be preserved.

In addition to protecting the City and its critical areas within its Urban Growth Area, the City has designated that the buffer areas adjacent to these critical areas should be preserved and protected as open spaces.

These buffer areas can function as permanent interconnected “greenbelts” throughout the community. These greenbelts may provide opportunities for interconnected trails; provide visual relief from the impacts of urban development; provide transitional open space; and, at the same time, provide important wildlife habitat. Greenbelts are important contributors to preserving the “the small town atmosphere and rural character” of the Sequim community.

## **CHAPTER FIVE-B**

### **OPEN SPACE ELEMENT GOALS**

“Goals” are measurable and observable outcomes that the *Comprehensive Plan* anticipates in conformance with the Growth Management Act.

#### **OSG-1**

Retain important open space to conserve fish and wildlife habitats; increase access to natural resource lands and water; and develop passive parks to include open space purposes.

#### **OSG -2**

Protect the historic character of the area by continuing to allow existing regionally-significant land uses and patterns, including agricultural uses, natural areas, and other open spaces within the City and its UGA.

#### **OSG -3**

Protect open spaces through development standards, and other land use regulations.

#### **OSG-4**

Create additional open spaces through thoughtful review and planning and with the cooperation of developers, builders and property owners.

## **CHAPTER FIVE-B**

### **OPEN SPACE ELEMENT POLICIES**

“Policies” are the guidelines as to how the staff and the readers of the *Comprehensive Plan* shall achieve the goals of the Urban Growth Area Element of this *Comprehensive Plan*.

#### **OSP-1**

Preserve open space, which includes developed and undeveloped parklands and water areas such as Sequim Bay tidelands, creeks, and irrigation systems/easements.

#### **OSP-2**

Encourage retention of open space in new residential, commercial, and mixed-use developments. Proposed projects should include provisions for open space by encouraging private developments to provide land [or in lieu of fees] for parks, trails, walkways and open space.

#### **OSP-3**

Preserve open space through the use of parks, plazas, and landscape setbacks, or other means which are shown to protect or enhance the natural environment, increase open space, and/or add to the general aesthetics of a land use proposal.

#### **OSP-4**

Promote the retention, conservation, and acquisition of open space and environmentally-sensitive areas with unique or fragile features to maintain scenic, educational, and natural resource values.

#### **OSP-5**

Encourage the development and maintenance of areas that enhance the natural beautification of the Sequim community.

#### **OSP-6**

Encourage the use of excess lands associated with rights-of-way, road ends, and similar areas for open space purposes.

#### **OSP-7**

Adopt development regulations, which encourage the creation of inter-connected open space for the use of migratory wildlife, while preserving development options for landowners.

#### **OSP-8**

Reclassify lands acquired for open space use under the Public Facilities (PF) zoning district classification.