

**APPENDIX H**  
**Sections from the Parks, Open Space and Cultural Resources**  
**An element of the King County Comprehensive Plan, 2008**

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# **Parks, Open Space and Cultural Resources**

The quality of life in King County is directly linked to the quality of our region's environment, with its diverse landscapes reaching from Puget Sound to the Cascade Mountains, scenic beauty and the variety of cultural and recreational opportunities that enrich our lives. These vital natural and cultural resources contribute to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of county residents and are integral to attracting employment and business activity.

The policies in this chapter focus on the county's role as a regional leader in acquiring and protecting its system of county-owned parks and other open spaces and in supporting cultural opportunities such as music, theater, ethnic heritage museums, literary activities, public art collections, urban historic districts and rural landmarks.

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# I. Parks, Recreation and Open Space

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The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires cities and counties to identify open space corridors within and between Urban Growth Areas, including lands useful for recreation, wildlife habitat, trails, and connection of critical areas. The county's designation of open space includes those lands that are part of the King County open space system as well as state parks and natural resource conservation areas and federal wilderness areas in unincorporated King County (see land use map). The GMA states that counties are the providers of regional services and local rural services, while cities are the appropriate providers of local urban services. The Growth Management Act states that counties are the providers of regional services and local rural services, while cities are the appropriate providers of local urban services. As the regional government, King County manages a regional open space system of parks, trails, natural or ecological areas and working resource lands. While the cities are the managers of local park, trails and open space lands in the Urban Growth Area, King County will continue to be the provider of local park, trails and open space lands in the Rural Area.

Population growth and associated development in recent years have transformed the county's landscape as forested and open lands have been converted to urban uses resulting in the fragmentation of wildlife corridors, riparian habitat and the depletion of working resource lands and open vistas. The policies in this section provide guidance for the open space system of lands the county owns and manages to protect the health of natural systems, provide recreational opportunities, shape community character, and help sustain agriculture and forestry economics. Additional benefits of the open space and trail systems include providing transportation alternatives as well as health benefits from participation in outdoor recreation. Large forested parks and natural areas help maintain air quality. The policies also reinforce the county's focus on linking components of the open space system with a focus on the regional trail system.

Regional active and multiuse parks serve a countywide population and provide high-quality, highly developed facilities to support multiple events, large group gatherings and special events. Passive parks serve less formal, organized or intense activities. The Regional Trail System forms the backbone for county and other trails that reach broadly throughout the county from the north to south and east to west linking with trails of cities, other counties and the state. Local rural park sites provide for active and passive recreation close to home. Local trails provide recreation, circulation within the local community and access to the regional trail system.

Natural areas and some parks contain undeveloped or un-developable acreage that remain in a natural or near natural state and support habitat and other ecologically significant attributes. Together these sites enhance environmental and visual quality and meet regional and local rural recreation needs.

**P-101** For the purposes of the King County open space system, “Regional Parks” shall mean sites and facilities that are large in size, have unique features or characteristics and serve communities from many jurisdictions, and “local” shall mean sites and facilities that predominantly serve communities in the unincorporated area.

## **A. The Regional Open Space System of Parks, Trails, Natural Areas and Working Resource Lands**

The policies in this chapter provide the basis to develop a contiguous open space system, connecting and including active and passive parks, trails, natural areas and working agricultural and forest resource lands. The Open Space System Map shows these publicly-owned open space lands and provides the basis for identifying the linkages necessary to strengthen the physical and functional connectivity of the county's open space system. The following policies reinforce the importance of the county's open space system, and guide planning and management of appropriate recreational opportunities that best meet regional and local needs, preserve ecologically significant resources and protect working resource lands. Implementation of these policies is guided by the *King County Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan*, adopted in 2004 (and subsequent updates).

**P-102** King County shall be a regional leader in the provision of a regional open space system of parks, trails, natural areas, working resource lands, and flood hazard management lands. The regional network of open spaces provides benefits to all county residents including: recreation facilities, conservation of natural and working resource lands, flood hazard management and related programs, and services. Preservation will include wildlife corridors and riparian habitat, as well as open space areas separating Urban and Rural Areas. These vital regional parks, trails, recreational facilities and natural resources contribute to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of county residents.

## **B. Local Parks**

In the Rural Area, the large geographic area and dispersed populations, individual lots, low residential density and economies of site management dictate fewer individual park sites. Nearby regional parks

and other open spaces also provide recreational opportunities. King County's role in the Rural Area will reflect rural levels of service.

**P-103 King County shall provide local parks, trails and other open spaces in the Rural Area. Local parks, trails and other open spaces that complement the regional system should be provided in each community in Rural Areas to enhance environmental and visual quality and meet local recreation needs. These vital local parks, trails, recreational facilities and natural resources contribute to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of county residents.**

**P-104 King County should provide local parks within rural communities with fields and other facilities that provide opportunities for active sports. These facilities shall be in addition to and compatible with King County's regional park system.**

## **C. Components of the Regional Open Space System**

King County's regional open space system contains lands with many functions including active and passive recreation; special purpose sites such as pools and trails; natural areas, including waterways, greenways, and forested areas with educational, scientific, wildlife habitat, cultural or scenic values; working resource lands including agriculture and forest lands; and community-defining systems, including physical and or visual buffers between areas of urban and rural development. Many sites within the open space system serve more than one function, but each site serves a primary role within the system.

### **1. Active Recreation, Multiuse Sites and Trails**

King County's local and regional parks and facilities accommodate a wide range of active and passive recreational activities. Active recreation includes a functional system of highly developed sites with organized, scheduled activities such as soccer and softball. Passive recreation includes both physical activities and less intense activities such as informal play, trail use, and picnicking. Multiuse sites can include a combination of active recreation and passive recreation with less intensely developed facilities and natural areas. The trail system is a major element of the recreation and natural systems and provides opportunities for recreation and nonmotorized transportation, as well as corridors often used by wildlife. These activities contribute to the health and well-being of both county residents and the environment.

Regional parks serve a broad spectrum of users. These parks and their facilities include those not generally viable for individual communities due to site or facility requirements or the unique nature of the offering requiring a broader user base to support them. Educational or interpretive programming promotes

appropriate and enjoyable use of the park system. Public awareness of resources and their values builds support and stewardship for the system and its resources.

**P-105 King County shall provide regional parks and recreational facilities that serve users from many neighborhoods and communities. Regional parks include unique sites and facilities that should be equitably and geographically distributed.**

**P-106 King County shall complete a regional trails system, linking trail corridors to form a countywide network. King County will continue to primarily own the land necessary for the operation and management of the trail system.**

**P-107 King County should facilitate educational, interpretive and aquatic programs on county-owned properties that further the enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of the natural, cultural and recreational resources of the park system and the region.**

**P-108 King County should facilitate and seek regional and national programs and special events at regional sites and facilities.**

## **2. Natural Areas (Ecological Sites)**

The King County open space system includes many sites whose primary purpose is to conserve and restore ecological value. These sites may allow public use that does not harm the ecological resources of the site. These natural areas include many environmental features of King County's landscape, which play a role in protecting a diversity of vegetation and fish and wildlife important to the beauty and character of the region. King County will focus on linking natural areas to create regional open space corridors of greenways and waterways along the major river systems, shorelines, and the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway.

Preserving these areas in partnership with other agencies, private groups and individuals will provide multiple values including environmental and economic benefits of surface water management, aquifer recharge, and fish and wildlife habitat preservation and enhancement.

**P-109 King County will manage its natural areas to protect, preserve and enhance important natural resource habitat, biological diversity, and the ecological integrity of natural systems.**

**P-110 King County shall recognize and protect the natural character and ecological value of its natural areas. These areas are important for preserving fish and wildlife and their habitat, native vegetation, and features of scientific and educational value. Development and public use may be limited to preserve the natural state and reduce**

**disturbance of the natural resources. Site improvements should be focused on providing educational and interpretive opportunities. Public access should be directed to the less fragile portions of a site to ensure continued protection of the ecological resources.**

### **3. Working Resource Lands**

The county's open space system includes lands that are managed as working farms and forests. The county has purchased several properties with the intention of conserving the resource use on the site. County ownership and management of these lands conserves the resource land base, allowing the resource activity to continue, while contributing to the local rural economy, providing healthy foods, reducing carbon emissions associated with importing food into the region, providing education about agriculture and forestry, and providing passive recreational opportunities on some properties. The county's policies to conserve farmland and encourage agriculture are discussed in Chapter 3.

The Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) is a county program that preserves farmland through the purchase of development rights. The farms in the FPP generally remain in private ownership. The county has purchased a farm outright in few cases, with the intention of reselling the land without the development rights to a private farmer. The county has developed a program to lease farms to small-scale farmers until such time that the property can be resold.

**P-111 Farmland owned by King County shall contribute to the preservation of contiguous tracts of agricultural land and make affordable farmland available for use by small-scale and new farmers.**

**P-112 Farmers leasing properties owned by King County shall use Agricultural best management practices, Integrated Pest Management and other sustainable farming methods.**

**P-113 The use and management of farmlands owned by King County shall be consistent with any requirements imposed by the funding program used to purchase each property and shall serve to meet and enhance the objectives of the King County Agriculture Program.**

One element of the King County Forestry Program is the conservation of forestland through acquisition to allow forest management on the property. The working forests owned by King County are generally very large parcels of land (several hundred acres or more), which support sustainable forest management practices and contribute to the retention of a contiguous forest. These properties contribute to



environmental protection, high-quality passive recreation, the public understanding of forestry, and scenic vistas.

**P-114 Forest land owned by King County shall provide large tracts of forested property in the Rural Forest Focus Areas and the Forest Production District (FPD) that will remain in active forestry, protect areas from development or provide a buffer between commercial forestland and adjacent residential development.**

**P-115 Forest land owned by King County shall be used to sustain and enhance environmental benefits, demonstrate progressive forest management and research, and provide revenue for the management of the working forest lands.**

**P-116 Forest land owned by King County shall provide a balance between sustainable timber production, conservation and restoration of resources, and appropriate public use.**

#### **4. Other Open Spaces**

Preservation of open space in the county reaches beyond the county system. Large areas of the county are owned and managed by federal agencies, the state, and other local jurisdictions that manage the land for environmental protection, resource production, or a wide range of recreational opportunities. Additionally, open space benefits are often provided by private land owners managing their land in ways that protect the environment, conserve natural resources, or provide open vistas. King County acquires property for other reasons, such as flood hazards or providing needed public facilities. These lands can also provide open space conservation benefits.

King County has acquired lands and manages facilities along major river and stream systems for the primary purpose of floodplain management and flood hazard management. Major streams and rivers are vital components of the county's open space system, therefore the flood hazard management lands function as critical links in the county's open space network. King County will continue to maintain flood hazard management land and facilities within available funding levels. The county will also seek innovative measures for maintaining and improving flood hazard management, reducing maintenance costs, integrating flood hazard management and recreational opportunities, and achieving wildlife habitat protection and salmon recovery.

### **D. Achieving the Open Space System**

Parks and other county-owned open space lands ensure a quality of life today and a legacy to generations of tomorrow. In King County, many types of open spaces and fish and wildlife habitat remain

in private ownership and may be subject to future development. To ensure that these lands and resources are protected and to offer an alternative to acquisition, the county offers landowners a wide variety of tools to preserve their property. Policies outlining strategies for using these tools can be found in chapters 3, 4, and 7.

Cooperation, coordination and partnerships with public agencies, private groups and individuals are necessary to develop the regional parks and open space system, to meet existing needs for park and recreation facilities and to accommodate the needs of growth. The Mountains-to-Sound Greenway, along the I-90 corridor, is a successful model for coordination of efforts by public and private entities to protect the backbone of the county's open space system.

King County will achieve the multiple benefits of resource protection and recreation by building partnerships and coordinating with providers and user groups of the parks and open space system. Working together, stewardship can be fostered and these lands and facilities can be enhanced, restored and operated more economically and efficiently to benefit all county residents.

### **Priorities**

- P-117**      **Open space sites should be acquired when identified in the King County Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, adopted in 2004 (and subsequent updates), or when needed to meet adopted local park and recreation standard, or to protect contiguous tracts of working resource lands or ecological resources.**
  
- P-118**      **Trails should be acquired when identified in King County Trails Plans, the Regional Trails Needs Report or when identified as part of a regional community trail network.**
  
- P-119**      **King County shall use park and recreation standards as adopted in the King County Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan, adopted in 2004 (and subsequent updates), as guidelines to evaluate and provide local parks, trails, and recreational services.**
  
- P-120**      **King County shall consider equity in the development and acquisition of its open space system to help in the reduction of health disparities and in the promotion of environmental justice.**

### **Criteria**

- P-121**      **Lands preserved for public parks or open space should provide multiple benefits whenever possible.**

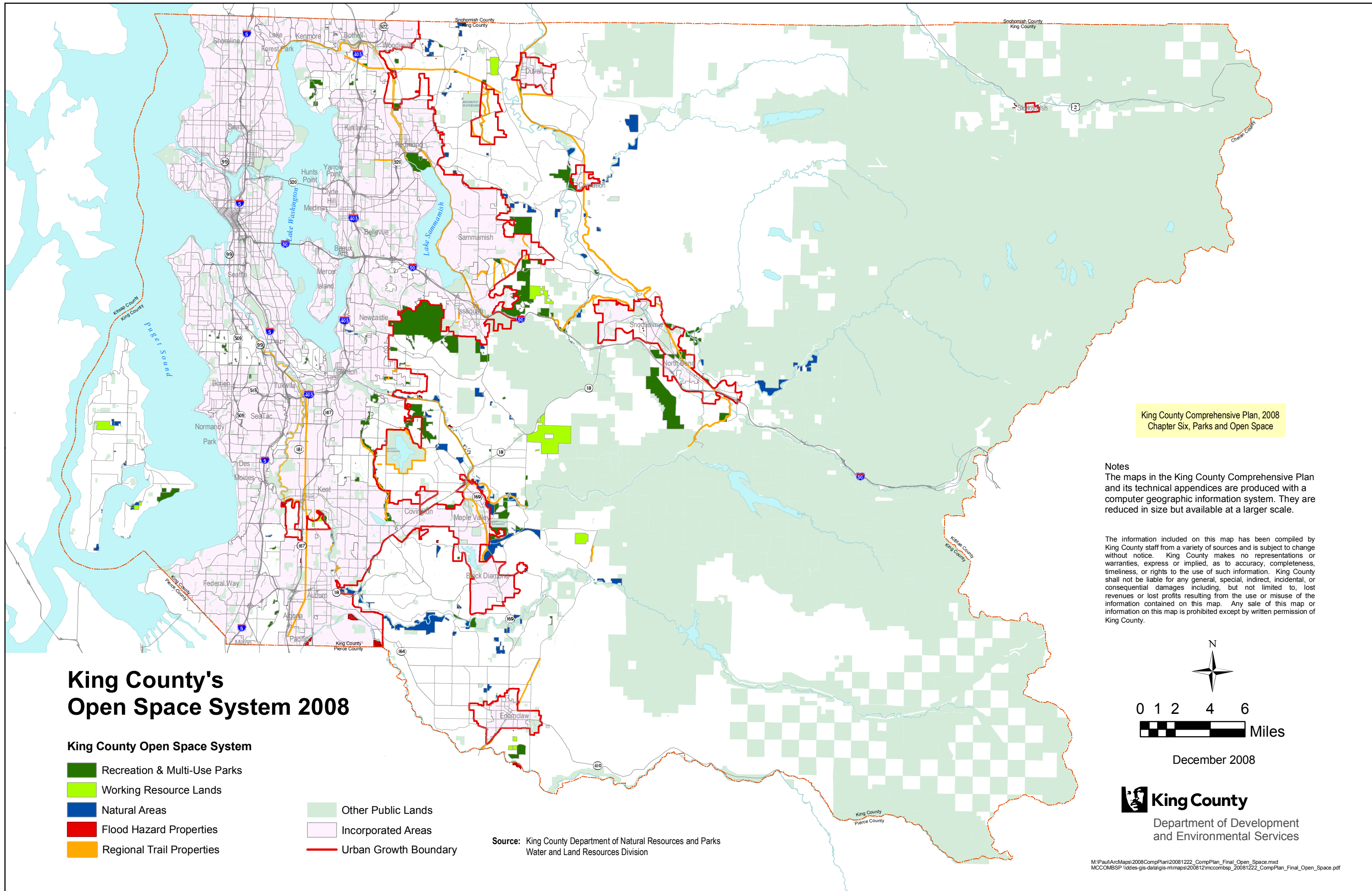
- P-122** Decisions on acquisition and development of park, trail, and other open space sites should consider funding needs for long term maintenance and operations.
- P-123** A variety of measures should be used to preserve and develop regional and local parks, trails and open space. Measures can include: county funding, partnerships, incentives, regulations, and trades of lands and shared development activities.
- P-124** King County shall explore incentives, regulations and funding mechanisms to preserve, acquire and manage valuable park and open space lands.
- P-125** Parks, trails and other open space lands should be acquired and developed to meet adopted standards with a combination of public funds and dedications or contributions from residential and commercial development, based on their service impacts.

#### **Managing the System**

- P-126** Management of the regional open space system of parks, trails, natural areas and working resource lands is guided by the King County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan, as adopted in 2004 (and subsequent updates). The plan includes policies on the management of parks and trails, natural areas, and resource lands.
- P-127** Funding and development of parks, trails and open space sites should be consistent with the purposes of their acquisition and in consideration of their funding sources.
- P-128** Open space lands shall be classified to identify the primary role in the open space system and purpose of acquisition as active recreation, trails, multiuse, natural area or working resource lands. They will be classified as regional or local and the primary role and purpose of the site will be identified.
- P-129** King County will adopt an entrepreneurial approach to managing and operating the open space system and work aggressively to implement multiple and appropriate strategies to sustain fiscally the open space system.

## **Coordination and Partnerships**

- P-130** King County shall be a leader in establishing partnerships with cities, adjacent counties, tribes, state and federal agencies, school and special purpose districts, community organizations, nonprofit organizations, land owners and other citizens. The county and these partnerships should work to promote and protect all aspects of environmental quality and complete the regional parks and open space system, linking local and regional lands and facilities.
- P-131** In the Urban Area, King County shall work in partnership with other jurisdictions to facilitate annexation and transfer of local parks, trails and other open spaces to cities or other providers to ensure continued service to the community.
- P-132** King County should work with cities to share operational and maintenance costs of parks and other open spaces in unincorporated areas in which a substantial portion of the users are from incorporated areas.



# King County's Open Space System 2008

## King County Open Space System

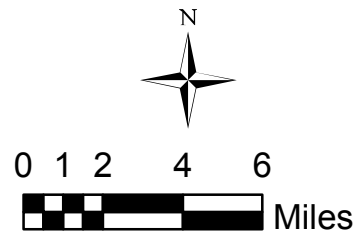
- Recreation & Multi-Use Parks
- Working Resource Lands
- Natural Areas
- Flood Hazard Properties
- Regional Trail Properties
- Other Public Lands
- Incorporated Areas
- Urban Growth Boundary

Source: King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks  
Water and Land Resources Division

King County Comprehensive Plan, 2008  
Chapter Six, Parks and Open Space

**Notes**  
The maps in the King County Comprehensive Plan and its technical appendices are produced with a computer geographic information system. They are reduced in size but available at a larger scale.

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