

Cluster Development in Thurston County

Report from the Cluster
Development Task Force

June 20, 2006

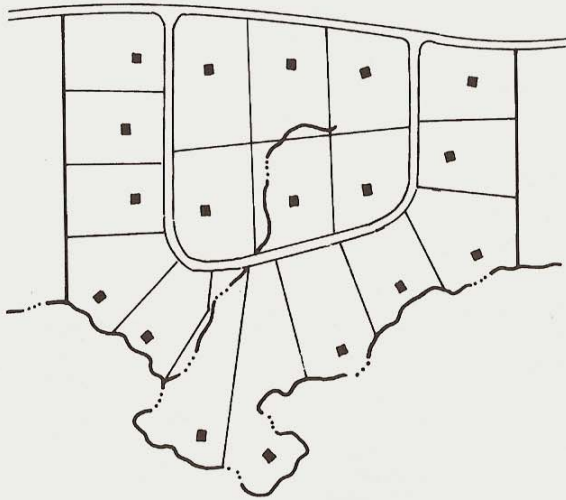
History of the Project

- Clustering in rural lands evaluated for GMA compliance in 2004 due to citizen complaints & appeals
- Board adopted Interim Ordinance #13222 in November 2004 (Renewed)
 - Eliminated density bonuses
 - Established size limits
- Work program established to review/revise rules

Task Force

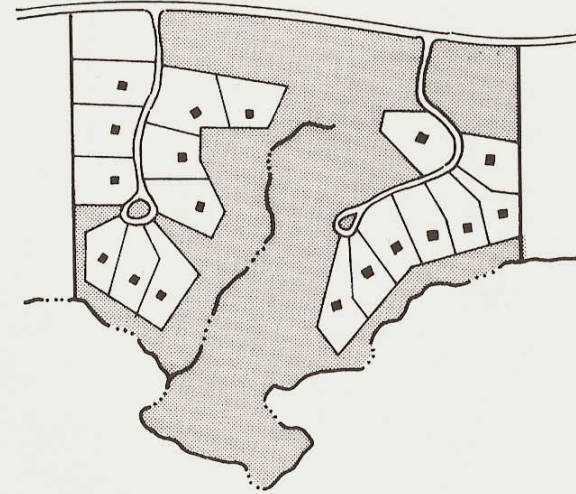
- The Board appointed 11 members:
 - 2 resource land reps, 2 environmental reps, 3 development reps, 3 citizen reps, & 1 design rep
- 19 meetings since January 2005
- Negotiated agreements + majority/minority
- Facilitated by county staff

Cluster Design Concept



Conventional Development:

- Larger individual lots
- No common open space or set-aside



Cluster Development:

- Smaller individual lots
- Compact development areas
- More contiguous open space



Conventional development spreads houses throughout the landscape

Clustering results in more compact development on rural land



Facts About Clustering in Thurston County

- Popular subdivision tool (40 – 50 applications per year prior to Interim Ordinance)
- Over 200 clusters in rural area
- Most are very small (2 - 7 lots on 8 - 20 acres)
- Some are very large (100 lots on 300 acres)
- Old rules (PRRD): Minimum 60% set-aside; Maximum 65% bonus. No special setbacks. Broadly defined uses in RUP.

Benefits of Clustering

- Preserves open space
- More affordable & efficient infrastructure (sewer/water) than conventional development
- Opportunity to preserve critical areas in contiguous tracts
- Fewer environmental impacts (likely or potentially)
- Affordable housing
- Design and continuity elements are more attractive than conventional development



Thurston County farm land
(photo taken by county staff)

Benefits of Clustering Continued...



Field of Dreams cluster development
(photo taken by county staff)

- Larger land set-asides
- Maximizes return on property investment
- Profitable for small builders
- Potential for water conservation
- Groundwater protection potential
- Less roadway/impervious surfaces
- May increase property values
- Enhanced security (closer neighbors)



Houses clustered around private equestrian facility, Pennsylvania (photo by Randall Arendt)

Challenges

- **Resource area (RUP)**
 - Stewardship and management of resource area
 - Viability of agriculture/forestry in resource area
 - Defining appropriate uses (resource uses, housing?)
- **Impacts on rural neighbors**
 - Education/perception of neighbors
 - Visual impacts
 - Clusters adjacent to other clusters- cumulative effects/urbanization
 - Impacts to neighboring agriculture- complaints- difficulty to sell ag operations next to cluster developments
- **Keeping clustering as a development option**
 - Not going back to or encouraging “cookie-cutter” development

Challenges Continued...

- **Design standards**
 - Creating open space connectivity
 - Lot sizes and orientation
 - Synchronizing road standards with clustering standards
- **Density and bonuses**
 - Finding ways to justify a density bonus
 - How to calculate bonuses and density- to include or exclude critical areas
 - Expectations of density by rural residents/buyers
- **Environmental concerns:**
 - Water and septic issues on “too-small” lots
 - Impacts on critical areas within cluster
- **Enforcement and monitoring**

Field of Dreams

GIFFORD RD SW

118TH AVE SW

118TH LP SW

PARK VIEW CT SW

DREAM ST SW

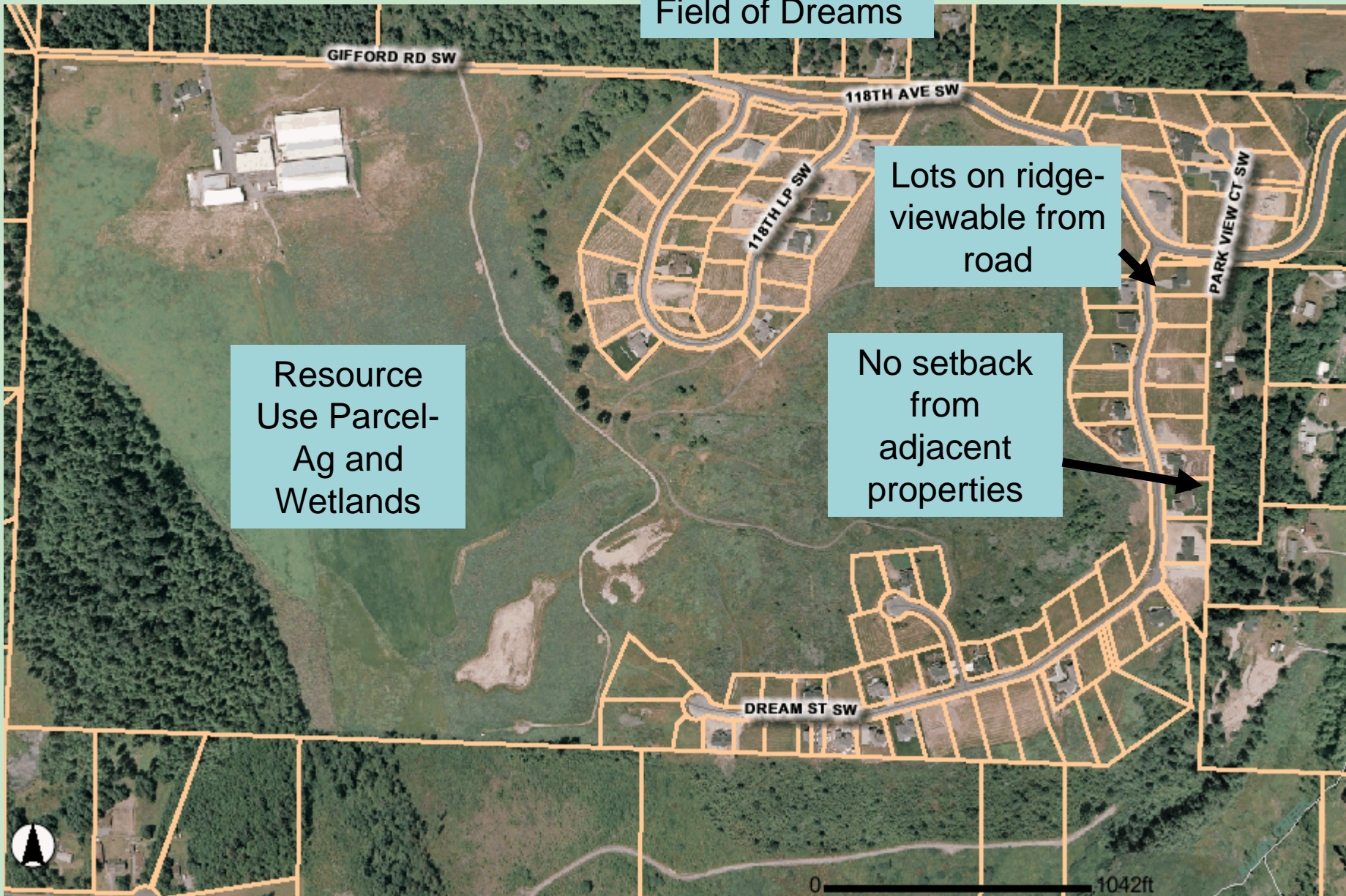
Resource
Use Parcel-
Ag and
Wetlands

Lots on ridge-
viewable from
road

No setback
from
adjacent
properties



0 1042ft



Small cluster in NW County, compared with surrounding lots

No visual buffer from road

House on small RUP



Legal framework

- Clustering encouraged under GMA– so long as it is designed in keeping with rural character
- Case law requires limits on size and intensity... but sets no strict size limit.
- Density of 1 unit per 5 acres generally considered “rural”...but some Counties allow slightly higher density through clustering
- Must justify/mitigate any density bonuses through standards that protect rural character

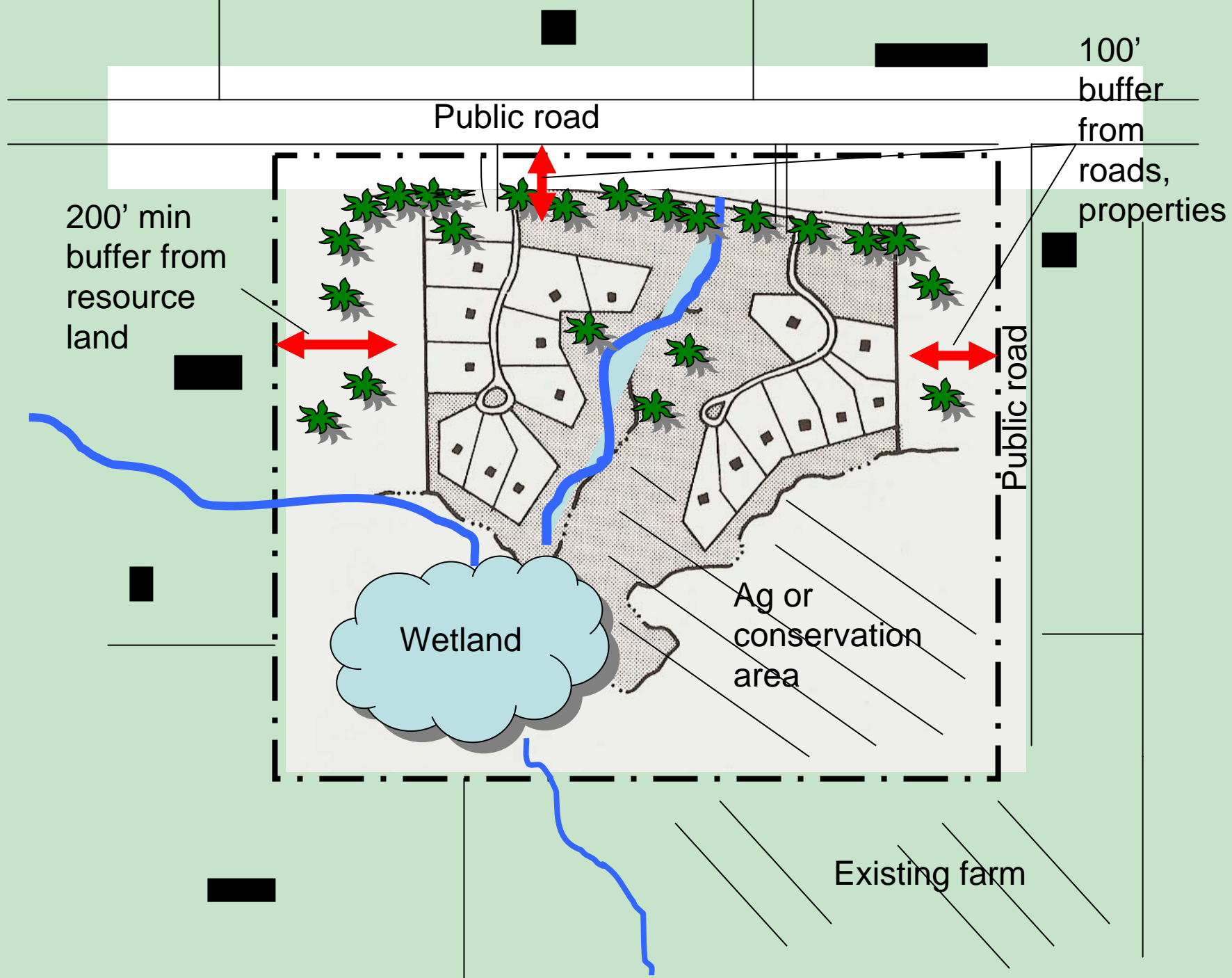
Island County Examples

- **WWGMHB (WEAN v. Island County):** *“Limit the overall size and intensity of development ... to ensure compatibility with rural character and preclude the future need for urban services.”*
- Island County revised the size and intensity of its clusters:
 - min size increased from 10 to 20 acres
 - max size capped at 80 acres
 - increased open space requirement from 50% to 65-80%
 - density bonus modified so it is based on amount of open space
 - no more than 6 units in a cluster
 - clusters must be separated by at least 200 feet of open space

| COUNTY | BASIC RURAL DENSITY | DENSITY /# LOTS PERMITTED IN CLUSTER | DESIGN STANDARDS |
|---|---------------------------|---|--|
| Thurston <i>(pre-interim ordinance)</i> | 1 unit per 5 acres | Sliding scale: 60% set aside = 35% bonus Up to 65% bonus as set-aside increases. | Min parcel size 7.5 acres. Visual buffering and nonlinear design encouraged. No separation between clusters required. |
| Lewis | 1/5, 1/10, 1/20 | 6 lot maximum, or up to 24 lots on 40 acres with SUP (300% bonus) <i>(Note: WWGMHB has “serious doubts” about this)</i> | At least ½ mile radius separation between clusters. Finding req’d by HE that cluster is not “urban” |
| Island | 1/ 5 | 6 units per cluster. 20-40 acres: 100% bonus 40-80 acres: 125% No bonus for properties over 80 acres. <i>Withstood legal challenge.</i> | Min parcel size 20 acres. 6-lot clusters must be separated from one another by distance of 200 feet. Other design and visual buffering reqmts. |
| Pierce | 1/ 5, 1/10, 1/20, 1/40 | 1/5: up to 2 units per 5 acres, if 50% preserved in open space; 1/10: up to 2.5 units per 10 acres if 75% in open space; 1/20: up to 5 dus on 20 acres if 75% in open space | Open space parcel must be contiguous to designated forest lands, if property is adjacent. |
| Whatcom | 1/2, 1/5, 1/10 | Max 16 lots clustered. No bonus. | 500 foot separation between clusters. |

Major Recommendations

- Keep minimum size at 20 acres
- Keep large set-aside (60 – 65%)
- Require “pod” design to reduce visual impacts
- Require 100’ setbacks from roads/adjacent (200’ from resource lands)
- Require inventory of vegetation on site at application, retain/enhance native veg in buffers
- Define three types of cluster w/specific management rules for each
- Limit RUP uses: housing only in ag or forestry, otherwise common ownership; limit active recreation, replanting required after harvest



Public road

100'
buffer
from
roads,
properties

200' min
buffer from
resource
land

Public road

Wetland

Ag or
conservation
area

Existing farm

Major area of difference: Density Bonuses

- **Majority:**

- Use all site acreage to calculate, including critical areas
- Sliding scale in 1/5 (max net density 1:3.5)
- 1:6 net in new 1:10 and 1:20 zoning districts
- No minimum lot size (determined by septic/well rules)

- **Minority:**

- Three minority options
- Sliding scale, but smaller bonuses for sites with unbuildable critical areas
- No bonus alternative
- Larger lot sizes for clustered portion: 1 acre to 1.25- 2.5 acres

Example of Majority v. Minority Bonus in 1:5 District

100-acre parcel in the 1:5 zone with 60% in critical areas

| | MAJORITY | MINORITY A | MINORITY B | MINORITY C |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Base Units | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Minimum Set-Aside | 60% | 60% | 60% | 60% |
| Bonus | 25% | 10% | No | 4% |
| Total Units | 25 | 22* | 20 | 20.8* |

*Additional units possible with fewer critical areas and/or a higher % set-aside and a conservation easement.

Example of Majority v. Minority Bonus in 1:20 Proposed District

100-acre parcel in the 1:20 zone with 60% in critical areas

| | MAJORITY | MINORITY A | MINORITY B | MINORITY C |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Base Units | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| % Set-Aside | 60% | 60% | 60% | 60% |
| Bonus | 1:6 | 10% | No | 4% |
| Total Units | 16.7 | 5.5* | 5 | 5.2* |

*Additional units possible with fewer critical areas and/or a higher % set-aside and a conservation easement.

Topics Still Under Discussion

- Road type and design (likely to recommend slower, narrower roads for clusters)
- Impervious surface limits on individual lots
- Location restrictions relative to other clusters
- Limits on infrastructure (stormwater, septic systems) in the resource area
- Permitting process (likely to require design review by staff)
- Monitoring, enforcement, penalties

Public Involvement

- Public hearings were held for Interim Ordinance adoption and renewal
- Web site with Task Force meeting notes and project information updated
- Public comment received at Task Force meetings
- For next steps: Public Hearing needed prior to adoption of interim or final regulations

Next Steps

The Board of County Commissioners is currently reviewing Task Force recommendations and determining next steps in the process. Check back for updates at <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/permitting/PRRD/PRRD.htm>

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