

# 3

## Farm and Forest Resources





## **Opportunities, Challenges, and Considerations**

Farm and forestry resources and operations continue to play an important role in the character and economy of Deschutes County. However, a variety of ongoing and forecasted trends will impact the viability and vitality of these industries and the people who contribute to them. A number of these trends and challenges are described below and more information about some issues is found in the Water Resources section of this Plan (see Chapter 5: Natural Resources).

### **PREVALENCE OF SMALL FARMING OPERATIONS AND HOBBY FARMS**

The 2022 Census of Agriculture profiles Deschutes County as primarily consisting of small acreage, hobby farms and other relatively small agricultural operations. As of 2022 there were approximately 1,572 farms, an increase of 5% from 2017. Although the average size of a farm in Deschutes County is 97 acres, the majority of acreage (about 85%) is in farms of 50 acres or less in size.

### **MARGINAL OR LOW PRODUCTIVITY SOILS**

While a large proportion of the County is zoned for exclusive farm use, much of the land in these areas has marginal soils which provide limited productivity, particularly for higher value crops. Limited access to water rights and irrigation can further hamper productivity in some areas. Deschutes County attempted to reclassify certain agricultural lands through a nonresource lands program. This approach was rejected at the state level. Since that time, some landowners have successfully redesignated property, primarily to residential zones, through an applicant-initiated process.

### **FINANCIAL CHALLENGES**

According to the 2022 Agricultural Census, agricultural producers in Deschutes County are often operating in the red. The per-farm average of market value of products sold was \$25,437, a 23% increase from 2017, and average production expenses of \$39,918. This results in a deficit of approximately \$14,481 per farm per year. Government payments help cover a portion of this deficit, with the average farm receiving \$17,959 in assistance. The costs of operating continue to be a major challenge for small family operations, resulting in approximately 48% of farms in Deschutes County reporting under \$2,500 in sales.

### **DECLINING FOREST PRODUCTS INDUSTRY**

Approximately 1,032,436 acres of Deschutes County area are zoned for Forest Use. Historically, forestry on public and private land was a primary industry in Central Oregon with key mill sites along the Deschutes River in Bend. Over time, species protections, international competition, and new technologies have reduced the overall footprint of the timber industry in Central Oregon. Recently, land uses are shifting toward recreation and residential development in these natural resource areas.



### WATER SUPPLY AND IRRIGATION

Much of Deschutes County is served by six irrigation districts (Map 3-1) – these are special entities created for the purpose of delivering water to their patrons. These districts are quasi-municipal corporations chartered under Oregon law that operate as political subdivisions of the State of Oregon. In addition to irrigation, these districts also supply other services including municipal, industrial, and pond maintenance. In most cases, these districts are holders of senior water rights with shares then distributed to their patrons. As is the case with all water rights, the irrigation districts’ water rights are managed by the Oregon Water Resources Department and subject to “beneficial use” requirements to prevent the waste of the water resource. The total water available for irrigation and other human uses in Deschutes County is fixed under the current water regime, and there is little opportunity to expand irrigated farming in the County. Irrigation districts with more junior water rights such as Arnold Irrigation District and North Unit Irrigation District (operating north of Deschutes County), have recently seen challenges with water delivery due to limited availability and drought.

### CHANGES IN CLIMATE CONDITIONS

Because the total volume of water available for agricultural and human use is fixed, strategies to decrease water usage (capping or piping irrigation channels, irrigation timing strategies,

water conservation) will become more crucial. Deschutes County is committed to working with irrigation districts and holders of water rights to increase water conservation efforts throughout the County in a manner consistent with existing legal frameworks established by State and Federal law.

### Context

#### Agriculture

Agriculture and ranching operations in Deschutes County vary widely based on water availability, soil, and microclimate. The following subzones were created through a commercial farm study conducted in 1992. This study concluded that irrigation is a key factor to viability of operations, which enabled the County to establish smaller acreages than allowed by state law to provide additional flexibility.

Additional information about farm and forest resources is provided in the tables and charts below.

#### Forest Lands

Deschutes County classifies Forest land in one of two zones. Forest 1 zoning is intended for land that is primarily used for forest management or commercial forestry, with a lot size over 160 acres, and not developed with residential or non-forest uses. Forest 2 zoning is intended for land that does have residential or non-forest uses, is less than 160 acres, and may contain roads or other public facilities that serve the property.

State regulations limit residential and non-forestry related development on forest lands and the County sees only a few applications for

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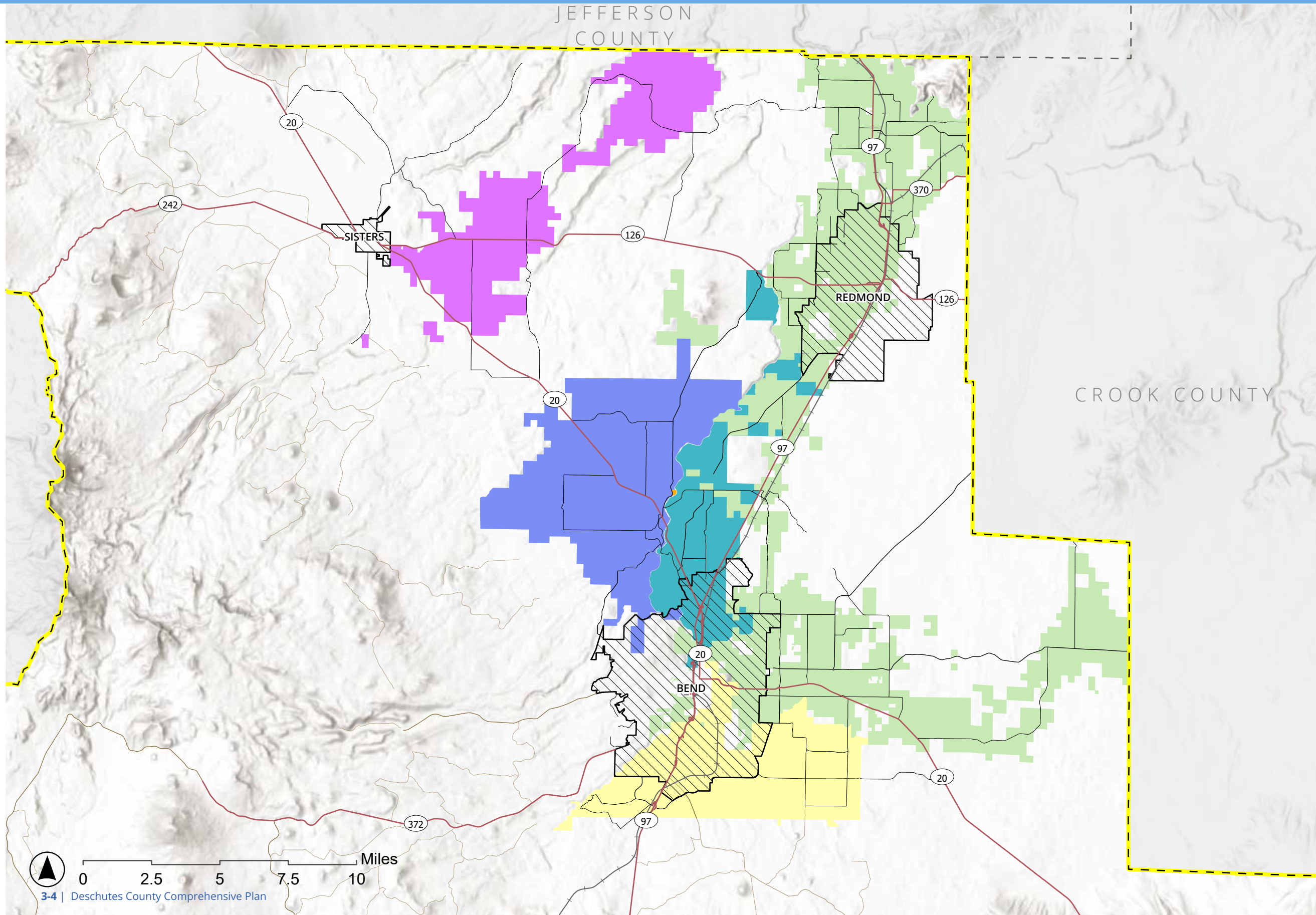
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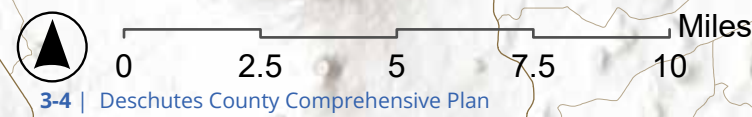
DESCHUTES COUNTY  
2040  
A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

## Irrigation Districts

- Arnold Irrigation District
- Central Oregon Irrigation District
- Rimrock Water Improvement District
- Swalley Irrigation Dist (DRIC)
- Three Sisters Irrigation District
- Tumalo Irrigation District
- State Routes

## Transportation

- Arterial
- Collector
- Forest Highway
- Railroad
- Urban Growth Boundaries
- County Boundary



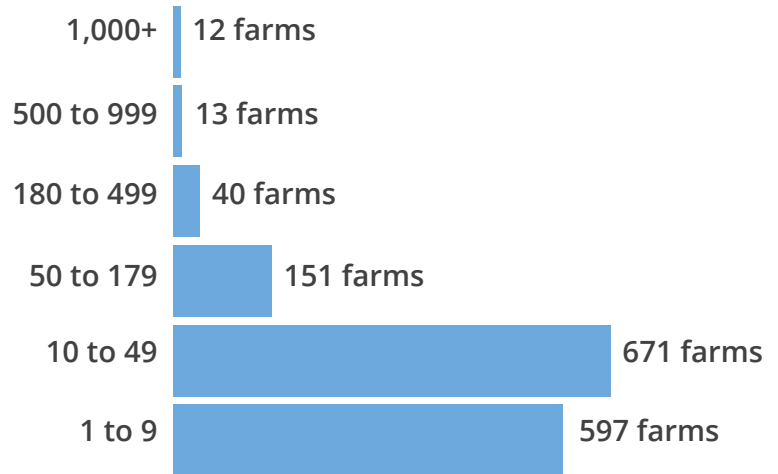
Prepared by   
Revised 8/1/2023

*This map is for information purposes only. The County's official zoning and comprehensive plan maps can be accessed through the Deschutes County Dial Property Information System. Please note that these maps do not represent all of the County's combining and overlay zones.*

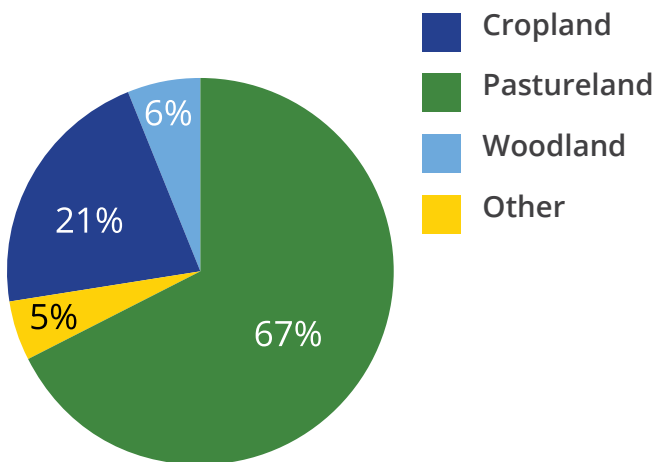
development in these areas each year. Even with this limitation on development, forest managers and service providers continue to express concern with wildfire risk associated with residential development in heavily wooded areas.

Most lands in either of these classifications within Deschutes County are federally owned and managed by the US Forest Service. Historically, forest lands were used for timber production. As timber harvesting decreases, other uses for forest lands are emerging. State regulations permit five general types of uses, including forest operations; environmental, agricultural or recreational uses; two types of

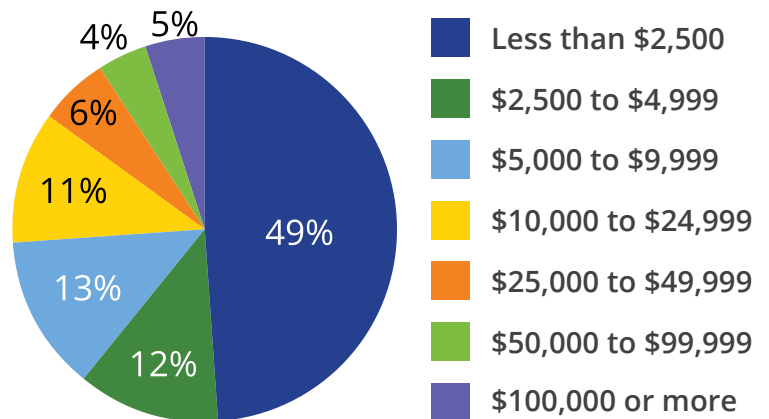
### Farms By Size (acres)



### Land in Farms by Use



### Farms By Value of Sales



Subzone Name	Minimum Parcel Size (for farm divisions and farm-related dwellings)	v
Lower Bridge	130	Irrigated field crops, hay pastures
Sisters/Cloverdale	63	Irrigated alfalfa, hay and pastures, wooded grazing and some field crops
Terrebonne	35	Irrigated hay and pasture
Tumalo/Redmond/Bend	23	Irrigated pasture and some hay
Alfalfa	36	Irrigated hay and pasture
La Pine	37	Riparian meadows, grazing and meadow hay
Horse Ridge East	320	Rangeland grazing

dwelling and locally dependent uses. Permitted uses are defined and clarified in OAR 660-006. The following uses are major forest uses in Deschutes County:

- **Secondary forest products (forest operations):** There is an increasing use of secondary forest products, such as hog fuel (chipped wood) or wood slash. This type of product is generally seen as providing dual benefit, by providing economic opportunity while also reducing wildfire risk through thinning projects.
- **Alternative Energy:** Biomass is an emerging technology for renewable energy and can also be integrated with these products. The first biomass facility in the County is currently under development through a partnership with Mt. Bachelor Ski Resort and the US Forest Service.
- **Recreation (environmental, agricultural and recreation uses):** The proximity of federal forests for hiking, mountain biking, skiing, hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and other outdoor recreation draws tourists and residents alike. Skyline Forest, a 33,000-acre privately owned property in the Forest 1 zone has been identified as a potential community asset, with several groups and nonprofits seeking to acquire and utilize the property as a community forest. In 2022, Deschutes Land Trust facilitated a community visioning process to identify preferred community uses if land were to be purchased as a privately held recreational asset.

## Key Community Considerations

Given the range of issues and conditions discussed above and, this plan includes a variety of policies to support farm and forest operations in Deschutes County. Additional related policies also are found in Chapter 2: Land Use and Regional Coordination, Chapter 5: Natural Resources, and Chapter 9: Economic Development. These strategies are underpinned by the following results of Comprehensive Plan outreach efforts.

- Community members opposed rezoning low productivity farmland with poor soil to allow greater opportunities for housing, while supporting rezoning of this land to preserve open space.
- There is strong support for conducting educational outreach to encourage water conservation and on-farm efficiency measures.
- Community members also strongly support allowing greater flexibility for income-producing supplemental activities on farms such as farm-to-table dinner, farm stands, weddings, or similar events.
- Outreach participants expressed support for investment in the agricultural economy through grants or exploring a farmland conservation program.

## Goals and Policies

**Goal 3.1:** Preserve and maintain agricultural lands, operations, and uses to support Deschutes County's agricultural economy

**Policy 3.1.1.** Retain agricultural lands through Exclusive Farm Use zoning.

**Policy 3.1.2.** Continue to apply Exclusive Farm Use sub- consistent with the County's most up-to-date adopted studies of agricultural land and as implemented through the County Development Code.

**Policy 3.1.3.** Develop comprehensive plan policy criteria and code to provide clarity on when and how EFU parcels can be converted to other designations.

**Policy 3.1.4.** Regularly review farm regulations to ensure compliance with changes to State Statute, Oregon Administrative Rules and case law.

**Goal 3.2:** Promote a diverse, sustainable, and thriving agricultural sector.

**Policy 3.2.1.** Encourage farming by promoting the raising and selling of crops, livestock and/or poultry.

**Policy 3.2.2.** Support agriculture through the use of grant funds, research, and other resources dedicated to agricultural community members and stakeholders, including but not limited to farmers, agricultural researchers, farm bureaus, and other organizations in studying and promoting economically viable agricultural opportunities and practices.

**Policy 3.2.3.** Support and encourage small farming enterprises through a variety of related strategies and programs, including, but not limited to, niche markets, organic farming, food council, buy local, farmers markets, farm-to-table activities, farm stands or value-added products, or other programs or strategies.

**Policy 3.2.4.** Work cooperatively with irrigation districts, public agencies and representatives, and landowners to promote and support agricultural uses and operations, including through use of rural reserves, conservation easements, transfer of development rights programs, land acquisition, and other preservation strategies consistent with existing Federal and State Law.

**Policy 3.2.5.** Support efforts to control noxious weeds and invasive species.

**Policy 3.2.6.** Continue to review and revise county code as needed to be and consistent with state code, rules, and regulations to permit alternative and supplemental farm activities that are compatible with farming, such as agritourism or other small-scale sustainable activities.

**Policy 3.2.7.** Work with the State to review and revise their regulations when a desired alternative or supplemental use identified by the County is not permitted by State regulations.



**Policy 3.2.8.** Use land use policy and development code requirements, including right-to-farm provisions, as well as coordination with other jurisdictions to minimize conflicts between residential uses and agricultural uses and continue to promote the viable operation of agricultural uses.

**Policy 3.2.9.** Provide resources such as technical assistance and access to grants to support on-site efficiency upgrades relating to agriculture.

**Goal 3.3:** Ensure Exclusive Farm Use policies, classifications, and codes are consistent with local and emerging agricultural conditions and markets.

**Policy 3.3.1.** Identify and retain accurately designated agricultural lands.

**Policy 3.3.2.** Continue to explore new methods of identifying and classifying agricultural lands.

- a. Apply for grants to review and, if needed, update farmland designations.
- b. Study County agricultural designations considering elements such as water availability, farm viability and economics, climatic conditions, land use patterns, accepted farm practices, and impacts on public services.
- c. Lobby for changes to State Statute regarding agricultural definitions specific to Deschutes County that would allow some reclassification of agricultural lands.

**Policy 3.3.3.** Address land use challenges in the Horse Ridge subzone, specifically:

- a. The large number of platted lots not meeting the minimum acreage;
- b. The need for non-farm dwellings and location requirements for farm dwellings;

- c. Concerns over the impact on private property from off-road vehicles, facilities, and trails located on adjacent public lands.

**Policy 3.3.4.** Continue to work with the State to review and revise accessory farm dwelling requirements to address the needs of local farmers.

**Policy 3.3.5.** Encourage coordination between agricultural interests and fish and wildlife management organizations, including public agencies, non-governmental organizations and others.

**Policy 3.3.6.** Explore the evaluation and potential redesignation of lands with a farm designation and poor soils and low productivity for protected open space, development of needed housing, or other uses that support community goals as follows.

- a. Allow comprehensive plan and zoning map amendments, including for those that qualify as non-resource land, for individual EFU parcels as allowed by State Statute, Oregon Administrative Rules and this Comprehensive Plan.
- b. Explore creation of a new zoning classification intended to balance value of high desert environment while allowing for limited housing opportunities and applying this designation through coordination with interested and willing property owners.

**Goal 3.4:** Protect and maintain forest lands for multiple uses and objectives, including forest products, watershed protection, conservation, recreation, wildlife habitat protection, carbon sequestration, forest health, and wildfire resilience.

**Policy 3.4.1.** Retain forest lands through Forest 1 and Forest 2 zoning.



**Policy 3.4.2.** To conserve and maintain unimpacted forest lands, retain Forest 1 zoning for those lands with the following characteristics:

- a. Consist predominantly of ownerships not developed by residences or non- forest uses;
- b. Consist predominantly of contiguous ownerships of 160 acres or larger;
- c. Consist predominantly of ownerships contiguous to other lands utilized for commercial forest or commercial farm uses;
- d. Are accessed by roads intended primarily for forest management; and
- e. Are primarily under forest management.

**Policy 3.4.3.** To conserve and maintain impacted forest lands, retain Forest 2 zoning for those lands with the following characteristics:

- a. Consist predominantly of ownerships developed for residential or non-forest uses;
- b. Consist predominantly of ownerships less than 160 acres;
- c. Consist of ownerships generally contiguous to tracts containing less than 160 acres and residences, or adjacent to acknowledged exception areas; and
- d. Provide a level of public facilities and services, including roads, intended primarily for direct services to rural residences.”

**Policy 3.4.4.** Notwithstanding any other quasi-judicial plan or zone change criteria, lands designated as Forest under this Plan and zoned Forest 2 may upon application be redesignated and rezoned from Forest 2 to Exclusive Farm Use if such lands:

- a. Do not qualify under State Statute for forestland tax deferral,
- b. Are not necessary to permit forest operations or practices on adjoining lands and do not constitute forested lands that maintain soil, air, water and fish and wildlife resources,
- c. Have soils on the property that fall within the definition of agricultural lands as set forth in Goal 3,
- d. Are a tract of land 40 acres or less in size,
- e. Do not qualify under State Statute and the terms of the Forest 2 zone for a dwelling, and;
- f. Were purchased by the property owner after January 1, 1985 but before November 4, 1993.

Such changes may be made regardless of the size of the resulting EFU zoning district. Such changes shall be processed in the same manner as other quasi- judicial plan or zoning map changes.

**Policy 3.4.5.** Ensure that criteria for and designation of Forest Lands are consistent with state administrative rules and statutes.

**Policy 3.4.6.** Coordinate and cooperate with the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and other public agencies to promote sustainable forest uses, including recreation and biomass facilities, on public forest land, including currently adopted Forest and Land Management Plans prepared by the US Forest Service (USFS) and US Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

- a. Using the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, or its successor, as the basis for mutual coordination and cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service;

- b. Using the Prineville Bureau of Land Management Upper Deschutes Resource Management Plan, or its successor, as the basis for mutual coordination and cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management.

**Policy 3.4.7.** Notify affected agencies and tribal governments when reviewing land use applications and proposals for development that could impact Federal or State forest lands.

**Policy 3.4.8.** Support economic development opportunities that promote forest health, create opportunities for local production of related forest products, and reduce the prevalence of invasive plant species that adversely affect forest health and soil quality.

**Policy 3.4.9.** Provide input on public forest plans that impact Deschutes County.

**Policy 3.4.10.** Coordinate with community stakeholders to support forest management plans and projects that are consistent with the policies of this chapter and with local community forest management and wildfire protection plans.

- a. Promote forest health and resilience to wildfire.
- b. Contribute to public safety by treating wildland hazardous fuels particularly in the designated Wildland Urban Interface as identified in the Community Wildfire Protection Plans described in Chapter 13, Natural Hazards, of this Plan.
- c. Retain fish and wildlife habitat.

**Policy 3.4.11.** Continue to review and revise the County Code as needed to ensure development in forest zones minimizes and/or mitigates impacts on fish and wildlife habitat, forest health, and wildfire resiliency.

