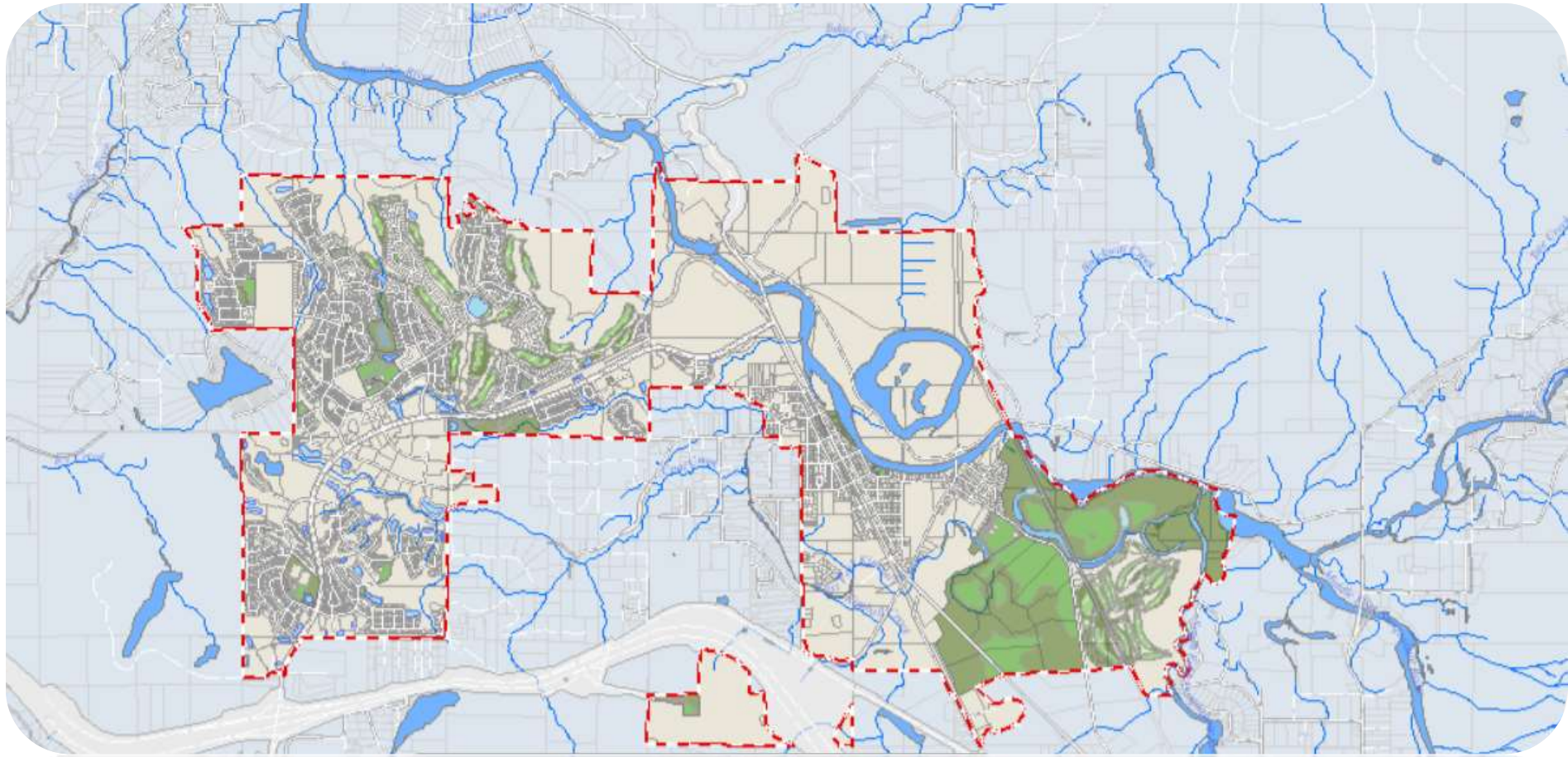
Introduction to the Environmental Element

Planning Commission Meeting
December 4, 2023

Introduction to the Environmental Element

- ☑ An optional Element
- ☑ Not required under the GMA
- ☑ Highly valued Element for Snoqualmie



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RCW 36.70A.030(5) defines five types of critical areas:

- Wetlands.
- Areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water.
- Frequently flooded areas.
- Geologically hazardous areas.
- Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas

Other policy topics anticipated to be covered: climate change, air quality and urban forestry

Critical Areas

All critical areas must be designated and their functions and values protected using the best available scientific information – known as best available science or BAS.

Salmonids play an extremely important role in the ecosystem and are vital cultural and economic resources, therefore jurisdictions must also "give special consideration to conservation and protection measures necessary to preserve or enhance anadromous fisheries."

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Protecting critical areas has a nexus in several federal and state laws:

- Federal Clean Water Act
- Safe Drinking Water Ac
- Endangered Species Act
- National Environmental Policy Act
- National Floodplain Insurance Program (administered by FEMA);
- Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA),
- Shoreline Management Act,
- Watershed Planning Act,
- Salmon Recovery Act,
- Municipal Water Law
- GMA

Additionally, the federal and state governments have a responsibility to ensure that tribal treaty rights are upheld, which in part requires that fish habitat is protected and improved.

Wetlands

Wetlands are fragile ecosystems that serve a number of important beneficial functions. Wetlands assist in the reduction of erosion, siltation, flooding, ground and surface water pollution, and provide wildlife, plant, and fisheries habitats. Wetlands destruction or impairment may result in increased public and private costs or property losses.

In designating wetlands for regulatory purposes, counties and cities are required to use the definition of wetlands in RCW 36.70A.030(20).

Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

Much of Washington's drinking water comes from ground water supplies. Once ground water is contaminated it is difficult, costly, and sometimes impossible to clean up.

Preventing contamination is necessary to avoid exorbitant costs, hardships, and potential physical harm to people.

The quality of ground water in an aquifer is inextricably linked to its recharge area.

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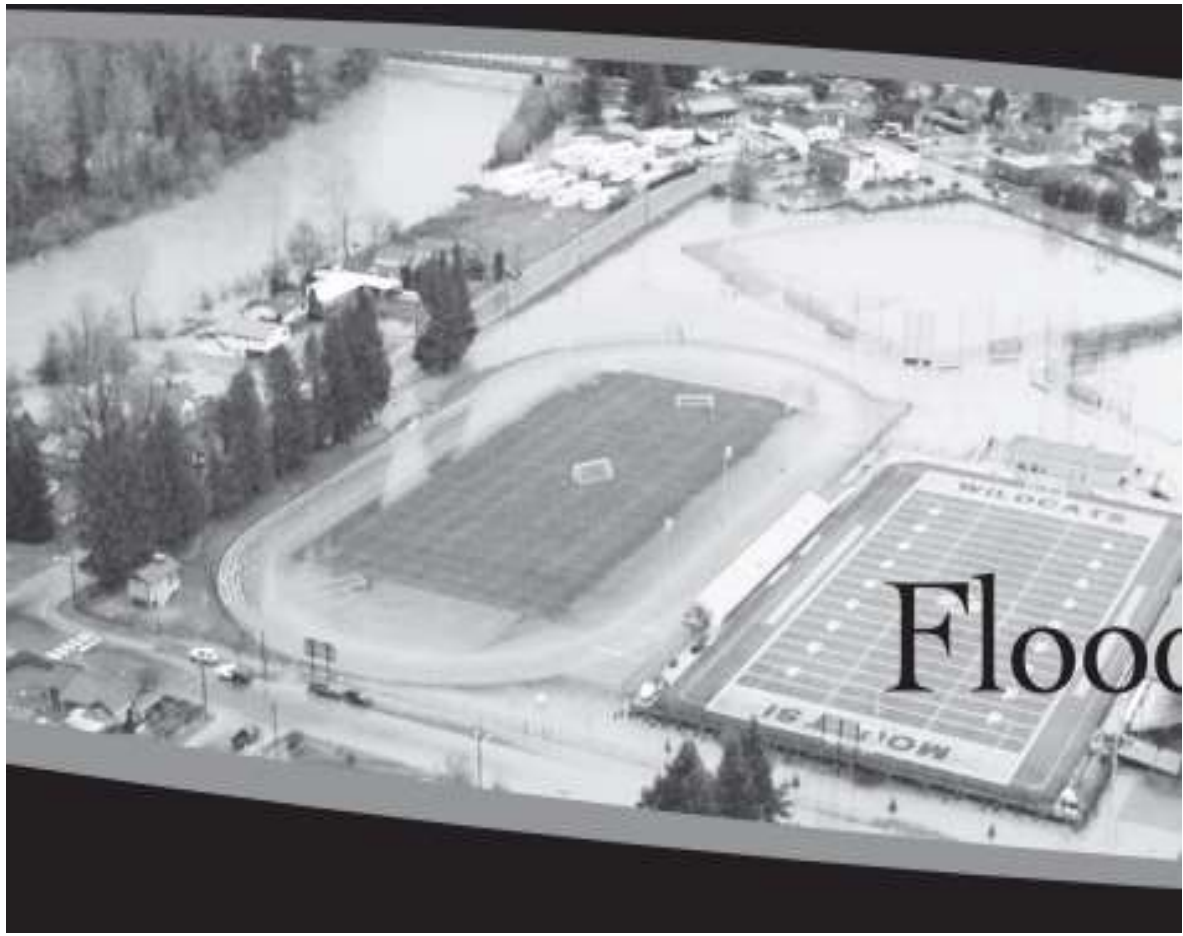
Frequently Flooded Areas

Floodplains and other areas subject to flooding perform important hydrologic functions and may present a risk to persons and property.

Classifications of frequently flooded areas should include, at a minimum, the 100-year floodplain designations of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Flood Insurance Program.

Historic losses to salmon habitat have occurred as a result of development encroaching into floodplains. In addition to minimizing adverse effects to human health, safety and infrastructure, floodplains are ideal locations for salmon habitat restoration.



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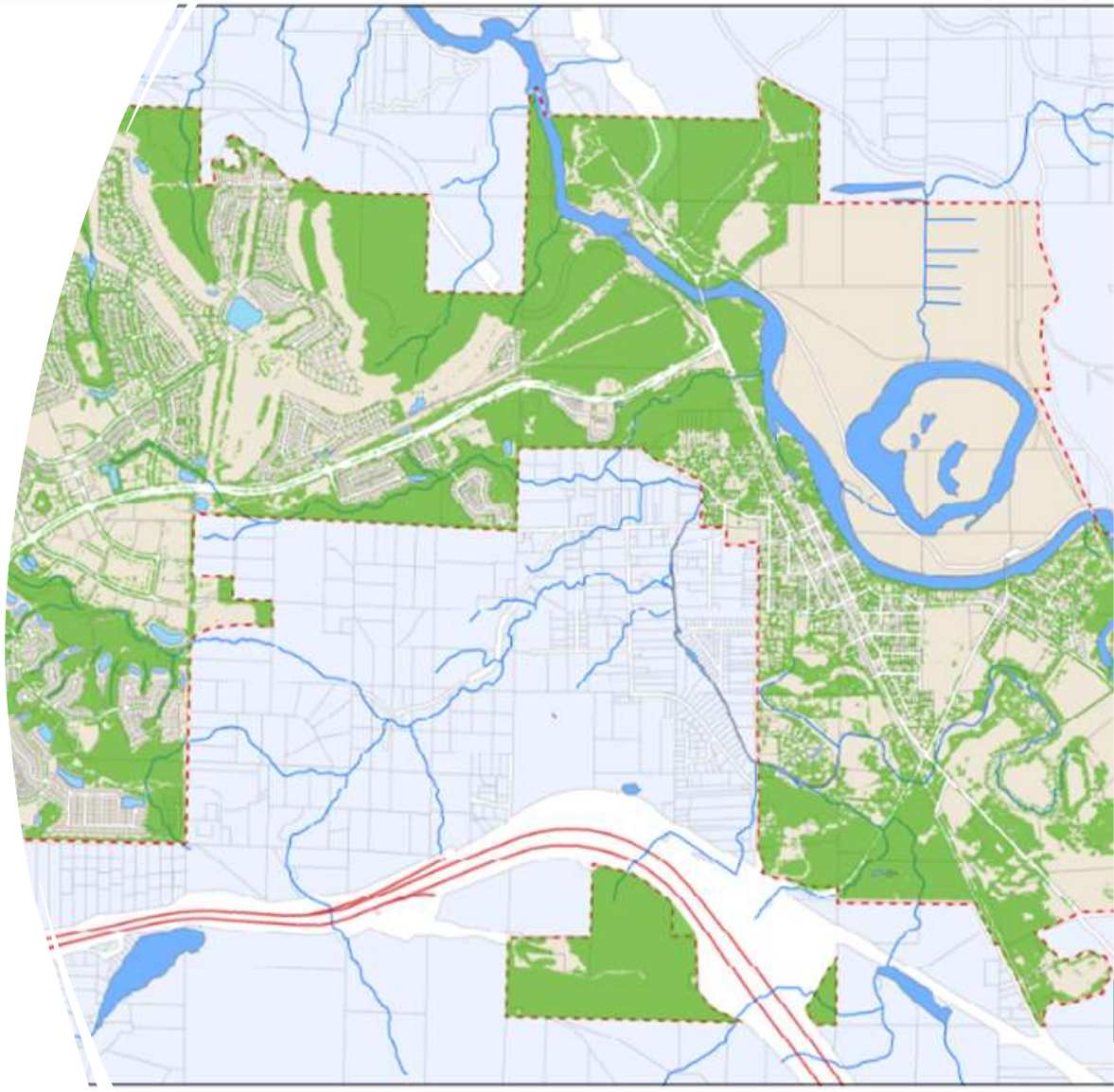
Urban Forestry

- Preserves open space and serves as wildlife corridors
- Tree cover contributes as important strategy for climate planning
- Tree Canopy map in current element; update based on Urban Forestry Strategic Plan



Geological Hazardous Areas

Geologically hazardous areas include areas susceptible to erosion, sliding, earthquake, or other geological events. They pose a threat to the health and safety of citizens, fish, and wildlife, when incompatible commercial, residential, or industrial development is sited in areas of significant hazard.

Some geological hazards can be reduced or mitigated by engineering, design, or modified construction or mining practices so that risks to health and safety are acceptable.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

Fish and wildlife habitat conservation is the management of land for maintaining species in suitable habitats within their natural geographic distribution so that isolated subpopulations are not created.

This does not mean that all individuals of all species must be maintained at all times, but it does mean cooperative and coordinated land use planning is critically important among counties and cities in a region.

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Climate Planning

PSRC VISION 2050 Climate Goal: The region substantially reduces emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change in accordance with the goals of the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency (50% below 1990 levels by 2030 and 80% below 1990 levels by 2050) and prepares for climate change impacts.

Growth Management Act: New Climate Element

Adds two sub-elements:

- Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction
- Resilience mandatory for all fully planning jurisdictions
- Due by 2029

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Public Comment Received

- Please consider the climate crisis in all decisions going forward.

- Would love to see housing start to level out and the focus to shift to maximizing the natural environment and creating and maintaining spaces to recreate in nature. This is such a beautiful area!

Draft Environment Policies Review

Next Steps:

January 2, 2024 - First review Environment Policies

Expected topic areas:

- Environmental protection
- Critical Areas
- Shorelines
- Climate Planning
- Urban Forestry