

Acres in Forest Land

OUTCOME: MAINTAIN THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF NATURAL RESOURCE LAND

Countywide Planning Policy Rationale

“Agricultural and forest lands are protected primarily for their long-term productive resource value. However, these lands also provide secondary benefits such as open space, scenic views and wildlife habitat.” (CPP LU-1)

Forest land is a significant resource in King County and its conservation is a goal of the Countywide Planning Policies. Forest production is an important economic resource of the County. The preservation of forest land provides many other benefits including: continuous habitat for many species of wildlife, protected stream quality for salmon habitat, air quality improvement, and aesthetic and recreational opportunities.

The King County Comprehensive Plan designates the Forest Production District (FPD) as those lands that are of long-term commercial significance for forestry. Also identified in the Comprehensive Plan are the Rural Forest Focus Areas (RFFA), geographic areas where the County is focusing its efforts on retaining large, contiguous blocks of rural forest.

Figure 39.1 compares the distribution of land ownership as a way to monitor changes in our forested lands over time. These data indicate a discernable shift of acreage out of the Industrial/Large Commercial Ownership category into public ownership and smaller lot, Non-Industrial Private Ownerships.

As shown, much of the increase in federal ownership in the FPD is the result of land trades between the US Forest Service and private companies to consolidate ownerships into larger, more manageable blocks. Also reflected are purchases of forestland, often facilitated by land trusts and other non-profit organizations, for addition to the national forest.

State and local governments have acquired significant amounts of forestland in both the FPD and the RFFAs from private owners, contributing to decreases in the total acres of forest in both the Industrial/Large Commercial Ownership category and in Non-Industrial Private Ownership over time. For example, King County acquired the 1,822-acre Taylor Mountain Forest and almost 650 acres of forested land bordering the Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River, east of North Bend.

Figure 39.1

Acres of Forested Land in Various Categories*			
Forest Production District (FPD)			
	1996	1999	2007
Federal Ownership	338,600		354,150
State Ownership	83,000		92,650
Municipal/ County Ownership	94,000		118,300
Industrial/Large Commercial Ownership (private)	286,510		233,400
Non-Industrial Private Ownership	13,570		15,700
Other**	8,320		9,800
FPD Total	824,000	-	824,000
Rural Forest Focus Areas (RFFA)			
Federal Ownership		75	80
State Ownership		4,650	4,790
Municipal/ County Ownership		4,660	9,500
Industrial/Large Commercial Ownership (private)		8,540	6,470
Non-Industrial Private Ownership		32,410	29,900
Other**		2,565	1,890
RFFA Total	52,900	52,900	52,630
	876,900	52,900	876,630
Proportion of County Land Area in Forestland	64%	64%	64%

Source: King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks

*This figure includes only acreages within King County's FPD and RFFAs. Vashon Island is not included. ** "Other" includes most bodies of water, rights-of-way and adjustments for boundary variations among GIS layers.

An analysis of landownership changes reveals an important trend of forestland moving from large timber companies into smaller ownerships. As large tracts of commercial forest are subdivided, sold and converted to residential land uses, the forested landscape is fragmented and many of the environmental benefits, as well as the ability to manage the land for forest production, are lost.

Illustrating this trend, King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks estimates that between 2005 and 2007 a total of 1,800 acres in the RFFAs and FPD were transferred from industrial ownership to Non-Industrial Private Ownership, reflecting the conversion of commercial forestland for residential uses. Moreover, within the RFFAs large forested properties in sizes of some hundreds of acres are increasingly being subdivided into properties of 40 acres and smaller.