



Our Green/Duwamish

Open Space Strategy

Introduction

In September 2014, King County, together with the City of Seattle, created the *Our Green/Duwamish* (OGD) initiative to develop strategies to strengthen communities and improve air, land, and water conditions in Green/Duwamish Watershed. This initiative is intended to increase coordination of current work at the local, state, and federal levels to manage habitat restoration, salmon recovery, flood control, public health, social equity, environmental cleanups, economic development, open space preservation, water quality and more.

Over a year of initial background research and community meetings culminated in a [Preliminary Background Report](#), which provides a summary of current conditions and existing plans and programs active in the Green/Duwamish Watershed. This report documents work currently being done to develop a more comprehensive approach to protect open space in the Green/Duwamish Watershed. More specifically, the recommendation is as follows:

Develop a watershed-wide open space plan prioritizing areas that protect the most valuable open space, habitat, recreation lands and farmland. Strategically planning for open space and parks can more effectively benefit environmental conditions, improve climate change resilience, and enhance public health outcomes for communities within the Green/Duwamish Watershed.

Background

Population growth and associated development continue to transform the Green/Duwamish Watershed landscape from forested and open space lands to urban uses resulting in the fragmentation of wildlife corridors, riparian habitat and the depletion of working resource lands and open vistas; however the current system of open space lands can still be enhanced to meet needs and optimize existing resources to provide multiple benefits to the watershed. Ongoing efforts to incrementally improve open space have been successful but greater linkages and a more comprehensive strategy can do more to protect and restore the health of natural systems, provide recreational opportunities, shape community character, and help sustain agriculture and forestry economies and improve community health.



Open spaces help maintain air quality, water quality and quantity, and help mitigate the effects of climate change. In the Green/Duwamish Watershed there is a need to link natural areas to create regional corridors of greenways and a contiguous and functional open space system for the community and environment. The Green/Duwamish River Watershed contains a significant amount of public lands managed for conservation and recreation purposes, including three regional trail corridors. Throughout the watershed, approximately 125,000 acres are owned by public agencies, with an additional 60,000 acres protected from future development by conservation easements. Of the total protected acreage, King County owns approximately 8,000 acres in fee, and holds conservation easements over approximately 50,000 acres. The balance of protected land is owned by state, federal, and city agencies or protected by easements held by conservation non-governmental organizations.

Purpose and Approach

A watershed-wide open space plan can include connecting active and passive parks, trails, natural areas, including those that have ecological benefits and contribute to biodiversity, forest resource lands, farmlands and floodplain function lands. Open space features related to the quality of the air we breathe, the land we live and grow food on, and water we drink and fish from can directly or indirectly influence the health of a community. Open space must be integrated as a part of a comprehensive solution to substantially address environmental and human health. Multiple benefits of resource protection and recreation can be achieved 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 watershed residents.

In March of 2016, King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks submitted the Land Conservation and Preservation Work Plan (LCP) to the King County Council, which is a project that has been in development since 2015. This work plan proposes steps the County can take to identify and conserve lands of high conservation value across King County, including land in the Green/Duwamish Watershed. More specifically, the Work Plan focuses on conservation lands in five major categories (below).

Natural lands for clean water, clean air, passive recreation opportunities, healthy communities, salmon recovery and wildlife, and resilience in an uncertain future.

Farmland for healthy local food and a thriving agricultural economy

Forestland for clean water, clean air, salmon recovery and wildlife, and a sustainable timber industry.

River valley and nearshore land for flood safety, salmon recovery, recreation, and a healthy Puget Sound.

Trail corridor connections to complete a regional trail network to increase mobility, improve human health and reduce pollution.

In addition to identifying the remaining unprotected conservation lands in King County, the Work Plan identifies existing and potential future revenues to support protection of the identified lands, proposes that these lands be protected within a generation, and proposes a process to further refine the analysis, including coordinating with cities for lands inside incorporated areas and additional engagement for stakeholders and partners. The LCP has a goal of conserving more than 60,000 acres of high conservation value lands.

With the interest in building upon existing programs, along with optimizing our investments in the Green/Duwamish Watershed, *Our Green/Duwamish* invited the LCP team to present the LCP Initiative to the Watershed Advisory Group (WAG). A WAG workshop was held on May 19, 2016 to learn about the LCP, in detail, and determine if this County project could meet the *Our Green/Duwamish* priority of developing an open space action strategy. After the presentations and discussions, the WAG determined the LCP Initiative does fulfill the desired purpose of a watershed-wide open space strategy and the WAG provided a set of recommendations to improve the LCP so it can best meet the interests of the Green/Duwamish Watershed.

Recommendation 1: Update parcel level maps based on comments from WAG (Duwamish Blueprint, KCD urban forests, etc.) and open space “opportunities” from OGD Phase I.

Recommendation 2: Consider equity: overlay “Access to Open Space” map to identify current and potential future gaps in open space.



Recommendation 3: King County Work Plan team will work with Green/Duwamish cities to identify candidate conservation lands (suggested by WAG).

Recommendation 4: Look at spatial nexus of stormwater management and open space lands.

Recommendation 5: Work with WAG volunteer team (PSRC, TNC, WRIA 9) over summer to respond if additional candidate conservation lands are added in the Green/Duwamish Watershed.

Recommendation 6: King County Work Plan team provide updates to the WAG when the Land Conservation Task Force begins to meet.

Over the course of six months, the LCP Initiative team has been taking steps to refine the LCP Work Plan with the help of the newly formed Land Conservation Advisory Group. The Advisory Group includes representatives from nonprofits, private industry, tribes, and city representatives and has held nine meetings to date. The group provides feedback on the lands to be protected, potential funding options, implementation strategies, and will conclude with recommendations on how to move the LCP Initiative towards fruition. More information regarding the progress made can be found on the advisory group website: [Land Conservation Advisory Group 2016](#). In addition, many of the recommendations proposed by the WAG have been or are on their way to being accomplished. Below is a description of what is currently being done to achieve the recommendations proposed by the WAG.

Status of WAG Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Update parcel level maps based on comments from WAG (Duwamish Blueprint, KCD urban forests, etc.) and open space “opportunities” from OGD Phase I. achievement

Recommendation 1 Accomplishments:

- The LCP Initiative team reviewed plans suggested by the WAG, as well as additional plans and programs that had the potential to provide support to and be supported by the LCP Initiative.
- The LCP Initiative team met with organizations to discuss the Initiative and determine methods to integrate city priorities. Organizations included:
 - WRIA 7, 8, 9 including committees
 - Sound Cities Association
 - Parks Directors Meetings
 - City Managers Meetings
 - The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe
 - The Snoqualmie Indian Tribe
 - King County Agriculture Commission
 - King County Rural Forest Commission
 - Non-profit conservation organizations including Forterra, Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, Vashon Maury Island Land Trust, and several community organizations.



Recommendation 2: Consider equity: overlay “Access to Open Space” map to identify current and potential future gaps in open space.

Recommendation 2 Accomplishments:

- The LCP Initiative team is working with the King County DNRP ESJ lead, and the LCP Advisory Group to evaluate how the LCP Initiative could advance equity and social justice priorities.
- The LCP Initiative team worked with GIS specialists to develop an Open Space Equity mapping tool which overlays access to open space, health information, and demographic information by census tract across King County to determine where additional open space will most improve equity and social justice.

Recommendation 3: King County Work Plan team will work with Green/Duwamish cities to identify candidate conservation lands (suggested by WAG).

Recommendation 3 Accomplishments:

- From November 2016 to March 2017, the LCP team met individually with cities to determine how to capture each city’s priorities.
- As of March 22, 2017, meetings have occurred with are currently scheduled with 33 cities, including all cities in WRIA 9
- In late April and May 2017, King County have follow up meetings with many cities to further discuss city-county open space themes and specific priorities.

Recommendation 4: Look at spatial nexus of stormwater management and open space lands.

Recommendation 4 Accomplishments:

- The LCP Initiative team is working with King County Stormwater Services (KCSS) staff to identify potential lands having both water quality and conservation benefits.
- The LCP Initiative team is also working with KCSS to examine feasibility of a stormwater “flow credit transfer” program.

Recommendation 5: Work with WAG volunteer team (PSRC, TNC, WRIA 9) over summer to respond if additional candidate conservation lands are added in the Green/Duwamish Watershed.

Recommendation 5 Accomplishments:

- The *Our Green/Duwamish* Open Space Workgroup met on October 10, 2016. At the meeting, the LCP Initiative team provided an update on the status of the WAG recommendations and received feedback from the Open Space Workgroup. No additional recommendations from the workgroup were suggested during this meeting.



Recommendation 6: King County Work Plan team provide updates to the WAG when the Land Conservation Task Force begins to meet.

Recommendation 6 Accomplishments:

- LCP Initiative updates are provided to the WAG in email updates from KC DNRP Department Director.

Conclusion

In summary, the Land Conservation and Preservation Initiative fulfills the intent of the *Our Green/Duwamish* Open Space Plan by prioritizing areas that protect the most valuable open space, habitat, recreation lands and farmland to effectively benefit environmental conditions, improve climate change resilience, and enhance public health outcomes for communities within the Green/Duwamish Watershed. Achievement of the WAG recommendations is close to being complete and the LCP Advisory Group will refine options to move forward and make recommendations on a final approach to achieving King County's land conservation goals. Final recommendations from the LCP Advisory Group were provided in a report to the King County Executive and Council in February 2017.