

300 survey completions

Whatcom County Park, Recreation, & Open Space Plan

In August 2005 a random sample of resident voter households in Whatcom County were contacted to participate in a controlled sample survey concerning park, recreation, and open space planning proposals.

600 households agreed to participate in the survey and were mailed a copy of a summary description of the plan and a copy of the questionnaire. Survey results were compiled for the first 300 households who completed the surveys by follow-up telephone call - the number planned for in the original survey scope - of which 49% were male and 51% were female.

The resulting survey results are accurate to within 7+/- percent of the opinions of the general population (the statistics are rounded and may not add to 100 percent and do not list don't know responses). The statistics also account for undecided, did not know, or refused a response. Following is a summary of the results for the total sample group.

Recreation program priorities and financing options

5	Have any household members used recreational programs provided by Whatcom County in the last year?	48% yes 52% no
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What recreational programs do you think Whatcom County should offer (that your household members would use) on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is the least important and 5 is the most important?

		<i>lowest / highest</i>				
		1	2	3	4	5
Interpretive programs provided in county parks						
6	Wildlife habitat exhibits, walks, programs, and events?	10%	15%	28%	31%	16%
7	Environmental exhibits, walks, programs, and events?	16%	19%	25%	24%	15%
8	Historical, archeological, and heritage exhibits, walks, programs, and events?	10%	11%	31%	28%	19%
9	Farm and agricultural exhibits, programs and events?	21%	26%	26%	19%	8%
Outdoor programs provided in county parks						
		<i>lowest / highest</i>				
10	Outdoor skill and safety instructions in biking, boating, horseback riding, etc?	20%	18%	23%	24%	14%
11	Campfire social and entertainment programs?	34%	26%	24%	10%	6%
12	Rental of bikes, canoes, boats, and other equipment?	20%	17%	25%	20%	17%
13	Rental of campsites and cabins?	15%	10%	16%	28%	30%
14	Rental of picnic shelters and lodges?	14%	10%	21%	27%	27%
Youth/family programs provided in county parks						
		<i>lowest / highest</i>				
15	Youth day use and overnight summer camps?	26%	12%	21%	22%	17%
16	Youth hike, bike, or horse trail excursions?	23%	12%	25%	21%	17%
17	Youth volunteer park construction/work parties?	22%	11%	20%	23%	22%
18	Family or group picnic and camping events?	21%	17%	27%	21%	11%
19	Family hike, bike, or horse trail excursions?	23%	18%	27%	20%	10%
20	Adult hike, bike, or horse trail excursions?	22%	19%	28%	19%	7%
21	Adult volunteer park construction/work parties?	16%	15%	23%	24%	18%
Cultural arts programs provided in county facilities						
		<i>lowest / highest</i>				
22	Hosting of music, drama, art, and other festivals and special events in a park?	11%	13%	20%	28%	28%
23	Roeder/Hovander home historical displays and tours?	12%	19%	29%	26%	13%
24	Rental of Roeder/Hovander homes for weddings, parties, and other special events?	20%	19%	20%	19%	21%

If it requires more money than can be budgeted from **Whatcom County** resources to provide future recreation programs, how would you rate the following methods of paying for them?

County recreation program financing options		lowest / highest				
25	Reduce the number - of programs to control costs?	13%	18%	31%	19%	17%
26	Reduce the content, variety, and duration - of programs to control costs?	12%	19%	33%	20%	13%
27	Increase user fees for non-residents - to finance program services?	9%	9%	16%	28%	36%
28	Increase user fees for everyone - to finance program services?	22%	18%	25%	24%	11%
29	Increase county taxes - to finance needed program services?	45%	18%	18%	10%	8%

Facility priorities in general

In general, how would you rate the **existing** inventory of **all** park, recreation, and open space facilities provided in **Whatcom County** by the county, cities, school districts, port, state, and other park providers?

		lowest / highest				
24	Quantity - the number, size and location of existing park and trail sites to serve the existing population?	4%	7%	27%	40%	21%
25	Quality - of maintenance conditions and furnishings including parking, restrooms, trails, campsites, shelters, cabins, and other facilities in existing parks?	1%	5%	26%	48%	19%

How would you rate the **need** for the following **additional** facilities within the county in general whether provided by the county, cities, school districts, port, state, or another park provider?

Conservation needs		lowest / highest				
26	Water resources and watershed protection areas?	8%	10%	20%	23%	38%
27	Wildlife habitat and conservation areas?	7%	8%	22%	30%	31%
28	Old growth forestland conservation areas?	8%	9%	17%	26%	39%
29	Productive farmland conservation areas?	9%	9%	25%	25%	30%
30	Open space and scenic area preservation?	7%	7%	22%	32%	31%
31	Historical buildings and sites?	8%	13%	28%	29%	21%

Regional park needs		lowest / highest				
32	Waterfront access and beach use sites?	6%	6%	18%	25%	44%
33	Cartop boat (kayak/canoe) launch sites?	12%	17%	32%	20%	17%
34	Powerboat launching and moorage facilities?	25%	23%	33%	9%	10%
35	Picnic tables, play areas, and shelters	6%	9%	29%	35%	20%
36	Tent, yurt, RV campsites, group camps, and cabins?	11%	16%	30%	27%	15%

Trail needs		lowest / highest				
37	Handicap accessible trails and facilities within parks?	9%	14%	35%	23%	18%
38	Off-road cross-country walking and hiking trails?	10%	8%	25%	32%	24%
39	Off-road cross-country horse trails?	23%	26%	32%	11%	6%
40	Off-road cross-country bicycle trails?	16%	19%	29%	21%	12%
41	Off-road snowshoe, skiing, and snowmobile trails?	22%	24%	32%	13%	6%
42	Off-road multipurpose (hike/bike/horse) trails?	17%	15%	32%	19%	14%
43	On-road cross-country bicycle routes?	20%	15%	29%	19%	16%
44	Dog parks, exercise areas, and trails?	23%	17%	27%	19%	12%
45	Off-road ATV, motorcycle, and ORV parks?	58%	18%	13%	5%	5%

Recreational facility needs		lowest / highest				
46	Soccer, lacrosse, baseball, and softball athletic fields?	14%	12%	31%	25%	17%
47	Golf course and driving ranges?	45%	23%	19%	7%	4%

48	Community classrooms and meeting facilities?	20%	24%	29%	21%	5%
49	Daycare facilities?	29%	20%	27%	13%	8%
50	Youth and teen activity centers?	9%	11%	24%	32%	22%
51	Senior activity centers?	11%	9%	26%	36%	16%

Development plan proposal priorities

*Under the proposed park plan, the county, cities, school districts, port, and other park providers may **jointly conserve and develop** wildlife and open space preservations, waterfront parks, picnic and camping facilities, trails, athletic fields, meeting facilities, and other activities within the county. How would you rate the following proposals - **as shown on the attached preliminary concept graphics that correspond with the question numbers?***

Conservancy parks - see pages 9-10 and 21		lowest / highest				
52	Conservancies watershed - protect the proposed water resource and watershed areas of the county?	5%	6%	17%	21%	49%
53	Conservancies wildlife - protect the proposed wildlife habitat areas of the county in and around fresh and saltwater areas, wetlands, and woodland areas?	5%	6%	16%	29%	42%
54	Conservancies forestland - protect the proposed mature and old growth forested areas of the county from logging in and around urbanizing areas and in backcountry sites?	7%	10%	13%	26%	43%
55	Conservancies farmland - protect the proposed historical and productive farmlands of the county from subdivision and development?	6%	9%	21%	24%	39%
56	Conservancies scenic - protect the proposed scenic areas, viewpoints, and vistas of the county along fresh and saltwater shorelines, farmlands, and wooded hilltop and ridgelines (<i>see page 21</i>)?	4%	9%	16%	29%	40%
57	Conservancies historical - protect the proposed farms, sawmills, railroads, mines, and other heritage sites from demolition and development?	7%	9%	30%	28%	23%
Regional parks - see pages 11-13		lowest / highest				
58	Saltwater access - acquire/develop the proposed additional saltwater access sites for fishing, beachcombing, and walking?	6%	6%	22%	26%	38%
59	Freshwater access - acquire/develop the proposed additional freshwater access sites for fishing, swimming, and boating?	8%	10%	25%	29%	26%
60	Motorized boat launches - saltwater - develop the proposed additional boat launching facilities at saltwater sites?	26%	21%	29%	12%	11%
61	Motorized boat launches - freshwater - develop the proposed additional boat launching facilities at freshwater sites?	33%	22%	26%	9%	10%
62	Non-motorized cartop (kayak/canoe) launch sites - develop the proposed additional access and launch sites at salt and freshwater sites?	13%	15%	27%	24%	20%
63	Picnic shelters and group activity sites - develop the proposed additional picnic shelters and group picnic facilities at major regional park sites?	9%	9%	31%	30%	19%
64	Campsites and cabins - develop the proposed additional tent and RV campsites, yurts and cabins, and group camp sites at major regional park sites?	14%	15%	30%	24%	16%

Trail systems - see pages 14-22		lowest	/	highest
65	Water trails - develop the proposed cartop boat put-in, take-out, and overnight campsites along navigable salt and freshwater paddling routes?	12%	16%	29% 23% 17%
66	Shoreline trails - develop the proposed cross-country network of saltwater beach and shoreline walking areas and trails?	6%	10%	22% 25% 34%
67	Hiking trails - develop the proposed cross-country network of on and off-road day and backpacking cross-country hiking trails?	8%	12%	22% 27% 30%
68	Horse trails - develop the proposed cross-country network of horse stables, riding areas, and trails?	27%	25%	32% 8% 6%
69	Off-road mountain bike trails - develop the proposed cross-country network of riding trails?	27%	20%	27% 15% 9%
70	Multipurpose trails - develop the proposed off-road cross-country network of hike, bike, and horse trails?	13%	17%	31% 18% 19%
71	Winter trails - develop the proposed cross-country network of snowshoe, skiing, and snowmobile trails?	22%	26%	28% 16% 6%
72	On-road bicycle routes - develop the proposed cross-country system of on-road routes using road shoulders and designated bike lanes?	15%	11%	23% 19% 30%
73	Scenic roads - designate the proposed system of cross-country back-road scenic routes with viewpoints, interpretive signage, and other exhibits?	14%	18%	27% 22% 17%
74	ATV/motorcycle riding areas - support the continued private party operation of ATV/motorcycle riding areas?	50%	19%	15% 7% 7%
Facilities - see pages 23-24		lowest	/	highest
75	Athletic fields - acquire and lease the proposed network of sites to athletic league organizations for the development of a regional system of public playing fields for youth and adults?	11%	12%	28% 27% 21%
76	Meeting facilities - develop and lease the proposed network of community facilities throughout the county to non-profit organizations for the operation of teen, senior, and other public activities and events?	12%	15%	35% 22% 15%
77	Enterprise facilities - where user fees and/or self help efforts will support, acquire and lease or develop the proposed gun ranges, equestrian facilities, conference facilities and retreats, at select regional properties throughout the county (no graphic provided)?	25%	18%	31% 17% 7%

Note - Whatcom County, like all jurisdictions in Washington State, must restructure fiscal policies to reflect recently adopted restraints on the use of property, license, and other taxes for the financing of general governmental services. The following questions outline a number of alternative methods for delivering park, recreation, and open space facilities and programs in the county for your evaluation. County Council could adopt some, most, or all of the following ways and methods for restructuring the way the county delivers and finances park and recreation facilities and services depending on the results of this survey, and in some cases subsequent voter approvals.

Whatcom County role and responsibility alternatives
 County Council could deliver the park, recreation, and open space facilities and programs proposed above under different policy priorities. How would you prioritize the **following functions that could be provided by the county for the development of park facilities and operation of recreation programs?**

Park facilities		lowest / highest
78	Regional coordinator - create plans, financing strategies, and implementation programs regardless of who may develop the facilities?	15% 17% 26% 20% 17%
79	Regional developer - acquire and develop regional facilities, such as multipurpose trails, to be used by all residents of the county on a countywide basis?	12% 11% 24% 27% 20%
80	Local developer - acquire and develop local facilities, such as playgrounds, to be used by residents of specific local areas in the county?	19% 17% 24% 19% 16%
Recreation programs		lowest / highest
81	Landlord - own, develop, and maintain facilities - but have other agencies conduct and operate programs?	27% 22% 28% 11% 5%
82	Regional operator - organize, schedule, staff, and conduct programs in regional facilities?	19% 13% 29% 23% 9%
83	Local operator - organize, schedule, staff, and conduct programs in local facilities?	15% 16% 26% 21% 15%

Joint venture opportunity and partner options
Besides Whatcom County - cities, school districts, athletic organizations, private operators, and a variety of other public and private agencies own and operate park facilities and recreational programs within the county. How would you rate joint venture projects with the following organizations?

Park facility development		lowest / highest
84	With other public agencies - like cities, school districts, and the port for the development of parks, trails, and athletic fields?	4% 7% 31% 27% 28%
85	With nonprofit organizations - for the conservation of sensitive environmental areas or the preservation of historical areas or the development of athletic fields for public use?	5% 7% 23% 30% 32%
86	With for-profit organizations - for the development of specialized facilities like campgrounds, marinas, and conference centers for public use for a fee?	21% 18% 30% 15% 13%
Recreation program operation		lowest / highest
87	With other public agencies - like cities, school districts, and the port for the operation of recreational programs at regional park sites for public use?	5% 11% 25% 31% 24%
88	With nonprofit organizations - for the management of sensitive environmental areas or the operation of childcare, teen, senior, or other community programs?	7% 8% 23% 33% 27%
89	With for-profit organizations - for the operation of specialized facilities like campgrounds, marinas, and conference centers for public use paid with a user fee?	22% 18% 29% 17% 11%

Organizational and financing alternatives
*County Council could institute alternative methods of organizationally managing and financing **regional versus local** park, recreation, and open space improvements within the county. How would you rate the following alternatives?*

- **Countywide approach to regional park facilities** - subject to voter approval, County Council could institute a property tax levy as a means of financing the acquisition, development, and operation of regional park, recreation, and open space facilities and programs on a countywide basis. A countywide approach would share revenues between the county, cities, school districts, and/or other agencies that provide **regional** park facilities and programs. How would you rate this method?

		lowest / highest
90	<u>Countywide regional park approach</u> - where revenues are shared between county, cities, school districts, and/or other agencies that provide regional park facilities and programs?	15% 11% 27% 25% 18%

		Amount per year
91	If a levy were to be put on the ballot <u>to finance regional park facilities and programs on a countywide basis</u> , how much, if anything, would your household be willing to pay <u>per year</u> for this source of funding?	Mean = \$79 245 responses from \$0 to \$2,000

- **Local park facilities using recreational service areas** - County Council could institute a limited short-term (3-5 year) property tax levy as a means of financing the acquisition, development, and/or operation of local park, recreation, and open space facilities and/or programs within specified areas of the county. Recreation service areas can be established for a single facility for a single benefit area, such as scenic preservation for county waterfront areas - or for multiple facilities for a specified portion of the county, such as athletic fields and indoor gymnasiums for a city or an urban growth area (UGA).

Once proposed, the county residents within each **local** recreation service area vote to determine whether to assess a limited short-term property tax increment to finance acquisition, development, and/or operation of the proposed facilities and programs within the proposed local service area. How would you rate the following methods?

	<u>Recreation service areas</u>	lowest / highest
92	<u>Specific facilities</u> - organizing recreation service areas to finance specific facilities and programs, such as the preservation of scenic areas?	21% 17% 30% 15% 10%
93	<u>Specific areas</u> - organizing recreation service areas to provide a mixture of facilities and programs within a specific local area, such as a city or school district or urban growth area?	19% 14% 26% 24% 11%

		Amount per year
94	If a levy were to be put on the ballot <u>to finance local park facilities and programs within your local area (which could include a city area)</u> , how much, if anything, would your household be willing to pay <u>per year</u> for this source of funding?	Mean = \$63 241 responses from \$0 to \$1,300

Real estate excise and fuel tax, and license fee options

Subject to voter approval, County Council could institute a variety of optional fees and taxes to be used **instead of or in addition to** the regional/local organizational financing approaches defined in the above (as a way of reducing the use of property taxes for park financing). How would you rate each of the following optional approaches?

Optional dedicated fees and taxes		lowest	/		highest	
95	Real Estate Excise Tax (REET-3) – an additional 0.25% assessment of the sales price of all real estate property (equal to \$250 per \$100,000 of sale price) paid by the purchaser to be dedicated exclusively to the acquisition and development of park and open space?	29%	13%	14%	17% 22%	
96	Local Option Vehicle License Fee – an additional \$15.00 per vehicle license registered in the county to be dedicated exclusively to the acquisition and development of trail improvements?	45%	12%	12%	11% 17%	
		lowest		/		highest
97	Local Option Fuel Tax – an additional \$0.023 per gallon sales tax to be paid by residents and tourists to be dedicated exclusively to the acquisition and development of trail improvements?	61%	12%	6%	5% 13%	
98	Local Option Sales Tax – an additional 0.1% sales tax (equal to \$0.10 for a \$100 purchase) to be paid by residents and tourists to be dedicated exclusively to the acquisition and development of park and open space?	41%	11%	16%	12% 17%	

General obligation bond options

Subject to voter approval, County Council could also propose a variety of optional bonds as a means of financing park, recreation, and open space improvements for specific projects. This option could be used **instead of or in addition to** the options defined in the above. How would you rate the following?

- **General obligation bond** - County Council could submit a general obligation bond for voter approval to finance **acquisition and development** of specific park, recreation, and open space improvements. The bond, which can not be used to finance operation and maintenance, would be financed over a 20-year period.

Amount per year

99	If a bond were to be put on the ballot <u>to finance the highest priority projects</u> , how much, if anything, would your household be willing to pay per year for this source of funding?	Mean = \$68 240 responses from \$0 to \$2,000
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Population growth impact management options

In the next 20 years the county population is projected to increase by another 60,500 people or 34% more than the existing population of 179,500 persons.

00	In your opinion, will existing park and recreation facilities (not including any of the plan's proposals) within the county, cities, and school districts systems be enough to provide for this population increase?	19% yes 60% no 21% don't know
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The existing inventory of **county** park and recreational facilities is estimated to be worth about \$900 per person or \$2,000 for an average single family house. **This amount is the cost required for additional park facilities for new housing residents if the county is to maintain the same standards for park, recreation, and open space facilities that are currently provided existing residents.** Given this fact, how would you rate the following methods for dealing with the impact of new population growth on parks and the methods existing residents may be using to finance park improvements?

Growth management financing		lowest / highest				
01	Lower standards - for the number of park facilities provided to future populations?	49%	18%	21%	6%	3%
02	Collect a one-time growth impact fee from new housing development projects - to pay for park improvements?	8%	5%	11%	27%	47%
03	Increase county taxes - to acquire and develop park facilities to offset population growth impacts?	38%	18%	26%	11%	5%

Growth impact fees		Percent of cost	
04	If a park growth impact fee were to be collected from new housing development projects , what percent of this cost would you recommend be charged for every new single family house to be developed in the county? <i>(The county does not currently charge growth impact fees.)</i>	22%	\$2,000
		9%	\$1,500
		17%	\$1,000
		15%	\$ 500
		22%	\$ 200
		9%	\$ 0

Your characteristics

05	Which area of the county do you live in?	1% Point Roberts area 1% Lummi Island area 3% Blaine area 2% Birch Bay area 8% Lynden area 6% Sumas/Nooksack area 11% Ferndale area 57% Bellingham area 11% Other county area				
06	How long have you lived in the county?	0-1	2-5	6-10	10+ years	
		1%	10%	11%	78%	
07	What type of housing do you live in?	own	rent			
		96%	4%			
08	What age group are you in?	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+
		1%	5%	27%	40%	27%

Comments

09	Do you have any specific comments or recommendations to make about the proposed park plan or this survey? 149 or 50% comments provided
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Please contact Michael McFarlane, Director, Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Department, at 360-733-2900 or mmcfarla@co.whatcom.wa.us if you have questions about the plan or this survey.