

North Cascades Audubon Society

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September 11, 2008

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LONG RANGE
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Re: Draft Whatcom County Foothills Subarea Plan SEIS (DSEIS)
Mr. Stalheim-

On May 19, 2008, we submitted a comment letter on the above document prior to its release to the public, we incorporate that here by reference. In that letter, a number of concerns were expressed regarding the impacts of moving forward with the establishment of high density growth in the Foothills Subarea. We do not feel these have been sufficiently addressed in the final document

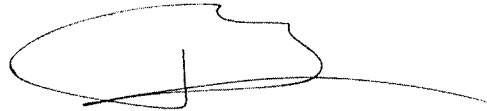
- One can see from the DSEIS that the allowance of increased high-density development will have serious water quality and quantity impacts. Water quantity will be affected both by increased groundwater withdrawals from increased residential units, and from stormwater infiltration effects on groundwater recharge. Groundwater withdrawal will have its greatest quantity effect by reducing the instream flow to Kendall Creek. This effect cannot be evaluated based on the information present in the document. The Aspect Report, upon which the Water Quantity and Water Quality sections of the DSEIS are based, states that without a detailed, numerical groundwater analysis "... the potential impact of additional groundwater withdrawals is assumed to be significant since Kendall Creek is known to be frequently below the MIF during the summer and fall, and any groundwater withdrawals during this time have the potential to either create or exacerbate a MIF violation." Potential stormwater mitigation measures include LID requirements. However, the long-term performance of many LID measures is questionable. For example, a developer may be able to achieve 100% infiltration following completion of a development, but the infiltration facilities could become impermeable with time, resulting in significant stormwater runoff. Concerns such as these have resulted in the formation of formal stormwater utilities in several areas (Birch Bay and Lake Whatcom are likely), but this is not mentioned as a requirement for this area.
- Mitigation for the effect of high density development on critical wildlife habitat garners scarcely a mention, except to mention potential mitigation measures for which no details are provided. The water quality and quantity effects will clearly have a negative impact on salmonid species in local streams – particularly Kendall Creek, where a couple of these species are raised at WDFW's Kendall Creek Hatchery.
- Some RF zoned land inside the UGA will be developed at high density if the current UGA designations are retained. Other RF and CF areas will not directly be affected by the plan, but, the only attempt to thwart conversion of these areas by rezoning are the statements that rezoning RF and CF zones should be strongly discouraged. Owners of adjacent forest lands will have strong arguments for rezoning if increased development at urban densities occurs here.

- The transportation impacts section of the document does not incorporate the Tilghman report (commissioned by Foothills Friends) as we requested in our May 19 letter. We feel the neglect of this additional, more recent information considerably weakens this document. However, even without this information, the DSEIS makes it clear that the current transportation infrastructure is insufficient to serve even the lowest level of increased development considered (Alternative 3). Very significant transportation improvements are needed, and some of these would come at considerable environmental cost. Additionally, many proposed mitigation measures rely on "county funds" and/or "developer contributions". Currently, the condition of the county road fund ("county funds") is relatively dire, and there is currently no requirement for developer paid transportation impact fees in the Whatcom County Code. Therefore, most of these mitigation measures are nothing more than "pipe dreams".

Clearly, the impact of continued expansion of the Foothills urban area will have very significant environmental consequences. For that reason, **the only alternative we can support is Alternative 3**, which would remove the current UGA designations and make all areas that are currently developed at high density LAMIRD's. While this is not the ideal situation, the clock cannot be turned back to the time before these recreational subdivision designations were put in place. Let us not continue with a mistake made over 40 years ago.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Pratum', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tom Pratum
Conservation Committee, North Cascades Audubon Society

cc: Matt Aamot
Whatcom County Planning Commission