

WHATCOM COUNTY AGRICULTURAL STRATEGIC PLAN

Planning & Development Services

May 17, 2011



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Purpose: *To describe the role Whatcom County Planning and Development Services will play in implementing an agricultural program consistent with County Council Resolution 2009-040 and Comprehensive Plan goals.*

1.0 Project Description & Introduction

Whatcom County is poised to build on prior work assessing its agricultural programs and activities. This strategic plan coordinates and integrates the efforts underway through the Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee, Agricultural Advisory Committee, Natural Resource Marketplace working group, Planning Commission and Council who all have a goal to effectively protect our agricultural economy and working lands. These and other local agencies' and nonprofits' goals can be aligned in a coordinated fashion when it comes to articulating the present and future objectives of Whatcom County's agricultural policies and programs.

The overall objectives of Planning and Development Services' agricultural program are:

- To ensure a minimum of **100,000 acres of land are available for agricultural use** to maintain the necessary land base to support an economically viable agricultural industry;
- To create and maintain strong, clear, concise, and **effective land and water programs and regulations** that benefit the agricultural industry and are in compliance with federal and state law;
- To **maintain public input** and see that the agricultural community has a voice through the Agricultural Advisory Committee and the Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee; and
- To effectively **measure progress** toward and communicate about these objectives.

The following pages of this strategic plan explore how best to achieve these objectives. Previous work is referenced, and in some cases, various options are presented. The implementation of the plan will require close work with the Agricultural Advisory Committee, Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee, Natural Resource Marketplace working group, and other local entities, incorporating their ideas and recommendations. Planning and Development Services staff support for agricultural programs was recently reduced, leaving about 1.0 total FTE now available for the work outlined in this plan, including less than full-time support from a senior planner, planner II, and GIS planner.

Review of the Rural Study Areas, Purchase of Development Rights Target Areas, Agricultural Protection Overlay, and Agricultural zone for possible alignment and/or changes will be necessary in order to reduce the existing complexity of the county's various agricultural designations. This review and other activities contemplated in this plan will ultimately lead to recommended changes to the agricultural lands portions of the Comprehensive Plan and development regulations. The intent of this plan is not to accomplish these tasks, but to lay out a clear path or optional paths to take that will lead us toward accomplishment, and allow us to measure our progress along the way.

2.0 Land Available for Agricultural Use

Whatcom County has identified the minimum of agricultural land necessary to be available for agricultural use as 100,000 acres, in order to keep the agricultural industry – and those businesses that support it – economically viable.¹

Many questions surround this objective, such as: What is agriculture, what does it mean for land to be “available for agricultural use,” and how do we measure and track the quantity and quality of agricultural lands over time?

Definitions

For the purposes of this plan, we approach the definition of agriculture in a number of ways. Agriculture that is commercially significant and a driver of the economy in Whatcom County, we are referring to as “commercial agricultural” or the “agricultural industry”.² Agriculture that is conducted on a smaller scale, by those deriving an alternative primary source of income, we are referring to as “noncommercial agriculture”.³ The market value of agricultural production in Whatcom County is estimated at 326.5 million dollars annually. Just over 45% of farm operators state that farming is their primary occupation, with their farms ranging in value of sales from \$5,000 to over \$500,000 annually.⁴ All of these operations contribute to the strength of Whatcom County’s economy.

It is difficult to characterize the acreages attached to commercial and noncommercial farm operations, respectively. While we have overall data for farm operations in Whatcom County published by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) through the National Census of Agriculture and released about every five years, this data is not tied geographically to specific farms. The Whatcom County Planning and Development Services department (PDS) is

¹ Appendix 3 includes a portion of Resolution 2009-040 outlining this target goal. The goal was established in part through ‘critical mass’ research published as part of the “Whatcom County Rural Land Study: A Collaborative Report Identifying Rural Areas of Agricultural Significance” in 2007.

² This could be defined by a variety of parameters, one of which is gross annual sales. The overwhelming majority of these farms in Whatcom County today produce dairy or berry products, and farm-derived income is generally the primary source of income for the household. While the overall average farm size in the county is about 69 acres, it is likely the average farm size for farms engaged in commercial agricultural is much larger.

³ Again, this could be defined by a variety of parameters, one of which is gross annual sales. These farms may produce a diversity of market crops, nursery crops, livestock, and other products, though the farm-derived income is generally not the primary source of income for the household. While the overall average farm size in the county is about 69 acres, it is likely the average farm size for farms engaged in noncommercial farming is smaller.

⁴ USDA-NASS 2007 Census of Agriculture (see Appendix H).

undergoing its own land cover characterization (see Appendix F) using GIS aerial technology, but this data is not associated with specific farm sales or farm size.

The agricultural community prefers to define agriculture by place and place-based criteria. In 2007, the “Whatcom County Rural Land Study” was published which used specific criteria for identifying rural lands of agricultural significance. The criteria used to identify these lands is included in Appendix J. Farm activities occurring in these areas of high agricultural value – including within the Agriculture zone and these Rural Land Study areas – warrant policy protection with targeted incentives, while activities occurring outside these areas may not (with possible exceptions discussed below).

Available for Agricultural Use

Within Whatcom County’s agricultural areas, on both commercial and noncommercial farm land, all of the land is not available to be used for farming. Streams, forests, wetlands, and non-farm related homes and businesses may be interspersed throughout the area of operations. These lands are not available for agricultural use.

Soil scientists have identified about one hundred different kinds of soil types in the lowlands of Whatcom County, most of which are well-suited to cropland, hay, and pasture. Soil management concerns for farmers generally center around water: water availability, water capacity of the soil, water permeability of the soil, seasonally high water tables, wetlands, and seasonal flooding are all management concerns that vary to degree depending on the particular soil type, slope, and location. Operations vary also in their soil and water management infrastructure, some having significant drain tile infrastructure, and water rights. All of these variables contribute to the degree to which these areas are “available for agricultural use.” For example, a farm with no water rights and soils that have low water holding capacity would have questionable commercial viability until irrigation water were to become available.

Characterization of land cover depicted on recent aerial photos of the county show that about 18% of the current agriculture zone is likely not in agriculture use. Rural areas outside the agriculture zone where high concentrations of farm activities occur⁵ show that about 40% of these areas are likely not in agricultural use as evidenced by aerial land cover characterization.

Whatcom County also has an Agriculture Protection Overlay zone that was established in 1997 and applies on a parcel-by-parcel basis (using specific criteria) over the Rural zoned areas that cover approximately 118,000 acres of land. Estimations of how many acres the zone applies to based on the criteria spelled out in Whatcom County Code 20.38 show roughly 27,000 acres affected.⁶ The APO zone requires development to be clustered and a reserve area created where agricultural use can theoretically continue. Based on land cover analysis of completed

⁵ Identified as Rural Study Areas in the 2007 Rural Lands Study by the Agricultural Advisory Committee.

⁶ The total land area effected by the APO depends on current use taxation status as well as soil types, and is scattered throughout the Rural zones.

APO cluster developments, approximately 61% of these areas are apparently in agricultural use. Assuming the entire area affected by APO would have a similar percentage of agricultural land cover, we can estimate that the APO areas consist of an additional 16,500 acres of agriculture.

Area analyzed	Authority	Study Acreage	Percent AG Land Cover	Current AG Acres
Agriculture Zone	County Code	87,500 ac	82%	72,034 acres
APO Affected Areas	County Code	27,138 ac	61%	16,554 acres
Rural Study Areas	AAC recommendation	22,000 ac	60%	13,200 acres

The agricultural community may want to consider recommending a reasonable multiplier to be added onto the 100,000 acre number in order to account for lands that are not actually “available for agricultural use.” A reasonable multiplier for Whatcom County farmlands may be somewhere between 15% and 40%; for example, we could assume about 20% of the total acreage of land set aside for agriculture will not be available for farming due to limitations and incompatible uses. If such a multiplier were established, the targeted total acreage of agricultural lands would be more than 100,000 acres, acknowledging a portion of that area would not be available for agricultural use.

The last question about the 100,000 acre target has to do with whether or not the acreage should be relatively contiguous. Currently, Whatcom County has designated an Agriculture zone which is a relatively contiguous area of land covering about 87,500 acres; and an Agricultural Protection Overlay (APO) that applies on a parcel-by-parcel basis over the Rural zoned areas, covering roughly 27,000 acres of that area.⁷ The APO requires cluster development on parcels larger than about 20 acres in the rural lands that are outside of urban growth areas.

The county Agricultural Advisory Committee studied the Rural zoned lands and published a Rural Lands Study in 2007, which identified areas outside the Agriculture zone recommended for heightened protection because of their agricultural use and viability. These are referred to as the Rural Study Areas (RSAs) and comprise about 22,000 acres of land in R(5)A or R(10)A zoning contiguous to Ag zoned areas.

Some within county leadership have suggested the APO be repealed and replaced by a rezone of the RSAs to Agricultural zoning. Others have suggested the county examine additional alternative agricultural zone designations. Currently there is one Agriculture zone option in Whatcom County with a 40-acre minimum lot size; other counties offer more than one possible

⁷ The total land area effected by the APO depends on current use taxation status as well as soil types, and is scattered throughout the Rural zones.

Ag zone.⁸ Most agree that the APO approach works well only in limited situations, and that an alternative approach would likely be a better fit for Whatcom County.

There is general agreement within the agricultural community leadership that a relatively contiguous block of land should be identified for agricultural policy protection, as opposed to scattered sites throughout the county. The vast majority of the contiguous agricultural lands lie within the north-central part of the county, with the core areas circling Lynden. Stretches of agricultural lands reach from the core west past Custer, east past Sumas, southwest to the Lummi Reservation, south in a scattered pattern toward the Bellingham urban growth area, and southeast toward the Mount Baker foothills and the South Fork of the Nooksack. It is the areas in and around the core where agriculture is to be encouraged and prioritized through financial and programmatic incentives and expanded use opportunities.

This said, there still exist pockets of vigorous agricultural activities outside the core, where because of the quantity of farmable land, prime soils, water, historic activities, and current agricultural use, the agricultural community wishes to preserve, and to encourage agricultural activity to continue. These smaller areas are important in order to augment a minimum base; areas such as Squalicum Valley, North Fork Valley, Aldergrove Road, Sand Road, South Pass Road, and possibly others. The Agricultural Advisory Committee will establish a clear process to allow a landowner, or a group of landowners, to petition for inclusion in the designated agricultural area in order to access the agricultural land protection policies and incentives. Such a process would aid landowners who are farming away from the contiguous agricultural lands to continue farming with the same protections and incentives afforded to farmers within the core agricultural areas.

Measurements

These issues relating to how to define agriculture, how to account for land within the county's 100,000 acre critical mass that is not actually "available for agricultural use," and whether Whatcom County's agricultural lands should be contiguous, will continue to be discussed in detail by the agricultural community, with recommendations made that can be implemented and acted on by staff. Criteria for measuring current availability and future changes of agricultural land are necessary for making progress toward the 100,000 acre objective.

The county has both policy and regulatory designations for agricultural lands. The policy benchmark is the Agriculture Comprehensive Plan designation which currently covers nearly 85,000 acres. By this benchmark, the county falls short of its 100,000 acre objective by about 15,000 acres. The regulatory benchmarks are the Agriculture and Agriculture Protection Overlay zoning designations. The only current regulatory tool that protects agricultural lands in a *relatively contiguous* area is the agriculture zoning district, making this a readily available

⁸ See Appendix G for a comparison chart of WA county agricultural zones.

benchmark for measuring protected agricultural land acres. By this benchmark, Whatcom County falls short of its 100,000 acre objective by about 12,500 acres.

Only those lands zoned Agriculture that also fall within the Agriculture Comprehensive Plan designation are protected by both regulation and policy. For example, some Agriculture zoned lands lie within urban growth areas, or urban growth area reserves, and retain their Agriculture zoning as a holding pattern for future urban development. These lands do not make sense to include within the acreage considered to support long-term agricultural operations.

The Rural Lands Study established that many acres exist outside the current Agriculture Comprehensive Plan designation that, due to their agricultural use and viability, deserve heightened protection; yet these areas have limited regulatory or policy designation for agricultural use at this time. The next section goes into detail on the programs and regulations that may be used to get us closer to meeting our objective.

3.0 Strong and Clear Agricultural Programs and Regulations

The Whatcom County Agricultural Program housed currently in the Planning and Development Services Department is but one program of a larger agriculture support structure across the county and state. The county program needs to acknowledge and coordinate with others in order to assist in avoiding redundancy and overlapping jurisdiction. Other agencies and programs relating to county agriculture are listed in Appendix E.

At the same time, Planning and Development Services needs to ensure the programs it does administer are carried out in a strong and clear manner that is effective, that reduces uncertainties for farmers, that makes progress toward achieving long-term objectives and outcomes, and that is in compliance with federal and state laws.

As discussed in the previous section, identifying 100,000 acres of relatively contiguous agricultural land is the first objective of the agricultural program. This section lays out priorities and tasks that will help achieve the 100,000 objective. It also lays out the need to comply with state policies and regulations as Whatcom County PDS works to meet its own objectives.

Priorities are then separated into categories based on the timeframe within which they can be accomplished: ‘Immediate priorities’ are first steps that can be accomplished in a one to two year timeframe; ‘Short-term priorities’ are those that can be accomplished in a three to four year timeframe; and ‘Medium-term priorities’ are those that will take at least five years to accomplish.

Compliance with Laws

Whatcom County must undergo a periodic review and update of its Comprehensive Plan pursuant to RCW 36.70A.130. Part of this process entails reviewing the Comprehensive Plan chapters for consistency with state law, and particularly with state law provisions which have changed since the last county Comprehensive Plan periodic review and update. The Agricultural Lands portion of the Comprehensive Plan lies within the Natural Resources chapter. The narrative, goals, and policies of this section will be reviewed, partially in reference to the following portions of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). While these reviews are required by law, they also tie back to ways in which we can accomplish the objective of having 100,000 acres of relatively contiguous agricultural land available for farming.

Designating Agricultural Lands of Long-Term Commercial Significance

RCW 36.70A.170 (1)(a) requires counties to “designate Agricultural lands that are not already characterized by urban growth and that have long-term significance for the commercial production of food or other agricultural products,” with further guidance on the designation and regulatory process given in WAC 365-190-050 (see Appendix K) and 365-196-815. Going

through a designation process using guidelines similar to those found in the WAC might assist the agricultural community in addressing the questions discussed in Chapter 2.0 of this plan.

Ensuring Accessory Uses Support and do not Interfere with Overall Agricultural Use of Property and Neighboring Properties

RCW 36.70A.177 has changed since 2005 when Whatcom County's Comprehensive Plan was last updated, and therefore Whatcom County is required to review its plan for consistency with these revised RCW provisions. Currently, WCC 20.40 (Agriculture zoning district code) allows a variety of accessory uses on agricultural lands which do not appear to be consistent with the provisions of this revised RCW. While the AAC has begun to discuss the issues of appropriate accessory uses consistent with 36.70A.177, no recommendations have yet been made for changes to the Comprehensive Plan and County Code.

Immediate Priorities

The incentives available for landowners involved with agriculture through programs and regulations need review and discussion in order to craft recommendations that target agricultural protections in a relatively contiguous area of the county. One example of this is the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program. The PDR Oversight Committee has recommended changes to improve this program, and an appraiser is developing a valuation formula to allow farmers to get a rough estimate of the value of their development rights prior to embarking on the long process of selling them to the county in the form of a conservation easement deed. Completed PDR transactions have been relatively opportunistic and scattered; Oversight Committee members are asking if there are ways to strategically concentrate efforts, following recommendations of the Agricultural Advisory Committee. At least one other nearby county only allows PDR program eligibility for landowners within the Agriculture zoning district.

The Agriculture zoning district (WCC 20.40 and maps) needs to be reviewed, along with the Agricultural Protection Overlay zone (WCC 20.38 and maps). The rural areas meeting criteria similar to the state designation criteria, as well as criteria laid out in Appendix J from the Rural Land Study should be redesignated to a new or existing agricultural zoning designation and Agriculture Comprehensive Plan designation, according to parameters and recommendations developed by the Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC).

Additional incentives, including the 'low-hanging fruit' of the tools recommended by the AAC and the County Council (see Appendix C), such as the Right to Farm improvements, may be incorporated into the draft changes to programs and regulations.

Short-term Priorities

Additional programmatic and regulatory changes that require slightly more time for research, discussion, and coordination can be accomplished over a three to four year period. This includes changes required by state law, as outlined previously, including the Comprehensive Plan periodic review and update (Agricultural lands portion of Natural Resources chapter),

development regulation changes for consistency, and review of both the Comprehensive Plan and development regulations for consistency with RCW 36.70A.177 that addresses uses accessory to agriculture.

Short-term priorities also include coordination activities with the Health Department, Public Works, and the natural resources division of Planning, as well as the Public Utility District and other agencies, during updates and activities such as the ACHIEVE community action plan implementation process (specifically items related to farms and food), the Coordinated Water System Plan Update, and any updates to existing critical areas policies and regulations.

Additional incentives for agriculture, including the slightly more complex tools outlined in the AAC recommendations such as the parcel reconfiguration and clustering tools, may be incorporated in this stage. Developing recommendations having to do with mitigation for the loss of agricultural land is also a short-term priority.

Medium-term Priorities

Programmatic and regulatory changes that require significant time for research, discussion, and coordination due to their more complex nature are assumed to take five-plus years to accomplish. These are important and promising topics that are of significant value to the agricultural community, but that have legal, financial, or political complexities that require more time. Coordination with the Natural Resources Marketplace (NRM) group is one such priority that impacts many others. AAC-recommended tools such as tax abatement, lease of development rights, and transfer of development rights all may have an increased likelihood of implementation because of the focused work underway through the NRM process. The NRM group is a way to continue the dialog, research, and coordination with other agencies that is needed to better understand the complexities of all these potential incentives and tools, as well as the very critical issue of securing water rights for farmers.

Tasks (*in priority order*) This section provides an overview of the specific tasks that will define the Agriculture work program. Each task includes estimated resources needed to accomplish the task and the year the task would begin and end. Resources are for a Whatcom County employee full time equivalent (FTE), and the cost if the task could be effectively contracted out. The range included with FTE resources represents whether an outside contractor would be used.

The overarching highest priority is the continuance and maintenance of the “Agriculture Program” within the county government. Staff support is necessary in order to achieve momentum and continuity in pursuit of the agriculture program objectives. The amount and professional level of support available will determine both the timing and quantity of work achieved. Maintaining support for the AAC is a key part of an effective agricultural program, as well as the other subtasks below. Current resources devoted to the agricultural program total about 1 FTE, which includes a Planner II assigned at roughly 0.6 FTE, a Senior Planner assigned

at roughly 0.25 FTE, a GIS Specialist assigned at roughly 0.1 FTE, and administrative assistance of roughly 0.05 FTE. To complete the tasks listed below, as well as in the following Sections Four and Five, within the estimated timeframe given, will require either about 2.3 total FTE of staffing, or a combination of contractors and additional staff.

PDR program: Maintain support for the PDR Oversight Committee and work with them to develop recommendations for program improvement, including adoption of new development rights pricing tool and review/modification of PDR eligibility areas.

Resources: 0.5 FTE

Schedule: Ongoing; recommendations for program changes- 2011

Review Rural Study Area Agricultural designation process: Work with the community to identify if any new or changed zoning designations are needed, building on the direction outlined in Resolution 2009-040. Once identified clearly and in accordance with RCW 36.70A.170, implement – write draft ordinance to change development regulation language, zoning maps, and/or Comprehensive Plan language. Complete staff report and attend Planning Commission and Council hearings.

Resources: 0.4-1.0 FTE (Contractor option: \$80,000)

Schedule: 2011 - 2012

Right to Farm Improvements: The AAC tool recommendation was to review the Right to Farm ordinance to see if it is possible to make it more effective at the farm level, including looking at strengthening farmers' recourse against those who bring failed lawsuits against them. Other work items under this task include coordination with law enforcement with regard to complaints from nearby non-farming neighbors.

Resources: 0.3-0.6 FTE (Contractor option: \$50,000)

Schedule: 2012

Parcel Reconfiguration tool development: The AAC tool recommendation was to allow reconfiguration of parcels (within and across ownership) to place the existing development potential in areas that are the least valuable as farm land.

Resources: 0.3-0.6 FTE (Contractor option: \$50,000)

Schedule: 2012 - 2013

Coordinate with other agencies to reduce overlapping jurisdiction: look for opportunities to eliminate redundancies between local, state, and/or federal agencies with regulations that impact farmers. Where possible, establish communication paths and agreements that guide jurisdictional and regulatory roles as they relate to Whatcom County farmers.

Resources: 0.3 FTE

Schedule: 2013

GMA Update, Agricultural Accessory Uses: Implement AAC recommendations for Comprehensive Plan and development regulation review and update that are consistent with RCW 36.70A.177 through work sessions and hearings with the Planning Commission and County Council.

Resources: 0.4-1.0 FTE (Contractor option: \$80,000)

Schedule: 2012-2014

Water system planning & agricultural planning coordination: When the Coordinated Water System Plan is updated, it should address irrigation and other agricultural water needs. Agriculture program staff need to coordinate with the AAC and water system planning staff to ensure the water needs of the agricultural community are incorporated into the updated CWSP.

Resources: 0.1-0.3 FTE (Contractor option: \$25,000)

Schedule: 2011-2014

Expedited permit review & other incentives for Commercial Agriculture: Review existing incentive programs with the AAC and develop recommendations for changes and additions that would work within state laws to ease regulatory and financial burdens through policy and development regulation changes that substantially benefit commercial farmers.

Resources: 0.6 FTE

Schedule: 2013-2014

Mitigation for the loss of Agricultural land: The AAC has expressed the desire to explore agricultural mitigation options and potential regulations. Currently there is the perception that critical area concerns trump agricultural concerns. Agricultural lands are lost due to conversions of the land to development, critical areas banking, and other types of conversions. The agricultural mitigation task would entail the development of policy recommendations to govern all conversions away from agricultural land.

Resources: 0.3-0.5 FTE (\$40,000)

Schedule: 2014-2015

Natural Resource Marketplace (NRM) development: Work with the NRM group on water issues, transfer of development rights program development, and other planning-related incentive programs that have the potential to use the marketplace to compensate farmers for the services they provide. The NRM group was initiated primarily due to farmers' comments that they would be willing to trade off their ability to develop their land in exchange for obtaining the legal right to water.

Resources: 0.15 FTE

Schedule: 2011-2015

4.0 Public Input

The two agricultural committees are an invaluable resource for county staff and policy makers. The agricultural community sees potential changes to county agricultural policies and regulations continuing to go through the Agricultural Advisory Committee for recommendations, and Purchase of Development Rights policy and transaction recommendations continuing to go through the PDR Oversight Committee. State Growth Management law requires early and continuous public involvement, and these committees are an important way to engage the farming community (and others interested) on a regular basis in planning-related agricultural issues.

A recent report highlighting research results from seven interviews of past Purchase of Development Rights program participants contains recommendations for improved public involvement. When it comes time to engage a broader audience in programs or regulatory discussions, farmers appear to be recommending outreach and publication in their alternative news outlets, and when possible, in-person discussions at meetings already attended by those in the farming community. Outreach should provide opportunities for farmers to talk about their experiences related to county programs with other farmers.

Maintaining these committees also provides the broader public outside the agricultural community to engage in discussions related to agricultural programs, policies, and regulations. They are welcomed and accommodated through open public meetings of both advisory committees, as well as the formal public processes that occur as changes make their way through the Planning Commission and County Council.

Tasks

Maintain regular meetings of Agricultural Advisory Committee:

Resources: 0.3 FTE
Schedule: Ongoing

Maintain regular meetings of PDR Oversight Committee *(This task has already been considered within the “PDR Program” task in the previous chapter):*

Resources: 0.3 FTE
Schedule: Ongoing

Facilitate biannual outreach discussions:

Resources: 0.05 FTE
Schedule: Ongoing

5.0 Measurements toward Progress

By tracking basic information related to agriculture and reporting results on a regular basis, Whatcom County can provide a valuable service to the agricultural community. There is no known source of compiled multi-agency data on agricultural issues in Whatcom County, yet data is a critical component to measuring progress. The county could compile data from other sources and make it available in a user friendly way to the broader community. Periodically, the county could add new data gleaned from staff GIS analysis. The information would relate back to the Agriculture program objectives in order to know whether programs and policies are achieving the intended results.

Some of the indicators useful for providing an agricultural status report include:

- Mapping of land currently in agricultural use – Methods used would be consistent with land characterization effort underway by Planning and Development Services described in Appendix F; reported as new aerial photos become available.
- Permits - Agricultural building permits and new single family residential permits in Ag zoned areas, available on an annual basis.
- New irrigation water rights issued, available through the Department of Ecology.
- Exempt wells installed for domestic and agricultural use
- Market value of agricultural products sold – US Agricultural Census.
- Number of Agricultural Advisory Committee meetings held, Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee meetings held, and other opportunities for public participation related to the agricultural program.
- Area of farms enrolled with WA Dept. of Agriculture or Whatcom Conservation District in a farm planning program.
- Incentive program participation including Open Space Agriculture current use taxation, Purchase of Development Rights program, and others.

Tasks

Mapping Agricultural lands based on Whatcom County aerial photos: conduct GIS analysis of land cover using updated aerial photography, and other agency GIS data if available.

Resources: 0.2 FTE (Contractor option: \$25,000)

Schedule: 2011-2012, continuing periodically

Compiling data and publishing an agricultural status report: Compile information from the USDA-NASS Agricultural Census, Whatcom Conservation District, Whatcom County permit system, and other available data sources to establish a consistent set of information on which to evaluate the changing face of agriculture in Whatcom County.

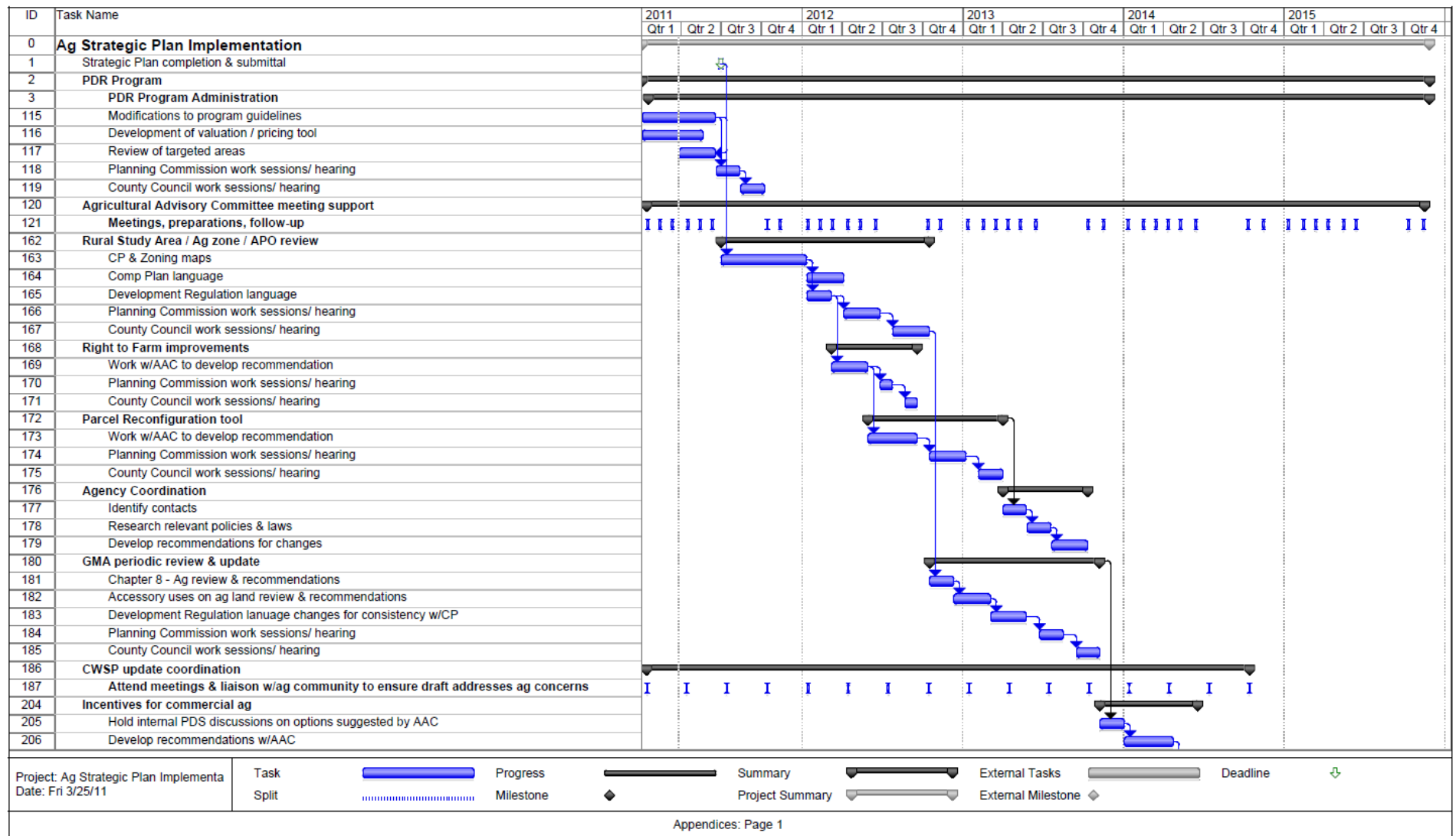
Resources: 0.05 FTE

Schedule: Biennial, ongoing










6.0 Appendices

- A. Draft Gantt chart for agricultural program 2011-2015
- B. Logic model
- C. Council Resolution 2009-040
- D. Possible agricultural protection matrix example
- E. County agencies and organizations involved in agriculture
- F. Map series
- G. WA counties agricultural zoning comparison
- H. NASS 2007 Agricultural Census for Whatcom County
- I. Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, agricultural goals & action plan
- J. Rural Land Study selection criteria
- K. Washington Administrative Code, agricultural designation criteria

Appendix A – Draft Gantt chart for agricultural program 2011-2015



ID	Task Name	2011				2012				2013				2014				2015			
		Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
207	Planning Commission work sessions/ hearing																				
208	County Council work sessions/ hearing																				
209	Ag mitigation policy recommendations																				
210	Develop recommendations w/AAC																				
211	Planning Commissions work sessions/ hearing																				
212	County Council work sessions/ hearing																				
213	NRM development & coordination																				
214	Attend meetings, research, develop recommendations	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
235	Additional biannual outreach meetings/discussions																				
236	Plan and host open houses or informational sessions in conjunction with other ag activities				I				I				I			I					I
246	Mapping of ag land cover through aerial GIS analysis																				
247	Initial land cover analysis																				
248	Ongoing land cover analysis updates																				
251	Publish ag status report																				
252	Gather data from other agencies																				
256	Compile WC data																				
260	Create report																				

Project: Ag Strategic Plan Implementa Date: Fri 3/25/11	Task		Progress		Summary		External Tasks		Deadline	
	Split		Milestone		Project Summary		External Milestone			
Appendices: Page 2										

Appendix B – Logic Model

Assumptions: Land and water use policies & regulations play a role in what land is available for farming in the county, and the ease with which farmers can farm.

Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan policies and zoning regulations must be consistent with each other and with the state Growth Management Act.

Farmer and Ag industry input and participation in development of an AG Strategic Plan will lead to a better product.

Significant work and public input is documented in recent planning documents related to the protection of AG, recommendations from these documents will help guide the County Strategic Plan.

INPUTS	OUTPUTS			OUTCOMES		
	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	PARTICIPANTS	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG TERM
<p>Staff time Committee & agency time OPF grant money Previous work products:</p> <p>2008: County has not had formal public policies for the agricultural industry with respect to land, water, and labor.</p> <p>Recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a set of formal policies regarding access to rural water. 2. Create a set of formal policies regarding access to rural water. 3. Create a set of formal policies regarding access to rural water. 4. Create a set of formal policies regarding access to rural water. 5. Create a set of formal policies regarding access to rural water. 6. Create a set of formal policies regarding access to rural water. 7. Create a set of formal policies regarding access to rural water. 8. Create a set of formal policies regarding access to rural water. 9. Create a set of formal policies regarding access to rural water. 10. Create a set of formal policies regarding access to rural water. <p>WFF Priorities</p> <p>OPF 2009 work products</p> <p>Ag Advisory Tools recommendations</p>	<p>Develop GIS data and analysis related to AG</p> <p>Identify changes to zoning and development regulations favorable to AG</p> <p>Recommend options for moving forward with changes to the Comprehensive Plan for GMA consistency</p> <p>Meet with Committees and other stakeholders</p> <p>Farmer surveys and interviews on PDR</p> <p>Refine PDR selection criteria</p> <p>Meetings with Council Natural Resource Subcommittee</p>	<p>GIS Maps and Report (quantify characteristics in acreage & %s)</p> <p>Final Strategic Plan lays out County Mission related to AG, improvements to county regulations, a plan for meeting GMA obligations, how to coordinate with water resource programs, and an estimate of resources needed to be successful</p> <p>PDR program recommended changes</p> <p>User-friendly presentations created</p> <p>Discussions held w/policy-makers</p>	<p>Agricultural Advisory Committee</p> <p>Purchase of Development Rights OC</p> <p>Farm Friends & other nonprofit groups</p> <p>Consultants</p> <p>WC staff</p> <p>Other Ag leaders (agency reps)</p> <p>Farmers</p> <p>Appraiser</p> <p>County Council</p> <p>Planning Commission</p>	<p>Assessment of current Ag lands and usefulness of APO</p> <p>Staff clarity in the AG program mission.</p> <p>Build on partnerships to develop consensus on steps the County will take to support AG.</p> <p>Implementation options are delineated clearly, with an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, that address recommendations for Ag Comp Plan and zoning chapter improvements (including APO, AAC tools, Rural Lands Study, and PDR program)</p> <p>Measures: Council resolution approving the Strategic Plan and changes to PDR by July 2011</p>	<p>County resources are assigned based on Strategic Plan</p> <p>Options are assessed through a public process with farmer participation. Preferred alternative changes are implemented.</p> <p>Measures: Changes to policies and regulations are adopted by Council</p> <p>Funding for a PDR program equal or greater than current funding</p> <p>Land purchases are completed more efficiently</p> <p>Number of County employees working on AG program</p>	<p>User friendly, agricultural land- and water-related policies and regulations that reflect the uniqueness of Whatcom County, and are in compliance with state laws.</p> <p>Meet contiguous 100K ag land goal</p> <p>Greater stability and certainty in the use of land for AG purposes in Whatcom County</p> <p>Agricultural land uses are the highest and best value of the land.</p> <p>Measures: Ag economy is greater than or equal to today</p>

Appendix C – Whatcom County Council Resolution 2009-040 (excerpt)

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Whatcom County Council that we confirm that 100,000 acres of land available for agricultural use is the minimum goal for ensuring a land base necessary to support a viable agriculture industry in Whatcom County; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the recommendations of the 2007 Rural Land Study by the Agricultural Advisory committee indicating specific rural areas of the County where agricultural land protection efforts should be strengthened are accepted; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Agricultural Advisory Committee and staff are requested to recommend options for code and comprehensive plan amendments to strengthen farm land preservation policies in the areas designated by the Rural Land Study; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the identified tools and strategies presented by the Agricultural Land Program Technical Review Committee and the Agricultural Advisory Committee are endorsed for further development and consideration and that we request that the County Executive authorize County Planning and Development Services staff to work with Council staff and the Agricultural Advisory Committee to develop and recommend appropriate code changes and comprehensive plan amendments enabling implementation of policies to strengthen the protection of agricultural land for agricultural use to include further defining the relationship between protecting agricultural land and critical areas; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that potential effects on agricultural land and its use for agriculture must be considered in the other planning processes currently underway including the size and establishment of urban growth areas and review of the county's rural areas; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council acknowledges that the Agricultural Advisory Committee and community-based agricultural interest groups, e.g., Whatcom Farm Friends, support the development of an integrated county land use policy that incorporates and considers the implications for use and availability of water for agriculture, the implications for availability of water for non-consumptive and in stream purposes, and implications on other natural resources in land use decisions.

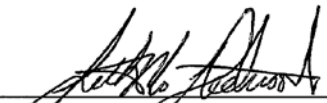
APPROVED this 7th day of July, 2009

ATTEST:

**WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON**



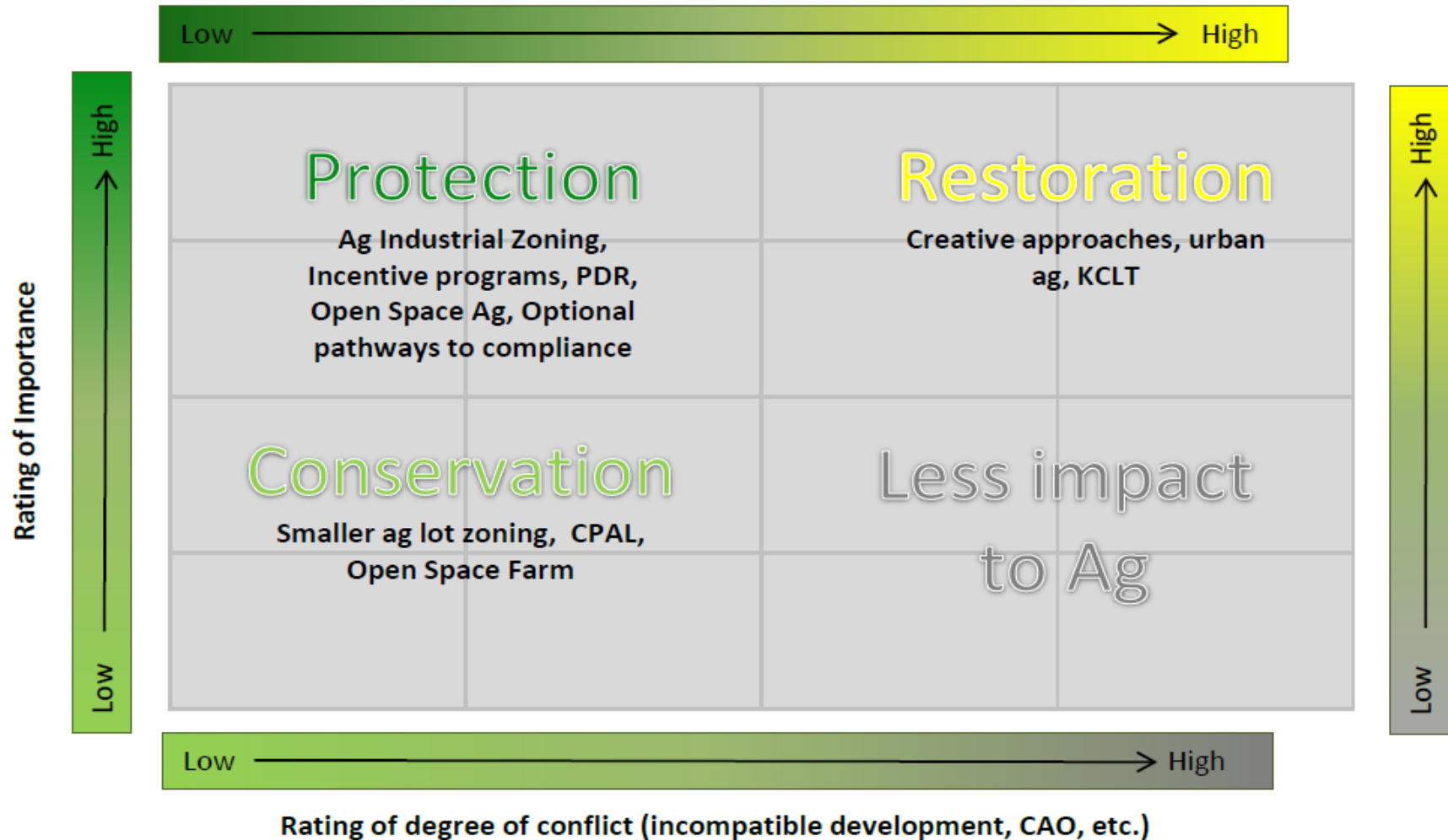
Dana Brown Davis, Council Clerk


Seth Fleetwood, Chairman

APPROVED as to form:


Civil Deputy Prosecutor

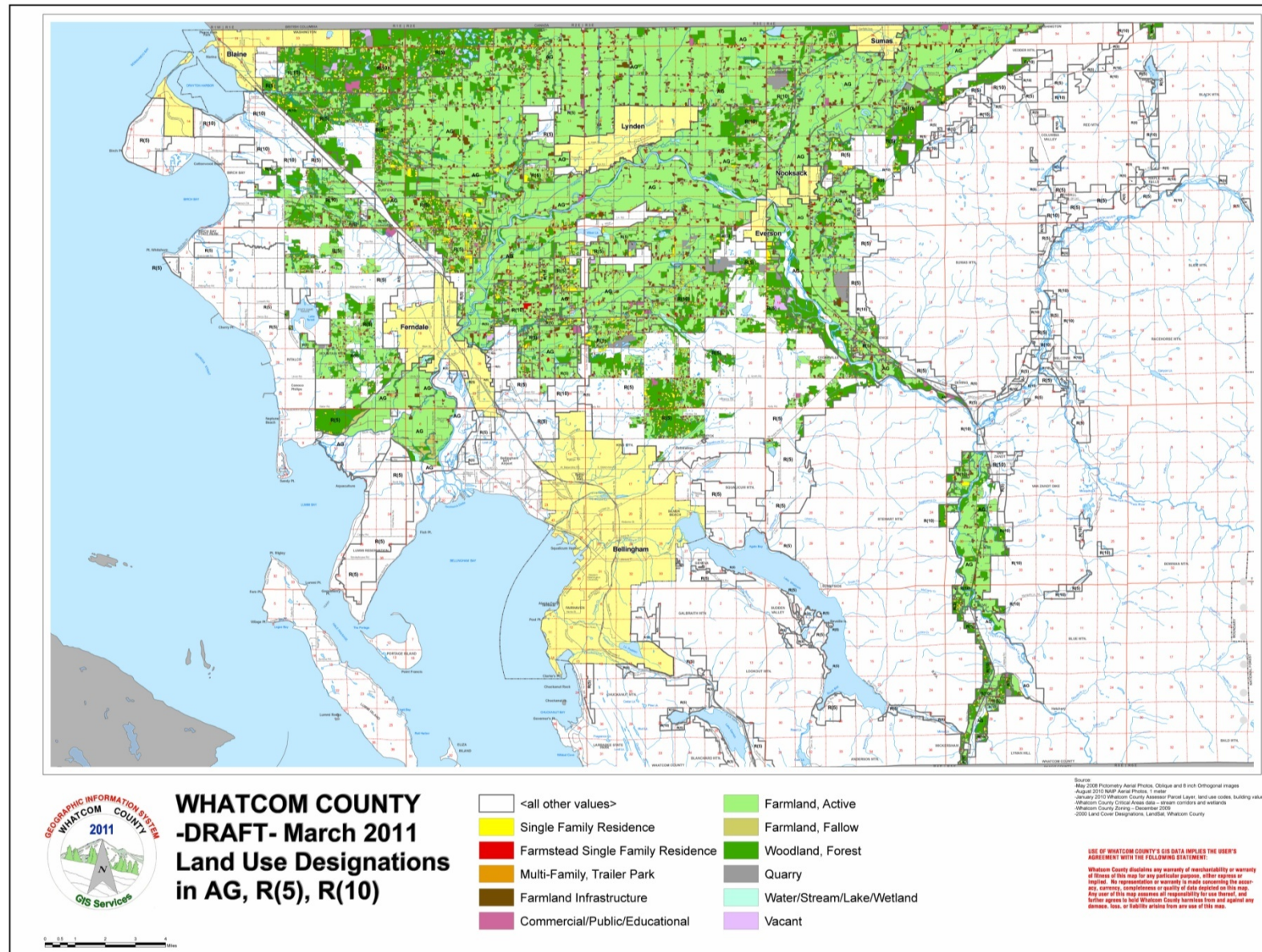
Appendix D – Possible Agricultural Protection Matrix Example

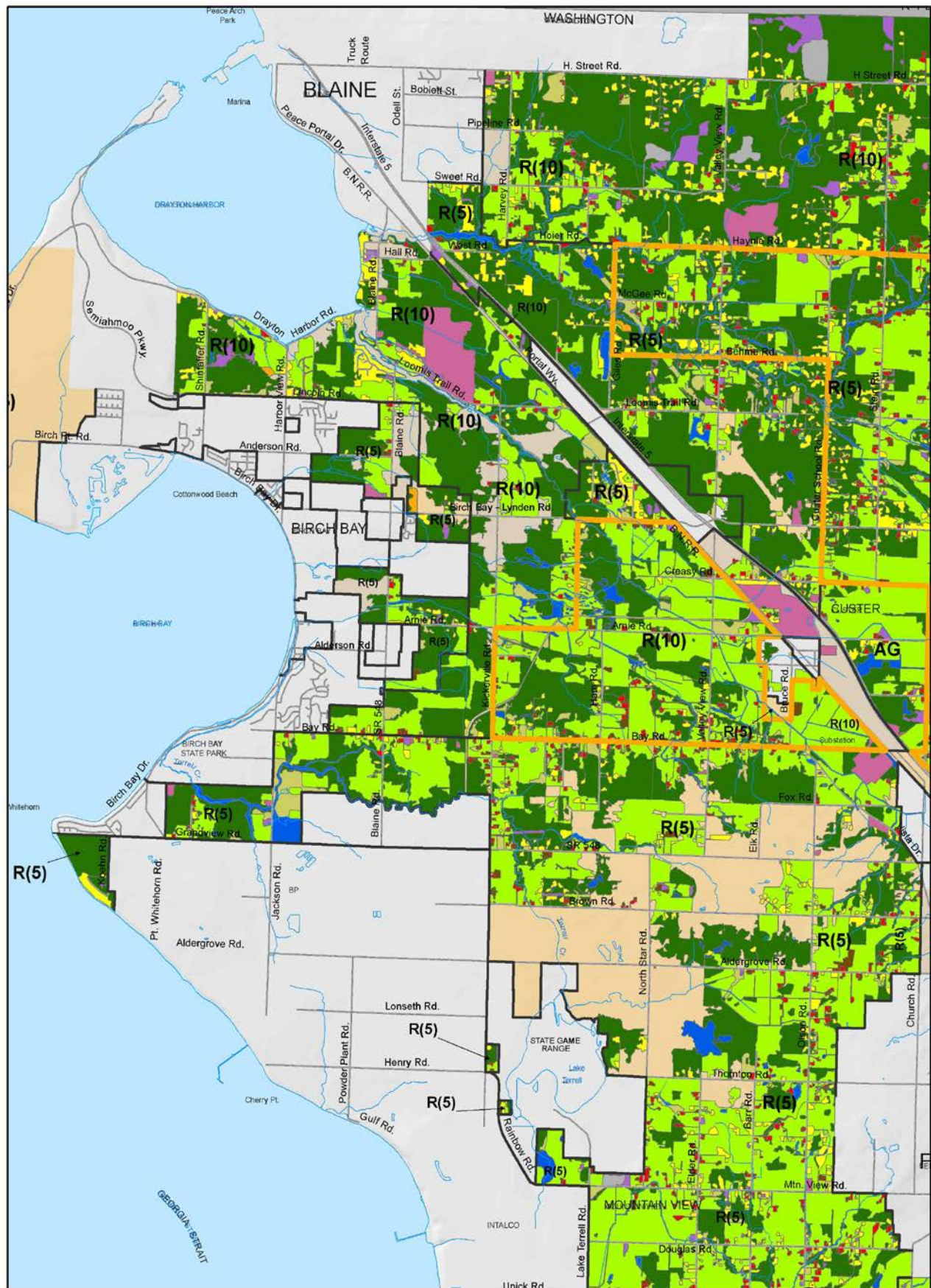


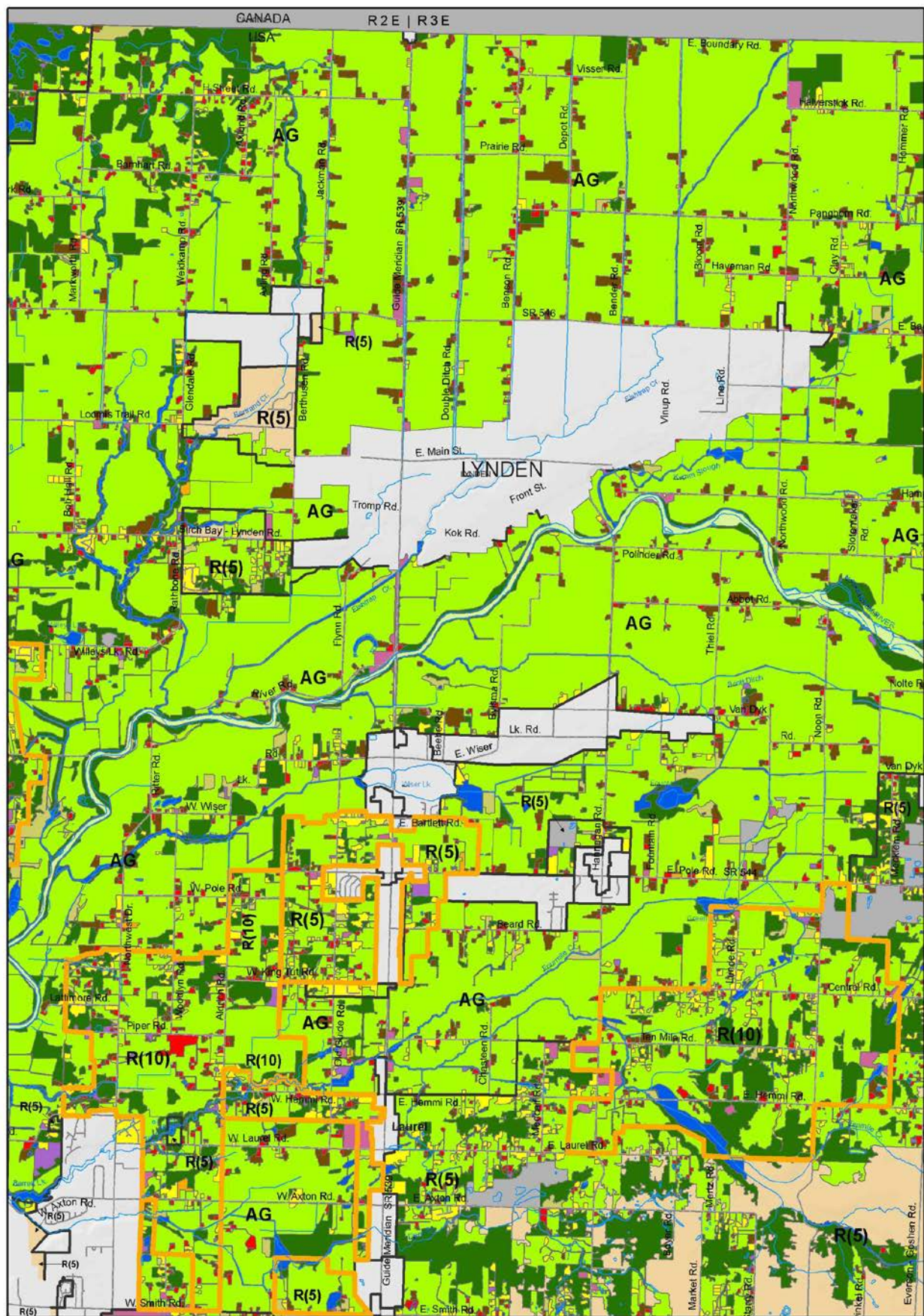
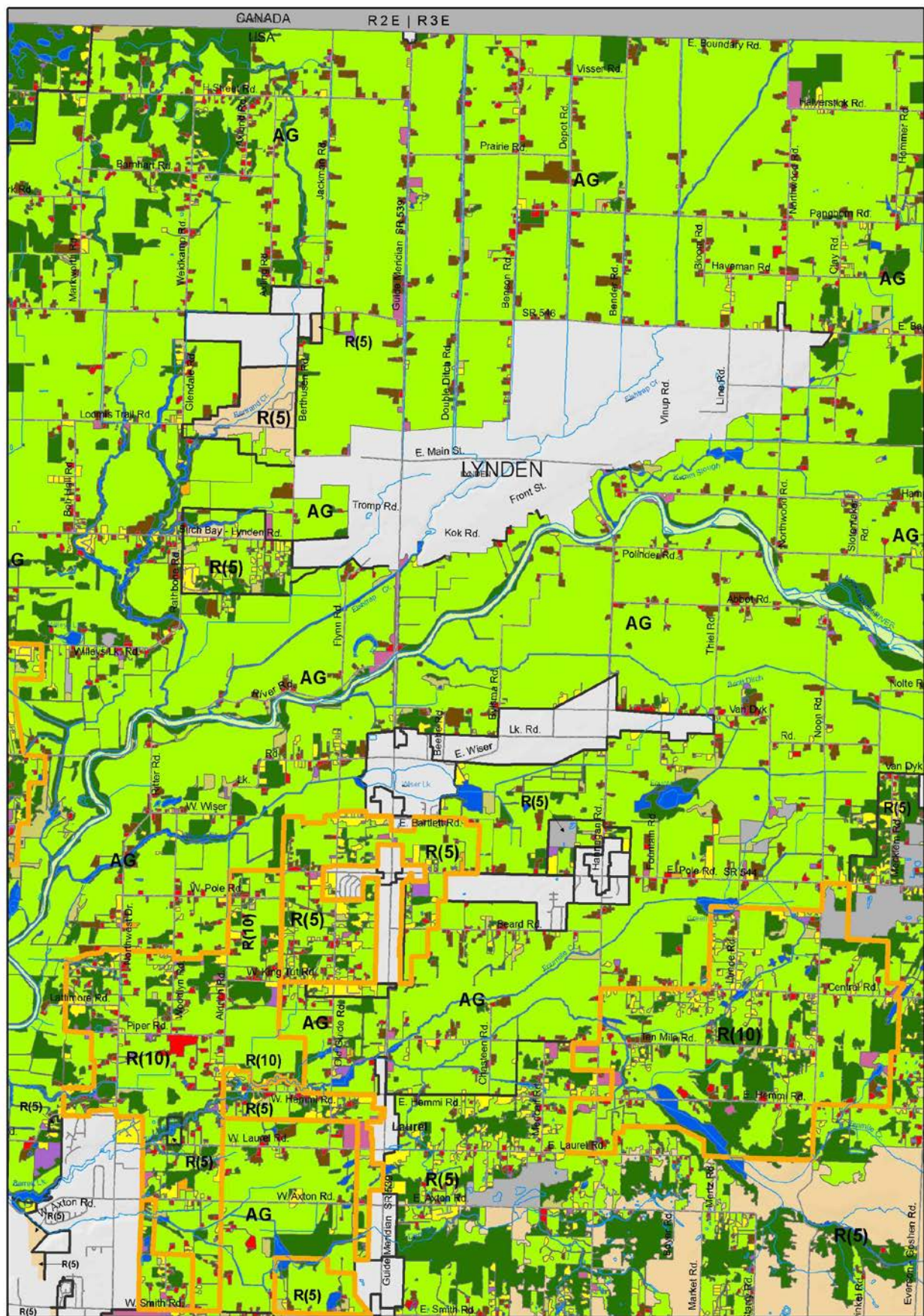
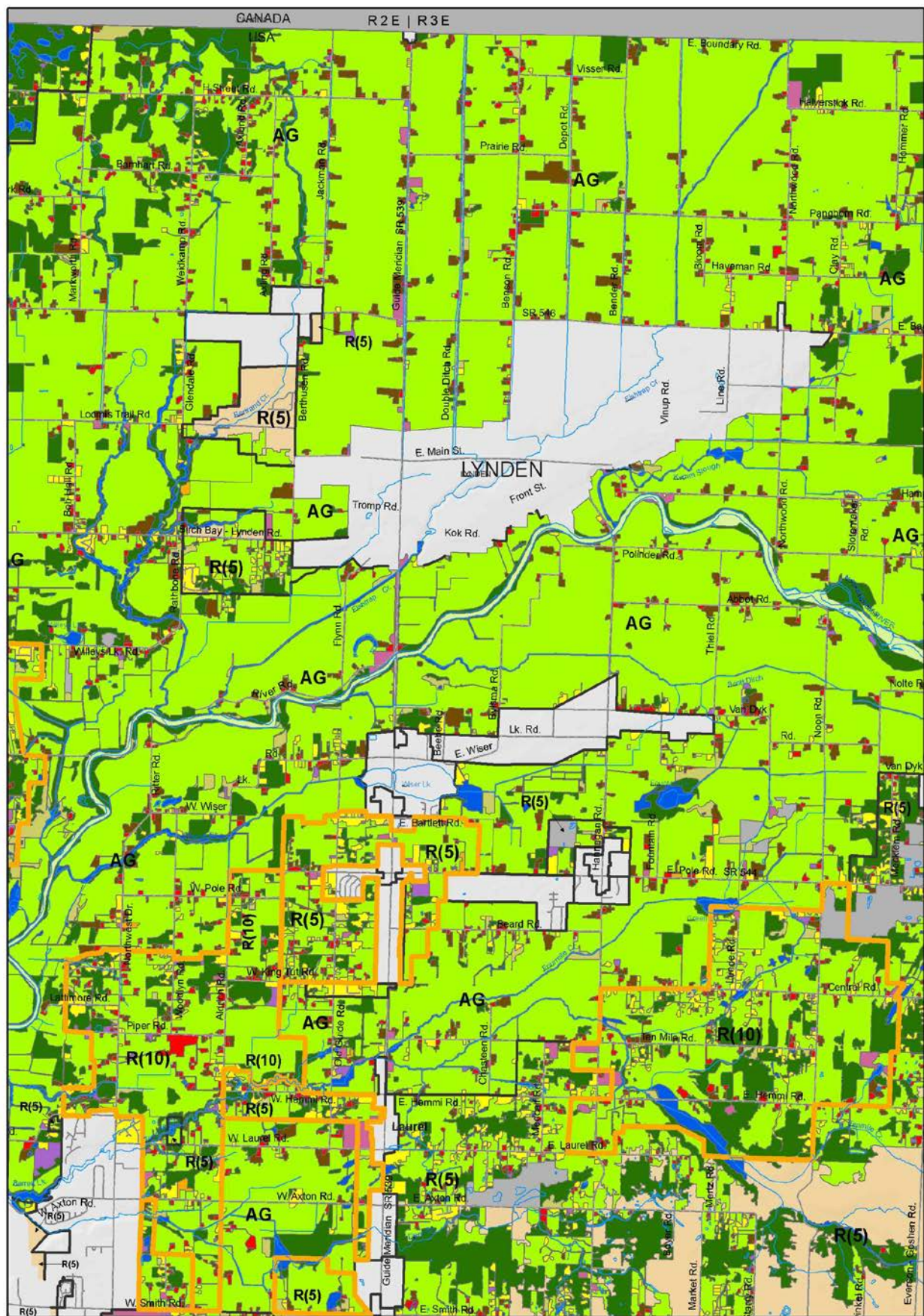
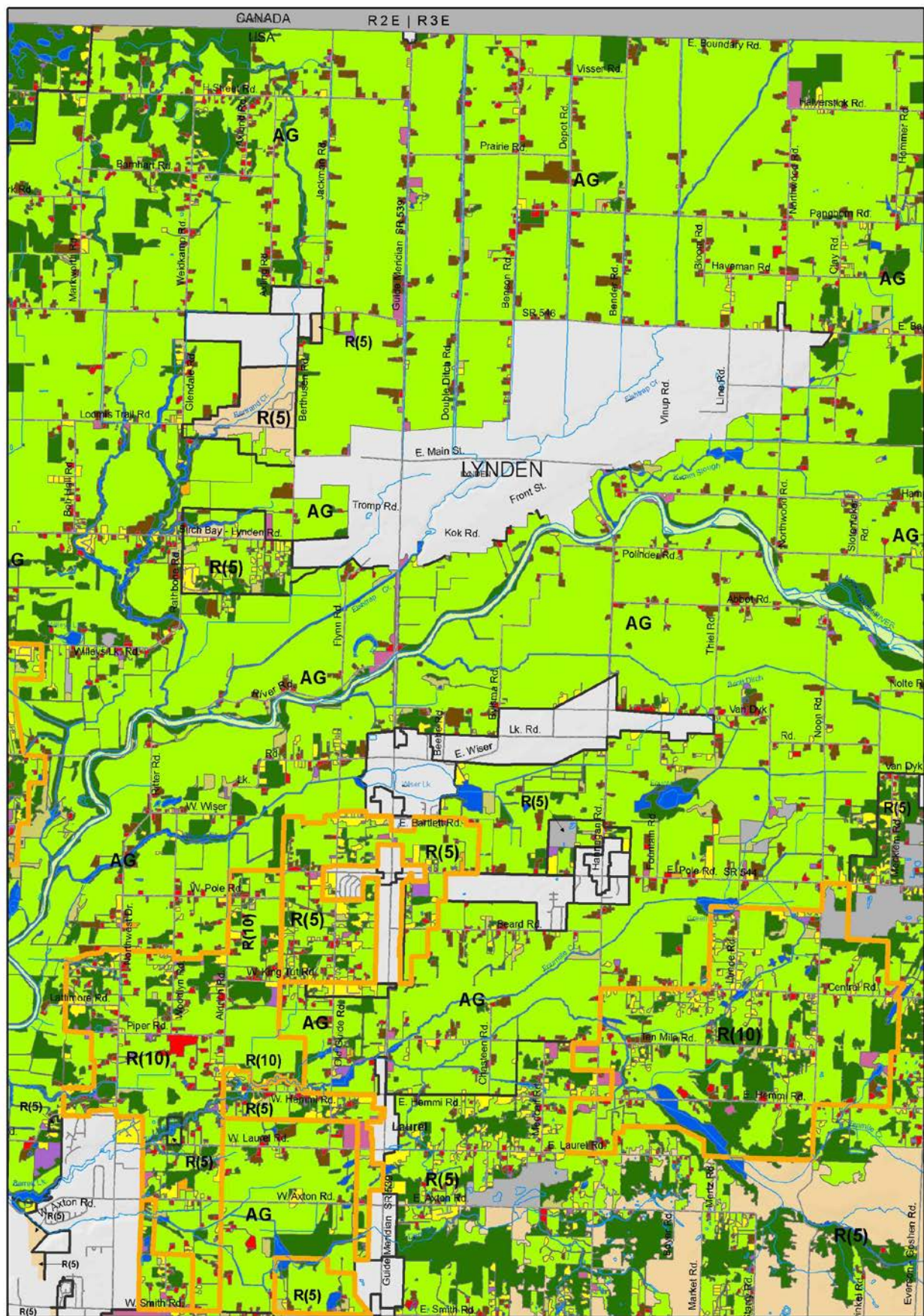
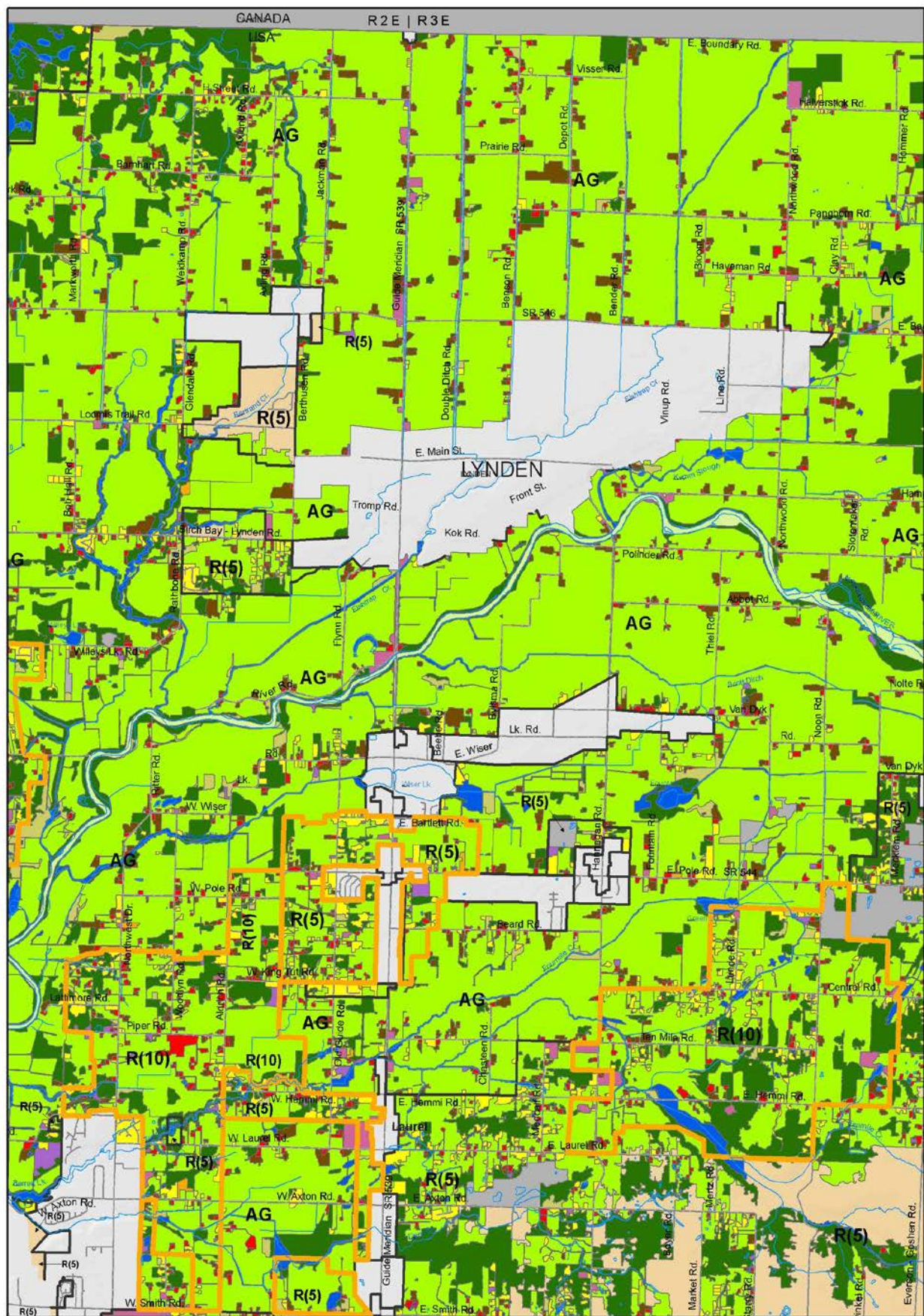
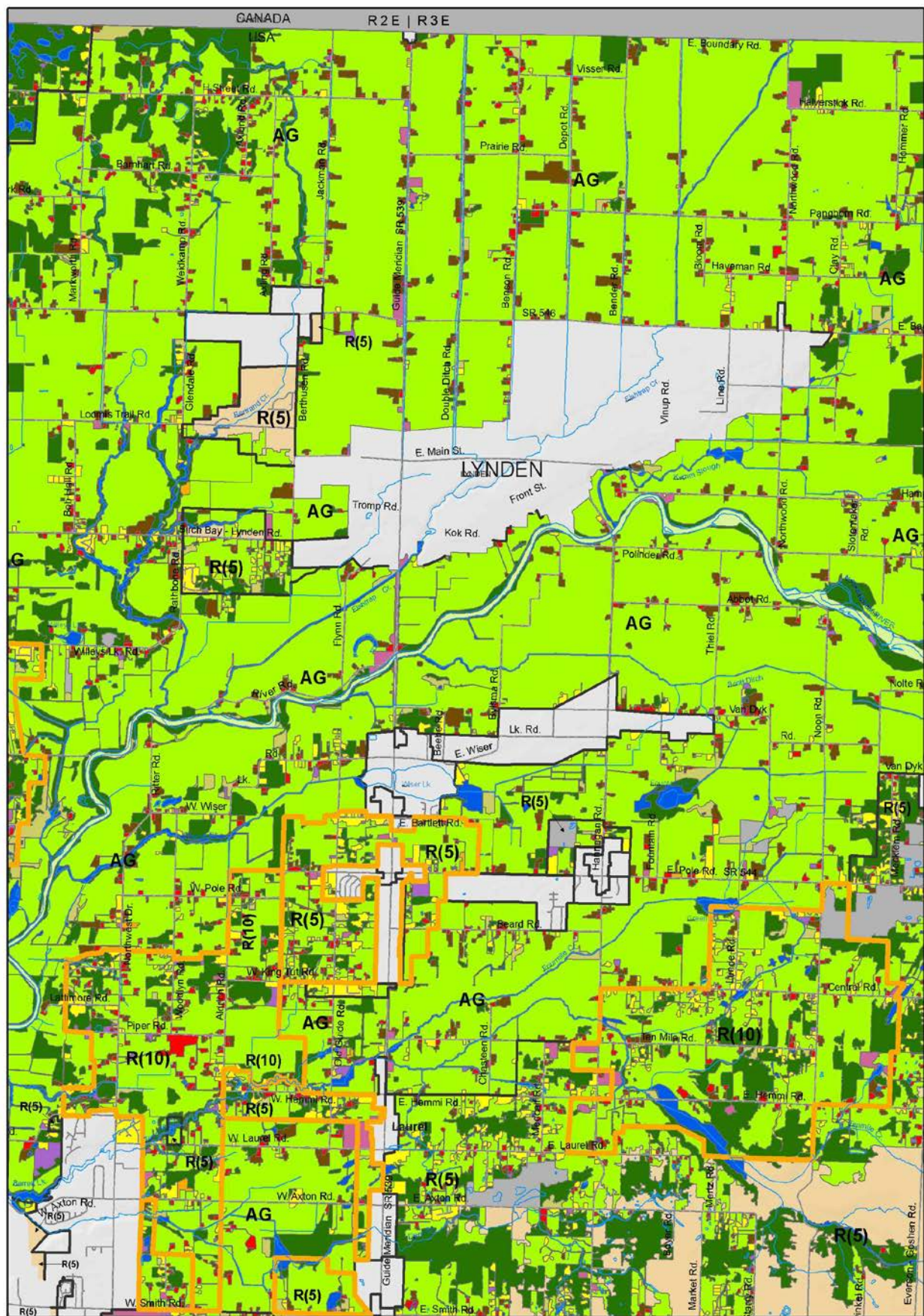
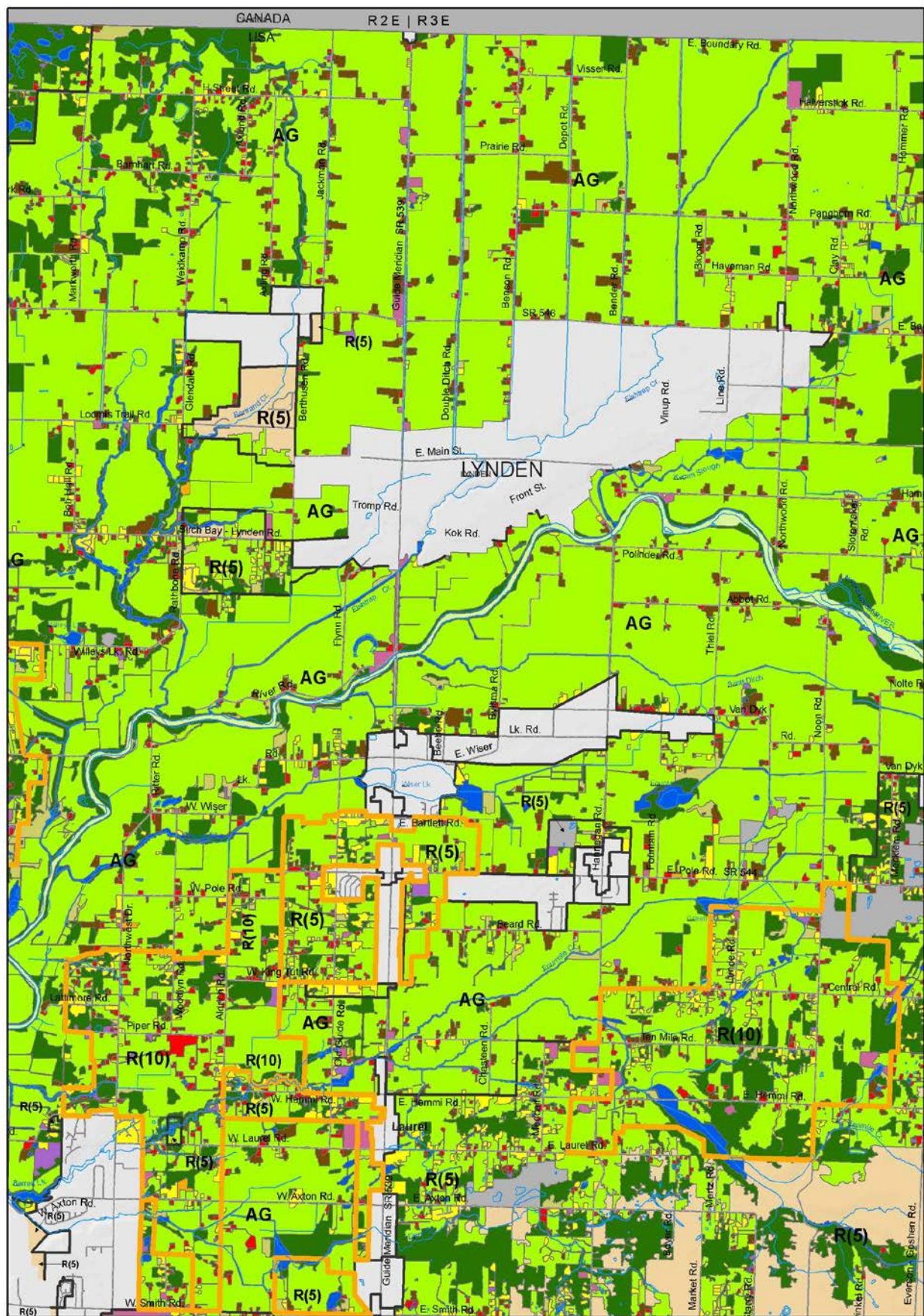
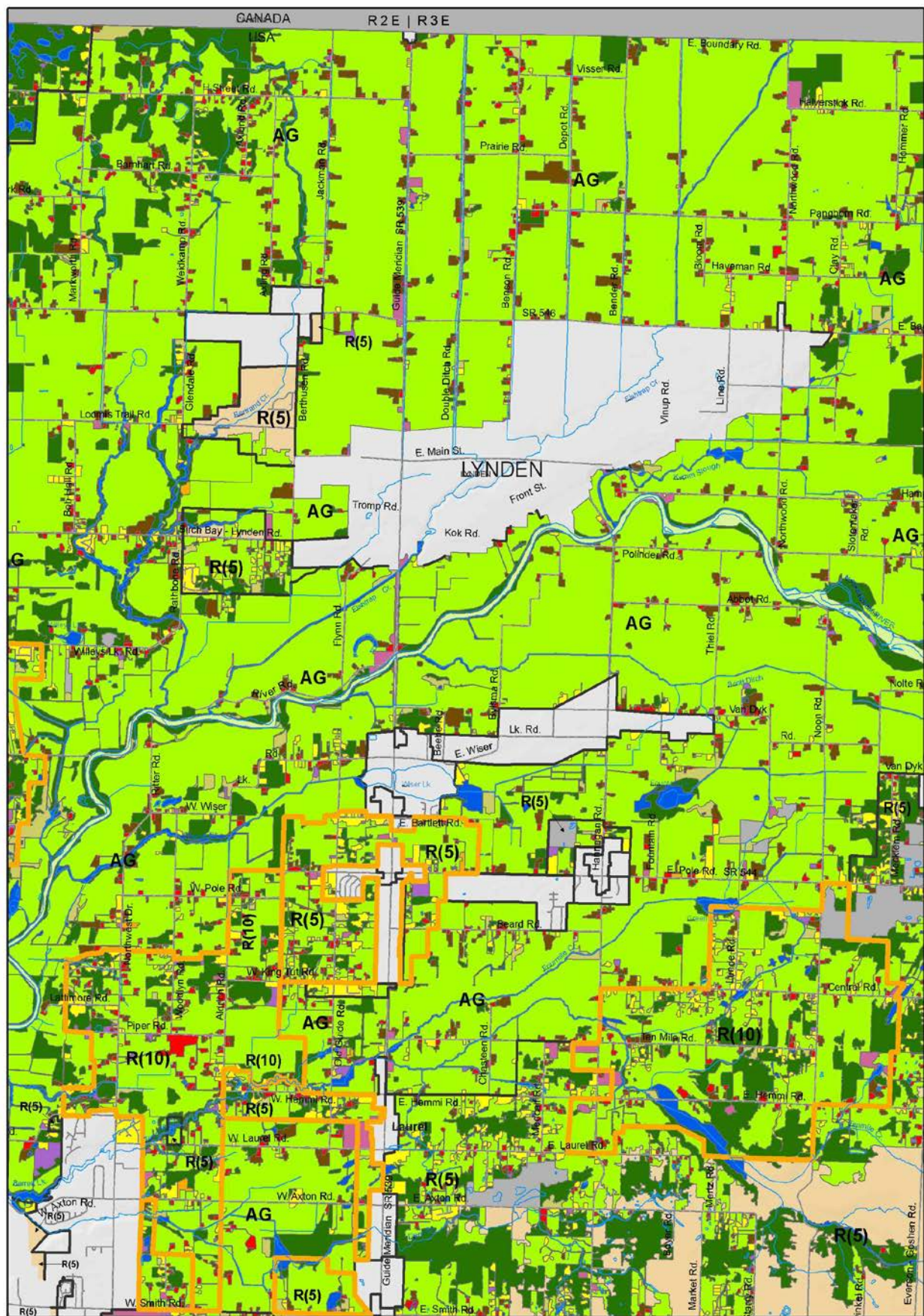
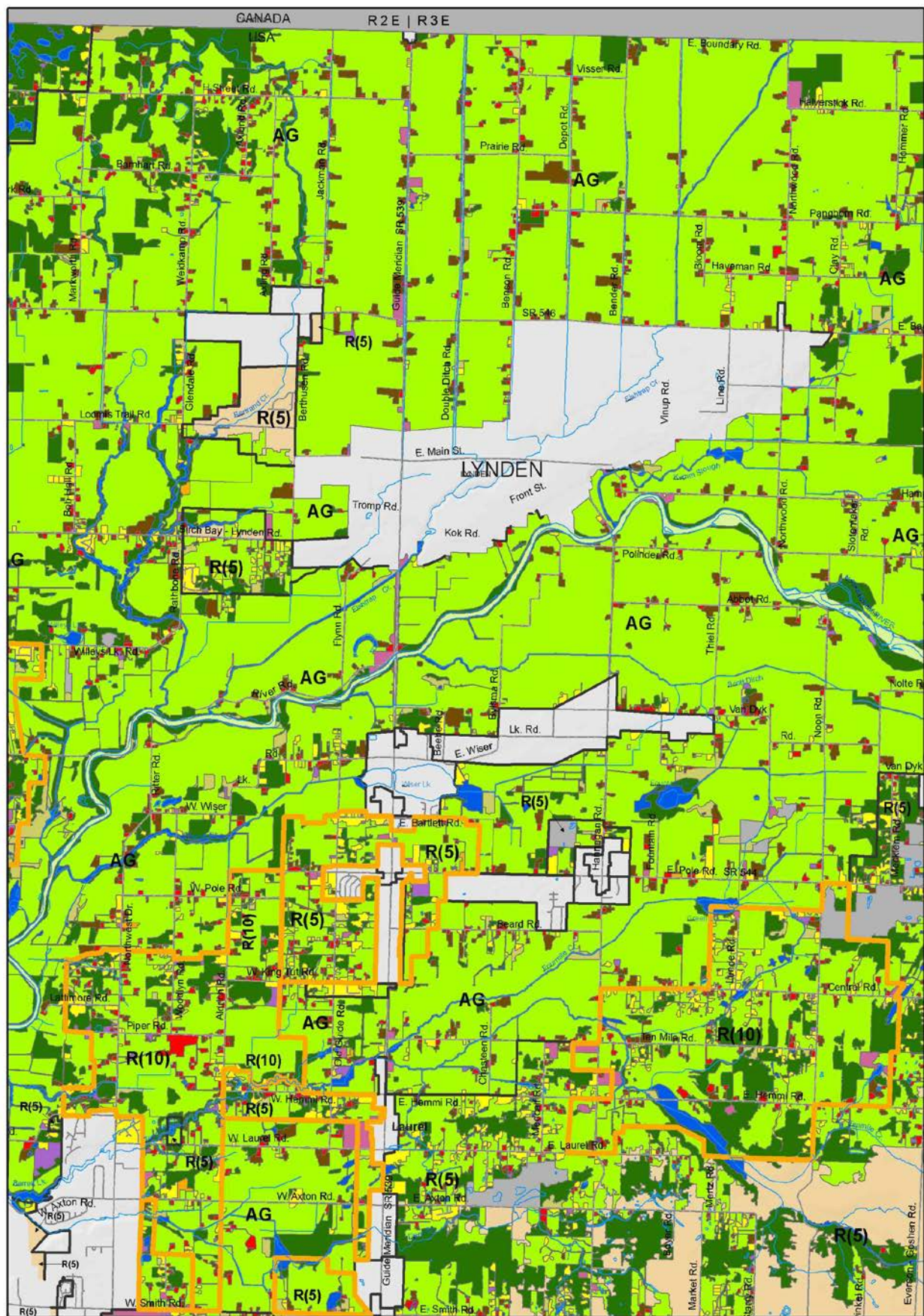
Appendix E – Governments, County Agencies and Organizations involved in Agriculture

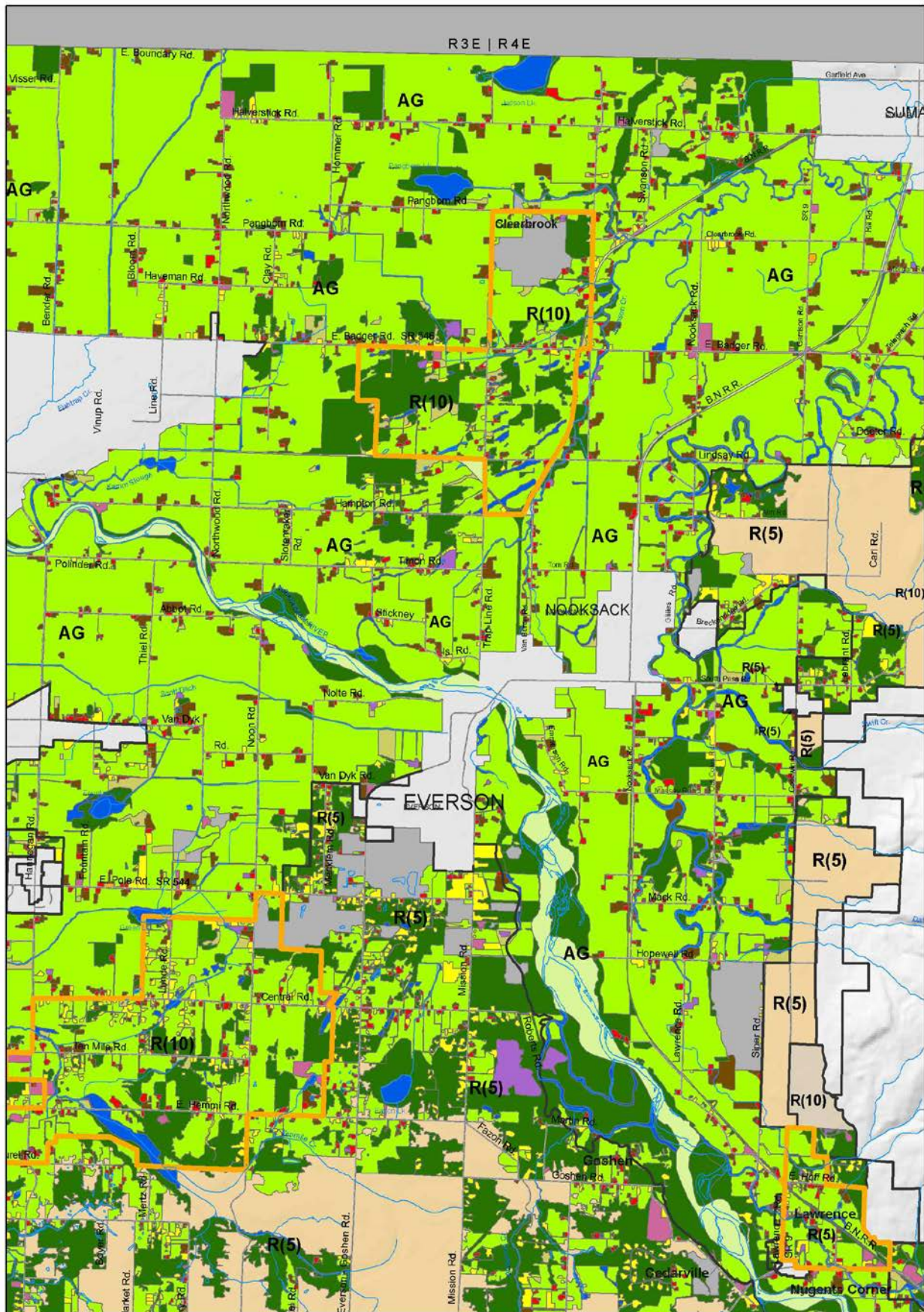
- Commissions (county, state, and regional)
 - Beef, Cattlemen
 - Blueberry, Raspberry, Strawberry
 - Dairy
 - Seed Potato
- Ditching, Diking, and Flood Districts
- Futurewise Whatcom
- Public Utility District No. 1 of Whatcom County
- WA State Conservation Commission, Office of Farmland Preservation
- WA State Dairy Federation & Whatcom County Dairy Federation
- WA State Dairy Women & Whatcom County Dairy Women
- WA State Department of Agriculture
- WA State Farm Bureau & Whatcom County Farm Bureau
- WA State Recreation & Conservation Office (Farmland Preservation Program)
- Whatcom Conservation District
- Whatcom County Agricultural Advisory Committee
- Whatcom County Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee
- Whatcom Farm Friends
- USDA-NRCS
- Youth organizations: Future Farmers of America & 4H
- Environment:
 - Nooksack Tribe
 - Lummi Nation
 - Whatcom Land Trust
 - Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association
 - Shellfish Districts
 - Puget Sound Partnership
 - WA State Department of Ecology, Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Health organizations:
 - Health Dept (overlap w/ACHIEVE goals – Access to Healthy Foods and Community Food Systems planning)
 - SeaMar
 - Whatcom Coalition for Healthy Communities
- Labor/Farmworker support organizations:
 - WA State Office of Rural & Farmworker Housing
 - Community to Community Development
 - Opportunity Council
- Market-grower:
 - Farmers Markets
 - Growing Washington
 - Sustainable Connections
- Research, Training, Marketing, Access to capital & land
 - Farm Credit & FSA
 - Kulshan CLT
 - Northwest Ag Business Center
 - WSU Extension
 - WSU – Mt Vernon NW Research & Extension Center

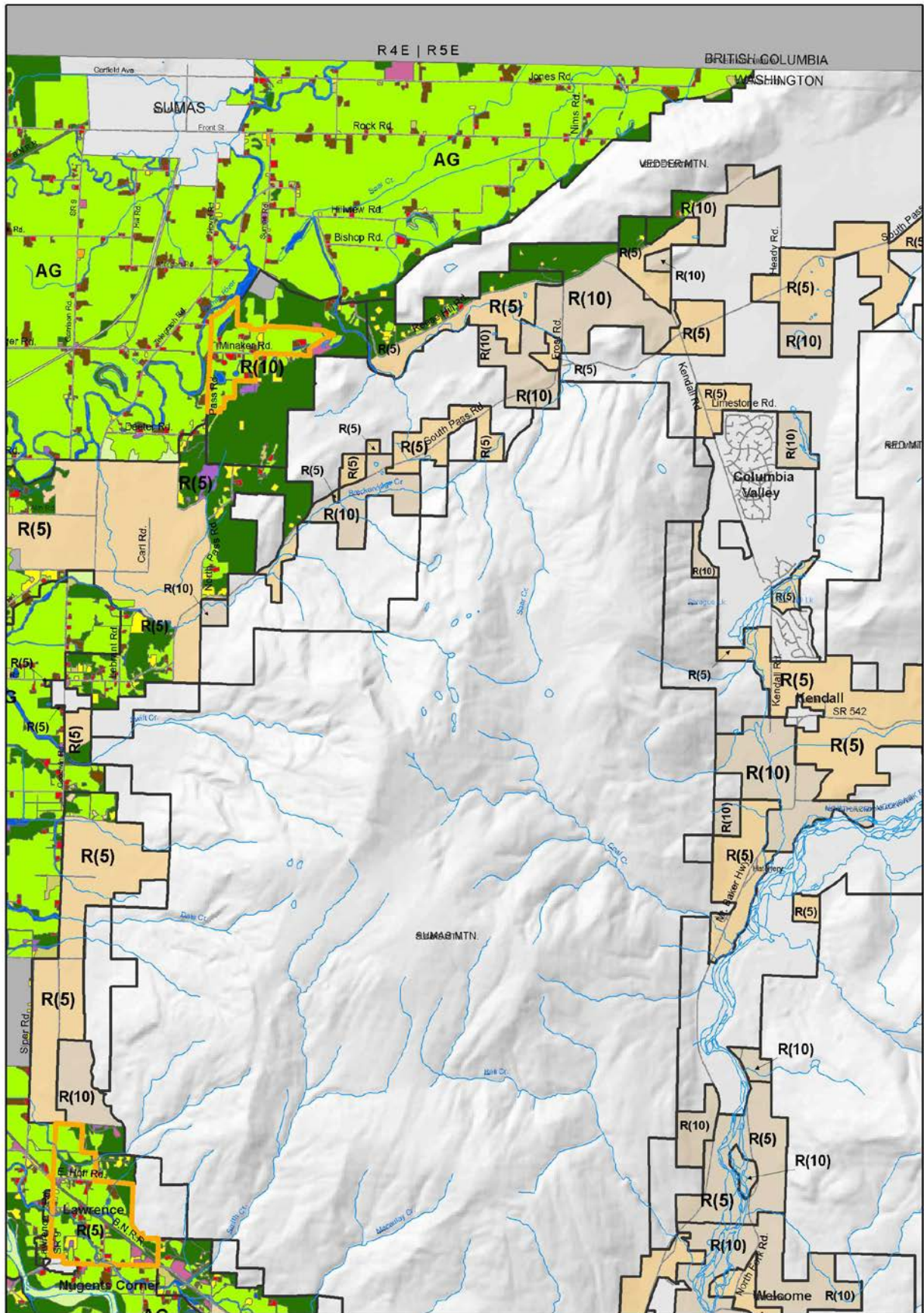
Appendix F – Map Series

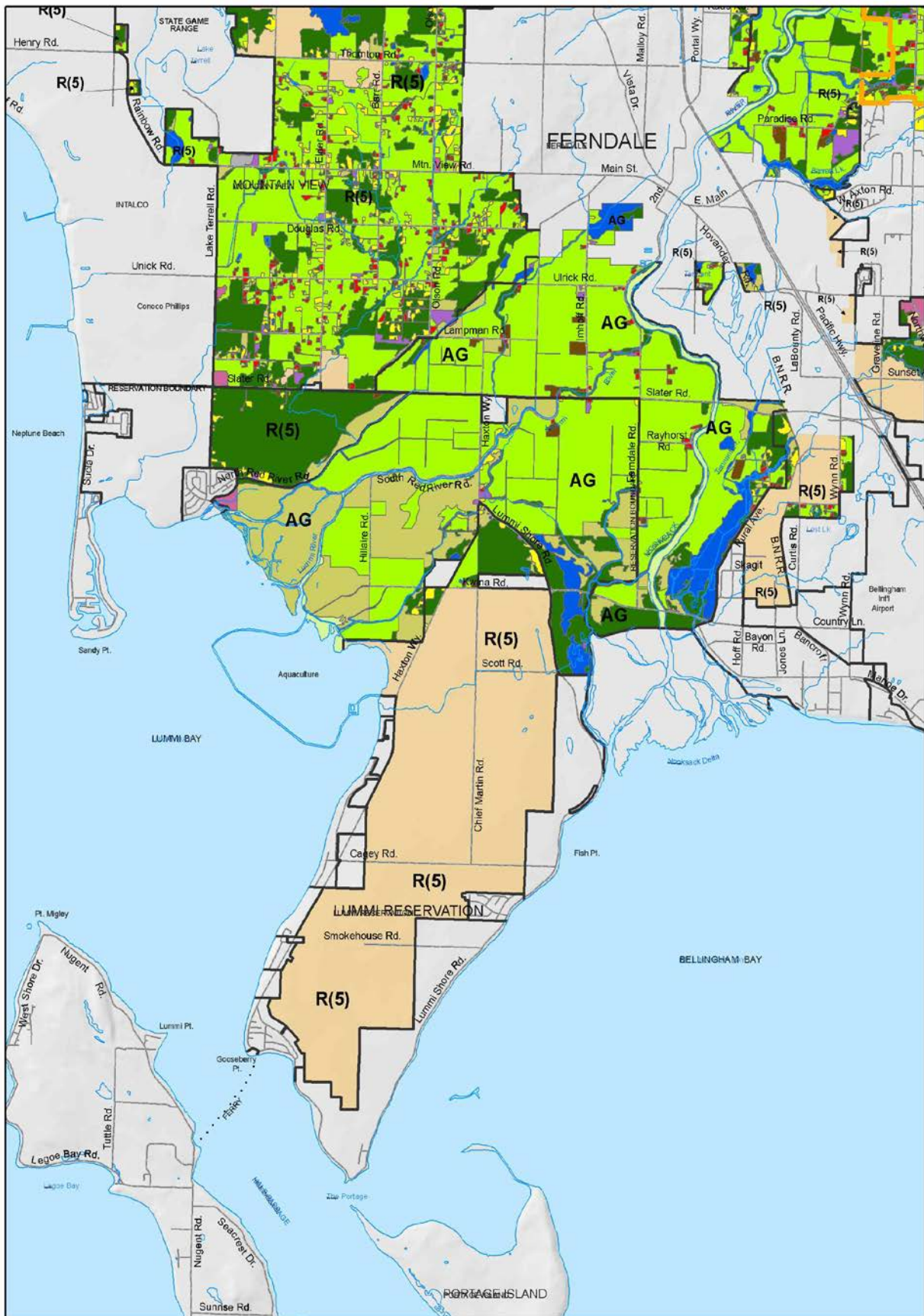


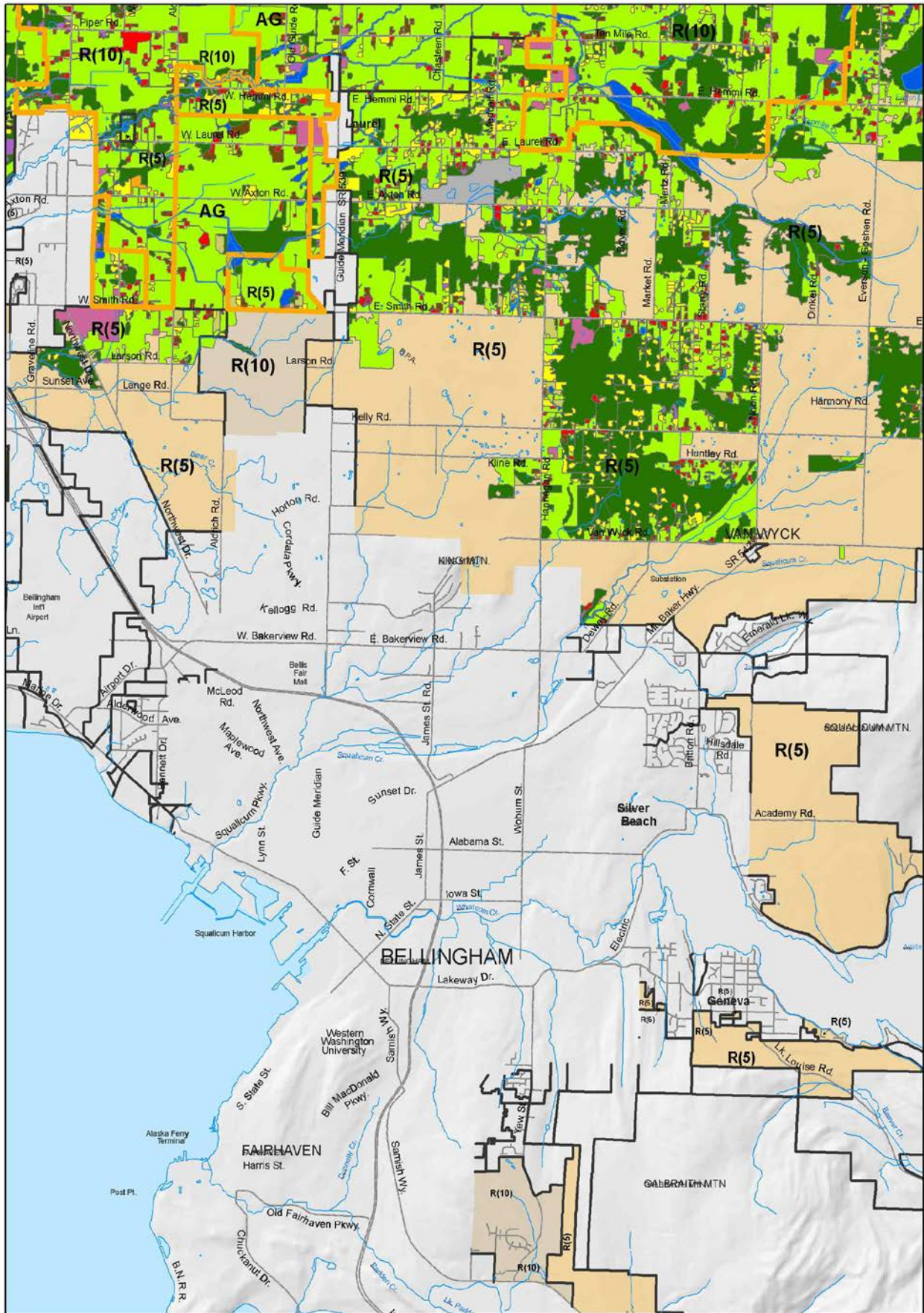


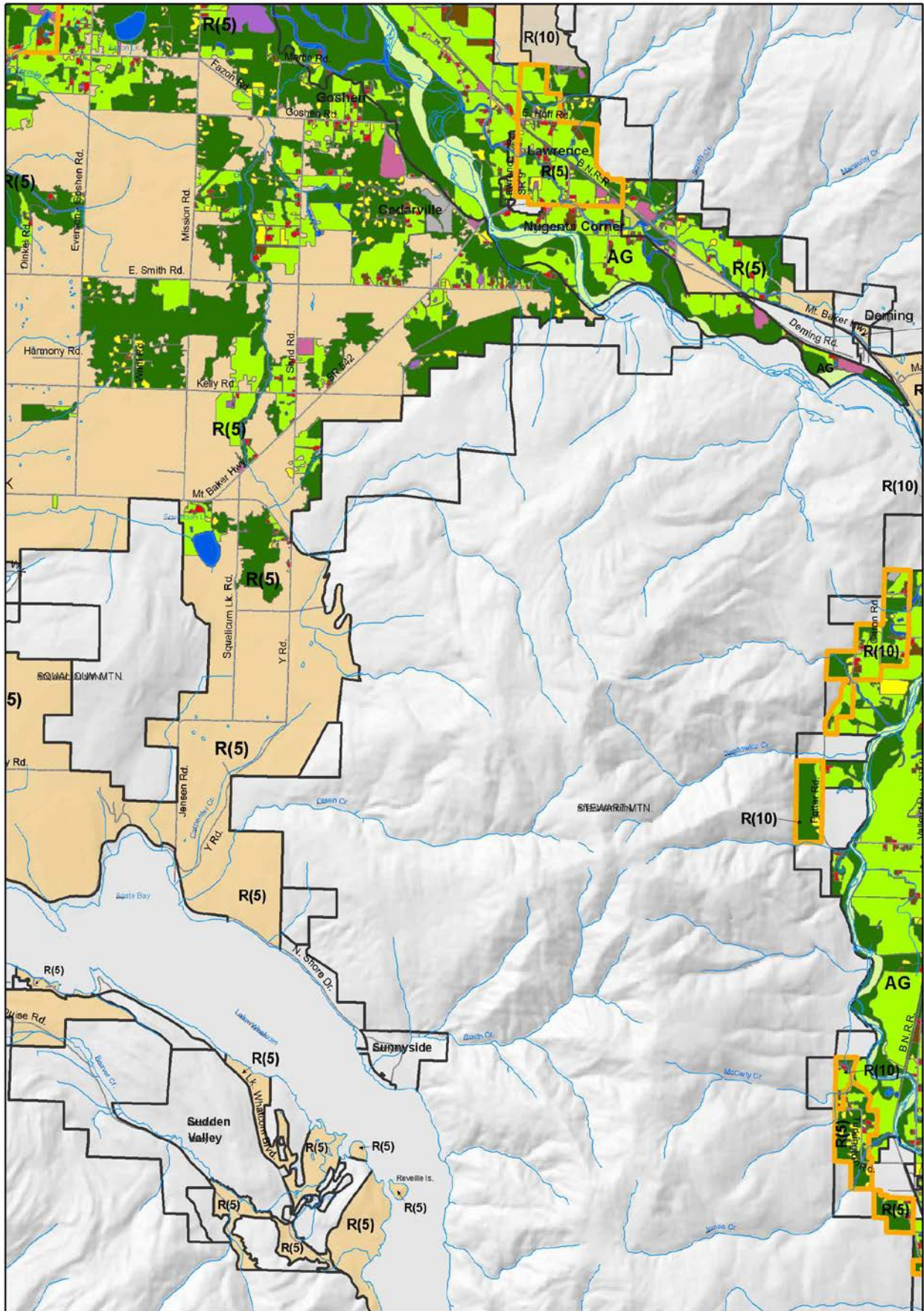


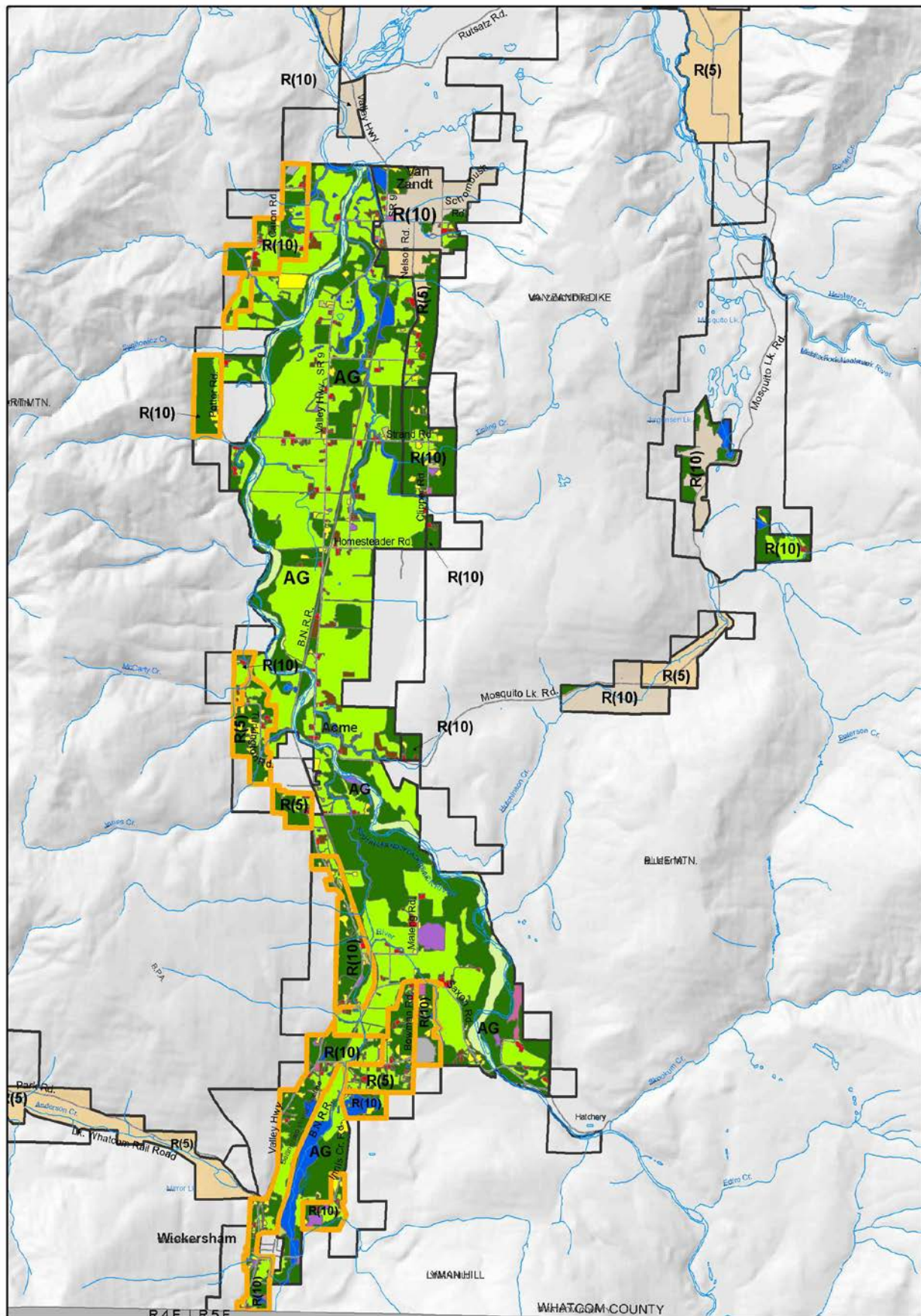












Legend



Rural Study Areas

Land Use



Single Family Residential



Farmstead SFR



Multi Family SFR/Mobile Home Park



Farmstead Infrastructure



Commercial/Public/Education



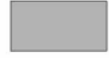
Farmland, Active



Farmland, Fallow



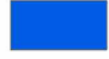
Woodland/Forest



Quarry

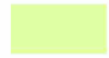


Vacant



Water/Stream/Wetland/Lake

Zoning Designation



Agriculture



Rural (10)



Rural (5)

Appendix G –WA Counties Agricultural Zoning Comparison

	Population ⁽¹⁾	Land in farms ⁽²⁾	No. Farms ⁽²⁾	Mkt value all ag ⁽²⁾	Avg mkt value per farm ⁽²⁾	Ag zone min lot size (acres) ⁽³⁾				
						~ 5	~ 10	~ 20	~ 40	other
West-side Counties										
Clallam	70,100	22,800	512	\$10,767,000	\$21,030			Ag Retention 16 (33.07.010)		
Clark	435,600	78,400	2,101	\$52,691,000	\$25,079			Ag 20 (40.210.010)		Ag/Wildlife - 160 ac (40.210.010)
Cowlitz	100,000	30,700	481	\$26,458,000	\$55,007	Ag 5 (18.10)			Ag 38; Ag-I 38 (18.10)	
Gray's Harbor	71,600	119,300	628	\$32,821,000	\$52,263		Ag 10 (17.12)		L-T Ag 40 (17.16)	
Island	81,100	17,700	458	\$14,344,000	\$31,319		Rural Ag 10 (17.03.090)	Commercial Ag 20 (17.03.100)		
Jefferson	29,300	12,700	211	\$8,689,000	\$41,179			Resource 20 (18.15.020)		
King	1,933,400	49,300	1,790	\$127,269,000	\$71,100		Ag Resource 10 (21A.12.040)		Comm/Ind Ag 35 (21A.12.040)	
Kitsap	248,300	15,300	664	\$6,985,000	\$10,520	No ag zone(s) found				
Lewis	75,600	131,600	1,717	\$109,996,000	\$64,063			Ag Resource 20 (17.30)		
Mason	57,100	25,200	471	\$36,963,000	\$78,478		Long-term Ag 10 (17.21)			
Pacific	22,100	61,700	390	\$34,996,000	\$89,734	No ag zone(s) found				
Pierce	814,600	47,700	1,448	\$83,402,000	\$57,598		All areas 10 (18A.17.030)			
San Juan	16,500	21,500	291	\$3,617,000	\$12,431		Ag 10	Ag 15; Ag 20	Ag 40	(18.30 and CP maps)
Skagit	119,300	108,500	1,215	\$256,248,000	\$210,904				Ag-NRL 40 (14.16.400)	14.16.860 allows substandard lots with Conservation Easements
Snohomish	711,100	76,800	1,670	\$125,619,000	\$75,221		Ag 10 (30.23.030)			
Thurston	252,400	80,600	1,288	\$117,885,000	\$91,525			L-T Ag 20 (20.08A)	Nisqually Ag 40 (20.08C)	allows for 5 ac divisions w/no residence(s) allowed
Wahkiakum	4,150	12,000	119	\$3,067,000	\$25,773	No ag zone(s) found				
Whatcom	195,500	102,600	1,483	\$326,450,000	\$220,128				Ag 40 (20.40)	

	Population ⁽¹⁾	Land in farms ⁽²⁾	No. Farms ⁽²⁾	Mkt value all ag ⁽²⁾	Avg mkt value per farm ⁽²⁾	Ag zone min lot size (acres) ⁽³⁾				
						~ 5	~ 10	~ 20	~ 40	other
Central WA Counties										
Benton	172,900	632,600	1,630	\$525,918,000	\$322,649			Ag 20 (56)		
Chelan	73,300	93,900	979	\$208,800,000	\$213,278		Commercial Ag 10 (11.30)			
Douglas	38,500	883,100	955	\$193,367,000	\$202,479	Commercial Ag 5 (18.34)	Commercial Ag 10 (18.36)	Dryland Ag 20 (18.40)		
Grant	87,700	1,088,000	1,858	\$1,190,191,000	\$640,576				Ag 40 (23.04.560; 23.12)	
Kittitas	40,500	191,100	1,038	\$60,949,000	\$58,717	Ag 3; Ag 5 (17.28; 17.28a)		Ag 20; Commercial Ag (17.29; 17.31)		
Klickitat	20,500	601,200	893	\$57,298,000	\$64,163			Extensive Ag 20	Extensive Ag 40	(all 2.6)
Okanogan	40,900	1,205,200	1,662	\$208,758,000	\$125,606	Ag Residential 2 (17.08)		Ag 20 (17.07)		
Skamania	10,900	5,500	123	\$2,661,000	\$21,635		Forestry-Ag 10	Forestry-Ag 20		(all 21.56)
Yakima	239,100	1,649,300	3,540	\$1,203,806,000	\$340,058				Ag 40 (15.21)	

	Population ⁽¹⁾	Land in farms ⁽²⁾	No. Farms ⁽²⁾	Mkt value all ag ⁽²⁾	Avg mkt value per farm ⁽²⁾	Ag zone min lot size (acres) ⁽³⁾				
						~ 5	~ 10	~ 20	~ 40	other
East-side Counties										
Adams	18,300	1,098,500	782	\$344,130,000	\$440,064			General Ag 20 (17.16)		Prime Ag 60 (17.12)
Asotin	21,700	273,900	192	\$13,376,000	\$69,668	No ag zone(s) found				
Columbia	4,150	313,300	283	\$39,819,000	\$140,702	Ag 5 - Transitional (Section 9)	Ag 10 - Transitional (Section 10)		Ag 40 (Section 8)	
Ferry	7,850	759,500	232	\$2,913,000	\$12,555			Ag 20 (Section 9)		
Franklin	75,500	609,000	891	\$467,014,000	\$524,145			Ag Production 20 (17.10)	Ag Production 40 (17.12)	
Garfield	2,300	308,200	239	\$26,440,000	\$110,629	Ag 5 (1.03)				Ag-Transitional (no specified minimum lot size found)
Lincoln	10,500	1,090,200	798	\$126,216,000	\$158,165			Ag 20 (17.02)		
Pend Oreille	13,100	55,100	316	\$2,818,000	\$8,917			Natural Resource 20 (Title XX)	Natural Resource 40 (Title XX)	
Spokane	470,300	626,300	2502	\$117,065,000	\$46,789		Sm Tract Ag 10		Lg Tract Ag 40	(all 14.606)
Stevens	44,300	531,100	1258	\$24,530,000	\$19,499			Ag 20 (Title 3)		
Walla Walla	59,600	682,400	929	\$344,489,000	\$370,818		Residential Ag 10	General Ag 20	Primary Ag 40	Exclusive Ag 120 (all 17.18.020)
Whitman	43,600	1,271,100	1247	\$254,031,000	\$203,714			Ag 20 - no residences (19.10)		only 'existing' residences allowed under specifications

⁽¹⁾ WA State, Office of Financial Management, 2010 Population Estimates.

⁽²⁾ 2007 National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA Census of Agriculture

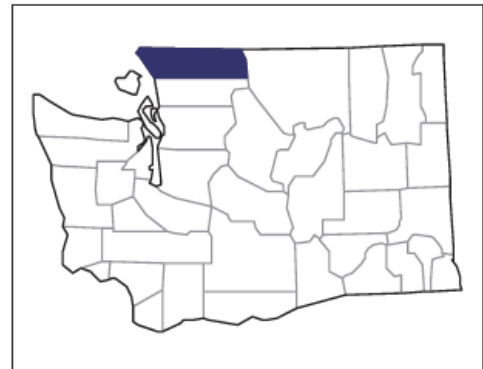
⁽³⁾ County code research done between July 2010 and April 2011 (code citations in parentheses)

Appendix H – NASS 2007 Agricultural Census for Whatcom County

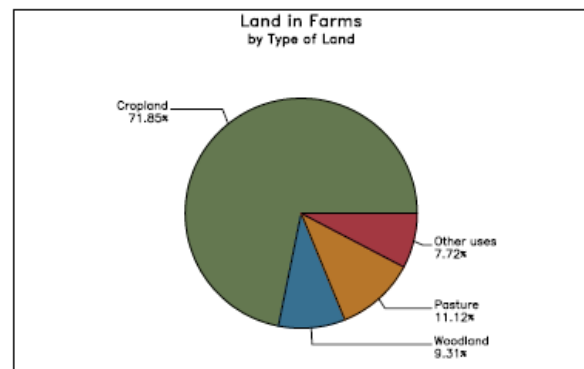
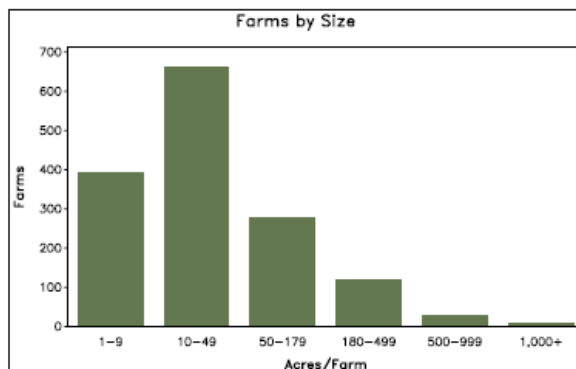
2007 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

County Profile

Whatcom, Washington



	2007	2002	% change
Number of Farms	1,483	1,485	- 0
Land in Farms	102,584 acres	126,027 acres	- 19
Average Size of Farm	69 acres	100 acres	- 31
Market Value of Production	\$326,450,000	\$287,860,000	+ 13
Crop Sales \$99,897,000 (31 percent)			
Livestock Sales \$226,553,000 (69 percent)			
Average Per Farm	\$220,128	\$193,845	+ 14
Government Payments	\$1,050,000	\$4,029,000	- 74
Average Per Farm	\$3,594	\$18,314	- 80



United States Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

www.agcensus.usda.gov

2007 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

County Profile

Whatcom, Washington

Ranked items among the 39 state counties and 3,079 U.S. counties, 2007

Item	Quantity	State Rank	Universe ¹	U.S. Rank	Universe ¹
MARKET VALUE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS SOLD (\$1,000)					
Total value of agricultural products sold	326,450	7	39	137	3,076
Value of crops including nursery and greenhouse	99,897	13	39	373	3,072
Value of livestock, poultry, and their products	226,553	3	39	101	3,069
VALUE OF SALES BY COMMODITY GROUP (\$1,000)					
Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, and dry peas	2,662	17	36	1,700	2,933
Tobacco	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	437
Cotton and cottonseed	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	626
Vegetables, melons, potatoes, and sweet potatoes	10,815	8	37	176	2,796
Fruits, tree nuts, and berries	66,788	9	39	51	2,659
Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, and sod	16,736	7	38	193	2,703
Cut Christmas trees and short rotation woody crops	876	5	33	52	1,710
Other crops and hay	2,020	18	39	867	3,054
Poultry and eggs	11,461	7	39	532	3,020
Cattle and calves	24,135	7	39	555	3,054
Milk and other dairy products from cows	186,491	2	34	29	2,493
Hogs and pigs	57	20	37	1,547	2,922
Sheep, goats, and their products	169	15	39	726	2,998
Horses, ponies, mules, burros, and donkeys	885	11	39	246	3,024
Aquaculture	1,509	16	34	152	1,498
Other animals and other animal products	1,847	4	39	99	2,875
TOP LIVESTOCK INVENTORY ITEMS (number)					
Broilers and other meat-type chickens	(D)	4	36	(D)	2,476
Cattle and calves	95,500	3	39	159	3,060
Colonies of bees	(D)	2	38	(D)	2,640
Mink and their pelts	(D)	2	5	(D)	123
Layers	3,855	14	39	852	3,024
TOP CROP ITEMS (acres)					
Forage-land used for all hay and haylage, grass silage, and greenchop	32,876	8	39	616	3,060
Corn for silage	16,478	2	25	62	2,263
Land in Berries	11,379	1	36	3	2,237
Vegetables harvested, all	2,765	11	37	288	2,794
Potatoes	1,884	7	37	96	2,124

Other County Highlights

Economic Characteristics	Quantity	Operator Characteristics	Quantity
Farms by value of sales		Principal operators by primary occupation:	
Less than \$1,000	489	Farming	671
\$1,000 to \$2,499	183	Other	812
\$2,500 to \$4,999	136	Principal operators by sex:	
\$5,000 to \$9,999	138	Male	1,215
\$10,000 to \$19,999	110	Female	268
\$20,000 to \$24,999	28	Average age of principal operator (years)	
\$25,000 to \$39,999	69		55.5
\$40,000 to \$49,999	25	All operators ² by race:	
\$50,000 to \$99,999	56	American Indian or Alaska Native	14
\$100,000 to \$249,999	54	Asian	87
\$250,000 to \$499,999	55	Black or African American	3
\$500,000 or more	140	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2
Total farm production expenses (\$1,000)	267,962	White	2,196
Average per farm (\$)	180,689	More than one race	21
Net cash farm income of operation (\$1,000)	66,840	All operators ² of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino Origin	
Average per farm (\$)	45,071		73

(D) Cannot be disclosed. (Z) Less than half of the unit shown. See "Census of Agriculture, Volume 1, Geographic Area Series" for complete footnotes.

¹ Universe is number of counties in state or U.S. with item.

² Data were collected for a maximum of three operators per farm.

Appendix I - Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, agricultural goals & action plan

GOALS:

- GOAL 8A: Conserve and enhance Whatcom County's agricultural land base for the continued production of food and fiber.
- GOAL 8B: Maintain and enhance Whatcom County's agricultural products industry as a long-term and sustainable industry.
- GOAL 8C: Preserve and enhance the cultural heritage that is related to agriculture.
- GOAL 8D: Reduce land use conflicts between Whatcom County's agriculture and non-agricultural landowners.
- GOAL 8E: Encourage agricultural land uses to voluntarily protect and restore habitat of threatened and endangered species through education and incentive programs.

ACTION PLAN:

1. Direct the Advisory Committee to review the existing Comprehensive Plan and zoning designations for Agriculture during subarea review to determine whether any adjustments in these boundaries are warranted. The review should include parcels within the Agriculture designation to determine if they should no longer be designated Agriculture, and should include parcels in the Rural designation (and possibly other designations) to determine if they should be designated Agriculture. The review should also include areas outside the immediate Agriculture boundary as available research and data indicate. Designation as "Agriculture Protection Overlay" may be one tool to implement this recommendation.
2. Direct the Advisory Committee to develop a process that conserves and enhances the Agricultural resource land base.
3. To assist staff and public in evaluating lands for possible inclusion in the Agriculture zone, develop a system such as the LESA (Land Evaluation and Site Assessment) system or a similar mechanism. This system will consider County-wide Planning Policies and Growth Management Act goals for the conservation of the agricultural resource. Other uses for such a system could include:
 - Evaluating requests for agricultural land divisions pursuant to the exceptions to the 40 acre minimum parcel size in the Agriculture zone district of Title 20.
 - Evaluating applications for Conditional Use Permits for non-agricultural production uses in the Agriculture zone district of *Title 20*.

4. Establish buffers or setback requirements on non-agricultural lands when they are adjacent to agricultural lands. As a part of this task, establish the quality and type of buffers or setbacks.
5. Implement strategies that reduce negative impacts by agricultural uses on natural systems.
6. Coordinate with the members of the agricultural community when addressing issues that affect agriculture in Whatcom County. Representative entities such as the Whatcom Conservation District, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Whatcom County Agricultural Preservation Committee, the Whatcom County Farm Bureau, the Whatcom County Dairy Federation, the Whatcom County Cooperative Extension Service and other agriculture related organizations should be included.
7. Support educational short courses which address methods of structuring agricultural estates to minimize inheritance taxes; give special emphasis to utilization of Land Trust as a mechanism by which to protect their farmlands in perpetuity for agricultural uses by their heirs or other farmers.
8. Work with the drainage districts and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife to resolve conflicting interests associated with fish and wildlife habitat.
9. Encourage equity in present tax assessment systems relating to agricultural land use.

Appendix J – Rural Land Study Selection Criteria

Excerpt from the “Whatcom County Rural Land Study: A Collaborative Report Identifying Rural Areas of Agricultural Significance” (page 6) published in 2007 by the Agricultural Advisory Committee and county staff.

1. Proximity to active agricultural areas:
 - a. Adjacent to Agriculture District
 - b. In or adjacent to a PDR Target Area
 - c. Inclusion of area provides buffer between Ag zone and more intensive uses
2. Current land use characterized by agriculture – visual analysis
3. High percentage of APO soils
4. Parcelization of the area:
 - a. Acreage totals by parcel size
 - i. Total acreage by parcel size is used to determine the percent of area still in large (20+ acre) parcels
 - b. Number of parcels by given size
 - i. Breakdown by parcel size indicates character of land use in the area
5. Land use as identified on Assessors records (Agricultural Open Space)
6. Evaluation of forested areas for potential agricultural use.
 - a. Land cover (forested) intersects with critical areas to determine likelihood that area could be developed for agricultural use.

Appendix K – Washington Administrative Code, Agricultural designation criteria

(For context and reference, see also RCW 36.70A.050 and 36.70A.060)

WAC 365-190-050 – Agricultural resource lands.

(1) In classifying and designating agricultural resource lands, counties must approach the effort as a county-wide or area-wide process. Counties and cities should not review resource lands designations solely on a parcel-by-parcel process. Counties and cities must have a program for the transfer or purchase of development rights prior to designating agricultural resource lands in urban growth areas. Cities are encouraged to coordinate their agricultural resource lands designations with their county and any adjacent jurisdictions.

(2) Once lands are designated, counties and cities planning under the act must adopt development regulations that assure the conservation of agricultural resource lands. Recommendations for those regulations are found in WAC 365-196-815.

(3) Lands should be considered for designation as agricultural resource lands based on three factors:

(a) The land is not already characterized by urban growth. To evaluate this factor, counties and cities should use the criteria contained in WAC 365-196-310.

(b) The land is used or capable of being used for agricultural production. This factor evaluates whether lands are well suited to agricultural use based primarily on their physical and geographic characteristics. Some agricultural operations are less dependent on soil quality than others, including some livestock production operations.

(i) Lands that are currently used for agricultural production and lands that are capable of such use must be evaluated for designation. The intent of a landowner to use land for agriculture or to cease such use is not the controlling factor in determining if land is used or capable of being used for agricultural production. Land enrolled in federal conservation reserve programs is recommended for designation based on previous agricultural use, management requirements, and potential for reuse as agricultural land.

(ii) In determining whether lands are used or capable of being used for agricultural production, counties and cities shall use the land-capability classification system of the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service as defined in relevant Field Office Technical Guides. These eight classes are incorporated by the United States Department of Agriculture into map units described in published soil surveys, and are based on the growing capacity, productivity and soil composition of the land.

(c) The land has long-term commercial significance for agriculture. In determining this factor, counties and cities should consider the following nonexclusive criteria, as applicable:

- (i) The classification of prime and unique farmland soils as mapped by the Natural Resources Conservation Service;
- (ii) The availability of public facilities, including roads used in transporting agricultural products;
- (iii) Tax status, including whether lands are enrolled under the current use tax assessment under chapter 84.34 RCW and whether the optional public benefit rating system is used locally, and whether there is the ability to purchase or transfer land development rights;
- (iv) The availability of public services;
- (v) Relationship or proximity to urban growth areas and to markets and suppliers;
- (vi) Predominant parcel size;
- (vii) Land use settlement patterns and their compatibility with agricultural practices;
- (viii) Intensity of nearby land uses;
- (ix) History of land development permits issued nearby; and
- (x) Land values under alternative uses.

(4) When designating agricultural resource lands, counties and cities may consider food security issues, which may include providing local food supplies for food banks, schools and institutions, vocational training opportunities in agricultural operations, and preserving heritage or artisanal foods.

(5) When applying the criteria in subsection (3)(c) of this section, the process should result in designating at least the minimum amount of agricultural resource lands needed to maintain economic viability for the agricultural industry and to retain supporting agricultural businesses, such as processors, farm suppliers, and equipment maintenance and repair facilities. Economic viability in this context is that amount of designated agricultural resource land needed to maintain the economic viability of the agricultural sector in the county over the long term.

(6) Counties and cities may further classify additional agricultural lands of local importance. Classifying additional agricultural lands of local importance should include, in addition to general public involvement, consultation with the board of the local conservation district and the local committee of the farm service agency. It may also be useful to consult with any existing local organizations marketing or using local produce, including the boards of local farmers markets, school districts, other large institutions, such as hospitals, correctional facilities, or existing food cooperatives.

These additional lands may include designated critical areas, such as bogs used to grow cranberries or farmed wetlands. Where these lands are also designated critical areas, counties and cities planning under the act must weigh the compatibility of adjacent land uses and development with the continuing need to protect the functions and values of critical areas and ecosystems.