

OPEN SPACES

We live in the second most densely populated county in Washington—yup, right behind King County and Seattle. Yet, scattered about our small city are larger tracts of land—set aside during development—that remain vacant to this day.

These “open spaces” typically contain environmentally sensitive areas such as streams, wetlands, habitat, landslide or earthquake hazards, and floodplains to name but a few. Although relatively small compared to the surrounding area, they are a productive and valuable resource and perform a number of very important functions. Yet, they are very fragile and must be managed carefully if we are to retain their vegetation, soil, and the many social, economic, and environmental benefits they provide. Most are protected by a combination of local, state and even federal laws.



- Open spaces which include streams play a crucial role in the health of our region’s surface water by acting as natural water filters to intercept sediment, nutrients, pesticides, and other materials before they foul our streams, rivers, and lakes.
- Approximately 85% of Washington's terrestrial vertebrate species use these open spaces for essential life activities. Protecting these habitats may yield the greatest gains for fish (especially salmon) and wildlife across the landscape while involving the least amount of area.
- Most of these areas have healthy tree canopies which filter air, and sunlight. They are critical in cooling the urban heat island effect which raises ambient temperatures between 1^o and 8^o Fahrenheit. This not only lowers energy use, it also improves air quality because the formation of ozone is dependent on temperature.
- Trees within open spaces reduce carbon dioxide by direct absorption. Lowered air temperatures and wind speeds from increased tree cover can decrease both cooling and heating demand. Air conditioning and heating savings result in reduced greenhouse gas emissions from power plants. Their shade shelters and cools buildings during the summer, but allows the sun to warm them in the winter after the leaves fall.
- Properties abutting open spaces usually see a slight enhancement of their property value because of the improved scenery and lack of built environment.

Excepting tracts with public trails, most open space tracts are required to be fenced and have signs posted every one hundred feet stating something akin to “CRITICAL AREA & BUFFER – PLEASE RETAIN IN A NATURAL STATE”.

Permits are usually required for activities in and around these areas. Failure to ask permission first may result in an avalanche of agencies, fines, or worse.

