Community Development Department
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PCM 1.1

STAFF REPORT TO THE
BENTON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

FILE NO:	Countywide Planning Policies-2026 Update
MEMO DATE:	December 4, 2026
HEARING DATE:	January 6, 2026
APPLICANT:	Benton County Community Development Department Greg Wendt, Director 102206 E Wiser Parkway Kennewick, WA 99338
OWNER:	N/A
LOCATION:	Countywide
PROPERTY SIZE:	N/A
LAND USE:	N/A
COMP PLAN:	N/A
ZONING:	N/A
STAFF RECOMMENDATION:	Planning Division staff recommends that the Planning Commission forward to the Board of County Commissioners a positive recommendation to approve the Benton County Countywide Planning Policies consistent with the requirements of RCW 36.70A, the Growth Management Act.

APPLICATION DESCRIPTION:

RCW 36.70A.210 requires the County adopt Countywide planning policies (CWPPs) in cooperation with the cities located in whole or in part within the County. The CWPP is a written policy statement used solely for establishing a countywide framework from which county and cities comprehensive plans are developed and updated. The Benton County Planning Division and the cities have worked over the past year on updating these policies.

The original CWPPs were adopted in 1992 pursuant to Resolution 92-296 and were updated in 2017 pursuant to Resolution 581. The adoption of updated CWPPs is considered the first step in Benton County's Comprehensive Plan periodic update as required by the State of Washington's Growth Management Act.

As part of our 2025-2026 Periodic Update process, the County and the Cities have held numerous meetings to discuss the CWPPs and any proposed modifications or amendments. These changes have been incorporated into a 2026 draft. Each city within Benton County has since received approval from their respective city council with an adopting resolution granting approval of the updated County Wide

Planning Policies. The City of West Richland Resolution No. 44-25 on November 16, 2025; City of Richland Resolution No. 2025-131 on October 21, 2025; City of Kennewick Resolution No. 25-16 on November 18, 2025; City of Benton City Resolution No. 2025-62 on November 18, 2025; and City of Prosser Resolution No._____ on December 9, 2025.

The CWPPs were updated to comply with new state laws and requirements. This generally included:

1. Section 2; Policies to implement were updated to comply with RCW 36.70A

2. Section 3; Population allocations were updated and the language to review a UGA amendment was updated to comply with recent state law changs

3. Section 6; Policies that consider the need for affordable housing needed to be updated to also comply with recent state law changes.

With no additional changes being proposed by the respective cities, the next step in this process is a recommendation by the Planning Commission to the BOCC and final review and approval/adoption by the Board of County Commissioners.

SUGGESTED MOTION:

The Planning Commission forward a **recommendation of approval** to the Benton County Board of Commissioners for the 2026 Update to the Benton County Countywide Planning Policies consistent with the requirements of RCW 36.70A, the Growth Management Act.

11 Climate Element (added new)

11.1 INTRODUCTION

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Benton County is incorporating a Climate Element into its Comprehensive Plan in accordance with the Growth Management Act (GMA) (RCW 36.70A) and House Bill 1181 (2023). This Element establishes goals, objectives, and policies to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and to build resilience against climate-related hazards such as drought, wildfire, flooding, and extreme heat. The GMA sets the following goals for climate change and resiliency:

> *Ensure that comprehensive plans, development regulations, and regional policies, plans, and strategies adapt to and mitigate the effects of a changing climate; support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled; prepare for climate impact scenarios; foster resiliency to climate impacts and natural hazards; protect and enhance environmental, economic, and human health and safety; and advance environmental justice. (RCW 36.70A.070(9)).*

The intent of the Climate Element is not only to comply with state requirements, but also to safeguard Benton County's economy, environment, and public health for future generations. Planning for climate resilience allows the County to anticipate risks, strengthen infrastructure, and prepare its communities for changing conditions. At the same time, emissions reduction policies enable the County to contribute to Washington State's targets for carbon neutrality while promoting energy efficiency and innovation.

Another key component of the Climate Element is promoting equitable climate outcomes for community members, as not all climate impacts are experience equally. Vulnerable populations are defined by HB 1181 as groups that are more likely to be at higher risk for poor health outcomes in response to environmental harms, which could be due to adverse socioeconomic factors (e.g., high housing and transportation costs relative to income, limited access to nutritious food and adequate health outcomes and increase vulnerability to the effects of environmental harms).

In alignment with these goals and requirements, the Climate Element addresses key climate issues facing Benton County community members to help build community resilience to climate change impacts. Benton County is also required to include a greenhouse gas (GHG) sub-element.

The issues in the Climate Element are complex and dynamic, and several other elements in the Comprehensive Plan interact with the Climate Element:

- **Land Use Element**: Assesses current and future land uses in Benton County, preserving rural lands and character, communities, natural spaces, and resource lands while meeting community growth and other needs. Land use and specifically land preservation can be used

to enhance climate resiliency and sequester carbon. See Section 2.2 for specific land use policies.

- **Natural Resources Element**: Protects a variety of environmental landscapes, biodiversity, and ecosystem functions in the county. Healthy functioning ecosystems can provide resiliency against climate impacts and work to mitigate against future climate impacts. Protects and enhances the function of county natural resource lands, bolstering resiliency and future yields. See Sections 2.3 to 2.5 for specific environmental protection policies.
- **Parks and Recreation Element**: Protects and expands parks and open spaces to provide for long-term agriculture and sustainable silviculture as well as great visual and direct access to open spaces for county residents and visitors. Encourages historical and cultural preservation. Open Spaces and parks provide ~~carob~~ carbon sequestration opportunities and can help mitigate against climate impacts such as extreme health and flooding. See Section 2.9 for related policies.
- **Transportation Element**: Identifies opportunities to enhance transportation system reliability and promotes multi modal transportation development that can reduce GHG emissions. See Section 2.8 for related policies.

11.2 Regional Approach

Five jurisdictions in the Tri-Cities Region – Benton County and the cities of Pasco, Kennewick, Richland, and West Richland, with the support of the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments – worked together on a regional approach address the new requirements of the GMA and HB 1181. These jurisdictions developed a collaborative regional strategy to address natural hazards related to climate and reduce GHG emissions. By collaborating as a region, Benton County benefitted from strong cross-regional governmental connection, collaboratively identifying areas of regional alignment across a highly interconnected region to address climate vulnerabilities and shared emissions sources. The Tri-Cities Regional Climate Action Plan, which informs and supports this Climate Element, is available through the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments.

11.3 Climate Resilience Sub-Element

This Climate Resilience Sub-Element summarizes the current and future state of climate impacts, vulnerabilities, and adaptation strategies to increase the region's resilience to climate impacts for its residents, ecosystems, and infrastructure. Steps one through four in Commerce's guidance build the foundation for step five: crafting goals and policies. Goals and policies in the Resilience Sub-Element must meet these requirements:

- **Requirement 1**: Address natural hazards created or aggravated by climate change, including sea level rise, landslides, flooding, drought, heat, smoke, wildfire, and other effects of changes to temperature and precipitation patterns;
- **Requirement 2**: Identify, protect, and enhance natural areas to foster climate resilience, as well as areas of vital habitat for safe species migration; and

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- **Requirement 3**: Identify, protect, and enhance community resilience to climate impacts, including social, economic, and built-environment factors, which support adaptation to climate impacts consistent with environmental justice.

The analysis of current and projected climate conditions and vulnerabilities provides insight into local policy options for increasing climate resilience in Benton County. Vulnerabilities and the ability to increase climate resilience vary between urban and rural areas and are reflected in Climate Resilience Sub-Element goals and policies.

11.3.1 Climate Vulnerability Assessment Results

The Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA) analyzes historical and potential future impacts of key climate hazards on the people, industries, assets, and infrastructure of the Benton County. The vulnerability assessment utilized existing regional and jurisdiction planning documents, along with national, state, and local data sources—including hazard mitigation plans, comprehensive plans, transportation plans, and shoreline master programs to assess climate vulnerabilities. The CVA includes both regional and jurisdiction levels and utilizes national, state, and local data sources. The sectors identified are **community health and well-being**, **ecosystems** and **water resources**, **built infrastructure**, and **land use**.

The current and future climate conditions and vulnerabilities were assessed using:

- Climate Impacts Summary
- Vulnerability Assessment
- Tree Canopy Assessment

The purpose of the climate and vulnerability assessments are to:

- Ensure compliance with Washington Department of Commerce and GMA requirements
- Inform the Climate Element drafting process by identifying key climate impacts and vulnerabilities
- Ensure sensitivities, exposures, and adaptive capacities are addressed in the Climate Element Goals and Policies.

Climate vulnerability is the degree to which climate change stressors may harm a system or community (Figure 11.1~~xx~~). This assessment used the following definitions of climate exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity to understand climate vulnerabilities in Benton County:

- ***Exposure*** is the degree to which a system is exposed to climate hazards. For example, low elevation coastal areas are more exposed to sea level rise and coastal flooding compared to higher elevation inland areas.
- ***Sensitivity*** is the degree to which that system is likely to be affected by climate change. For example, older adults are less able to regulate their body temperatures and are often more physically sensitive to extreme heat than younger people.

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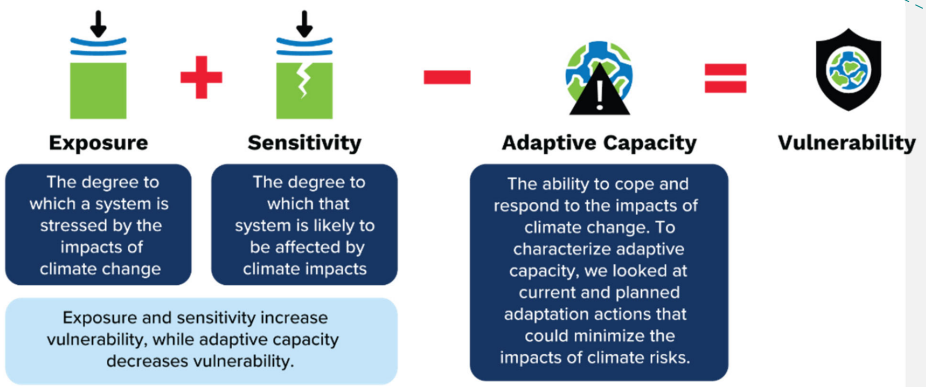
- ***Adaptive capacity*** is the ability to moderate the damage of, cope with, or adjust to climate change. For example, access to a vehicle and health insurance increases people's ability to manage health impacts from extreme heat, smoke, and any injuries related to climate hazards.

Figure 11.1~~XX~~. Climate Vulnerability Framework



11.3.2 Climate Impacts and Social Vulnerability

The CVA, assessed past, current, and future climate hazards for the region. The identified hazards (Figure 11.2~~Figure XX~~) are the foundation for the goals and policies in the Benton County Climate Element. The ~~Tri-Cities Region~~Benton County currently experiences impacts from several climate hazards, including drought, extreme heat, severe storms, wildfire smoke, and air and water quality issues. The following hazards are expected to become more frequent and severe from climate change:

~~Table~~Figure 11.2. ~~XX~~ Key Climate Hazards in Benton County

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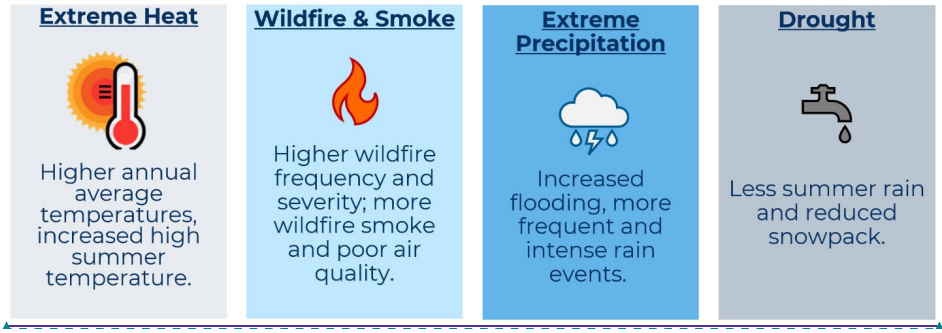

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Benton County is likely to experience more extreme heat and wildfire risk days and variable precipitation by the end of this century. Much of Benton County has high wildfire risk (Figure 11.3 ~~XX~~).

- **Extreme heat:** Temperatures in Benton County have increased 2.9°F since 1895. Benton County is predicted to experience 34 days over 100°F by 2099, compared to just one days over 100°F in 2000 (Abatzoglou & Brown, 2012).

- ~~**Wildfire**: Higher summer temperatures greatly increase the risk and severity of fire in Benton County. Benton County has very high fire danger expectations. By 2070, the city can expect 70 high fire danger days per year. Nearly nine in ten (87 percent) of properties in Benton County are at risk of wildfire damage in the next 30 years (First Street Risk Factor, 2025). Models cannot accurately predict wildfire risks beyond 2070, so they have been omitted from the summary table.~~

- **Precipitation and Flood Events**: Benton County can expect a slight increase in annual precipitation. Historical winter precipitation is just under three inches. By 2100, annual winter precipitation is expected to increase by a quarter of an inch. As it increases, so does the potential for flooding that can occur due to sudden rain events and snowmelt. By the end of century, winter precipitation is predicted to be around 4 inches, an increase of nearly 20 percent (Abatzoglou, 2013).

- **Drought**: Benton County can expect a decrease in summer precipitation of around 10 percent (Abatzoglou & Brown, 2012). Additionally, summer streamflows in the region will decrease because of smaller snowpacks and earlier snowmelt, contributing to lower water availability during warm months.

- **Wildfire**: Higher summer temperatures greatly increase the risk and severity of fire in Benton County. Benton County has very high fire danger expectations. By 2070, the city can expect 70 high fire danger days per year. Nearly nine in ten (87 percent) of properties in Benton County are at risk of wildfire damage in the next 30 years (First Street Risk Factor, 2025). Models cannot accurately predict wildfire risks beyond 2070, so they have been omitted from the summary table.

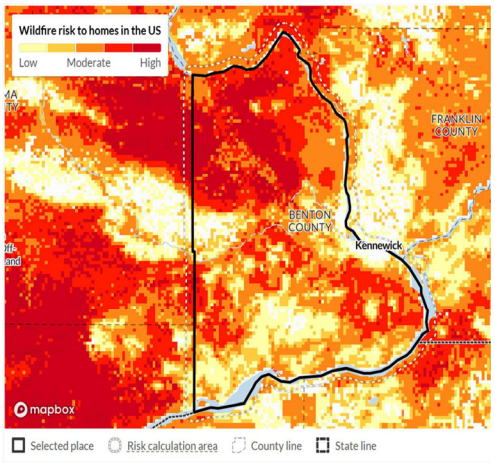

Figure 11.3. Benton County wildfire risk map. wildfirerisk.org; accessed Aug 7, 2025.

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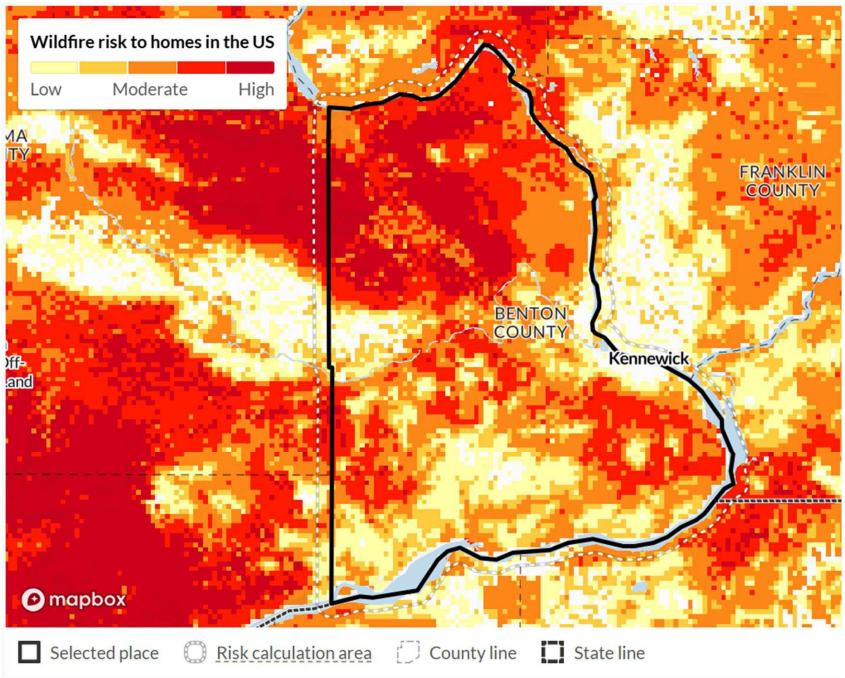

Residents of Benton County face different degrees of exposure and sensitivity to climate hazards and have different levels of adaptation to reduce climate impacts. Key sensitivities across the region include poor physical health, asthma, diabetes, and COPD. Major exposures to key climate hazards include proximity wildfire risk areas, high summer temperatures, and potential future precipitation. Table 11.1 also summarizes the top three adaptive capacity variables for block groups with low or very low adaptive capacity compared to adaptive capacity in the city or county. In Benton County those groups include those living in poverty, with lack of transit access, and with limited English.

Table 11.1. Top three variables contributing to vulnerability in groups with very high and high sensitivity and exposure, and very low and low adaptive capacity in Benton County

Benton County

Figure XX. Benton County wildfire risk map. wildfirerisk.org; accessed 7 August 2025.

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Very High / High Sensitivity	Very High / High Exposure	Very Low / Low Adaptive Capacity
COPD	Wildland-Urban Interface	Living in poverty
CHD	Average summer high temperature	Transit access
Poor physical health	Future heavy precipitation	Limited English

11.3.3 Climate Vulnerability Key Findings

The CVA expands on the identified climate hazards and assesses their impact on the natural and built environments and residents in Benton County. Key findings for regional vulnerabilities are summarized below. Benton County is likely to experience more extreme heat and wildfire risk days and variable precipitation by the end of this century. Much of Benton County has high wildfire risk. Northeastern and southern Benton County have the highest vulnerability to climate hazards (see Figure 11.4~~-XX~~). Vulnerabilities include flooding risk to roads, extreme heat impacts to agricultural lands and workers, and residents and communities in high wildfire risk areas. Vulnerabilities unique to rural Benton County include long emergency response times and the quantity of farmland susceptible to climate impacts.

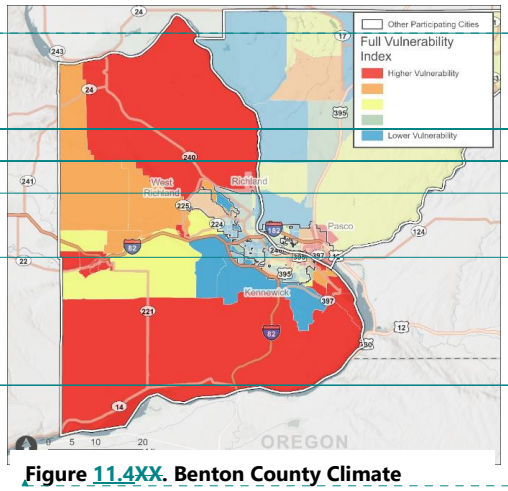

Figure 11.4~~XX~~. Benton County Climate Vulnerability, Map by BERK

Extreme Heat:

- Buildings that lack adequate insulation, reflective roofing, or cooling systems will be less able to maintain safe indoor temperatures during longer and more intense heat events.
- Warmer temperatures can lead to higher health care costs associated with an increase in emergency room visits.
- Rising air and surface water temperatures are affecting some key species, and threatening access to vital cultural resources.

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- Residential development is increasingly expanding into Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) zones, increasing exposure and sensitivity to wildfire.
- Hotter summers will increase the demand for cooling, affecting homes and businesses that rely on air conditioning. Rising electricity costs could further burden low-income households.

Wildfires and Smoke:

- Wildfires can cause poor air quality which can contribute to respiratory problems, long-term health challenges, and increased healthcare costs. People who work outside are especially at risk of health issues due to extreme heat and poor air quality.
- Increases in the frequency and intensity of wildfires in high-risk areas like Badger Mountain and the Yakima Delta threaten historic sites, trails, and natural areas.

Extreme Precipitation and Flooding:

- Flooding is a risk to public health and can cause injury, death, and property loss and damages.
- Flooding presents a persistent and growing threat to buildings in the region. Since 2005, Benton County has had nine flooding events, two of which were declared federal disasters.
- Flooding can negatively impact agriculture by delaying planting timelines, impacting crops, increasing erosion, and increasing susceptibility to disease.

Drought:

- Reductions in snowfall will decrease the potential for groundwater recharge in aquifers.
- The risk of drought is increasing. Benton County is one of nine counties most vulnerable to drought in Washington.
- Drought can disrupt commerce through the closures of water-centered recreational businesses such as swimming pools and water parks.
- Benton County land is predominantly used for agriculture. Drought can threaten agricultural productivity and food processing, which impacts the people whose livelihoods depend on these industries.

Table 11.2~~XX~~ Key Climate Risks & Community Vulnerability in Benton County

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Key Climate Risks & Community Vulnerability	
Flooding	**Extreme heat**
• Extreme precipitation and flood can lead to washouts, erosion, slides, and undermining of county roads. • There is an increased flooding risk in spring from heavy rains melting the snowpack.	• Residents in southern Benton County are most vulnerable to extreme heat due to social vulnerability factors including lower incomes and chronic health conditions.
Drought	**Wildfire**
• Benton County's agriculture- centered economy and growing population are vulnerable to drought impacts. • Benton County has experienced a gradual loss of artificial wetlands because of water conservation projects.	• Residential and agricultural burns increase wildfire risk and contribute to poor air quality. • Benton County has a low number of Firewise Communities; there are many property owners within the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) that are not aware of the problems and threats they face.
Community Vulnerability & Adaptation	
• To further protect culturally important gathering spaces and areas of transport, Benton County incorporated a policy to create and maintain a regional park and trail system that is integrated with city recreational resources. • Rural communities in Benton County face longer emergency response times due to limited infrastructure and distance from services. • Over 63 percent of Benton County is agricultural lands. 94 percent of privately- owned land is in agriculture, over 703,000 acres.	

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11.4 GHG EMISSIONS REDUCTION SUB-ELEMENT

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This Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Reduction Sub-Element summarizes the current and future state of GHG emissions and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the region and presents policies aimed at reducing these emissions and VMT while improving quality of life for residents and visitors. Goals and policies in the GHG Emissions Reduction Sub-Element must meet the following requirements to comply with HB 1181:

- **Requirement 1**: Result in reductions in overall greenhouse gas emissions generated by transportation and land use within the jurisdiction but without increasing emissions elsewhere in Washington.
- **Requirement 2**: Result in reductions in per capita vehicle miles traveled within the jurisdiction but without increasing greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere in Washington; and,
- **Requirement 3**: Prioritize reductions that benefit overburdened communities in order to maximize the co-benefits of reduced air pollution and environmental justice.

The analysis of current and projected GHG emissions and VMT provides insight into local policy options for reducing emissions in Benton County and the Tri-Cities Region.

- **Reducing energy consumption in new and existing residential, commercial, and industrial buildings** by supporting clean building energy sources and energy efficient building design and retrofits. Local actions for decarbonization and energy efficiency would reduce the Tri-Cities Region's buildings emissions, which made up 39% of 2022 communitywide emissions.
- **Reducing passenger vehicle travel** within the Tri-Cities Region, including through changes to land use, transportation infrastructure (transit, walking, bicycling), and commuting options/modes. A reduction in passenger VMT would reduce the Tri-Cities Region's communitywide on-road emissions from passenger vehicles, which made up 36% of 2022 emissions.
- **Facilitating the transition to electric vehicles** through expansion of reliable EV charging infrastructure and public education on EV options and available incentives/rebates. Local action to transition passenger and freight vehicles to electric would reduce Tri-Cities Region's passenger and freight vehicle on-road emissions, which made up 50% of 2022 communitywide emissions.

11.4.1 Current and Projected Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Vehicle Miles Traveled

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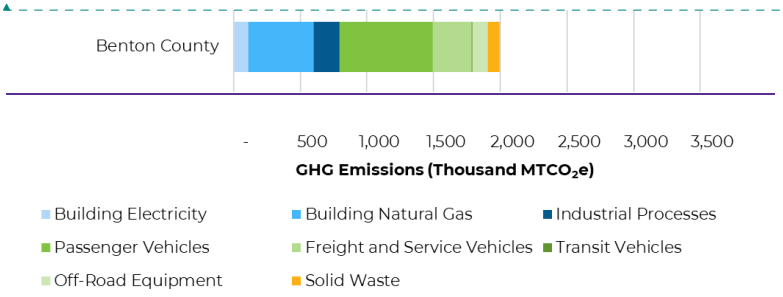
Understanding Benton County and the region's current and projected GHG emissions and VMT helps policymakers set goals and create targeted policies to reach those goals.

11.4.2 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The GHG emissions inventory identifies and quantifies GHG emissions from residents, businesses, and institutions in Benton County for the 2022 calendar year. The inventory includes a variety of emissions sources recommended by established protocols and relevant to local governments, including building energy consumption (electricity and natural gas), industrial processes, on-road and off-road transportation, and solid waste. The inventories serve as a baseline to support target setting, policy development, and future progress tracking. Results from the GHG emissions inventory suggested the largest sources of emissions were from **transportation** and **building energy use** (*See* Figure 11.5~~XX~~). For most jurisdictions, **on-road passenger vehicles** were the largest source of emissions, followed by **industrial natural gas consumption**.

Figure 11.5~~XX~~. Total GHG Emissions in Benton County



Benton County includes all incorporated cities and unincorporated areas within its boundaries (including the cities of Kennewick, Richland, and West Richland~~, which each have individual report sections below~~). Findings from this GHG emission inventory suggest that Benton County's residents, businesses, and visitors generated an estimated 1,996,781 MTCO2e in 2022—or approximately 9.41 MTCO2e per capita.

In Benton County, **on-road passenger vehicles** contributed the most to 2022 communitywide emissions (35% of total emissions), followed by **on-road freight and service vehicles** (15% of total emissions). The next largest contributors to 2022 emissions were industrial natural gas (13%), commercial natural gas (7%), and off-road equipment (6%). Figure 11.6 ~~Figure 12~~ shows the breakdown of communitywide GHG by source.

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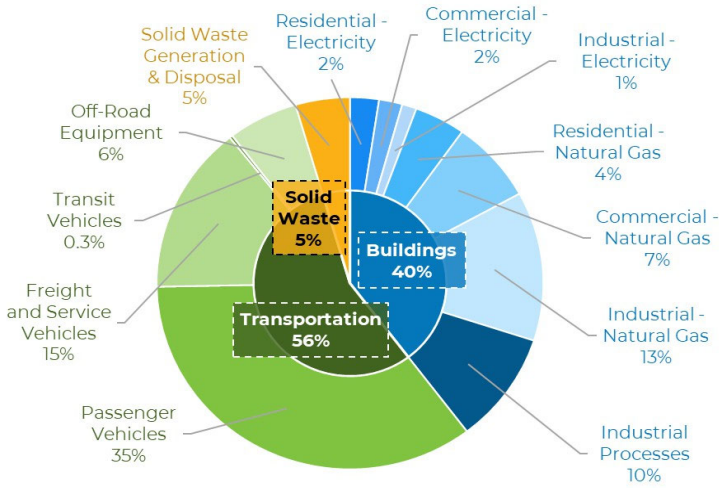
Figure 11.6~~XX.~~ Benton County communitywide GHG emissions summary.



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11.4.3 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Forecast

To inform the region's local GHG emission reduction targets and policies, results from the 2022 communitywide GHG inventory were used to forecast future emissions and emission reduction scenarios for ~~the~~ Benton County. Specifically, the analysis forecasted communitywide GHG emissions to 2050 under three scenarios, as summarized in Table 11.3-~~XX~~:

Table 11.3. Benton County findings from the emissions forecast and scenario analysis.

The three scenarios are described in more detail below:

Scenario	% Change in GHG Emissions from 2022 Baseline				
	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050
No Action	+14%	+20%	+26%	+32%	+38%
State/Federal Policy	-28%	-36%	-45%	-49%	-48%
Local Action	-33%	-42%	-53%	-81%	-95%

- **No Action:** Without federal, state, or local climate action, Benton County's emissions will grow 38% by 2050 (compared to a 2022 baseline), as depicted by the dotted black line in Figure 11.7-XX.
- **State/Federal Policy:** When considering the anticipated impacts of federal, state, and regional policies, communitywide emissions will decrease 48% by 2050 (compared to a

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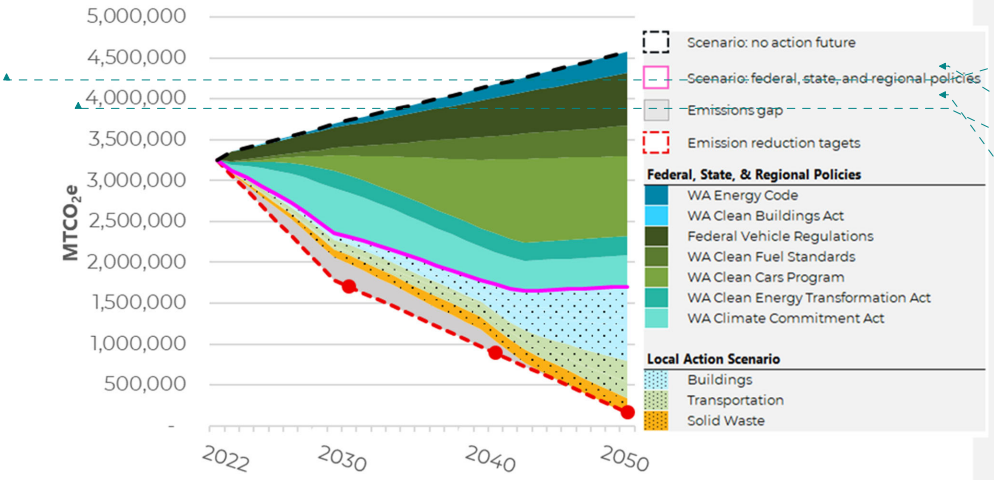
2022 baseline), as depicted by the pink line in Figure 11.7-XX.

- **Local Action:** With the implementation of additional local action strategies, communitywide emissions could be reduced by an estimated 95% by 2050 (compared to a 2022 baseline), as shown by the Local Action scenario reductions in Figure 11.7-XX.

Figure 11.7. Benton-County forecast GHG emissions and reductions under three scenarios ($MTCO_2e$)



~~**Table XX. Benton-County findings from the emissions forecast and scenario analysis.**~~

~~**Figure XX. Benton-Franklin Region forecast GHG emissions and reductions under three scenarios ($MTCO_2e$)**~~

11.5 Vehicle Miles Traveled

Vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is a transportation metric that calculates the total travel distance of all vehicles in a specific geographic region over a given period. VMT is a key metric in transportation planning because it provides a measure of total travel that can be used to understand changes over time or differences amongst areas.

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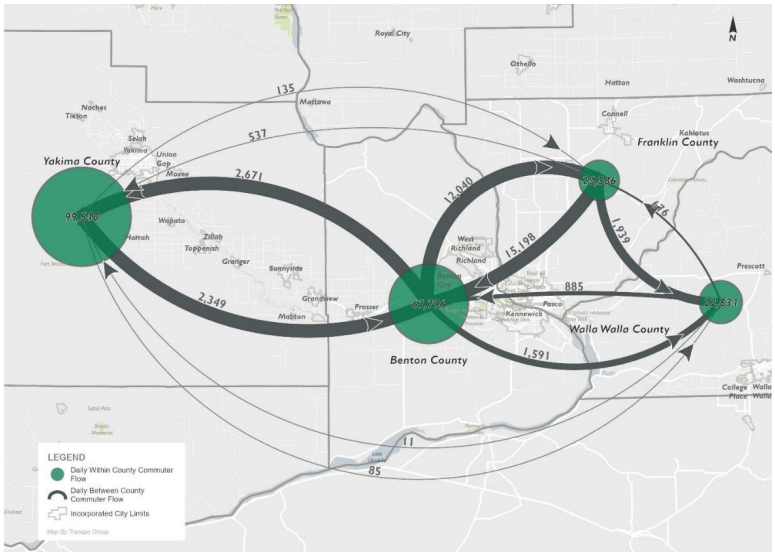
The VMT study provides a VMT travel market assessment, analysis, and overview of potential reduction strategies for the Tri-Cities Region, including Benton County. Tri-Cities Region VMT includes travel to neighboring counties, including Yakima County and Walla Walla County (Figure 11.8-~~XX~~).

Figure 11.8~~XX~~. County Level Daily Commute Trips. Source: Transpo Group, 2025.



Decreasing VMT per capita (population) contributes to reducing GHG emissions. VMT is a transportation metric that calculates the total travel distance of all vehicles in a specific geographic area over a given period. Table 7 summarizes the per-capita VMT for Benton County.

Table 11.4 ~~XX~~. Tri-Cities Region base and future annual per-capita residential VMT (1,000*s*)

Location	Base 2022	Future 2045
Unincorporated Benton County	3.98	3.98

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Benton-Franklin Region	**6.52**	**7.25**

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Table 11.4~~XX~~ shows that VMT increases as the region grows between 2022 and 2045. Per capita VMT without the implementation of reduction strategies will increase by 11% for the region. However, there is no change to VMT in Benton County between 2022 and 2045 due to the limited growth assumed. This limited growth is based upon 2022 population from the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) and the projected population is based on adjusting 2046 Housing for All Planning Tool (HAPT) population projections provided by BERK Consulting to 2045.

While the table above indicates that the per-capita residential VMT growth does not occur in the unincorporated Benton County, Benton County will still work to implement strategies and policies to contribute to the overall VMT reduction targets as proposed in Table 11.5-~~XX~~. The VMT target was determined based on coordination with agency staff and reduction strategies implemented through goals and policies in the Climate Element.

Goals and policies related to land use and transportation—including housing and job density, transit-oriented development, transportation management and commute trip reduction, street system connectivity and design, multimodal transportation design and options and parking—all impact VMT.

11.5.1 Regional Targets

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Recommended short- and long-term targets for the Tri-Cities Region are presented in Table 11.5-~~XX~~ below. These targets are based on state requirements, regional and peer jurisdiction context, and quantitative modeling.

Table 11.5-~~XX~~. Proposed GHG emissions and per-capita VMT reduction targets for the Tri- Cities Region.

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Category	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050	Notes
Communitywide GHG Emissions (% below 2022 levels)	36%	50%	64%	82%	95%	• Short-term (interim) targets are less aggressive than state targets to accommodate slow ramp-up and reflect local action assumptions • Long-term (2050) targets align with state targets

Per-Capita VMT (% below 2022 levels)	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%	• For review

11.6 Recommended Actions

Table 11.6-XX highlights recommended actions the County can take or support to implement the Climate Element over the next ten years and beyond, as applicable, with several in partnership with other entities.

Table 11.6 Climate Element and GHG Sub-Element Implementation Action Plan

Action	Sector Nexus	Related Goals & Policies	Description / Implementation Steps
Update zoning & development codes for heat, flood, and wildfire resilience	Land Use, Buildings & Energy, Emergency Mgmt	• CE-2.2 • CE-2.3 • CE-2.4 • CE-2.6 • CE-5.1	Integrate best-available climate data into site design and building standards; require wildfire-resilient siting/materials in WUI, shaded transit amenities, and passive survivability provisions in critical areas and subdivisions.
Retrofit assistance for vulnerable households (cooling & weatherization)	Buildings & Energy, Public Health	• CE-2.1 • CE-5.3	Launch/expand programs for HVAC/heat pumps, window shading, and weatherization; coordinate with utilities for rebates and prioritized outreach to seniors/low-income residents.
Update zoning & development codes for heat, flood, and wildfire resilience	Land Use, Buildings & Energy, Emergency Mgmt	• CE-2.2 • CE-2.3 • CE-2.4 • CE-2.6 • CE-5.1	Integrate best-available climate data into site design and building standards; require wildfire-resilient siting/materials in WUI, shaded transit amenities, and passive survivability provisions in critical areas and subdivisions.
Retrofit assistance for vulnerable households	Buildings & Energy, Public Health	• CE-2.1 • CE-5.3	Launch/expand programs for HVAC/heat pumps, window shading, and weatherization;

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Commented [GW119]: Is there a way to ensure the action plan items are recommendations but not requirements??

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Action	Sector Nexus	Related Goals & Policies	Description / Implementation Steps
(cooling & weatherization)			coordinate with utilities for rebates and prioritized outreach to seniors/low-income residents.
Transportation resilience & mode shift package	Transportation, Land Use	• CE-2.4 • CE-2.5	Implement BFCOG MTP/ATP; add shade/air-quality features at transit stops; prioritize safe multimodal links serving overburdened areas; incorporate TDM in capital programming.
Non-emitting energy infrastructure coordination	Energy, Economic Dev.	• CE-2.6	With TRIDEC Energy Forward Alliance and utilities, identify grid upgrades, microgrids, and reliability nodes supporting essential services and growth centers.
Water-smart codes & conservation standards	Water Resources, Land Use	• CE-3.10 • CE-3.13	Update landscape and irrigation standards; encourage drought-tolerant species lists; align subdivision and building permits with high-efficiency fixtures and reuse.
Local drought resilience strategy	Water Resources, Agriculture	• CE-3.1 • CE-3.14	Define drought stages, triggers, and actions; coordinate with irrigation districts and Yakima/Columbia Basin planning. Implement Rural Water Supply Program.
Recycled/alternative water program	Water Resources	• CE-3.11	Establish policies/pilots for greywater/industrial reuse with health safeguards and simple approvals.
Native plant lists & green infrastructure toolkit	Water, Ecosystems, Land Use	• CE-3.12 • CE-3.5	Publish approved plant palettes and GI details for public/private projects; prioritize heat/flood hotspots.
Wildfire risk reduction in vegetation management	Ecosystems, Emergency Mgmt	• CE-3.6	Expand defensible-space education, roadside fuels management, and utility vegetation management in high-risk corridors.

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Action	Sector Nexus	Related Goals & Policies	Description / Implementation Steps
Protect & expand natural cooling and flood-storage areas	Ecosystems, Water, Health	• CE-3.5	Prioritize riparian shade, park tree canopy, and floodplain reconnection projects in vulnerable areas.
Renewable siting compatibility mapping	Energy, Land Use, Agriculture	• CE-3.4	Identify least-conflict urban/institutional lands for renewables while avoiding sensitive habitat and prime ag.
Conservation tools for working lands	Agriculture, Ecosystems	• CE-3.3	Expand participation in Open Space Taxation, VSP; evaluate TDR/PDR and conservation futures.
Climate-ready ag technical assistance	Agriculture, Economic Dev.	• CE-3.1 • CE-3.2	Provide field days and grants for irrigation efficiency, drought-tolerant varieties, and low-emission equipment.
Critical infrastructure risk inventory & capital plan	Emergency Mgmt, Buildings	• CE-5.1 • CE-5.2	Map exposure for critical facilities; program relocation, elevation, cooling backup, and redundancy.
Cooling/clean-air centers & severe-weather sheltering	Health, Emergency Mgmt	• CE-5.3 • CE-5.9	Establish network of sites with HVAC and filtration; multilingual outreach and transit access.
Wildfire mapping, Firewise, and public outreach	Emergency Mgmt, Ecosystems	• CE-5.4 • CE-5.5	Update hazard maps; expand CERT/LTRG training; promote Firewise.
Regional climate coordination & reporting	Communications, All Sectors	• CE-1.1 • CE-1.2	Maintain shared dashboards and inter-jurisdictional climate workgroup.
VMT		•	See Table 11-5 for VMT goals

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2 Goals and Policies

2.1 Planning Process

PP Goal 1: Develop a Comprehensive Plan that reflects the community's vision and objectives, is consistent with the State's planning laws, and is implemented through various local development regulations.

Policy 1: Use zoning and subdivision ordinances, performance standards, and related measures to implement the plan.

Policy 2: Use and maintain County-wide resource inventories to assist in determining the suitability and capability of the land and its resources to support future development.

Policy 3: Make land use decisions consistent with the Land Use Map and with the inherent capability of the land to sustain uses without creating problems that require a publicly funded solution (e.g., flooding, landslides).

Policy 4: Coordinate the County's plans and programs with those at local, regional, and state levels.

PP Goal 2: Develop and maintain a Comprehensive Plan responsive to growth and economic trends which can be readily adapted to changing conditions.

Policy 1: Base amendments to the Comprehensive Plan on facts and findings that respond to public needs, are beneficial to the public interest, and are consistent with the vision and goals of the County.

Policy 2: Review and update the Comprehensive Plan according to the GMA.

PP Goal 3: Continue citizen involvement that insures full citizen participation in public decision-making according to the County's adopted Public Participation Plan.

Policy 1: Maintain opportunities for citizen involvement and input on issues in advance of making land use decisions.

Policy 2: Provide information to citizens through the news media and other outreach processes as indicated in the Public Participation Plan to allow maximum citizen involvement.

2.2 Land Use

LU Goal 1: Ensure that land uses are compatible with surrounding uses that maintain public health, safety, and general welfare, and giving special consideration to advancing environmental justice.

Policy 1: Maintain a mix of land uses that allow for a variety of housing types while supporting~~s~~ the character of each rural community.

Policy 2: Promote compatible mixed uses of urban intensity that are appropriate ~~in UGAs~~ and where community sewer and water are available or provided, including ~~and outside of~~ UGAs and~~within~~ designated Rural Community Center areas and Commercial zones, and Planned Developments (PDs).

Policy 3: Maximize the opportunities for compatible development within land use designations to serve a multitude of compatible uses and activities.

Policy 4: Establish regulations for site planning and design to avoid or reduce potential impacts associated with "land use incompatibility" of proposed non-farm developments on parcels adjacent to lands designated GMA Agriculture, Rural Resource, or adjacent to lands being farmed commercially within other rural designations.

Policy 5: Encourage multi-modal connectivity between land uses that enhances community access and promotes healthier and more active lifestyles for residents.

Policy 6: ~~Encourage~~ Plan compact development within incorporated UGAs where adequate infrastructure is available.

Policy 7: Consider identified patterns of development and likely future development pressure in areas when designating and maintaining UGAs.

Policy 8: Consider ways to advance environmental justice in land use planning designations and development regulations, including efforts to avoid creating or worsening environmental health disparities.

Policy ~~7~~98: Encourage "green infrastructure" in new developments and redevelopments to address flooding and storm water runoff.

LU Goal 2: Follow controlling law and constitutional requirements, both state and federal, to ensure the appropriate protection of private property rights.

Policy 1: Prevent regulations that create undue adverse economic impacts, or unnecessarily restrict the use of private property.

Policy 2: Monitor evolving state and federal statutory amendments and judicial precedent so that timely amendments or changes can be made in implementing Comprehensive Plan policies and development regulations.

2.2.1 Urban Growth

LU Goal 3: Concentrate urban development ~~in and adjacent to existing~~within urban growth areas.

Policy 1: Promote urban growth within the UGA and incorporated areas where urban services are available.

Policy 2: Encourage ~~well-designed,~~ compact development of a wide variety of housing types and uses in UGAs to save taxpayers and ratepayers money, prevent disinvestment, conserve water, reduce water pollution, and support transit use.

LU Goal 4: Establish UGAs adjacent to incorporated areas, within which an orderly and cost-effective transition from rural to urban land uses and authority can be coordinated within the next 10 to 20 years.

Policy 1: Consider UGA expansions according to the process identified in the Benton CWPP.

Policy 2: Facilitate the realization of regional transportation and other infrastructure and public facilities plans.

Policy 3: Designate zoning and promote development on unincorporated lands within the UGAs consistent with the cities' Comprehensive Plan land use designations.

Policy 4: Promote outreach to established ~~citizen~~ community interest groups regarding significant developments proposed within or adjacent to their communities.

2.2.2 Communities Outside UGAs

LU Goal 5: Identify the location, site planning, and density of new non-farm development outside of UGAs to protect existing agriculture from incompatible adjacent land uses.

Policy 1: Establish compatible land uses adjacent to areas designated as GMA Agriculture to minimize conflicts associated with farm activities such as spray, dust, noise, odors, and liability.

2.2.3 Rural Lands

LU Goal 6: Preserve rural lifestyles outside UGAs and incorporated areas while accommodating new population growth consistent with ~~the protection of~~ rural character.

Policy 1: Maintain overall residential densities within rural residential areas that protect surface and ground water, can be supported by available public services, provide rural housing types, reflect rural character as defined by the GMA, and are low enough to perpetuate rural

lifestyles~~, which are typically~~ characterized ~~locally~~ by a predominantly open landscape inhabited by households engaged in diverse and recreational land use activities related to livestock and crop production~~, protect surface and ground water, and that can be supported by available public services~~.

Policy 2: Support the protection of ground and surface water through ~~Development in rural areas is typified by~~ large lots and less dense development in the rural areas. ~~Favoring development that is less dense and has larger lots helps maintain the rural character of designated rural areas and supports the protection of ground and surface water.~~

Policy 3: Designated rural areas will be utilized to reduce the inappropriate conversion of agricultural lands, prevent sprawling low-density development and assure that rural development is compatible with surrounding rural and agricultural areas.

Policy 4: Encourage low impact recreational uses and protect open spaces that preserve rural character.

Policy 5: Provide public services consistent with rural character. ~~Rural developments will not impact existing public facilities/services to the extent that the level of service for that facility is reduced below the adopted threshold and/or acceptable operation capacity.~~ Rural developments should occur where adequate access to transportation systems, and rural levels of utilities and facilities, such as domestic water, power, and fire and police protection are available.

Policy 6: Rural development shall minimize potential adverse impacts to water quality, slope stability, vegetation, wildlife and aquatic life as implemented through the County's critical area regulations, shoreline master program, and hydrology manual.

~~Policy 7: Support the availability of sufficient water to maintain the agricultural industry and agricultural processing and value-added manufacturing.~~

Policy ~~8~~7: Encourage long-term conservation, adequate water supply, and the wise stewardship of natural resources within Benton County for the benefit of current and future residents.

Policy ~~9~~8: Encourage the continued communication with irrigation districts, legislature, and other responsible entities to ensure that adequate irrigation water is available for agricultural uses.

Policy ~~10~~9: Limit impervious surface in rural lands by implementing maximum lot coverage in the development regulations.

Commented [FO22]: This section is moved to Land Use Element for discussion.

Commented [BF23R22]: Follow up - Ben actually just deleted this text as this concept is covered here in the remaining Policy 5 text, and in LOS discussion in Section 9.2

Commented [FO24]: Moved under Agriculture

Policy ~~11~~10: Encourage the use of low-impact development (LID) measures in the Eastern Washington Low Impact Development Guidance Manual and their application to urban development, urban and rural subdivisions, and large rural developments in Benton County.

Policy ~~12~~11: Support on-site infiltration in rural areas for new lots, subdivisions and developments by promoting storm water best management practices. Promote the retention of existing native vegetative cover in landscaping plans for areas zoned Rural Lands One Acre (RL-1), Rural Lands Five Acre (RL-5), Rural Lands Twenty Acre (RL-20), and Planned Development (PD) zones applied to any of these zones. ~~Where the proposed development will not be precluded, limit impervious surfaces that are not infiltrated on-site for all new development in the zoning districts listed above to no more than ten percent and require the retention of 45 percent vegetative cover, which may include native or non-native species, provided soil infiltration/filtration properties are maintained.~~

Policy ~~13~~12: Encourage the reduction of fire risk and urban/wildland interface through fire-wise principles, prevention measures, and other programs.

Policy ~~14~~13: Support and encourage the use of and application of Firewise principles and other fire risk reduction measures consistent with the Benton County Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan and Community Wildfire Protection Plan to reduce fire risk for urban development, urban subdivisions, rural subdivisions and large rural developments susceptible to wildfires. Encourage the implementation of the Firewise principles, or similar best management measures, applicable to individual lots on all lots at risk from wildfires.

Policy ~~15~~14: Encourage new rural development away from the 100-year floodplain, and as guided in the County's Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance, CAO, and SMP.

Commented [FO25]: Suggest moving this to development regulations

Commented [GW26]: Correct, these are zoning standards

Commented [GW27]: We may want to revaluate and update if needed once we get the Wildlands/Urban Interface strategy completed

2.2.4 Master Plan Resorts and Small-scale Recreational or Tourist Use

LU Goal 7: Provide opportunities for Master Planned Resorts (MPRs) and Small-scale Recreational or Tourist (SSRT) uses consistent with the GMA.

Policy 1: Provide MPR and SSRT development regulations that are consistent with provisions of RCW 36.70A.360, the Comprehensive Plan, and County regulations.

Policy 2: Locate MPR and SSRT Uses outside the vicinity of UGAs according to the provisions of the GMA.

Policy 3: Develop a master site plan that functionally integrates various land uses with motorized and non-motorized circulation systems that are accessible to public transportation where available and connect with open spaces for public use.

Policy 4: Ensure that infrastructure, such as roads, water supply, and utility standards are consistent with rural densities and uses.

Policy 5: Prepare a capital facilities plan. Necessary capital facilities, utilities, and services may be provided to a MPR by service providers from outside the boundary of the MPR, including municipalities and special service districts, provided that all costs associated with service extensions and capacity increases directly attributable to the MPR are fully borne by the resort.

Policy 6: Ensure that developments contain open space and open space amenities (paths, trails, scenic overlooks, and viewpoints) that are open to the public.

2.3 Natural Resource Lands

NR Goal 1: Conserve and maintain agricultural land of long-term commercial significance as the local natural resource most essential for sustaining the County's agricultural economy.

Policy 1: Conserve areas designated "GMA Agriculture" in the Comprehensive Plan for a broad range of agricultural uses to the maximum extent possible and protect these areas from the encroachment of incompatible uses.

Policy 2: In the event of a conflict between residential uses and normal and routine practices of commercial agriculture on lands designated as GMA Agriculture, support the agricultural use where it is evident that the agricultural practice is consistent with or equivalent to recognized Best Management Practices.

Policy 3: Recognize that only uses related or ancillary to, supportive of, complimentary to, and/or not in conflict with agricultural activities are appropriate in areas designated GMA Agriculture, and that these types of development should be encouraged to occur on lands with poor soils or lands otherwise not suitable for agricultural purposes.

Policy 4: Apply development standards that conserve water resources when reviewing proposed new non-agricultural developments to sustain the ability of the regional agricultural economy to expand and respond to new market conditions and opportunities, or drought, extreme heat, or other impacts of a changing climate.

Commented [GW28]: We may want to revisit and confirm this after our ag tourism discussions and ensure this complies with WAC 365-195-815

NR Goal 2: Identify and protect mineral resource lands of commercial significance and from being significantly compromised by encroaching land uses that are incompatible with mining activity uses.

Policy 1: Protect mineral and aggregate resources of commercial significance from compromise by applying the County's Mineral Resources Protective Ordinance and BCC Title 15, Mineral Resource Lands when the owner of the resource requests such protection and use of the site has not already been compromised by incompatible adjacent land uses or development.

Policy 2: Discourage incompatible uses from encroaching upon and compromising the exploitation of protected mineral and aggregate resources.

Policy 3: Reclaim sites used for the extraction of mineral and aggregate resources in a manner consistent with applicable laws and ordinances.

2.4 Water Resources

WR Goal 1: Conserve, maintain, and manage existing ground and surface water resources to meet existing and future water supply needs for cities, farms, industry, and rural growth.

2.4.1 General Policies

Policy 1: Support efforts to secure long-term, sustainable water supplies that are consistent with the Benton County Comprehensive Land Use Plan or the Comprehensive Land Use Plans of the municipalities within Benton County.

Policy 2: Encourage water reuse, conservation, and responsible stewardship through the development of voluntary conservation programs, educational outreach, and alterations to current water policy that provide incentives for common sense approaches to stewarding water resources.

Policy 3 Support increasing water storage by increasing capacity in existing reservoirs, developing new above ground water storage capacity, and the development of storage capacity through aquifer storage and recovery, enhanced water recharge, and other groundwater management strategies.

Policy 4 Support ground water management strategies, including maintaining the County's Rural Water Supply Program, that permit the responsible development of ground water resources, while protecting the long-term sustainability of aquifers and considering trends for changes in precipitation and drought and how this impacts groundwater recharge.

Commented [GW29]: Should we add a general policy for Rural Water Supply Program?

Commented [ma30R29]: That could be helpful. I see it fitting fluidly with Policy 4. Our policies may be more effective if we tie them to specific programs we already have and could further advance, i.e., the rural water supply program.

Commented [BF31R29]: Updated

Commented [ma32]: If we have secured water rights for future development through the RWSP for 4+ decades from now, do we still need to include this policy?

Commented [BF33R32]: I think so - rural water supply is only one of many needs - water for ag, industry and commercial uses in the County and similarly in the cities (minus the ag)

Commented [BF34]: Cascadia recommended

Policy 5: Encourage water management practices that will allow and provide incentives for reclaiming water resources that retain economic and recreational resources. Such practices include reclaiming waters used for food processing to irrigate crops or reclaiming wastewater to support developed open spaces, such as parks or golf courses.

Policy 6: Encourage voluntary conservation of water resources through xeriscape (low water use landscape plantings) and other low water use methods.

Policy 7: Encourage water marketing, the trading of water rights as commodities, providing there are sufficient controls in place to protect the basic needs of Benton County citizens and industries.

Policy 8: Support the formation and utilization of Water Conservancy Boards to review water rights transfer applications.

Policy 9: Support selective continued issuance of new water rights from groundwater sources where new water rights will not impair existing rights and are consistent with the long-term sustainability of aquifers.

2.4.2 Municipal Water Supply Policies

Policy 1: Endorse responsible stewardship of municipal water supplies.

Policy 2: Work to identify opportunities for water conservation on County property and at County facilities.

Policy 3: Encourage the use of irrigation water for non-potable uses in housing units, parks, and other developed lands within water service areas.

Policy 4: Acknowledge that municipal governments and other water utilities, as applicable, are the best long-term water supply service providers within designated UGAs.

Policy 5: Consider existing public or private water purveyors first when the need arises for a rural domestic water supplier.

Policy 6: Look to Satellite Management Agencies (SMA) first for assistance with operations and management of failing or troubled water systems throughout the County. Encourage an increase in the number of approved SMAs in the County.

2.4.3 Rural Domestic Water Policies

Policy 1: Public and private purveyors, along with exempt wells operated by individual households, adequately provide for water needs in rural areas of the County. The County will not seek

to become a residential water purveyor except where mandated by the state under RCW 43.70.195.

Policy 2: Recognize that new rural water right permit exempt wells are junior to senior surface and ground water rights and may have the potential to impair these water rights. Support the implementation of water management and mitigation strategies to avoid or offset impacts from exempt wells, as applicable, that allow for continued growth and development consistent with the land use plan.

Policy 3: Rural development shall provide adequate water for domestic use. When feasible, rural developments will be encouraged to utilize existing community systems with adequate availability for domestic water and sewage disposal.

Policy 4: New groundwater uses must provide evidence that the proposed water source is physically and legally available. Groundwater uses and withdrawals, including the issuance of building permits and the approval of land divisions, must be consistent with RCW 90.44.050, and with applicable rules adopted pursuant to RCW 90.22 and 90.54.

2.4.4 Industrial Policy

Policy 1: Support efforts to secure long-term sustainable water supplies sufficient to provide for industrial activity on the Hanford site, in the Finley area, and in other industrial designated areas.

2.4.5 Agriculture Policies

Policy 1: Support the availability of sufficient water to maintain the agricultural industry and agricultural processing and value-added manufacturing.

Commented [FO35]: Moved from Rural. The next policy is very similar, so this one can be deleted as well.

~~Policy 12: Encourage efforts to secure long-term water supplies to support the County's strong and diverse agriculture economy.~~

Policy ~~2~~23: Support the withdrawal of additional water from the John Day and McNary pools, under reserved and new water rights, and water right changes and transfers, to service additional agricultural needs, including direct irrigation, food processing, and related ag-industrial needs.

Policy ~~3~~34: Encourage the continued development of water transfers and changes to meet changing agricultural production needs.

Policy 4~~4~~5: Support strategies that improve water supply during drought conditions for irrigation districts and other water right holders on the Yakima River consistent with the Yakima Integrated Plan (Ecology and USBR 2011).

WR Goal 2: Protect and enhance surface and groundwater water quality for human health, drinking water supply, and to meet water quality standards.

Policy 1: Prohibit developments which have the potential for significant individual or cumulative impacts on ground and surface water quality; or alternatively, site and design developments to avoid or mitigate such impacts.

Policy 2: Protect surface and groundwater quality as a resource essential to the public health, safety and welfare, economic growth, and prosperity of Benton County.

Policy 3: Support development and management of County-owned storm water systems that protect surface and ground water quality consistent with local conditions.

Policy 4: Support the Benton-Franklin Health District to develop and implement septic tank and drain field standards that protect surface and ground water quality and human health.

Policy 5: Encourage educational programs and voluntary efforts of agricultural producers, processors, irrigation districts, and municipal users to responsibly manage return flows to improve surface and ground water quality.

Policy 6: Support application of state standards in a manner that reflects climate differences in Benton County compared to other regions of Washington State.

WR Goal 3: Support continued multi-purpose uses of the Columbia River.

Policy 1: Encourage use of the Columbia River and its reservoirs as a key element in ensuring long-term availability of water supply, barge transportation, power generation, and flood control and support for population growth, agricultural production, industry, fisheries, and economic development. Pursuant to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers John Day reservoir drawdown study, the reservoirs should also be maintained to protect wildlife habitat.

Policy 2: Support the designation and allocation of reserved water for municipal, commercial, industrial, and irrigation use from the John Day and McNary pools as per the authority under the RCW (90.54) and Washington Administrative Code ([WAC]173-531A.040) to allocate Columbia River water resources.

Policy 3: Support water resource policy decisions based on defensible science to meet the needs of people and fish and wildlife. Evaluate strategies for challenging policies that may not be scientifically defensible.

Policy 4: Support off-stream reservoirs to augment river flows.

WR Goal 4: Protect and enhance surface water resources to support rivers, streams, and wetlands that support fish and wildlife species and associated habitats.

Policy 1: Support strategies that improve flows for anadromous fish and other fish and wildlife during all types of water years on the Columbia and Yakima rivers, and for the Yakima River ensure actions are consistent with the Yakima Integrated Plan (Ecology and USBR 2011).

Policy 2: Promote a balanced response to listings of threatened and endangered species that provides improved conditions for species maintenance and recovery, while maintaining and allowing sustainable development of water resources for economic growth.

Policy 3: Equitably apply the Endangered Species Act by establishing specific, measurable recovery goals and addressing human factors, economic costs, and opportunity costs when preparing science-based species recovery and species protection plans.

Policy 4: Protect and enhance water quality to improve habitat conditions for salmonids.

2.5 Critical Areas

CA Goal 1: Protect the functions and values of critical areas within the county with land use decision-making and development review.

Policy 1: Apply standards, regulations, and mitigation strategies to development during the permitting and development approval process that protects critical areas functions and values.

Policy 2: Encourage new development and redevelopment in UGAs and large developments outside of UGAs to comply with low impact development standards as applicable.

CA Goal 2: Protect life and property and avoid or mitigate significant risks to public and private property and to public health and safety that are posed by frequently flooded and geologic hazard areas.

Policy 1: Limit developments in areas with higher risk for natural disaster or geologic hazard unless it can be demonstrated by the project proponent that the development is sited, designed, and engineered for long term structural integrity and that life and property on- and off-site are not subject to increased risk as a result of the development. Additionally, establish

development regulations that incorporate best practices for reducing the risk of wildfire, extreme heat, flooding, and other climate-exacerbated hazards.

Commented [BF36]: Added per Cascadia recommendation

Policy 2: Prevent developments within floodways and inherently unstable slopes as they are not suitable for developments. Review required buffers and setbacks for steep slopes and floodways vulnerable to erosion exacerbated by climate change, and establish new minimums, if necessary, so that improvements are not required to protect structures during their expected life.

Commented [BF37]: Per Cascadia

Policy 3: Locate and designate lands subject to natural disasters and current or future climate hazards for uses which avoid or minimize exposure of life and property to risk.

CA Goal 3: Protect the County's natural areas, shorelines, and critical areas as unique assets to the community.

Policy 1: Use the CAO, SMP, SEPA, and other ordinances, as applicable, to designate and protect critical areas and the natural environment.

Policy 2: Identify and protect river, stream, wetlands, and fish and wildlife habitat conservation area functions and values.

Policy 3: Encourage development of water-oriented recreational, cultural, and commercial facilities in certain shoreline locations, consistent with SMP goals and policies and its criteria of no net loss of ecological functions, to enhance and diversify community recreational resources and its attractiveness to tourists.

Policy 4: Ensure public access to shorelines on public land, subject to regulations protecting public safety, sensitive habitat areas, and wildlife.

Policy 5: Encourage public agency acquisition of natural areas of scientific, research and educational significance for public benefit.

Policy 6: Identify and designate habitats of local importance to protect locally important habitats and species under the County CAO.

Policy 7: Any developments, uses, and/or activities in the channel migration zone should be consistent with the standards in the SMP.

Policy 8: Protections associated with landslide areas should be maintained according to the standards in the County CAO and SMP.

CA Goal 4: Sustain a diverse, productive, and high-quality natural environment for the use, health, and enjoyment of County residents.

Policy 1: Work with private and public property owners during development to ensure protection and appropriate use of the County's natural resources.

Policy 2: Integrate natural resources and critical areas such as rivers, creeks, ridges, and slopes into a linked pattern of open lands where feasible, to serve multiple open space functions such as buffers, visual resources, recreation, and wildlife habitat/corridors.

Policy 3: Provide necessary trails or linkages between natural features when feasible.

CA Goal 5: Achieve balance among economic uses of land and critical areas protection.

Policy 1: Work with state, federal, and local agencies and other County stakeholders regarding the application of environmental protection laws and regulations.

Policy 2: Maintain and enhance the viability of agriculture while voluntarily protecting and enhancing critical areas through the County VSP on agricultural lands.

Policy 3: Apply Best Management Practices and the conservation practices outlined in the County VSP Work Plan to lands historically and currently used for the production of food, agricultural products, and grazing of livestock.

Policy 4: Continue to consistently apply Best Management Practices to lands used for the extraction of minerals.

2.6 Economic Development

ED Goal 1: Create a balanced and diverse economy that provides an opportunity to make economic and lifestyle choices for Benton County residents.

Policy 1: Promote industries that are diverse and support an agriculture-based economy.

Policy 2: Promote and protect tourism related to viticulture and other agricultural activities.

Policy 3: Provide adequate, accessible commercial areas while minimizing impact on surrounding uses.

Policy 4: Facilitate economic growth and prosperity while preserving the existing rural quality of life and character, as it is defined by rural residents.

ED Goal 2: Expand employment opportunities in unincorporated Benton County.

Policy 1: Maintain and protect the agricultural economic base of Benton County.

Policy 2: Locate commercial retail and service activities serving urban and regional markets within UGAs. Commercial development serving rural communities is appropriate on commercially designated lands within or adjacent to the communities of Finley, Plymouth, Paterson, and Whitstran. Evaluate MPRs and tourist-oriented visitor destinations for appropriate siting countywide.

Policy 3: Develop commercial activities in "nodes" or clusters as opposed to strip-type configurations.

Policy 4: Designate uses within "Rural Commercial" areas as those which either serve interstate freeway traffic or are located at the center of rural communities to serve their needs.

Policy 5: Plan, construct, and landscape commercial developments to be visually and physically compatible with surrounding areas and uses.

ED Goal 3: Provide areas for the location of light and environmentally acceptable heavy industrial uses, while minimizing impacts on surrounding rural uses.

Policy 1: Establish industrial sites on lands designated for industrial use to protect from incompatible uses by using performance and/or site design criteria.

Policy 2: Do not locate non-agricultural related industry on "GMA Agriculture" designated land.

Policy 3: ~~Identify diverse~~Locate industrial ~~land uses in the Plan and locate these~~ uses and activities where minimal environmental and social impact occurs. This includes appropriate buffers from critical areas and floodplains, and also includes prohibitions on siting polluting industrial activities in or near overburdened communities.

Commented [BF38]: Updated per Cascadia

Policy 4: Encourage light and heavy industrial uses to locate in areas where:

1. Access can be provided by major transportation networks such as road, rail, air, and water
2. Existing development is characterized by and/or compatible with industrial activity
3. Utilities, including electric, gas, water, and sewer, can be adequately provided, either as extensions of municipal facilities (e.g., by service contract) or by on-site facilities

2.7 Housing

HE Goal 1: Provide for a variety of residential uses ~~and densities~~ in the unincorporated areas of the County consistent with the rural character and lifestyles and a choice of housing types for people of all income levels.

Policy 1: Include and preserve a variety of dwelling unit types and rural densities within the rural housing stock.

Policy 2: Allow and regulate manufactured homes in the same way as site-built homes.

Policy 3: Work with Cities to provide housing for all economic segments of the population and seek to create the conditions necessary for the construction of affordable housing at appropriate densities within ~~each of the jurisdiction types (i.e., rural and urban)~~ city limits.

Policy 4: Follow RCW 36.70A.350 with regard to new fully contained communities when approving urban densities located outside of urban growth boundaries and outside of existing Rural Community Center areas, unless they are encompassed by the expansion of an existing UGA.

Policy 5: Allow residential development within unincorporated Urban Growth Areas at rural densities prior to the provision of urban infrastructure, provided that future development at urban densities is not precluded.

Policy ~~5~~6: Locate higher than rural densities in the County's RL-1 areas and ~~appropriate~~ LAMIRD areas ~~within~~ in the Rural Community Center~~s areas~~, ~~Rural Transition Areas, or~~mostly within ~~adjacent to~~ the communities of Finley, Plymouth, Paterson, and Whitstran ~~land uses~~ when rural infrastructure is available and has capacity to support additional development~~ per the adopted Land Use Map~~.

Policy ~~6~~7: Keep plan provisions for the location of rural residential development ~~consistent with~~while preserving agricultural lands and maintaining the rural lifestyles of the County while also minimizing conflicts with commercial agricultural activities.

Policy ~~7~~8: Consider accessory dwelling units as an affordable housing option and look for flexible and innovative ways of integrating accessory dwelling units into single family residential zones.

HE Goal 2: Plan for and accommodate sufficient ~~Adequate~~ housing types ~~should be~~ that are affordable and available to meet the housing needs for the existing and projected population of all income groups.

Policy 1: Preserve various existing~~,~~ and viable~~, rural~~ residential areas and housing types protect ~~single-family residential areas~~them from incompatible land uses.

Commented [KR39]: Should we narrow this down to just Finley and Plymouth?

Commented [BF40R39]: I don't think so - all allow higher density - some just have more capacity to accommodate growth than others

Commented [GW41]: Should we also mention the infill only of RL-1 lands that were established in 2018 comp plan update?

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Policy 2: Allow new housing in the unincorporated County consistent with densities maintained in the Land Use Element and map.

Policy 3: Identify sufficient land countywide for existing and projected residential needs for all income groups.

Policy 4: Plan for and accommodate a variety of residential development types in rural areas, including detached single-family housing, cluster housing, duplexes and other adjoined unit housing, and manufactured homes in conjunction with commercial uses in rural commercial areas and Rural Community Center areas.

Policy 5: Plan for and accommodate a variety of residential developments in urban areas including, but not limited to, middle housing types, ADUs, housing for moderate, low, very low, and extremely low income households, manufactured housing, multifamily housing, group homes, emergency housing, emergency shelters, and permanent supportive housing.

Policy 6: Countywide, ensure adequate zoning to support emergency and temporary housing for homeless as well as transitional and permanent supportive housing for formerly unhoused families and individuals.

HE Goal 3: Prevent discrimination and displacement in the development and maintenance of housing.

Policy 1: Evaluate the potential for displacement due to planning, public investments, redevelopment, and market pressures. Use strategies to mitigate displacement, as applicable.

Policy 2: Collaborate with the community to understand the drivers of displacement through involvement of community groups, organizations, and institutions in the affected areas.

Policy 3: Ensure that county regulations, and permit processes do not lead to displacement of marginalized populations.

Policy 4: Coordinate with housing authorities, public agencies, and private sector for housing developments.

Commented [FO43]: Ben, this is a compiled version of the last set of policy points in the RDI document.

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2.8 Transportation Element

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TE Goal 1: Provide safe, convenient, efficient, economic, and multi-modal transportation networks compatible with the rural character and which serve the transportation demands consistent with the Land Use Element, and all other relevant provisions of the Comprehensive Plan.

Policy 1: Provide adequate roads that safely handle anticipated traffic and serve a diversified area of industrial, agricultural, and residential uses.

Policy 2: Encourage transportation planning and projects that:

1. Conform with and serve the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan
2. Facilitate the flow of people, goods, local products, and services to strengthen and assist the expansion of the local and regional economy
3. Enable the conservation of energy

Policy 3: Improve the cost effectiveness of capital spending by coordinating new road construction with all jurisdictions and service districts/providers.

Policy 4: Minimize the segmentation, loss, and compromising of agricultural lands and productivity resulting from new road construction.

Policy 5: Plan for the need to expand the existing road system to accommodate future growth in farm to market and industrial transport and overall traffic.

Policy 6: Use a frontage road or a circulation system, where practical, for commercial development to prevent the occurrence of numerous driveways opening onto arterial roadways.

Policy 7: Plan to expand transportation capacity by using existing facilities and rights-of-way, where practical and feasible.

Policy 8: Minimize the number of railroad crossings for public safety by using frontage roads, underpass installation, or signals.

Policy 9: Create an integrated network of safe pedestrian ways and/or bicycle routes along arterial and other roadways.

Policy 10: Construct pedestrian ways and bicycle routes in conformance with uniform design standards for trails and paths as described in the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Design Manual or standards developed and adopted by Benton County.

Policy 11: Review new development under the County's designated LOS on County owned roads.

Policy 12: Support the development of a complete streets policy that would make accommodations for pedestrian, bicycle, and transit users on appropriate roadways.

Policy 13: Maintain location and alignment of all proposed streets within a subdivision compatible with existing and planned streets, topographical conditions, public convenience and safety, and the proposed uses of the land to be served by such streets. Limit dead-end streets to 600 feet in maximum length as a means of protection to property, owners, residents, and emergency personnel.

Policy 14: Encourage the use of the local road network for short-range local vehicular trips, and integrate multimodal transportation strategies that reduce pressure on ~~to use the local street system to assist in preserving the functionality of~~ state highways, promote system efficiency and ensure equitable access for all users.

TE Goal 2: Provide an integrated network of trails and paths for non-motorized circulation throughout rural areas connecting to urban trails and paths to promote active lifestyles.

Policy 1: Provide safe pedestrian ways and bicycle routes, separate from vehicle roadways where feasible.

Policy 2: Provide County road rights-of-way wide enough for off-road walking, jogging, bicycling, and horseback riding where feasible.

Policy 3: Include local resident needs for pedestrian, bicycle, and recreational, and equestrian travel when those needs are identified in the Comprehensive Plan.

TE Goal 3: Maintain the integrity of the transportation system while minimizing environmental and other impacts.

Policy 1: Avoid and/or minimize adverse social, economic, and environmental impacts and costs.

Policy 2: Avoid or mitigate conflicts and adverse impacts to rural character that may occur due to the transportation network and its improvements.

TE Goal 4: Coordinate the transportation system with neighboring cities and other transportation providers.

Policy 1: Promote regional transportation plans that help to reduce VMT.

Policy 2: Work with transit, rail, port authorities, and other transportation agencies to promote a coordinated transportation system.

Commented [BF45]: WSDOT suggestions to ask yourself or the Planning Commission with Goal 4, policy 2:

- What role does the MPO (BFCG) play in Benton County transportation funding efforts and decisions? Are there any road blocks, conflicts or areas that could be identified to make improvements?
- How can the County improve reaching Goal 4?
- Are there areas that BC can increase or promote additional collaboration with Rail, Air, Water, Transit or non-motorized systems and improvements? Some may be very easy to promote in Comp Plan policies.
- Can WSDOT help provide anything realistic to improve information or resources with Transit, Rail, Ports, airports and other non-motorized transportation systems?
- What is the County's future vision for an ideal multi-modal transportation network? How and what can WSDOT do to promote this vision?

TE Goal 5: Protect public safety and property by establishing development regulations that discourage the siting of incompatible uses and airspace obstructions adjacent to general aviation airports that serve the public.

Policy 1: Preserve, maintain, and develop air, barge, and railway transportation facilities which serve the County.

2.9 Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Historic Preservation

PL Goal 1: Develop and maintain a park system for Benton County residents and visitors that provides a variety of recreational opportunities in regional and local parks and open space.

Policy 1: Develop and maintain a regional park and trail system integrated with city recreational resources.

Policy 2: Encourage the development of a system of bicycling, hiking, recreational, and equestrian trails in the County that coordinates with existing and/or proposed city systems.

Policy 3: Encourage developers of low density, large lot subdivisions and plats to provide access easements for bicycle and horse riding within and between contiguous developments, connecting to regional trails and to establish a means of maintaining such easements through coordination between the County, developers, and homeowners.

Policy 4: Offer a broad range of recreational opportunities for various abilities and needs of County residents (e.g., fishing, hiking, playfields).

PL Goal 2: Work with cities and agencies to protect greenways and open spaces along the riverine corridor of the lower Yakima River.

Policy 1: Identify and consider acquisition of natural open space preserves, wildlife corridors, and critical areas as part of the park system.

Policy 2: Work with cities to promote the protection of natural resources and open spaces to improve community and ecosystem resiliency.

PL Goal 3: Conserve visually prominent naturally vegetated steep slopes and elevated ridges that define the Columbia Basin landscape and are uniquely a product of the ice age floods.

Policy 1: Identify and preserve historically significant structures and sites whenever feasible.

Policy 2: Encourage the public and/or private acquisition of the prominent ridges within unincorporated Benton County as Open Space Conservation, in order to preserve views,

protect native habitat, and provide for public access and recreation associated with these landscapes.

Policy 3: Pursue a variety of means and mechanisms such as the preparation of specific and area plans, conservation easements, clustered developments, land acquisitions and trades, statutory requirements to protect the natural landform and vegetative cover of the Rattlesnake uplift formation, notably Rattlesnake, Red, Candy, and Badger mountains and the Horse Heaven Hills.

Policy 4: Consider the preservation of the ridges and hillside areas through various development regulations.

PL Goal 4: Preserve significant historic structures, districts, and cultural resources that are unique to Benton County.

Policy 1: Coordinate with local tribes to protect historic and cultural resources, including from extreme weather and other natural hazards worsened by climate change.

Policy 2: Preserve archaeologically significant sites by siting and designing development to avoid or mitigate impacts.

PL Goal 5: Identify, preserve, and protect historic, cultural, and archaeological resources found to be significant by recognized local, state, tribal or federal processes.

Policy 1: Identify known, recorded archaeological, cultural, and historic resources.

Policy 2: Update and refine the local process for evaluating the significance of historic, cultural, and archaeological resources.

Policy 3: Preserve areas that contain valuable historical or archaeological sites of federal, state, tribal, or local significance including those maintained in the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation's database, areas known only to tribes and areas of higher risk potential. Maintain and enforce development code provisions that require conditioning of project approval on findings made by a professional archaeologist for development activities on sites of known cultural, historical, or archaeological significance.

Policy 4: Prior to demolition, moving, or alteration to any designated historic, cultural, and archaeological landmark, ensure that due consideration is given to its preservation or, at a minimum, documentation of its historic, cultural, or archaeological value.

2.10 Capital Facilities and Public Services

CF Goal 1: Anticipate the need and location of and plan for the timely and cost-effective provision of public facilities and services based upon the Land Use Element,

Policy 1: Ensure capital budget decisions are in conformity with this comprehensive plan, and establish associated procedures for reviewing and updating the capital facilities plan if probable funding falls short of meeting existing needs.

Policy 2~~1~~: Expand and diversify the rural economy and employment base by constructing public facility capacity to serve as a framework and incentive for rural development consistent with land use designations.

Policy 3~~2~~: Plan for the location and protection of anticipated and existing public uses such as parks, playgrounds, schools, essential public facilities, and other public, state, or federal activities or facilities owned and operated for the benefit of the public. As part of planning, maintain an inventory through the County GIS platform of existing capital facilities owned by public entities, including green infrastructure.

Policy 4~~3~~: Eliminate existing service level deficiencies in existing facilities before expending capital funds for new uses. Capital facilities planning should integrate all of the County's capital project resources (grants, bonds, general County funds, donations, real estate excise tax, conservation futures property tax, fees and rates for public utility services, and any other available funding).

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Policy 5~~4~~: Prioritize and evaluate public capital facilities annually for funding for capital projects that are necessary to accommodate existing and projected demands of the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan. Consider equity and potential displacement impacts in the process.

Policy 6~~5~~: Prioritize capital facilities planning and expenditures consistent with this Comprehensive Plan for projects that accomplish one or more of the following:

4. Are essential for public health, safety, and welfare
5. Address and/or improve the quality and level of regional government services
6. Maintain designated transportation LOS
7. Improve public and private sector productivity
8. Facilitate the maintenance and growth of the rural/agricultural economy

Policy 7: Consider capital facility needs of other public entities in the County as part of capital facilities planning, including special purpose districts, and coordinate with cities on capital plans for UGAs.

Policy 86: Explore public facilities and infrastructure investment options that use Hanford site resources and benefit the region beyond the Hanford area.

Policy 97: Promote compatible development of land adjacent to existing and proposed school and other public facilities.

CF Goal 2: Provide for the siting of "Essential Public Facilities" using siting criteria that are consistent with statutory requirements applicable to these facilities and within appropriate land use designations,

Policy 1: Locate capital facilities identified as essential public facilities in a manner that will provide necessary service to intended users while minimizing the impact to surrounding land uses.

~~2.11 Utilities~~

~~**UE Goal 1: Ensure utilities support the land use and economic development goals of the County.**~~

~~Policy 1: Siting of proposed public facilities should be consistent with adopted land use policies.~~

~~**UE Goal 2: Maintain public and private household water and sewer systems that are consistent with the rural character of the County.**~~

~~Policy 1: Develop joint service agreements between special districts, counties, and cities for lands within UGAs.~~

~~**UE Goal 3: Facilitate efficiency in utility land use and development.**~~

~~Policy 1: Support development regulations that are flexible and receptive to innovations and advances in cellular technology and act upon the knowledge that moving information rather than people yields benefits of conservation and cost efficiencies.~~

~~Policy 2: Encourage multiple uses, including passive recreational use, in utility corridors where practical.~~

~~Policy 3: Facilitate maintenance and rehabilitation of existing utility systems and facilities and encourage the use of existing transmission/distribution corridors.~~

~~**UE Goal 4: Develop and adopt provisions as necessary that support future demand for alternative energy vehicles.**~~

~~Policy 1: Permit electric vehicle charging stations equipped with slow and medium speed charging equipment as an accessory or ancillary use to any principal use in all zoning districts.~~

2.11 ~~Policy 2: Allow electric vehicle "rapid charging stations" designation in commercial, industrial, and agricultural zones as regulated in the zoning code and exclude in areas identified as critical resource areas.~~ Utilities

UE Goal 1: Ensure utilities support the land use and economic development goals of the County.

Policy 1: Siting of proposed public facilities should be consistent with adopted land use policies.

UE Goal 2: Maintain public and private household water and sewer systems that are consistent with the rural character of the County.

Policy 1: Develop joint service agreements between special districts, counties, and cities for lands within UGAs.

UE Goal 3: Facilitate efficiency in utility land use and development.

Policy 1: Support development regulations that are flexible and receptive to innovations and advances in cellular technology and act upon the knowledge that moving information rather than people yields benefits of conservation and cost efficiencies.

Policy 2: Encourage multiple uses, including passive recreational use, in utility corridors where practical.

Policy 3: Facilitate maintenance and rehabilitation of existing utility systems and facilities and encourage the use of existing transmission/distribution corridors.

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Policy 1: Permit electric vehicle charging stations equipped with slow and medium speed charging equipment as an accessory or ancillary use to any principal use in all zoning districts.

Policy 2: Allow electric vehicle "rapid charging stations" designation in commercial, industrial, and agricultural zones as regulated in the zoning code and exclude in areas identified as critical resource areas.

2.12 Climate and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The goals outline below provide a general direction for building climate resilience in Benton County across sectors, including zoning and development, water resources, ecosystems, cultural resources and practices, agriculture resources and food systems, budling and energy, emergency management and community well-being, transportation, and communications and collaboration. These goals are based on the requirements of HB1181, which outlines specific criteria for addressing climate hazards that Benton County currently experiences and that are expected to worsen in the future.

2.12.1 Overarching Goals and Policies

Policies in this section apply to both the Climate Resilience and Greehoues Gas Emissions Reductions Sub-Element.

~~CE Goal 1:~~*CE Goal 1: Integrate climate resilience and GHG emissions reduction into local and regional planning, resource allocation, and overall strategy to ensure compliance with state guidelines and meaningful alignment with current and future priorities. *Integrate Climate Resilience ~~AND GHG EMISSIONS REDUCTION INTO LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLANNING, RESOURCE ALLOCATION, AND OVERALL STRATEGY TO ENSURE COMPLIANCE WITH STATE GUIDELINES AND MEANINGFUL ALIGNMENT WITH CURRENT AND FUTURE PRIORITIES.~~

Policy 1: Develop and maintain staff expertise, skills, and capacity to implement Climate Element policies equitably across the region.

Policy 2:~~**CE-1.2:**~~ Strengthen and invest in regional capacity to track and report on climate resilience and GHG emissions reduction policy implementation across the County, including the Tri-Cities area. Develop and maintain shared progress reports, dashboards, and other tools to monitor and communicate progress on climate goals over time.

Policy 3:~~**CE-1.3:**~~ Comprehensive plan policies and implementing development regulations should be consistent with defensible science.

CE Goal 2: Build a Healthier and more resilient region by preparing for the impacts of climate change, protecting vulnerable communities and natural systems, supporting clean economic development, and strengthening agriculture, infrastructure, and emergency response.~~OVERARCHING CLIMATE RESILIENCE GOAL: *BUILD A HEALTHIER AND MORE RESILIENT REGION BY PREPARING FOR THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE, PROTECTING VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES AND NATURAL SYSTEMS, SUPPORTING CLEAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND STRENGTHENING AGRICULTURE, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE.*~~

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2.12.2 Transportation, Buildings, Energy, and Land Use

~~GOAL CE-2~~CE Goal 3: Ensure policies and development regulations result in land use patterns and built environments that support resilience to extreme weather and climate-related impacts. ~~ENSURE *POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS RESULT IN LAND USE PATTERNS AND BUILT ENVIRONMENTS THAT SUPPORT RESILIENCE TO EXTREME WEATHER AND CLIMATE-RELATED IMPACTS*~~

~~Policy CE-2.1~~Policy 1: Support retrofitting homes with low-cost cooling solutions that meet current building standards, for example by exploring partnership and funding opportunities for programs to provide HVAC units and installation to residents most vulnerable to extreme temperature events (e.g., low- income seniors).

~~CE-2.2~~Policy 2: Monitor implementation of the state building code and consider whether additional development standards would be helpful to encourage the integration of exterior building features that reduce the impacts of extreme heat and precipitation.

~~CE-2.3~~Policy 3: Encourage local utilities and fire departments to implement wildfire mitigation best practices such as undergrounding and vegetation management in fire-prone areas.

~~CE-2.4~~Policy 4: Implement the BFCOG Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Active Transportation Plan as well as multimodal transportation plans developed by the cities and counties to enhance the safety and security of the region's transportation system, improve access for motorized and non-motorized users—especially currently underserved populations—and increase the resilience of the transportation network to climate hazards.

~~CE-2.5~~Policy 5: Explore ways to protect transit-users from extreme heat, such as working with Benton Franklin Transit to install shaded bus shelters and consider installing additional cooling features such as fans or misters.

~~CE-2.6~~Policy 6: Coordinate with utility providers and partners, such as TRIDEC Energy Forward Alliance, to encourage the expansion of non-emitting infrastructure that provides reliable and affordable power, diversifying sources of energy.

Water Resources, Ecosystems, Agriculture, and Food Systems

~~GOAL CE-3~~CE Goal 4: Protect the viability of the region's water resources, ecosystems, and agricultural economy by promoting resilience to extreme weather and climate-related hazards, while balancing regional water needs and ecosystem health. ~~*PROTECT THE VIABILITY OF THE REGION'S WATER RESOURCES, ECOSYSTEMS, AND AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY BY PROMOTING RESILIENCE TO EXTREME WEATHER AND CLIMATE-RELATED HAZARDS, WHILE BALANCING REGIONAL WATER NEEDS AND ECOSYSTEM HEALTH.*~~

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Policy 1:~~CE-3.1:~~ Promote sustainable water storage, irrigation, and water practices that help agricultural producers adapt to changing conditions while balancing regional water needs. Consider operational modernization and enhanced water conservation strategies, such as those in the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, and coordinate with conservation and irrigation districts. Continue to implement County's Rural Water Supply Program to benefit the Yakima Basin water supply.

Policy 2:~~CE-3.2:~~ Promote innovation, investment, and management regimes that address trends for reduced precipitation and increased extreme heat, drought, smoke, and extreme precipitation. This includes supporting research and partnerships on reducing input costs, energy demand, water demand, and greenhouse gas emissions, as well as plant varieties suited to changing weather conditions.

Policy 3:~~CE-3.3:~~ Encourage carbon sequestration and conservation of agricultural and open space land through existing programs such as the Open Space Taxation Program and Voluntary Stewardship Program, and consider new multijurisdictional tools such as conservation futures, transfers or purchase of development rights, or other strategies.

Policy 4: ~~CE-3.4:~~ Identify compatible rural, urban and institutional lands for renewable energy infrastructure opportunities. Protect long-term viable agricultural lands and environmentally sensitive lands while allowing the least conflict with renewable energy siting.

Policy 5:~~CE-3.5:~~ Preserve or expand natural areas that help control flooding and provide shade, prioritizing projects for locations that frequently flood, have high heat conditions, or have community groups that are lower income or more sensitive to high heat (children, seniors, people with chronic health conditions).

Policy 6:~~CE-3.6:~~ Manage trees and other vegetation in both urban and rural areas to decrease risks from severe wildfires, preserving vegetation where possible and improving ecosystem health and habitat function.

Policy 7:~~CE-3.7:~~ Collaborate with partner agencies and groups to protect aquatic ecosystems and increase their resilience to extreme weather and climate- related impacts such as algal blooms and increased threat of invasive species.

Policy 8:~~CE-3.8:~~ Protect and enhance surface and groundwater quantity and quality, recognizing that water resources are essential to the public health, safety and welfare, economic growth, and prosperity of the Tri Cities Region and its jurisdictions, as well as the health of native fish.

Policy 9:~~**CE-3.9:**~~ Coordinate with regional, state, federal, and tribal partners on plans to manage water resources and hydropower generation in the Yakima River Basin and Columbia River Basin. Advocate for long-range planning that considers at least 20 years of projected demand, and needs for increased storage capacity given increasing trends in intense precipitation, reduced snowpack, and severe drought.

Policy 10:~~**CE-3.10:**~~ Ensure development regulations conserve water resources and support the Tri-Cities Region's ability to support a high quality of life and vibrant economy in a semi-arid climate. This includes implementing, monitoring, and possibly updating development regulations for water-efficient buildings, landscaping, irrigation systems, water systems, and stormwater management.

Policy 11:~~**CE-3.11:**~~ Allow and incentivize private water management practices that recycle water for uses that require less treatment than drinking water. This could include reclaiming waters used for food processing to irrigate crops or reclaiming greywater to irrigate landscaping or golf courses (greywater is used potable water from sources such as sinks that does not include toilet water).

Policy 12:~~**CE-3.12:**~~ Work with the Benton Conservation District to develop acceptable native plant species for new developments and restoration projects, to increase resilience and reduce maintenance costs and demand for irrigation water.

Policy 13:~~**CE-3.13:**~~ Provide outreach or incentive programs to promote voluntary water and energy conservation. This could include raising public awareness of best practices such as switching from lawns to drought- tolerant landscaping or working with utilities to explore demand pricing structures that do not unfairly burden low-income households.

Policy 14:~~**CE-3.14:**~~ Consider developing a comprehensive, local drought resilience strategy that complements state and federal water basin plans, factors in projected climate impacts, and sets action levels for different drought stages.

2.12.3 Economic Development and Cultural Resources

CE Goal 5: Ensure that the local economy, cultural resources, and cultural traditions are resilient to extreme weather and climate-related impacts.~~**GOAL CE-4:** *ENSURE THAT THE LOCAL ECONOMY, CULTURAL RESOURCES, AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS ARE RESILIENT TO EXTREME WEATHER AND CLIMATE-RELATED IMPACTS.*~~

~~**CE-4.**~~Policy 1:~~**1:**~~ Build on existing coordination with Tribal governments to strengthen community resilience and protect cultural resources from climate impacts. This includes supporting

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tribal efforts to increase knowledge collection and sharing about ways to protect cultural resources and build climate-adaptive systems related to food, health, and the economy.

Policy 2:~~**CE-4.2:**~~ Collaborate with community partners to explore ways to expand entry level jobs and career development pathways in low-emission industries that align with the needs and strengths of Tri-Cities communities. Potential partners include local schools, labor unions, the Tri-City Development Council (TRIDEC), chambers of commerce, community-based organizations, and business leaders in light industrial uses and nuclear, solar, and hydropower energy.

Policy 3:~~**CE-4.3:**~~ Ensure regional multijurisdictional hazard mitigation plans for Benton and Franklin counties include information about the impacts of extreme weather and climate-related hazards, and mitigation strategies for preparing for and managing post climate disaster hazards to protect community health, economies, and ecosystems.

2.12.4 Health and Well-being, and Emergency Management

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CE Goal 6~~GOAL 5~~: Protect community health and well-being and enhance emergency preparedness, response, and recovery from the impacts of climate-related hazards, focusing resources on the people and places most at risk to these hazards ~~*PROTECT COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AND ENHANCE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY FROM THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE-RELATED HAZARDS, FOCUSING RESOURCES ON THE PEOPLE AND PLACES MOST AT RISK TO THESE HAZARDS.*~~

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Policy 1:~~**CE-5.1:**~~ Ensure critical infrastructure is resilient to natural hazards such as flooding and extreme heat and implement related area-wide and jurisdiction- specific mitigation actions in regional hazard mitigation plans.

Policy 2:~~**CE-5.2:**~~ Collaborate at the regional, state, and federal levels on updating floodplain maps to reflect best available information and update local development codes as needed to mitigate for impacts related to changes in the floodplain over time

~~**CE-5.3:**~~Policy 3: Work with the community and funding partners to raise awareness of and expand programs that provide cooling and warming centers and other types of emergency shelter and resource distribution during extreme weather, focusing on supporting the people who are most at risk.

~~CE-5.4:~~Policy 4: Continue to mitigate risk of wildfires in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), consistent with regional multijurisdictional hazard mitigation plans for Benton and Franklin counties. This includes public education for private owners and residents and ensuring

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wildfire risk reduction strategies are incorporated into public land management practices and local development standards.

~~CE-5.5:~~Policy 5: Evaluate and potentially expand community outreach and training programs focused on preparedness and response to floods, fire, poor air quality, extreme temperatures, and utility outages, and consistent with Firewise program.

~~CE-5.6:~~Policy 6: Strengthen communication with non- English-speaking communities by continuing to build relationships with local groups and exploring the most effective methods for raising awareness of and engagement with climate issues.

~~CE-5.7:~~Policy 7: Recognize that parks support climate resilience by providing public access to cool places, such as water or shaded areas, and by providing public gathering places where community members can connect and support each other. Promote equitable access to parks, creating inclusive and connected recreational spaces, and supporting culturally responsive, community-driven park development that reflects local needs and values.

~~**CE-5.8:**~~Policy 8: Ensure all residents have access to information about climate impacts and an opportunity to participate in public decision- making processes related to plans and the use of public resources to address those impacts.

- Collaborate with community groups to connect local concerns with regional and statewide efforts and help guide policies, programs, and investments.
- Seek input from populations that are typically most at-risk to climate impacts such as seniors, children, low-income households, and those with chronic health conditions. Also seek input from community service providers regarding people who are homeless.

~~CE-5.9:~~Policy 9: Protect the health and well-being of agricultural, construction, recreation, first responders, and other outdoor workers exposed to extreme heat, poor air quality, and other weather-related hazards. Coordinate with the Benton Franklin Health District, the State Department of Labor and Industries, and labor unions to consider strategies such as promoting awareness of worker protection laws and best practices such as scheduling heavy routine outdoor work during cooler times of day and providing breaks and shelter during extreme weather events.

2.12.5 GHG Goals and Policies

The following section presents GHG emissions reduction goals and policies. GHG emissions reduction goals and policies are organized by the following sectors:

- Buildings and energy;

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- Transportation, zoning and development, and land use; and
- Waste management.

OVERARCHING GHG EMISSION REDUCTION GOAL**GHG Goal 1: Support clean growth and climate-smart development in the region by reducing greenhouse gas emissions across all sectors, advancing clean energy, and integrating sustainable land use and transportation strategies.**: ~~SUPPORT CLEAN GROWTH *AND CLIMATE-SMART DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION BY REDUCING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS ACROSS ALL SECTORS, ADVANCING CLEAN ENERGY, AND INTEGRATING SUSTAINABLE LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION STRATEGIES.*~~

2.12.6 Buildings and Energy

GOAL CE-6: ~~*IMPROVE BUILDING PERFORMANCE AND ENERGY RESILIENCE BY REDUCING ENERGY USE, SUPPORTING CLEANER ENERGY CHOICES, AND MAKING ENERGY-SAVING UPGRADES MORE ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE.*~~

GHG Goal 2: Improve building performance and energy resilience by reducing energy use, supporting cleaner energy choices, and making energy savings upgrades more accessible and affordable.

~~CE-6.1:~~Policy 1: Follow state building and energy code development and implementation specific to decarbonization. Educate and support building officials, partners, and staff to integrate energy and building codes for new and remodeled buildings that reduce energy use, expand EV charging infrastructure, and support a variety of energy sources, including renewable sources.

~~CE-6.2:~~Policy 2: Enhance energy resilience and reduce energy consumption in existing buildings by:

- Supporting public programs that incentivize or encourage energy efficiency retrofits for commercial and residential buildings.
- Advancing energy efficiency initiatives across residential, commercial, and municipal sectors, such as weatherization.
- Prioritizing programs that serve low-income, senior, and historically marginalized communities.

~~CE-6.3:~~Policy 3: Promote the use of sustainable building materials to improve energy and environmental performance through:

- Incentivized green building certification.

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- Building code and other development regulations.

~~CE-6.4:~~Policy 4: Consider creating a regional resource hub of federal, state, county, and local incentives available to residents interested in building electrification, insulation, and weatherization, to improve energy efficiency, resilience, and affordability. Prioritize low- and no-cost home retrofit packages for low-income and marginalized communities.

2.12.7 Transportation, Zoning and Development, and Land Use

~~Goal CE-7:~~ *~~COLLABORATE REGIONALLY TO PROMOTE TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE PATTERNS THAT SUPPORT REDUCTIONS IN EMISSIONS AND VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED (VMT), AIMING TO REDUCE REGIONAL VMT BY AT LEAST 5% BELOW 2022 LEVELS BY 2050 BY DIRECTING URBAN GROWTH TO CITIES AND FUTURE ANNEXATION AREAS, ON STRATEGIC UPDATES TO RURAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS, AND ON MANAGING RURAL LANDS TO SUPPORT EMISSIONS REDUCTION CONSISTENT WITH POLICIES UNDER GOAL 3~~*

GHG Goal 3: Collaborate regionally to promote transportation and land use patterns that support reductions in emissions and vehicle miles traveled (VMT), aiming to reduce regional VMT by at least 5% below 2022 levels by 2050 by directing urban growth to cities and future annexation areas, on strategic updates to rural transportation systems, and on managing rural lands to support emissions reduction consistent with policies under CE Goal 4.

~~CE-7.1:~~Policy 1: Foster higher-density, mixed-use development in urban ~~villages~~areas and transit corridors by supporting transit-oriented development and aligning zoning and permitting processes to facilitate compact growth near transit and amenities.

CE-7.2: Create a safe, well-connected, and attractive bicycle and pedestrian transportation network to encourage active transportation and improve street connectivity and walkability. Ensure improvements integrate with transit networks and increase accessibility for people with disabilities and the elderly.

~~CE-7.3:~~Policy 3: Coordinate with Ben-Franklin Transit to prioritize, develop, and maintain mobility hubs in transportation-efficient locations, especially in overburdened communities experiencing a scarcity of transportation alternatives. Incorporate mobility choices (including multimodal transportation and rideshares) for people with special transportation needs, including persons with disabilities, the elderly, the young, and low-income populations.

~~CE-7.4:~~Policy 4: Implement and seek alignment with the following plans to support regional transportation GHG emissions reductions, as required by the state: BFCOG Regional Active Transportation Plan; BFCOG Metropolitan Transportation Plan (Transition 2045); BFCOG

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Regional Bicycle Plan; BFCOG Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy; other Comprehensive Plan elements.

Policy 5: ~~**CE-7.5:**~~ Support the improvement of transit speed, frequency, coverage, and reliability, including improving the number of destinations reachable by transit.

~~CE-7.6:~~Policy 6: Encourage the private sector and other partners to provide subsidies for low-income residents to purchase or lease electric vehicles and bicycles. Encourage these partners to provide EV charging infrastructure, especially in areas that serve low-income populations and renters.

Policy 7: ~~**CE-7.7:**~~ Encourage (or require when mandated by state building code) EV charging infrastructure in major building remodels and retrofits where feasible.

Policy 8: ~~**CE-7.8:**~~ Encourage phasing out the use of gas-powered landscaping equipment and other off- or non-road vehicle and equipment types. ~~leading by example through local government practices.~~

Policy 9: ~~**CE-7.9**~~: Promote local government leadership by:~~:~~

- Converting vehicle fleet vehicles to low-emissions vehicles, where cost and technology allow.
- Developing and implementing programs that reduce staff commute VMT (e.g., provide free or subsidized transit passes, encourage ridesharing, explore options for telecommuting).

Policy 10: ~~**CE-7.10**~~: Coordinate regionally to track trends in GHG emissions and VMT for 5-year Comprehensive Plan progress reporting, including coordinating on how to allocate data from unincorporated UGAs.

Policy 11: ~~**CE-7.11:**~~ Continue conducting joint-planning, where possible, between county and city governments for unincorporated Urban Growth Areas (UGAs). ~~Where possible, develop transportation and utility systems in UGAs to the standards of adjacent cities, and promote zoning that supports higher densities appropriate for future annexation.~~

2.12.8 Waste Management

~~***GOAL CE-8:** ENSURE THAT THE COMMUNITY CAN REDUCE, REUSE, AND RECYCLE WASTE MATERIALS SUSTAINABLY.*~~

GHG Goal 4: Ensure that the community can reduce, reuse, and recycle waste materials sustainably.

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Policy 1: ~~**CE-8.1:**~~ Explore opportunities to expand communitywide waste reduction and recycling programs to divert recyclable waste from entering landfills. This could include investing in new waste management options, collaborating with neighboring jurisdictions, and exploring opportunities to make recycling and composting more affordable and feasible.

Policy 2: ~~**CE-8.2:**~~ Provide public education to encourage residents to use waste management providers, rather than burn garbage, to improve air quality and reduce fire risk.

Policy 3: ~~**CE-8.3:**~~ Expand communitywide waste reduction and recycling programs to divert 40% of community recyclable waste from entering landfills by 2029, in alignment with Solid Waste and Hazardous Waste Management Plan.

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3 Land Use Element

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter contains the GMA required land use element to ~~create~~ provide a framework ~~upon which~~ for future growth and development ~~will occur~~ consistent with community objectives and ~~the requirements of~~state law. Consistent with GMA requirements, the land use element designates the proposed general distribution, location, and extent of land uses for agriculture and other resource lands, ~~timber production,~~ housing, commerce, industry, recreation, open space~~s~~, general aviation airports, public utilities, public facilities, and other functions, as applicable, and describes development densities and projections for future population growth.

Within all elements of the Comprehensive Plan, project planning, scheduling, and financing are targeted to provide the basic infrastructure services that correspond to ~~enables the public to realizing the~~ designated land use. The relationship between elements is one of functional interdependence and internal consistency, where the Comprehensive Plan Elements and land use designations are:

- Consistent with and carry forth the Comprehensive Plan's policies
- Depict scale and densities consistent with the carrying capacity of the land, surrounding area, and infrastructure
- Cost effective ~~relative to~~for the expenditure of public revenues to construct and maintain public infrastructure/service
- Reflect the suitability of the land for the designated land uses ~~in terms of~~for capacity, compatibility, and availability of services

The land use element should undergo a major review every ~~8~~ 10 years to reaffirm both the legitimacy of the "Vision" and to make necessary adjustments in response to new conditions or changing attitudes. Annual review enables the County to monitor the progress of meeting objectives and to keep objectives current relative to emerging issues and needs.

The purpose of the land use element, in conjunction with the rural element, is to:

- Provide a description of the outcomes the community expects from growth and development
- Provide certainty and predictability for development and financial interests, residents, and service providers
- Serve as the policy and regulatory framework which ensures that through the passage of time and successive political administrations the cumulative outcome of growth and development consistently moves toward that chosen by the rural community
- Demonstrate how local interests meet the mandates of state planning law and other requirements consistent with local needs and preferences

3.2 Existing Land Uses in the County

Benton County consists of over 1,715 square miles. The U.S. Department of Energy's Hanford Reservation occupies 416 miles, or 24 percent, of Benton County's northern area (see Appendix A: Map Folio, Figure 2 – Publicly Owned Lands Map). An additional 93,299 acres are owned or managed by other public entities (port districts, state, federal, and local government lands). Total public ownership represents 33 percent of the acreage in Benton County.

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The existing land use activities within unincorporated Benton County are principally agriculture, agricultural related industry, rural residential, rangeland, open space, and Hanford industrial uses (see Appendix A: Map Folio, Figure 3 – Existing Land Use Activities Map). The current allocation of land use within the County is presented in Table 3-1.

Dryland agriculture in Benton County

Table 3-1 indicates that GMA agriculture (irrigated and dryland) is the largest single land use within the County. It occupies approximately 59 percent of the total land area. Next largest is Hanford, which accounts for approximately 25 percent, followed by rural land uses (approximately 7 percent). The five cities and their UGAs occupy 72,245.37 acres (113 square miles), or over 6 percent of the total land area. See Appendix A: Map Folio, Figure 4 – Existing Land Use Designations Map.

Table 3-1
Current Land Use in Benton County ~~(City annexations updated 2016)~~

Land Use Type	Acres	Square Miles	Percent
Cities and Urban Growth Areas	72,~~245~~059	113	6.58
Hanford	~~266,351~~265517	416	24.27
Hanford Reach	12,~~443~~268	19	1.13

Land Use Type	Acres	Square Miles	Percent
Unincorporated Area			
Growth Management Act Agriculture	647,107	1,011	58.96
Open Space Conservation	2,108	3	0.19
Public	15,163	24	1.38
Rural Lands 1	1,182	2	0.11
Rural Lands 1-3	318	0	0.03
Rural Lands 5	74,039	116	6.75
Rural Lands 20	1,813	3	0.17
Community Center	500	1	0.05
Community Commercial	26	0	0.00
Interchange Commercial	325	1	0.03
General Commercial	202	0	0.02
Light Industrial	1,333	2	0.12
Heavy Industrial	2,344	4	0.21
Total Unincorporated Area	746,460	1,166	68.01
Total County Area	1,097,~~499~~860	1,715	100

Source: Benton County GIS data

3.2.1 Land Use Pattern and Compatibility

Rural residential area in Benton County

Benton County's land use can be described in broad categories: urban, rural, agricultural, industrial, public, and open space. Agriculture is the predominant land use in Benton County. Much of the urban land is concentrated in the eastern portion of the County which comprises the Tri-Cities area—Kennewick, Richland, and West Richland—with Benton City and Prosser comprising the urban land in central and western Benton County. The rural residential lands are mostly along the Interstate-82 corridor and in the urban fringes with some located in the Patterson and Plymouth areas. Industrial lands are minimal in the unincorporated County, located near Finley, ~~and~~ Prosser and Plymouth. This is in part due to the ability to site agro-industrial uses within agricultural lands, with several agriculture related developments such as storage and product packing facilities located adjacent to production lands throughout the County. Other industrial lands are mostly located within the Hanford area or within the UGAs. Public and open space lands are located throughout the County.

Compatibility is based on the intensity of land uses. Generally speaking, the most intense use is industrial due its operational impacts (e.g., noise, light, dust), supporting facility needs, and overall land impact. Natural areas are considered the least intense as there are no developments or improvements ~~on such~~in these areas. ~~Therefore, a low density r~~Residential areas are not compatible ~~next~~ next to ~~a~~ heavy industrial ~~land use would be considered incompatible because of the negative impacts industrial uses may have on the residential areas~~. Appropriately designed buffers,

landscaping, and transition areas between uses should be considered between incompatible land uses.

3.2.1.1 Military Training Routes

When planning for new development within Benton County, it is important to consider the critical role of military training areas in support of national defense. Within Benton County there are several military training routes that function as 'highways in the sky' used by military aircraft to practice high- and low-altitude training exercises and to traverse between military installations. Any development or new construction that seriously impacts or hinders the military training routes' function and viability is considered incompatible land use. Future land use compatibility planning ~~must be~~is an overarching goal of the Comprehensive Plan.

The GMA requires the County to provide notice to the military when it intends to amend its "comprehensive plan or development regulations to address lands adjacent to military installations to ensure those lands are protected from incompatible development." Per the RCW 36.70A.530:

1. Military installations are of particular importance to the economic health of the state of Washington. It is a priority of the state to protect the land surrounding military installations from incompatible development.
2. A comprehensive plan, amendment to a comprehensive plan, a development regulation, or amendment to a development regulation, should not allow development in the vicinity of a military installation that is incompatible with the installation's ability to carry out its mission requirements.

3.2.2 Population and Land Use Trends

~~Beginning in~~Since the 1990s, ~~through the present~~ there has been a condition of sustained population and economic growth in southeast~~ern~~ Washington. ~~For the present, T~~the cyclic booms and busts in the local economy characteristic of the 1960s through late 1980s have been replaced with a ~~seemingly~~ steady and prolonged period of population growth and conversion of raw land to agriculture and related industries, urban uses, and rural residential development.

~~Locally, since the early 1990s B~~both the farm and construction/development sector of the non-farm economy of the county have enjoyed relatively favorable market conditions. The economy was less impacted by the recession in 2008 than the rest of the nation due to the increase in employment at the Hanford Site as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) investment in expedited cleanup activities in 2009 and beyond. Like many other communities, t~~T~~he Covid-19 pandemic ~~, like many other areas,~~ temporarily impacted the local Benton County economy, but ~~this~~it has since recovered. Table 3-2 indicates the historic population growth in Benton County by decades.

Table 3-2
Historic Population Growth in Benton County

Year	Benton County	% Change Benton County
1970	67,540	8.81%
1980	105,800	56.65%
1990	112,560	6.39%
2000	142,475	26.58%
2010	175,177	22.95%
2020	206,873	18.1%

Benton County's current population, based on the ~~2017~~ 2024 OFM data, is 217~~193~~,5850~~0~~. The unincorporated County population constitutes ~~35~~37,~~0~~805 persons, or approximately ~~18~~ 17.4 percent of the total County population. Agriculture, food processing, health care, education, and research have all contributed to recent and substantial economic development in the County. At present, the agricultural ~~and~~ sector is experiencing ~~significant~~ steady economic growth in the County, as the domestic and global market share for eastern Washington farm products continue to increase~~expand~~ (Washington State ESD June 2025). At the local level, the commercial retail sector within the Tri-Cities has reached a scale of regional significance with new retail stores being constructed regularly and serving an area within an approximate 100-mile circumference of the Tri-Cities. A few renewable energy projects have been developed in recent years, and several others have been proposed. Additional energy projects may be proposed in the future. Hanford Cleanup budgets continue to play a major role in supporting local economic and population growth, and this is expected to continue into the future.

The land use trend ~~on~~ at the Hanford Site can be broadly described as ~~the~~ gradual reintegration of major portions of Hanford's resources (land, water, and infrastructure) into the economy, custom and culture, and regulatory authority of local jurisdictions ~~within which the Hanford Site lies~~. Today, the Hanford Site is being cleaned up for future uses that~~,~~ in addition to federal missions~~,~~ will likely include non-defense related private and public sector uses.

~~Recently~~In 2016, 1,641 acres of Hanford land was transferred from the U.S. Department of Energy to the City of Richland, the Port of Benton, and Energy Northwest for industrial uses. A solar renewable energy project ~~has~~is located on this land and additional future development is expected. The Hanford Reach National Monument, created by President Clinton in 1999, has also generated additional visitors and tourists to the site and the surrounding communities for~~from~~ water-related and upland recreation activities.

3.2.3 Future Considerations

Accommodating land use needs ~~of~~ for both agricultural and non-agricultural uses, while maintaining the potential of all economic sectors, is important for Benton County. Key considerations for land use in the County are to preserve and protect agricultural and resource lands, allow rural lifestyle in rural lands, support ag-industrial and other industrial and associated commercial development in County opportunity areas, and allow growth where services are available, primarily in the urban areas. With the County situated at the confluence of three rivers and its mountainous and ridged geological characteristics, protection of the County's environmental resources is also an important aspect for future planning.

As the agriculture economy continues to grow in Benton County, properly locating sites and providing basic services for agriculture related industries, facilitating the growth of "agri-tourism" and "value-added" processing sectors ~~will~~ continue to be important. In addition to preserving rural lands, the County also needs to provide space for industrial and agri-industrial development that supports the local economy. While much of this activity is located in designated industrial areas such as Prosser, Plymouth, and Finley, many agriculture-related industries are found within the GMA Agriculture District. These uses are often tied to farming and food production but can be large in scale and function much like industrial development. Allowing flexibility in zoning to support these facilities near farms, while making sure they are compatible with surrounding uses, is an important planning goal.

A review of industrial-scale activity in the County shows that the need for industrial land depends on factors such as access to infrastructure, nearby land uses, and development trends. Some areas, like Finley and Prosser, have an adequate supply of industrial land, while other areas have more specific needs. For example, Plymouth has demand for additional industrial land to expand the existing industrial park and support agriculture and transportation. In other cases, such as Port- or federally owned lands in Plymouth or parcels north of Prosser, industrial zoning is less suitable due to nearby land uses, environmental conditions, or landowner preferences. ~~Making adjustments to~~Adjusting the supply of industrial land will help balance the County's land base, ensuring there is enough land available to support agricultural processing and distribution, and associated industrial development, while also protecting rural character and environmental resources.

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3.3 Land Use Categories

As noted above, land use in Benton County is organized into designation categories: urban, rural, agriculture, industrial, public, and open space lands. Some of these designations also have sub-categories. Table 3-3 indicates the proposed land uses and distribution of lands within Benton County (see Appendix A: Map Folio, Figure 5 – Future/Proposed Land Use Designations Map).

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Table 3-3
Proposed Land Uses and Land Distribution in Benton County

Land Use Type	Acres	Square Miles	Percent
Cities and Urban Growth Areas	72,245059	111113	6.586
Hanford Site	265,57617	415	24.189
Hanford Reach	12,443268	19	1.132
Unincorporated Area			
Growth Management Act Agriculture	649,153062	1,014	59.12
Open Space Conservation	2,169	3	0.20
Public	15,56374	24	1.42
Rural Transition	3,601507	65	0.332
Rural Remote	66,402770	104	6.085
Rural Resource	7,214136	11	0.656
Rural Community Center	448450	1	0.04
Rural Commercial	46823	1	0.04
Rural Industrial	2,870786	4	0.26
Total Unincorporated Area	747,7498,016	1,1698	
Total County Area	1,0987,860013	1,7156	100

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Benton County implements its various land uses through zoning designations as shown in Table 3-4 below.

Table 3-4
Land Use Implementation by Zoning

Land Use	Zoning
Urban	Urban Growth Area Residential
Hanford	Unclassified
Hanford Reach	Unclassified
Growth Management Act Agriculture	Growth Management Act Agriculture, Red Mountain Agriculture
Open Space Conservation	Open Space Conservation
Public	Park District
Rural Transition	Rural Lands 1
Rural Remote	Rural Lands 5
Rural Resource	Rural Lands 20
Rural Community Center	Community Center Residential, Community Commercial
Rural Commercial	Interchange Commercial, General Commercial
Rural Industrial	Light Industrial, Heavy Industrial

Designations under each category are further discussed below.

3.3.1 Urban Lands

Urban lands are lands located within, adjacent to, or as in the case of existing unincorporated islands, surrounded by existing city limits.

A key component of the GMA and the Comprehensive Plan is to allow growth within the UGAs. These areas include cities and other areas characterized by urban growth or adjacent to such ~~areas, and~~areas and are designed to accommodate the projected population growth for 20 years. The GMA further specifies that urban growth should first be located in areas that already have adequate existing public facilities and service capacity and second, be located in areas where such services if not already available, can be served adequately by a combination of both existing and future public and private sector facilities and services.

The CWPP establishes a process between the County and cities to manage development within the cities and their UGAs, and a process of annexation of UGAs into the cities.

3.3.1.1 Urban Land Use Designation

Urban lands in Benton County include land within the city limits and the UGAs. There are five designated and approved urban growth areas (UGA's) in Benton County: Benton City (Appendix A-Figure 18), Kennewick (Appendix A-Figure 19), Prosser (Appendix A-Figure 20), Richland (Appendix A-Figure 21), and West Richland (Appendix A-Figure 22). The densities, uses, and development provisions allowed within this land use assure that development patterns are consistent with city comprehensive plans.

~~This page updated April 12, 2022 & May 14, 2024~~

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3.3.2 Rural Lands and Element

The GMA requires counties to include a rural element in their comprehensive plans to permit appropriate land uses that are compatible with the rural character of such lands and provide for a variety of rural densities. This element has been incorporated as a part of the land use element of the County's plan.

Rural lands are those areas outside of UGAs, excluding agricultural, public, open space, and other specifically designated lands in this Comprehensive Plan. Land uses in rural areas include a variety of densities for rural, commercial, and industrial use consistent with the rural character. Rural areas are traditionally used for small-acreage farms, orchards, agricultural crops, livestock, mineral extraction and processing, and low-density residential development. The low intensity use of rural land also

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provides fish and wildlife habitat, open space, and other environmental benefits. Recreational uses which preserve open space and protect the natural environment are encouraged in rural lands. The County's goals and policies, through the rural element in this Comprehensive Plan and associated development regulations, aim to identify and guide land use designation of rural lands in a manner t

hat preserves rural character.

Rural lands in Benton County, along the Yakima River near Yakitat Road

3.3.2.1 Rural Character

The rural areas of Benton County are places where open space, the natural environment, and vegetation dominate over the built environment. The rural area is a place where one can find wildlife habitats and a historic heritage characterized by low-intensity land uses that include large and small farms, ~~or~~ scattered homesteads and smaller, higher density communities, residences along the rivers and hills with views and extensive areas of open space. Rural areas vary in Benton County and differ based on physical characteristics and community preferences based on their customs, culture, outlook, and living environments.

Rural character embodies a quality of life based upon traditional rural landscapes, activities, lifestyles, and aesthetic values. This includes more open landscapes where the setting is quiet, peaceful, and natural. The residents may enjoy a slower paced lifestyle, closeness with nature, and access to recreational opportunities, acknowledging that larger acreage areas may also require more time for maintenance and management of ~~the~~ land, animals, and other responsibilities often associated with a more rural lifestyle. Rural areas are typically separated from urban areas.

3.3.2.2 Rural Communities

Rural communities, such as Paterson, Plymouth, Whitstran, and Finley are designated as Rural Community Centers to reflect a localized pattern of residences on less than 5-acre lots and a variety of small-scale local commercial service areas such as: grocery stores, service stations, eateries, taverns, post offices, and auto repair, that serve the surrounding rural population. The Comprehensive Plan Rural Community Center designation reflects this pattern and equals 1 to 3 dwelling units per acre (Du/acre). Rural Community Centers are "limited areas of more intensive rural development" (LAMIRDs) authorized by RCW36.70A.070 (5)(d). The County's RL-1 "Rural Lands One Acre District" lands are not LAMIRDs but may developed at an intensity similar to a LAMIRD based on historical development patterns and plats approved prior to the GMA. The size of the Rural Community Centers in Paterson, Plymouth, and Finley are 36, 89, and 189 acres, respectively. Whitstran Rural Community Center contains 67 acres. Paterson and Whitstran are almost completely built out per the current densities but could accommodate some ADUs while Finley and Plymouth have more undeveloped and underdeveloped parcels that could accommodate additional residential growth.

Other areas that are considered the equivalent of limited areas of more intense rural development are pre-existing urban/suburban areas designated rural lands one acre (RL-1). These RL-1 areas are located throughout the County and are characterized by locations adjacent to major travel corridors (e.g., state routes); smaller parcel sizes relative to the GMA "rural" designation; cultures associated with "neighborhoods" or landowner associations; and densities that allow for infill that would not negatively impact adjacent rural or agriculturally designated lands.

3.3.2.3 Rural Land Use Designations

Rural land~~s~~ designations are based upon a required "minimum" lot size. A larger than minimum lot size may be required, when necessary, to satisfy Washington State Department of Health requirements for water and domestic waste disposal and code requirements (e.g., setbacks, easements).

Rural Transition is designated to areas that are in close proximity to UGAs and have experienced steady growth in the last decade. The intent of the Rural Transition designation is to enable rural residential living in conjunction with providing a transition area between the rural and urban

environments. These Rural Transition areas may be~~, and~~ potentially suitable for future inclusion into UGAs. Maximum allowable density in this land use category is 1 DU/acre.

There are currently six areas in the County designated as Rural Transition. One is surrounded by Richland urban areas on all sides near the Columbia Park Trail. All other Rural Transition areas abut Kennewick, Richland, and Prosser UGAs on at least one side or adjoin a higher intensity land use between a UGA and the Rural Transition land use. A significant portion of the future population growth within the County is anticipated to occur in these areas.

Rural Remote is the predominant rural land use in the County. This land is located mostly between the agricultural lands (GMA Agriculture), Rural Transition, and the UGAs. Rural Remote land use is intended to enhance and preserve the County's rural character, which includes rural open space, low densities, wildlife habitat, public open space for outdoor recreational activities, and rural home sites on which a limited range of agricultural activities may be conducted. Allowable density in Rural Remote land use is 1DU~~u~~/5acres.

Rural Resource is designated in areas where existing topography or geological conditions can be protected and where a very low density of residential or other uses may be allowed. It is designed to enhance and preserve Benton County's rural character, which includes rural open space, low densities, wildlife habitat, public open space for outdoor recreational activities; ridges, slopes, and bluffs; and rural home sites on which a range of agricultural activities may be conducted. Allowable density in Rural Resource 1DU/20acres.

Rural Community Center – see discussion ~~above~~ in Section 3.3.2.2.

Master Planned Resorts per RCW 36.70A.360, MPRs are developments with urban characteristics that may be located outside of UGAs. A MPR is a fully integrated, self-contained planned unit development in a setting of significant natural amenities, with its primary focus on destination resort facilities consisting of ~~short term~~short-term visitor accommodations and a range of developed on-site indoor and/or outdoor recreational facilities. Capital facilities, utilities, and services, including those related to sewer, water, security, fire suppression, and emergency medicine provided on-site shall be limited to meet the needs of the MPR.

The primary purpose of MPRs is to provide for carefully planned, self-contained, and integrated destination resort facilities and amenities that are centered upon unique and commanding natural resource settings. MPRs may be amended to the Comprehensive Plan as Sub Area Plans.

Small-scale Recreation or Tourist (SSRT) Use per RCW 36.70A.070 (5) (d) (ii) can be an intensification of recreation or tourist uses on existing lots, or new development of SSRT uses, including commercial facilities to serve those recreational or tourist activities that rely on a rural

location and setting, but that do not include new residential development and are not intended to principally serve the existing or projected rural population.

Commented [BF63]: Update this section based on findings/recommendations from Agri-Tourism stakeholder process

Significant differences between the MPR and the SSRT uses are: scale, the MPR is perceived as a destination resort of potentially very large size whereas the SSRT is relatively small and concentrated; residents, the MPR can have them as a secondary use, but the SSRT cannot; municipal services, although MPRs can be outside of a UGA, at the developer's expense, a MPR can connect to city services, whereas the SSRT cannot.

Rural Commercial encompasses all commercial lands in Benton County. This includes general commercial uses and commercial areas primarily along Interstate 82 and within the Rural Community Centers discussed in 3.3.2.2. The purpose of this land use is to provide retail goods and services to regional trade areas, serve highway travelers, and provide convenience services to residents. Uses include motels, truck stops, service stations, convenience stores, restaurants, and fast food.

Rural Industrial includes both heavy and light industrial uses in the County. The primary purpose of ~~this land use~~Rural Industrial use is to provide land for industrial and supporting uses that will not present unmanageable conflicts with other land uses, that have access to necessary utilities and public facilities, and that have less environmental constraints. Some of the heavy industrial uses function at the fundamental economic level: rail transport and facilities operations, chemical products manufacturing and shipment for agriculture, sand and gravel operations for construction, raw products processing, and waste products recycling. The County has reviewed industrial lands in the entire County as part of the 2026 update and identified additional industrial land designation opportunity areas, primarily in the Plymouth area along State Highway 14. Some existing industrial-designated lands could change to other designations.

Wind turbines and dryland wheat

3.3.2.4 Agricultural Lands

Agricultural land is defined as land primarily devoted to the commercial production of horticultural, viticultural, floricultural, dairy, apiary, vegetable, or animal products or of berries, grain, hay, straw, turf, seed, Christmas trees, finfish in upland hatcheries, or livestock, and that has long-term commercial significance for agricultural production (RCW 36.70A.030(2)). Long-term commercial significance includes the growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition of the land for long-term commercial production, in consideration with the land's proximity to population areas, and the possibility of more intense uses of the land. GMA requires each county to designate appropriate 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 (RCW 36.70A.170(1)(a)). Table 3-5 summarizes agricultural lands in the County by dryland, irrigated and rangeland.

Table 3-5
Agricultural Lands by Land Type

GMA Agriculture Land Type	Acres
Dry land	286,440~~304,839~~
Irrigated	218,306~~296,432~~
Rangeland	~~11~~292,~~190~~289

Source: WSDA 2024, AC Geo 2025 ~~BERK Consulting 2016~~

Dryland agricultural activities primarily consist of dryland wheat production, principally in the Horse Heaven and Rattlesnake Hills. Dryland production has an economy of scale requiring large operations, typically in the thousands of acres.

Crops grown in Benton County includes "specialty" berries and orchard crops, mint, hops, and juice and wine grapes. Corporate acreages of asparagus, potatoes, wine grapes, and corn are grown in large operations under "circle" irrigation systems found throughout the County, but most notably on the south slope of the Horse Heaven Hills above the Columbia River. Significant acreages of hillside orchards are found in the Red Mountain/Badger Canyon and Kennewick/Finley areas.

Benton County designates agricultural land as GMA Agriculture based on primary factors below~~, as well as other factors discussed in Appendix L~~:

- Urban Growth. The land is not already characterized by urban growth.
- Production Capability. The land is used or capable of being used for agricultural production.

- Long-Term Commercial Significance. This is determined by classification of prime and unique farmland soils, availability of public facilities including roads used in transporting agricultural products, tax status, public service availability, proximity to UGAs, predominant parcel size, land use settlement patterns, intensity of nearby land uses, history of nearby land development permits, land values under alternative uses, and proximity to markets.

Irrigated agriculture in Benton County

3.3.2.5 Agricultural Land Use Designation

GMA Agriculture (GMA AG) includes agricultural land (such as dryland and irrigated land) identified by the County based on the criteria established by the GMA. A GMA Agricultural District zone conserves agricultural lands by establishing a 20-acre minimum parcel size and (with exceptions e.g., resort destinations, wineries) limits the range of other land uses to those which are dependent upon, supportive of, ancillary to, or compatible with, agricultural production as the principal land use. This land constitutes about 59 percent of the total land in Benton County as shown in Table 3-3.

The county-wide review and designation of these lands was updated in ~~this~~ the 2018 Comprehensive Plan and updated via a supplemental analysis as part of the 2026 update, ~~,~~ as described below ~~and in more detail in Appendix L~~. ~~A supplemental analysis was conducted county-wide of agricultural lands as part of the 2026 update, and some minor adjustments have been identified for consideration.~~

Commented [BF64]: Update by late fall 2025 with findings from ag lands review

As part of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan update, Benton County completed an updated county-wide review of agricultural resource land designations. This review was supplemented further with an additional review and addendum during the 2026 update. WAC 365-190-050(3) states that "lands

should be considered for designation as agricultural resource lands based on three factors:" 1) specifically is not characterized by urban growth; 2) is used or is capable of being used for agricultural production; and 3) has long-term commercial significance for agriculture.

Per the first factor, the urban and UGAs mapped in the County were excluded from the agricultural resource lands analysis as by their definitions, as these are areas characterized by urban growth.

For the second factor, agricultural production capability was evaluated using the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) land-capability classification system. Eight soil classes were grouped into "suitable," "suitable with management," and "non-suitable" categories. Both "suitable" and "suitable with management" lands were considered capable of sustaining agricultural use. Non-suitable areas were generally excluded unless they formed part of a larger, contiguous agricultural operation—such as draws or canyons interspersed among productive fields.

For the third factor, long-term commercial significance was assessed using criteria consistent with WAC 365-190-050(3)(c) and refined to reflect local conditions. Considerations included:

Per factor two, aAgricultural land production capability (factor two) was evaluated based on physical and geographic characteristics of resource lands in Benton County, using the land-capability classification system of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service as defined in relevant Field Office Technical Guides consistent with WAC 365-190-050(3)(b)(ii).

The Natural Resources Conservation Service land-capability classification was applied to Benton County lands, splitting eight soil type classes into suitable, suitable with management, and non-suitable land for cultivation. Strictly applied, both the suitable and suitable with management lands have the potential for remaining as GMA Agriculture lands, while non-suitable areas would not. However, many non-suitable areas are often adjacent to or surrounded by suitable or suitable with management lands often in existing agricultural production. Adjusting the designation of some these non-suitable areas from GMA Agriculture – primarily draws and canyons – was determined not to be necessary at this time, but a change of designation could be possible in the future, as other considerations come into play. Additionally, many of the areas near the fringe of the current areas designated as agricultural land and nearer to population centers that may be classified as suitable or suitable with management may also have the possibility of more intense land uses in the long-term. In some instances, these are also the more marginal lands, particularly when considering dryland production areas in concert with factor 3 considerations, i.e., lands of long-term commercial significance.

Finally, applying factor three, lLong-term commercial significance for agriculture was evaluated by applying several different considerations determined to be most applicable to Benton County

~~resource lands, and generally consistent with guidance provided in (WAC 365-190-050(3)(c), but also supplemented by information important to local conditions such as precipitation patterns. These considerations included:~~

- Water availability/precipitation
- Parcel size
- Nearby UGAs, settlement patterns, land use, land values, and development permits
- Land in the Conservation Reserve Program or conservation land
- Prime farmlands
- Pesticide restrictions
- Public facilities and proximity to markets
- Tax status

Each of these considerations was reviewed on a county-wide, comprehensive basis of both existing GMA Agriculture and other lands to determine their relevance or contribution to long-term commercial significance of agriculture. Through this evaluation, multiple areas in the County were considered for reclassification.

In general, it was deemed important to maintain continuity in agricultural resource land designation; unless there are sufficient reasons that ~~the agricultu~~the ~~ral~~agricultural resource land should be de-designated, land should remain as agricultural resource land to protect the resource. ~~Additionally, there are many areas that had potential to be removed from designation through some analysis considerations but not others. For example, there are several areas north of Prosser that have small parcel sizes but are currently designated as agricultural resource land. However, these areas are irrigated lands with suitable soils, so it would not be appropriate to remove them from the agricultural resource land designation.~~

The areas that were removed from agricultural resource land designation are areas south of Richland, Kennewick, and West Richland. These areas are near population centers, adjacent to growing areas, proximate to utilities and roads, have low precipitation without irrigation, are outside of AVAs, and follow the recent settlement pattern of the County. Some of these areas also have more restrictive pesticide regulations, making it more expensive to treat agricultural lands. Together these considerations threaten or have already reduced the viability for the long-term commercial significance of the land as agricultural land, which fits the considerations noted in *Lewis County v Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board* (2006).

Lands

~~Areas that should be~~ added to agricultural resource land designation included ~~are~~ areas south of Finley, west of Benton City, and near Prosser. These areas are currently farmed, are irrigated and

often have permanent crops in place, are large parcels, exist outside of UGAs, and are near existing land that is already designated as agricultural resource land and other rural uses.

The 2018 update resulted in 6,051 acres added and 4,565 acres removed from the GMA Agriculture designation. Additionally, 7,130 acres of higher-density Rural Residential lands were re-designated to Rural Resource to preserve these lands for potential agricultural uses such as rangelands, vineyards, and orchards.

As part of the 2026 Periodic Update, Benton County completed an addendum to the 2018 analysis to evaluate further needs for addition or removal of parcels from the GMA Agriculture designation. The addendum applied the same WAC 365-190-050 criteria through a set of sequential screening steps using current parcel data, aerial imagery, and input from County staff and landowners. The screening criteria included proximity to other zones, soil capability class, farmland classification, overlap with critical areas, and surrounding urban growth and development pressure.

The review identified 16 parcels totaling 1,248 acres where re-designation was warranted due to reduced agricultural suitability and land use incompatibility from adjacency to existing industrial or rural residential development. Approximately 973 acres were recommended for re-designation to Rural Industrial, and 250 acres to Rural Remote. No further additions to the GMA Agricultural zone were identified, indicating that the 2018 analysis adequately captured all parcels suitable for long-term agricultural use. The proposed designation changes from GMA Agriculture to Rural Industrial are further supported by a countywide review of industrial lands completed as part of the 2026 Update. This review showed localized needs for additional industrial lands near Plymouth for value added processing, storage, and transport of agricultural products, all of which support agricultural viability in the surrounding region. The proposed changes from GMA Agriculture to Rural Remote remove parcels with limited agricultural suitability that are partially surrounded by more intensive growth, improving the consistency of land use boundaries and reflecting current growth patterns. Overall, these limited adjustments preserve the County's base of productive agricultural lands while improving alignment with recent development patterns and supporting localized industrial land needs.

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Agricultural lands above Lake Wallula (Columbia River)

~~Additionally, approximately 7,130 acres are proposed to be changed from higher density rural residential designations to a lower density Rural Resource designation. This change in designation will preserve these lands for rangeland uses and agricultural production opportunity areas, such as vineyards and orchards. This can be considered an innovative zoning technique that fits RCW 36.70A.177(1) as being designed to conserve agricultural lands and encourage the agricultural economy.~~

~~In addition to the re-designation of lands described above, the comprehensive agricultural lands analysis resulted in 6,051 acres to be added to the GMA Agriculture designation and 4,565 acres removed from the agricultural land designation.~~

Commented [BF66]: Also, update as applicable

3.3.3 Industrial Lands

Outside of the Hanford Site, there are currently 3,3~~12~~87 acres of industrially designated land within unincorporated Benton County. Though a broad range of industrial uses is appropriate for these lands, the principle current use is for agriculturally related industries such as chemicals processing and shipping, cold storage, and fruit and vegetable processing and shipping.

Industrial development in ~~Benton County~~Whitstran

The Hanford Site has land suitable for industrial development, and the Hanford Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) includes areas zoned "Industrial" and "Industrial Exclusive." ~~–~~ A percentage of this land will be developed to federally "programmed" industrial uses, including the Hanford industrial land recently transferred to the City of Richland, the Port of Benton, and Energy Northwest, as noted previously. The City of Richland and Port plan to market the property to industrial developers as "mega-sites" of 200 acres or larger (Oneza & Associates 2017). The proximity of this land to highways, rail, and utility services together with the large acreages available provide development opportunities for industries that exist in very few places throughout the Pacific Northwest. As a result, 901 acres of Hanford land ~~is in the process of being~~was added to the Richland UGA. This and other industrial lands within the cities augment the County's supply of industrial designated lands.

Current industrial lands in unincorporated Benton County are located in the vicinities of Paterson and Plymouth, east and north of the City of Prosser on County Route 12, within the Community Center of Whitstran, and in the south Finley area.

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Industrial development in Plymouth

Development of industrial land requires careful consideration of environmental constraints and associated mitigation strategies, availability of infrastructure and utility services and their capacity; access to rail, roads, and navigable water; proximity to the market, supplies, labor pool and other considerations.

An inventory of industrial lands in Benton County and surrounding communities was conducted as part of the 2026 Periodic Update, as described below and in more detail in Appendix M. The inventory highlighted a significant supply of industrial-zoned lands across the region, with Richland, Pasco, and unincorporated Benton County hosting the largest concentrations. The assessment further refined industrial land supply estimates by segmenting industrial lands into categories based on their development status. Various future population and industrial sector growth projections were also reviewed, presenting a range of demand scenarios for industrial land. Supplementary data, including building permits, stormwater permits, and aerial imagery, was also incorporated to assess industrial development trends across the entire landscape. This highlighted the spatial patterns of industrial development on both agricultural and industrial-zoned lands. Industrial-scale storage and value-added processing of agricultural products —such as potato and onion sheds and fruit packing facilities— are often closely integrated with farming operations and occur in more dispersed, decentralized patterns.

Larger-scale industrial activities, including manufacturing plants, distribution centers, and warehouses, are more concentrated in industrial-zoned areas with utility infrastructure and transportation connections. These larger hubs play a critical role in supporting surrounding

agricultural activity by facilitating the storage, processing, and distribution of agricultural products to wider markets.

The criteria used to identify areas for potential industrial land use designations included local industrial buildout activity, proximity to transportation infrastructure, availability of utilities, and the presence of development constraints such as critical areas. Development trends in nearby areas outside the County, such as Pasco, Burbank, Umatilla and Morrow counties in Oregon, were also considered. The review also included collaborative discussions with Benton County planning staff, employees of Tri-County Development Council (TRIDEC), Benton Public Utility District (PUD), Benton Rural Electric Association (REA), and industrial property owners.

Additional industrial land use designations are proposed near Plymouth and Paterson based on the findings of the memo. Plymouth and Paterson have higher growth potential due to their proximity to agricultural production, access to highways, rail, and waterborne transportation networks, and available utility infrastructure. These areas support the viability of surrounding agricultural operations by providing storage, processing, and transportation of agricultural products. Supporting industries such as metals fabrication and logistics/storage facilities may also be potential fits for this area.

The future demand for industrial land is further shaped by the emergence of new industries, including renewable energy, data centers, and large-scale warehousing. These industries typically require large parcels with direct access to energy transmission infrastructure, and growth in these sectors may drive changes in the industrial land supply, creating additional demand for lands dedicated to these uses in the county's long-term planning.

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Port Districts are major players in the industrial land base of Benton County. The industrially zoned acreage is predominantly owned by the Benton and Kennewick port districts, which are taxing districts under Washington State Law. Port districts are authorized to purchase lands for marketing, development, lease, and eventual sale to commercial interests with the objective of improving the local economy. Port district holdings include lands in the rural areas of Paterson, Plymouth, and Finley, and in or adjacent to the cities of Richland, Kennewick, Prosser, and Benton City.

Typical port enterprises include the construction of industrial and office space for start-up businesses; the lease of land or buildings to commercial enterprises, which may in turn purchase the real property from the Port; and facilitating the assemblage of major industrial/commercial projects requiring collaboration by numerous interests such as utilities, local and regional governments, and private enterprise.

Descriptions of the County's industrial land resources can be found in Chapter 5 (Economic Element).

~~3.3.3.1 Industrial Land Use Designation~~

Rural Industrial is intended for a wide range of industrial land uses including light and heavy industrial uses. These lands require access and infrastructure for heavy industrial uses; rail and waterborne transportation access are critical. Other important criteria include separation of such land from residential and commercial uses and availability of large acreages for outside storage and maneuvering of trucks and rail equipment. Industrial lands play a key role in the local and regional economy by offering manufacturing and various other types of jobs.

3.3.4 Public Lands Designation

The Public Lands (PL) designation is found throughout the County, but is ~~most~~ generally concentrated along the Columbia River corridor. Designated PL ~~designated lands~~ are intended for public uses such as parks, playgrounds, greenways, open spaces, and wildlife habitats owned and operated by a local, state, or federal government. ~~Although~~There are approximately 15,563 acres of land ~~are~~ currently designated PL in the Land Use Map~~.~~. Though not specifically designated as PL, there are about 93,299 acres of additional land in Benton County currently owned by public entities, including the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Natural Resources, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Publicly owned properties—particularly those managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Department of Natural Resources, or Benton County—often contain open space characteristics such as native shrubsteppe habitat, steep slopes, wetlands, or riparian corridors. In these cases, the Public Lands designation may serve as an appropriate mechanism to ensure long-term preservation of open space functions while accommodating compatible public uses such as recreation, education, and habitat management.

Designation of suitable public parcels as Public Lands rather than Open Space Conservation may simplify administration and reflect existing ownership and management intent, while still fulfilling the County's open space protection objectives under RCW 36.70A.160. In other cases, Open Space Conservation designations may be appropriate for privately owned lands or mixed-ownership areas where conservation easements, ~~restoration programs, or voluntary stewardship actions~~ are ~~used~~required to protect open space functions without public acquisition.

Commented [GW68]: Open Space Conservation Zoning requires a conservation easement

Commented [BF69R68]: Updated

3.3.5 Open Space Conservation

Open Space Conservation lands are ~~recognized as~~ areas that have been recognized as having critical resources and ecosystems with unique characteristics that support significant habitats for migratory birds, fish, and wildlife; natural riverine functions and aquatic environments; botanical inventory; water quality and flood retention. Open Space Conservation designated areas provide significant natural functions and benefits to natural resources and the public and should be protected from destruction, conversion, and encroachment by incompatible uses. These areas may also provide

limited recreational and educational opportunities for the public. Open Space Conservation lands can be public or private property, and must be held under conservation easements with local, state, or federal agencies or land trusts. Open Space Conservation designations are voluntary in nature for property owners.

Under RCW 36.70A.160, Benton County is required to identify open space corridors within and between urban growth areas, including lands useful for recreation, wildlife habitat, trails, and the connection of critical areas. The 2026 periodic update included an expanded focus on open space corridors within and between urban growth areas. These corridors serve multiple purposes, including recreation and trails, wildlife habitat, and the connection of critical areas. ~~Open space strategies are integrated with shrubsteppe protection efforts, and incorporate shrubsteppe habitat quality modeling to identify high priority properties for protection and restoration~~. A GIS analysis was conducted to identify open space corridors within and between UGAs. The analysis incorporated data and guidance from parallel open space and habitat preservation efforts, including the Benton County Parks Plan, the Arid Lands Initiative (ALI), Priority Habitats and Species (PHS), the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI), and the Washington Habitat Connectivity Action Plan (WAHCAP). The following datasets were used to identify open space corridors:

- **Habitat quality and connectivity:**
  - PHS habitats
  - Habitat cores and coriddors (PHS, WSRRI, WAHCAP, and ALI datasets)
  - Shrubsteppe biodiversity potential modeling.
- **Critical Areas and Shorelines**
  - Wetlands
  - Streams
  - Floodplains
  - Shoreline environments
- **Infrastructure and access to multimodal transportation corridors**
  - County road and highway rights of way
  - Railroad rights of way
  - Canals
  - Trails

The analysis identified a network of primary open space corridors within and between UGAs and forming a broad network of interconnected open lands. Identified corridors include the Horse Heaven and Rattlesnake uplifts, the Yakima River valley, major ridgelines near Red, Badger, and Candy Mountains, Amon Creek and Elliott Lake within the Richland and Kennewick UGAs, and shrubsteppe areas extending south from Kennewick along SR 397. These corridors provide the primary linkages between large habitat cores, critical areas, and recreation destinations throughout

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the County. Many overlap existing public lands and shoreline areas, supporting combined functions of habitat connectivity, flood storage, groundwater recharge, and non-motorized access. These identified areas overlap significantly with existing protected lands, including BLM and DNR holdings, county parks, and other publicly owned open spaces.

Open space areas and corridors may occur on private or public lands, but the means of protection differ. Publicly owned lands managed by local, state, or federal agencies often already provide open space and habitat functions consistent with the intent of the Open Space Conservation designation. In such cases, the Public Lands (PL) designation may be equally appropriate to recognize and preserve open space values while reflecting the property's ownership and management intent. Application of the Public Lands designation to publicly owned parcels with significant habitat or recreation value—such as DNR, BLM, or County-managed properties— also supports long-term open space preservation. Together, the Open Space Conservation and Public Lands designations establish a complementary framework for protecting Benton County's network of natural and recreational lands.

Through the open space inventory and analysis, several parcels were identified for permanent protection to advance the County's long-term conservation goals. Three publicly owned parcels totaling approximately 457 acres were recommended for redesignation from Rural Remote to Open Space Conservation or Public Lands. These properties, managed by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), contain shrubsteppe habitat, scenic ridgelines, and other ecological features that align with the County's open space objectives.

Through the 2026 Update, the County plans to implement~~ed~~ an Open Space Taxation Program and Public Benefit Rating System (PBRS) and a Shrubsteppe Mitigation Program to further support countywide preservation of Open Space lands. These are provided in Appendix XX and YYY.

The Open Space Taxation Program ~~is~~will be based on statewide authorization under RCW 84.34 to encourage the preservation of open space lands by allowing qualifying properties to be taxed based on their current use rather than full market value. The Benton County program includes a Public Benefit Rating System (PBRS) that assigns point values to open space resources such as shrubsteppe habitat, wetlands, floodplains, scenic ridgelines, and historic sites, and provides additional points for permanent protection through a conservation easement. Properties with higher scores receive greater tax reductions. High-priority resources—including WDFW biodiversity corridors and WSRRI shrubsteppe cores and linkages—may qualify for up to a 75 percent reduction in assessed value. This voluntary, incentive-based program enables private landowners to conserve important open space features while retaining ownership and compatible use of their land. Properties enrolled in the

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Commented [GW71R70]: Same with Shrub steppe mitigation program?

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program that include permanent conservation easements may also be suitable for future Open Space Conservation designation.

The Shrubsteppe Mitigation Program complements these efforts by establishing a County-supported mitigation bank and in-lieu-fee framework, administered in partnership with the Benton Conservation District. The Program provides a mechanism for developers or project proponents to offset unavoidable impacts to shrubsteppe habitat through restoration, enhancement, and long-term protection of priority sites. Mitigation credits are generated from the preservation of high-quality shrubsteppe and open space corridors identified using the County's shrubsteppe biodiversity potential model. Lands protected under this Program are permanently conserved through recorded easements and may also qualify for Open Space Conservation designation as part of the County's long-term open space network.

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3.3.6 Energy Overlay

Renewable energy development in Benton County has increased significantly in recent years, driven by increasing energy demands, federal tax credits, and the state's clean energy goals. Several large-scale energy projects have been reviewed through the state's Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) process. EFSEC coordinates the review and permitting of major energy facilities on behalf of the state, issuing a Site Certification Agreement that replaces local permits. These projects have primarily been located in the County's GMA Agricultural District. Additional energy development has also occurred within the Hanford Site and industrial areas near Richland, which provide large tracts of land already designated for energy and industrial use. Other emerging energy technologies such as anaerobic digestors, small modular nuclear reactors, and battery energy storage systems may also factor into Benton County's energy landscape in the future. As energy development continues to grow, careful planning is needed to balance energy goals with the protection of agricultural lands, habitat and other critical areas, and rural character.

As part of the 2026 update, the County completed a supplemental analysis to evaluate a potential energy overlay zone. The purpose of creating an energy overlay zone is to identify areas that are suitable for renewable energy development based on the ability to avoid or mitigate environmental and agricultural impacts. The overlay zone ~~can also establish~~would also include clear siting criteria to guide project review, ensuring that each proposal is thoroughly evaluated on a site-specific basis and appropriately addresses potential impacts.

The energy overlay analysis is focused on the County's GMA Agriculture District, which has seen the majority of large-scale renewable energy development proposals. The GMA Agriculture district includes lands that have long-term significance for the commercial production of food or other agricultural products. These lands form the bulk of Benton County's agricultural land base and drive its agricultural economy, which generates over $1 billion in annual agricultural product sales (USDA 2022).

A large portion of the agricultural lands considered in the energy overlay analysis also intersect with mapped priority habitats and species, including shrubsteppe and biodiversity corridors. These habitats often occur along the edges of cultivated fields or in less intensively farmed areas, presenting challenges for siting energy projects without impacting habitat or agriculture. The energy overlay analysis used a range of spatial data to identify areas with lower potential conflict for renewable energy development, focusing on the protection of agricultural lands, sensitive habitats, and other key land use constraints. The analysis inputs included:

- Agricultural lands mapped by the Washington State Department of Agriculture
- NRCS soil capability classes 1–4
- Soils designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Unique Importance, or Farmland of Statewide Importance

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- PHS Habitats
- Biodiversity areas and corridors
- Wetlands
- Geologically Hazardous Areas

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Using the input data, three scenarios were developed to reflect different criteria for agricultural land protection. All scenarios considered NRCS soil classes 1–4 and WSDA-mapped agricultural lands as indicators of protection priority. Scenario 1 took a conservative approach by including all agricultural lands and all prime, unique, and statewide important soils as protected. Scenario 2 removed irrigated Prime Farmland if it was not currently irrigated. Scenario 3 was the most flexible, excluding unirrigated lands with lower soil productivity from the "protected" category. These scenarios were used to identify areas with larger extents of "lower conflict" agricultural lands that do not overlap with protected habitats and other critical areas. The energy overlay was applied to areas that contained an above-average extent of "lower conflict" agricultural lands and a below-average extent of habitat and other mapped critical areas. Lastly, secondary factors such as proximity to major transmission lines were used to refine the boundaries of the energy overlay area.

Within the energy overlay, two zones are proposed to guide potential energy development. Zone 1 is more restrictive and includes lands with soils in NRCS land capability classes 1–4 and irrigated agricultural lands. In Zone 1, energy development is prohibited except under specific exceptions, such as on rooftops, parking lots, or other disturbed sites existing prior to the adoption of the overlay.

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Zone 2 consists of lands that do not meet the criteria of Zone 1, including unirrigated agricultural lands with soils in capability classes 5–8. In Zone 2, energy development may be conditionally permitted, subject to site-specific review, mitigation, and compliance with defined siting criteria. The exceptions and siting criteria can be refined based on renewable energy trends and changing technology to accommodate future energy growth while maintaining protection of agriculture and habitat.

The Energy Overlay integrates with Benton County's broader strategies for protecting critical areas, preserving open space, planning for industrial lands, and conserving Agricultural Resource Lands (ARL). The overlay was developed in coordination with the identification of Open Space Corridors described in the County's Open Space Corridors Memorandum, using a unified approach to inventory and protect sensitive habitats, key wildlife corridors, and other critical areas. Additionally, the Energy Overlay aligns with the County's Shrubsteppe Mitigation Program, which provides a consistent mechanism to protect and restore the highest value shrubsteppe habitats in the County while offering a predictable path forward for development, including energy projects, with unavoidable impacts. The overlay methodology for protection of agricultural lands aligns with the criteria applied in the 2018 and 2026 countywide reviews of Agricultural Lands of Long-Term

Commented [BF73]: Adam - let's add AC Geo 2025 memo references for all the memo's prepared and include in Section 12 as well as short references in the plan. Global update

Commercial Significance, ensuring that renewable energy development avoids high-value irrigated and prime farmlands while directing growth toward areas with lower agricultural and environmental constraints. In addition, the overlay complements the Industrial Lands Analysis Memorandum, which identifies key infrastructure nodes and existing industrial corridors that benefit from and can accommodate energy generation, transmission, and storage uses. Together, these coordinated strategies balance renewable energy siting with long-term goals for agricultural viability, habitat conservation, and efficient land use.

Commented [GW74]: Do we want to specially mention the 2026 Memo, as referenced or in the appendix?

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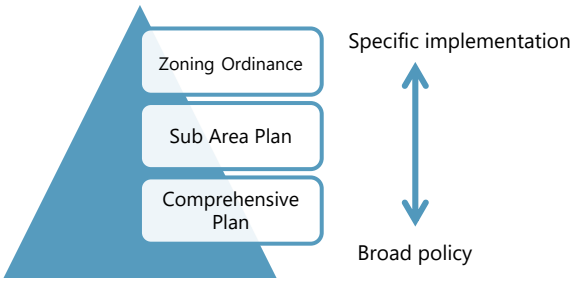
3.4 Sub Area Plans

The purpose of a sub area plan is to provide a framework for future decision-making for select and unique geographical areas within Benton County. These plans may regard areas with special features, such as shorelines that provide important functions and values or lands with exceptional soils and climate characteristics suitable for prime agricultural production, as valuable or unique for preservation, protection, or certain development. Sub area plans contain statements of guiding principles ~~to be followed~~, recommendations for strategies to achieve desired goals and objectives, and a plan of action to guide future land use development decisions in the area. Sub area plans are prepared with substantial public involvement.

3.4.1 Hierarchy of a Sub Area Plan Document

~~The~~ A sub area plan document fits between the broad policies of the Benton County Comprehensive Plan and the Benton County Zoning Ordinance with specific implementation tools as shown in Figure 3-1 below.

Figure 3-1
Sub Area Plan



The following sub area plans are listed by their adopted title as found in the corresponding Benton County Planning ~~Department~~ Division files and are adopted by reference and incorporated as if fully set forth within.

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3.4.2 Red Mountain American Viticultural Area Master Site Plan

The provisions of the Red Mountain AVA Master Site Plan (RM MSP; ~~Appendix G~~adopted by reference) represent many hours of effort by the Red Mountain Alliance and interested citizens who live and work or have a vested interest in the development of the area described by the RM MSP. Red Mountain's topography, soils, and solar aspect have made it suitable for viticulture, an important economic resource for the region.

The purpose of the RM MSP is to provide a "viticultural park" concept that reinforces the existing and future qualities of the Red Mountain AVA. The RM MSP and its provisions are advisory in nature and intended to guide future development of the Red Mountain site plan area.

3.4.2.1 How the Plan Is Organized

The RM MSP is divided into seven chapters that reflect the fundamental components of this Sub Area Plan. The chapters are as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Master Site Plan Elements
3. Visitor Projections
4. Design Guidelines
5. Steps toward Sustainability
6. Zoning
7. Next Steps

Each chapter refers to items and issues related to that category only. Endnotes and references are provided in Chapter 8, and an appendix follows.

The Red Mountain AVA Master Site Plan Map (RM MSP Map Figure ~~4-14~~2-1) shows the boundaries of the RM MSP, the Red Mountain AVA boundary, existing vineyards and wineries, potential vineyards and wineries, existing roads, and other proposed infrastructure. The boundary of the Red Mountain AVA and existing vineyards are shown in Figure 3.2 below.

Figure 3-2
Red Mountain AVA Map

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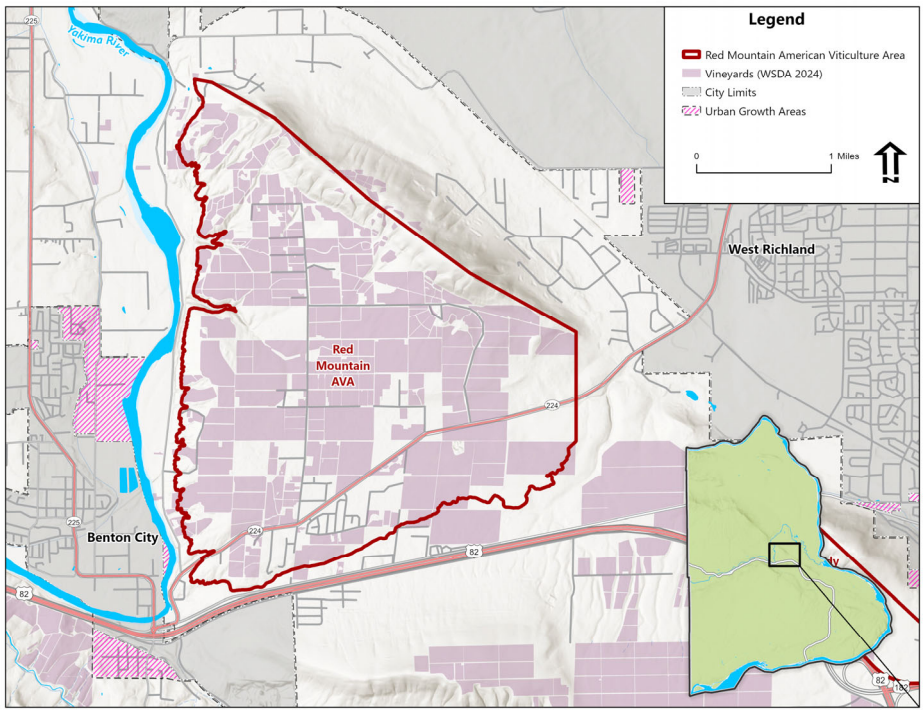


3.4.2.2 Land Use Designations

The land use designation in the current Comprehensive Plan shows the RM MSP area designated as GMA Agriculture, with the land bordering south of State Route 225 and land adjacent to the east side of Demoss Road designated for Rural Remote. Land characteristics include suitable soils, farmable topography, un-platted acreages of significant size, and existing or potential availability of water, suitable slope exposure, and the absence of existing land uses that are known to be incompatible with agricultural operations.

3.4.2.3 Proposed Uses

3.4.2.3.1 Red Mountain GMA Agricultural District

The area is planned to conserve and protect agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance as required by the GMA (RCW 36.70A) and more particularly to protect the unique agricultural character and attributes of these lands on Red Mountain. This area is within the federally designated Red Mountain Viticulture Wine Appellation. Vineyards and wineries are the predominant uses within this area. The Red Mtn zoning district was created and implemented in December of 2018)

3.4.2.3.2 The Wine Village

Red Mountain's "Wine Village" will provide an interpretive center with welcoming, educational, recreation, and support functions. The Wine Village is designed to both welcome and introduce visitors to Red Mountain and prepare them for what they will see, experience, and enjoy, as well as offering other tourist-related support services. Allowed uses within the Wine Village include a visitor interpretive center, small restaurants, bistros, casual food shops, art studios and galleries, wine retail, antique shops, demonstration vineyards, wineries, gardens, and small lodging facilities. Under current planning law, these uses will most likely occur via an MPR designation.

3.4.2.3.3 Tourist Serving Area

In the southeast corner of the Red Mountain AVA, outside the AVA boundary and within the Rural Lands Five designation, the RM MSP identifies an important future entry way into the Red Mountain AVA area. A coordinated site-specific planning effort in this area is needed to provide a development plan that allows for a limited range of short-term "visitor serving" activities, recreational, commercial, and wine related conveniences for tourists and visitors to the vineyards and wineries of the Red Mountain AVA.

3.5 Countywide Planning Policies

Benton County and the five cities within it have jointly adopted a set of CWPPs (Appendix ~~E~~X), which form the framework for the preparation, implementation, and amendment of ~~their~~ individual comprehensive plans. The CWPPs ~~in a manner that~~ provide~~s~~ for integration and consistency among the County and city plans in terms of services, designations, and other elements as applicable.

~~Included within T~~the CWPPs include ~~are~~ a uniform methodology to calculate the amounts of additional land needed by each city to accommodate the population growth projections provided by the OFM. Other CWPPs establish standards for selecting additional lands to be included within the UGAs and for joint county and city planning on lands within UGAs.

3.6 Expansion of Urban Growth Areas

There are two aspects are important for UGA expansion: 1) meeting the required need for future land in urban areas and 2) maintaining low density land outside the UGA to enable logical and cost-effective expansion.

~~Currently, the County is updating the UGA boundary in two areas as follows:~~

~~1. City of Richland UGA expansion. As discussed before, 1,641 acres of Hanford land was transferred from the U.S. Department of Energy to the City of Richland, the Port of Benton, and Energy Northwest. As a result, the City has applied for an UGA expansion to add 1,184 acres of~~

~~Hanford land to its UGA and remove 283 acres from the Richland UGA (for a net increase of 901 acres). This request has been incorporated into the County's Comprehensive Plan update.~~

~~2. City of Prosser UGA amendment. Based on the City of Prosser's OFM population projection and land needed to accommodate this population, a reduction of 483.96 acres of UGA land and an addition of 100.44 acres of industrial land (for a net reduction of 383.52 acres) has been applied for and is incorporated into this Comprehensive Plan update.~~

Within the Comprehensive Plan, four principal factors apply to future connections between cities and the County relative to the build-out of and expansion of UGAs. These include the availability of vacant lands in the municipalities; urban densities within the cities and UGAs; appropriate sizing of UGAs compared to future population growth; and consideration of site planning that preserves rural lands outside of UGAs for future expansion.

For the 2026 update, only one community, the City of Benton City, is considering a UGA change but the County has not yet received the proposed change. Guidance has been provided to Benton City on what is required as part of a UGA change proposal.

Commented [BF77]: Update later in year, if Benton City submits UGA proposal

Commented [GW78]: City of Richland is also going to be submitting an application. Will know by Dec 1 which cities have applied

3.6.1 *Total Vacant Land Within Benton County's Metropolitan Planning Area*

The cities of West Richland, Richland, and Kennewick are contiguous. Some ~~of the~~ cities already have annexed unincorporated lands that are adequate to meet future demand. For instance, the City of Richland ~~had~~ placed a significant amount of land within its UGA under the Urban Reserve land use category. West Richland also has extensive reserve lands within its city limits. Each City assesses their own land use demand based on vacant land and developable land to identify future needs before any UGA expansion is proposed.

The adoption of the County's Comprehensive Plan~~,~~ and the adoption of each of the cities' plans~~,~~ require that the expansion of urbanization, with its conversion of rural lands to urban uses, be an orderly, cost-efficient process, based on population projections and protection of rural neighborhoods and natural resource lands. The UGA process is intended to, and has, influenced a reduction of urban sprawl, increased annexation of unincorporated islands with the cities, and achieved greater cost effectiveness for development within UGAs.

3.6.2 *Urban Densities within Cities and Their Urban Growth Areas*

In response to market demands, the development of urban densities within UGAs is essential if the UGA is to function as a tool to achieve cost effective provision of urban services~~,~~ and to protect agricultural lands and the rural community outside of the UGAs. To achieve this, densities within the UGAs should be high enough and encourage infill of existing UGAs.

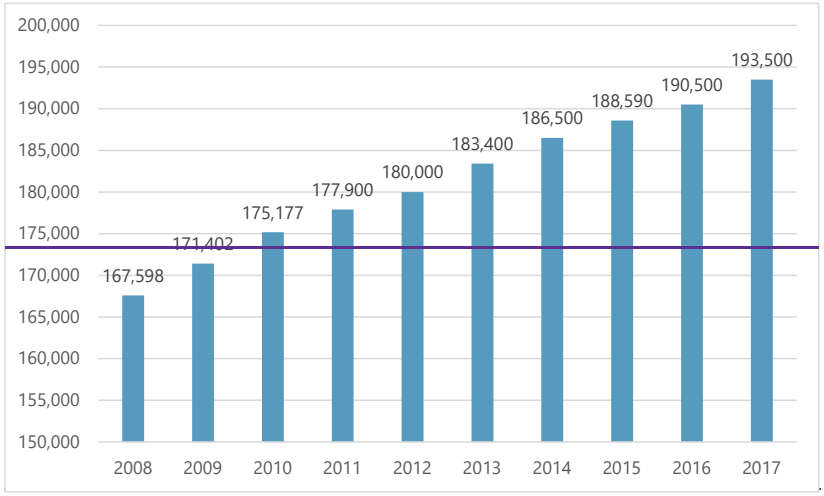
3.6.3 Objective Criteria for Determining When and How to Expand Urban Growth Areas

The CWPPs sets forth uniform criteria and methodology for calculating the amounts of land necessary in a UGA to accommodate projected population growth. The policies reflect methodologies identified in current planning literature (as well as recent GMA Regional Hearings Board decisions) for identifying the appropriate size of UGAs relative to population projections. Other CWPPs direct how locations of new UGAs are to be selected to avoid rural communities and agricultural lands. Additionally, the Washington State Department of Commerce also provides guidance on UGA change proposals.

3.7 Population Projections for Benton County

From 2014 to 2024, the p~~P~~opulation ~~growth~~ in Benton County ~~from 2011~~ 2014 ~~to 20~~2416 ~~at a rate~~from 186,500 to 217,850 for a total increase of 16.8 percent. The 20-year projection (through 2046) for the total and unincorporated part of the County and each of the cities is provided in Figure 3-2. ~~reflective of the slow growth in the nation's economy, the improved national economy of 2017 has provided a rebound in growth reminiscent of the growth in 2009. Figure 3-2 reflects the population trend in the last 10 years in Benton County.~~

Figure 3-~~3~~2
~~Ten Year~~ Population Growth through 2046 in Benton County



Jurisdiction	2020 Population	2046 Population	Population Growth (2020-2046)
Benton City	3,479	4,985	1,506
Kennewick	83,921	108,989	25,068
Prosser	6,062	8,292	2,230
Richland	60,560	82,448	21,888
West Richland	16,295	26,387	10,092
Unincorporated	36,556	47,355	10,799
Total	**206,873**	**278,456**	**71,583**

Source: BERK, 2025 based on Commerce HAPT.

The latest population projections from OFM (2022), using the "~~high~~middle" series estimates, indicate that Benton County can expect a population increase of ~~86,609~~71,583 ~~over the next 20 years~~by 2046. This will result in a ~~year 2037~~20-year population of 2~~78~~80,~~456~~109, which is an increase of ~~45~~ 34.6 percent over the ~~current~~ 2020 population of 206,873~~193,500~~. The County will review the future growth trends and adjust population projections if necessary.

Approximately 18 percent of the total County population, or 36,556~~35,085~~ people ~~(OFM 2017),~~ reside~~d~~ in the unincorporated area of Benton County. The 20-year OFM projection also indicates the unincorporated County population will grow to ~~53,220~~47,355 persons in ~~2037~~2046. This will add 10,799~~8,135~~ additional people in the next 20 years who are projected to seek housing in unincorporated areas of the County ~~between now and the year 2037~~2046. This growth represents ~~a 52~~ approximately a 30 percent increase over the current rural population. Growth projections effects on housing projections are provided in the Housing Element, Section 6. ~~Table 3-6 indicates the population estimates in Benton County and the unincorporated areas of the County.~~

~~Table 3-6~~
~~Population Estimates in Benton County~~

~~Year~~	~~Population in Unincorporated Benton County~~	~~Population in All Benton County~~
~~2017~~	~~35,085~~	~~193,500~~
~~2037 Projection~~	~~53,220~~	~~280,109~~

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20 Year increase	18,135	86,609

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management and U.S. Census Bureau

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3.8 New Housing Units Needed for Projected Rural Population Growth

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At an estimated 2.7 residents per household, the increased population in unincorporated Benton County would require approximately 6,716 new homes in the next 20 years. This growth will be accommodated mostly in the Urban lands of the UGAs, Rural Transition areas, and Rural Remote areas. Some growth will also take place in the Rural Community Centers and Rural Resource areas.

There are currently 78,952 acres designated for the rural residential uses within the four rural land use designations of Benton County (outside of Hanford and the agricultural areas).

A land capacity analysis on vacant and existing units in the Rural Transition land (1 du/acre) and Rural Remote land (1 du/5 acre) indicates adequate land supply to accommodate future housing demand. However, additional growth is also anticipated to occur in the Rural Community Centers and Urban areas. Table 3-7 indicates potential allocation of future population in these two land use categories:

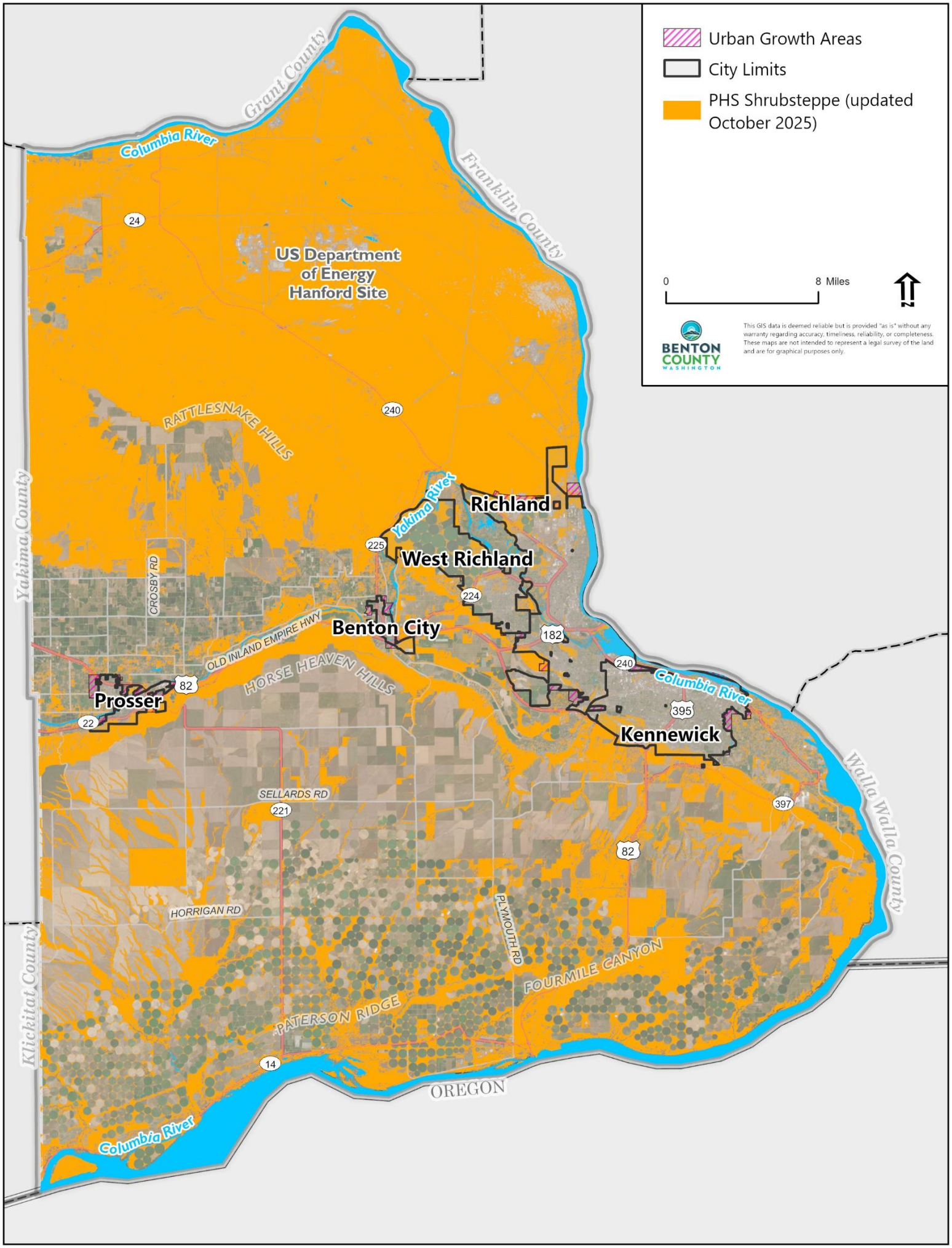
Table 3-7
Potential Allocation of Future Population Per Land Use Category

Land Use	New Units
Urban	134
Rural Transition	1,142
Rural Remote	5,652
Rural Community Centers	34
Total	**6,961**

Notes:
1. Does not include UGAs
2. Lot size is determined by minimum lot size requirements; i.e., how many units are allowed per given acreage.

3.9 NatuIntroduction

This Chapter describes the physical and biological setting of the County. Critical resources within the County are identified, including their "functions and values," and the current trends associated with regulatory protections for those resources. This Chapter also presents Benton County's approach for the protection of critical resources.


Urban Growth Areas
City Limits
PHS Shrubsteppe (updated October 2025)
0
8 Miles
BENTON COUNTY WASHINGTON
This GIS data is deemed reliable but is provided "as is" without any warranty regarding accuracy, timeliness, reliability, or completeness. These maps are not intended to represent a legal survey of the land and are for graphical purposes only.
Grant County
Franklin County
Yakima County
Klickitat County
Walla Walla County
Columbia River
US Department of Energy Hanford Site
RATTLESNAKE HILLS
Yakima River
Richland
West Richland
Benton City
Prosser
CROSBY RD
OLD INLAND EMPIRE HWY
HORSE HEAVEN HILLS
Kennewick
SELLARDS RD
HORRIGAN RD
PLYMOUTH RD
FOURMILE CANYON
PATERSON RIDGE
OREGON
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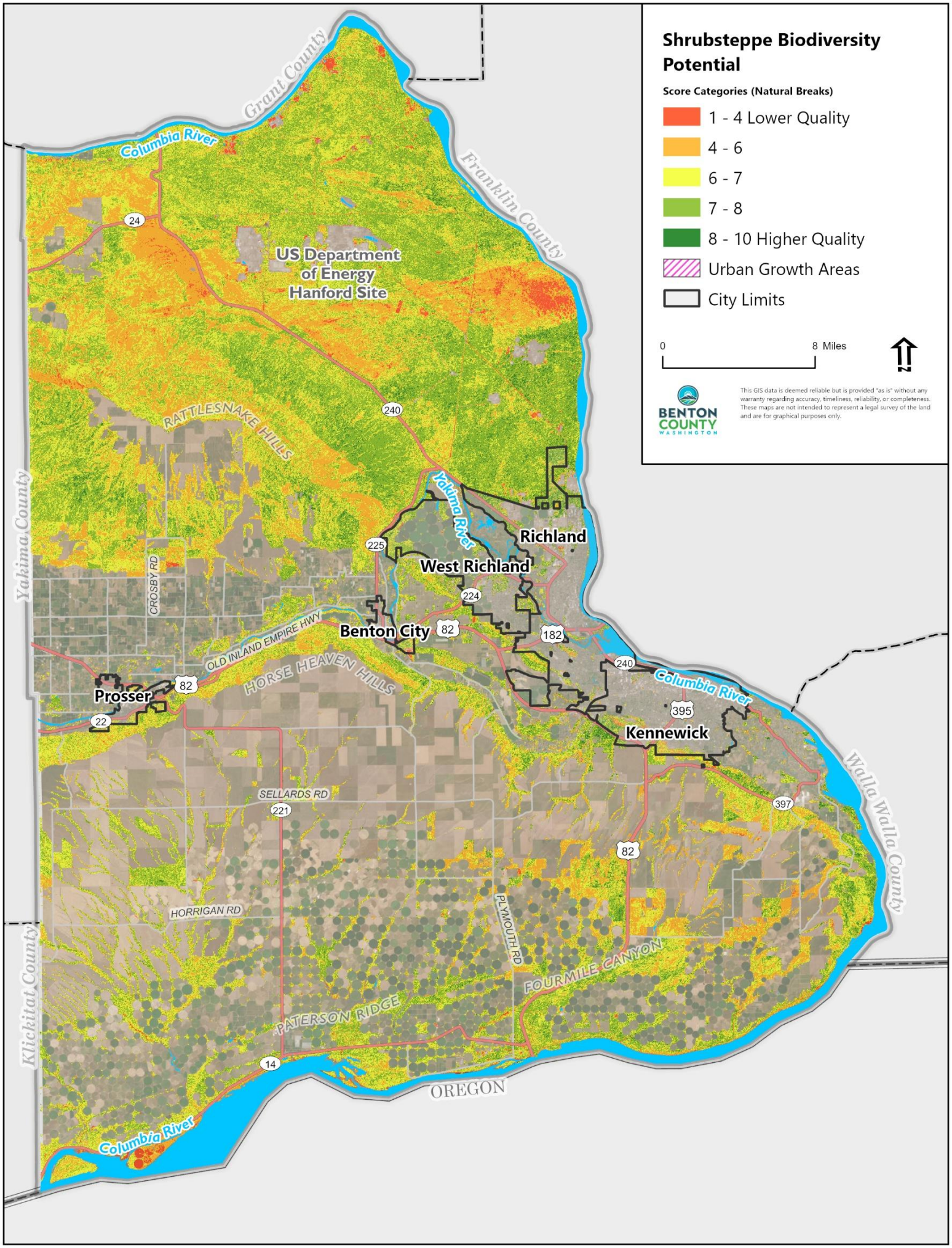
Shrubsteppe Biodiversity Potential
Score Categories (Natural Breaks)
1 - 4 Lower Quality
4 - 6
6 - 7
7 - 8
8 - 10 Higher Quality
Urban Growth Areas
City Limits
0
8 Miles
BENTON COUNTY WASHINGTON
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Kennewick
CROSBY RD
OLD INLAND EMPIRE HWY
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SELLARDS RD
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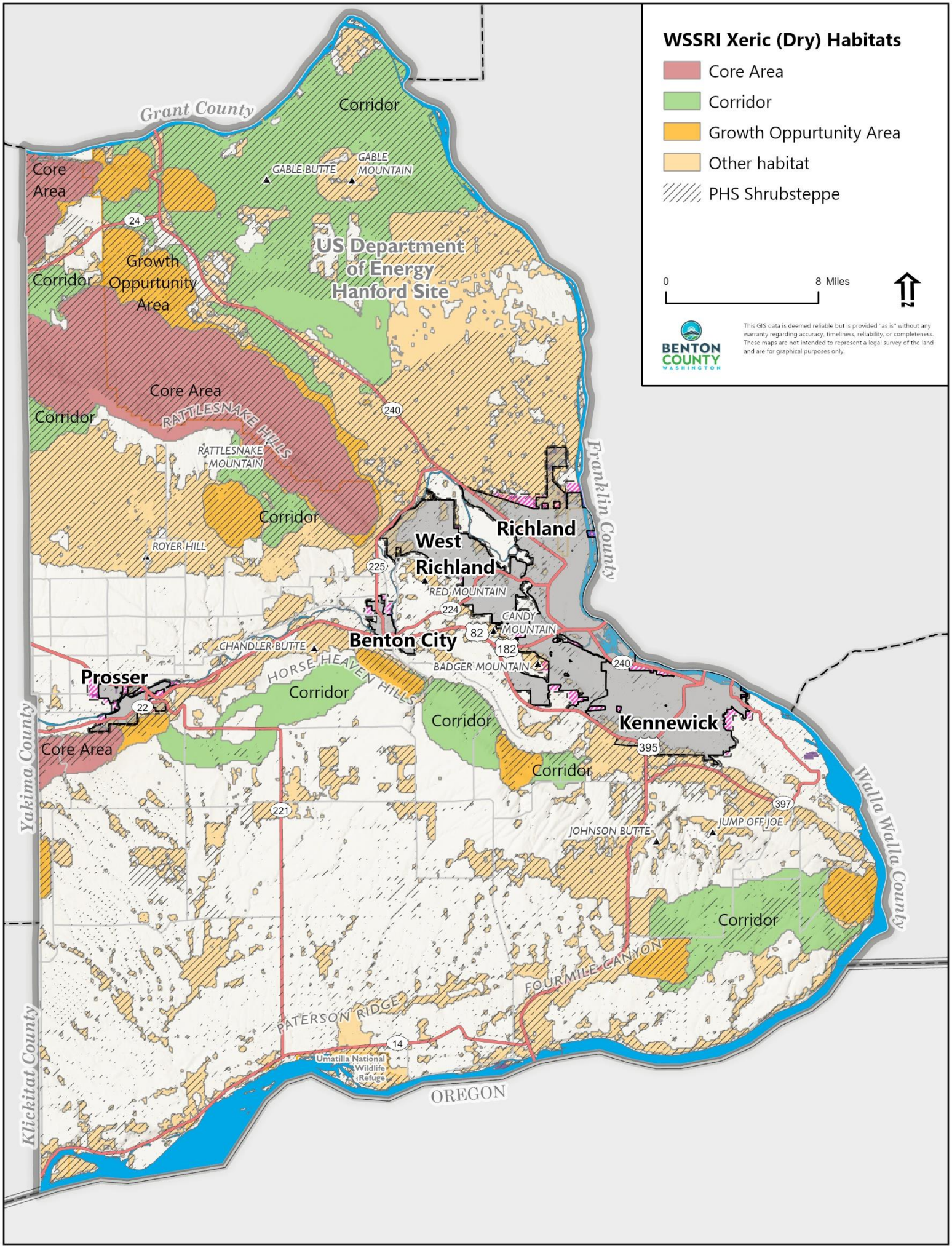
WSSRI Xeric (Dry) Habitats
Core Area
Corridor
Growth Oppurtunity Area
Other habitat
PHS Shrubsteppe
0
8 Miles
BENTON COUNTY WASHINGTON
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Franklin County
Yakima County
Walla Walla County
Klickitat County
OREGON
Core Area
Corridor
Growth Oppurtunity Area
US Department of Energy Hanford Site
GABLE BUTTE
GABLE MOUNTAIN
RATTLESNAKE HILLS
RATTLESNAKE MOUNTAIN
ROYER HILL
HORSE HEAVEN HILLS
CHANDLER BUTTE
RED MOUNTAIN
CANDY MOUNTAIN
BADGER MOUNTAIN
JOHNSON BUTTE
JUMP OFF JOE
FOURMILE CANYON
PATERSON RIDGE
Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge
Richland
West Richland
Benton City
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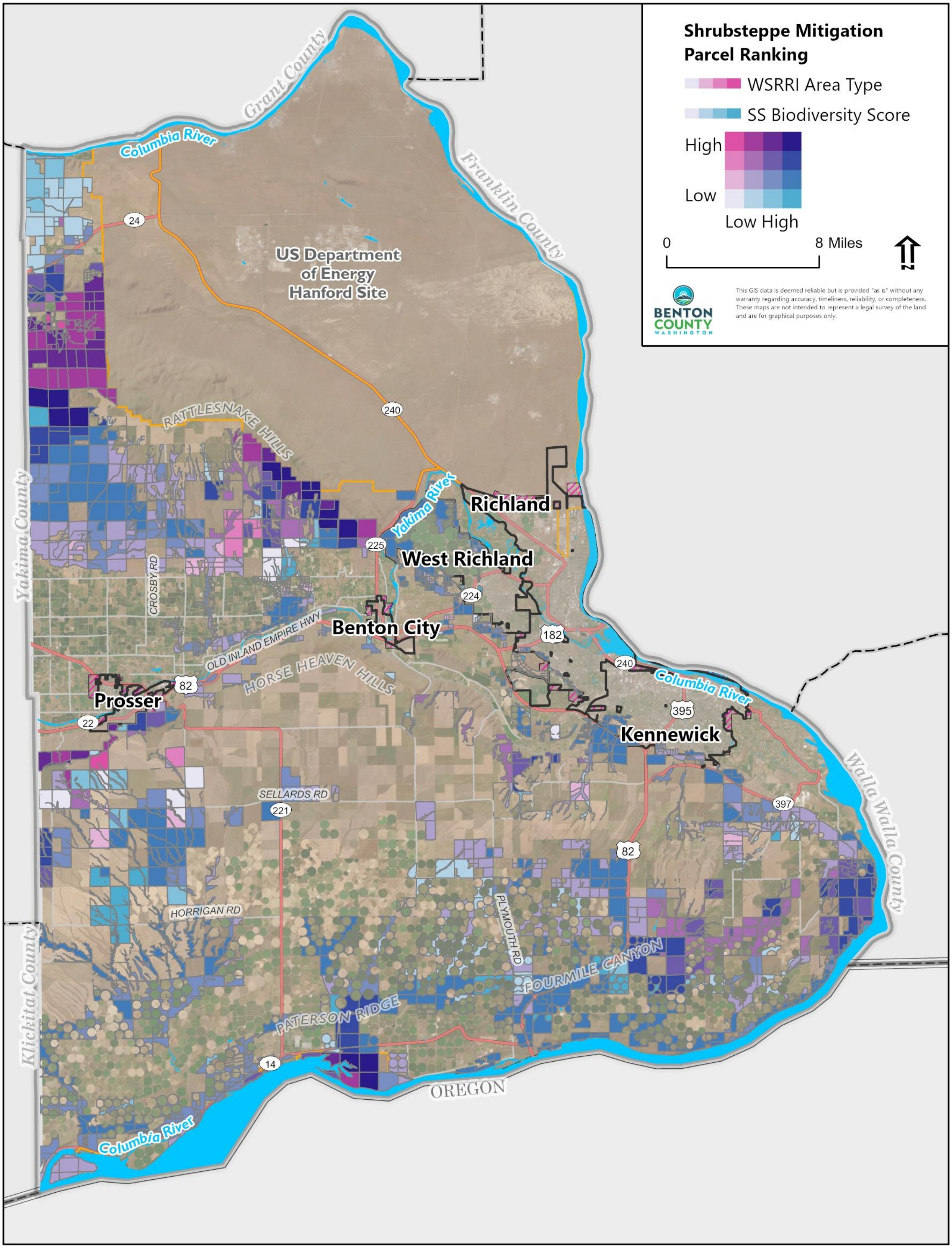
Shrubsteppe Mitigation Parcel Ranking
WSRRI Area Type
SS Biodiversity Score
High
Low
Low High
0
8 Miles
BENTON COUNTY WASHINGTON
This GIS data is deemed reliable but is provided "as is" without any warranty regarding accuracy, timeliness, reliability, or completeness. These maps are not intended to represent a legal survey of the land and are for graphical purposes only.
Grant County
Columbia River
Franklin County
US Department of Energy Hanford Site
24
240
Rattlesnake Hills
Yakima River
Richland
West Richland
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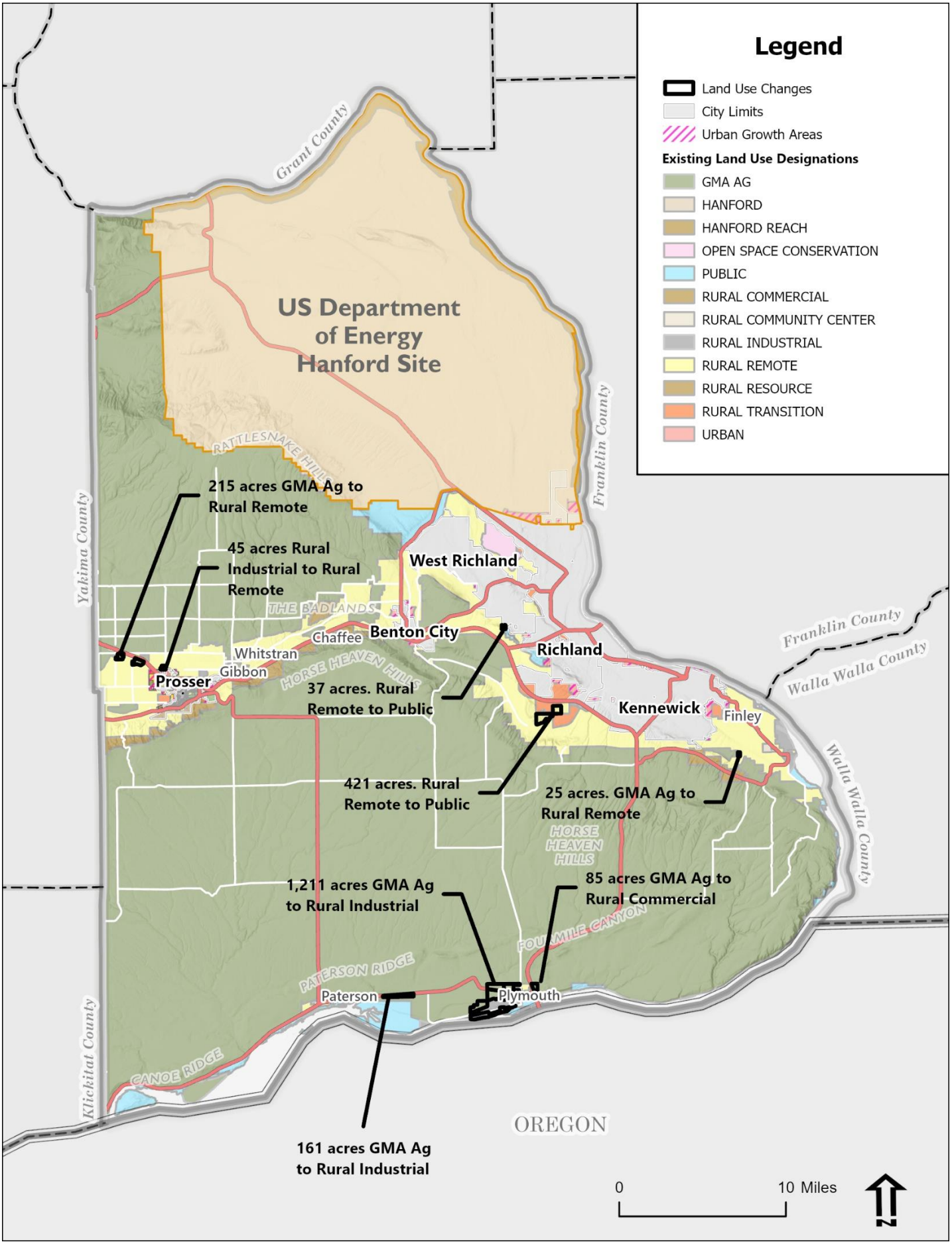
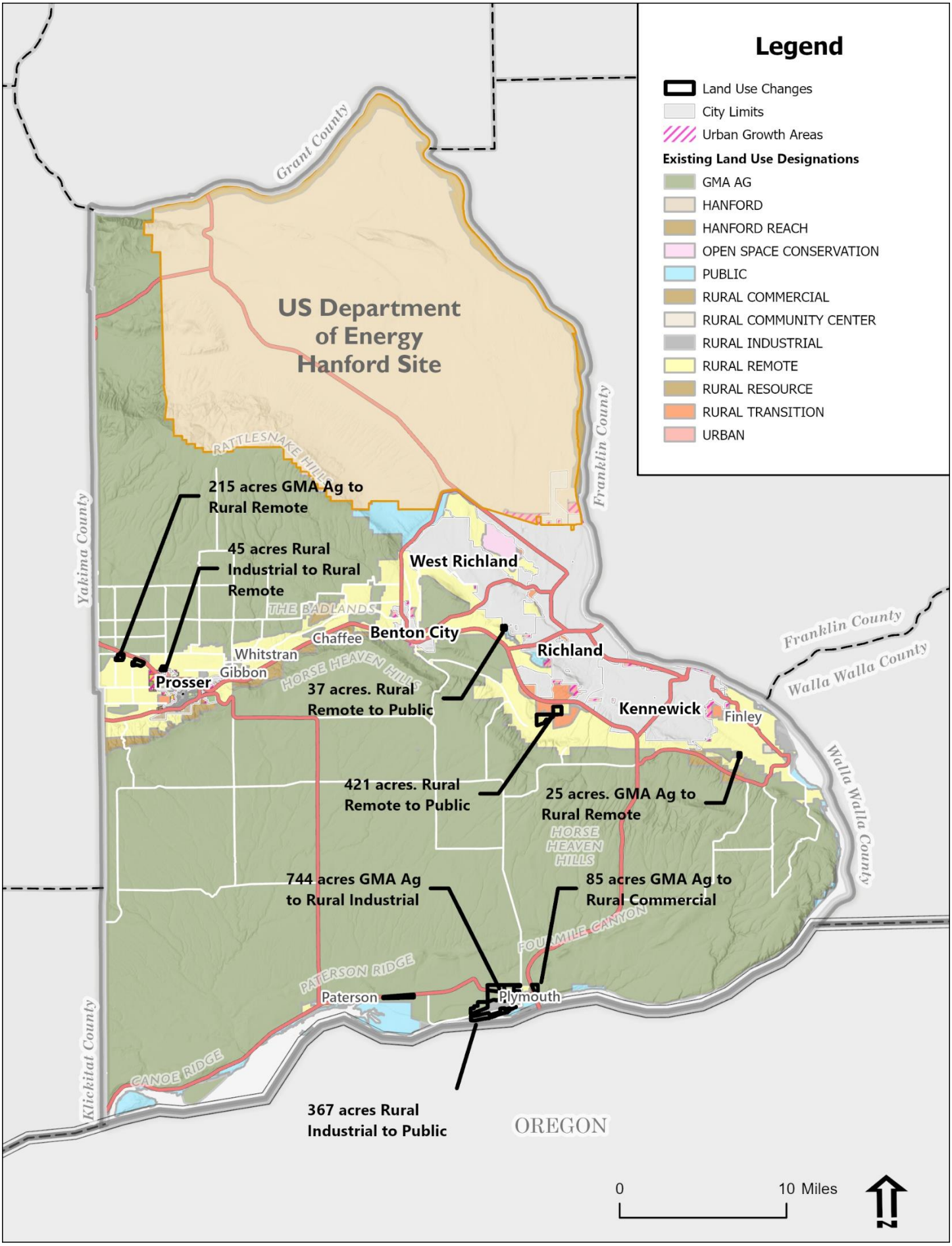
224
Benton City
182
Yakima County
Crosby Rd
Old Inland Empire Hwy
Horse Heaven Hills
82
Prosser
22
240
Columbia River
395
Kennewick
Walla Walla County
397
Sellards Rd
221
82
Horrigan Rd
Plymouth Rd
Fourmile Canyon
Paterson Ridge
14
Oregon
Klickitat County
Columbia River


Legend
Land Use Changes
City Limits
Urban Growth Areas
Existing Land Use Designations
GMA AG
HANFORD
HANFORD REACH
OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION
PUBLIC
RURAL COMMERCIAL
RURAL COMMUNITY CENTER
RURAL INDUSTRIAL
RURAL REMOTE
RURAL RESOURCE
RURAL TRANSITION
URBAN
US Department of Energy Hanford Site
Grant County
Franklin County
Yakima County
Klickitat County
Walla Walla County
Franklin County
Walla Walla County
RATTLESNAKE HILLS
THE BADLANDS
HORSE HEAVEN HILLS
HORSE HEAVEN HILLS
FOUR MILE CANYON
PATERSON RIDGE
CANOE RIDGE
215 acres GMA Ag to Rural Remote
45 acres Rural Industrial to Rural Remote
West Richland
Benton City
Chaffee
Whitstran
Gibbon
Prosser
Richland
37 acres. Rural Remote to Public
Kennewick
Finley
421 acres. Rural Remote to Public
25 acres. GMA Ag to Rural Remote
1,211 acres GMA Ag to Rural Industrial
85 acres GMA Ag to Rural Commercial
Paterson
Plymouth
161 acres GMA Ag to Rural Industrial
OREGON
0
10 Miles


Legend
Land Use Changes
City Limits
Urban Growth Areas
Existing Land Use Designations
GMA AG
HANFORD
HANFORD REACH
OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION
PUBLIC
RURAL COMMERCIAL
RURAL COMMUNITY CENTER
RURAL INDUSTRIAL
RURAL REMOTE
RURAL RESOURCE
RURAL TRANSITION
URBAN
US Department of Energy Hanford Site
Grant County
Franklin County
Yakima County
Klickitat County
Walla Walla County
215 acres GMA Ag to Rural Remote
45 acres Rural Industrial to Rural Remote
37 acres. Rural Remote to Public
421 acres. Rural Remote to Public
25 acres. GMA Ag to Rural Remote
744 acres GMA Ag to Rural Industrial
85 acres GMA Ag to Rural Commercial
367 acres Rural Industrial to Public
West Richland
Benton City
Richland
Kennewick
Finley
Prosser
Whitstran
Gibbon
Chaffee
Paterson
Plymouth
RATTLESNAKE HILLS
THE BADLANDS
HORSE HEAVEN HILLS
PATERSON RIDGE
FOUR MILE CANYON
CANOE RIDGE
OREGON
0
10 Miles
N