

# VISION 2040 & Rural Lands



*Rural areas offer diverse natural amenities and characteristics that provide vital environmental and habitat functions. Common elements of rural areas include small-scale farms, wooded areas, lakes, streams, and open spaces. Rural lands also have unique economic opportunities and amenities.*

## The Importance of Addressing Rural Lands

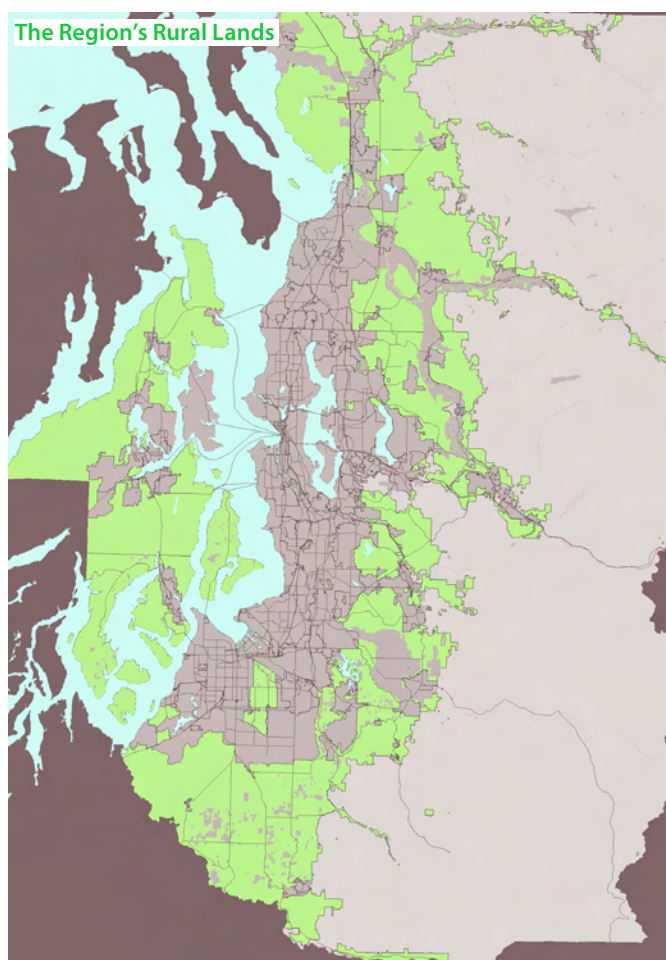
In central Puget Sound, rural lands primarily contain a mix of low-density residential development and some resource-based uses. These areas accommodate many activities associated with natural resources, as well as small-scale farming and cottage industries. Managing rural growth by directing urban-type development into designated urban lands helps to preserve vital ecosystems and economically productive lands.

### What's in VISION 2040?

VISION 2040 emphasizes the preservation of rural lands. It calls for continued use of rural lands for farming, forestry, recreation, and low-density development supported by rural services. VISION 2040 acknowledges recent successes in directing growth away from rural lands. However, it also acknowledges continuing conversion pressures, particularly through *vesting* — a practice that allows development to take place under standards on the books at the time a permit was initially issued. The *Regional Growth Strategy* calls for rural areas to accommodate only 7 percent of the region's population growth and 3 percent of employment growth between now and 2040.

**Multicounty Planning Policies.** VISION 2040 states that rural and natural resource lands will continue to be a permanent and vital part of the region. Multicounty planning policies call for minimizing environmental impacts to rural lands, while providing long-term solutions for the environmental and economic sustainability of rural-based industries. They address the appropriate character, scale, and location of development in rural areas, and call for tools and strategies to permanently protect vital rural and resource lands. Facilities that primarily support urban residents should not be located in rural areas, including urban-sized schools and other facilities. The policies state that new highways and major roads should be avoided in rural areas to limit development pressure and the conversion of rural lands.

**Actions.** VISION 2040 calls for developing a regional program for the transfer of development rights (TDR), the purchase of development rights (PDR), and other innovative techniques and strategies designed to protect rural areas and



resource lands from overdevelopment. It also calls for the Regional Council to develop a best practices toolkit for sustainable design for both urban and rural areas including low-impact development and green development practices.

### What This Means for Other Planning Efforts in the Region

Curbing the conversion of rural lands is a challenge that requires mutually supportive and coordinated efforts among counties and cities. Countywide planning policies should address the ecological, economic, and lifestyle values of the region's rural lands. This means limiting the amount of growth in rural areas and ensuring that the character of development is at an appropriate type, size, and scale. The overarching goal of preserving rural land as a permanent and vital part of the region needs to be factored into processes for adjusting urban growth areas.

County local comprehensive plans must take steps to reduce the amount of growth in rural areas. This includes employing tools and practices to curb rural development and redirect growth into urban areas. Level-of-service standards appropriate for rural areas must be clearly defined and maintained. Innovative and meaningful strategies to address vested lots and nonconformity development should also be pursued.

All local comprehensive plans should incorporate strategies that reduce development pressure on the region's rural land. Local governments can provide attractive and sufficient opportunities for sustainable land development within urban areas — such as planning for centers and compact communities, redeveloping underutilized lands, streamlining development processes, and offering incentive programs.

### For More Information

Additional information on VISION 2040 and how it addresses rural land use is available by contacting the Puget Sound Regional Council's Information Center at 206-464-7532 or [info@psrc.org](mailto:info@psrc.org).

