

# Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan

APRIL 2019



WASHINGTON STATE DEPT OF  
**NATURAL  
RESOURCES**



# Acknowledgements

The Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan was created through a public planning process. The process brought together recreation users, neighbors, interest groups, partner agencies, citizens, and staff from Washington State Department of Natural Resources to develop a comprehensive plan to guide the future use of recreation and public access within the Recreation Planning Area. Public input was a key component in developing the plan. The following individuals contributed to the development of this document.

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The committee provided valuable and diverse input throughout the planning process. The final concept map being recommended by DNR is based on considerable input from the committee, the public, and information learned during the planning process. Recreation Planning Committee members included:

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HILARY S. FRANZ  
COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS

April 2019

Dear Recreationist,

I am excited to present the Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan, a plan that brought together those passionate about this area to determine its best recreational use moving forward.

The input we received from people who love activities such as hiking, horseback riding, camping, mountain biking, and rock climbing was invaluable. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) spent three years working with a citizen's advisory committee to develop the plan. The result is a recreation guide that outlines sustainable recreation experiences for families living in and visiting Whatcom County for the next 15 years.

The plan looks specifically at developing recreation opportunities for the Recreation Planning Area near Bellingham in Whatcom County that includes the **Red Mountain, North Fork, Stewart Mountain, and Mirror Lake** units of working forest in DNR's Northwest Region.

DNR is the steward of state trust lands, including working forestland. We manage our working forests so they sustainably produce income to support our beneficiaries such as schools and hospitals. At the same time, DNR works ensure these lands protect water quality, preserve critical wildlife habitat, and provide access for recreation on some of the most beautiful areas in our state. The Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan enables DNR to take a more efficient and integrated approach to implementing quality recreation opportunities. We are honoring our land management priorities and meeting those efforts the public's desire for access to varied and sustainable recreation opportunities.

I want to thank everyone who worked on behalf of the Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan for their valuable insights and dedication to our shared goals. The time and effort from our stakeholders, local residents, nonprofits, and state agencies was essential to the planning process.

I encourage all of us to remain engaged as we work together to implement this plan over the coming years.

Sincerely,

**Hilary S. Franz**  
Commissioner of Public Lands  
Washington State Department of Natural Resources

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# Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan



April 2019

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# Introduction

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) uses a recreation planning process that actively engages the public in developing recreation and public use plans for popular DNR-managed landscapes. The Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan provides guidance for recreation and public use on DNR-managed lands in Whatcom County for the next 10-15 years. It responds to forest management responsibilities, provides goals and objectives for non-motorized recreational opportunities, and presents strategies for pursuit of the objectives and implementing projects.

Motorized recreational opportunities are not presented in this plan as extensive community outreach and public discussions with the Whatcom County Council revealed strong opposition to developed motorized recreational opportunities in Whatcom County. The current zoning on DNR-managed lands in Whatcom County is Commercial Forestry, which excludes motorized vehicular recreational trails or ORV parks. Because of these circumstances, DNR removed motorized recreation from the planning process.

While maintaining state trust land responsibilities and habitat protections, the plan achieves the agency's values of enhancing recreational opportunities and protecting the area's natural resources. The recreation plan provides for forest management, natural resource stewardship, and access to public recreation activities. It establishes goals and objectives for recreational opportunities, and states strategies for attaining the objectives and implementing projects.

## The Washington State Department of Natural Resources

### State Trust Lands

At statehood in 1889, the U.S. Congress granted Washington millions of acres of land to support public institutions such as funding the construction of public K-12 grade schools statewide, state universities, other state educational institutions, and prisons. Revenue is produced on state trust lands from the harvesting of timber and forest products, leasing agricultural and grazing lands, communication site leases, mineral leases and other activities.

### State Forest Lands

DNR also manages hundreds of thousands of acres of state forest lands that help fund services in many counties and contribute to the state General Fund—earmarked for education. About 546,000 acres are State Forest Transfer trust lands that were acquired by 21 counties in the 1920s and 1930s through tax foreclosures.

Since 1970, DNR-managed trust lands have produced more than \$7 billion in revenue, alleviating much of the tax funding for these important institutions.

The Multiple Use Concept allows other uses, such as recreation, as long as they are compatible with the financial obligations of trust management.

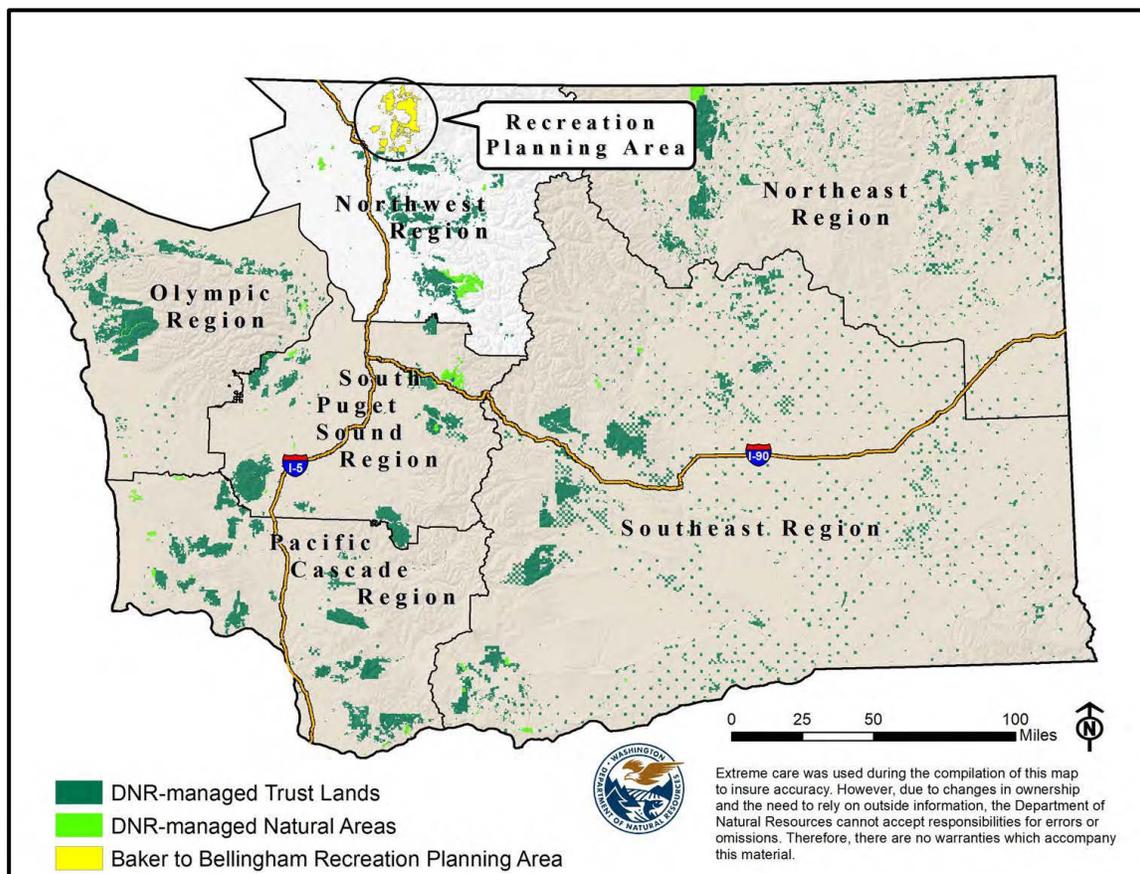
The 86,000 acres of trust lands in Whatcom County are part of Washington's heritage of public lands managed by DNR. DNR-managed trust lands and natural areas provide 1,200 miles of

trails, 160 recreation sites, and a variety of landscapes throughout Washington State. Recreational opportunities on trust lands include hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, camping, hunting, fishing, motorized vehicle riding, and boating.

DNR also fights wildfires on public and private lands, manages a Natural Areas Program that protects native ecosystems, administers state forest practices rules, helps communities with fire prevention and urban forestry resources, provides geological services, regulates surface mine reclamation, and supplies knowledge about forestry, mining, rare native plant species, ecosystems, and geologic hazards.

The DNR is divided into six geographic regions (see Figure 1). Each region manages the day-to-day operations involved in protecting and managing the public lands. The Baker to Bellingham Recreation Non-Motorized Planning Area is located in the Northwest Region.

**Figure 1. DNR Regions and Recreation Planning Area**



### Working Forests

Statewide, approximately 2.1 million acres of state trust lands are forested, most of which are working forests. Working forests are managed to provide a continuous supply of wood products and non-wood products, forest ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and water filtration, and habitat for flora and fauna, as well as recreation opportunities. The average timber harvest cycle for DNR working forests is 45 - 55 years.

Responsibly managed working forests provide a number of environmental, economic, and social benefits for current and future generations. As a trust land manager, DNR is obligated to follow the common law duties of a trustee which include generating revenue, managing trust assets prudently and acting with undivided loyalty to trust beneficiaries (Washington Supreme Court: Skamania vs. State of Washington, 1984).

### **Agency Mission**

Our actions ensure a future where Washington's lands, waters, and communities thrive.

### **Agency Vision**

Manage, sustain, and protect the health and productivity of Washington's lands and waters to meet the needs of present and future generations.

### **DNR Guiding Principles**

#### ***Manage the state's resources sustainably.***

Through our sustainable management of resources entrusted to our care, future generations will have ample opportunities to enjoy and benefit from Washington's rich natural heritage. We will also ensure that revenues for our trusts will be stable or growing and that associated industries will thrive for generations to come.

#### ***Make decisions based on sound science.***

Using sound science, data, and information to guide our decisions will result in the best possible outcomes for the State of Washington.

#### ***Make decisions in the public interest and with the public's knowledge.***

Transparency and accountability are vital to earn the public's trust and appropriately manage shared resources. Decisions should be made for the benefit of current and future generations.

# Part I. Project Overview

## Statewide Recreation

### DNR-Managed Lands

As directed by the Multiple Use Concept, DNR provides recreation and public access opportunities across 2.1 million acres of forested state trust lands. Recreation on DNR-managed lands includes, but is not limited to, hiking, horseback riding, camping, off-road vehicle (ORV) riding, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, hunting, paragliding and hang-gliding, nature/wildlife viewing, rock climbing, picnicking, and boating.

The agency provides trails and campgrounds in primitive, natural settings. Most recreation on these lands takes place in the approximately 2.9 million acres of forests that DNR manages as state trust lands. DNR manages over 1,200 miles of designated trails, 160 recreation sites, and access for a variety of dispersed recreation opportunities such as fishing, hunting, camping, berry picking, birding, and geocaching in a wide variety of landscapes across the state.

The management goals for statewide recreation are:

**Goal 1:** Promote the safety of the public, DNR employees, and volunteers

**Goal 2:** Support enjoyable recreation that is compatible with land management responsibilities

**Goal 3:** Work in collaboration with volunteers and interested stakeholders to provide engaging recreational opportunities

**Goal 4:** Manage healthy natural landscapes and working forests that can sustain recreation for current and future generations

## Non-Motorized Recreation Plan Purpose and Use

The Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan considered recreation in multiple units of state trust lands in Whatcom County: Sumas Unit, Red Mountain Unit, Black Mountain Unit, Vedder Unit, North Fork Unit, Middle Fork Unit, South Fork Unit, Van Zandt Dike Unit, Mirror Lake Unit, and Stewart Mountain Unit. These units are collectively referred to as The Recreation Planning Area. The Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan is intended to guide DNR in safe and sustainable management in the planning area for the next 10-15 years. The plan has two primary purposes:

- Consider a 10-15 year vision for non-motorized recreation and public access by describing recreation management concepts.
- Present specific objectives and strategies to guide non-motorized recreation and management over the next 10-15 years.

## Recreation Planning Area Description

The Recreation Planning Area lies in a region that covers the western foothills of the Cascade

Mountains and numerous river valleys spanning approximately 86,000 acres within Whatcom County (see Figure 2).

The broad and expansive landscape is made up of diverse terrain and drainages across central Whatcom County. High-forested ridges and valleys down to farmlands mark the terrain. The majority of well-defined drainages that flow west and north to the Nooksack River include North Fork Nooksack River, Middle Fork Nooksack River and South Fork Nooksack River.

## **Current Recreation in the Recreation Planning Area**

Providing recreation opportunities in The Recreation Planning Area is consistent with DNR's authority to construct, operate, and maintain primitive outdoor recreation facilities under the 1971 Multiple Use concept (RCW 79.10) and agency policies. Recreation in The Recreation Planning Area includes both developed and dispersed opportunities.

Developed recreation is recreation that occurs at a designated site or location on agency managed land, built or improved for recreation such as a trailhead, vista, parking area, boat launch, picnic area, or campground. Dispersed recreation involves activities that occur on agency-managed land outside of developed recreation facilities. Dispersed recreation includes, but is not limited to, activities such as camping, hunting, hiking, nature observation, snowshoeing, etc.

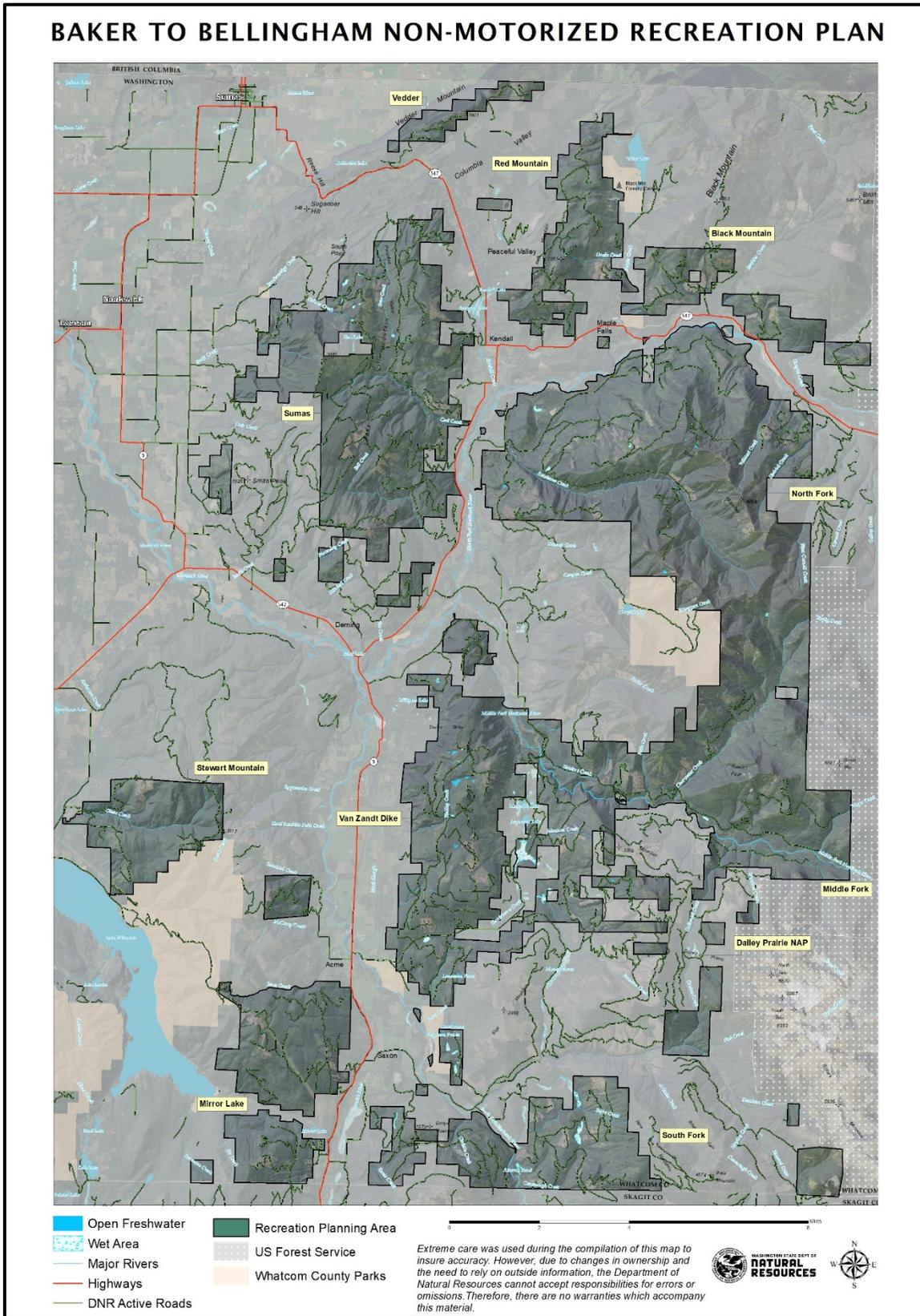
Currently, there is no developed recreation or designated motorized or non-motorized trail systems in The Recreation Planning Area. The diverse landscape, however, experiences year-round non-sanctioned motorized and sanctioned non-motorized recreational activities. Non-sanctioned motorized uses include all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), motorcycles, and 4x4s. Non-motorized uses include camping, hiking, picnicking, mountain biking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, kayaking, and snowshoeing.

The Recreation Planning Area is a common destination for many forms of motorized, non-motorized and dispersed recreational activities. Visitation varies from those who visit the planning area on a daily basis to those who visit once a year. Approximately 49% visit on a monthly basis; 12% visit once a year; approximately 36% visit on a weekly basis; and 3% visit the planning area daily (Baker to Bellingham Recreation Survey: Summary of Results, January 2017). Popular areas that people visit in the planning area include North Fork, Middle Fork, Stewart Mountain, and Sumas units.

## **Previous Recreational Planning Efforts**

There have been two trail planning efforts proposed previously in the planning area. A proposal for an off road vehicle park in the Van Zandt Dike Unit was considered in 1978, and in 1987 an off road trail facility proposal was considered for the Sumas Mountain Unit.

Figure 2. Recreation Planning Area



## Part II. The Plan

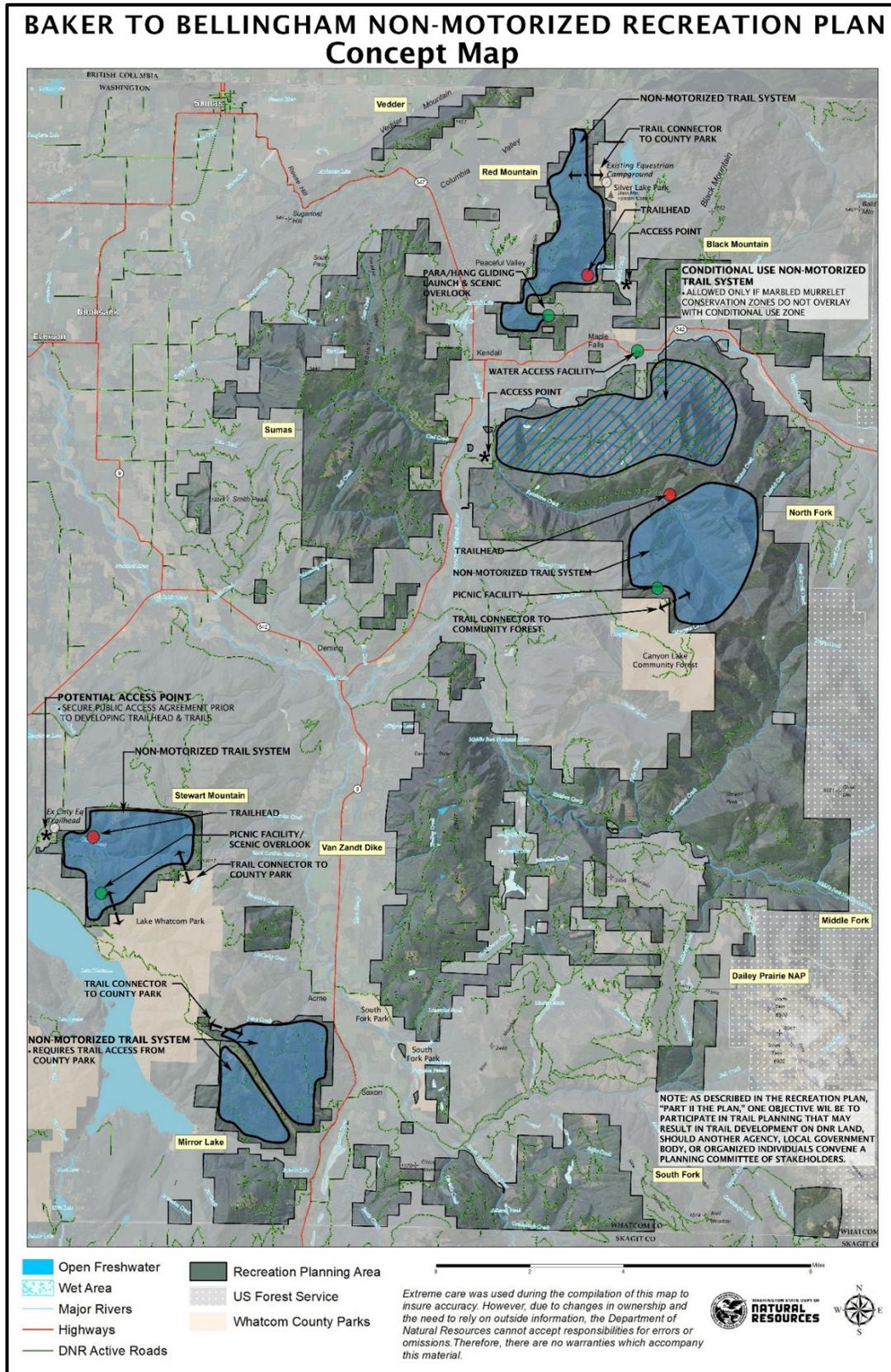
The Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan is intended to guide DNR in planning, developing, and managing non-motorized recreational opportunities and public access over the next 10-15 years. It includes DNR's recreation program goals, and identifies priorities for implementation. This plan will be evaluated periodically as part of adaptive management, and changes will be made as necessary to ensure compatibility with trust obligations and forest management objectives.

### Concept Map

One key outcome of the planning process is the development of a recreational use concept map (see Figure 3) for The Recreation Planning Area. The map reflects the general locations of proposed recreation management concepts within The Recreation Planning Area. DNR developed the concept map with involvement and feedback from the Recreation Planning Committee and the public. The concept map is based on broad scale mapping information. Exact locations and site specific details related to proposed projects will be generated from on-the-ground site assessments to ensure safety, sustainability, and a positive user experience consistent with trust obligations.

This concept map shows the general locations related to what is proposed for the next 10-15 years as the plan is implemented.

Figure 3. Recreational Use Concept Map



## Objectives and Strategies

Another key outcome of the recreation planning process is a list of recreation management objectives and strategies for The Recreation Planning Area. These objectives and strategies describe in further detail the proposed recreation concepts and how they may be implemented and managed. Implementation of proposed projects is subject to the availability of funding, staffing and consideration of maintenance and operations funding.

### Recreation Planning Sub-Areas

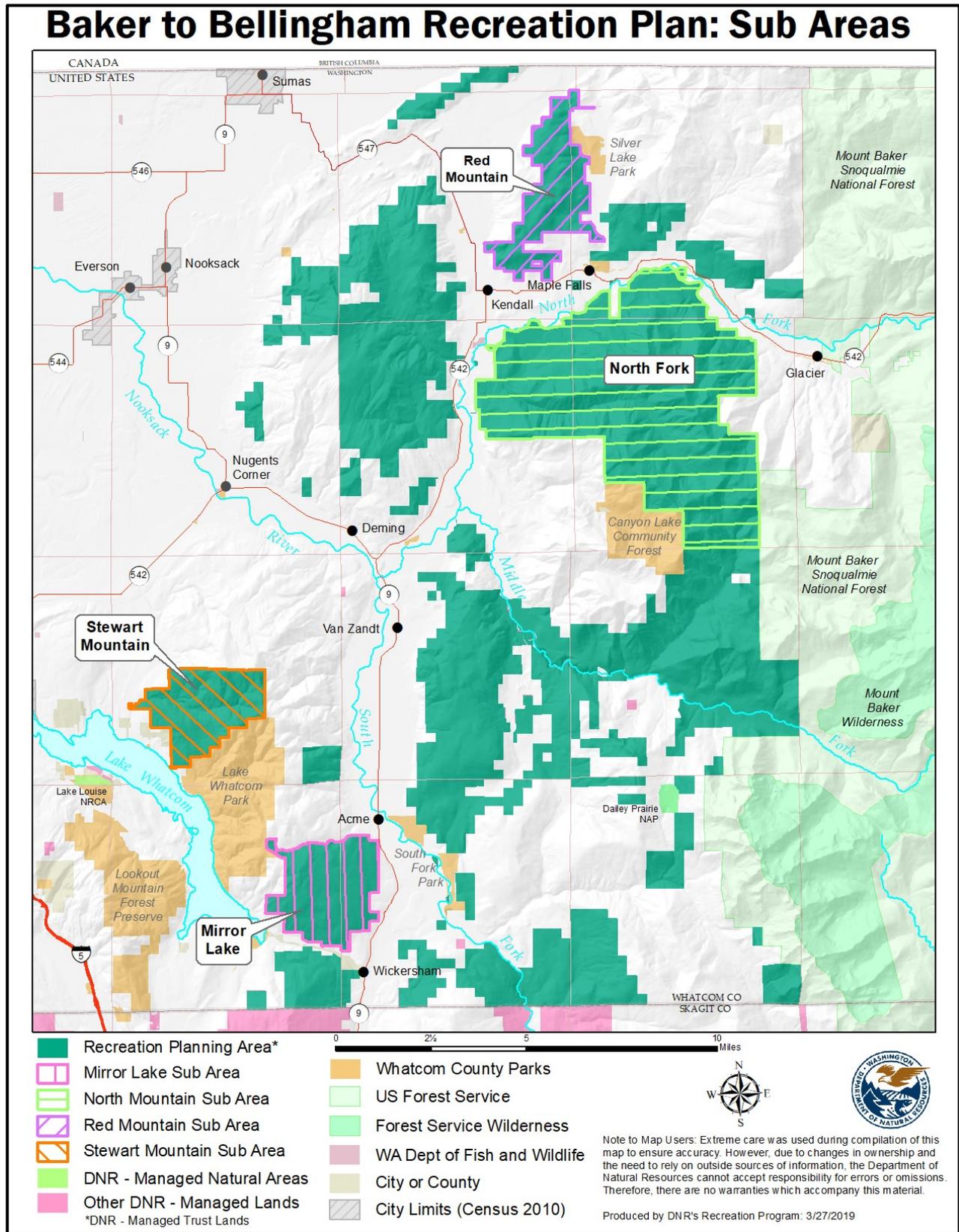
Due to the dispersed nature of the units of trust lands in The Recreation Planning Area, Sub-Areas (see Figure 4) were created as part of this recreation plan to assist in associating specific objectives and strategies with particular locations or landscape features. Recreation Planning Sub-Areas describe geographic sections and the primary management objectives (PMOs) of The Recreation Planning Area (see Table 1). Sub-Areas are not intended to reflect official boundaries. The sub-areas not listed in Table 1 will still allow dispersed recreation.

This is a broad-scale planning effort and includes a non-project level environmental review in compliance with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). In the future, as this plan is implemented, there will be additional project specific work such as site-specific assessments, field reconnaissance and inventory work, and detailed facility and trail design work. During implementation, individual projects will be subject to applicable regulatory procedures and practices. Processes referred to in these objectives and strategies are in addition to and do not replace current regulatory processes and procedures. At that time there will be additional environmental review in compliance with SEPA and opportunities for public involvement.

**Table 1. Recreation Planning Sub-Area Designations**

Recreation Planning Sub-Area Designation	Primary Recreation Management Objectives
<b>Red Mountain Unit:</b> Portions of the Red Mountain block of trust land	Non-motorized recreation
<b>North Fork Unit:</b> Portions of the North Fork block of trust land	Non-motorized recreation
<b>Stewart Mountain Unit:</b> Portions of the Stewart Mountain block of trust land	Non-motorized recreation
<b>Mirror Lake Unit:</b> Portions of the northern Mirror Lake block of trust land	Non-motorized recreation

Figure 4. Recreation Planning Sub-Areas



## Public Access

The forest road system was built for the purpose of supporting working forests. These forest roads provide access into DNR-managed lands and are maintained for timber management purposes. These roads also serve as the primary means of public access to the Red Mountain, North Fork, Stewart Mountain and Mirror Lake units of The Recreation Planning Area.

### Entire Planning Area

**Objective A:** Look for opportunities to provide public access to each recreation development zone in The Recreation Planning Area as compatible with timber management.

#### Strategies

1. Work with private property owners in an effort to secure public access rights onto forest roads that access the recreation development zone in the Stewart Mountain Unit.
2. Maintain public access into the Red Mountain Unit and the North Fork Unit.
3. Integrate marbled murrelet conservation strategies for the North Fork Unit into recreation access to development zones.

**Objective B:** Use existing forest roads whenever appropriate to provide public access into recreation development zones.

#### Strategies

1. Inventory forest roads that could potentially provide access into the various units of The Recreation Planning Area.
2. As needed, identify locations where new roads could be developed to access proposed trailhead locations.
3. Project proposals will include forest road options, public safety considerations, cost benefit analysis and mitigation strategies that take into account year round working forest activities.

**Objective C:** Where reasonable, establish and maintain roads to each trailhead location to a level that is appropriate to the needs for vehicular access.

#### Strategies

1. Develop criteria for access roads into recreation development zones that fits into the primary management activities on DNR-managed lands.
2. Bring existing roads up to standards established to provide appropriate access to each trailhead location.
3. Develop a long-term sustainable maintenance program to maintain access roads, while addressing forest practices maintenance issues.
4. Identify funding methods to implement appropriate staffing maintenance and operations programs.

## Recreation Trails

A main component of all trail projects will include an evaluation a) of existing undesignated

trails within the units planned for recreation development (Red Mountain, North Fork, Stewart Mountain and Mirror Lake units) for sustainability and user experience, and b) planning new trails that are sustainably located and built to provide a safe recreation experience without compromising environmental and resource health. New trail systems are a dynamic element across many landscapes; integrating trail planning and forest management activities provides an opportunity to respond to the changing nature of the working forests. Trail work will include restoring areas with known resource and environmental damage, relocating and developing trails in long-term sustainable locations, and restoring former trail locations.

The Recreation Program statewide coordinates with forest management activities when planning trail systems. This ensures the response to current and future management activities, including timber harvests that may impact trails, is managed appropriately. The dynamic nature of our forests mean that trails may be temporarily closed or re-routed in response to our agency's vital mission to generate revenue for the trust beneficiaries.

### **Entire Planning Area**

**Objective A:** Provide and maintain a network of safe, enjoyable and sustainable non-motorized recreation trails consistent with the following strategies based on available staffing, funding and resources.

#### **Strategies**

1. When planning for and locating future trails, inventory existing undesignated, non-sanctioned trails to determine extent of resource and environmental damage and the potential for reuse as part of a designated trail system.
2. Develop a coordinated systematic approach to adding new trails where appropriate, decommissioning and/or restoring old locations simultaneously.
3. Provide separate use trails where appropriate for safety of users and user experience.
4. Design and locate designated trails consistent with DNR's standards, stewardship responsibilities, suitability criteria, safety and risk management, and user experience.
5. Create and maintain trail systems that minimize long-term maintenance and prevent or minimize the potential for erosion and sediment delivery into nearby streams and water bodies.
6. Establish Trail Management Objectives (TMOs) for the designated trails; TMO's describe standards for planning, construction, and maintenance of new trails and trail segments.
7. Provide trail lengths, loops, and destination trails that create a range of trail experiences.
8. Where practical, locate trails away from adjacent private property boundaries.
9. Establish a trails working group that includes representatives from interested user groups and local residents to provide ongoing input and participate in trail planning, design, group events and maintenance.
10. Consider and pursue a range of maintenance funding opportunities for trails including partnerships, commercial agreements, permits and fees.

**Objective B:** DNR is willing to participate in trail planning, for example, on the Whatcom County conceptual Bellingham – Mt. Baker Trail, that may result in trail development on DNR

land should another state agency, local government body, or organized group of individuals convene a planning committee of stakeholders.

### **Strategies**

1. Work with land managers (public and private) and stakeholders to participate in public input driven planning processes that include DNR land.
2. As these opportunities are presented, engage with necessary parties to encourage the design and development of non-motorized trails that are consistent with DNR's standards, stewardship responsibilities, suitability criteria, safety and risk management, and user experience.

### **North Fork Unit, Red Mountain Unit, Mirror Lake Unit and Stewart Mountain Unit**

**Objective C:** Provide non-motorized trail opportunities for horseback riding, hiking and mountain biking based on available staffing, funding and resources.

### **Strategies**

1. Inventory and evaluate the non-motorized trail zones identified on the Concept Map (Figure 3) for a non-motorized trail system.
2. Partner with the public to identify trail location options.
3. Work to plan, design and develop a variety of non-motorized trails for hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking.

**Objective D:** Provide non-motorized trail connections to Whatcom County parks – Lake Whatcom Park, Canyon Lake Community Forest and Silver Lake Park, based on available staffing, funding and resources.

### **Strategies**

1. Work (establish partnership) with Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Department, to identify potential linkage routes for connecting to existing and proposed county trails in Lake Whatcom Park, Canyon Lake Community Forest, and Silver Lake Park.
2. Evaluate areas that could be suitable for locating multi-use trail connectors.
3. Design and develop trails with compatible connections to county trails.

**Objective E:** Provide non-motorized trail opportunities in the conditional use zone (proposed use if specific requirements are met) of the North Fork Unit if the recreation zone is not restricted by conservation zones or allowed activities in conservation zones as defined by the final long-term marbled murrelet conservation strategy as approved by the Board of Natural Resources.

### **Strategies**

1. Any trail development will only be considered after the 1997 State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is amended and approved by the United States Department of Fish and Wildlife.
2. The amended HCP does not include habitat conservation zones within the non-motorized recreation zone.

3. Any trail planning and development will fully comply with the amended HCP.

## **Recreation Facilities**

Designated recreation facilities within The Recreation Planning Area include those facilities planned for and managed by the agency. New recreation facilities may include trailheads, day-use areas, a paragliding/hang gliding launch site and a water access point.

### **Entire Planning Area**

**Objective A:** Provide and maintain designated safe, enjoyable, and sustainable recreation facilities based on available staffing, funding and resources.

#### **Strategies**

1. Plan new facility locations and designs that are consistent with the multiple use statute, DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan and other relevant policies, procedures, rules, and regulations.
2. Develop proposed facilities in conjunction with the required leases, easements, permits and agreements needed for counties, grant funding requirements, and trust compensation.
3. Determine appropriate locations for new recreation facilities based on an assessment of biological, soils, geological and management considerations.
4. Determine the size of new trailheads based in part on a carrying capacity assessment of the trail system.
5. Design and maintain facilities that protect the environment and natural resources, support safe and sustainable recreation opportunities, and provide user accessibility in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other regulations.

### **Red Mountain Unit**

**Objective B:** Provide developed facilities for non-motorized day-use activities in the Red Mountain Unit based on available staffing, funding and resources.

#### **Strategies**

1. Work to locate, design, and develop a new non-motorized trailhead in the southeastern portion of the unit.
2. If public access can be established, locate, design, and develop a new scenic viewpoint/launch site for paragliding and hang gliding use in the southern portion of the unit.

### **North Fork Unit**

**Objective C:** Provide developed facilities for non-motorized day-use activities in the North Fork Unit based on available staffing, funding and resources.

#### **Strategies**

1. Work to locate, design and develop a new non-motorized trailhead in the central portion of the Unit.
2. Work to locate, design, and develop a small picnic facility in the southwestern portion of

the Unit.

3. As a conditional use (contingent on there being no marbled murrelet conservation zones within the conditional recreation zone), work to locate, design and develop, a new non-motorized trailhead on the western edge of the Unit.

**Objective D:** Provide a quality non-motorized day-use water access facility on the North Fork Nooksack River adjacent to the northern edge of the Unit based on available staffing, funding and resources.

#### **Strategies**

1. Evaluate water access facility needs as part of a day-use assessment to determine appropriate types and levels of future use at the DNR-managed parcel adjacent to the North Fork Nooksack River.
2. Coordinate with adjacent landowners, public agencies, and tribes on project proposals.
3. Work to design and develop a water access facility to provide public access, protect the resources (including water quality), and minimize future maintenance needs.

#### **Stewart Mountain Unit**

**Objective E:** Provide developed facilities for non-motorized day-use activities in the Stewart Mountain Unit based on available staffing, funding and resources.

#### **Strategies**

1. If public access can be established, work to locate, design, and develop a new non-motorized trailhead on the western edge of the Unit or partner with Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Department to support development of a non-motorized trailhead in a suitable location.
2. Work to locate, design, and develop a new picnic/scenic viewpoint facility in the western portion of the Unit.

### **Dispersed Recreation Management**

Activities outside the boundaries of designated recreation facilities and trails are considered “dispersed recreation.” Dispersed recreation examples include, but are not limited to, camping, fishing, hunting, exploring, pleasure driving on open forest roads, nature viewing and firewood gathering (with appropriate DNR permits). Dispersed recreation opportunities are secondary uses within the working forests. At all times, primary management activities take precedent over recreation uses such as dispersed recreation.

#### **Entire Planning Area**

**Objective A:** Provide and enhance dispersed recreation opportunities in The Recreation Planning Area.

#### **Strategies:**

1. Continue to provide opportunities such as dispersed camping, pleasure driving, hunting, fishing, and exploring without impacting the primary management activities for working forests.
2. In the North Fork Unit, utilize seasonal restrictions as necessary to facilitate compatibility

- between recreational activities and habitat conservation requirements.
3. Manage dispersed recreation consistent with WAC332.52 – Public Access and Recreation.

## Restoration

For the purposes of this document, restoration is defined as repairing resource damage that has occurred due to past recreational use. Redirecting recreational use away from unsustainable areas, correcting erosion and sediment delivery issues, and supporting re-vegetation as necessary are fundamental to restoration.

**Objective A:** Identify areas with resource damage due to past recreational use throughout the recreation planning area.

### Strategies

1. Identify areas with resource damage due to past recreational use, using existing data as much as possible.
2. Prioritize restoration efforts across the recreation planning area, including units that do not contain recreation zones.
3. Engage the public and organizations to assist, where practical, with restoration efforts.
4. Once damaged areas are identified, redirect or restrict recreational uses to prevent further resource damage.
5. Begin restoration efforts according to the following criteria:
  - a. Address public health and safety concerns.
  - b. Reduce or eliminate sediment delivery to streams.
  - c. Stabilize stream banks.
  - d. Restore soil and vegetation on impacted wetland and riparian buffers.
  - e. Remediate habitat-related issues in areas with sensitive, threatened, or endangered species or with those listed in the Habitat Conservation Plan.
6. Secondary priorities include:
  - a. Restore other resource damage.
  - b. Re-vegetate areas as needed.
  - c. Repair areas with compacted soils.

**Objective B:** Protect restored areas.

### Strategies

1. Protect restored areas with barriers (fencing, boulders, stumps, etc.), signage, and public education.
2. Monitoring: Photograph and document restoration efforts and implement corrective actions in damaged areas.
3. Increase enforcement.

**Objective C:** Communicate with and educate the public on restoration activities.

### Strategies

1. Form partnerships with the public and local organizations during restoration projects.
2. Use a variety of communication tools including signage, public meetings, brochures, and DNR's website to inform the public where restoration efforts are underway and re-direct

activities to other areas.

## **Partnerships and Volunteer Coordination**

Partnerships with public agencies, user groups, and citizen volunteers are important components of DNR's ongoing enforcement and maintenance programs.

**Objective A:** Encourage new volunteer and partnership opportunities.

### **Strategies**

1. Encourage users to volunteer through programs such as DNR's Forest Watch Volunteers Program, cooperative projects and other organized maintenance and clean-up events.
2. Partner with local coalition groups for the development of recreation projects.
3. DNR will form partnerships with citizen volunteers who can assist in planning, designing, constructing and maintaining trails, performing restoration work, and providing an overall increased presence in the landscapes.

**Objective B:** Pursue partnering opportunities for recreation, service, education, and restoration projects with adjacent public agencies, counties, municipalities, schools, nearby landowners, user groups, and youth groups.

### **Strategies**

1. Work to develop partnerships with adjacent landowners such as Whatcom County, City of Bellingham, private neighbors, chambers of commerce, and local interest groups.
2. Promote youth awareness by partnering with schools, scout organizations, and service clubs and by involving students in maintenance, education, and restoration activities.
3. Pursue collaboration with Whatcom County to evaluate and identify methods that are appropriate to the needs of user groups, which do not negatively affect either the County or the agency as site-specific projects are implemented in The Recreation Planning Area.

**Objective C:** Pursue partnerships that enhance safety and support education and enforcement efforts.

### **Strategies**

1. Pursue additional opportunities to partner with enforcement personnel from Whatcom County sheriff's offices and Whatcom County Search and Rescue.
2. Partner with Whatcom County to evaluate and identify methods for maintaining current level of services as site-specific projects are implemented in the Recreation Planning Area.

## **Education and Enforcement**

Education and enforcement efforts are essential to meet DNR's environmental stewardship responsibilities and trust mandate obligations, as well as provide quality recreational opportunities to the public.

**Objective A:** Pursue resources that will increase education and enforcement efforts at sanctioned and unsanctioned sites across the various landscapes in The Recreation Planning Area.

### **Strategies**

1. In sanctioned recreation areas, look to develop an increased presence through DNR Recreation Wardens, DNR staff, and potentially DNR's Forest Watch Volunteer Program.
2. In areas outside of proposed recreation zones, look to develop methods to increase the presence of DNR staff and volunteers to reduce unsanctioned use within the recreation planning area.
3. Consider coordination with law enforcement from Whatcom County, where appropriate.
4. Develop tools and partnerships to protect property and to increase security on trails and at trailheads.

**Objective B:** Increase the availability of educational information about The Recreation Planning Area.

### **Strategies**

1. Provide consistent signage that educates the public about allowed uses, existing regulations, campfire use, fire danger, adjoining watershed lands, and other applicable rules.
2. Clearly communicate status information related to recreational facilities and trails through methods such as DNR's website, signage, and outreach.
3. Update web-based resources to include downloadable maps of the area, recreation rules, and recreation access information.
4. Pursue efforts and partnerships for the development of maps and smart phone applications.
5. Pursue efforts and partnerships with Whatcom County to develop communication tools to inform recreationists about the working rural nature of the lands adjacent to The Recreation Planning Area.

**Objective C:** Increase public awareness of DNR's vision, trust mandate, and the multiple-use concept, while providing sustainable recreational opportunities.

### **Strategies**

1. Utilize written and electronic communication efforts in educating and encouraging volunteer participation in maintenance and planning projects.
2. Provide additional outreach on the unique features of The Recreation Planning Area through the agency website, maps, blogs, social media, and coordination with local businesses.
3. Provide information about DNR management objectives and responsibilities in various electronic formats including website, blogs, and social media.
4. Attend user group meetings periodically to provide information and answer questions from the public.

**Objective D:** Enhance emergency access to the developed areas of The Recreation Planning Area.

### **Strategy**

1. Work with local emergency responders and jurisdictions to develop adaptive emergency access plans for The Recreation Planning Area.

## Adaptive Management

Adaptive management provides for ongoing modifications of land and resource management practices in order to respond to new ecological information or Best Management Practices (BMPs), changes in site-specific circumstances or the regulatory environment, innovative technological developments, or evolving recreation patterns.

**Objective A:** Employ adaptive management practices to implement this recreation plan, adjusting recreation management practices to respond to changing laws, resource management objectives, environmental information, recreation trends, and on-the-ground circumstances.

### Strategies

1. Evaluate site-specific conditions when implementing projects on the ground.
2. Respond and adapt to new or changing information and variable site conditions.
3. Consider proposals submitted to DNR by others that are consistent with achieving recreation plan concepts, goals, objectives and strategies, and are compatible with agency requirements.
4. Evaluate new or emerging recreation activities for compatibility with the management objectives laid out in this plan and the vision and management goals of DNR's statewide Recreation Program goals.
5. Hunting and fishing will continue to be allowed under the rules promulgated by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Commission.

## Sustainable Funding

Sustainable funding is essential to meeting the DNR goal of providing quality recreation opportunities for the public. It supports appropriate levels of staffing to provide facility and trail maintenance and operation needs, facility development and improvements, and enforcement efforts.

**Objective A:** Pursue sustainable funding opportunities that allow for education, enforcement, and ongoing facility and trail development and maintenance.

### Strategies

1. Continue to apply for grant funding for maintenance, enforcement, and facility and trail construction projects.
2. Work to increase public understanding regarding the costs associated with maintaining and operating facilities and trails.
3. Consider and pursue alternative funding sources for accomplishing plan objectives.
4. Identify and pursue funding sources to maintain facilities and trails on a long-term basis.

## Implementation

Implementation priorities were established based on committee input, agency management considerations, agency resource protection priorities, and logical sequencing of related projects. Development and construction are dependent upon a number of factors. These include funding availability for staffing, construction, maintenance, operations, and enforcement as well as current or projected management plans (largely timber management plans), and conservation

plans for the landscape in question. Priorities may change during the life of the recreation plan as additional information and resources are identified.

**Table 2. Proposed Implementation Priorities**

Proposed Project Implementation Priorities	
<b>Tier I</b>	Acquire and/or establish access agreement and develop trailhead for the Stewart Mountain Unit
	Work with stakeholders to explore creation and development of a non-motorized trail corridor that crosses DNR-managed land
	Develop a non-motorized trail system in the Stewart Mountain Unit with trail connectors into Lake Whatcom Park
	Establish trail access agreement with Whatcom County Parks and Recreation for the Mirror Lake Unit and develop non-motorized trail system with trail connector into Lake Whatcom Park
	Design and construct a paragliding/hang gliding launch facility in the Red Mountain Unit
	Design and construct a water access facility on the parcel adjacent to the Nooksack River off Highway 542
	Restore areas damaged by unauthorized trail use in the Stewart Mountain and the Mirror Lake units and areas outside the recreation development zones
<b>Tier II</b>	Develop a non-motorized trail system for the upper recreation zone in the North Fork Unit with a trail connector into Canyon Lake Community Forest
	Develop a trailhead in the upper recreation zone in the North Fork Unit
	Develop a non-motorized trail system in the Red Mountain Unit with a trail connector to Silver Lake Park
	Develop a trailhead in the Red Mountain Unit
	Restore areas damaged by unauthorized trail use in the North Fork and Red Mountain units and areas outside the recreation development zones
<b>Tier III</b>	Develop a non-motorized trail system in the conditional use zone in the North Fork Unit
	Develop a trailhead for the conditional use zone in the North Fork Unit
	Design and construct a small picnic/scenic point day-use facility in the Stewart Mountain Unit
	Design and construct a small picnic day-use facility at lake in the North Fork Unit
	Restore areas damaged by unauthorized trail use in the North Fork Unit and areas outside the recreation development zones

*Priorities may shift between tiers during the life of the recreation plan as additional information and resources are identified.*

# Part III. Planning Area Background

## Regional Context and Recreation

The Recreation Planning Area lies within DNR's Northwest Region in Whatcom County. DNR's Northwest Region stretches from the northern suburbs of Seattle to the Canadian border and includes Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties. This region of mountains, valleys, islands, and Puget Sound shorelines features Chuckanut Mountain, Lake Whatcom, Walker Valley, Cypress Island, and the Sultan Basin landscapes. The region includes 382,323 acres of state trust lands managed for forestry, farming, and commercial uses, and the staff oversee forest practices and lead wildfire prevention and fighting efforts on 1 million acres of state and private forestland. The region also oversees more than 40,000 acres of natural areas that protect high-quality wildlife and plant habitat. The region office is located in Sedro-Woolley, within Skagit County.

Levels of recreational use on state trust lands have increased over time and are expected to continue to rise. Popular recreation areas in the Northwest Region include areas such as Reiter Foothills State Forest, Walker Valley ORV Area, Harry Osborn Forest, Blanchard Forest Block and North Mountain Bike Skills Area.

There are no developed recreational sites or facilities in The Recreation Planning Area. As with most DNR-managed lands, it is open year round for dispersed recreation, including hiking, snowmobiling, and horseback riding. Seasonal hunting and fishing are regulated by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The Northwest Region currently offers these developed recreation amenities:

- 23 recreational sites
- Three trail systems:
  - 60 miles of motorized trails
  - 60 miles of non-motorized trails
  - 72 miles of hiker only trails
- Region staff also work with volunteers to provide visitors with a variety of facilities and trails for hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking and ORV use.

Recreation in the Northwest Region is generally guided by past planning efforts such as the Reiter Foothills State Forest Recreation Plan and the Blanchard Forest Management Plan, as well as the 2010 Northwest Region HCP Planning Unit Forest Land Plan.

## Recreation Planning Area Context

The Recreation Planning Area sits within Whatcom County, and is surrounded and influenced by numerous land uses including federal forests, county parks, forested lands with multiple ownerships and purposes, agricultural uses, and rural residential development (see Figure 4).

**Whatcom County** ranges from west of the Cascade crest to Puget Sound in western Washington; the Canadian border to the north and Skagit County to the south. It includes

mountains and lakes, miles of Puget Sound shoreline, and river valleys around the three forks of the Nooksack River. Ross Lake, in eastern Whatcom County, is the largest lake in the county. Winters in the Recreation Planning Area range from rain to significant amounts of snow and extended periods of below freezing temperatures. With more of a temperate type climate - usually characterized by rainy winters and dry, warm to hot summers, it has developed into an all-season outdoor recreation area sought out by people from around western Washington and British Columbia Canada.

In addition to agriculture, (Whatcom County is responsible for almost 75% of the nation's raspberry production), tourism is growing in the county, playing a larger part in the local economy with numerous popular areas for the state, including North Cascades National Park and Ross Lake National Recreation Area. Both places are attractive tourist areas in the summer.

The legislature created Whatcom County in 1854, carving it out of Island County. It originally included territory of present day San Juan and Skagit counties. Its name derives from the Lummi word *Xwot'qom*, meaning "noisy water." Bellingham is the county seat. The estimated 2017 population is 216,228 people. Whatcom County's population in 2010 was 201,140, growing an estimated 7.5 per cent from 2010 to 2017. The pace of growth in the county's population was more robust than the state's 1.76-percent growth rate from April 1, 2016 to April 1, 2017. The largest city in Whatcom County is Bellingham. Other cities are Blaine, Ferndale and Lynden. Whatcom County ranks 12th in the state in land area, with 2,503 square miles, and is populated with 102.66 people per square mile, compared to Washington State at 101.16 people per square mile.

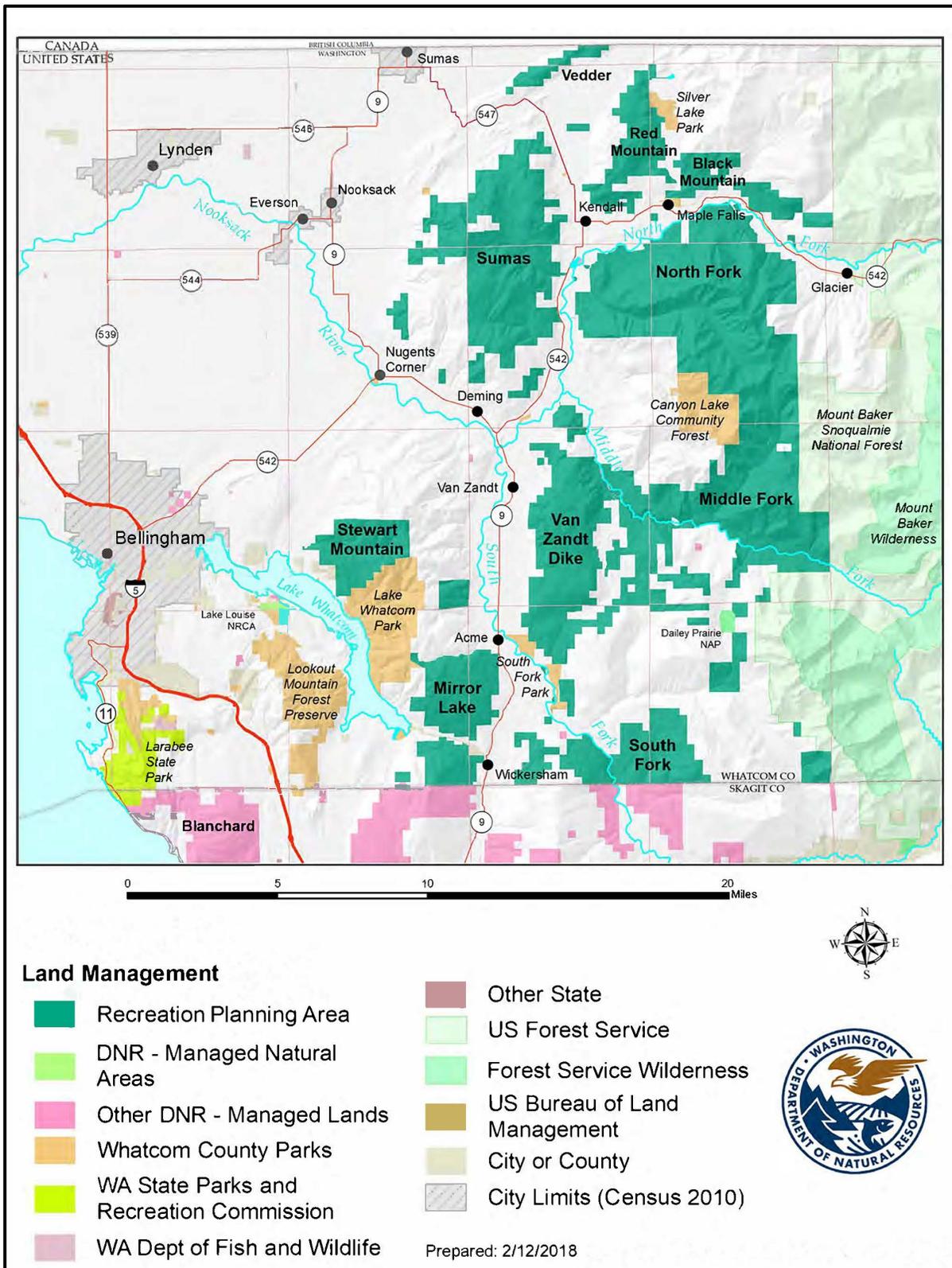
### **Nearby Municipalities**

The city of Bellingham is within a short distance of The Recreation Planning Area (see Figure 5. Interstate-5 provides regional access to the city, which is approximately 5 miles from the western part of the planning area. Several direct routes connect Bellingham to The Recreation Planning Area, of which State Highway 542 is the most prominent.

The city of Bellingham was formally incorporated on November 4, 1903. It was the result of the consolidation of four towns initially situated around Bellingham Bay: Whatcom, Sehome, Bellingham, and Fairhaven. The name of Bellingham was derived from the bay on which the city is situated. In 2017, Bellingham was the 12th largest city in Washington State with a population of 89,405. Bellingham is also home to Western Washington University, with an enrollment of approximately 15,575 students each year.

There are several smaller cities within driving distance to The Recreation Planning Area, including Blaine, Everson, Ferndale, Lynden, Nooksack and Sumas. Smaller communities in the surrounding area include Acme, Deming, Glacier, Kendall, and Maple Falls. Saxon, Welcome, and Wickersham are unincorporated communities around the planning area.

**Figure 5. Recreation Planning Area Context Map**



**Whatcom County: Lake Whatcom Park**

Lake Whatcom Park is approximately 4,680 acres in size and is situated on the northeast side of Lake Whatcom. The Stewart Mountain and Mirror Lake units each have a common boundary with the park. Amenities include vault toilets, multi-use non-motorized trails (hiking, mountain biking and equestrian), shore access and parking areas. A trail plan for the park was completed in June 2016, and several trails were constructed in 2017. Additional trail construction is expected in 2019.

**Whatcom County: Silver Lake Park**

Silver Lake Park is approximately 410 acres in size and is located on Silver Lake Road adjacent to the Red Mountain Unit of The Recreation Planning Area. The park is on the western shore of Silver Lake, which is approximately 157 acres in size. Amenities include an administration building (day lodge, kitchen, concession area and restrooms), six cabins, docks, a boat launch, three campground areas containing 123 campsites, restrooms and showers, an equestrian site swimming beach, playground and activity fields.

**Whatcom County: South Fork Park**

South Fork Park consists of two park areas along the South Fork Nooksack River. The park is approximately 550 acres in size. It is currently undeveloped, however there are plans for a trail system linking the two parcels by traversing DNR-managed land in the Van Zandt Dike Unit.

**Whatcom County: Canyon Lake Community Forest**

Canyon Lake Community Forest is located west of the planning area, abutting the North Fork Unit and is managed as a nature reserve. With over 2,200 acres, this nature reserve has opportunities to hike around a 45-acre lake filled with cutthroat trout or through an old-growth forest of Alaska Yellow Cedar, Pacific Silver Fir and Mountain Hemlock that are 800 to 1,000 years old. The excellent habitat provides opportunities to see owls, bears, cougars, and the diminutive pica.

**USFS: Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest**

Forest Service lands exist on the east side of the planning area. This land is part of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, which offers over 1.7 million acres of forest for hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, horseback riding, mountain biking, climbing, off road vehicles, and winter activities such as cross-country and downhill skiing and snowmobiling. Miles of forest roads offer access and sightseeing opportunities and cabins are available for recreational renting in some locations (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest).

**Mount Baker Ski Area**

The Mount Baker Ski Area is located 52 miles east of the city of Bellingham, with a skiable area of 1,000 acres in Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. The mountain offers downhill skiing and snowboarding.

**Lake Whatcom Watershed**

The Lake Whatcom watershed is approximately 35,200 acres, of which, approximately 5,855 acres lie within the Stewart Mountain and Mirror Lake units of The Recreation Planning Area. It is protected through a special district regulated by Whatcom County. The special district is an

overlay zone that imposes regulatory controls designed to preserve and protect the unique character and long-term viability of the watershed. The overlay zone is found in Title 20 of Whatcom County Code. Lake Whatcom is the drinking water supply for approximately 85,000 residents in Bellingham and Whatcom County, and is managed by three entities: the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County and the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District.

### **Private Ownerships of Surrounding Lands**

There is a variety of privately owned parcels with an array of land uses surrounding The Recreation Planning Area, including forest management, conservation, agricultural, and residential development.

## **Ecological Description**

Located in western Washington, The Recreation Planning Area is part of the foothills between the western reaches of the Cascade Range and river valleys of the three forks of the Nooksack River. It is defined by mountain ridges in the east to meandering river channels in the valleys. The ecoregions include the Puget Trough and the Northern Cascades. Generally, The Recreation Planning Area is characterized by moderate to steep topography cut by a network of creeks and streams that drain toward the North Fork, Middle Fork and South Fork of the Nooksack River. Elevations range from 400 feet to over 5,000 feet above sea level. Much of The Recreation Planning Area has soils that are derived from loess, volcanic ash, alluvium and colluvium. Such soils tend to be deep and make up the RPA's plateaus, hillslopes, summits canyon walls, and mountain slopes. Across the planning area, the average annual precipitation ranges from 42 to 54 inches in the lower elevations to 60 to 65 inches in the higher elevations near the foothills of the Cascade Range.

The native coniferous forest in the planning area is primarily made up of Douglas-fir, western red cedar, and western hemlock. Deciduous trees, including red alder and big leaf maple are abundant in the riparian areas. Understory plants include sword fern, snowberry, salmonberry, yarrow, camas, Pacific dogwood, salal, cascara, spirea, white trillium and vetch. Additional vegetation from the natural forest understory, more commonly gathered for recreational and/or tribal purposes, include bear grass, bracken fern, various mushrooms and berries.

Rare plant species identified by DNR found within the planning area include tall bugbane, several-flowered sedge, spotted Joe-Pye weed, western jewel-weed and pygmy water-lily.

The forests and the river corridors provide habitat for a wide diversity of wildlife species. Wildlife prevalent in The Recreation Planning Area and vicinity include black-tail deer, elk, coyote, gray wolf, cougar, mountain goat, black bear, raccoon, and western squirrel. Examples of bird populations include bald eagles, golden eagles, peregrine falcons, goshawks, Washington sage grouse, western meadowlarks, and vesper sparrows. The riparian areas within The Recreation Planning Area also serve as habitat for chinook, coho, chum, pink, and sockeye salmon; Coastal and westslope cutthroat; golden, rainbow, brook, and bull trout; Dolly Varden char, kokanee, toads, frogs, and a variety of other amphibians.

Species listed as candidate, threatened, or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act, or species which are considered by Washington State to be a "species of greatest conservation

need”, which have a reasonable likelihood of occurring within or near The Recreation Planning Area include fisher, gray wolf, grizzly bear, lynx, martin, wolverine, Cascade red fox, Townsend’s big-eared bat, Keen’s myotis, marbled murrelet, harlequin duck, golden eagle, band-tailed pigeon, northern spotted owl, purple martin, Columbia spotted frog, Oregon spotted frog, western toad, bull trout/Dolly Varden, chinook salmon, coho salmon, chum salmon, sockeye salmon, rainbow trout/steelhead, white sturgeon, Pacific lamprey, river lamprey, and Johnson’s hairstreak. Species whose geographic distributions are limited to marine environments are not included in this list.

# PART IV. The Planning Process

The Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan was developed with input and assistance from various individuals and organizations representing a wide range of interests and backgrounds. The public planning process included open public meetings, Recreation Planning Committee meetings, a user survey, and public ideas and suggestions submitted via email, phone calls, and letters. DNR also developed a Baker to Bellingham Recreation Plan webpage to provide updates and information during the planning process.

The Recreation Planning Committee was a vital component of the planning process. This group of volunteers consisted of 17 community members who represented a wide variety of user interests, and helped to guide the course of the planning effort and offered input and suggestions. The collaborative process yielded a plan that is consistent with DNR's trust mandate, addresses environmental responsibilities, and provides for continued public access and safe and sustainable recreational opportunities. The plan also promotes the development of new recreational opportunities on public lands in Whatcom County.

## Developing the Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan

The process to develop this plan included the following seven phases:

### **Phase 1: Pre-Planning**

- Develop project scope
- Identify need for planning
- Identify data collection needs
- Create stakeholder involvement plan

### **Phase 2: Recreation Land Suitability**

- Identify and map areas with long-term limiting factors for recreational use
- Conduct field trips

### **Phase 3: Inventory and Public Involvement**

- Identify public issues and concerns
- Hold public meetings
- Establish a Recreation Planning Committee
- Conduct an online user survey

### **Phase 4: Assessment**

- Evaluate and discuss biological, geological/soils, and management suitability data with Recreation Planning Committee
- Compile the data from the online user survey
- Develop preliminary concepts for recreation management

### **Phase 5: Concepts**

- Refine recreation concepts into one recommended plan
- Develop objectives and strategies for the plan
- Develop an implementation approach for the proposed plan
- Complete a draft write up of the plan

## **Phase 6: State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Review**

- Conduct a non-project SEPA review for the proposed plan

## **Phase 7: Plan Completion**

- Finalize the plan for publication
- DNR adopt the recommended plan

## **Recreation Land Suitability**

Biological, geological/soils, and management suitability assessments were completed for recreation opportunities in The Recreation Planning Area in the second phase of this project. The assessments resulted in composite maps that helped to guide the Recreation Planning Committee and the planning effort. The purpose of the assessments was to identify and map areas within The Recreation Planning Area that may have long-term limiting factors that could affect recreation planning.

The composite maps identify locations within The Recreation Planning Area that have low or moderate suitability for recreational facilities, motorized trails and non-motorized trails. The suitability assessment was intended to be broad scale and does not replace future site-specific analysis for individual projects where they are required.

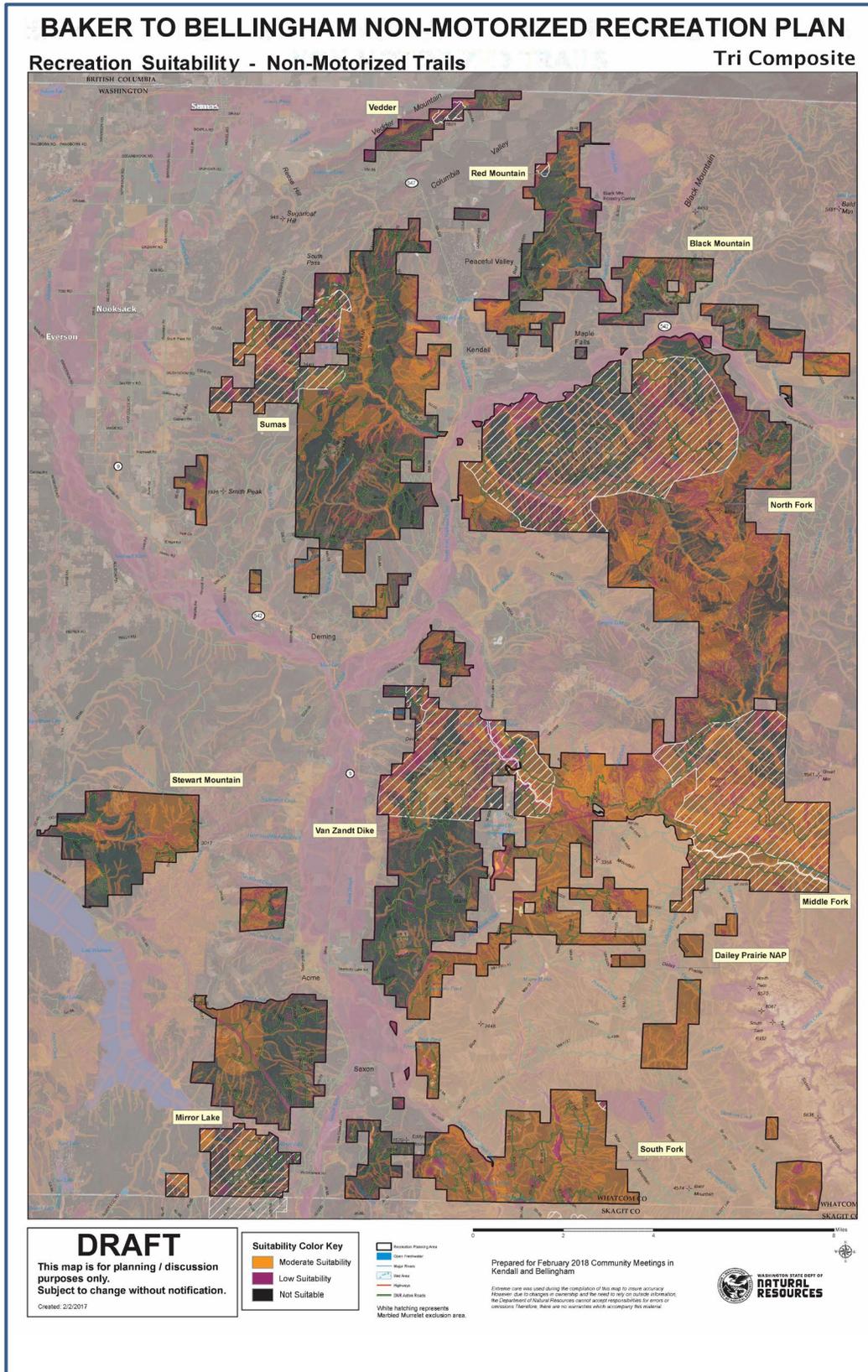
Scientists, planners, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysts, and land managers developed the suitability maps. The process included identifying and mapping biologic, soils/geologic, and management criteria within The Recreation Planning Area.

Examples of composite suitability maps are found on pages 28 - 29 of this plan. Additional maps are located on DNR's website.

**Table 3. Suitability Criteria**

Criteria Category	Specific Criteria
<b>Biological Criteria</b>	Wetlands and wetland buffers
	Fish habitat
	Riparian areas and riparian buffers
	Elk core habitat areas
	Marbled murrelet habitat zones
	Cliffs, balds, caves and talus
	High quality and rare plant communities
	Sensitive, threatened, or endangered species
<b>Geological/Soils Criteria</b>	Soils with high erosion potential
	Soils with poor drainage
	Deep-seated landslides
	Areas that have moved in previous landslides
	Areas with high potential for landslides
	Slope percentage (steep slopes)
	Alluvial Fans
	100-year floodplain
<b>Management Criteria</b>	Communication sites
	Rock sources
	Utility easements
	Land adjacent to other properties
	Water sources
	Cultural and archeological resources

Figure 6. Non-Motorized Tri-Composite Map





## Public Involvement

Public participation in the recreation planning process was an integral part of creating this plan. The outreach process included the following key components:

- Preparation of an outreach plan that identified key stakeholders, other government entities, and user groups for inclusion in external communications.
- E-newsletters sent throughout the planning effort to more than 1,500 people interested in the recreation planning process.
- A set of public kick-off meetings to introduce the project and collect public input.
- Two sets of community meetings to gather input and ideas from the public and interested community members.
- Participation in a web-based user survey.
- Formation of a citizen-based Recreation Planning Committee to work with staff to discuss challenges and recommend improvements within The Recreation Planning Area.
- External information gathering and issue identification from a variety of sources.
- Maintaining outreach efforts throughout the planning process with other governments and Whatcom County.
- Creation of a webpage to provide general information on the planning process and activities, and solicit comments.

Consultation with tribes occurred throughout the planning process. As cultural and traditional practice concerns were shared with DNR staff, management decisions were made to mitigate those concerns.

### The Public Kick-off Meetings

To kick off the planning process, DNR invited the public to a set of open house meetings held on January 19, 2016 at the Port of Bellingham Terminal Building in Bellingham, and January 20, 2016 at the Senior Center in Lynden. The purpose of these meetings was to provide the public an opportunity to share thoughts and ideas about recreation on DNR-managed trust lands in Whatcom County and learn more about the planning process. Over 450 people attended the kick-off meetings, sharing their favorite activities and experiences in The Recreation Planning Area.

Kick-off meeting participants were asked to share feedback about:

- Opportunities for partnerships.
- Enjoyable recreation activities in the planning area.
- Missing recreation opportunities in the planning area.
- Favorite places within the forest to visit.

### Community Meetings

In November 2016, DNR held a community meeting at Bellingham Technical College in Bellingham. The intent of the meeting was to present the results of the land suitability assessment and gather input from the public about recreational opportunities and their impact on the surrounding communities, Whatcom County's economic vitality, quality of life, and recreational experiences. Attendees shared insights and ideas on recreation opportunities that

were later presented to the Recreation Planning Committee during the planning process.

In February 2018, the agency went back to the public, holding a set of community meetings to present two preliminary concept maps developed with the Recreation Planning Committee during the winter months of 2017 and 2018. The first meeting was held at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center in Kendall and the second meeting was held at the Port of Bellingham Terminal Building in Bellingham. Attendees shared insights, ideas, and comments on the preliminary concepts for proposed recreation development in The Recreation Planning Area with the agency and planning staff.

### **User Survey**

During July and August 2016, DNR conducted a voluntary online survey to gather information on people's recreation experiences in and around The Recreation Planning Area. More than 1,300 people responded.

The survey asked participants about a variety of topics including travel distance, camping, recreational concerns, and demographics. The survey was not intended to be a statistical representation of use. It was utilized as a tool to gain additional information about how The Recreation Planning Area was used for recreation. The Recreation Planning Area is a common destination for many forms of motorized, non-motorized, and dispersed recreational activities.

A summary of the survey can be found at:

[https://www.dnr.wa.gov/publications/amp\\_rec\\_b2bsurveyresults.pdf](https://www.dnr.wa.gov/publications/amp_rec_b2bsurveyresults.pdf)

### **Recreation Planning Committee**

A committee of citizen volunteers with diverse recreational interests was selected to assist in the recreation planning process. Initially the committee was composed of 17 members, but over time, with the decision to exclude motorized recreation use, several members made the decision to excuse themselves from the committee and forgo participation in the planning process. The remaining volunteers committed to a 24 month planning process consisting of monthly meetings, field trips, and outreach with various user groups for input and ideas. The committee was guided by a Recreation Planning Committee Charter that described the agency's mission, guiding principles, vision, and goals as well as the committee's mission, commitment, and authority.

The committee included representatives with a broad variety of recreational backgrounds including mountain biking, motorcycle use, ATV use, pleasure driving, equestrian use, 4x4 driving, hiking, snowmobiling, hunting and fishing, water-based recreation, and paragliding/hang gliding interests. Additional members included citizens from surrounding areas concerned with economic vitality, family recreation opportunities, and environmental responsibility.

The committee members provided the agency with information about various recreation interests in The Recreation Planning Area. DNR shared information with the committee regarding trust obligations, habitat protections, environmental and resource responsibilities, and funding limitations. Committee members served as a conduit of information to the recreational groups they represented. The collective information was critical in making recreational use recommendations within The Recreation Planning Area.

The first several meetings focused on providing information about The Recreation Planning Area and the agencies' responsibilities. Recreation Planning Committee members were given an overview of The Recreation Planning Area including the history of ownership and use, developed versus dispersed recreation, current use patterns, and illegal or inappropriate use.

Committee members were asked to share their own knowledge about The Recreation Planning Area and surrounding lands. Each member also shared a brief description of the recreational activities they pursued in The Recreation Planning Area and provided insight into what specific user groups would like to see happen in the recreation plan.

Several meetings were dedicated to presentations that provided critical information about biological, geological/soils, and management criteria as it relates to land suitability for recreational use. Suitability maps were developed that helped identify general areas less suitable for recreational use. These maps provided a foundation for the recreational-use draft concept map of The Recreation Planning Area. Specific locations of all proposed facilities and trails were not identified as part of this process; they will be determined by on-the-ground site assessments and planning.

The committee spent a large amount of time reviewing and discussing various recreational use draft concepts for The Recreation Planning Area, with an objective of finding a concept they all could support. Historic use, current conditions, land suitability, resource protection, public use needs, and other identified issues were considered during the draft concept review and discussion process.

The final recreational use concept map recommended by the committee reflects the comprehensive planning process and was supported by the majority of the Recreation Planning Committee.

## **Planning Area Issues**

A vital part of the planning process involved identifying existing issues within The Recreation Planning Area and discussing and developing strategies to address those issues. Issue identification was achieved through a variety of means including outreach to the public and nearby residents, recreational user input, Recreation Planning Committee feedback, discussions with tribal representatives, community meetings, an online survey, and general comments from email, letters, and telephone conversations.

The Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan aims to address a number of key issues identified through this process. The following summary captures many of the main issues discussed; however, it is not intended to be comprehensive of all issues or suggestions the public submitted to the agencies:

- Illegal or inappropriate use by motorized recreationists.
- Maintaining working forests while providing recreation opportunities in The Recreation Planning Area.
- Maintaining the forest road system for public access.
- Providing for motorized recreation opportunities in The Recreation Planning Area.
- Locating facilities near the perimeter of the planning area.
- Spread recreation development across the units of The Recreation Planning Area.

- Maintaining dispersed recreation activities.
- Improving education and enforcement where the land has been impacted and abused.
- Protecting important elk and marbled murrelet habitats.

## **In Closing**

This plan is intended to guide non-motorized recreation and public access opportunities within The Recreation Planning Area for the next 10-15 years. Objectives, strategies, and implementation priorities were developed with the active participation of the Recreation Planning Committee and DNR staff.

Future development of facilities and trails will undergo site-specific analysis. Implementation of individual projects is contingent on acquiring adequate funding, staffing and resources. Funding for these projects will come from the competitive grant process in which each project will compete statewide, against similar projects, for grant dollars every two years. Capital money may also be used on these individual projects for development. Similar to the granting process, capital money is used towards projects that are prioritized by recreation program management.

# **PART V. Background Information and Decision Criteria**

DNR is required to comply with all local, state, and federal laws. Important components of the legal and policy framework that apply to recreation on DNR-managed trust lands include the following:

## **Public Lands Act (Title 79RCW)**

Many of DNR’s obligations and authorities as a land manager are established in the state Public Lands Act. This statute defines “multiple use”, “state lands”, and “sustainable harvest”, which are key concepts that help shape the Policy for Sustainable Forests.

## **The Multiple Use Concept (79.10RCW)**

When managing state trust lands, utilizing the Multiple Use Concept means DNR is to provide for other public uses when those uses are compatible with the obligations of trust management...if such uses are not compatible with the fiduciary obligations in the management of trust land, they may be permitted only if there is compensation to satisfy the trust’s financial obligations.

## **Public Access and Recreation Policy**

Adopted in 2006, this policy provides guidance of the management of public access and recreation use on forested state trust lands. It protects trust interests while seeking to balance economic, ecological, and social concerns.

## **The Policy for Sustainable Forests**

Adopted in 2006, this policy aims to conserve and enhance the natural systems and resources of forested state trust lands managed by DNR to produce long-term, sustainable trust income and environmental and other benefits for the people of Washington.

## **DNR’s Trust Mandate**

Washington State’s public trust lands are managed by DNR for the trust beneficiaries. DNR is guided by a “trust mandate,” which is a legal obligation to manage state lands to generate sustainable revenue for the beneficiaries, which include counties and designated state institutions. The role of trustee directs DNR to act with undivided loyalty to the trust beneficiaries, manage the trust assets prudently, preserve the trust property, make the trust property productive, deal impartially with beneficiaries, and consider the interests of successive beneficiaries.

## **State Environmental Policy Act – SEPA (43.21CRCW)**

SEPA is a state policy that requires state and local agencies to consider the likely environmental consequences of a proposal before approving or denying the proposal.

### **DNR's Public Access and Recreation Rules (332-52WAC)**

The purpose of these rules is to set standards for public use on DNR-managed lands. These rules promote public health and safety and protect DNR-managed lands, property, and resources. All persons who use DNR-managed lands should know and follow the department's rules.

### **DNR State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan 1997**

The State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) guides the management of approximately 1.8 million acres of forested state trust lands within the range of the northern spotted owl. This HCP is a partnership between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and DNR.

The HCP also enables compliance with the Endangered Species Act requirements. By providing conservation objectives and strategies that provide habitat for listed and unlisted species while providing greater certainty, flexibility, and stability, the trust is better able to meet its responsibilities of generating revenue for the beneficiaries.

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# Appendix A

## Glossary of Terms

For the purposes of this Recreation Plan, the terms below have the following meanings:

**Adaptive management** - a concept that provides for ongoing modifications of management practices in order to respond to new information, changes in circumstances on the ground, changes in laws, and/or new scientific developments.

**Alluvium** - a deposit of clay, silt, sand, and gravel left by flowing streams in a river valley or delta, typically producing fertile soil.

**Colluvium** - soil and debris that accumulate at the base of a slope by mass wasting or sheet erosion.

**Day-use area** - an area that supports daytime recreational activities but is not designed for overnight camping activities.

**Deep-seated landslides** - those in which the slide plane or zone of movement is typically below the maximum rooting depth of forest trees (generally greater than 10 feet). They may extend to hundreds of feet in depth and may involve underlying bedrock. Deep-seated landslides can be a wide range of sizes, up to several miles across.

**Department of Natural Resources (DNR)** - Washington State government department dedicated to educating and preserving Washington's natural resources. DNR manages 5.6 million acres of state lands, including approximately 3 million acres of trust lands.

**Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)** - Washington State government department dedicated to preserving, protecting and perpetuating fish, wildlife and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities.

**Designated trails** - trails planned for and managed by DNR.

**Developed recreation** - recreation that occurs at a designated site or location; built or improved for recreation on agency managed land, such as a trailhead, vista, parking area, picnic area, campground, or water access site.

**Dispersed recreation** - activities that occur outside the boundaries of developed recreational facilities and trails. Examples of dispersed use include, but are not limited to, fishing, hunting, camping, mushroom and berry picking, nature viewing, and geocaching.

**Floodplains** - flat or nearly flat land adjacent to a stream or river that experiences occasional or periodic flooding.

**Forest Watch Program** – a DNR sponsored volunteer program that helps protect and enhance DNR-managed lands while working with the public to encourage appropriate recreation use.

**Loess soils** - a light-colored fine-grained accumulation of clay and silt particles that have been deposited by the wind.

**Multiple-use recreation (shared use)** - trails and facilities that allow and support different kinds of trail-based recreational activities, which can include hiking, mountain biking, equestrian, etc.

**Primary Management Objective (PMO)** – indicates the principle recreation type(s) for which a designated recreation area is managed; PMOs establish the type of travel that is actively managed and appropriate on a trail.

**Recreation land suitability assessment** - a process where biological, geological, soils, and management data are applied in geographic layers and overlaid to produce composite maps. These maps assisted the committee in identifying areas with long-term limiting factors that would alter or affect recreation planning in The Recreation Planning Area

**Recreation Planning Area** - DNR-managed lands that are included in the planning process for this plan.

**Recreation Planning Committee** - a committee of citizen volunteers with diverse recreational interests, selected to assist in the recreation planning process.

**Recreation Planning Sub-Areas** - specific geographic sections of The Recreation Planning Area that contain land managed by DNR.

**Restoration** - for the purposes of this plan, restoration implies repairing resource damage that has occurred due to past recreational use. Fundamental to restoration is redirecting recreational activities away from unsustainable areas, correcting erosion and sediment delivery issues and supporting re-vegetation as necessary.

**State trust lands** - DNR-managed state lands held as a fiduciary (financial) trust and managed to benefit specific trust beneficiaries such as public K-12 schools and universities, capitol buildings, counties, and local services such as libraries.

**Sustainable** - meeting the principal characteristics of protecting the environment while addressing the user's needs and desired experiences, and requiring little maintenance.

**Suitability criteria** - characteristics used to identify locations within The Recreation Planning Area that have low or moderate suitability for recreational facilities or trails.

**Sustainable trails** - trails with the principal characteristics of minimal impact to the

environment, that meet the user's needs and desired experiences, and require little maintenance.

**Trail Management Objective (TMO)** - a description of the planned purpose for a specific trail or trail segment. TMOs include information such as the primary recreational use of the trail as well as any other allowed uses, design criteria, and any special considerations.

**Trailhead** - Designated parking area for trail access

**Unsanctioned trails** - trails that have not been developed or managed by DNR. They are not formally recognized, managed or signed to support sustainable recreation opportunities on DNR-managed lands.

**Watershed** - an area of land where all the water that is under it or drains off of it goes to the same place.

# Appendix B

## Recreation Planning Committee Meetings, Field Trips, and Main Agenda Items

Meeting Date	Main Agenda Items
March 8, 2016	Introductory meeting: meet DNR, committee members, overview of planning process, group charter, DNR land management objectives
April 12, 2016	Discussion on recreation plan development, presentation on landscape units in planning area
May 10, 2016	Review land suitability analysis process, specific modules used in the study, participate in group mapping exercise, committee member presentations on recreational activities in planning area
May 14, 2016	Field Trip to planning area
June 10, 2016	Geological/Soils Suitability Criteria presentation, committee member presentations on recreational activities in planning area
June 25, 2016	Second field trip to planning area
September 13, 2016	Management Criteria presentation, committee member presentations on recreational activities in planning area
October 11, 2016	Biological Suitability Criteria presentation, committee member presentations on recreational activities in planning area
November 1, 2016	Tri-composite suitability maps presentation, identify planning area issues, committee member presentations on recreational activities in planning area
January 10, 2017	Review comments from community meeting, discuss the public survey, participate in a brainstorming activity and a group mapping exercise
February 14, 2017	Participate in brainstorming activities, a group mapping exercise, and hear committee member presentations on recreation experiences
March 14, 2017	Learn about the Pacific Northwest Scenic Trail System, hear brainstorming ideas by the user groups, and engage in an issue sorting exercise
April 11, 2017	Continue the committee brainstorming exercise, hear from committee members on user group brainstorming, and complete the issue sorting exercise
May 9, 2017	Mapping exercise on roads, discussion on forest roads, identify relevant issues for recreation planning, discuss outstanding concepts for recreation planning
September 19, 2017	Issue sorting and discussion, review planning committee brainstorming ideas, identify outstanding concepts
October 10, 2017	Present and discuss options A, B, and C
January 9, 2018	Present and discuss concepts D and E
February 13, 2018	Discuss concepts D and E; discuss and identify partnerships and education and enforcement opportunities; review objectives and strategies
April 10, 2018	Review and discuss revisions to draft concepts F and G, review community meeting findings, consider Concept H
May 8, 2018	Present and discuss draft Concept H, objectives and strategies and implementation priorities
June 12, 2018	Review and discuss Concept Map, discuss implementation priorities and plan objectives and strategies

# Appendix C

## Public Comments

Public comments from the following community meetings are posted on the Baker to Bellingham Recreation planning web page:

- Public Kick-off Meetings January 19 & 20, 2016
- Public Community Meeting November 29, 2016
- Public Community Meeting February 21 & 22, 2018

Additional public comments were submitted throughout the planning process, in writing, in person or by email in response to the monthly recreation planning committee meetings.

All comments can be found at: <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/BakertoBellingham>

# **Appendix D**

## **Certificate of Adoption**

# Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan

The signature below certifies the adoption of this document by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources for the recreation management of DNR-managed lands in Whatcom County.

Angus W. Brodie                      4/4/19

Angus Brodie, Deputy Supervisor State Uplands DNR

Date