

Chapter One

Introduction and Growth Projections

How the Plan was Created

Whatcom County's Comprehensive Plan is intended to guide growth in unincorporated areas for the next 20 years in coordination with city comprehensive plans, the new plans of its cities. The fundamental purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to establish a framework of goals, and policies and action items to guide growth, land use, capital facility and transportation planning, and environmental protection for the more detailed growth planning and implementation actions which will occur in the near future in designated urban growth areas and in the county's rural areas.

The plan identifies urban growth area (UGA) boundaries, rural areas, agricultural lands, forestry lands and mineral resource lands, and contains a future land use map. The majority of the county's growth will be located within the UGA's. Several factors influenced the development of the adopted goals and polices contained in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.

First, this plan has been reviewed for consistency with the requirements of the Growth Management Act (GMA), the thirteen (13) goals of the GMA (RCW 36.70A.020 and .480), and mandatory plan elements (RCW 36.70A.070), and the current County-Wide Planning Policies. GMA goals are set forth below:

- (1) Urban growth. Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.
- (2) Reduce sprawl. Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development.
- (3) Transportation. Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.
- (4) Housing. Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population of this state, promote a variety of residential densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock.
- (5) Economic development. Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses and recruitment of new businesses,

- 1 recognize regional differences impacting economic development  
2 opportunities, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient  
3 economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources,  
4 public services, and public facilities.
- 5 (6) Property rights. Private property shall not be taken for public use without  
6 just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners  
7 shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions.
- 8 (7) Permits. Applications for both state and local government permits should  
9 be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.
- 10 (8) Natural resource industries. Maintain and enhance natural resource-based  
11 industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries  
12 industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and  
13 productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.
- 14 (9) Open space and recreation. Retain open space, enhance recreational  
15 opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to  
16 natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation  
17 facilities.
- 18 (10) Environment. Protect the environment and enhance the state's high  
19 quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of  
20 water.
- 21 (11) Citizen participation and coordination. Encourage the involvement of  
22 citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between  
23 communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.
- 24 (12) Public facilities and services. Ensure that those public facilities and  
25 services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the  
26 development at the time the development is available for occupancy and  
27 use without decreasing current service levels below locally established  
28 minimum standards.
- 29 (13) Historic preservation. Identify and encourage the preservation of lands,  
30 sites, and structures that have historical or archaeological significance.
- 31 (14) Shoreline Management. Per RCW 36.70A.480 Shorelines of the State, the  
32 goals and policies of the Shoreline Management Act, as set forth in RCW  
33 90.58.020, are added as one of the goals of the Growth Management Act.

34 Second, through inter-jurisdictional cooperation, Whatcom County has coordinated  
35 planning and decision making with various~~at~~ levels of government to ensure  
36 compatibility of goals and consistency of plans~~, desires, and has made this plan~~  
37 consistent with local plans.

1 Third, extensive citizen participation was facilitated through meetings, educational  
2 forums, surveys/questionnaires, presentations, public hearings, and written  
3 comments made throughout this process. ~~The Planning Commission and County~~  
4 ~~Council quickly learned that for every group or individual that sought a benefit,~~  
5 ~~another's rights were potentially impacted. This Plan will probably not satisfy any~~  
6 ~~one particular group of citizens with strongly held views. It does, however, provide~~  
7 ~~common ground on the most sensitive issues that all sides can stand on, if~~  
8 ~~somewhat uneasily, in the interest of what is best for the County as a whole.~~

## 9 **County-Wide Planning Policies**

10 The Whatcom County Council, in conjunction with the all local cities, previously  
11 adopted a set of County-Wide Planning Policies (see Appendix C). The framework  
12 provided by the adopted County-Wide Planning Policies ensures that local planning  
13 efforts will be consistent with one another and supportive of regional goals.

### 14 **~~Whatcom County: The Next Generations~~**

15 ~~In April 1993, the County Executive appointed a committee of individuals~~  
16 ~~representing a broad cross-section of county residents. Their charge was to~~  
17 ~~produce a graphic and written description of what the people of Whatcom County~~  
18 ~~wanted the county to be in 2010 and beyond. They designed an extensive public~~  
19 ~~input process to define this vision for the County. The committee's work was~~  
20 ~~supported and facilitated by Planning staff. Staff also provided the committee with~~  
21 ~~information about GMA requirements and existing conditions in the county.~~  
22 ~~Information included land use facilities, population, environment, resources, and~~  
23 ~~existing plans and zoning designations.~~

24 ~~The committee helped staff a booth at the Northwest Washington Fair in August~~  
25 ~~1993. Over 1,500 people visited the booth where they perused displays and maps,~~  
26 ~~completed questionnaires, and read newsletters. In June, August, and September,~~  
27 ~~the Visioning Committee hosted sixteen town hall meetings throughout the county~~  
28 ~~that were attended by over 500 people. Committee members also met with various~~  
29 ~~community groups to explain the Visioning Process. To encourage public input, over~~  
30 ~~12,000 surveys were distributed, and by October 1, over 1,000 had been returned.~~  
31 ~~A countywide statistically valid phone survey was conducted which added another~~  
32 ~~410 people's opinions to the Visioning Process.~~

33 ~~The telephone survey and questionnaire data were then analyzed, and the results~~  
34 ~~tabulated and summarized by professional survey consultants. By February 1994,~~  
35 ~~the committee had thoroughly reviewed the data and generated a set of **Visioning**~~  
36 ~~**Community Value Statements**. These statements are included in Appendix C of~~  
37 ~~this plan. They were distributed to all committees working on components of the~~  
38 ~~plan.~~

39 ~~The committee then developed four land use alternatives in order to explore and~~  
40 ~~test different ways of expressing the value statements. The four land use~~

1 ~~alternatives were presented around the county in another series of town hall~~  
2 ~~meetings. Finally, in June 1994, the committee produced a recommended land use~~  
3 ~~alternative expressed through written value statements and a conceptual land use~~  
4 ~~map. The Visioning Community Value Statements and written recommendations~~  
5 ~~were the basis from which individual committees and Planning staff developed land~~  
6 ~~use issues, goals, policies, and action plans as presented to the Planning~~  
7 ~~Commission in the November 1994 *Draft Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan*.~~

## 8 ~~Whatcom 2031~~

9 ~~*Whatcom 2031* is the County's work program for the period 2008 to 2011 to~~  
10 ~~prepare for the next 20 years of growth and update its Comprehensive Plan~~  
11 ~~consistent with GMA. Phase I focused on the required 10-Year UGA Review and~~  
12 ~~included developing population and employment forecasts and reviewing land~~  
13 ~~capacity and UGA boundaries. An EIS addressing four regional growth alternatives~~  
14 ~~was prepared addressing urban and rural growth patterns to the year 2031. Phase~~  
15 ~~II will address the required 7-Year Review which is anticipated to involve a broader~~  
16 ~~review of the Comprehensive Plan elements in relation to GMA amendments and~~  
17 ~~other required topics.~~

## 18 ~~Other Growth Management Committees~~

19 ~~Citizen committees were used extensively to develop this plan in the 1990s.~~  
20 ~~Almost all of the elements of the plan were generated using input from appointed~~  
21 ~~citizen committees. Each committee was given the results of surveys and town hall~~  
22 ~~meetings from the *Whatcom County: The Next Generations*. Each committee spent~~  
23 ~~countless hours reviewing background material, identifying issues, generating goals~~  
24 ~~and policies, and, in some cases, action plans. Committees and committee~~  
25 ~~members are listed in the front of this document. For the purposes of updating the~~  
26 ~~Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) in 2009, and as Phase I of the *Whatcom 2031*~~  
27 ~~comprehensive plan update process, the Growth Management Coordinating Council~~  
28 ~~(GMCC) was formed in 2008. This committee was composed of elected officials~~  
29 ~~from all the affected jurisdictions including one representative from each of the~~  
30 ~~small cities, two from Bellingham, and three from Whatcom County. Planning staff~~  
31 ~~from each of these municipalities met with county staff on a regular basis to review~~  
32 ~~methodologies, data, and policies and provide guidance to the GMCC on these~~  
33 ~~issues. At its last meeting for the UGA update process on July 1, 2009, the GMCC~~  
34 ~~approved a document showing their recommendations for the Urban Growth Area~~  
35 ~~review. This document was presented to the county planning commission and~~  
36 ~~county council to provide perspective to their decision-making process.~~

37 ~~The *Whatcom 2031* process will be on-going through 2011 and the comprehensive~~  
38 ~~plan will be revised and updated as part of that process.~~

## 1 Original Adoption and Amendments

2 The County Council adopted the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan in May of  
3 1997. Since then, amendments have been made on an annual basis. Additionally, a  
4 comprehensive plan update took place in 2005, a UGA review occurred in 2009 and  
5 a combined comprehensive plan update and UGA review occurred in 2016 as  
6 required by RCW 36.70A.130. ~~the periodic review of the comprehensive plan for~~  
7 ~~consistency with the GMA, required by RCW 36.70A.130, is occurring over a three-~~  
8 ~~year period from 2008-2011 and is called *Whatcom 2031*.~~

## 9 ~~GMA Goals, County-Wide Planning Policies, and Visioning Community Value~~ 10 ~~Statements~~

11 ~~Every chapter in this plan was reviewed for consistency with the *GMA Planning*~~  
12 ~~*Goals, the County-Wide Planning Policies, and the Visioning Community Value*~~  
13 ~~*Statements* generated by the Visioning Process. Each individual chapter describes~~  
14 ~~how consistency was achieved. The connections between this plan's goals and~~  
15 ~~policies, and the goals, policies, and value statements of the other documents are~~  
16 ~~evaluated in the *Environmental Impact Statement* for this plan.~~

17 ~~For the complete text of the *GMA Planning Goals, the County-Wide Planning*~~  
18 ~~*Policies, and the Visioning Community Value Statements*, see Appendix C of this~~  
19 ~~plan.~~

## 20 Introducing Whatcom County

21 Whatcom County lies in the northwest corner of both the State of Washington and  
22 the coterminous United States. It is bounded on the north by the Canadian border,  
23 on the east by Okanogan County, on the south by Skagit County, and on the west  
24 by the Strait of Georgia and Bellingham Bay. These borders enclose large parts of  
25 the Mount Baker National Forest and the North Cascades National Park, which take  
26 up about two-thirds of Whatcom County's total area. All but a few residents live in  
27 the western third of the county. Bellingham, ~~with an estimated 2008 population of~~  
28 ~~75,750 (89,284 with unincorporated UGA),~~ is Whatcom County's largest city. Other  
29 cities include Blaine, Everson, Ferndale, Lynden, Nooksack, and Sumas, and there  
30 are three unincorporated UGAs and several smaller unincorporated communities.

31 Two Indian reservations and associated trust lands are located within Whatcom  
32 County's borders. The Lummi Nation reservation is on the Lummi Peninsula and  
33 Portage Island on the western side of the county; the Nooksack Tribe reservation  
34 and trust lands ~~include~~ comprise several parcels along the Nooksack River in the  
35 west-central area of the county.

## 37 Whatcom County Government

38 Whatcom County's mission statement is to "promote, enrich and enhance the  
39 freedoms, opportunities, health and safety of its citizens. We will provide essential  
40 and desirable public services in a cost effective and accountable manner. We will  
41 conduct the public's business and treat all members of our diverse community in a

1 courteous and professional manner. We will provide vision, leadership and  
2 responsiveness while addressing community issues and conducting the business of  
3 the people. We will encourage community involvement in public issues while  
4 protecting the rights of the individual and encouraging respect for diversity. We will  
5 serve as an active catalyst for individuals and other entities to participate in  
6 achieving a positive future for Whatcom County."

7 Ensure good government through transparency, robust public involvement and  
8 ongoing process and performance improvement.

9 **Goal 1A: Ensure that government activities, regulations and policies are**  
10 **transparent, accountable and easy to understand.**

11 Policy 1A-1: Integrate and simplify all documents using the "Federal Plain Language  
12 Guidelines" available at [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov) to make them more  
13 understandable and user-friendly.

14 Policy 1A-2: Benchmark the County's performance against itself and other  
15 comparable jurisdictions. Develop and publish reports on key  
16 performance metrics.

17 Policy 1A-3: Ensure all acronyms and abbreviations used in public documents have  
18 clearly defined and readily accessible explanations.

19 Policy 1A-4: Maintain a user-friendly, intuitive, and helpful website.

20 Policy 1A-5: Ensure forms, permits, applications, and similar documents are readily  
21 available to the public and are updated often to reflect changes to  
22 regulations and contact information. These documents should be  
23 present on the County website and cross-referenced appropriately so  
24 the public can easily find and access them.

25 Policy 1A-6: Use technological tools, such as Geographic Information Systems  
26 (GIS), to make information easily accessible to the public.

27 Policy 1A-7: Respond to inquiries from the public in a timely, professional, and  
28 courteous manner.

29 Policy 1A-8: No rule, regulation, restriction, or requirement shall be imposed by the  
30 County that is not embodied in local, state, or federal law.

## 31 **Population**

32 Population growth in Whatcom County since the arrival of the first Euro-American  
33 immigrants in the 1850s has been driven largely by in-migration of people from  
34 other sections of the state and country. **Table 1** displays the growth of population  
35 in Whatcom County from 1910 to ~~2010~~2000, and **Table 2** shows the estimated  
36 growth figures for each year of the current decade. These tables indicate a steady

1 increase in population over time, with varying rates of growth often driven by  
 2 factors external to Whatcom County such as international events or changes in  
 3 technology and transportation. Approximately 73% of the population growth  
 4 between ~~1980-1960~~ and ~~2013-2000~~ was due to in-migration of people from outside  
 5 the area seeking jobs, life styles, and/or amenities found in Whatcom County.  
 6 Figure 1 below shows net migration fluctuating significantly over time.

7 It should be noted that the first decade of planning under the Growth Management  
 8 Act (1990-2000) accompanied the reversal of a 30-year trend from 1960-1990  
 9 where unincorporated areas grew faster than cities. From 1990 to 2000, cities grew  
 10 at a more rapid rate than unincorporated areas for the first time since the  
 11 1950's. The trend of faster city growth continued between 2000-2010.

12 **Table 1. Population Growth in Whatcom County, 1910-~~2010-2000~~**

YEAR	TOTAL COUNTY POPULATION	AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF GROWTH	UNINCORPORATED POPULATION	AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF GROWTH	COMBINED POPULATION OF CITIES*	AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF GROWTH
1910	49,511		20,183		29,328	
1920	50,600	0.2%	19,621	-0.3%	30,979	0.5%
1930	59,128	1.6%	23,112	1.7%	36,016	1.5%
1940	60,355	0.2%	25,860	1.1%	34,495	-0.4%
1950	66,733	1.0%	26,462	0.2%	40,271	1.6%
1960	70,317	0.5%	25,990	-0.2%	44,327	1.0%
1970	81,983	1.5%	34,004	2.7%	47,979	0.8%
1980	106,701	2.7%	48,622	3.6%	58,079	1.9%
1990	127,780	1.8%	59,187	2.0%	68,593	1.7%
2000	<del>166,814</del> 166,826	2.7%	74,231	2.3%	<del>92,583</del> 92,595	3.0%
2010	201,140	1.9%	87,065	1.6%	114,075	2.1%

13 Source: US Census  
 14 \*Cities include Bellingham, Blaine, Everson (since 1930), Ferndale, Lynden, Nooksack (since 1920), and Sumas  
 15

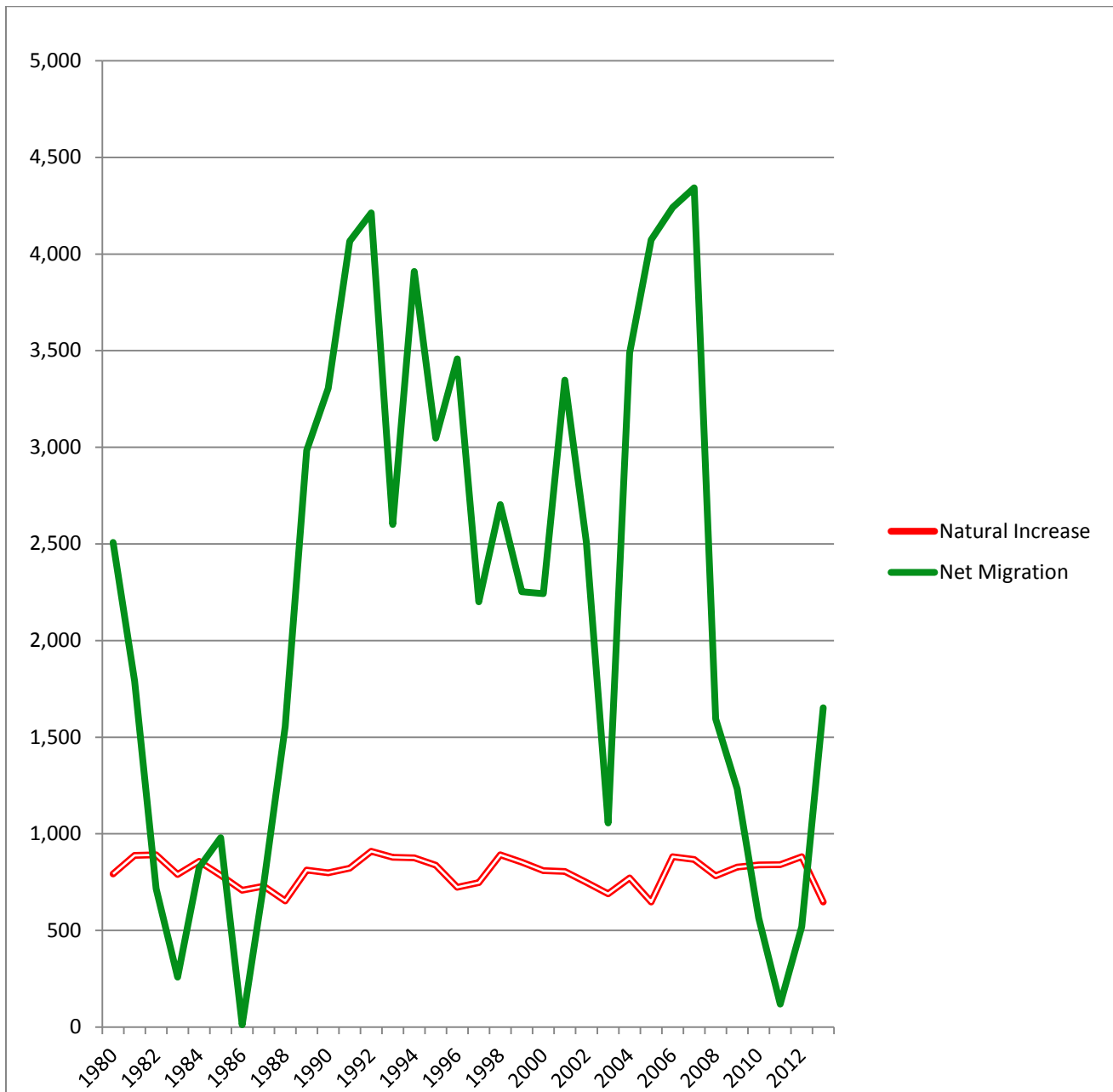
1 **Table 2. Estimated Population Growth in Whatcom County, 2010-**  
 2 **2013~~2000-2008~~**

YEAR	TOTAL COUNTY POPULATION	ANNUAL RATE OF GROWTH	UNINCORPORATED POPULATION	ANNUAL RATE OF GROWTH	COMBINED POPULATION OF CITIES*	ANNUAL RATE OF GROWTH
<del>2000</del>	<del>166,184</del>		<del>74,231</del>		<del>92,583</del>	
<del>2001</del>	<del>170,600</del>	<del>2.27%</del>	<del>75,682</del>	<del>1.95%</del>	<del>94,918</del>	<del>2.52%</del>
<del>2002</del>	<del>172,200</del>	<del>-.94%</del>	<del>76,718</del>	<del>1.37%</del>	<del>95,482</del>	<del>-.59%</del>
<del>2003</del>	<del>174,500</del>	<del>1.3%</del>	<del>77,796</del>	<del>1.4%</del>	<del>96,704</del>	<del>1.3%</del>
<del>2004</del>	<del>177,300</del>	<del>1.6%</del>	<del>78,746</del>	<del>1.2%</del>	<del>98,554</del>	<del>1.9%</del>
<del>2005</del>	<del>180,800</del>	<del>2.0%</del>	<del>79,848</del>	<del>1.4%</del>	<del>100,952</del>	<del>2.4%</del>
<del>2006</del>	<del>184,300</del>	<del>1.9%</del>	<del>81,066</del>	<del>1.5%</del>	<del>103,234</del>	<del>2.3%</del>
<del>2007</del>	<del>188,300</del>	<del>2.2%</del>	<del>82,309</del>	<del>1.5%</del>	<del>105,991</del>	<del>2.7%</del>
<del>2008</del>	<del>191,000</del>	<del>1.4%</del>	<del>83,911</del>	<del>1.9%</del>	<del>107,089</del>	<del>1.0%</del>
<u>2010</u>	<u>201,140</u>		<u>87,065</u>		<u>114,075</u>	
<u>2011</u>	<u>202,100</u>	<u>0.48%</u>	<u>87,535</u>	<u>0.54%</u>	<u>114,565</u>	<u>0.43%</u>
<u>2012</u>	<u>203,500</u>	<u>0.69%</u>	<u>87,921</u>	<u>0.44%</u>	<u>115,579</u>	<u>0.89%</u>
<u>2013</u>	<u>205,800</u>	<u>1.13%</u>	<u>88,276</u>	<u>0.40%</u>	<u>117,524</u>	<u>1.68%</u>

3 Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management (~~2013 June 29, 2009~~)  
 4 \*Cities include Bellingham, Blaine, Everson, Ferndale, Lynden, Nooksack, and Sumas.  
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1 **Figure 1. Natural Increase and Net Migration in Whatcom County**



3 | Source of information: Washington State Office of Financial Management (2013)

4  
5 | ~~Between 1997 and 2007, the total population of Whatcom County had grown at an~~  
6 ~~average annual rate of 1.83% per year with the incorporated cities growing at an~~  
7 ~~annual rate of 1.86% and the unincorporated areas (including the urban areas of~~  
8 ~~Birch Bay and Columbia Valley) growth at 1.50% per year (source: OFM). The total~~  
9 ~~2007 estimated population was 188,300 and the 2008 estimated population of~~  
10 ~~Whatcom County is 191,000.~~

1 More than half of all Whatcom County residents live in cities. **Map 1-1** displays the  
 2 ~~2010~~ population density for Whatcom County. The highest densities are in  
 3 and around cities, though there are other ~~small~~ centers of medium to high  
 4 population density such as the ones at Sudden Valley, Birch Bay, Columbia  
 5 Valley~~Paradise Lakes near Kendall~~, and along the Guide Meridian. Approximately  
 6 68% of the Whatcom County population lived in cities and urban growth areas in  
 7 2013.~~The 2000 Census data showed 92,583 people, or about 55.5% of the county's~~  
 8 ~~total population, living inside the city limits of Whatcom County's seven~~  
 9 ~~incorporated cities. Another 13,920 people were living near the cities in city urban~~  
 10 ~~growth areas (derived from Whatcom County Population and Economic Forecasts,~~  
 11 ~~ECONorthwest, May 2003, Table 3-2 and Census counts).~~ Counting these  
 12 ~~neighborhoods, the urban population was about 64% of the county total.~~

13 **Population Projections**

14 Projections of future population size are an essential component of land use  
 15 planning. As required by RCW 36.70A.110, in ~~2012~~2007, the Washington State  
 16 Office of Financial Management (OFM) developed a 20-year population projection  
 17 for Whatcom County. The OFM projections for ~~2036~~2029 are provided in Table 3  
 18 below:

19  
20 **Table 3. OFM Population Projections for Whatcom County**

	OFM Population Projections for <del>2036</del> 2029	Average Annual Growth Rate <del>2013-2036</del> 2009-2029	Average Annual Population Growth <del>2013-2036</del> 2009-2029	Total Population Growth <del>2013-2036</del> 2009-2029
<b>Low</b>	<del>225,580</del> 216,300	<del>0.4%</del> 0.66%	<del>860</del> 1,265	<del>19,780</del> 25,300
<b>Medium</b>	<del>273,911</del> 258,448	<del>1.3%</del> 1.77%	<del>2,961</del> 3,372	<del>68,111</del> 67,448
<b>High</b>	<del>330,869</del> 318,832	<del>2.1%</del> 3.35%	<del>5,438</del> 6,392	<del>125,069</del> 127,832

21 Source: OFM (2012) and Whatcom County Population and Employment Projections and Urban Growth Area  
 22 Allocations – Phase I Technical Report, Berk (2013)  
 23 Whatcom County Countywide Population and Employment Extrapolations and Scenarios, Memo,  
 24 Berk and Associates, February 9, 2009.  
 25 Note: The OFM population estimate of 191,000 in 2008 was utilized as a starting point for calculating the  
 26 average annual growth rates and average annual population growth figures in this table.  
 27

28 The Growth Management Act requires ~~that~~ the County to plan for ~~a 20-year~~  
 29 ~~population growth~~ ~~that is~~ based upon OFM~~the growth management~~ population  
 30 ~~projections.~~ ~~by the office of financial management (OFM).~~ The county and each city  
 31 must include areas and densities sufficient to permit the urban growth that is  
 32 projected to occur for the succeeding twenty-year period.

1 | The County's ~~2036~~2029 population projection of ~~275,450~~247,755 is within OFM's  
2 | range and therefore requires no further justification. The rationale for using this  
3 | figure, which is close to OFM's medium projection, include: ~~an overall slowing trend~~  
4 | ~~for growth in Washington State and Whatcom County,~~ ensuring an adequate land  
5 | supply to accommodate growth, the need to plan for growth, and the need to  
6 | protect the quality of life and natural resources in Whatcom County. This population  
7 | projection is selected for planning purposes only and does not obligate the County  
8 | to encourage growth. Given past population trends and the requirements of GMA,  
9 | planning for population growth, whether it occurs or not, is critical for the quality of  
10 | life, protection of natural resources and economic health of Whatcom County.

11 | **Table 4** shows how the total projected ~~2036~~2029 population would be distributed  
12 | ~~to UGAs and the area outside UGAs, assuming: 1) that all of the UGAs have been~~  
13 | ~~annexed into existing cities; 2) that each urban area receives a share of the~~  
14 | ~~county's overall growth; and 3) that the portion of growth to urban areas is~~  
15 | ~~approximately 85% of county-wide growth, with the balance to unincorporated~~  
16 | ~~rural Whatcom County (areas outside the UGAs, including rural and resource~~  
17 | ~~lands). The 2008 population estimates – and, by extension, the 2029 population~~  
18 | ~~projections – rely on OFM estimates that were based on 2000 census figures. After~~  
19 | ~~the 2010 census data were released, OFM revised its population estimates for the~~  
20 | ~~years between 2000 and 2010. As shown in Figure 1, the revised estimate for the~~  
21 | ~~total 2008 County population is more than 6,000 persons higher than the one used~~  
22 | ~~to develop the Table 4 population projections. OFM did not provide revised~~  
23 | ~~estimates for the UGA (or non-UGA) population in the years between 2000 and~~  
24 | ~~2010, but Figure 1 shows an estimate of the non-UGA population assuming the~~  
25 | ~~proportion of non-UGA population held constant at about 32% of total County~~  
26 | ~~population in those years. The revised OFM estimates are shown in Figure 1 for~~  
27 | ~~illustrative purposes only; neither these estimates nor any projections based on~~  
28 | ~~them are adopted in this plan. The projections used in Table 4 and elsewhere in this~~  
29 | ~~plan will be revised using the most current OFM estimates and projections during~~  
30 | ~~the next UGA review, due in 2016.~~

31 | Outside the UGAs there is a large number of undeveloped tax parcels. While it is  
32 | not clear exactly how many of these tax parcels are legally buildable lots, the total  
33 | number of potential new dwelling units could theoretically accommodate population  
34 | growth in excess of the rural population projection. However, because adequate  
35 | land capacity is available for growth within urban growth areas, growth is not  
36 | forced into the rural areas. Through the monitoring process described in Policies  
37 | 2S-5 and 2DD-1 of this plan, the County will evaluate development activity in  
38 | comparison with these urban and rural growth projections and take action as  
39 | necessary to address discrepancies if any are identified.

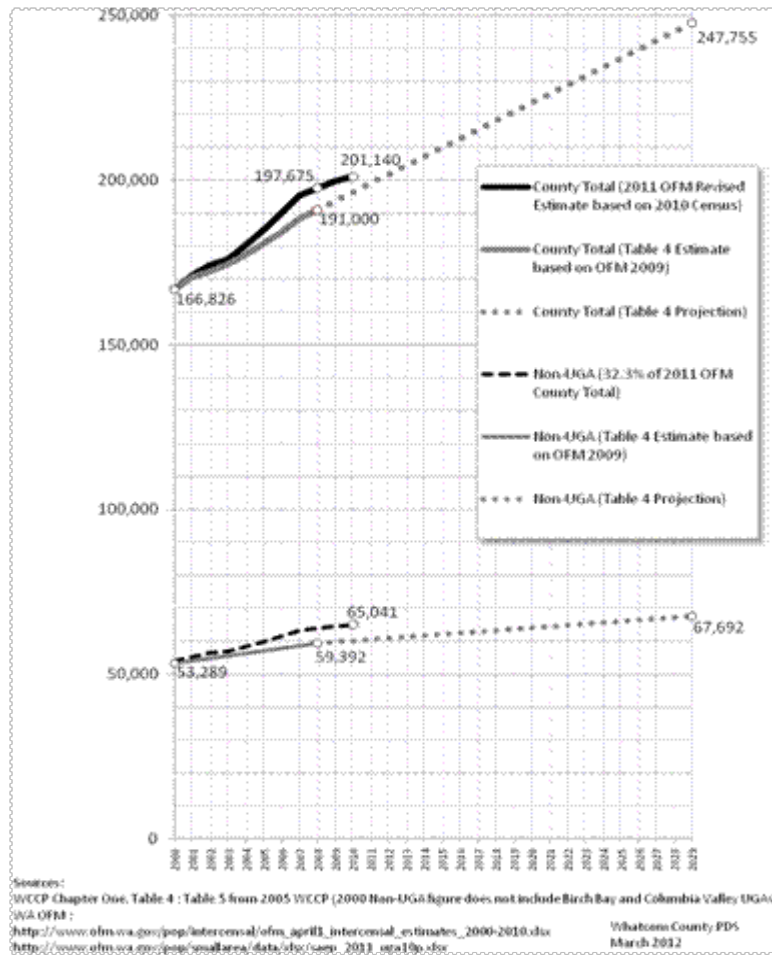
1 **Table 4. Whatcom County Population Projections and Distribution**

	<del>2013</del> <sup>2008</sup> UGA Population- (Cities and unincorporated UGAs)	Projected <del>2036</del> <sup>2029</sup> Population	<del>2013-</del> <del>2036</del> <sup>2008-2029</sup> Net Growth
<b>Bellingham</b>	<del>92,660</del> 89,284	<del>123,710</del> 111,764	<del>31,050</del> 22,477
<b>Birch Bay</b>	<del>7,540</del> 5,290	<del>12,822</del> 9,115	<del>5,282</del> 3,825
<b>Blaine</b>	<del>5,171</del> 4,667	<del>9,585</del> 8,916	<del>4,414</del> 4,249
<b>Columbia Valley</b>	<del>3,103</del> 3,924	<del>4,448</del> 5,000	<del>1,345</del> 1,076
<b>Everson</b>	<del>2,665</del> 2,395	<del>3,907</del> 3,623	<del>1,242</del> 1,228
<b>Ferndale</b>	<del>12,758</del> 12,019	<del>19,591</del> 20,707	<del>6,833</del> 8,688
<b>Lynden</b>	<del>12,872</del> 11,613	<del>19,275</del> 16,788	<del>6,403</del> 5,175
<b>Nooksack</b>	<del>1,435</del> 1,137	<del>2,425</del> 2,081	<del>990</del> 944
<b>Sumas</b>	<del>1,449</del> 1,279	<del>2,323</del> 2,072	<del>874</del> 793
<b>Subtotal</b>	<del>139,696</del> 131,608	<del>198,129</del> 180,063	<del>58,433</del> 48,455
<b><del>Area outside UGAs</del></b>			
<b><del>Unincorporated</del></b>			
<b><del>Rural</del></b>	<del>66,104</del>	<del>77,321</del>	<del>11,217</del>
<b><del>Whatcom County</del></b>	<del>59,392</del>	<del>67,692</del>	<del>8,300</del>
<b>Total Whatcom County</b>	<del>205,800</del> 191,000	<del>275,450</del> 247,755	<del>69,650</del> 56,755

2 Source: The 2013 total Whatcom County population is from OFM. The Cherry Point UGA, which is not shown in the chart  
3 above, had an estimated 2013 population of 43 people. Source: Washington Office of Financial Management (April 1, 2009)

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1 **Figure 1. Revised OFM Population Estimates and Adopted Population Estimates**



2  
3 **Employment ProjectionsForecasts and Distribution**

4 The Growth Management Act requires that comprehensive plans and/or  
5 development regulations provide sufficient capacity of land suitable for  
6 development within their jurisdictions to accommodate employment growth. In  
7 2009, the Act was amended to ensure that the employment growth accommodated  
8 medical, governmental, educational, institutional, commercial and industrial  
9 facilities.

10 ~~Whatcom County contracted with ICF Jones & Stokes and Berk and Associates, to~~  
11 ~~develop Countywide Population and Employment Extrapolations and Scenarios, and~~  
12 ~~then to provide allocation scenarios to the various urban and rural areas. These~~  
13 ~~employment scenarios were reviewed with cities, the Growth Management~~  
14 ~~Coordinating Council, and their report was first published on September 23, 2008,~~

~~1 and later edited and re-published on February 9, 2009 prior to the scoping process  
2 for the Environmental Impact Statement on the Urban Growth Area review.~~

3 The employment forecasts considered the various sectors of the labor force in  
4 Whatcom County, including construction, finance, government, manufacturing,  
5 retail, services, transportation, and wholesale trade. The forecasts also considered  
6 the labor participation rate as the proportion of labor to the total population of all  
7 ages. For the purpose of Urban Growth Areas, non-agricultural labor force was  
8 considered in the forecasts.

~~9 After the county-wide employment forecasts were complete, the allocation of that  
10 employment to the various urban areas was also developed in a report by Berk and  
11 Associates, published on January 13, 2009. These allocation scenarios considered  
12 allocation based on current pattern of job distribution and an alternative approach  
13 to allocating job growth distinguishing between regional and local employment  
14 growth. Variations on these scenarios were tested in an EIS prepared in 2009.~~

~~15 The common theme recommended by the Growth Management Coordinating  
16 Council was a labor participation rate of 49%. In some urban areas, this rate is  
17 either high (Bellingham) or low (Columbia Valley and Birch Bay). City requests for  
18 allocation of employment, and the sizing of the Urban Growth Area, Employment  
19 allocations were based largely on the local request recognizing the incentives that  
20 cities have for larger employment areas (sales tax, property tax). Due to the  
21 challenge in designating lands for commercial or industrial development, the  
22 allocation of employment allowed for these optimistic scenarios, ~~if they did not~~  
23 ~~result in expansion of Urban Growth Areas. If expansion of an Urban Growth Area~~  
24 ~~would be considered for employment purposes, greater justification for the need for~~  
25 ~~employment lands should be required.~~ Table 5 shows the allocation of ~~total non-~~  
26 ~~agricultural~~ employment to the ~~various~~ Urban Growth Areas and the area outside  
27 UGAs.~~

1 **Table 5: Whatcom County Employment Projections and Distribution**

<b>Study Area</b>	<del>2008</del> <b>2013</b> Employment	<b>2013-2036</b> Growth Allocation	<del>2029 Total</del> <b>2036</b> Employment
Bellingham UGA	<del>52,359</del> 51,153	<del>22,641</del> 18,829	<del>75,000</del> 69,982
Birch Bay UGA	<del>595</del> 436	<del>545</del> 489	<del>1,140</del> 925
Blaine UGA	<del>3,062</del> 2,971	<del>2,097</del> 1,903	<del>5,159</del> 4,874
Cherry Point UGA	<del>1,993</del> 1,182	<del>890</del> 760	<del>2,883</del> 1,942
Columbia Valley UGA	<del>85</del> 90	359	<del>444</del> 449
Everson UGA	<del>710</del> 638	602	<del>1,312</del> 1,240
Ferndale UGA	<del>5,372</del> 5,534	<del>4,000</del> 4,335	<del>9,372</del> 9,869
Lynden UGA	<del>4,946</del> 4,832	<del>2,157</del> 3,115	<del>7,103</del> 7,947
Nooksack UGA	<del>254</del> 206	<del>115</del> 130	<del>369</del> 336
Sumas UGA	<del>700</del> 254	<del>445</del> 391	<del>1,145</del> 645
<u>Area outside UGAs Rural</u>	<del>13,156</del> 10,130	<del>3,201</del> 2,276	<del>16,357</del> 12,406
<b>TOTALS</b>	<del>83,232</del> 77,426	<del>37,052</del> 33,188	<del>120,284</del> 110,614

2  
3  
4 Source: The 2013 non-farm employment is from the Whatcom Council of Governments (2010 and 2013) and BERK Consulting (2014).

5  
6  
7 Note: Year 2008 employment data (77,426) do not add up to Employment Security Department's (ESD) current estimate of non-agriculture wage and salary employment for the County as a whole (84,850) likely due to jobs for which ESD was unable to assign a specific location.

## Demographics

The culturally diverse demographic makeup of the county's population has an effect on land use patterns. For example, Whatcom County residents with children may choose different kinds of transportation and recreation than retired people. Single-parent families and large extended families need different kinds of housing. ~~And levels of service requirements will vary according to cultural and individual abilities.~~ Another influence on county demographics is the cyclical influx of seasonal residents, primarily from Canada, who maintain recreational homes in parts of the county. Areas most influenced by seasonal residency include Point Roberts, Birch Bay, and the Foothills Subarea.

~~Table 6 below shows the Whatcom County population in the following generalized categories: school age, college age, working age and retirement age. All categories have seen an absolute increase in population between 2000 and 2010. However, as a percentage of total population, the school age children category has declined, the college age category has remained steady, and the working age and retirement age categories have increased. OFM projects that the retirement age population (65 and over) will continue to increase over the planning period.~~

~~Table 6. Population and Age Groups~~

<del>Age</del>	<del>2000</del>	<del>Census</del>	<del>2010</del>	<del>Census</del>
<del>0-19</del>	<del>47,175</del>	<del>28.28%</del>	<del>50,566</del>	<del>25.14%</del>
<del>20-24</del>	<del>16,776</del>	<del>10.06%</del>	<del>20,277</del>	<del>10.08%</del>
<del>25-64</del>	<del>83,463</del>	<del>50.03%</del>	<del>103,657</del>	<del>51.54%</del>
<del>65-over</del>	<del>19,400</del>	<del>11.63%</del>	<del>26,640</del>	<del>13.24%</del>
<del>Total</del>	<del>166,814</del>	<del>100.00%</del>	<del>201,140</del>	<del>100.00%</del>

~~In the period between 1990 and 2000, the age composition of Whatcom County's population changed appreciably, and some of the changes were different from what was happening state-wide and nation-wide. These changes were partly due to immigration. For instance, the number of people at or nearing retirement age (50-69 years) increased in Whatcom County faster than simple aging could account for, and at a much greater rate than the state average (*Whatcom County Population and Economic Forecast*, ECONorthwest, May 2002, pp. 2-7 & 2-8). In 2000, there were 19,400 people age 65 and older in Whatcom County (11.6% of the total population). Over 4,900 of the 65+ group had self-care or mobility limitations. Approximately 1,560 (8%) had incomes below the poverty level. By comparison, approximately 15% of Whatcom County residents under age 65 lived in poverty. Census age groups containing the traditional ages of college students (15-19 and 20-24) have significantly larger counts than the pre-college-age and post-college-age groups.~~

~~In 2000, Whatcom County residents between the ages of 15 and 64 numbered 114,185. There were 33,229 children under 15.~~

~~The county's racial composition also changed between 1990 and 2000. Although in 2000 88% of all county residents were white, there has nevertheless been an~~



~~1 increase in populations of Native Americans, African Americans, Asian-Pacific  
2 Islanders, and Hispanics. The Hispanic population is the most difficult to assess  
3 accurately because of its mobility. It is the primary component of a large  
4 contingent of migrant farm workers. The Washington State Employment Security  
5 Department estimates that of the approximately 3,600 farm workers employed  
6 annually in the county (not including agricultural support services such as  
7 processing and trucking), 2,300 are seasonal or migrant workers.~~

## 8 Land Use History

9 When Euro-American immigrants first arrived on Bellingham Bay in the 1850s, the  
10 landscape of Whatcom County was comprised of mature conifer forests, winding  
11 streams and rivers, numerous lakes and wetlands, and small natural meadows.

12 Lummi and Nooksack people inhabited villages near the coast and along the rivers  
13 and lakes at strategic fishing locations. The Nooksack Indian people cultivated root  
14 crops they had developed along the Nooksack Valley where sub-irrigated meadows  
15 were ideal sites for such plants as camas and "Indian carrot." They emphasized the  
16 use of root crops, perhaps much more than other native peoples along the Pacific  
17 Coast.

18 The abundance of high-quality timber and easy accessibility to water for milling and  
19 transport were the principal reasons Euro-American immigrants first came to  
20 Whatcom County in the 1850s. Small communities grew along Bellingham Bay and  
21 the Nooksack River as more immigrants arrived in Whatcom County. They began  
22 clearing the forests and draining the wetland areas for farmsteads. Between 1890  
23 and 1925, 130,000 acres of lowland Nooksack Valley forests were cleared for farms.  
24 In addition, logging companies sold logged-over land to their employees and to  
25 immigrants from the East Coast for small farmsteads. As a result of the sale of  
26 small parcels of logged-over lands, the average farm size in Whatcom County is  
27 relatively small--about ~~6884~~ acres--compared to the statewide average of ~~396523~~  
28 acres (~~2012+1997~~ Census of Agriculture ~~Profiles~~, USDA).

29 Many lumber and shake mills and other industrial plants were built in Bellingham,  
30 on Lake Whatcom, and in other areas of the county, while new commercial and  
31 residential buildings were being developed in all communities. Coal mining was  
32 taking place at several locations in Whatcom County at this time, and major fish  
33 processing plants were constructed on Bellingham Bay. Whatcom County's  
34 population in 1910 was 49,511.

35 Between 1925 and 1950, there was little change in the land use patterns that had  
36 been developed during the previous fifty years. Some land, which had been cleared  
37 for agriculture was abandoned and naturally regenerated into second-growth  
38 forests. Most areas that were harvested for timber had re-seeded and were  
39 growing mixed forests of conifers and deciduous trees. Residential and industrial  
40 development continued to grow, but at a slower pace than during the previous fifty  
41 years. Commercial centers remained within the core of the major cities. By 1950,

1 Whatcom County's total population had grown to 66,733, with the majority of the  
2 growth occurring in the cities.

3 Between 1950 and 2000, the amount of land devoted to commercial activity  
4 gradually increased in response to population growth. Expanded use of the  
5 automobile encouraged commercial activities and residential development outside  
6 city centers. Coal mining ceased, but sand and gravel mining grew in importance.  
7 Farming became increasingly competitive, and the economic pressure tended to  
8 concentrate agricultural resources on the most productive soils. The trend toward  
9 abandonment or conversion of farmland to other uses continued. Some lands in  
10 the Nooksack Valley, which were formerly cleared for agriculture reverted back to  
11 native forest cover. Residential, commercial, and industrial uses continued to  
12 expand into agricultural areas. These changes picked up speed during the 1960s  
13 and 1970s as Whatcom County experienced a population boom. Rapid population  
14 growth also occurred in the 1990s and from 2004-2007. The total population for  
15 Whatcom County in ~~2010~~ had grown to 201,140~~166,814~~, an increase of  
16 approximately 145%~~137%~~ in 40 years.

## 17 **Current Land Use**

18 Whatcom County covers 1,378,446~~1,377,645~~ acres, or approximately 2,154~~2,152~~  
19 square miles. ~~Of that total area, about 1,107,453 acres, or 80%, is either covered~~  
20 ~~with forest or is managed for forest resources. This total includes virtually all~~  
21 ~~federal lands and all state and private forest lands in unincorporated Whatcom~~  
22 ~~County. A significant portion of this total (850,980~~877,000 ~~acres or 62%) is under~~  
23 ~~federal management, by either the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service or~~  
24 ~~the US Interior Department, North Cascades National Park. Cities cover~~  
25 31,577~~30,647~~ acres or 2.3% of the total Whatcom County land area.

26 Resource land uses, which include agriculture, forestry, marine and minerals, are  
27 the largest category of land use in Whatcom County. ~~Map 2 displays the~~  
28 ~~distribution of agriculture and forestry land uses based on County Assessor's data~~  
29 ~~within Whatcom County. From the map it is evident that a~~ Agricultural land use  
30 predominates throughout the western lowlands of the county and in the South Fork  
31 Nooksack Valley. Forest land use is concentrated on the uplands of the county.  
32 (See Chapter 8, "Resource Lands," for more detailed information on each of these  
33 land uses.)

34 ~~Map 3 displays the distribution of commercial and industrial land uses in Whatcom~~  
35 ~~County. The majority of commercial land uses occur next to major transportation~~  
36 routes, such as the Guide Meridian, or within ~~the boundaries of~~ cities. There are  
37 also concentrations of commercial uses in the Birch Bay UGA and Point Roberts. The  
38 majority of industrial parcels are also located in the cities, their UGAs or at the  
39 Cherry Point industrial area. The locational pattern of commercial and industrial  
40 uses shown by Map 3 indicates the importance of transportation connections to  
41 these land uses. (See Chapter 6, "Transportation," and Chapter 7, "Economics.")

~~Vacant lands are scattered throughout the county. **Map 4** depicts the general distribution of vacant lands, as defined by the latest Whatcom County Assessor's records. Vacant lands are land which at the time of the assessor's survey appear to be undeveloped, or if previously developed, are presently vacant and unused. They are usually lands being held for future development. Vacant lands are particularly concentrated in and around urban areas of the county.~~

~~**Map 5** graphically portrays the distribution of all single-family residential parcels in unincorporated Whatcom County, as interpreted from the Whatcom County Assessor's property information database. The majority of single-family homes/residents are concentrated in the cities and the major urban and intensely developed rural portions of the county such as Sudden Valley, Columbia Valley/Paradise Lakes, Glacier, Lake Samish, Lake Whatcom (north end), Cain Lake, Birch Bay, Sandy Point, and Lummi Island. Lower density residential development is scattered throughout the rural areas of the County. A fairly even, but lower, density distribution of single-family residences is scattered throughout the central rural portion of the county between Bellingham and Lynden, Ferndale and Everson/Nooksack. Another even but lower density distribution of single-family residences occurs between Ferndale and Blaine. As may be expected, single-family homes are also located along the valley floors of the three forks of the Nooksack. The Cherry Point industrial area, the agriculturally dominated area north of Lynden and the forested foothills in the eastern part of the county have very low to zero residential density.~~

A prominent characteristic of Whatcom County housing is the high number of vacation, resort, and second-home units found throughout the county. In 2010, 2000 approximately 55%~~2/3~~ of the "vacant" units were actually occupied part of the year for seasonal, recreational or occasional use.

~~ulti-family residential land use is displayed on **Map 6**. The majority of multi-family residential units are located in the urban areas of the county, primarily in and around Bellingham, Ferndale, Lynden, and Blaine. Within the unincorporated area of Whatcom County, multi-family housing units are found near Birch Bay, Sudden Valley, Glacier, Point Roberts and in the area between Bellingham and Lynden.~~

~~According to the 2000 Census, there were 34,421 housing units within the unincorporated portions of Whatcom County. This figure equates to a residential housing density of 0.127 dwelling units per acre of land, or one residence per eight acres, on land currently zoned to permit residences (Rural, Urban, Rural Residential, Agricultural, certain commercial zones, the Point Roberts Transitional zone, Eliza Island and Rural Forestry).~~

~~Under the direction of the Growth Management Act, Whatcom County is required to develop transportation plans for future population growth. Part of the analysis for transportation planning includes defining the density of population by transportation analysis zones. **Map 7** presents the housing density per acre for Whatcom County in 2000, displayed by Census Block. (See Chapter 3, "Housing," and the *Housing Background Document* for more information.)~~

**Other Topics**

Background information on other topics including land use, housing, utilities, transportation, economics, natural resources and the environment can be found in the following chapters of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Water Resources**

~~Water resources in Whatcom County include 16 major lakes and dozens of smaller ones, 3,012 miles of rivers and streams and their estuaries, over 37,000 acres of wetlands, aquifers containing an undetermined amount of groundwater, and 134 miles of marine shoreline. These resources must serve multiple uses. The beneficial uses they provide are water for domestic, stock watering, industrial, commercial, agricultural, irrigation, hydroelectric power production, mining, for fish and wildlife maintenance and enhancement, recreational, and thermal power production purposes, and preservation of environmental and aesthetic values, and all other uses compatible with the enjoyment of the public waters of the state (RCW 90.54.020 (1)).~~

~~Many human uses tap into the water to use it elsewhere. For instance, individual residents are supplied with potable water by approximately 375 public water systems. According to a statistically valid phone survey conducted by the Whatcom County Health and Human Services Department in 2002, the following drinking water sources serve the population of Whatcom County:~~

**Table 8. Drinking Water Supplies**

<del>Drinking Water Source</del>	<del>Percentage of people in Whatcom County Using this Drinking Water Source</del>
<del>City or District</del>	<del>69.3%</del>
<del>Community Water System</del>	<del>9.9%</del>
<del>Private Well</del>	<del>13.0%</del>
<del>Surface Water</del>	<del>1.2%</del>
<del>Bottled Water</del>	<del>4.5%</del>
<del>Don't Know</del>	<del>2.1%</del>
<del>Total</del>	<del>100.0%</del>

~~Source: Whatcom County Health & Human Services telephone survey completed in October 2002.~~

~~Households consume an average of 100 to 140 gallons per person per day, and more than that during the summer. Water is also critical to Whatcom County agriculture; irrigation is mandatory for all high-value crops. Irrigated crops use an average of 5,445 gallons per acre per day during spring and summer, and irrigated pasture averages 2,160 gallons per acre per day. Livestock must be watered year round, and dairy equipment and facility cleanup also go on all year. Dairy operations, for example, call for about 50 gallons per cow per day year round.~~

~~Some industries are large-scale water users, and they may need both potable and non-potable water. One of the largest, the Georgia Pacific paper mill, used about~~

~~67,000 gallons of potable water and 8,500,000 gallons of non-potable water per day in 2002. This is a smaller volume than Georgia Pacific once used; closure of the pulp operations and conservation measures have reduced its water use significantly in recent years.~~

~~The three major water systems, Whatcom County PUD #1, City of Bellingham, and City of Lynden, draw surface water from the Nooksack River and Lake Whatcom. Most of the rest rely on groundwater as their source. This is not as distinct a difference as it seems, since Whatcom County water resources are an interconnected system. While a few major water suppliers appear to have the capacity to meet future demand, many of the county's water suppliers are nearing their legal and physical capacity to supply water to their customers.~~

~~Whatcom County's plan will be adjusted and will respond to emerging information on water. The working assumption of the plan is that there will be adequate water supply. Water supply for the county was most recently identified in the *Coordinated Water System Plan* (February 2000). The complexities related to water supply are further discussed in the Utility chapter of this plan.~~

## **Economies**

~~Whatcom County's economy has traditionally been based on agriculture, fishing, forestry, and mining. Through the 1950s, these industries represented more than 25% of the total county employment. Access to markets for sale of locally produced goods as well as for purchase of products manufactured elsewhere was limited to rail, ship, and a two-lane highway. Employment was seasonal for many types of work.~~

~~Since the 1960s, there has been a significant shift in Whatcom County's economy. Increased activities in manufacturing, trade, services and government have joined the traditional economic activities. Mobil Oil (now Conoco-Phillips) initiated major changes in the county's economy when it opened its oil refinery at Neptune Beach in the mid-1950s. The Intalco aluminum refinery at Cherry Point came on line in 1966, and Atlantic Richfield built an oil refinery at Cherry Point in the 1970s (now BP West Coast Products). Interstate-5, also completed in the early 1970s, provided ready access to Whatcom County from both British Columbia and the central Puget Sound region. Western Washington University expanded enrollment and became one of the county's major employers.~~

~~According to the Greater Whatcom Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy or CEDS (August 2002), agriculture remains an important component of the County's economy, although the timber and fishing industries have declined significantly in the 1990s. Relating to agriculture, the CEDS states:~~

~~. . . Dairy and berry farms are the largest component of agriculture. The county is in the top 12 counties nationwide in milk production . . . In addition, Whatcom County produces more blueberries and raspberries than~~

any other county in the state and ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in strawberries . . . (CEDS, p. III-4).

The top five employment sectors in 2000, excluding the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors, are listed below. Together, these sectors accounted for 85.4% of the non-farm employment.

**Table 9. Non-Farm Employment**

Sector	Employment Share
Services	25.6%
Retail Trade	21.3%
Government & Public Education	16.2%
Manufacturing	14.3%
Construction	8.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>85.40%</b>

Source: CEDS (p. III-2)

The top paying sectors in 2000, excluding the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors, were:

**Table 10. Average Wages**

Sector	Annual Average Wage
Manufacturing	\$37,325
Construction & Mining	\$36,118
Wholesale Trade	\$33,420
Transportation	\$32,570
Finance, Insurance, & Real Estate	\$30,754
<b>Average County Wage</b>	<b>\$26,295</b>

Source: CEDS (p. III-20)

Resource-based occupations still give a distinctive flavor to Whatcom County's economy, although in recent years they have come to account for only under 6% to 7% of county employment (*Natural Resources Sector Profile*, Center for Economic and Business Research Western Washington University, Fall 2002, pp.3, 18, and 26. The combination of good soils, favorable climate, abundant rainfall and access to urban markets underlies the continued importance of intensive-type farming necessary for successful operation of the small farms found in Whatcom County. According to the County Assessor's records, in 2000, 25% of non-federal lands in the county were devoted to agriculture. As significant as agriculture is to the economy, these lands are often considered for urban or rural uses, and the amount of land in farm production has been steadily shrinking over time. This erosion of the farm land base has implications for the county's wider economy. For example, the maintenance of a sufficiently large land area devoted to farming is necessary to support associated farm processing operations such as milk and berry processing facilities.



1 ~~The fishing industry is facing a variety of restrictions on its activities. The~~  
2 ~~populations of many fish species have declined. Chinook salmon and bull trout~~  
3 ~~have been listed under the Endangered Species Act. Moratoria, quotas, and harvest~~  
4 ~~management are already in place for most of the species Whatcom County fishers~~  
5 ~~currently harvest. In addition, the available fishery is divided between Indian, US,~~  
6 ~~and Canadian fishers. Nevertheless, the fishing industry contributes substantially~~  
7 ~~to the county's economy. Whatcom County's fishing fleet fishes both Washington~~  
8 ~~and Alaska waters. The total catch landed at the ports of Bellingham and Blaine~~  
9 ~~between 1985 and 1990 ranged from 50 to 65 million pounds annually but declined~~  
10 ~~to 24.7 million pounds by 2000 (CEDs, p III-6).~~

11 ~~The forest resources of Whatcom County have historically been one of the most~~  
12 ~~important natural resources in the region. Forests cover approximately half of the~~  
13 ~~non-federal lands in the county. In addition to trees for lumber, poles and paper,~~  
14 ~~forest land products include gravel, rock, medicinal products, and ornamental~~  
15 ~~plants. Logging and processing various types of forest products employ hundreds~~  
16 ~~of county residents. Like fishing, however, forestry is subject to limitations,~~  
17 ~~because forest lands provide important associated resources such as water, wildlife~~  
18 ~~habitat, and fish habitat which need to be conserved.~~

19 ~~The extraction of minerals, in particular sand and gravel remains important in areas~~  
20 ~~characterized by growth such as western Washington. In Whatcom County, high~~  
21 ~~quality aggregate resources are in great demand (*Reconnaissance Investigation of*~~  
22 ~~*Sand, Gravel, and Quarried Bedrock Resources in the Bellingham 1:100,000*~~  
23 ~~*Quadrangle, Washington, DNR, Jan. 2001, p. 10).*~~ The material is an essential  
24 ~~element in the construction of roads, homes, schools, shopping centers and other~~  
25 ~~structures. To a degree this reflected growth in economic activity, much of it in the~~  
26 ~~form of urbanization. While urbanization creates demand for sand and gravel~~  
27 ~~resources, it may also encroach upon or build over those same resources, rendering~~  
28 ~~them inaccessible. Strong community opposition to mining near residential,~~  
29 ~~agricultural or sensitive environmental areas may also limit mining opportunities.~~

30 ~~Manufacturing is a vital contributor to Whatcom County's economy, pay higher~~  
31 ~~wages than any other sector of the economy, and employing 14.3% of the county's~~  
32 ~~non-farm work force in 2000 (CEDs, pp III-2 and III-20). The county's primary~~  
33 ~~manufacturing industries ranked by number of jobs in 2000, were: Food and~~  
34 ~~kindred products, lumber & wood products, primary metal industries, paper & allied~~  
35 ~~products, petroleum & coal products and transportation equipment (*Manufacturing*~~  
36 ~~*Sector Profile, Center for Economic and Business Research Western Washington*~~  
37 ~~*University, Fall 2002, p. 8).*~~ However, Georgia Pacific closed its pulp operations in  
38 ~~2001 resulting in the loss of 420 jobs from the manufacturing sector. In 2001, the~~  
39 ~~Intalco aluminum smelter shut down due to high energy costs. Intalco re-started~~  
40 ~~the smelter in 2002 with a reduced work force, which was largely due to early~~  
41 ~~retirement (CEDs, p. III-9).~~

42 ~~Within the last 20 years, the impact of Canadian manufacturers has been increasing~~  
43 ~~in Whatcom County. Beginning in 1989, Canadian manufacturing investment in~~  
44 ~~Whatcom County surged, with British Columbia manufacturers developing~~

1 ~~operations in the county to take advantage of lower operating costs and easy~~  
2 ~~access to US markets.~~

3 ~~Even more than Canadian manufacturers, Canadian consumers have contributed to~~  
4 ~~and impacted the local Whatcom County economy. In fact, Canadian influences~~  
5 ~~may be more significant for the county's economy than any internal factor short of~~  
6 ~~major new industrial development. When the Bellis Fair Mall opened in 1988, it~~  
7 ~~instantly became a regular destination for thousands of Canadian shoppers seeking~~  
8 ~~relief from higher taxes on goods and services in British Columbia. Every major~~  
9 ~~retailer from downtown Bellingham moved to the new regional mall. Total retail~~  
10 ~~sales in Whatcom County, rose rapidly from \$885 million in 1987 to \$1.9 billion in~~  
11 ~~1992. By 2000, total retail sales had increased to almost 2.2 billion (*Trade Sector*~~  
12 ~~*Profile*, Center for Economic and Business Research Western Washington University,~~  
13 ~~Fall 2002, p. 5). The level of sales to Canadian consumers can vary widely, since~~  
14 ~~their spending in Whatcom County is subject to both Canadian and US economic~~  
15 ~~pressures. Sluggish sales when the Canadians stay away have a negative effect on~~  
16 ~~the county economy. This negative effect is especially significant for destinations~~  
17 ~~close to the border.~~

18 ~~While the growth of the retail and service sectors have generally been good for~~  
19 ~~Whatcom County's economy, for individual residents it has been a mixed blessing.~~  
20 ~~Growth has tended to keep unemployment down, but underemployment is~~  
21 ~~common. Retail and service sector jobs increased between 1981 and 2000 from~~  
22 ~~42.4% to 46.9% of the non-farm job market whereas manufacturing jobs fell from~~  
23 ~~20.8% to 14.3% in the same period (CEDS, p III-3). Retail sector jobs pay at a~~  
24 ~~lesser rate than manufacturing, and are often part-time and without benefits.~~

25 ~~Tourism has developed into a significant industry. Visitors spend \$333 million~~  
26 ~~annually in Whatcom County and there are approximately 7,120 travel and tourism~~  
27 ~~jobs in Whatcom County (Washington State County Travel Impact Report, Dean~~  
28 ~~Runyan Associates for Washington State Business and Tourism Development,~~  
29 ~~October 2002). Whatcom County's natural scenic attractions draw six to seven~~  
30 ~~million visitors a year. Shopping draws millions more: 20,000 to 30,000 Canadians~~  
31 ~~per week visit Bellis Fair alone. County businesses provide both kinds of tourists a~~  
32 ~~variety of services, including lodging, food and beverages, organized recreational~~  
33 ~~activities, tours, car rentals, air charters, and cruises.~~

34 ~~Currently Whatcom County has many natural advantages for expanding economic~~  
35 ~~activity. Besides relatively low prices and labor costs, the county's assets include a~~  
36 ~~high quality educational system, including a major university; excellent access to~~  
37 ~~markets in British Columbia, Puget Sound, California, Alaska, and Asia; a productive~~  
38 ~~and dependable work force; and a mild climate. The transportation infrastructure is~~  
39 ~~good, with access to Interstate 5, a well-developed secondary road system, a deep-~~  
40 ~~water port and multiple docks at Cherry Point, additional port facilities in~~  
41 ~~Bellingham, good rail connections to US and Canadian destinations, and an~~  
42 ~~international airport. The overall quality of life in Whatcom County and recreational~~  
43 ~~activities are also major assets in retaining, expanding, and attracting businesses.~~