



Farms & Forests Use

Objective:

Encourage sustainable agriculture and forestry

Strategy:

Utilize landowner incentives to keep land in agricultural and forestry use

Why is this strategy important?

Population growth and accompanying residential and commercial development in King County have often occurred at the expense of farmland and forest land, which have been displaced in favor of urban land uses. King County utilizes property tax reduction incentives along with the transfer and purchase of development rights to prevent the conversion of forests and farmland and protect natural resources.

Forests and farms provide many benefits to King County residents and are important to preserve now and for future generations. Forests, rural woodlots, hedgerows and aquatic buffers naturally regulate stormwater runoff, provide habitat for many species, and maintain healthy streams and rivers for salmon and other fish. Forests also provide a significant source of recreation and aesthetic value for residents throughout King County. Farms provide an important source of local employment, as well as a sustainable and local food source for many King County residents.

How is our performance?

King County utilizes a varied set of tax incentive and other financial programs to support the preservation of forests and farmland. The Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program works with forest and farm landowners to transfer development rights from their properties to ensure permanent protection of natural resources. Conservation easements are placed on the properties when development rights are transferred. As of 2012, the TDR Program has protected over 142,000 acres of working forest in the county. Through the Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) the county itself has purchased the development rights on 13,371 acres of agricultural properties.

Current Use Taxation Programs (CUT) provide incentives to encourage landowners to voluntarily conserve habitat resources, open space, and timber. In return for preserving and actively managing natural resources, the land is assessed at a value consistent with its "current use" rather than its potential value if developed. The county's four CUT programs have protected over 287,000 acres of land where some part of the property is used for active agriculture and forestry. The Timber Land and Forest CUT programs are designed for lands devoted to the growth and harvest of timber. The Agriculture CUT program conserves property used for the production of livestock or agricultural commodities for commercial purposes. The Public Benefit Rating System (PBRS) open space program includes categories for conserving working farm and forest lands.

Note that many landowners in the TDR and FPP programs have both sold the development rights on their properties and enrolled in a CUT program, so the total number of acres protected is not the sum of the acres in each program category.

What can you do?

- Develop a forest stewardship plan for your forested property
- Learn how to protect your home from wildfire and have a healthy forest too
- Consider enrolling protecting your forested land through a property tax reduction or transfer of development rights program
- Purchase local farm products See a list of local farms
- Support local farm preservation efforts and consider enrolling in the Farmland Preservation Program
- If you own land that is not being farmed, consider enrolling it the FarmLink Program.

Moving forward

King County will continue to encourage stewardship and conservation on privately-owned lands through effective program delivery and strategic use of funds to acquire easements on high priority lands that will protect environmental quality for future generations. For example, King County's Water and Land Resources Division will collaborate with the King County Agriculture Commission to establish a target for the number of acres preserved in the Farmland Preservation Program (FPP). The FPP began in 1979 when the voters of King County approved an initiative authorizing the County to preserve rapidly diminishing farmland by purchasing the right to develop it.

Related Links

King County Census of Agriculture, 2007

Technical Notes

This measure captures non-duplicated privately-owned farm and forest acres where some part of the property is enrolled in Current Use Taxation, Transfer of Development Rights or Farmland Preservation programs. It includes Rural zoned lands, the Forest Production District and the Agricultural Production District. (2011 data)

Data source: King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks