



Memo: Survey Analysis Summary

Date: 08/19/26

To: General Public

From: Jason Robert Walsh – Long-Range Planner Kitsap County DCD

Subject: A summary memo for the Rural Lands Analysis & Salmon Recovery in Local Planning July 2026 public survey

I. Executive Summary

From July 8, 2026, through August 5, 2026, the Rural Lands Analysis & Salmon Recovery in Local Planning project conducted an online survey of the general public. The survey's goal was to gather input from the public on what makes the County's rural areas important, how they have changed, the challenges they face, and how the County should address these challenges moving forward. This survey aimed to build on the information gathered throughout the Comprehensive Plan, Year of the Rural work and outreach. There were 290 completed surveys. Survey respondents shared that Kitsap County is currently growing beyond its means, and that its infrastructure is insufficient to handle the current rates of growth. Further, the elements that make the County's rural areas important and unique, such as large open spaces, forests, and farmland are disappearing and with that, so is its rural character. This memo:

- describes the purpose of the survey
- provides a summary of the survey process
- details the project team's analysis
- explains how these results will be used

Aggregate and disaggregate survey data are available on the [project website](#), under Outreach.

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II. Survey Purpose

Building on the community engagement and conversations that occurred during the Year of the Rural in 2025, Kitsap County is conducting a Rural Lands Analysis to better understand the opportunities, challenges, and priorities that will shape the future of rural Kitsap County.

The analysis will evaluate current rural land use patterns, development pressures, working lands, natural resource protection, salmon recovery, and the elements that contribute to rural character. Community input will help identify priorities, evaluate potential future land use scenarios, and guide recommendations for policies, programs, and actions that support a sustainable rural future.

The feedback that the County sought will help it better understand community values, landowner needs, and the opportunities and challenges associated with protecting rural and resource lands while managing growth and supporting vibrant rural communities.

III. Survey Process

The survey consisted of 21 questions, which were:

- demographically focused (i.e., respondent age, profession, County Council District, etc.)
- Likert scale
- Ranking questions
- Open-ended questions

The survey included three open-ended questions and three questions that allowed for additional open-ended input by selecting the “Other” option. Analysis was performed across all six of these questions and coded for recurring themes based on the substantive content of each response. The respondent data was anonymized and survey responses often contained more than one theme, as they addressed multiple issues.

The survey was hosted on the RLA & SRLP project website, administered online and made available through a hyperlink in the Department of Community Development’s monthly newsletter and the project listserv, via QR code on project materials and shared with attendees of a July 8th project open house event. The survey was active from July 8 through August 6, 2026.



IV. Analysis

The survey was a combination of questions to gather demographic data, to determine respondent sentiments, to understand respondent's priorities, and to learn their thoughts on what makes rural Kitsap County so special, how to keep it that way, and what the challenges are to doing just that.

The responses reveal a central tension between growth and preservation. The dominant narrative is:

More people lead to more development, which leads to the loss of rural land/habitat, which includes more traffic, which stresses insufficient infrastructure, which leads to declining rural character.

At the same time, a substantial minority—or possibly a different segment of respondents—argues:

More regulation leads to less buildable land, which results in higher housing costs, thus, fewer opportunities for families and farmers, and in turn the loss of working lands and local ownership.

This distinction is important because the survey does not simply show respondents as uniformly anti-growth. Rather, there is broad concern about the way growth is occurring, while respondents disagree substantially about the appropriate policy response.

Themes

The five themes are:

1. **Development & Rural Sprawl** — Growth is changing the physical and cultural character of rural Kitsap.
2. **Environmental & Habitat Loss** — Forests, wildlife, wetlands, water, and biodiversity are perceived as increasingly threatened.
3. **Regulation & Property Rights** — County regulations are viewed by some as excessive and by others as insufficient or inconsistently enforced.
4. **Traffic & Infrastructure** — Roads and public services are perceived as lagging behind population and development.
5. **Housing & Affordability** — Housing is increasingly unaffordable, but respondents disagree on whether more development or tighter growth controls are the answer.



The following is a deeper explanation of the prevailing themes gleaned from the survey responses, including a representative quote from the survey, and an explanation of the overall sentiment of that theme. Themes are ordered by prevalence.

1. Development & Rural Sprawl

This is by far the most pervasive theme. Respondents repeatedly describe residential subdivisions, apartments, high-density development, clear-cutting, rezoning, and urban/suburban expansion into areas they consider rural. Many feel that development is occurring too quickly and is fundamentally changing Kitsap County's rural identity.

Representative quote:

“The rural part of Kitsap county has decreased during to all the houses coming in.”

Sentiment: Strongly negative.

The dominant emotional response is frustration, disappointment, anger, and a sense of loss. Many respondents explicitly say that growth itself is inevitable but object to where and how growth is occurring. A smaller group takes the opposite position, arguing that existing rural zoning should not be reduced and that rural landowners need greater flexibility to develop their property.

2. Environmental & Habitat Loss

Environmental concerns form the second major theme and frequently overlap with development concerns. Respondents mention:

- Loss of forests and mature trees
- Wildlife displacement
- Declining bird, fish, amphibian, and pollinator populations
- Wetland and watershed impacts
- Aquifer and water-supply concerns
- Loss of farmland
- Habitat fragmentation and wildlife corridors
- Invasive species
- Stormwater and pollution



- Climate change
- Concerns about clear-cutting and timber practices

There is particularly strong concern that development is removing the natural features that make Kitsap County attractive in the first place.

Representative quote:

“The reason people want to move here is the beauty and the connection to nature. If that isn't prioritized, Kitsap will become just be another overpopulated, hot, suburban area.”

Sentiment: Strongly negative.

The responses convey a strong sense of environmental decline and urgency. Many respondents believe environmental protection should take precedence over additional development. There is also a notable philosophical divide over whether forests should be actively managed or simply left natural.

3. Regulation & Property Rights

This theme represents one of the strongest counterpoints to the development/environmental concerns. Many respondents criticize the County for excessive regulation, permitting costs, critical-area restrictions, buffers, zoning limitations, and what they perceive as inconsistent enforcement.

Common concerns include:

- Expensive and lengthy permitting
- Restrictions on building homes or ADUs
- Difficulty passing property to children
- Critical-area and wetland regulations
- Restrictions on agricultural and forestry activities
- Perceived violations of property rights
- County decisions favoring developers—or, from the opposite perspective, giving developers too much flexibility
- Calls for local control and reduced government involvement



Importantly, this theme contains two opposing perspectives: some respondents want substantially more regulation to protect rural land, while others want substantially less regulation to protect property rights and working lands.

Representative quote:

“There has to be a better less costly middle ground for property owners and regulations.”

Sentiment: Mixed / highly polarized.

The sentiment is negative toward the current regulatory system, but the desired solution varies dramatically. Some want stronger enforcement and environmental protections; others want deregulation, greater flexibility, and stronger property rights.

4. Traffic & Infrastructure

Traffic and infrastructure concerns appear repeatedly, particularly in connection with new housing development. Respondents describe roads that have not kept pace with population growth, congestion, speeding, aggressive driving, inadequate transit, and insufficient capacity for water, sewer, schools, emergency services, and other public infrastructure.

A recurring complaint is that **development is being approved before supporting infrastructure is available.**

Representative quote:

“Huge amount of traffic increase with little or no infrastructure and roads to support the high density housing that is being built in previous farm land.”

Sentiment: Strongly negative.

Respondents frequently describe traffic as frustrating, dangerous, and damaging to rural character. There is also considerable support for requiring developers to pay for infrastructure and for improving public transportation, bicycle facilities, and pedestrian connections.

5. Housing & Affordability

Housing is a more complicated theme than the others. Respondents are concerned about both too much housing development and insufficient affordable housing.

The responses divide roughly into several perspectives:

- Housing costs are becoming unaffordable for local families.



- Young people and agricultural workers cannot afford to remain in Kitsap.
- Large developments are producing housing that many existing residents cannot afford.
- Rural land-use restrictions contribute to high housing costs.
- Some respondents favor ADUs and multigenerational housing.
- Others strongly oppose additional rural housing and want growth concentrated in urban areas.
- Some respondents believe the County should accommodate growth but only where infrastructure already exists.

Representative quote:

“Young families who grew up here can no longer afford to stay.”

Sentiment: Mixed / concerned.

The underlying concern is widespread, but respondents disagree about the solution. Some see additional development and regulatory flexibility as necessary to improve affordability; others see uncontrolled development as the cause of declining affordability and quality of life.

Challenges to Maintaining Rural Character & Priorities to Focus on

Questions geared towards determining respondent sentiments and priorities illustrated that respondents believe that the most important resources and characteristics in the rural parts of the County are the forested areas, its open spaces, and working farms.

Respondents indicated that the greatest challenges to maintaining the rural character and the long-term health of rural Kitsap County were:

- The further fragmentation of rural lands (i.e., habitat fragmentation and loss of wildlife corridors and parcel fragmentation) and growth outside of the Urban Growth Areas
- Development that outpaces infrastructure and leads to even greater increases in traffic and places strains on existing resources such as water
- Conversion of forests and farms to other uses



Further, when asked which policies and or actions the County should prioritize to preserve these valued resources and traits, respondents indicated strong support for:

- Protecting forests, agricultural lands, and important wildlife habitat (i.e., salmon habitat)
- Providing financial incentives for conservation, habitat restoration, and tax incentive programs for qualifying farms and forestlands
- Preserving the rural character and maintaining open spaces

V. Next Steps

The Kitsap County project team is actively working with the project consultant, Environmental Science Associates, to develop an analytical framework for the analysis of the project plan and data inventory. This inventory consists of plans and supporting data that address salmon population health within Kitsap County and the Puget Sound region. This analytical framework was iteratively developed with the guidance of the project Salmon Recovery Team. This is an advisory group comprised of subject matter experts on salmon, from the Hood Canal Coordinating Council and West Sound Partners for Ecosystem Recovery. The final analytical framework was utilized for the analysis of the project plan and data inventory and the creation of a technical memorandum on the state of salmon in the County and strategies to address conservation and preservation needs.

This technical memorandum will directly inform the development of a prioritization matrix for conservation strategies.

The project team will discuss the survey findings over the course of several meetings to identify opportunities for application to the development of the prioritization matrix. The themes will inform the team's exploration of the potentially overlapping areas amongst the project's topics of focus: forestry, agricultural lands, salmon habitat, and development. The team aims to develop a set of priority recommendations that will maximize benefits across topic areas and will preserve rural character. The findings of this survey will be a lens through which the team will analyze the potential strategies and how they can be prioritized.

The prioritization matrix and attendant strategies will be analyzed by five advisory groups:

- Salmon Recovery Team
- Agricultural Advisory Council
- Forestry Working Group



- Technical Policy Advisory Group
- Internal Review Team

The final prioritization matrix and recommended strategies will be the product of the application of the survey findings and the analysis of the project advisory groups. The synthesis of these two will be essential to the creation of the final Rural Lands Analysis.