

Adam Zack

From: Alexandra Gayek <gayek07@hotmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 20, 2021 11:35 PM
To: Lynda Guernsey; Adam Zack; Cindy Wolf; Jamie Stephens; Christine Minney
Subject: Please Reconsider De-designation of Resource Lands

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21 May, 2021

San Juan County Planning Commission, Department of Community Development, and County Council Members

Re: Dededesignation of Resource Lands

Dear Commissioners, Planners, and Council Members:

I have carefully read the Washington State Growth Management Act, and see that it clearly emphasizes the importance of **conserving** and **protecting** both resource lands and critical areas.

Per RCW 36.70A.060:

3. Any county or city that is initially required to conform with all of the requirements of this chapter under subsection (1) of this section shall take actions under this chapter as follows: (a) The county legislative authority shall adopt a countywide planning policy under RCW [36.70A.210](#); (b) the county and each city located within the county shall designate critical areas, agricultural lands, forestlands, and mineral resource lands, and **adopt development regulations conserving these designated agricultural lands, forestlands, and mineral resource lands and protecting these designated critical areas**, under RCW [36.70A.170](#) and [36.70A.060](#);

Therefore, the very first priority for our county government must be to **conserve these lands and protect them from development**. Certainly, we must maintain net zero loss of protected lands, so that if a single acre is removed from protection, another undeveloped, equally ecologically important acre must replace it.

While I understand the logic of considering that a parcel may no longer meet the original commercial viability reasons for which it was designated as a resource land, it seems to me to be equally logical to now apply reconsideration of its importance as a critical area, or at the very least to continue to conserve it due to the secondary benefits that were not widely recognized at the time of original designation.

The loss of these secondary benefits for forestlands, for example, are described by the Department of Natural Resources at <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/managed-lands/forest-and-trust-lands>

“When lands are converted from forestry, the state loses the vital benefits that forests provide in the ecosystem—wildlife habitat, clean water for people and salmon, recreation, clean air, and carbon

storage. Conversion also puts local natural resource-based industries and jobs at risk, along with the ecological, economic, and social values these forests provide to the community.”

Similarly, agricultural lands, when managed with regenerative practices, maintain healthy, living soil that is a significant source of carbon sequestration and aquifer recharge, provides habitat for pollinators, and are important for their role in stormwater management, and thus salmon protection.

As a greater and greater percentage of our islands is converted from native forested vegetation to developed lands, the remaining land becomes more and more critical to maintaining some vestige of the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems required to stabilize our climate, protect aquifer recharge, protect our salmon and orcas, invertebrates, amphibians and birds—the entire web of life that includes humans.

Because of the peril of climate disruption and the inherent associated damage to our collective physical and mental health, our community stability, and island economy, we must shift our thinking from “environmental impact,” meaning what amount of further damage to our ecosystems is tolerable, to aiming instead for “net ecological gain” from our human interventions, as is described in proposed HB 1117, a salmon recovery bill, by our state legislators. We must think in terms of doing everything possible to *restore* the regenerative, self-regulating system of nature that human actions have disrupted.

Preserving resource lands and critical areas, and designating new critical areas, green belts, and conservation lands, is essential.

Thank you for taking this into consideration in your decisions regarding the requests for removing certain parcels from designation as resource lands.

With appreciation,
Alexandra Gayek