

# CLATSOP COUNTY STRATEGIC PLANNING ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY FOCUS AREA OCTOBER 2020

## Introduction

Clatsop County is developing a Strategic Plan to serve as the cornerstone of an annual process to link planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The Board of Commissioners retained Portland State University, Center for Public Service, to facilitate and guide the planning process. The County has (1) defined a Vision, Mission and set of Values; (2) assessed past, current, and likely future conditions that suggest areas that could benefit from special attention; and (3) evaluated and selected the most important areas for the Plan to address in FY 2021-22 (Focus Areas).

In August 2020, the Board of Commissioners identified five focus areas for the Plan to address, and created work groups to develop reports describing issues and evaluating potential actions to address them:

- Governance
- Infrastructure
- Economic Development
- Environmental Quality
- Social Services

In October 2020, the Environmental Quality Focus work group convened to discuss areas for focus and improvement over the next 12-18 months. The members of the group were:

Pamela Wev, District 3 Commissioner

Don Abing, Chinook Indian Nation, Clatsop Plains Citizen Advisory Committee

Patrick Corcoran, Countywide Citizen Advisory Committee

Chris Farrar, Clatsop County Planning Commission, Clatsop Soil and Water Conservation District, North Coast Watershed Association

Denise Löfman, Director, Columbia River Estuary Taskforce (CREST)

Daniel Stark, Assistant Professor of Practice, Oregon State University

Katie Voelke, Executive Director, North Coast Land Conservancy

Dr. Michael McNickle, Director, Public Health

Tiffany Brown, Director, Emergency Management

Gail Henrikson, Director, Community Development

## Description of Focus Area

Clatsop County lies at the mouth of the Columbia River, one of North America's greatest navigable river systems, and along the Coast of the Pacific Ocean. For millennia the river and the ocean, the many streams and the immense forest, has provided life and sustenance to a succession of civilizations, bringing people from far away to its shores and offering abundant resources that fuel economic vitality in its communities. The County's ecosystem is composed of intertwined

resources that are highly dependent on the health of each other. Ocean weather systems bring rain and sun that provide the moisture and light for rich forest and farm land. The river's and their estuaries and tributaries offer prime habitat for migratory fish. Together, these natural resources have been the backbone for thriving communities, more recently attracting tourists to enjoy the cultural heritage and natural splendor of this wonderful place.

However, the environment is changing. Fish stocks are declining; old forests are disappearing; species are going extinct; fresh water quality and quantity are at risk as hydrologic systems are being altered in unplanned ways with potential negative consequences; winter storms are projected to become more frequent as the atmosphere continues to warm; wildfire threatens our forests; and ocean levels are rising and in places lowlands are more frequently flooded by ocean inundation and impeded runoff from land.

Recent work in updating the County's Comprehensive Plan has exposed the need for better information about the quality and quantity of these changing natural resources. As we plan for the future protection of our wetlands, streams, ocean, land, and wildlife, we need much better data about conditions as they are evolving. Also, as we plan for future protections, we need to take known actions now.

In order to identify the scope of the Environmental Quality Focus Group, the members first discussed what factors contributed to environmental quality. Based upon that discussion, the group developed a working definition or framework for the term "environmental quality". The agreed working definition was "the need to conserve, protect, and promote sustainability of natural resources." The consensus of the focus group members was that education is a critical component in achieving that balance.

## Recommended Actions

### Overview

The work group identified 18 potential actions for focus over the next eighteen months and beyond. The group then selected the top four actions and categorized those four proposed actions into tiers. Tier 1 refers to items that will be a primary focus during FY 2021-22, while recognizing select actions will be multi-year engagements. Tier 2 refers to items that will be worked on as time and resources are available; if not completed in the FY 2021-22 cycle, they will roll over as part of FY 2022-23 considerations.

<b>Table 1: Summary of Recommended Actions by Tier</b>	
<b>Tier 1 - Foundational</b>	<b>Tier 2 – Next Step: Aspirational</b>
<p>1. Create the Environmental Quality Action Team with the following tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Assess existing studies and State and local initiatives on Climate Conditions and Natural Climate Solutions<sup>1</sup> that apply to Clatsop County</li> <li>b. Initiate, oversee, and review studies of natural resource conditions where information is lacking. Priority should be given to fresh water sources.</li> <li>c. Review resilient lands<sup>2</sup> mapping completed for Oregon to ensure those systems and places remain resilient.</li> </ul>	<p>1. Adopt the tsunami overlay zone.</p>
<p>2. Initiate a moratorium on building homes with septic systems on less than one acre in the Clatsop Plains area. Complete a water assessment study to analyze groundwater quality and quantity and prepare projections for future use. Such study should also include surface water.</p>	<p>2. Prepare a countywide salmon recovery plan</p>
<p>3. Partner with the Clatsop County Fire Defense Board and Oregon State University (OSU) Extension staff to prepare education and preparedness exercises related to defensible fire space. These may include webinars; program to promote smarter development; and use of appropriate building materials in forested areas.</p>	
<p>4. Work with the Tourism Studio to develop an education program for visitors/tourists to promote “leaving no trace” tourism.</p>	

The work group developed the details for Tier 1 actions only, which follow. As the County begins to engage in Tier 2 actions, it would begin by developing a similar description of each action.

<sup>1</sup> Natural climate solutions (NCS): Changes in land management, ecosystem restoration, and avoided conversion of forests and habitats.

<sup>2</sup> Resilient Terrestrial Lands: With a changing climate, many places may become degraded and lose species, but some places will retain high quality habitat and continue to support a diverse array of plants and animals. Sites that have both complex topography and connected land cover are places where conservation is most likely to succeed in the long term. A complex topography provides many microclimates where species can move to adjust to a changing climate. A landscape that is “permeable” or free of barriers to movement allows species to take advantage of the diversity of local microclimates. Combining topoclimate diversity with local permeability provides a resilience metric that can be used to identify the most resilient occurrences of each land facet.

## Details of Tier 1 Recommendations:

1. Create the Environmental Quality Action Team with the following tasks:
  - a. Assess existing studies and State and local initiatives on Climate Conditions and natural climate solutions that apply to Clatsop County.
  - b. Initiate, oversee, and review studies of natural resource conditions where information is lacking. Priority should be given to fresh water sources.
  - c. Review resilient lands mapping completed for Oregon, to ensure those systems and places remain resilient.

### How the action will address an issue of importance

Since the adoption of the Clatsop County Comprehensive Plan and Land and Water Development and Use Ordinance (LWDUO) in 1980, minimal monitoring, review, or analysis has occurred to track development capacity, particularly within the Clatsop Plains planning area. Over the past several years, a number of issues have arisen and are beginning to converge, including water capacity, impacts of septic systems on groundwater, conflicts between humans and wildlife, and traffic congestion. While these issues are especially prominent in the Clatsop Plains area, which the county has identified as the location for increased density and development, similar concerns are present throughout all planning areas in unincorporated county.

### How the action fits with other current policies and activities

The county is currently in the midst of a 3-plus-year project to conduct an update of its comprehensive plan. The plan will provide policies to assist in guiding growth in the unincorporated areas over the next 20 years. Growth and development, which are necessary for the economic sustainability of the county and its residents, should be directed based upon the water, air, and transportation capacity available to serve that development. In March 2020, the City of Warrenton enacted an 18-month moratorium on providing new water connections outside of its city boundaries. This has had an immediate impact on residential development in the unincorporated Clatsop Plains area, which relies on Warrenton for the provision of potable water.

### Who does what, and how

Clatsop County will convene the Environmental Quality Action Team, which would consist of members drawn from educational and water resource agencies organizations, the business community, and County staff in order to inventory and review existing studies in order to identify where further analysis and studies may be needed. The committee, in coordination with staff, would prepare requests for qualifications in order to initiate the studies, which would be completed by professional consultants in the appropriate field. The Environmental Quality Action Team would then work with the consultants to review and recommend final actions to the Board of Commissioners for direction. A webpage would be maintained by Clatsop County staff.

### Timeline

The goal is to convene the committee during the third quarter of FY 20-21.

### Funding Requirement

The estimated cost of developing a strategy is approximately \$50,000 and is primarily related to funding consultants and studies.

Description	One-time Expense	Annual/Ongoing	Total FY 21
Consultant(s)	\$50,000	TBD	\$50,000

### Monitoring Progress

The County Manager’s Office, with assistance from staff, will provide regular updates to the Board of Commissioners and key partners and interested parties.

2. Initiate a moratorium on building homes with septic systems on less than one acre in the Clatsop Plains area. Complete a water assessment study to analyze groundwater quality and quantity and prepare projections for future use. Such study should also include surface water.

### How the action will address an issue of importance

Eutrophication of coastal lakes caused by septic leakage and run-off has been an on-going concern, particularly in the Clatsop Plains planning area, since the late 1970s/early 1980s. Of particular concern are impacts that may be occurring to groundwater and the aquifer due to the increasingly prevalent use of septic systems in this area. The Clatsop Plains area is identified in the county’s comprehensive plan, and its implementing ordinances, as a primary location for increased residential density and growth. As water capacity issues become more dominant throughout the county, but especially in the Clatsop Plains area, the need to monitor of ground and surface waters has also become increasingly important.

### How the action fits with other current policies and activities

Growth and development, which are necessary for the economic sustainability of the county and its residents, should be directed based upon the water, air, and transportation capacity available to serve that development. In March 2020, the City of Warrenton enacted an 18-month moratorium on providing new water connections outside of its city boundaries. This has had an immediate impact on residential development in the unincorporated Clatsop Plains area, which relies on Warrenton for the provision of potable water. The county is currently in the midst of a 3-plus-year project to conduct an update of its comprehensive plan. The plan will provide policies to assist in guiding growth in the unincorporated areas over the next 20 years.

### Who does what, and how

The Board of Commissioners would need to adopt a moratorium with a specific stated purpose of what work would be accomplished during the moratorium. County staff, in conjunction with the Environmental Quality Action Team, state agencies, local watershed associations and councils, the business community, and other stakeholders, and professional consultants, would work to complete and analyze the results of the groundwater study. The Environmental Quality Action Team would then work with the

consultants to review and recommend final actions to the Board of Commissioners for direction. A webpage would be maintained by Clatsop County staff.

### Timeline

In order to coordinate with the work of the Environmental quality Action Team, identified in #1, above, a moratorium should be enacted during the third quarter of FY 20-21.

### Funding Requirement

The action item will be supported and facilitated by a consultant. The Clatsop County Public Health Department estimates that the cost to conduct the recommended groundwater/surface water study is approximately \$100,000.

Description	One-time Expense	Annual/Ongoing	Total
Consultant	\$100,000	TBD	\$100,000

### Monitoring Progress

The County Manager’s Office, with assistance from staff, will provide regular updates to the Board of Commissioners and key partners and interested parties.

- Partner with the Clatsop County Fire Defense Board and OSU Extension staff to prepare education and preparedness exercises related to defensible fire space. These may include webinars; programs to promote smart development; and use of appropriate building materials in forested areas.

### How the action will address an issue of importance

Clatsop County faces increasing resiliency challenges. These include wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis, and impacts from climate change. In the face of an existing affordable housing shortage, people are also seeking to permanently resettle from more congested cities to less dense areas as a result of the pandemic. This increases development pressures and encourages people to build in coastal and forested areas, which are more vulnerable to natural disasters. Many of these new residents, who may be coming from urban areas, may be unfamiliar with the additional precautions that may be required when constructing their homes in these ecosystems. Increased education will assist in making sure new residents and structures are better equipped to handle the increasing likelihood of a natural disaster.

### How the action fits with other current policies and activities

In addition to updating its comprehensive plan, which addresses natural hazards mitigation in Goal 7, the county is also in the process of updating its Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan (NHMP). The NHMP is expected to be completed by the end of 2020. This proposed education program would coordinate with and complement the recommendations of both the NHMP as well as any recommendations that may be included in the updated comprehensive plan.

### Who does what, and how

Clatsop County staff will work with the Clatsop County Fire Defense Board and Oregon State University (OSU) Extension staff to identify relevant topics and schedule workshops and presentations. Educational programs may be conducted using a variety of formats, depending upon ongoing limitations due to the pandemic.

**Timeline**

This process will commence during the fourth quarter of FY 20-21.

**Funding Requirement**

This action item would utilize time of existing staff. Minimal costs associated with the promotion of the events may be incurred.

Description	One-time Expense	Annual/Ongoing	Total FY 21-22
Promotional Expenses	\$5,000	TBD	\$5,000

**Monitoring Progress**

The County Manager’s Office, with assistance from staff, will provide regular updates to the Board of Commissioners and key partners and interested parties.

- 4. Work with the Tourism Studio to develop an education program for visitors / tourists to promote “leaving no trace” tourism.

**How the action will address an issue of importance**

During the pandemic the impact of visitors on Clatsop County has become increasingly clear. While such impacts were normally associated with traffic congestion, pandemic restrictions and budget impacts have highlighted other areas of concern. Most prevalent is the issue of trash disposal. Because many restaurants now only offer take-out meals, disposable food containers often overflow trash bins. Reduced upkeep at public parks, particularly state-operated parks, has been reduced due to budget shortfalls. The result is that visitors are often depositing trash wherever it is convenient instead of bringing their garbage back home with them. This places a strain on local resources, increases pollution in natural areas and may pose a risk to wildlife. Because the natural beauty of Clatsop County is one of its primary tourism draws, it is especially important to keep natural areas as pristine as possible. This can be accomplished, in part, by educating visitors of their responsibilities when visiting the county.

**How the action fits with other current policies and activities**

Travel Oregon has been conducting a series of Rural Tourism Studios. The program is designed to help rural communities develop and offer high-value, authentic experiences to travelers, in a sustainable, manageable way. A primary component of this sustainability includes the responsibilities of visitors to this area. This proposed action item would assist in addressing that component through increased education and awareness.

**Who does what, and how**

Clatsop County staff will work with Travel Oregon staff and representatives from the local chambers of commerce to identify relevant topics and media to promote education and awareness.

### Timeline

This process will commence during fourth quarter of FY 2020-21.

### Funding Requirement

This action item would utilize time of existing staff. Costs associated with the production and dissemination of educational materials would be incurred. Possible funding sources include grants from the Oregon Coast Visitors Association and possible use of transient room tax monies.

Description	One-time Expense	Annual/Ongoing	Total FY 21-22
Promotional Expenses	\$25,000	TBD	\$25,000

### Monitoring Progress

The County Manager's Office, with assistance from staff, will provide regular updates to the Board of Commissioners and key partners and interested parties.

### Tier 1 Summary Estimated Expenses

Task	One-time Expense	Annual/Ongoing	Total FY 21-22
1	\$ 50,000	TBD	\$ 50,000
2	\$ 100,000	TBD	\$ 100,000
3	\$ 5,000	TBD	\$ 5,000
4	\$ 25,000	TBD	\$ 25,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$180,000</b>	<b>TBD</b>	<b>\$180,000</b>