



CHAPTER 2: PLANNING CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

A thorough understanding of Pierce County's planning context is a key component of a successful planning process. This chapter of the Pierce County Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan summarizes the context in which P&RS operates. Specifically, this chapter:

- Provides an overview of the Pierce County planning area;
- Discusses population growth and development in the region, with their implications for park and recreation services;
- Briefly notes changes in land use patterns that have been caused by this rapid growth;
- Highlights the area's natural resources that can be conserved through parks and open space planning; and
- Notes the various governmental jurisdictions within Pierce County that are involved in providing park and recreation services.



PLANNING AREA

Pierce County is located in west central Washington, in the south Puget Sound region. It encompasses approximately 1,680 square miles, an area larger than the State of Rhode Island. The County landscape varies widely, from the summit of Mount Rainier, to the steep foothills of the Cascades, to the rolling uplands, flat plains, and shores of the Puget Sound. Although Pierce County ranks 23rd in size out of Washington's 39 counties, it is the second most populated county in Washington State.

POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

In 2007, an estimated 782,200 residents lived in Pierce County. The majority of Pierce County's population and development is concentrated in the central portion of the county, along the Interstate-5 corridor, in cities such as Tacoma, Lakewood, Puyallup, and University Place.

Most cities in Pierce County provide park and recreation opportunities for residents, or the needs in these areas are met by park and recreation districts or metropolitan park districts. However, nearly half of all residents (357,257 or 45.7%) live in unincorporated areas, such as South Hill, Graham, Spanaway, and Frederickson. These unincorporated areas range from urban to rural, but unlike the

municipalities, most of these areas do not have other primary recreation providers at this time.

The population in Pierce County is growing rapidly. As indicated in Table 2.1, the County’s population increased by nearly 29% overall between 1990 and 2005. This is extremely significant to this Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan, because population growth increases the demand for park and recreation services. Moreover, growth in unincorporated Pierce County places an even greater burden on P&RS, the primary provider of regional, County, and local parks in most unincorporated areas.

In the 1980’s, 84% of the County’s population growth occurred in unincorporated areas. However, in the 1990’s, three new cities in Pierce County were incorporated and numerous other areas were annexed. As a result, growth in incorporated areas appears to skyrocket between 1990 and 2005, with a 66.5% change in a 15-year period (Table 2.1). Because of these incorporations, growth in unincorporated areas appears to decline from 1990-2000, but it increases again in the last five years.

Table 2.1: Change in Population, 1990-2005

Population	1990	2000	2005	Percent Change
Unincorporated	339,925	315,443	345,940	1.8%
Incorporated	246,278	385,377	409,960	66.5%
Total Pierce County	586,203	700,820	755,900	28.9%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Office of Financial Management

Population projections indicate that similar growth patterns will occur County-wide during the 15-year timeframe for this Plan update. Population will continue to grow, with development spreading outward from cities to previously undeveloped areas. Urban infill within older areas will proceed slowly, while new cities and suburban communities, such as DuPont and South Hill, will continue to grow rapidly.

Based on population allocations, Table 2.2 (on the next page) shows that the total County population is expected to grow by more than 16% in the next 15 years. While it appears that most of this growth occurs in incorporated areas, this table doesn’t capture the explosive growth that is occurring in some areas of the County. It also doesn’t reflect the most recent data that is being developed, which suggests that population in Pierce County is growing more rapidly than expected.

Table 2.2: Pierce County Population Allocations, 2007-2022

	Total Population			
	2007 Allocation	2013 Allocation	2022 Allocated	Estimated 15-Year Growth
Unincorporated	357,257	370,266	389,780	9.1%
Incorporated	424,943	464,134	522,920	23.1%
Total Pierce County	782,200	834,400	912,700	16.7%

Source: Pierce County Council Ordinance 2003-104s. Data is based on allocations from the 2002 OFM Population Series.

Pursuant to GMA, the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) generates low, middle, and high population projections for the County every five years. It is noteworthy that the 2007 Office of Financial Management (OFM) Population series has a significantly higher projection for Pierce County in 2022. By 2007, growth in Pierce County has already exceeded the mid-range population expectations that are shown in Table 2.2 by 30,600.

The new mid-range 2022 projection for Pierce County is 969,156. This projection is 56,456 higher than the 2002 OFM projection series, which is shown in Table 2.2. The 56,456 additional people will be reflected in the next allocation update, which should begin later this year. The higher OFM projection will result in higher growth assumptions within Pierce County, much of which will be associated with unincorporated Pierce County.

To gauge the amount of growth in areas of unincorporated Pierce County, Figure 2 illustrates the percentages of County population in incorporated vs. unincorporated areas that are predicted for 2022. Although more County residents (57.3%) will reside in established municipalities, many people will live within unincorporated urban areas (25.2%), where city-type services, including local parks and recreation services, are expected. Table 2.3 further illustrates that urban unincorporated areas are expected to experience more growth (35.6%) than other areas. While this data cannot be compared to Table 2.2 because of the different timeframe, it does suggest that Pierce County, even in unincorporated areas, is expected to become more urbanized by 2022.

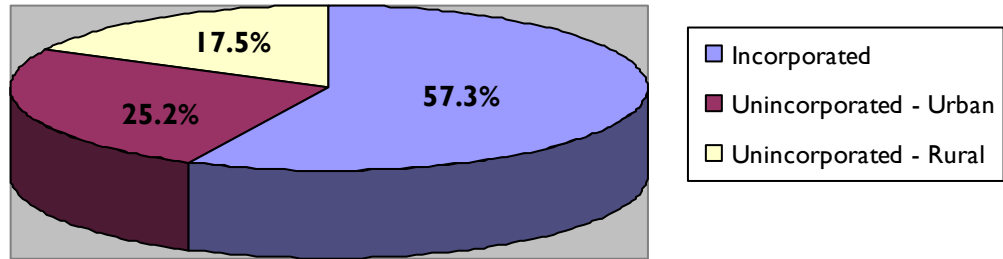


Figure 2: 2022 Population Allocations for Incorporated and Unincorporated Pierce County

Table 2.3: Urban and Rural Allocations for Unincorporated Areas, 2000 and 2022

	2000 Population	2022 Allocated	Estimated 22-Year Growth
Unincorporated - Urban	169,864	230,380	35.6%
Unincorporated - Rural	144,082	159,400	10.6%
Unincorporated - Total	313,946	389,780	24.2%
Incorporated - Total	386,865	522,920	35.2%
Total Pierce County	700,820	912,700	30.2%

Source: Pierce County Council Ordinance 2003-104s. Data is based on US Census Data and allocations from the 2002 OFM Population Series.

As noted earlier, certain areas of the county are expected to grow at a much greater rate than others. Table 2.4 illustrates how this growth applies to the 11 communities that have developed Community Plans in Pierce County.

Finally, according to population estimates made by the Puget Sound Regional Council, the areas noted in Table 2.5 are anticipated to more than double their population between 2000 and 2040. Although the Forecast Analysis Zones (FAZ) shown here do not represent the same geographical boundaries of adopted Pierce County Community Plans or municipalities in Pierce County, these numbers reveal a general geographic proximity for high-growth areas in Pierce County.

Table 2.4: Population Allocations in Community Plan Areas 2000-2022

Community Plan Area	2000	2022	Growth 2000-2022
Alderton-McMillin	4,532	8,669	91.3%
Frederickson	14,000	17,163	22.6%
Gig Harbor	32,937	40,084	21.7%
Graham	32,513	39,246	20.7%
Key Peninsula	14,968	16,369	9.4%
Mid-County	23,117	25,639	10.9%
Parkland/Spanaway/Midland	59,751	69,212	15.8%
South Hill	34,548	54,691	58.3%
Upper Nisqually	1,239	1,750	41.2%
TOTAL	313,946	389,780	24.2%

Source: Pierce County Council Ordinance 2003-104s. Data is based on allocations from the 2002 OFM Population Series.

Table 2.5: Population Forecasts for the Central Puget Sound Region, 2000-2040

Location	Total Population				Growth 2000-2040
	2000	2020	2030	2040	
Frederickson / Berkeley	27,041	50,148	52,535	56,212	107.9%
Thun Field	15,287	31,188	37,331	42,946	180.9%
South Hill	13,636	25,565	28,255	31,570	131.5%
Orting / Prairie Ridge	14,343	27,572	33,188	37,998	164.9%
Lake Tapps / Dieringer	15,800	34,722	41,543	47,821	202.7%
Sumner area	8,624	12,390	14,738	17,601	104.0%
Milton area / Edgewood area	14,238	22,140	27,139	32,612	129.0%
Tacoma CBD / Union Station	4,619	7,487	8,864	10,628	130.1%
Port Of Tacoma	887	1,284	1,719	2,393	169.8%
Fife area	6,369	9,961	12,175	14,813	132.6%
Gig Harbor area	11,361	17,259	20,761	24,524	115.9%
Dupont area	2,162	7,761	9,412	11,038	410.5%

Source: Puget Sound Regional Council, 2006 Sub-County (Small Area) Forecasts of Population, Central Puget Sound Region. Note: Each forecast is produced in a unit called a Forecast Analysis Zone (FAZ). FAZs may have city or neighborhood names; however, they are made up of census tracts, so they do not exactly follow official boundaries.



LAND USE

As noted earlier, Pierce County is the second most populated county in the state. It is also the fourth most densely-populated county, with 450.2 persons per square mile. This calculation, however, does not reflect the fact that nearly half of the land area (46%) in Pierce County is held in public ownership by jurisdictions such as the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Departments of Army and Air Force, and Washington Department of Natural Resources. This makes the incorporated and several unincorporated areas of Pierce County more densely populated than data suggests. For this reason, population density and growth are rapidly changing the character and land use patterns of several areas within the county.

Some areas that were once characterized by small communities, productive farmland, and harvestable and protected forests are now facing unprecedented development. Pierce County finds itself in a predicament where more people, who are moving into unincorporated urban and suburban areas, are in need of recreation facilities and services. Increasing density, smaller lot sizes, and disappearing open space has increased pressure to find close-to-home places to play. Open space and developed parks and recreation facilities will be critical as these areas continue to develop.

Rural areas face their own challenges in terms of growth and increasing development. In some cases, residents in areas such as the Key Peninsula have anticipated growth and pushed for park and recreation zones to encourage and streamline new park development. On the Gig Harbor Peninsula, citizens supported the development of active recreation in rural areas where sport fields could be established. On the other hand, in some more rural areas of the County, highly developed parks, sport complexes, etc., do not fit the character of these communities. In places where land use is predominately rural farms, agricultural resource areas, and rural sensitive resources, parks that both conserve and provide access to open space and natural resources are desirable.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The diverse topography in Pierce County contributes to a variety of plants, animals, and ecological systems in the area. Many sensitive environments are not suitable for development, but can provide significant open spaces, wildlife habitats, conservation preserves, scenic parks, valued trail corridors, and recreation opportunities.

THE PUGET SOUND

The Puget Sound is a significant regional resource, with ecological, environmental, economic, and recreational value. A number of saltwater ecosystems, along with the deltas, estuaries and mudflats that border the Sound, have been conserved by various federal, state, county and municipal agencies. While there is a strong public desire for public waterfront access, only some of these areas are accessible for recreation. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge, maintained by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, is an example of a major conservation effort that also provides valuable recreational and educational opportunities, including public exhibits, interpretive facilities, and trails.

LAKES, RIVERS, AND STREAMS

Pierce County has a number of lakes and smaller ponds that provide freshwater habitat, recreation opportunities, and stormwater containment. Various recreation sites near Alder Lake, American Lake, Florence Lake, Josephine Lake, Lake Tapps, Silver Lake, Snake Lake, Spanaway Lake, Steilacoom Lake, Wapato Lake, and Wauhop Lake are maintained by various jurisdictions and include facilities such as beaches, marinas, boat access areas, picnic facilities, nature centers, and trails.

Rivers, creeks, and streams in the county provide a number of freshwater corridors that could be maintained as open space to conserve habitat areas and maintain water-quality. The Chambers Creek Canyon is an example of a park site that currently protects a creek corridor. In addition, there are several significant properties in the Carbon River Valley that can be incorporated into a plan for watershed conservation. At more than 1,400 acres, these include undeveloped sites at Fairfax, the Fairfax Town Site, the Marsh Property, and the Carbon River Valley site.

WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS

A combination of high water tables, poor drainage patterns, and water retaining soils have created an extensive wetland system within the County. Wetlands offer natural wildlife habitats, create unique ecological systems, retain stormwater runoff, cleanse groundwater reserves, and provide recreation and educational opportunities, including interpretive trails and scenic viewpoints. Seeley Lake Park, adjacent to the Lakewood Community Center, is an example of a wetland that provides a local stormwater basin, a blue heron nesting area, a natural area for native plants, and a loop trail for recreational use.



Flood hazard areas also have been identified within the County. According to the Comprehensive Plan, flood and geologic hazard areas should be utilized as open space wherever possible.

OTHER CRITICAL AREAS

Aside from the ecosystems described above, there are several other critical environments that are ideal for preservation and limited recreation development. These include:

- Prairies and oak savannahs
- Forested open space
- Bluffs, foothills and steep slopes
- Mountain and glacial features

LOCAL PARK JURISDICTIONS

In Pierce County, there are many different cities, districts, agencies, departments, and public and private groups involved with the provision of parks, open space, and recreation facilities on local, county, regional, state, and federal levels. Overlapping jurisdictions, goals, and strategies have helped create an interesting patchwork of parks, trail corridors, and natural open space areas in the County. In this context, Parks and Recreation Services fills an important niche in providing parks, open space, facilities, programs and services. Map 1 illustrates the different political jurisdictions in the County. In Appendix A, Maps 1-9 indicate the location of park and recreation sites in Pierce County, based on available GIS data.

PIERCE COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES

Created in 1958, Parks & Recreation Services (P&RS) provides public parks and recreation services to the residents of Pierce County, focusing especially on the unmet needs of residents living in unincorporated areas. The department is divided into four divisions: Resource Stewardship, Parks Division, Recreation Division, and Administrative Division. P&RS supports 65 full-time staff, supplemented by volunteers and extra hires to assist with programming and maintenance primarily in the summer.

Parks & Recreation Services owns approximately more than 3,800 acres of park land at 56 sites. The inventory of parks and facilities is described in Chapter 3. The full inventory appears in Appendix B.



Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan



- Pierce County
- Community Planning Area
- Municipality
- Urban Unincorporated Area
- Within CUGA and not in any city UGA
- Rural Federal Land
- Urban Federal Land
- National Park
- National Forest
- Waterbody
- Other Park District
- Railroad

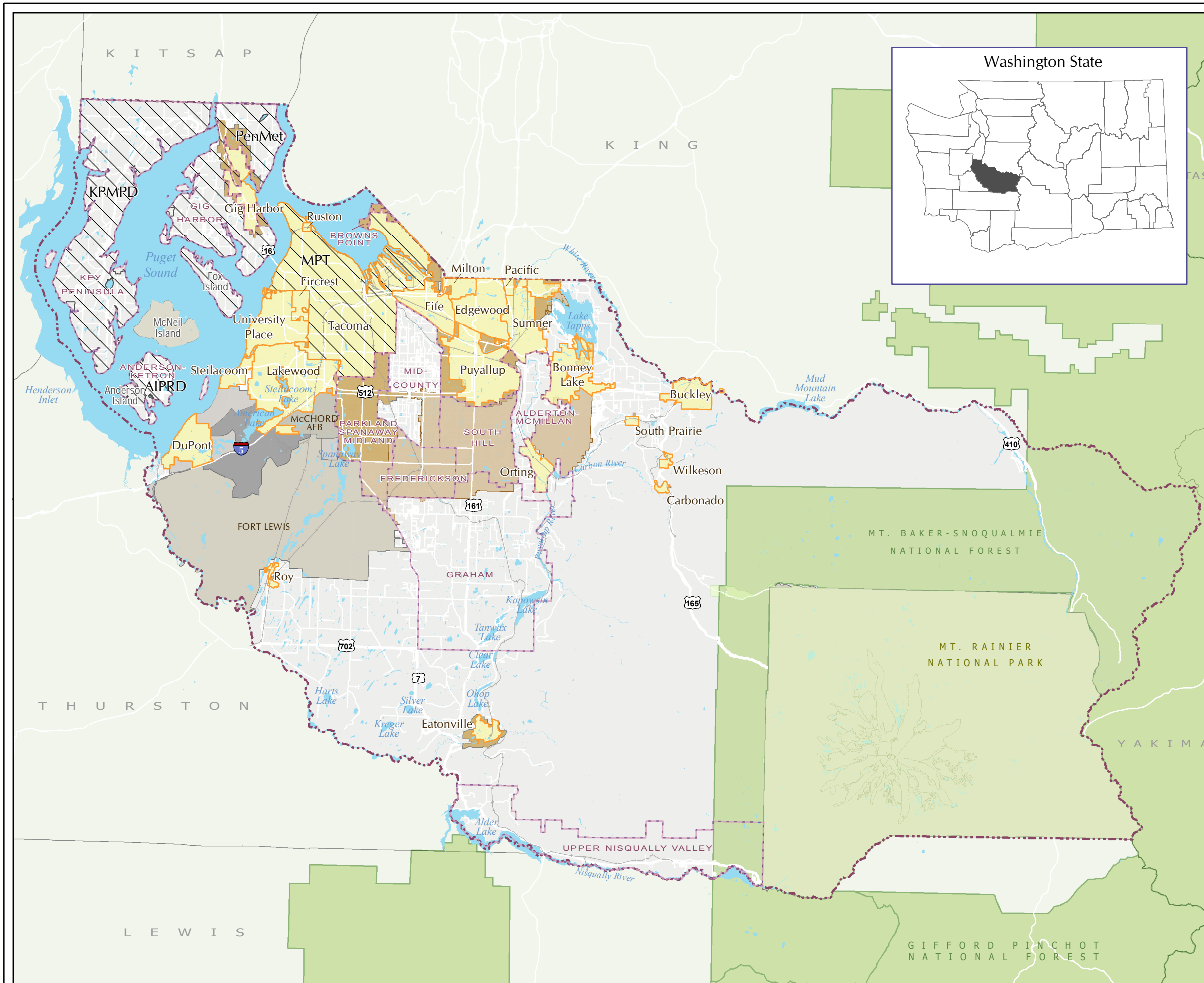


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Map 1: Planning Context



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PIERCE COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS AND UTILITIES

Within Pierce County, Public Works and Utilities oversees additional recreation and open space areas, reviewed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

CITY PARKS AND RECREATION

There are 23 incorporated municipalities in Pierce County, along with extensive rural and urban unincorporated areas. Cities and towns range in size from Wilkeson (population 440) to Tacoma (population 198,100), which is Pierce County's largest and principal city. Most cities oversee their own parks or community services departments and provide parks, recreation facilities, programs, and leisure services within their boundaries.



OTHER PARK DISTRICTS

Parks and Recreation Services works closely with four independent park and recreation districts or metropolitan park districts in Pierce County. These districts provide numerous recreation opportunities on local, community, and regional scales:

- Metro Parks Tacoma (MPT)
- Key Peninsula Metropolitan Park District (KPMPD)
- Peninsula Metropolitan Park District (PenMet)
- Anderson Island Park and Recreation District

P&RS relies on these districts—as it will with any new park and recreation districts or metropolitan park districts that form in unincorporated areas—for the provision of local parks. As specified in the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, where P&RS has land-banked local park sites, it should move these properties to local control when feasible.

COMMUNITY PLAN AREAS

Several communities have been identified in various geographic urban, suburban, and rural areas of unincorporated Pierce County (Map 1). At this time, 11 of these communities have developed plans that include strategies for providing and maintaining parks and open space. Once adopted, Community Plans are considered to be part of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan. Community Plans take a community-oriented approach to park and recreation planning, which is different from the regional park perspective and benefits-based approach in this Plan. While many of the recommendations from the Community Plans regarding parks and recreation have been incorporated into this Plan,

Recreation & Open Space Plan, future local jurisdictions will have the primary responsibility to implement the objectives and policies noted in individual Community Plans. However, Community Plans do provide valuable local planning tools for the implementation of park, recreation, and open space policies that reflect community priorities.

NATIONAL FORESTS AND PARKS

The southeastern section of Pierce County includes portions of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and all of Mount Rainier National Park, which itself includes 368 square miles and a myriad of recreation opportunities, such as hiking, camping, mountain climbing, picnicking, lodging, interpretative programs, etc. Besides providing important resources in the area, the National Park Service (NPS) and Forest Service (USFS) offer opportunities for collaboration and coordination, particularly with regards to plans for undeveloped P&RS parks in that vicinity.

WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION

The State of Washington is involved in providing parks, recreation, and open space in Pierce County through several different departments, including the Departments of Natural Resources (DNR), Fish and Wildlife, Parks & Recreation, Transportation, and Agriculture. There are several significant state parks in Pierce County, including Dash Point Park (north of Tacoma), Kopachuck Park (on the Gig Harbor Peninsula), and Penrose Point and Joemma Beach (both on the Key Peninsula). These sites contribute significant opportunities for camping, nature interpretation, and water access, such as fishing, boating, swimming, beachcombing, clamming, crabbing, etc. There are also tentative plans for a new State park in southern Pierce County, as well as many DNR parcels distributed throughout the County, which offer opportunities for collaboration.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Pierce County has a variety of educational institutions that contribute to the supply of open space, community facilities, and recreational and educational programming within the county. Fifteen different school districts, nearly 50 private schools, and 11 two-year, four-year, and technical colleges and universities help meet community recreation needs.

MILITARY INSTITUTIONS

Pierce County is also home to two significant military installations. Fort Lewis and the McChord Air Force Base provide open space,

recreation opportunities, and sport and recreation facilities in the region. These bases also offer a variety of recreation programs for military personnel, their families, and civilian employees.

PRIVATE PROVIDERS

Private providers contribute many more recreation facilities and programs within the County. Significant providers include organizations such as the YMCA and Boys & Girls Club, which provide multiple indoor and outdoor facilities, along with additional programs through partnerships at several school sites. Additionally, sports leagues, clubs, and organizations manage sports facilities and provide diverse sporting events, programs and leagues throughout Pierce County.

PLANNING CONTEXT IMPLICATIONS

As described in this chapter, Pierce County's geography, population growth, land use and development, natural resources, and overlapping political jurisdictions all affect the provision of parks, recreation facilities, open space, and programs. These factors are noted here to provide important context for the description of P&RS's inventory, which appears in Chapter 3.

