



**King County**

## Open Space Charter Amendment

Much of the appeal of King County as a desirable place to live and visit is the natural beauty and accessibility of the county's open spaces. These irreplaceable lands are facing increasing development pressure as the population and prosperity of King County grows.

The King County Charter Review Commission has responded to this situation by proposing the Open Space Amendment (OSA), and amendment to the county's constitution that would provide **additional protection for over 100,000 acres of open space land owned by the county.**

The OSA would create a list of high conservation value county properties as an appendix to the Charter. These lands would be **permanently protected from sale, transfer, or conversion** to a different use than was authorized at the time of their acquisition. There would be no change in how residents currently use these spaces.

A **majority vote of the people** would be required to remove this protection from a Charter property, providing a powerful firewall against shortsighted land use decisions. The lands protected by the OSA would remain natural, open spaces unless an exception must be made for the public good, such as a utility project or in the event of a natural disaster.

The specific properties protected by the Amendment were chosen for their high value in safeguarding the county's drinking water, habitat, recreation opportunities, and rural economy:



Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie

*Clean drinking water* – protects the water quality of rivers, lakes, streams, and aquifers that county residents rely upon for their drinking water.

*High-quality habitat* – provides some of the best habitat in the county for native vegetation and wildlife, including salmon, which are threatened by urbanization.

*Recreation* – provides open spaces for recreation opportunities such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, and wildlife viewing.

*Rural economy* – commercial timber production maintains a vibrant rural economy, as well as large open spaces important for recreation, wildlife habitat, and water quality.

A few of the over 100 open space properties that the OSA would protect include Black Diamond Natural Area, Cougar Mountain Regional Park, Fall City Park West, Green River Natural Area, Maury Island Marine Park, Middle Fork Snoqualmie Natural Area, Moss Lake Natural Area, Snoqualmie Forest, Upper Raging River Forest, and Tiger Mountain/Squawk Mountain Corridor.

No new land would be purchased under this amendment. King County already owns the OSA-protected land, or the development rights to the land. No direct costs are associated with OSA.

For more information, visit the Charter Review Commission's website at <http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec/charter/issues/openspace> or call the Commission at (206) 296-4950.

## **About the King County Charter Review Commission**

As the constitution for King County, the Charter provides the foundation for county government. The Washington State Constitution authorizes counties to create their own “home rule” charters. Charter counties have broad authority to address local governance issues.

The King County Charter calls for the Executive to appoint a citizen commission to review the Charter every 10 years. In January 2007, Executive Ron Sims appointed 21 members to the county’s fifth Charter Review Commission under the leadership of co-chairs former Washington Governor Mike Lowry and former King County Councilmember Lois North. After over a year of public outreach, research, and deliberation, the Commission has released twelve proposed amendments to the Charter.

**The County Council will now review the amendments and decide which of the amendments will go to the ballot** for a public vote. Amendments will appear on the ballot as soon as November 2008. The amendments can be reviewed on the Commission’s website at:

*<http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec/charter>*

## **Open Space Amendment Charter Language – New Section 897**

The clerk of the council shall maintain the list of inventoried high conservation value properties set forth as Appendix A to this charter. The inventory may include only properties in which the county owns a fee simple interest or a lesser interest. No inventoried county property interest shall ever be conveyed, relinquished, or converted to a different use than was authorized at the time of acquisition, as evidenced by deed, easement, covenant, contract or funding source requirements, except that this section shall not prevent: the conveyance of an inventoried property interest to another government, the conveyance of an inventoried property interest under the lawful threat or exercise of eminent domain; the grant of an easement, license, franchise or use agreement for utilities or other activities compatible with use restrictions in place at the time of acquisition; or the use of an inventoried property interest for habitat restoration, flood control, low-impact public amenities or regionally significant public facilities developed for purposes related to the conservation values of the property, road or utility projects, or emergency projects necessary to protect public health, welfare or safety. This section shall not affect any contractual obligations entered into as part of the county’s acquisition of an inventoried property interest.

*For more information about the Charter Review Commission or the Open Space Amendment, please contact Charter Review Project Manager Corrie Watterson Bryant at [corrie.watterson@kingcounty.gov](mailto:corrie.watterson@kingcounty.gov) or (206) 296-4950.*