

WAC 365-196-815

Conservation of natural resource lands.

(1) Requirements.

(a) Counties and cities planning under RCW **36.70A.040** must adopt development regulations that assure the conservation of designated agricultural, forest, and mineral lands of long-term commercial significance. If counties and cities designate agricultural or forest resource lands within any urban growth area, they must also establish a program for the purchase or transfer of development rights.

(b) "Conservation" means measures designed to assure that the natural resource lands will remain available to be used for commercial production of the natural resources designated. Counties and cities should address two components to conservation:

(i) Development regulations must prevent conversion to a use that removes land from resource production. Development regulations must not allow a primary use of agricultural resource lands that would convert those lands to nonresource purposes. Accessory uses may be allowed, consistent with subsection (3)(b) of this section.

(ii) Development regulations must assure that the use of lands adjacent to designated natural resource lands does not interfere with the continued use, in the accustomed manner and in accordance with the best management practices, of these designated lands for the production of food, agricultural products, or timber, or for the extraction of minerals.

(c) Classification, designation and designation amendment. The department adopted minimum guidelines in chapter **365-190** WAC, detailing the process involved in establishing a natural resource lands conservation program. Included are criteria to be considered before any designation change should be approved.

(d) Prior uses. Regulations for the conservation of natural resource lands may not prohibit uses legally existing on any parcel prior to their adoption.

(e) Plats and permits. Counties and cities shall require that all plats, short plats, development permits, and building permits issued for development activities on, or within five hundred feet, of designated natural resource lands contain a notice that the subject property is within or near designated agricultural lands, forest lands, or mineral resource lands on which a variety of commercial activities may occur that are not compatible with residential development for certain periods of limited duration.

(2) Relationship to other programs. In designing development regulations and nonregulatory programs to conserve designated natural resource lands, counties and cities should endeavor to make development regulations and programs fit together with regional, state and federal resource management programs applicable to the same lands. Comprehensive plans and policies may in some respects be adequately implemented by adopting the provisions of such other programs as part of the local regulations.

(3) Innovative zoning techniques.

(a) When adopting development regulations to assure the conservation of agricultural lands, counties should consider use of innovative zoning techniques. These techniques should be designed to conserve agricultural lands and encourage the agricultural economy. Any nonagricultural uses allowed should be limited to lands with poor soils or lands otherwise not suitable for agricultural purposes.

(b) Examples of innovative zoning techniques include:

- (i) Agricultural zoning, which limits the density of development and restricts or prohibits nonfarm uses of agricultural land and may allow accessory uses, including nonagricultural accessory uses and activities, that support, promote, or sustain agricultural operations and production, as provided in this subsection;
 - (ii) Cluster zoning, which allows new development on one portion of the land, leaving the remainder in agricultural or open space uses;
 - (iii) Large lot zoning, which establishes as a minimum lot size the amount of land necessary to achieve a successful farming practice;
 - (iv) Quarter/quarter zoning, which permits one residential dwelling on a one-acre minimum lot for each one-sixteenth of a section of land;
 - (v) Sliding scale zoning, which allows the number of lots for single-family residential purposes, with a minimum lot size of one acre, to increase inversely as the size of the total acreage increases; and
 - (vi) The transfer or purchase of development rights from agricultural lands, which can be used through cooperative agreements with cities, or counties with nonmunicipal urban growth areas, as receiving areas for the use of these development rights.
- (c) Accessory uses on agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance:
- (i) Counties may allow certain accessory uses on agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance. Accessory uses can promote the continued use of agricultural lands by allowing accessory uses that add value to agricultural products. Accessory uses can also promote the continued use of agricultural lands by allowing farming operations to generate supplemental income through unrelated uses, provided they are compatible with the continued use of agricultural land of resource production;
 - (ii) Development regulations must require accessory uses to be located, designed, and operated so as to not interfere with, and to support the continuation of, the overall agricultural use of the property and neighboring properties, and must comply with the requirements of the act;
 - (iii) Accessory uses may include:
 - (A) Agricultural accessory uses and activities, including but not limited to the storage, distribution, and marketing of regional agricultural products from one or more producers, agriculturally related experiences, or the production, marketing, and distribution of value-added agricultural products, including support services that facilitate these activities; and
 - (B) Nonagricultural accessory uses and activities as long as they are consistent with the size, scale, and intensity of the existing agricultural use of the property and the existing buildings on the site. Nonagricultural accessory uses and activities, including new buildings, parking, or supportive uses, shall not be located outside the general area already developed for buildings and residential uses and shall not otherwise convert more than one acre of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses; and
 - (C) Counties and cities have the authority to limit or exclude accessory uses otherwise authorized in this subsection in areas designated as agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance.
 - (iv) Any innovative zoning techniques must not limit agricultural production on designated agricultural resource lands.

[Statutory Authority: RCW [36.70A.050](#) and [36.70A.190](#). WSR 10-03-085, § 365-196-815, filed 1/19/10, effective 2/19/10.]