

San Juan County Comprehensive Plan

**first adopted
December 20, 1998**

Incorporating revisions through Ordinance 18-2010 (April 27, 2010)

WE THE PEOPLE of San Juan County recognize that these rural islands are an extraordinary treasure of natural beauty and abundance, and that independence, privacy and personal freedom are values prized by islanders. Being a diverse people bound together by these shared values, we declare our commitment to work towards this vision of the San Juan Islands in 2020 A.D.

SAN JUAN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

**SECTION A
INTRODUCTION**

July 2006

INTRODUCTION

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1. PURPOSE

The San Juan County Comprehensive Plan was produced by and for its citizens. San Juan County citizens are looking far into the future and trying to determine what the County will look and feel like if certain decisions are made now. This Plan integrates their ideas, concerns and expressions of preference into statements of how the County should be developed, what development regulations should accomplish, what facilities and service levels are needed, and how publicly funded improvements should support these objectives. Although this Plan looks only 20 years into the future, the visions and values expressed in this Plan extend beyond the 20 year planning horizon to future generations. The Plan is intended to be reviewed regularly to consider possible changes in conditions or the vision of the County's citizens.

This Plan, together with its supporting documents and the ordinance by which it is adopted, is the official policy statement of the County. The Plan is not a detailed, final plan. Rather, it provides a long range framework to guide citizens, County government, and private agencies and service providers in their planning, design and location decisions about growth, land uses, conservation of natural resources, and major capital facility expenditures. The goals and policies in this Plan direct future decisions on land use actions, ordinance amendments, capital expenditures, procedures and programs. This Plan replaces the County's first Comprehensive Plan which was adopted in 1979.

2. VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Visions allow people to dream and look into the future; they give us a chance to imagine what our community can become at its best.

Vision planning asks people from all walks of life to think about the future and what they would like it to become, and then figure out ways to make it happen.

In the simplest terms, a vision is a consensus image of what a community seeks to become. Adopted as a formal policy statement, a vision serves as both a blueprint for future direction and a yardstick against which to measure current decisions and actions.

Three Citizen Advisory Committees (CACs) representing a broad range of interests among the island communities were appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to guide the County in revising its 1979 Comprehensive Plan. The first task of the CACs was to create a vision for the future. The three district groups met on Orcas, San Juan and Lopez for five months to develop district vision statements. The district vision statements were displayed at the 1993 County Fair with a questionnaire for public comment. The three statements along with over 100 written comments from the public were then submitted to a Steering Committee made up of members from the district CACs. The Steering Committee reviewed and compared the three vision statements and public comments and, over a two month period, created a county-wide vision statement. The County-wide Vision Statement was formally endorsed by the Board of County Commissioners in December 1993. The Vision Statement (Table 1) is the foundation upon which the entire Comprehensive Plan is based.

3. GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT PLANNING GOALS

In 1990 the legislature enacted the Growth Management Act (GMA) to guide Washington State as it grows into the future. It required that cities and counties develop comprehensive plans to accomplish both state and local objectives. This Plan was developed to comply with the GMA as well as to update the 1979 Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Regulations. The GMA established 13 goals to address issues important to the development of a comprehensive plan. Each goal was considered during the formulation of the elements of the San Juan County Comprehensive Plan. The GMA goals are in Table 2, below.

A DECLARATION OF VISION AND COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE OF SAN JUAN COUNTY

PREAMBLE

WE THE PEOPLE of San Juan County recognize that these rural islands are an extraordinary treasure of natural beauty and abundance, and that independence, privacy and personal freedom are values prized by islanders. Being a diverse people bound together by these shared values, we declare our commitment to work towards this vision of the San Juan Islands in 2020 A.D.

COMMUNITY

We envision a community that is primarily rural, made up of islands of varying character, each with its own unique qualities. The islands are places of peace and mutual tolerance, where citizens of differing backgrounds and beliefs respect each other's dignity, privacy, and freedoms. We communicate effectively and openly and work together toward goals identified as being for the common good. We foster a sense of neighborliness, of self-sufficiency, and community pride that has long been a part of our island character.

BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

Our islands are places where all citizens can safely walk or play, day or night. The drinking water supply is clean and adequate. Health care and help in time of need are accessible and affordable. The supply of affordable housing is adequate to meet the needs of our diverse population.

EDUCATION

Learning is a continuing lifelong process which is encouraged and aided by the community. A partnership of families and community creates a supportive and challenging environment founded on academic excellence and artistic expression. This educational environment produces ethical, self-directed, compassionate, responsible world citizens, alive with the love of learning.

ECONOMY

We support a pattern of economic growth and development which serves the needs of our community, and which recognizes the rural, residential, quiet, agricultural, marine and isolated nature of the islands. Our economy comprises a wide spectrum of stable, year-round activities that provide employment for islanders. We support and encourage traditional industries including forestry, farming, aquaculture, construction, fishing and tourism without jeopardizing the resources on which they depend. We have home occupations and cottage industries which are compatible with surrounding neighborhoods. We encourage new ideas and new technology for improving the quality and profitability of our goods and services. Value-added activities are encouraged. Environmental conservation and sustainable development are balanced.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Our islands have exceptional natural beauty and healthy diverse ecosystems surrounded by pollution-free marine waters. The air is fresh and clean, the water quality is excellent, and the soil is uncontaminated. As careful stewards of these islands, we conserve resources, preserve open space, and take appropriate action to assure healthy land and marine environments. Native plants and animals of the islands thrive, and are identified, appreciated and conserved.

LAND USE

Neighborhoods, hamlets, villages and towns are clearly defined so as to conserve agricultural, forest, mineral resource and environmentally sensitive lands. These areas provide for commerce and community activities without losing their small scale and attractive island ambiance. There is housing for people of all incomes. The unique character of our shorelines is protected by encouraging uses which maintain or enhance the quality of the shoreline environment. Through innovative land use strategies, our citizens and institutions balance and protect private property rights, public rights, and our natural environment.

TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION

We have water, land, and air transportation systems commensurate with our island culture. On-island circulation is by means of a system of scenic rural roads with automobile, bicycle and pedestrian ways functioning without conflict. In some places, the roads are unpaved, narrow, and winding, and care is taken to maintain a rustic quality in public signs. Expansion or new construction of basic public transportation facilities occurs only on the basis of demonstrated local public need. Advanced interactive communication systems are encouraged.

ENERGY AND RESOURCES

Our community fosters resource and energy conservation. Energy independence is encouraged. Recycling, solid waste, and sewage treatment are managed within the confines of each island in an environmentally sound manner. Renewable natural resources are used on a sustainable basis. Nonrenewable resources are conserved wherever possible and practical.

ARTS, CULTURE AND RECREATION

Our community nurtures the expression of its creative talents and supports diverse cultural and entertainment activities. Our cultural facilities such as libraries, museums, and theaters are focal points of activity and community support. Well managed parks, trails, and shoreline access, where appropriate, provide islanders with recreation with due regard for both the rights of private property owners and the natural limitations of each site.

HERITAGE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Our community is enriched by a strong sense of identity, tradition, legacy, and continuity, where past and present freely mingle. We recognize the contributions to our rural and maritime heritage made by indigenous peoples, explorers, and island pioneers, and encourage the preservation of that heritage. We encourage preservation of historic sites, structures, and traditions for the enjoyment of all.

GOVERNANCE

We are self-governed by informed citizens. We are equally represented by elected officials who conduct the activities of government in an ethical, fair, impartial, responsive and open manner which recognizes the independent, self-reliant nature of its citizens. Our government institutions balance responsibility with resources and costs, consolidate services where practical, manage prudently, provide reliable data, are service-oriented, and perform in a timely manner.

OUR COMMITMENT:

AS FORTUNATE CITIZENS OF THE SAN JUAN ISLANDS, WE COMMIT ourselves individually and communally to a future for ourselves and our children that reflects this vision. To this end, we, the undersigned individuals dedicate our time and our talents.

Table 2. Growth Management Act Planning Goals.

| Goal | Description |
|--|---|
| Urban Growth | Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner. |
| Reduce Sprawl | Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low density development. |
| Transportation | Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans. |
| Housing | Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population of this state, promote a variety of residential densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock. |
| Economic Development | Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunities for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities. |
| Property Rights | Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions. |
| Permits | Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability. |
| Natural Resources Industries | Maintain and enhance natural resource based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses. |
| Open Space and Recreation | Encourage the retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks. |
| Environment | Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water. |
| Shorelines of the State | Coordinated planning is necessary in order to protect the public interest associated with the shorelines of the state while, at the same time, recognizing and protecting private property rights consistent with the public interest; and other goals and policies of the Shoreline Management Act, as set forth in RCW 92.58.020 |
| Citizen Participation and Coordination | Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts. |
| Public Facilities and Services | Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards. |
| Historic Preservation | Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures that have historical or archeological significance. |

4. THE PLANNING PROCESS

San Juan County is committed to an inclusive, on-going process of open dialogue, effective communication, community education, and broad public participation in the development of the County's Comprehensive Plan. To that end, the Board of County Commissioners appointed forty-six citizens to advisory committees to guide the County in this critical long-range planning effort. Committees representing the three major island districts of San Juan, Orcas and Lopez and a steering committee made up of delegates from the district committees were appointed. Committee members

had a variety of different interests and backgrounds. Although the district and steering committees had distinct roles and responsibilities, their common mission was:

To examine complex and controversial issues facing the county in a manner that fosters constructive and productive interaction among the varied interests and results in a Comprehensive Plan which recognizes the unique qualities of each island community, and provides a vision for the future and clearly defined goals, policies, and strategies for accomplishing that vision.

To achieve the mission the district committees focused on planning issues which related to their districts. The steering committee had the responsibility to guide the county-wide planning process and the public participation campaign.

District Committees

Role: Focus on planning issues which relate to their districts.

Responsibilities:

- Explore community values and ideals to define the desired “quality of life” for their districts;
- Examine the issues and review, discuss and recommend goals, policies and strategies for addressing planning issues which affect the desired quality of life;
- Provide input to the Steering Committee on those issues which require a County-wide perspective;
- Conduct public information sessions, community outreach and education at the district level.

Steering Committee

Role: Guide the County-wide planning process.

Responsibilities:

- Design a highly visible and informative public participation campaign to stimulate broad-based public discussion of the issues;
- Formulate a County "vision" statement, based on input from the district committees, to define the desired quality of life in the County over the next 20 years;
- Develop a framework for the revised Plan that combines the input from the districts for County-wide consistency.

The CACs were assisted by the long-range planning staff of the San Juan County Planning Department who, in turn, were assisted by numerous public and private agencies, service providers, and individuals. The CACs met for nearly three years to complete a Final Draft Plan which was then forwarded to the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners for further public review and deliberation. The adopted Plan is the cumulative effort of many people who spent countless hours to formulate a Plan which best meets the diverse needs of County citizens.

Table 3, below, provides a chronology of significant events that have led to the development of the Comprehensive Plan.

Table 3. Milestones in Development of the Comprehensive Plan.

| Date | Milestone |
|----------------|--|
| September 1962 | Subdivision Ordinance adopted |
| August 1976 | Waldron Limited Development District adopted |
| October 1976 | Shoreline Master Program adopted |
| October 1979 | Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Regulations adopted |
| December 1981 | Eastsound Village Plan adopted |
| April 1990 | Growth Management Act of 1990 passed by the State legislature |
| November 1990 | Board of County Commissioners vote unanimously to plan according to the Growth |

Table 3. Milestones in Development of the Comprehensive Plan.

| Date | Milestone |
|---|--|
| November 1990 July 1991 | Management Act Land Bank established by San Juan County voters Comprehensive Water Plan adopted |
| September 1991 September 1991 October 1991 | Open Space and Conservation Plan adopted Citizen Technical Advisory Committees appointed to develop recommendations for Interim Regulations for Resource Lands and Critical Areas The County and Town of Friday Harbor sign Memorandum of Agreement to develop Joint Planning Policies |
| December 1991 Feb.–Nov. 1992 April 1992 | Recommendations for Interim Regulations completed Planning Commission and BOCC hold hearings on Draft Interim Regulations Eastsound Subarea Plan adopted (completely revised from 1981) |
| July 1992 December 1992 January 1993 | Joint Planning Policies adopted with Town of Friday Harbor Interim Regulations (7th Draft) for Resource Lands and Critical Areas adopted Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Strategy Plan completed by the Citizens Advisory Committee on Housing |
| March 1993 October 1993 November 1993 | Three District Citizen Advisory Committees (CACs) and a Steering Committee appointed to revise Comprehensive Plan CACs produce county-wide Vision Statement Draft Tourism Plan completed |
| January 1994 May 1994 June 1994 | Draft Land Use Element available for CAC and public review County adopts interim Urban Growth Area for Friday Harbor Draft Comprehensive Plan (all elements) available for CAC and public review |
| July 1994 July 1995 August 1994 | Shaw Island Subarea Plan adopted Waldron Island Subarea Plan adopted CACs complete review of the Draft Comprehensive Plan |
| January 1995 October 1995 August 1996 | Draft Comprehensive Plan and Draft EEIS released for public comment Planning Commission public hearings on Final Draft Comprehensive Plan Shoreline Element of the Plan and Supplemental EIS completed. Addenda to EIS for Friday Harbor Urban Growth Area and Roche Harbor Master Planned Resort completed. Public Hearing held |
| October 10, 1996 October 1996 December 1996 | Final EIS released BOCC public hearings on Planning Commission Final Draft Comprehensive Plan BOCC public hearing on Final Draft Comprehensive Plan |
| December 31, 1996 March 1997 April 29, 1997 | Final Comprehensive Plan adopted Comprehensive Plan appeal deadline. Fourteen Petitions for Review filed with the Growth Management Hearings Board BOCC repeals the ordinance that adopted the Plan on 12/31/96 |
| October 1, 1997 November 17–20 and December 3–5, 1997 December 15, 1997–February 13, 1998 | SEIS released covering the changes to the Plan and Maps during 10/10/96-12/31/96, proposed revisions to the Plan and Maps, and draft Unified Development Code Joint Planning Commission and BOCC hearings on Comprehensive Plan, Official Maps, and Unified Development Code Planning Commission Deliberations |

Table 3. Milestones in Development of the Comprehensive Plan.

| Date | Milestone |
|-------------------------|---|
| March 23–25 & 29, 1998 | BOCC hearings for Comprehensive Plan, Official Maps, and Unified Development Code |
| March 30–April 10, 1998 | BOCC Deliberations |
| June 2, 1998 | BOCC hearing for Comprehensive Plan, Official Maps, and Unified Development Code |
| June 3–15, 1998 | BOCC Deliberations |
| June 15, 1998 | Adoption (but not implementation) of new Comp Plan, UDC, and Official Maps |
| June 17, 1998 | CTED 60-day GMA Review and WDOE Shoreline Master Program Review Begin |
| December 16, 1998 | Publication of Notice of Adoption |
| December 20, 1998 | Implementation of new Comprehensive Plan, Official Maps, and Unified Development Code |

5. ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

The balance of this Plan consists of chapters which contain the nine Plan elements, definitions, administrative procedures, and supporting documents. The goals and policies contained within each of the elements are the heart of the Plan. The goals and policies provide the basis for subsequent implementation measures (development regulations). Each of the elements presents part of the picture for guiding San Juan County's growth. The Land Use Element touches on all of the elements, providing the overall picture and the interconnections between the other elements.

The Growth Management Act prescribes six specific elements that must be contained in a comprehensive plan: Land Use, Rural, Housing, Transportation, Capital Facilities, and Utilities. This Plan contains each of these elements, with the section on Rural Lands included within the Land Use Element. At the request of the CACs, additional elements for Governance, Water Resources, and Historic and Cultural Preservation are included in the Plan. The foundation of this Plan is the Vision Statement. However, this Plan also incorporates many components of previous planning efforts.

This Plan has a number of supporting documents which provide the issue analysis, facts, forecasts, and findings of the environmental and economic studies, as well as the necessary implementation tools to support and accomplish the Plan.

The Unified Development Code is the key to full realization of this Plan. This ordinance combines various development regulations into one document. The new format is intended to promote a predictable, accountable, consistent and timely land use planning and permit process.

6. SUMMARY OF LAND USE ASSUMPTIONS AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

This section provides general land use assumptions used in the planning process. The land use assumptions outlined below were used to guide the estimates and forecasts presented in Appendix 1 of this Plan. Existing conditions presented in Appendix 1 include historic population estimates, projected population forecasts, estimates of population and dwelling unit distribution, and estimates of the distribution of existing land uses. The land use assumptions are based upon a variety of information sources including, but not limited to, the Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM), the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the Washington Department of Transportation, and local demographic research.

6.1 Land Use Assumptions

The land use assumptions which are outlined below were used in the preparation of this Plan:

- A twenty-year planning time frame (1995 to 2015).

- A projected annual growth rate of 2.5 percent for the unincorporated County (San Juan County's average annual growth rate in the 1980's). The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires that counties consider the high, medium, and low population projection series prepared by OFM. San Juan County's population is projected to be 20,442 people by the year 2015 (17,403 in the County and 3,039 in the town of Friday Harbor).
- A projected annual growth rate of 2.78 percent for the Town of Friday Harbor.
- A 1995 base population of 12,300 persons county-wide (OFM).
- The number of persons per household will remain at the 1990 Census level of 2.25 persons per household.
- Population distribution of permanent residents will remain approximately the same during the planning timeframe as it was in 1990 Census.
- San Juan County's population will continue to reach a peak in the month of August. There was a total estimated peak season population of 27,138 in 1995, which included permanent residents, summer residents, and visitors.
- The ratio of permanent residents to others will remain the same through the twenty year planning period with the peak population continuing to be slightly more than double the permanent population. Distribution of the peak season population will remain approximately the same during the planning timeframe as it was in 1995.

6.2 Summary of Existing Conditions

Physical Setting. San Juan County is located in the northwestern portion of Washington State between the mainland of Washington and Vancouver Island, Canada. There are 428 islands exposed at high tide with a total land area of 114,560 acres or 179.3 square miles and with a total of approximately 375 miles of shoreline. They range in size from 36,432 acres to considerably less than one acre. Many of the smaller islands are uninhabitable or are in public ownership; fewer than fifty are potentially available for private development. Only the four largest islands are served by the Washington State Ferry System: Orcas (36,432 acres), San Juan Island (35,448 acres), Lopez (18,847 acres), and Shaw (4,937 acres).

Historic Population. Table 4, below, identifies San Juan County's annual population estimate from the Office of Financial Management (OFM) from 1870 to 1995. As this table shows San Juan County's population grew rapidly around the turn of the century, leveled off between 1920 and 1970, and then

Table 4. San Juan County Population, 1870-1996.

| Year | Population | Year | Population | Year | Population |
|------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|
| 1870 | 554 | 1930 | 3,097 | 1991 | 10,700 |
| 1880 | 948 | 1940 | 3,157 | 1992 | 11,300 |
| 1890 | 2,072 | 1950 | 3,245 | 1993 | 11,900 |
| 1900 | 2,928 | 1960 | 2,872 | 1994 | 12,100 |
| 1910 | 3,603 | 1970 | 3,856 | 1995 | 12,300 |
| 1920 | 3,605 | 1980 | 7,838 | 1996 | 12,500 |
| | | 1990 | 10,035 | | |

began to grow rapidly again after 1970. During the first three years of the 1990's the county experienced an average annual growth rate of 5.8 percent. In 1994 and 1995 the county grew at an average rate of 1.66 percent per year.

Population Projections and Distribution. Table 5, below, shows the number and distribution of residents from the 1990 Census. The Office of Financial Management (OFM) provides counties and cities with annual population estimates. OFM's estimate for the unincorporated County is distributed among the islands based on the distribution pattern established by the 1990 Census. The projections are based on a 2.5 percent annual growth rate for the unincorporated County with a base year of 1995. These figures do not reflect seasonal or part-time residents. As this table shows, San Juan Island is the most populous with approximately 40 percent of the unincorporated population. If the Town is included, San Juan Island had approximately 49 percent of the County's 10,035 residents in 1990.

Table 5. Projected Population to 2015 based on a 2.5% Growth Rate.

| Island | 1990 Census | Percent of County | OFM-Projected Population | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | | | 1995 | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 |
| San Juan (excluding TFH) | 3,449 | 34.37 | 4,246 | 4,800 | 5,451 | 6,191 | 7,026 |
| Town of Friday Harbor | 1,492 | 14.87 | 1,810 | 2,077 | 2,359 | 2,678 | 3,039 |
| Orcas | 3,194 | 31.83 | 3,915 | 4,445 | 5,048 | 5,733 | 6,506 |
| Lopez | 1,483 | 14.78 | 1,818 | 2,064 | 2,344 | 2,662 | 3,021 |
| Shaw | 163 | 1.62 | 200 | 227 | 258 | 293 | 332 |
| Blakely | 29 | 0.29 | 36 | 40 | 46 | 52 | 59 |
| Brown | 14 | 0.14 | 17 | 20 | 22 | 25 | 29 |
| Center | 14 | 0.14 | 17 | 20 | 22 | 25 | 29 |
| Crane | 11 | 0.11 | 13 | 15 | 17 | 20 | 22 |
| Decatur | 54 | 0.54 | 66 | 75 | 85 | 97 | 110 |
| Stuart | 40 | 0.40 | 49 | 56 | 63 | 72 | 81 |
| Waldron | 70 | 0.70 | 86 | 97 | 111 | 126 | 143 |
| Other Islands | 22 | 0.22 | 27 | 31 | 35 | 39 | 45 |
| TOTAL | 10,035 | 100.00 | 12,300 | 13,967 | 15,861 | 18,013 | 20,442 |

A complete analysis of population projections and additional information on county demographics is included in Appendices 1 and 5.