



Okanogan Highlands Alliance

P.O. Box 163 Tonasket WA 98855

david@okanoganhighlands.org

www.okanoganhighlands.org

VIA ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION

October 13, 2017

Commissioner Jim DeTro
Commissioner Chris Branch
Commissioner Andy Hoover
Okanogan Board of County Commissioners
123 5th Avenue North, Room 105
Okanogan, WA 98840

Re: OHA's comments on the Comprehensive Plan

Dear Commissioners DeTro, Branch, and Hoover:

The Okanogan Highlands Alliance (OHA) is a grassroots non-profit environmental advocacy organization based in Tonasket, Washington, with an extensive membership throughout Okanogan County. The sustainability and prosperity of our community is a central concern of OHA's, and it is within that context that we respectfully submit the following comments on the Comprehensive Plan.

At the core of OHA's activism and stewardship is water. The organization has spent over 25 years working to protect water resources in the Okanogan Highlands from degradation and misuse. As climate change and development continues to shift the delicate balance of resources in our county, it is paramount that our elected representatives act with care and creativity to protect and preserve our water resources and create a vision for our county that is firmly rooted in sustainability.

Okanogan County's previous (2014) attempt at a Comprehensive Plan revision did not adequately consider the amount of water required to effectuate the plan, a quantity of water our county does not have to spare. It is now incumbent on the county to look for solutions that will allow for responsible growth and equitably manage the water resources shared by county residents, visitors, and ecosystems alike. It is not prudent to zone a large portion of the county as rural high density when there is not nearly enough water to support, or mitigation for, that development. This will only result in environmental degradation, litigation, and personal heartbreak as residents who intend to make homes here are forced themselves to reconcile with the realities of water scarcity.

One challenge to water management that the county must address is that lack of credible information regarding the hydrology of the Okanogan Valley. Not having a firm understanding of how much water is available, what water can be used more efficiently,

and what waters are hydrologically connected, is a major impediment to planning for future use and development. The comprehensive plan should identify this challenge, discuss the types of inquiries that will be necessary to manage water within the county, and propose a path to obtain the data. The county's current approach to water management relies on anecdotal information and extrapolates unfounded conclusions from pieces of information (e.g. well logs) that alone are not suitable for this purpose and will continue to result in a problematic, piece-meal approach.

Because water is a finite recourse that is inextricably tied to the county's economic, social, and environmental well-being, it must be used wisely. The comprehensive plan should identify and prioritize efficiency in water use. Potential opportunities exist to "save" water through conservation practices, which could then be re-allocated or used for mitigation. The county should analyze this potential and promote water-use efficiency whenever possible.

Recent court decisions have in some ways clarified the county's responsibility with respect to the management of water resources, but in other ways opened up a chasm of uncertainty. We are sympathetic to the reality that the county has to work within limitations of technical expertise, budgets, and staff time; however, ignoring the water quantity problem and moving forward as if the resource existed in unlimited, discrete supplies is a fiction that will only serve to create greater problems in the future. The county needs to aggressively pursue funding to acquire hydrologic data and seek to develop appropriate mitigation mechanisms that will allow for economic prosperity and environmental protection into the future.

We look forward to participating in a transparent, collaborative process and are optimistic that the county will develop a durable plan to guide our community into a future of sustainable economic prosperity, resiliency, and environmental health.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Kliegman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "K".

David Kliegman,
Executive Director