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Okanogan County Planning Dept.
via e-mail: rrobbins@co.okanogan.wa.us

Subject: Scoping comments for the EIS on the County Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Ordinance, etc.

The EIS should address the impacts on all alternatives of the Plan, Zoning, and other affiliated land uses in regard to the following:

WATER

how do the various alternatives differ in regard to their ability to retain and protect ground and surface water., the recognition of critical watersheds and the availability of water for wildfire protection?
If the Plan is depending on Hydrological studies then there should be a time schedule as to when these will be available.

CLIMATE CHANGE

how will it be either lessened or hastened by development of various kinds, ie., traffic, density, area of forest and grassland that will remain under each alternative,
(leaving more forest and grassland undeveloped will increase carbon sequestration.)

RURAL ASPECTS

The rural classification in the Plan appears to be a catch-all for many diverse and incompatible activities—many of which appear “commercial”, not rural. Considering that many county residents want to maintain a “rural” atmosphere, you might want to redo this section and divide rural into actual usages. For example: one-acre or less subdivisions are hardly rural, nor are large cannabis operations.

AESTHETICS/OPEN SPACE/RECREATION

Considering that tourism and recreation are cited as important activities, there needs to be an evaluation as to how the different alternatives provide for protection and enhancement of these aspects. There is little or no reference to the value of these aspects when planning other activities. Also, the plan fails to consider that the scenic beauty of the Okanogan is what attracts people to the area and needs to be considered in planning,

WILDLIFE

Habitat loss is one of the chief reasons for the decline of wildlife. This is happening in the Okanogan as well as elsewhere. How will development and zoning factors in each alternative influence the preservation of wildlife habitat through wildlife corridors, open space, conservation easements, etc.

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Additional comments/questions concerning the Plan.

Under “Objectives” there should be recognition of the environmental benefits of retaining agricultural and forest resource lands, such as water retention, soil protection, aquifer replenishment, wildlife habitat and carbon sequestration.

Population figures---It does not appear that the absentee property owners were considered. There are many part-time residents who invest in properties for future development, as well as building housing and living in the area for part of the year. Their impacts need to be considered in the Plan

Conservation easements, under a qualified land trust, need recognition for their value in maintaining open space. Some, but not all of these properties have ag or forest resource value,, but have other values too and should be valued for those as far as tax reductions. For example, in some WA counties wetland retention receives a 90% tax benefit!

The Plan cannot ignore climate change and its potential for change particularly in regard to drought and mega wildfires. This will be particularly important in siting of large developments adjoining wildlands..

In general, this plan is greatly improved over previous ones. Alternative 3 gives the most consideration to the objectives and vision statement that the County intends to follow.

Jessica McNamara