



Guiding Growth—Healthy Watersheds

Translating Science into Local Policy

March 2014



What's this project? Thurston County and the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) are working to use watershed science to create local policies that protect Puget Sound water quality. This project is funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and focuses on select watersheds draining into Puget Sound, including Woodard Creek Basin.

Why plan today? A key goal of this project is to identify basin management strategies that will help to preserve water resources in areas impacted by growth. TRPC estimates that Thurston County — one of the state's fastest-growing counties — will add about 140,000 people during the next three decades. The Woodard Creek Basin includes urban growth areas slated for future incorporation by the City of Olympia.

What's at stake? Development in sensitive areas can damage or disrupt ecosystem services, including the filtering and purification of water, regulation of water flows, protection from floods, and creation of habitat for plants and animals. Careless development in these areas could lead to lakes, streams, and beaches that are unhealthy and unusable for people and wildlife.

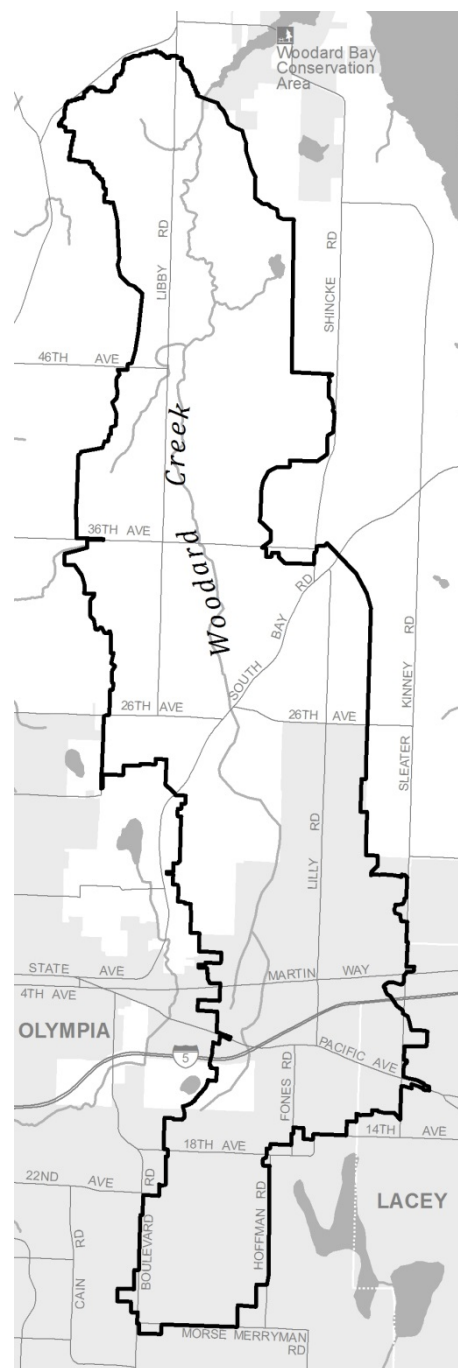
Why was this basin selected? Woodard Creek is the second-largest stream flowing into Henderson Inlet, a vital shellfish production area. The creek originates in an Olympia wetland surrounded by commercial and industrial development, and then travels north through unincorporated county land until it empties into Woodard Bay. The basin has been impacted by development, with 15 percent of the basin covered by impervious surfaces (e.g., roads and parking lots) and just 46 percent remaining tree canopy. Woodard Creek regularly exceeds standards for bacteria and nutrients. Though the basin is relatively healthy today, future development could increase the amount of impervious surfaces and stormwater runoff in the basin, exacerbating water quality issues.

What has been done so far? This project focuses on preventing basins in relatively good condition — yet facing development pressure — from becoming degraded. Our first step was to understand the current condition of the basin by examining scientific and monitoring data and growth patterns. We then considered how different management strategies might affect Woodard Creek's flow and water quality in the future.

What's next? We are seeking public input to help identify a management strategy for the basin. Policies under consideration include changes to development regulations and zoning, transfer or purchase of development rights, long-term protection of sensitive lands, and low-impact development.

Want to learn more? Contact Thurston County Associate Planner Allison Osterberg: (360) 754-3355, x7011; osterba@co.thurston.wa.us. Or visit the project website: www.co.thurston.wa.us/planning/watershed

Woodard Creek Basin Map



2013 Woodard Creek Basin Survey

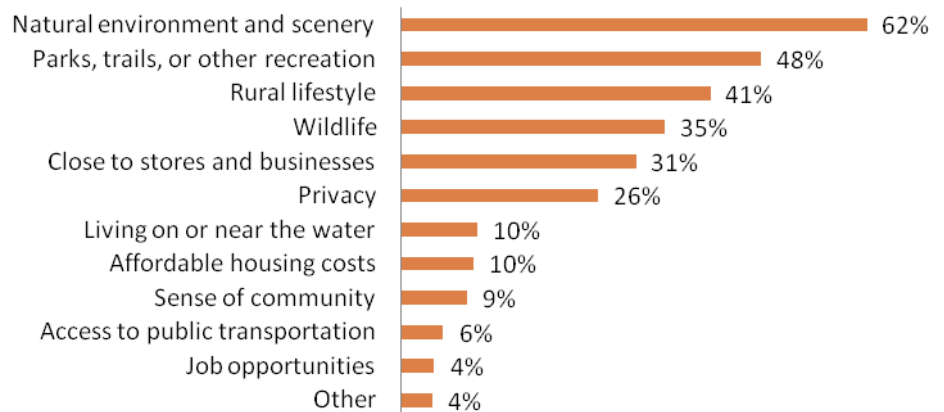
An August 2013 survey¹ conducted by TRPC shows what Woodard Creek Basin residents and property owners value most about living in the basin: natural environment and scenery; access to parks, trails, and other recreational facilities; and, opportunities for a rural lifestyle. Clean drinking water, Puget Sound water quality, and healthy salmon runs also are very important to the majority of the survey respondents.

More than half of those who responded (65%) indicated that they are somewhat or very concerned about water quality in the basin. The greatest risks to water quality they see are urban development, pollution from stormwater runoff and septic systems, and the loss of forest cover. When it comes to planning for the future of the basin, residents said the most important issues to address were:

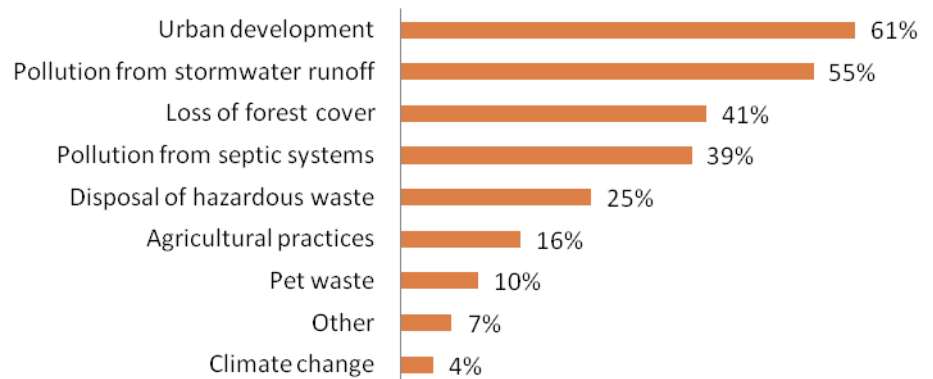
- Protecting water quality (55%)
- Protecting wildlife, fish habitat (54%)
- Preserving undeveloped land (37%)
- Preserving farmland (29%)
- Low-impact development (22%)

When asked how residents would like to describe Woodard Creek Basin in the future, many expressed hope that the area would remain much as it is today, with natural and rural areas maintained and protected, and with water quality improved. They also expressed a desire that future development be concentrated in the more urban areas and designed to be low-impact. Residents also want to preserve natural areas and maintain a high quality of life.

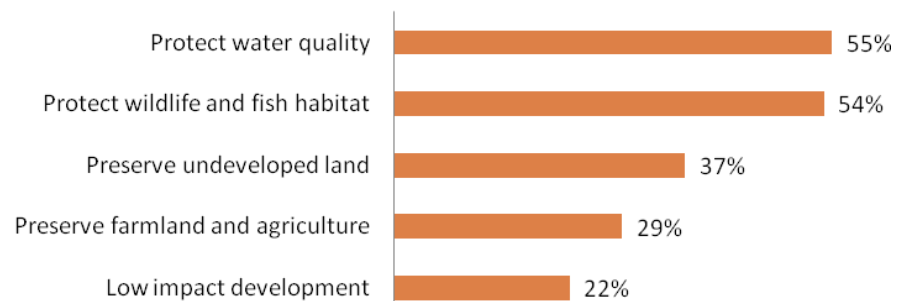
What do you value most about living in the Woodard Creek Basin?



What are the greatest risks to water quality in Woodard Creek Basin?



What should be addressed in a watershed plan for Woodard Creek Basin?



¹ TRPC sent the survey to 3,374 residents and property owners and elicited a response rate of 12 percent.