

## 2. Rural Character

### 2.1 Revised Code of Washington (RCW)

Per RCW 36.70A.030(15) "Rural character" refers to the patterns of land use and development established by a county in the Rural Element of its comprehensive plan:

- (a) In which open space, the natural landscape, and vegetation predominate over the built environment;
- (b) That foster traditional rural lifestyles, rural-based economies, and opportunities to both live and work in rural areas;
- (c) That provide visual landscapes that are traditionally found in rural areas and communities;
- (d) That are compatible with the use of the land by wildlife and for fish and wildlife habitat;
- (e) That reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development;
- (f) That generally do not require the extension of urban government services; and
- (g) That are consistent with the protection of natural surface water flows and groundwater and surface water recharge and discharge areas.

The underlined text above illustrates that "rural character" is not specifically defined and is largely left up to the individual jurisdiction to establish. The information in this Preliminary Analysis will assist the County in defining its unique rural character.

In regard to the Rural Element, RCW.36.70A.070 Comprehensive Plans, describes what is to be included.:

"(5) Rural element. Counties shall include a rural element including lands that are not designated for urban growth, agriculture, forest, or mineral resources. The following provisions shall apply to the rural element:

(a) Growth management act goals and local circumstances. Because circumstances vary from county to county, in establishing patterns of rural densities and uses, a county may consider local circumstances, but shall develop a written record explaining how the rural element harmonizes the planning goals in RCW 36.70A.020 and meets the requirements of this chapter.

(b) Rural development. The rural element shall permit rural development, forestry, and agriculture in rural areas. The rural element shall provide for a variety of rural densities, uses, essential public facilities, and rural governmental services needed to serve the permitted densities and uses. To achieve a variety of rural densities and uses, counties may provide for clustering, density transfer, design guidelines, conservation easements, and other innovative techniques that will accommodate appropriate rural densities and uses that are not characterized by urban growth and that are consistent with rural character.

(c) Measures governing rural development. The rural element shall include measures that apply to rural development and protect the rural character of the area, as established by the county, by:

- (i) Containing or otherwise controlling rural development;
- (ii) Assuring visual compatibility of rural development with the surrounding rural area;
- (iii) Reducing the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development in the rural area;
- (iv) Protecting critical areas, as provided in RCW 36.70A.060, and surface water and groundwater resources; and
- (v) Protecting against conflicts with the use of agricultural, forest, and mineral resource lands designated under RCW 36.70A.170.

Emphasis added.

The determination of what is "rural" and what is included in the Rural Element is placed upon the community and County to define and establish in a manner that is acceptable to the State through the Hearings Board.

## 2.2 Kittitas County Comprehensive Plan

### 2.2.1 Compliance History

Kittitas County's Comprehensive Plan (Plan) and Development Regulations were appealed to the Hearings Board in the consolidated matters of *Kittitas County Conservation Coalition, et al. v. Kittitas County*, EWGMHB Case Nos. 07-1-0004c and 07-1-0015. The procedural history of this case is as follows:

On August 20, 2007, the Hearings Board issued its Final Decision and Order (FDO) in EWGMHB Case No. 07-1-0004c. The case represented a challenge to various amendments to Kittitas County's Plan enacted via Ordinance 2006-63. Since the August 2007 FDO, the Board has issued six compliance orders. The Sixth Compliance Order is dated July 28, 2011.

On March 20, 2008, the Hearings Board issued its FDO in EWGMHB Case No. 07-1-0015. The case challenged a number of development regulations adopted by Kittitas County in its Development Regulation Update, Ordinance 2007-22.

On September 19, 2007, EWGMHB Case No. 07-1-0004c, Legal Issues 1, 10, and 11 were appealed to Kittitas County Superior Court, Case No. 08-2-00195-7.

On April 30, 2008, EWGMHB Case No. 07-1-0015 was appealed to Kittitas County Superior Court, which issued a Stay. Subsequently, EWGMHB Case Nos. 07-1-0004c and 07-1-0015 were consolidated by the Washington State Supreme Court, and a remand was issued on July 28, 2011, in the challenged matters.

As a result of the Hearings Board Order Following Remand from Washington State Supreme Court in EWGMHB Case Nos. 07-1-0004c and 07-1-0015 dated November 7, 2011, the County is required to comply by September 2012 on the remaining legal issues. This Preliminary Analysis will be a resource for completing the remaining steps in the compliance process.

### 2.2.2 Land Use Designations

**Map 2.2-1** shows the land use designations in the 2011 Comprehensive Plan. The map legend and **Appendix A** show the number of land use designations existing in the County GIS data set. When extracting the Commercial Agriculture and the Commercial Forest designations, the rural area is perceptible.

**Map 2.2-2** was created from the previous information to more clearly distinguish the location of the resource, rural and urban lands for purposes of this Preliminary Analysis. Master Planned Resort and LAMIRDs are within the Rural land use designation. The Urban designated areas consist of the incorporated Cities/Town and their Urban Growth Areas. The Resource land use designation consists of mineral lands, commercial forest lands and commercial agriculture lands. **Appendix B** shows the Land Use Designations Utilized for the Preliminary Analysis.

## 2.3 Kittitas County Rural Character

Determining the character of Kittitas County, as well as with any area, requires a significant amount of examination of the environment and the attitude of people within the jurisdiction. In this Preliminary Analysis, a series of public interactions through meetings and questionnaires were conducted to define the "rural" character of the County. A visual analysis was also completed to determine the varying makeup of the existing environment to assist in the analysis of the recreational, open space and resource preservation, as well as potential development characteristics and opportunities throughout the County. Such definition will provide direction for amending the County's Plan and regulations to preserve the "rural" environment.

Primarily two types of environments have been identified within the public involvement and visual process: One type of rural environment consists of an agriculture/open space area in the eastern half of the County, often referenced as the "Lower County." Many of the persons identifying such an area were split on whether to preserve the agriculture environment or permitting opportunities for development of it. The second identification of "rural" within the County

involved significant recreational activities for visitors to the County and residents in the western portion of the County. This “recreational rural” environment exists primarily in the western portion of Kittitas County near and within the mountain areas and is often referenced as the “Upper County.”

### 2.3.1 Questionnaires and Public Meetings

A significant public input process was conducted within the Preliminary Analysis process in order to obtain the public image of the existing “rural” character of the County and obtain some idea of the characteristics desired in preservation. A questionnaire/meeting process was conducted with the public at the beginning of 2012 to obtain the public understanding of “rural” in the County and obtain an idea of the character that should be preserved from citizens’ perspective. Issues brought forward in past citizen involvement activities were also examined to evaluate how some persons perceived “rural” in the near past. Specific community comments from various sources are outlined and presented in detail within **Appendix K**.

In January, 2012 a group of citizens (often referred to as “Stakeholders”) were identified and mailed a questionnaire. The identified Stakeholders in the context of this questionnaire were persons or organizations having some potential gain or loss with a particular action. These individuals and organizations were recognized through past public meetings, public phone conversations, meetings with County staff and elected officials, and other events. Public agencies that normally review checklists for proposed projects were asked to respond to the questionnaire. Citizens with past involvement in the planning and building issues were identified as stakeholders, and are recorded within the County’s email list of contacts. Private interest groups, such as Futurewise, members of Kittitas County Conservation Coalition, Ridge, and native-American tribes, such as the Yakama Nation, were also identified as Stakeholders.

A questionnaire was developed by Kittitas County staff after hearing concerns from a number of interest groups and individuals participating in the public meetings and conversations. Over twenty questions were initially developed by staff in order to obtain responses from citizens about issues relating to Kittitas County in general, about the existing Plan, and about the regulations within the County all relating to rural character. The number of questions was reduced to ten questions in three different categories for easing potential respondents’ time to answer questions. All issues brought out by the participating groups and citizens were recorded and analyzed to identify major issues existing in the County’s rural area. A total of 317 groups, organizations, and private citizens were directly mailed or emailed this questionnaire. The questionnaire was also posted on the County’s website to provide an opportunity for other interested citizens to respond.

The average length of residence of those responding to the “Stakeholders” questionnaire was almost 34 years, but varied from 3.5 years to almost 65 years. The median time of residence in the County from those responding was approximately 30 years, suggesting that the respondents’ length of residence in Kittitas County varied, however not significantly. The number of respondents living in the County less than 34 years was higher than the number living in the County more than 34 years. Three questionnaire respondents have resided in the County less than 10 years.

It was clear from the responses received to the Stakeholders’ Questionnaire that respondents fell within two groups: One group was pro-development within the “rural environment. The other group was for little, if any, development within the “rural” area.

A total of 33% of the respondents indicated that some type of development could be considered rural in nature, often suggesting a need for cluster development, small towns, and smaller residential areas. Most respondents (56%) expressed that “rural” meant some form of agriculture, such as large and small farms, ranches and intensive agricultural activity. Almost half of the respondents indicated forest as something that suggested “rural” in Kittitas County. Twenty-two percent (22%) indicated that recreational activities were an indication of “rural” environment.

Respondents stated that more regulations were necessary while approximately 33% stated that some form of development was necessary to preserve the “rural” environment, directly correlating with those indicating that “rural” to them meant some form of development. A larger group indicated that little, if any, development was needed to preserve the “rural” environment as they defined it. They suggested that existing ordinances and regulations needed

enforcement, while others felt that new ones needed to be developed. Several wanted a “record of ‘rural’ definition” so that proposed new ordinances could be measured as to how “rural” environment was being protected and considered by future decisions. A number of respondents suggested moratorium on development altogether, or limiting development to areas adjacent to established UGAs until studies were conducted to indicate where development could be accommodated. Others suggested creating incentives for developers within County ordinances to encourage more open space.

The final section of the questionnaire included three questions designed to get an idea of what regulations were needed in order to preserve the rural character within Kittitas County. Again, the respondents to the Stakeholders’ Questionnaire were largely in two groups, those who suggested having fewer regulations and those suggesting having more regulations. Several suggested that the existing land use codes were all that was needed. Some thought the codes were adequate but needed more strict enforcement. Several (22% of respondents) felt that the Fire Codes were adequate and protected the rural environment. The majority of the respondents indicated that most of the regulations in existence were ineffective in preserving the rural character and needed to be created, amended, or replaced. This group suggested cleaning up the cluster concept so that less development occurred in the rural area.

Many of the respondents to the Stakeholders’ questionnaire indicated that Commercial Agriculture should be protected through various means including:

- Requiring any agricultural land owner to preserve a percentage of their agricultural land to remain in agriculture use
- Providing large buffers around agricultural lands
- Eliminating all platting activity in agricultural lands
- Limiting trails near or upon agricultural lands and enforcing trespass laws
- Limiting development to 20-acre minimum lot sizes or improve cluster development criteria
- Placing a moratorium on rezoning of any commercial agricultural lands.

A large majority of respondents to the Stakeholders’ Questionnaire identified agriculture, recreational opportunity, and forests as key to the “rural” environment, which merit consideration when creating changes to the “Rural” section of the Plan goals, objectives and policies. Many felt that these characteristics should be highly regarded when creating changes in our current ordinances designed to protect these values.

Two Open Houses and a more general questionnaire was developed for the public at large. The questionnaire was posted on the County’s website to provide an opportunity for individuals to give comments. The questionnaire and responses are outlined in **Appendix K**.

This questionnaire had fewer questions and was more general than the Stakeholders’ questionnaire. Responses were also designed to obtain the citizens’ perception of what they valued in the “rural” area, what they defined as “rural,” and what they felt was necessary to preserve such character.

The format of the public Open Houses was informal, with residents, property owners and staff sharing and discussing information regarding twelve rural subareas in the County. Discussions also included land use issues in the County and the existing Rural Lands Element of the Plan. A handout provided at the first Open House indicated the purpose of the meeting, outlining the related RCW to be addressed, a brief summary of the issues to be addressed based upon the outstanding compliance issues, and the schedule of the completion of the process. The handout was also listed on the County’s website for anyone desiring the information. Comments and questions were generally obtained by face-to-face individual conversation between attendees and attending County staff. Numerous questions were posed by individuals and staff representatives. Many of the attendees were very interested in the map displays and in discovering how their property was presently viewed by the County in its brief description of subareas. Most expressed optimism in the process and were taking a “wait-and-see” attitude towards the County’s new effort.

Most of the comments received from attendees at the Upper County Open House were in favor of preserving the “rural” environment in which they lived. Most of the respondents indicated that they thought of open space, wildlife, agriculture activities and smells, light traffic and wooded areas. As many of the respondents liked the Agriculture 3 and Rural 3 zones as those that disliked these zones. Many liked the three-acre zones because they felt it allowed for an open, rural environment, while those who disliked the zones indicated that such zones prevented the preservation of the open environment that they cherished.

Most of the comments received from attendees to the Lower County Open House were from those residing in the West Ellensburg subarea. Almost all of the respondents stated that they associated rural with agriculture in the Lower County and that agriculture and open space is what is most desirable. Only two respondents indicated that rural to them represented opportunity for development (“compatible to business and schools,” and “mixed use.”) Several mentioned that open space and lack of noise was what they liked in a rural environment. They were generally concerned about the increase in housing within the agriculture and flooding areas, and wanted some control to prevent development in such areas in the future.

Many of the same concerns were expressed at the second series of Open Houses. This Open House was designed to obtain participants’ ideas towards potential map changes to the Plan. Participants were asked to provide their issues and concerns regarding specific geographic County areas, even to the parcel level. A different handout was provided attendees and viewers of the County’s website. This handout stated that the purpose of the meeting was to include their input in developing new criteria for mapping rural land use designations and rural zoning classifications. The draft mapping criteria are outlined in **Appendix E** and **Appendix J**. Participants of the second Open House were encouraged to utilize this criteria to propose mapping for particular County rural parcels in the areas in which they lived or in which they were interested.

As in the first Open House, most of the comments received from people attending from the Upper County Open House were in favor of preserving the “rural” environment in which they lived. People responding to the questionnaire at this Open House have lived in the County an average of 19 years, very similar to the questionnaires received in the first public interaction. Unlike the first Open House, there were more people indicating that they were in favor of development opportunities, particularly in the West Siding subarea. However, most of the respondents (as in the first Open House) indicated that they wanted protection of open space, wildlife, agriculture activities. Many disliked the three-acre zones because they felt it hindered open, rural environment preservation of the open environment desired. Several people from the Lower County area were in favor of some type of development opportunity. Many respondents from the West Ellensburg subarea suggested that areas be designated “Rural Working Lands” which would encourage large lot zones such as Agriculture 20 or Forest and Range zones.

Several people provided comments related to the Teanaway/Swauk Prairie subarea. All were suggesting “Rural Natural Resource” or “Rural Working Areas” encouraging Agriculture 20 and Forest and Range zones. One respondent indicated the necessity of allowing farmers to sell parcels no less than 40 acres. Another respondent suggested permitting individual, small commercial activities at familiar local crossroads where small retail could serve the rural residents and farmers working in the subarea.

Participants providing comments on the Lower County subarea maps suggested development opportunities north and adjacent to the Ellensburg Urban Growth Area, and recommended that such areas be designated on the Plan as “Rural Transition.” Other respondents recommended designations requiring larger minimum lot sizes, and thereby, preserving agricultural activities.

Responses to the questionnaires and suggestions on land use designation and zoning classification mapping criteria, and regulation amendments will be accepted from the public through June 2012.

### 2.3.2 Visual Survey

Kittitas County is known statewide for its outdoor recreation and large farming activities. Lower County, or the eastern part of the County, is recognized by its major irrigated hay fields and massive areas for cattle grazing. The

housing activity in these areas is limited, and the intense areas of development which occur are noticeable in contrast to the existing agriculture and rangeland existing open spaces.

The Upper County, or western portion of the County, is distinctly different from the Lower County, and is recognized for its massive mountain range views, large lakes, and active winter skiing recreational spaces. Forest lands and large water areas are quite prevalent, and the area is very desirable for summer and winter recreation activities. Much of the development is provided for seasonal activity, and residential development is often provided for recreational activity. Many of these dwellings are large and do not indicate the character of seasonal structures. While most of the units are for seasonal use and are not used throughout the year, there are a number of areas which have units more characteristic of a suburban development in a pleasurable atmosphere versus a rural environment.

The following photos show much of the character throughout Kittitas County and how various land uses coordinate, or conflict, with each other. **Photos 2.3.2-1 through 2.3.2-6** illustrate the small town, recreational atmosphere of the Upper County areas, and the visual interaction of this environment with the various types of development that occurs in the Upper County areas.

**Photo 2.3.2-1** very clearly shows the overwhelming characteristic of the mountain region near the Snoqualmie Pass and illustrates development opportunities within the lower areas near I-90. Many people reside in this seasonal recreation area during parts of the year. The area offers massive recreational opportunity for summer and winter skiing, hiking, and camping activity. Many of the residential units that have been developed in the area can create small “community” living during different times of the year, and might be disruptive to the rural character of this particular subarea of the County



**Photo 2.3.2-1** Massive open areas within large mountain ranges are prevalent within the Upper County area. Some areas below mountains are subject to development.



**Photo 2.3.2-2** shows an area of the City of Roslyn. Small town atmosphere with heritage buildings are prevalent in the town and are distinctive to the open spaces surrounding it. The area provides a rural character distinctive to mountain environment. Development proposed in various areas leading to the town from the south, which could detract from this rural environmental vision. Within its comprehensive plan, the town has not expanded its UGA in order to protect this characteristic.

**Photo 2.3.2-2** The small town of Roslyn is concentrated within evergreen trees and dry grass areas. Surrounding open spaces distinguishes the town from rural areas.

**Photo 2.3.2-3** illustrates an area around the Easton belt that provides some “fill-in” opportunities since sparse development already exists that is more concentrated than other rural areas in the County. It is near I-90 where traffic is abundant, creating less of a rural environment than other areas of the County.



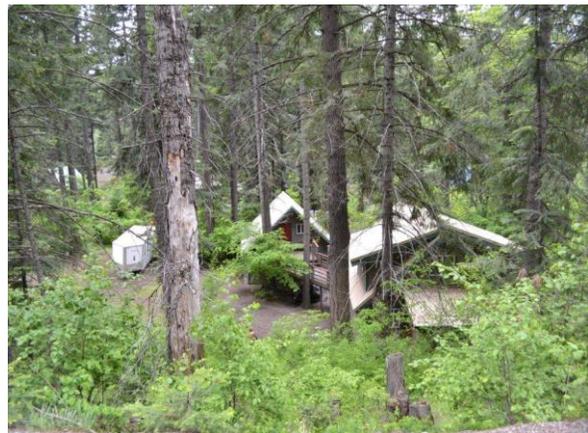
**Photo 2.3.2-3** The unincorporated developments within the Easton area are visible from the I-90 freeway and offer opportunity for “fill-in” development within and around the developed areas.



**Photo 2.3.2-4** documents the living conditions that have existed for decades in the Upper County area. This “cabin” environment is conducive to the recreational nature of the area, and this kind of development might not be considered invasive to the rural character of the County.

**Photo 2.3.2-4** Small cabins have existed for decades for recreational purposes in the Upper County mountain/lake areas.

**Photo 2.3.2-5** illustrates the type of dwelling that have been created over the past decade. It is much larger in size and impression than the homes typical to the ones shown in the previous photo, and often requires large landscape changes which may have greater impact the rural character in lake and mountain areas.



**Photo 2.3.2-5** Large homes in the recreation areas of the mountains and lakes in the Upper County have become more prevalent in the recent years even though many are seasonal.

**Photo 2.3.2-6** is located in an area between Roslyn and Cle Elum which shows a more intense development and more urban in character. It creates an atmosphere that is distinct from the open spaces surrounding it, and although is mostly used for recreation purposes, can provide an “in-town” image possibly creating urban environments within rural areas.



**Photo 2.3.2-6** Large development communities have developed over the past decade sometimes uncharacteristic of the surrounding open mountain spaces.



**Photo 2.3.2-7** illustrates the open spaces characteristic of the Lower County area. Many of the grazing areas exist throughout the lower area, often attracting wildlife of deer and elk, even within the Lower area. Like this picture,

**Photo 2.3.2-7** Massive rangelands and farmland are characteristic of the Lower County Area.

**Photo 2.3.2-8** shows the arid nature of the area of transition between the Upper County and the Lower County. The scattering of pine with large dry grasses provide spaces for wildlife. Development in these areas often depends upon the availability of water since aquifers are deeper in this area than the more western Upper Kittitas area.



**Photo 2.3.2-8** Open rangeland are typical of the areas between the Upper County and the Lower County.



**Photo 2.3.2-9** shows how intermittent development in dense amounts can interrupt the open spaces character of some areas in Kittitas County. These types of “communities often do not have the necessary utilities and services often provided to more urban areas, and can create potential problems in protecting the rural character and in protecting water sources.

**Photo 2.3.2-9** Intermittent housing development can sometimes interrupt open spaces and impact the existing rural character of the area.

**Photo 2.3.2-10** demonstrates that such development, when spaced to the character of the area, can fit in rural areas and provide for varying densities without negatively impacting the rural character of the area. Trees within the developed areas and widely spaced structures can provide a small town feeling characteristic to an agriculture community area.



**Photo 2.3.2-10** Intermittent development can sometimes enhance the rural character and provide for a variety of densities.



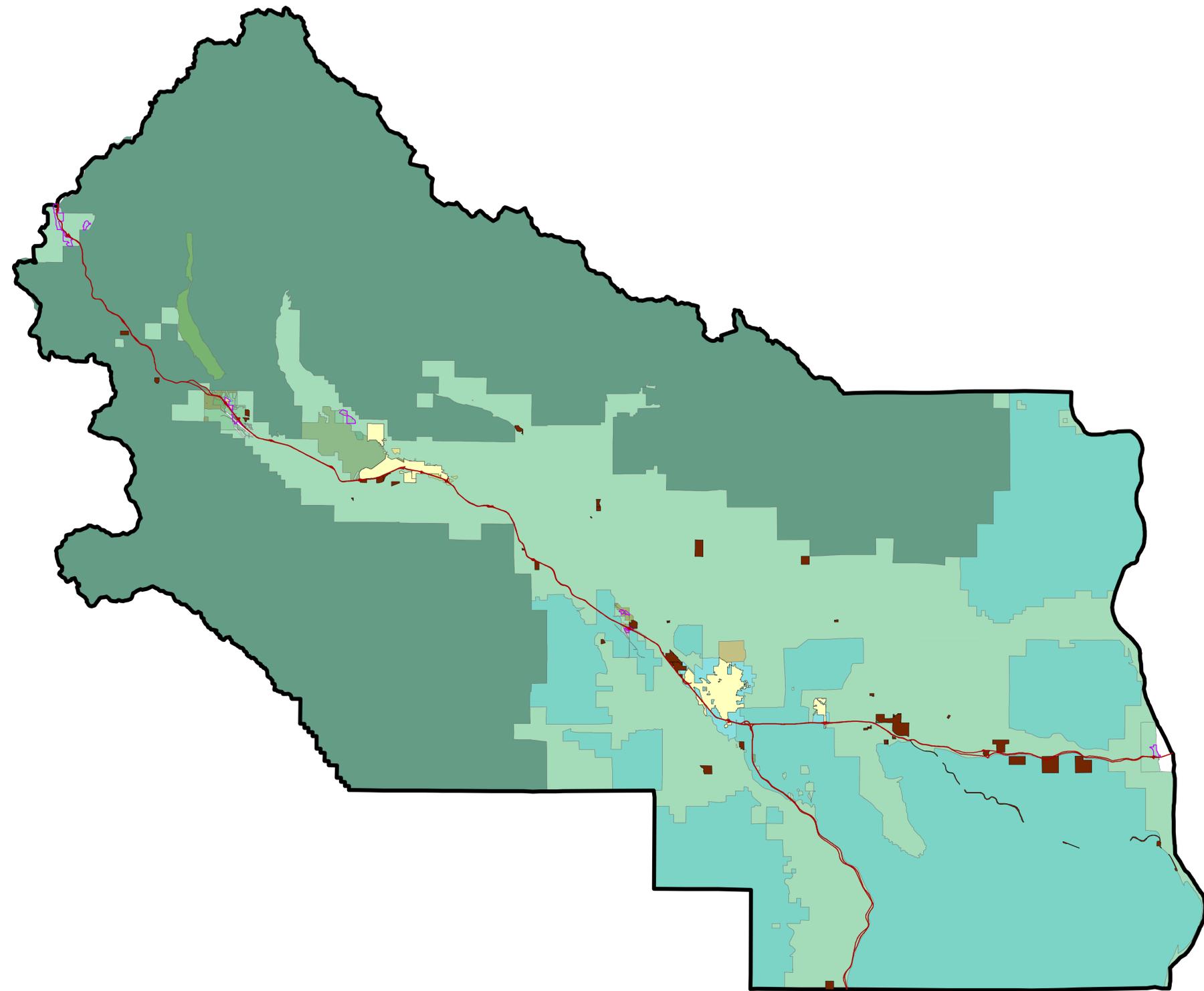
**Photo 2.3.2-11** illustrates how development, when provided in greater, rural densities can accent the large, agriculture surrounding the development. This photo shows the west side of the City of Kittitas, and the City provides a distinct difference in character between the two environments.

**Photo 2.3.2-11** Large agriculture fields are distinctive when more dense development is visible in the background.

**Photo 2.3.2-12** illustrates the vast dryness in the eastern hills of Kittitas County west of the Columbia River. The Vantage community does not detract from the rural character of the area since it is based at the bottom of a large, arid grazing environment. This is characteristic of much of the eastern area of the Lower County.



**Photo 2.3.2-12** The large dry areas of the eastern portion of the County are apparent as characteristic to the County.



- Legend**
-  Cities
  -  LAMIRDs
  -  Interstate Highways
  -  Mineral Resource Lands
  -  Agricultural
  -  Cle Elum UGA
  -  Commercial
  -  Commercial Agriculture
  -  Commercial Forest
  -  Forest Multiple Use
  -  Industrial
  -  Light Industrial
  -  Master Planned Resort
  -  Mountain Star Sub-Area
  -  Parks and Open Space
  -  Public Recreation
  -  Rural
  -  Rural Residential
  -  Unclassified
  -  Urban

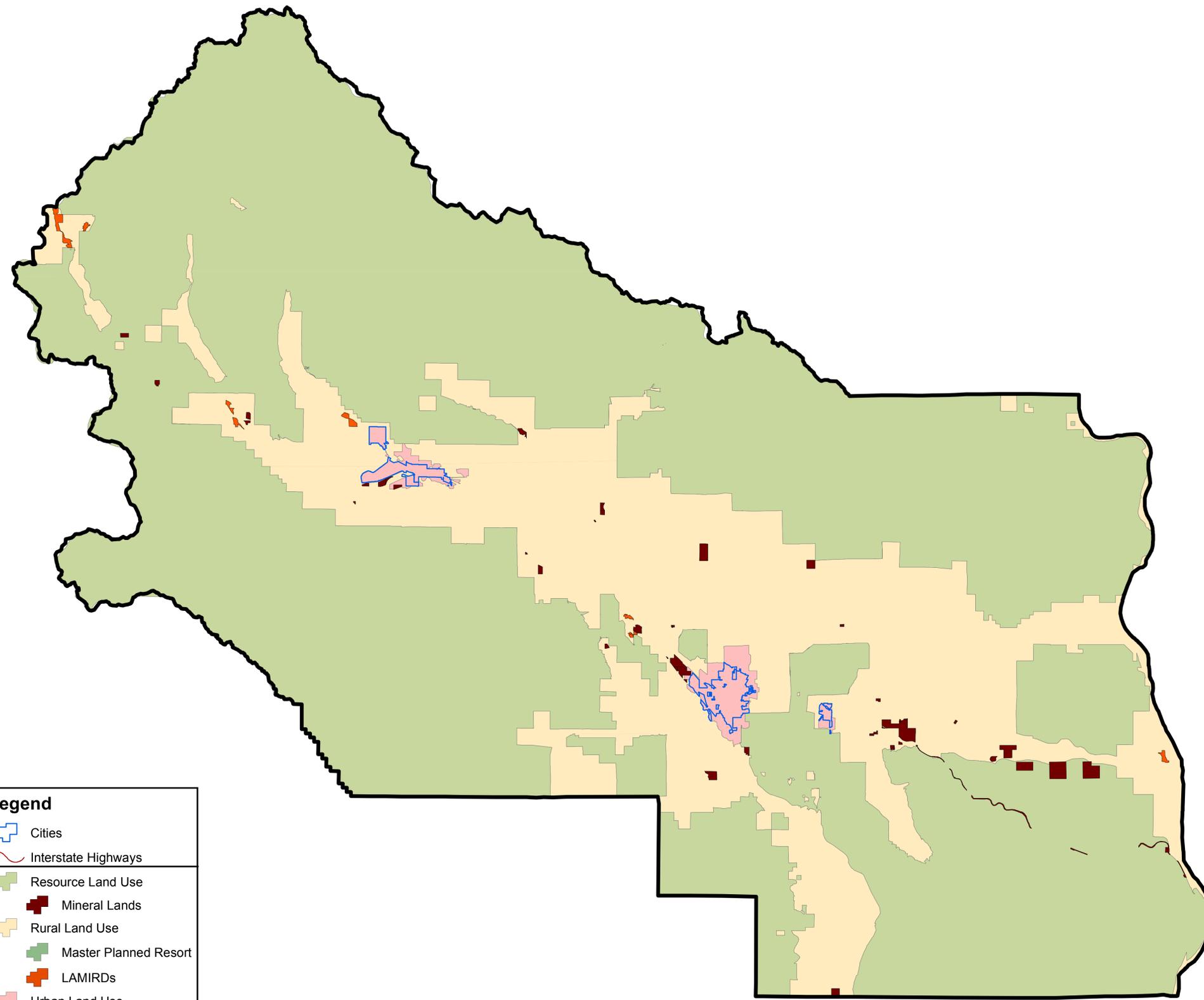


Growth Management Act Compliance - Preliminary Analysis  
 Kittitas County Comprehensive Plan Compliance 2012

Map 2.2-1

Land Use Designations  
 2011 Comprehensive Plan

Map 2.2-2 Land Use Designations - Modified for Preliminary Analysis; by Zoning Classification



**Legend**

-  Cities
-  Interstate Highways
-  Resource Land Use
-  Mineral Lands
-  Rural Land Use
-  Master Planned Resort
-  LAMIRDs
-  Urban Land Use

Zoning Designations Classified as Resource Lands

Commercial Agriculture	352,396 Acres
Commercial Forest	734,626 Acres
Mineral Lands*	5730 Acres
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,092,752 Acres</b>

Zoning Designations Classified as Urban\*\*

Agriculture 3	220.3 Acres
Forest and Range	688.4 Acres
General Commercial	310.8 Acres
General Industrial	428.5 Acres
Highway Commercial	66.4 Acres
Light Industrial	1,378.6 Acres
Limited Commercial	8.5 Acres
Mineral Lands*	68.8 Acres
PUD	87.0 Acres
Residential	274.1 Acres
Rural 3	562.3 Acres
Rural 5	56.4 Acres
Rural Residential	2.4 Acres
Trailer Court ZD	24.1 Acres
Urban Residential	2,486.5 Acres
<b>Total</b>	<b>6663.1 Acres</b>

Zoning Designations Classified as Rural

Agriculture 20	100,559.0 Acres
Agriculture 3	16,457.9 Acres
Agriculture 5	1,379.1 Acres
Forest and Range	200,755.7 Acres
General Commercial	197.7 Acres
General Industrial	144.4 Acres
Highway Commercial	568.4 Acres
Historic	17.3 Acres
Light Industrial	92.6 Acres
Limited Commercial	13.5 Acres
MPR	6,206.4 Acres
Mineral Lands*	157.8 Acres
PUD	1,209.8 Acres
Residential	306.7 Acres
Residential 2	32.1 Acres
Rural 3	23,273.0 Acres
Rural 5	1,506.6 Acres
Rural Residential	1,908.5 Acres
Urban Reserve	117.9 Acres
Urban Residential	1.1 Acres
<b>Total</b>	<b>354,905.5 Acres</b>

\*Mineral Lands are technically not a zone; Total Acreage: 5,956.6

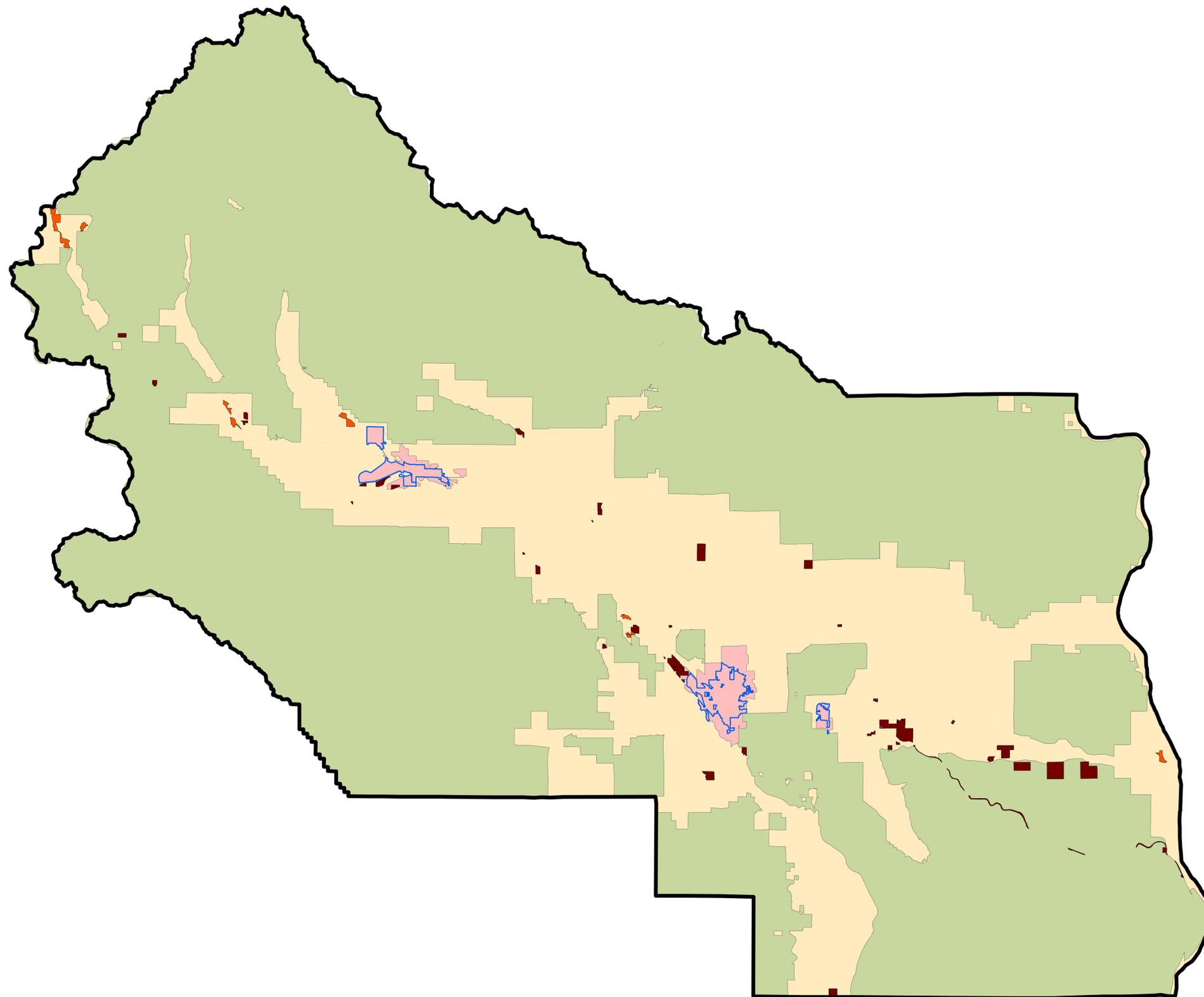
\*\* Urban designation includes the cities; Zoning acreages do not.



Growth Management Act Compliance - Preliminary Analysis  
Kittitas County Comprehensive Plan Compliance 2012

Map 2.2-2

Land Use Designations  
Modified for Preliminary Analysis: 2011



**Legend**

-  Cities
-  Interstate Highways
-  Resource Land Use
-  Mineral Lands
-  Rural Land Use
-  Master Planned Resort
-  LAMIRDs
-  Urban Land Use



Growth Management Act Compliance - Preliminary Analysis  
 Kittitas County Comprehensive Plan Compliance 2012

Map 2.2-2

Land Use Designations  
 Modified for Preliminary Analysis: 2011