



# KITTITAS COUNTY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

411 N. Ruby St., Suite 2, Ellensburg, WA 98926

CDS@CO.KITTITAS.WA.US

Office (509) 962-7506

Fax (509) 962-7682

"Building Partnerships – Building Communities"

## OC-10-00008 COHORTS LLC OPEN SPACE CURRENT USE APPLICATION STAFF REPORT

**TO:** Kittitas County Planning Commission  
**FROM:** Jeff Watson, GIS Technician\Planner II  
**DATE:** August 23, 2011  
**SUBJECT:** Cohorts LLC Open Space Current Use Application (OC-10-00008)

### I. GENERAL INFORMATION

**Proposal:** On December 22, 2010 Bruce and Kim Coe, authorized agents for Cohorts LLC landowner, submitted an application for classification or reclassification of portions two tax parcels totaling 21.96 of 39.16 acres as open space land current use under the provisions of RCW Chapter 84.34. The application has been reviewed by Assessor staff for ownership, parcel numbers, and legal descriptions, and by Community Development Services staff for land use and critical areas assessment.

**Location:** The subject property is located approximately 10.5 miles east of the City of Cle Elum south of State Route 970 west of US 97 at the end of Hidden Valley Road in a portion of section and 33, township 20, range 17, WM, in Kittitas County; Assessor's map numbers 20-17-33000-0003 and 20-17-33000-0004, parcel identification numbers (concurrently) 435635, 445635.

### II. SITE INFORMATION

**Site Characteristics:** Utilizing Aerial Photography, analysis indicates mostly sparse fir stands mixed with open meadow lands. Assessor's records show substantial improvements have been made on the properties, which is apparently a guest ranch. Total assessed value for both properties with improvements is \$824,290. The topography is gently sloped from west to east approximately 250 feet vertically over the roughly 1700 foot cross section of the parcel, for an approximately 14.7% slope. Areas in the northwest corner of the parcel are indicated as 25-50% slope within the GIS, the only critical areas within the subject properties. The entire application area is located within the Swauk Prairie Deer Winter Range.

### III. RECOMMENDATION

The application as submitted is requesting classification as open space for current use. Justification for this proposed designation by the applicant is based on the following criteria listed in RCW 84.34.020

- (b) any land area, the preservation of which in its present use would*  
*(i) conserve and enhance natural or scenic resources, or...*

Kittitas County ordinance 1994-025 stipulates that applications "... based on conservation or enhancement of natural resources must meet at least one of the following:

- (1) Geologically significant rock formations that may be appropriate for educational study.*
- (2) Archeological sites that are registered with the state of Washington and protected.*
- (3) Game preserves and nesting grounds as agreed by the state of Washington Department of wildlife. (Public access may be controlled. Hunting and fishing may be denied.)*

This application's narrative does not indicate that any of these criteria have been met. Washington State DAHP shows no cultural or archaeological sites in their data base for the parcel. The site is identified in the Priority Habitat Species data set as "Swauk Prairie Deer Winter Range", but no indication was given that there is a designation for game preserves or nesting

grounds.

***(ii) protect streams or water supply, or***

Kittitas County ordinance 1994-025 stipulates that applications "... for open space on protection of streams and meet at least one of the following:

- (1) Preservation or protection of major drainage ways (major drainage ways being defined as the areas where feeder streams intersect with major streams) flowing directly into streams of 20 C.F.S. or more.*
- (2) Tracts continuous to or straddling major streams flowing at a rate of 20 C. F.S. or more.*
- (3) Significant aquifer recharge areas and areas of significant springs identified as water resources."*

These parcels are not "continuous to or straddling" a major stream. Kittitas County Code title 17A.08.010 ***Designation of aquifer recharge areas*** states that **"No critical aquifer recharge locations have been identified in Kittitas County."**

***(iii) promote conservation of soils, wetlands, beaches or tidal marshes,***

Kittitas County ordinance 1994-025 stipulates that applications "...will be restricted to at least one of the following:

- (1) Tracts with 25% or greater slope on at least 50% of the tracts or where there is physical evidence of erosion.
  - (a) Applications for this category shall be accompanied with a conservation plan prepared by the Soil Conservation Service including implementation program for the plan. (Failure to implement the plan in a timely manner will be cause for removal from the Open Space category and subject to penalties under RCW 84.34.)**
- (2) Tracts within the 100 year flood plain.*
- (3) Tracts where commercial development would destroy the natural cover and could result in erosion, loss of natural habitat and such action would result in damage to adjacent property.*

The average slope of the parcel is approximately 14.7%; The GIS indicates that a possibility exists for slopes greater than 25%, but no soil conservation plan accompanied the application. Neither parcel in this application contain Flood Insurance Rate Map designations. Zoning is Agriculture 3; existing commercial activities permitted are extremely limited. Some potential for damage may exist.

***(iv) enhance the value to the public of abutting or neighboring parks, forests, wildlife preserves, nature reservations or sanctuaries or other open space, or***

Kittitas County ordinance 1994-025 does not specifically address this criterion. The properties are approximately two miles away from any state or federally held lands. The applicant's narrative indicates proximity to "... an open space overlay as part of a MPR application or in conservation easements or open space designations." It is presumed that the applicant is referring to the 2006 Ranch on the Swauk Creek Planned Unit Development. While the approximately 500 acre application proposes some 150 plus acres to be designated as open space, it also indicates an intent to develop a 3 phased 243 lot subdivision of mixed residential uses.

***(vi) preserve historic sites***

Kittitas County ordinance 1994-025 does not specifically address this criterion. WSDAHP indicated that no cultural resources are recorded for the parcels indicated. A cultural resource survey for the adjacent PUD property revealed one "refuse site" and one "talus pit feature site" recommendations were for avoidance and immediate investigation should new discoveries be made during maintenance or road modifications.

***(vii) preserve visual quality along highway, road, and street corridors or scenic vistas,***

Kittitas County ordinance 1994-025 does not specifically address this criterion. The application indicates that:

*"There are no specific view sheds from which Hidden Valley can be viewed other than points along Hidden Valley*

*Road, the county road that leads to the parcels under consideration for inclusion. Hidden Valley Road dead ends at Hidden Valley Ranch, in the past the road has been used to track cougars with radio collars, and for hunters to scout for wildlife, though they are not allowed to hunt on the parcels under consideration for inclusion.”*

The reasons for the applicant’s request for inclusion for consideration under this criterion are unclear.

**In the light of the guidance given by Resolution 94-25,**

*“Lands not expressly eligible or ineligible for Open Space or Timberland Classification under the guidelines established by this Resolution will be evaluated carefully and not allowed eligibility unless the applicant clearly demonstrates a significant public benefit from the granting of Open space or Timberland Classification.”*

**Staff recommends denial of this application. Staff feels that granting the proposed tax shift would yield limited or no public benefit. The applicant has been informed of this staff assessment and may wish to present additional information during the hearing.**