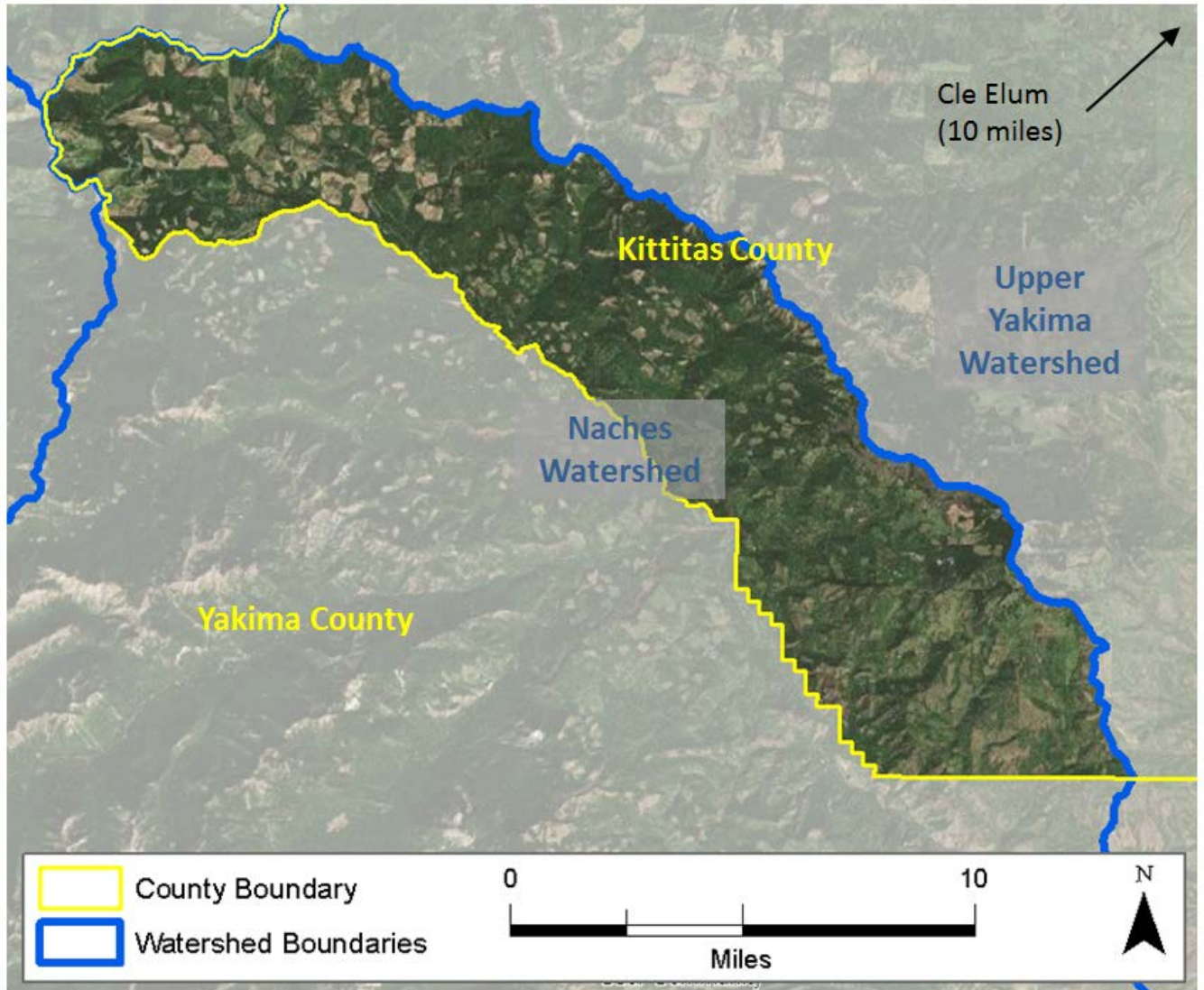


Agriculture/Critical Areas Issues in the Naches Watershed (Kittitas County)



Background Information

- Approximately 112 square miles of the Naches watershed (10% of the watershed area) is located within Kittitas County. Land ownership in this area is approximately 80% National Forest, 10% Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and 10% private (Plum Creek timberland). Most of the Plum Creek parcels are in the process of being acquired by the Nature Conservancy.
- The portion of the Naches Watershed in Kittitas County is not enrolled in the Voluntary Stewardship Plan (VSP) so agricultural activities are subject to the updated critical area regulations.
- There are no commercial agriculture crops that are farmed within the watershed, and there is low likelihood of this occurring. Rangeland grazing may occur within the watershed, but it is unknown if it currently occurs.

Best Available Science Summary

Critical Area	Potential Impacts*	Potential Regulations*
Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARAs)	Manure storage facilities can adversely affect groundwater; however, these facilities are not typically utilized for rangeland grazing. Properly managed rangeland grazing operations generally do not significantly affect groundwater quality. Existing mapping indicates that the Naches watershed is moderately susceptible to aquifer contamination.	Construction of new manure storage facilities could be regulated pursuant to the draft CARA regulations. There is low likelihood of these facilities being proposed in the watershed.
Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas	Grazing affects riparian and aquatic ecosystems by disturbing streambanks, removing streamside vegetation, and increasing bank erosion. Manure from livestock can also decrease water quality. Livestock may compete with native wildlife species for forage, and fencing can create significant barriers to impediments to normal movement for wildlife.	There are a variety of management strategies used to protect hazardous and ecologically-sensitive areas from grazing-related degradation that could be required, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fence livestock out of heavily damaged areas • Allow grazed plant to recover before regrazing the area • Avoid grazing in riparian areas, floodplains, and erosion-prone areas when the soil is wet or saturated • Provide livestock with alternative sources of water, to minimize impacts to the riparian zone • Construct ramps or bridges to provide stream crossings
Frequently Flooded Areas	Grazing does not typically influence the rate and/or extent of flood hazards, but disturbance within the floodplain may impact floodplain ecological functions and values.	
Geologically Hazardous Areas	Grazing along stream banks and on steep slopes may increase erosion potential.	
Wetlands	Grazing can reduce plant species diversity in wetlands, and livestock manure can decrease water quality. Existing mapping does not indicate the presence of wetland areas within the watershed, although wetlands are likely present within the Little Naches River valley.	

* Rangeland grazing impacts and the related need for regulation of critical areas are highly dependent upon stock density.

Regulation Examples/Options/Issues

- Existing agricultural activities could continue to operate (i.e., nonconforming use).
- Grazing on National Forest land is regulated pursuant to 36 CFR 222. Grazing permits include Annual Operating Instructions (AOI), which include conservation measures.
- Grazing on WDFW land is regulated, which requires submission of a Grazing Management Plan.

- Plum Creek may allow grazing on their lands, which requires submission of a Range Management Plan
(see https://www.fws.gov/montanafielddoffice/endangered_species/Habitat_Conservation_Plans/Plum_Creek_HCP/Tech-rpt_Wht-ppr/WhiteP/Grazing.pdf)
- Yakima County addresses new grazing in their critical areas code as follows:
For rangeland livestock grazing operations, the administrative official may waive compliance with development standards in Chapters 16C.06 (Fish and Wildlife Habitat and the Stream Corridor System), 16C.07 (Wetlands), 16C.08 (Geologically Hazardous Areas), and 16C.09 (CARA), except for those uses and activities listed in Section 16C.06.10 (Prohibited Uses). To qualify for this provision, a resource management plan must be provided that has been prepared using all applicable U.S. Department of Agriculture – National Resource Conservation Service best management practices designed to protect streams, wetlands, vegetative buffers, erosion hazards, and floodplains from grazing operations. An acceptable resource management plan is deemed to consist of acceptable critical areas protection measures capable of dealing with impacts of grazing activities dispersed across large areas. This provision is not intended to apply to pasture grazing, hobby farms, or confinement feeding operations.

Recommendation for Critical Areas Update

- Federal actions on federal lands (such as issuance of grazing permits National Forest land) are not regulated at the County level.
- For rangeland grazing on state or private land, the County could consider requiring a grazing plan that meets State requirements, pursuant to WAC 232-12-181 and RCW 77.12.204. The County Community Development Services department may not have expertise to review a grazing plan, but may seek guidance from state agency(s) and/or the Kittitas County Conservation District.
- New structures associated with livestock grazing, such as stream crossing structures and manure storage facilities, should be regulated per the applicable CAO chapter(s).