



GREEN GROUND

Low Impact Development Program

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San Juan Islands Conservation District

Visit us at www.sanjuanislandscd.org

Citizen-Stewards Checklist for Buying or Developing Land

There are many important decisions to be made when buying raw or developed land, or when developing a construction plan for land development. Here are some low impact ideas and a checklist that can be used to guide you through important natural resource conservation ideas to consider when making decisions about your land purchase or development. Included with each checklist item is information about who to contact for carrying out each of these objectives.

- Identify the natural features of the site. You can use the **SJC Assessors Website** or contact the **San Juan Islands Conservation District**, **Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife**, **WSU Extension of San Juan County** or **Local Environmental/Wildlife Protection Organizations**.
- Identify the soils and plants on the property and learn about the drainage characteristics of the soils before deciding where to place your house, infrastructure, drives, etc. Do any areas produce seasonal ponding or flooding? The **San Juan Islands Conservation District** can assist you with this aspect.
- Design your living spaces to work in concert with the natural resource features and functions on the land. Choose local architects, landscape architects, engineers and building tradespeople familiar with natural resource issues and who are experienced in low-impact design and building. Utilize your local green building trades groups such as the **Green Business Alliance** or **Chambers of Commerce**.
- Determine the source for drinking water, is there or will there be a drilled well? or a community system? Will you be irrigating? Consider rainwater catchment instead of using precious groundwater for non-potable uses. Contact the **San Juan County Health & Community Services Drinking Water Program** which has many services to help ensure that the citizens of San Juan County have safe and reliable drinking water. The program oversees **Group B** water systems (2-14 connections) and individual wells.
- Determine the destination/use of waste water, is there or will there be an on-site septic? (70% of the county is on septic systems) or a community system? If your water facilities are on the site, locate them and learn how they work. Contact the **San Juan County Health & Community Services On-Site Sewage Program** which provides services to help ensure safe treatment and disposal of wastewater in areas of San Juan County not served by municipal sewage treatment plants. The program provides technical assistance to property owners and contractors, including information on choosing a site, design, installation, operation, and maintenance of on-site sewage systems at (360) 378-4474.
- Learn about the dominant plant communities and their contribution to habitat, look for forest/woodland, meadow/prairie, understory, riparian, wetland/pond, near shore and many others. Are

there noxious or invasive plant or animal species present? If yes, find out what species and when the best time is to get them under control by contacting the San Juan County Noxious Weed Board or website at <http://sanjuan.wsu.edu/noxious/>.

Are there any known threatened or endangered species or habitats present, examples include bald eagle nests and Garry Oak habitat.

Discover your watershed and find out where you are located within it. Contact us with your parcel number and we can help.

If a natural stream or drainage channel (flowing water) is present are there any areas over the stream without vegetative cover (tree canopy)?

Are there signs of stream bank or bed erosion?

Are there physical signs of water degradation / pollution (e.g. cloudiness, chemical, color)?

If a pond or lake is present:

Was the pond or lake natural or constructed?

Are there any invasive aquatic plants present (floating or rooted)?

Are there signs of water quality problems (cloudiness, brown or green color)?

Are there any potential sources upslope from the open water to cause decline?

Are there any edges without vegetation?

If wetlands are present have a professional note what type-forested, bog, shrub, emergent / marsh, open water or tidal and if the wetland is natural or constructed or a result of altered hydrology upslope.

Note evidence of disturbance/degradation to wetland or riparian areas as these may need restoration.

For Building and Development

Know your zoning and its requirements; San Juan County has Rural Residential, Urban Growth, Rural Farm Forest, Agricultural Resource Lands, special Forest designations and many others. Also note the adjacent properties and their requirements; this may impact your use of land. Check with the San Juan County Assessor's Office Website at <http://www.sanjuanco.com/assessor/>.

Estimate the slope (rise over run) and remember it takes very little gradient to get water to flow (1-2% for paved areas) and cause erosion or rills downstream. Check for severe slopes, note if any areas of the parcel have slopes greater than 30% as this can result in higher chance for soil erosion and runoff.

Before building assure that soils are saved/preserved and are protected from compaction, true topsoil is difficult to come by. Watch for noxious weed infestations by covering any bare soil with weed-free compost blankets. Make sure soils covering tree roots will not be disturbed or removed.

Consider Low Impact Development alternatives when designing any new developments and for remodeling existing homes. There are many alternatives including using your landscaping as your stormwater control, ie. raingardens, bio retention swales and pervious pavements instead of culverts.

The San Juan Islands Conservation District offers landowners natural resource inventories and recommendations on Low Impact Development practices + farm and forest planning. Contact the SJICD (360) 378-6621 or visit www.sanjuanislandscd.org

Last in a 12 part series on Low Impact Living in the San Juan Islands. These topics are also covered in our Conservation and Stewardship Folio Packet. Ask for your copy today. San Juan Islands Conservation District located at 540 Guard Street in Friday Harbor, Washington. Submitted to Project Home June 2009.