

LaKell Havens moved to Seattle last year to work as a freelancer in the area's burgeoning film production industry. Originally from Utah, she spent the last 5 years in New York City studying and working in the most bustling city in the world. She finally realized she needed a change and essentially, more nature in her life, but could not bear to forfeit city life. That's when Seattle came into play, giving her the perfect balance. Instinctively, she was drawn to the region's unrivaled physical beauty, strong economy, and culture of healthy living. And she isn't the only one.

For decades, employers and employees alike have been drawn to the unparalleled quality of life we enjoy in the Pacific Northwest, largely due to the beauty and uniqueness of the natural environment that still surrounds us. However, the enormous pressures of a booming economy and corresponding population threaten the very qualities that make our region so attractive in the first place.

This growth translates to approximately 7 individuals per hour locating to the central Puget Sound region. Over the next 25 years, we can expect 1 million more residents to the central Puget Sound – the current populations of Everett, Bellevue, Seattle, Bremerton and Kent combined.

Safeguarding Puget Sound's natural beauty and unique charm that benefit all of us is essential. As our communities continue to grow, we must stop and ask ourselves: what steps are we taking now to preserve and enhance clean water, productive farmland, healthy forests, public parks, salmon and wildlife, and other open space resources essential to our region? How and where will we accommodate the one million newcomers, and what impacts will that have on our region, our environment, and our quality of life for the next generations?

We lack adequate answers to these questions. We already see our natural infrastructure being stretched to its limits because of development, and while there have been significant efforts to stem the tide, radically more needs to be done. In the past 50 years, the Puget Sound has lost approximately 66 percent of its remaining old growth forest, over 90 percent of its native prairies, and approximately 80 percent of its marshes. These troubling statistics have caused some to say we could lose our last acre of farmland in the next 30 years. As these natural resource lands are paved, we are exposed to growing risk of floods, landslides, droughts, water shortages and wildfires.

These are big, seminal challenges affecting our entire region that must be addressed partially, but very significantly, by the creation, restoration and enhancement of open space. While there have been some notable successes, we continue to lack a comprehensive, coordinated, planned, prioritized, and regionally funded open space conservation program. We believe developing one is paramount.

This report lays out a strategy for what we in the Puget Sound region must do to confront this challenge: balance enormous expected future population growth while protecting the natural assets our thriving communities depend on. While we may not all agree on the specifics of these recommendations, **it is clear there is an urgent need to better coordinate our efforts and be more efficient with our dollars. We must protect the green infrastructure that uniquely defines our region and makes it so special and attractive or through inaction - lose it forever.**

In the Pacific Northwest we pride ourselves on our resourcefulness and optimism. We are fortunate to be as rich in skilled, dedicated human resources as we are in natural resources. As such, we embrace the challenges before us with optimism, and confidence in our ability to succeed by working together.

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