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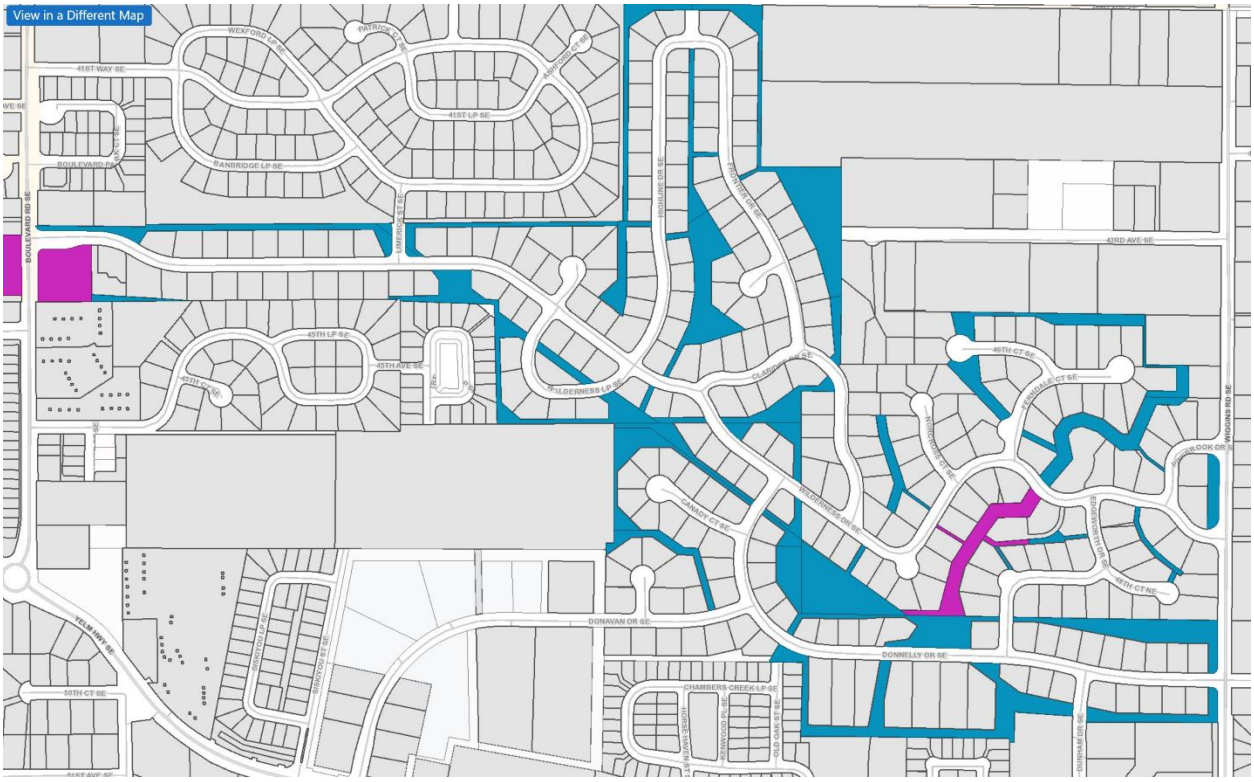
Wilderness Property Owner's Association Site Visit 29 Mar 2024
Forestry Technical Assistance Memo



Site Address:

P.O. Box 466
Olympia, WA 98507-0466

Prepared by:

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Stewardship Forester
Thurston Conservation District
11 April 2024

"The mission of Thurston Conservation District is to educate and assist the citizens of Thurston County in the management of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations, inspiring voluntary, incentive-based conservation practices."

Overview

The Wilderness Property Owners' Association (WPOA) is an approximately 280-lot owners' association of homes located in south Olympia, founded in 1978. WPOA manages about 52.5 acres of common-area greenspaces adjacent to community homes and lots, much of which is forested with native trees such as Douglas-fir, western redcedar, bigleaf maple, and red alder, along with ornamental trees interspersed throughout.

Forest Health and Composition

Hazard Trees

After an arborist evaluation in 2018, many identified hazardous trees were removed in subsequent years. Many of these trees were broadleafs such as red alder and bigleaf maple, both of which are prone to structural defects. Red alder especially are comparatively short-lived trees, and given the maturity of many of these trees on the WPOA greenspaces, this kind of decline is to be expected, and not indicative of any major forest health issues. Bigleaf maple are also prone to developing internal decays, which prompted the removal of several of these near homes and structures.

With the prevalence of mature red alder on the property, many of these trees are likely to continue declining in health. With the overall proximity of many large trees to private residences at the WPOA, continued monitoring of trees for potential hazards is highly recommended. According to the assessment provided by South Sound Treescapes, a reevaluation has been recommended sometime between 2023-2027

Tree Density & Thinning

Several areas of the WPOA have fairly high densities of trees closely spaced together. When trees are overcrowded like this, they tend to develop tall, thin trunks that are less structurally stable and more likely to fall over during wind storms. The understory also tends to be less diverse due to the dense tree canopy blocking available light.

Areas such as these would benefit from a thinning to remove smaller, unhealthy trees, undesirable saplings (such as bigleaf maple), and leaving the most healthy and vigorous to improve overall forest health and structure.

A patch of overly dense trees at WPOA. Note the tall, thin growth habit and lack of diversity in the understory

Underplanting

Once thinned, this would also allow space for planting under existing trees (a.k.a. "underplanting") with a more diverse selection of appropriate native trees which would improve the natural habitat of these areas. Mid-canopy smaller trees and shrubs would be a good fit to both diversify

forest structure while not getting large enough to develop into future hazard trees. Species such as cascara, dogwood, hazelnut, and vine maple could all be good fits. See horticultural information on these species available from WSU Clark County Extension below:

- Cascara
- Hazelnut
- Pacific Dogwood
- Vine Maple

If looking to replant larger trees, shade-tolerant conifers such as redcedar and grand fir would be good candidates, but should be installed with bud caps to protect from deer browse. Due to the prevalence of invasive species, special care should be taken to avoid new plants from being smothered, and the surrounding 3-5ft should be cleared annually of invasives for the next 2-3 years.

Invasive Species

Woody invasives such as English ivy, Himalayan blackberry, holly, and spurge laurel are ubiquitous across much of the green spaces at WPOA, in addition to several herbaceous weeds. These species inhibit the growth of native vegetation, and some larger Douglas-fir were observed smothered from the growth of English ivy. The dense growth of this vegetation also poses a risk of accumulating woody fuels. Control of these species would be highly recommended to improve plant diversity and forest health, and additionally to control the accumulation of woody fuels that have potential to pose a fire risk.

Invasive ivy smothering Douglas-fir at WPOA

While there are not many resources available to support removal of these species, Best Management Practices on the most effective ways to control them are available from the King County Noxious Weed Control Program and include as follows:

- Best Management Practices: Himalayan Blackberry
- Best Management Practices: English Ivy
- Spurge laurel identification and control

Wildfire

Reducing Wildfire Risk around Homes

While the surrounding forest is fairly dense, the primary threats to people and property during fires come not from the raging fire front, but from smaller spot fires and embers that ignite ahead of the main fire. Taking preventative measures starting from the home first can make the biggest difference in whether or not a home will survive a wildfire. These can include actions such as:

- Keeping the first 0-5ft of the home clear of bark mulch and vegetation
- Keeping the roof and gutters clear of leaf litter
- Installing 1/8th inch metal mesh screening in ventelation openings

Further actions in and around the home, up to 200ft out, can further increase fire resiliency. A full list of guidelines can be found from the National Fire Prevention Association article, "*Preparing Homes for Wildfire*".

Hazard Tree Fuels

Many of the hazard trees addressed in the WPOA greenspaces were felled and left on-site due to the difficulty of extracting woody debris. These piles of woody debris could be a source of risk during the event of a wildfire due to their proximity to homes, and we would recommend these piles be chipped or lopped and scattered.

Wildfire Ready Neighbors

Thurston CD is partners with the WA Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) on the Wildfire Ready Neighbors (WRN) program, which gives out customized Wildfire Ready Plans with actions homeowners can take. Interested residents can also schedule a home visit with a wildfire professional from DNR or TCD to give tailored recommendations. More information and scheduling information can be found at www.wildfireready.com

Thurston CD can provide additional support for wildfire resources, including community presentations on wildfire preparedness and WRN. If interested, please feel free to contact us.

Soil Testing

There was a mention of interest in Thurston CD's soil testing program, which can determine the nutrient levels of your soils for gardening purposes. More information on this program is available at:

- https://www.thurstoncd.com/working-lands/soil-testing/

FUNDED BY WASHINGTON'S CLIMATE COMMITMENT ACT

The Thurston CD Forestry Program is supported with funding from Washington's Climate Commitment Act. The CCA supports Washington's climate action efforts by putting cap-and-invest dollars to work reducing climate pollution, creating jobs, and improving public health. Information about the CCA is available at www.climate.wa.gov

Greenbelt Canopy Heights (2017)

Thurston Conservation District EST 1948 www.thurstoncd.com

0 500 1,000 2,000 Feet

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Map prepared by TCD on 4/11/2024

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 HARN StatePlane Washington South FIPS 4602 Feet

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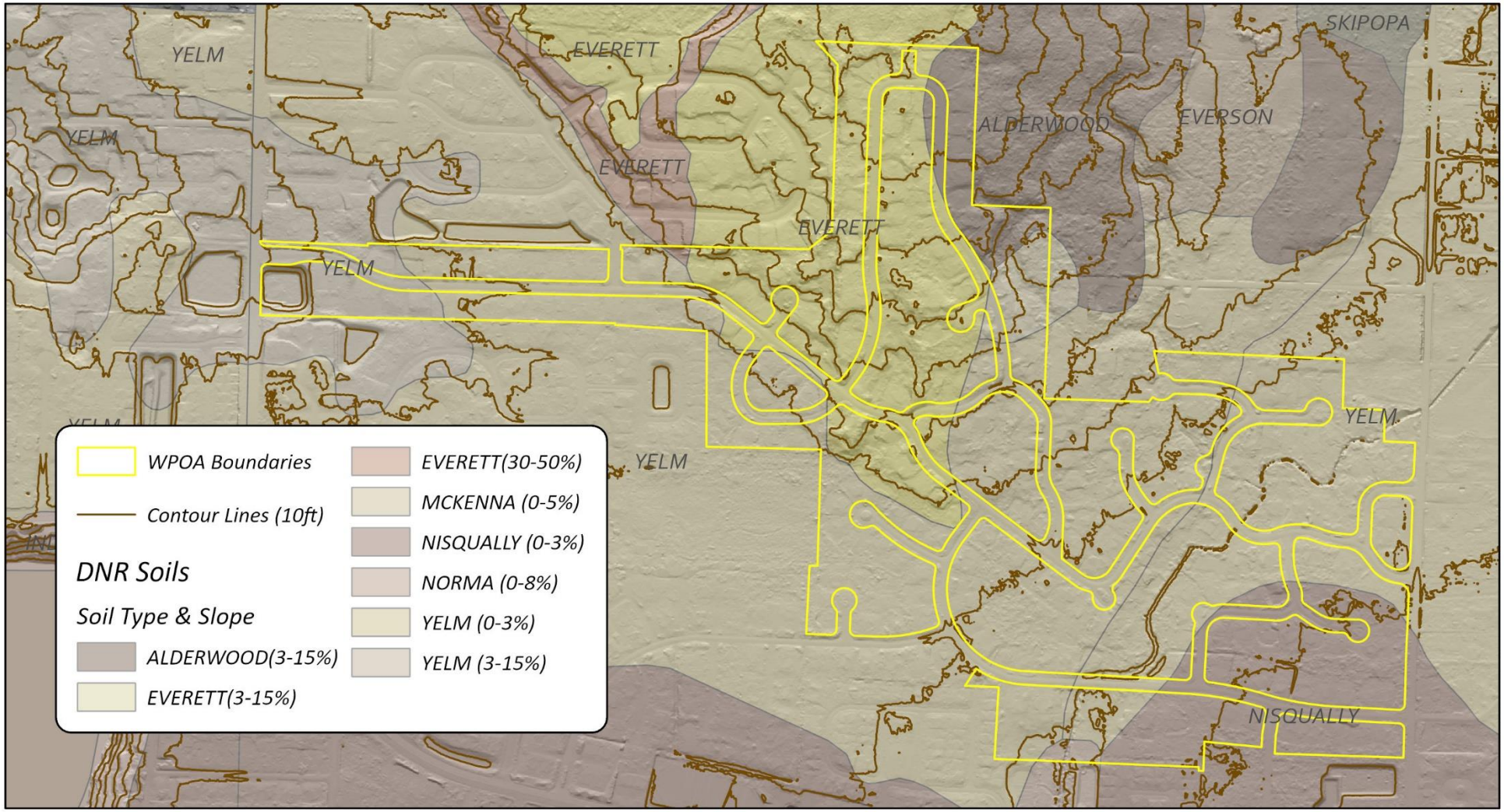
Soils & Slope



Thurston Conservation District
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0 375 750 1,500 Feet

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Coordinate System: NAD 1983 HARN StatePlane Washington South FIPS 4602 Feet

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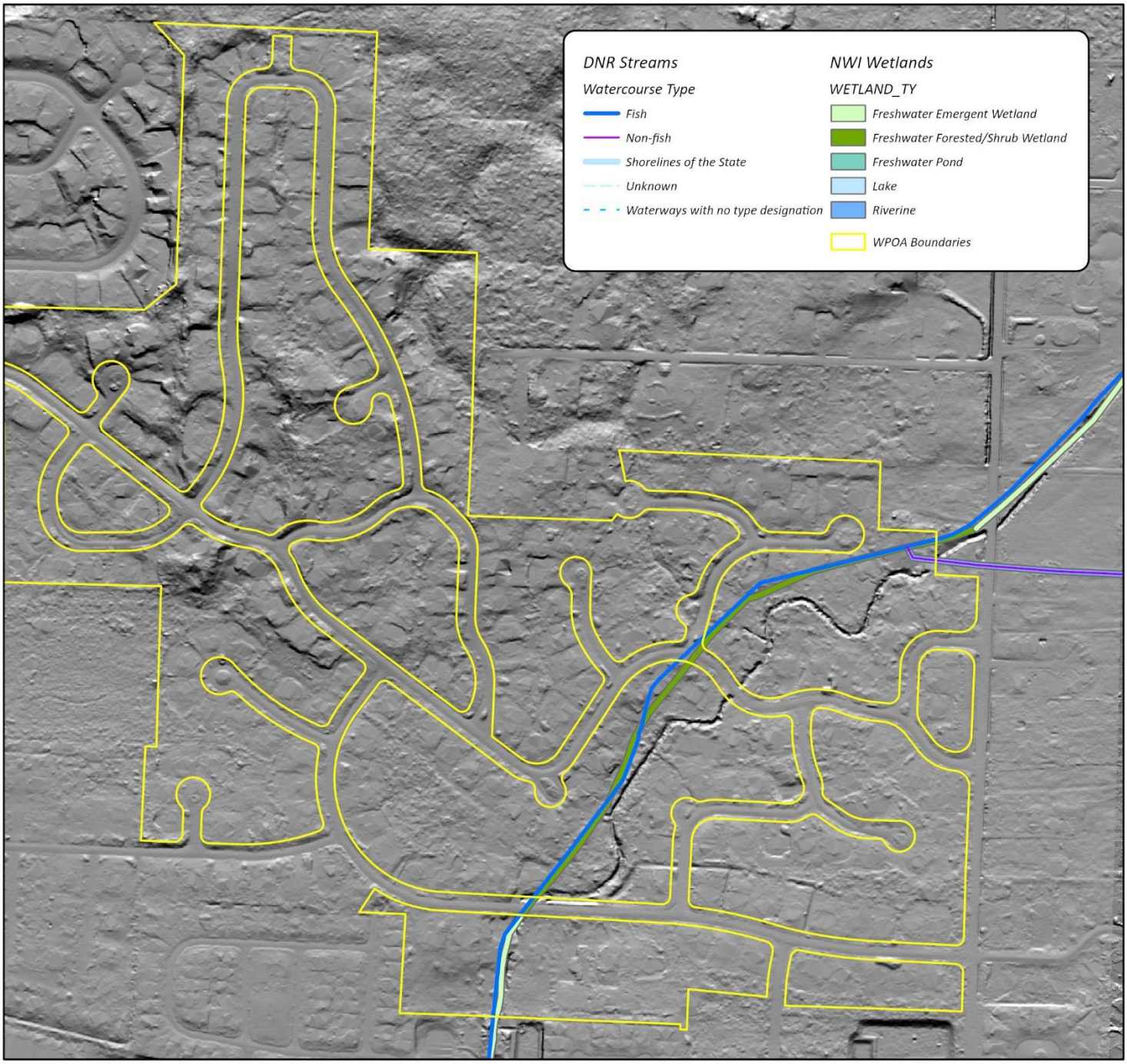
Soil Type	Slope	Flood	Windthrow	Erosion	Drought
EVERETT	15	N/A	LOW	LOW	HIGH
ALDERWOOD	15	N/A	MEDIUM	LOW	HIGH
EVERETT	50	N/A	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
YELM	3	MODERATE	HIGH	LOW	LOW
YELM	15	SLIGHT	MEDIUM	LOW	MEDIUM
MCKENNA	5	SEVERE	HIGH	LOW	LOW
NORMA	8	SEVERE	HIGH	LOW	LOW
NISQUALLY	3	N/A	LOW	LOW	MEDIUM

Topography & Hydrology



0 300 600 1,200 Feet

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