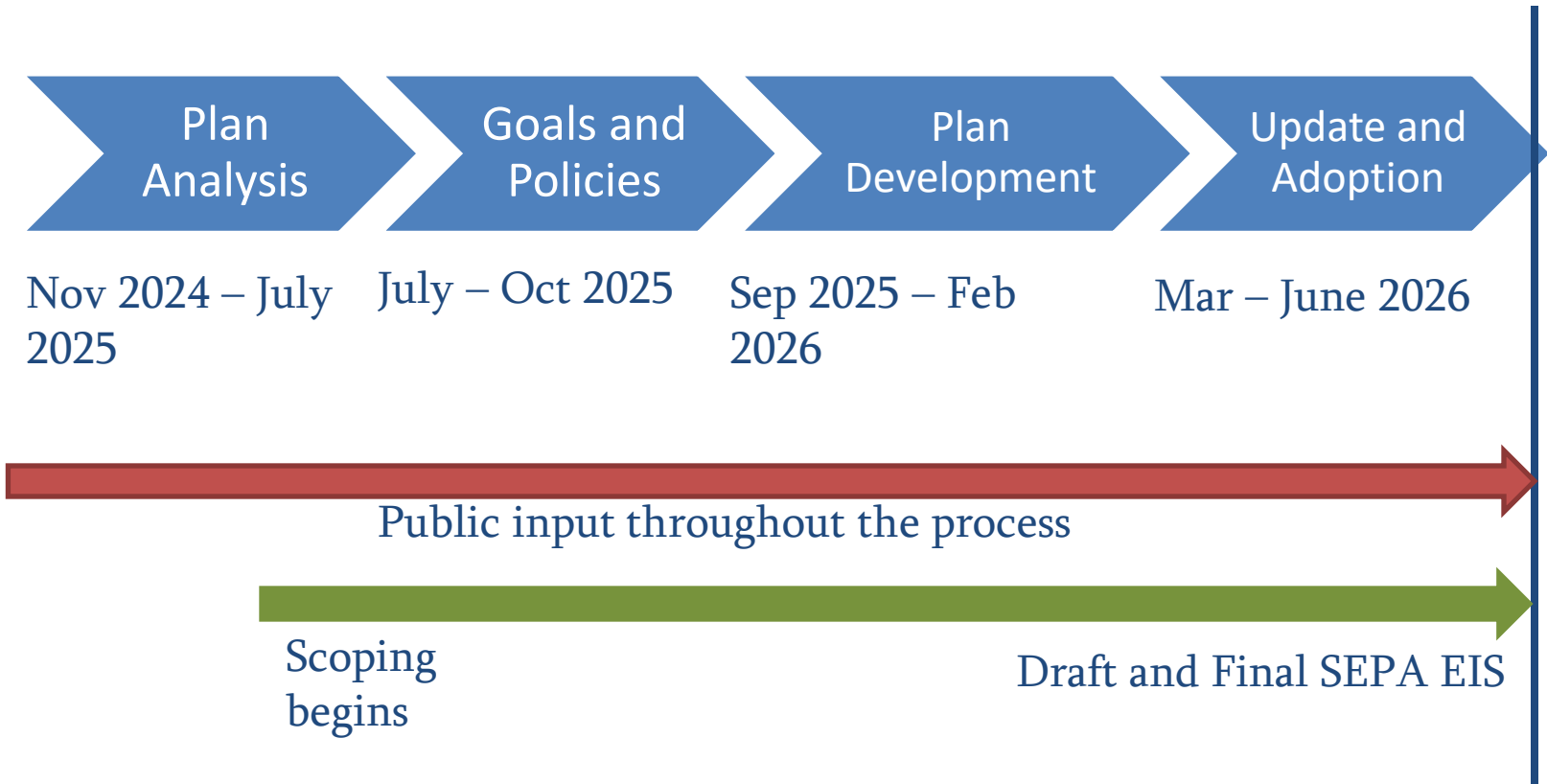


# Benton County Planning Commission Comprehensive Plan 2026 Update



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# Timeline



# Presentation Overview

- Scoping Report - EIS
- Critical Areas
- Open Space
- Energy Overlay
- Industrial Lands
- Next Steps

# Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

- Programmatic EIS Required:
  - Benton County has determined that this proposal is likely to have a significant adverse impact on the environment.
  - A programmatic environmental impact statement (EIS) is required under RCW 43.21C.030 (2)(c) and will be prepared.
- Three (3) draft alternatives have been formulated for evaluation in the draft EIS
- Scoping conducted through late April

# Preliminary Draft Alternatives

## *Alternative 1, No Action/No Change in Current Growth Patterns:*

- Maintain the County's existing Comprehensive Plan
- Growth would be expected based on past trends, but no land use changes (densities, designations, etc.) or regulation changes (e.g., zoning) would occur

## *Alternative 2, Aggressive Growth Target with Emphasis on Affordable Housing, Industry and Energy:*

- More multi-family housing/affordable housing in higher density areas and UGAs
- Designation of additional industrial areas
- Several energy projects to potentially develop/energy overlay for County rural areas

## *Alternative 3, Moderate Growth Target with More Limited Emphasis on Industry and Energy:*

- Smaller renewable energy projects with energy overlay
- Add some industrial designated lands (but less than in Alternative 2).

# Scoping Comments

- 3 comments - WDFW, Ecology, Benton PUD
  - Focus on shrub steppe protection, restoration, and resiliency and latest info sources
  - Update critical area code elements (wetlands, frequently flooded areas and fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas) using latest guidance
  - Address new housing requirements in the County
  - For future energy, note transmission limitations that currently exists and the amount of land required for limited/less firm power generation



# Scoping Comments

- 3 comments - WDFW, Ecology, Benton PUD
  - Use renewable energy/using agency landscape tools to protect priority fish and wildlife species and their habitats
  - Address interaction between open space and critical areas and encourage development away from critical areas
  - Use latest agency guidance documents for designating and updating Riparian Management Zones (RMZ) and RMZ widths

# Draft Critical Areas Code Updates



# Critical Areas Code Updates

- Best available science sources updated with latest guidance documents – wetlands, riparian
- Chapter 15.02
  - “Buffer” changed to “Riparian Management Zone”
  - Updated definitions – RMZ, others
- Chapter 15.04
  - Wetland delineations only valid 5 years/guidance on how to do them
  - Reference latest guidance docs



# Critical Areas Code Updates

- Chapter 15.04 continued
  - Updated/reorganize activities allowed in wetlands
  - Updated scoring, method for wetland delineation, buffer widths, required measures to minimize impacts
  - Conditions for stormwater facilities
  - Updated mitigation requirements/options
    - On site, offsite compensatory (banks or in-lieu)
  - Updated mitigation ratios



# Critical Areas Code Updates

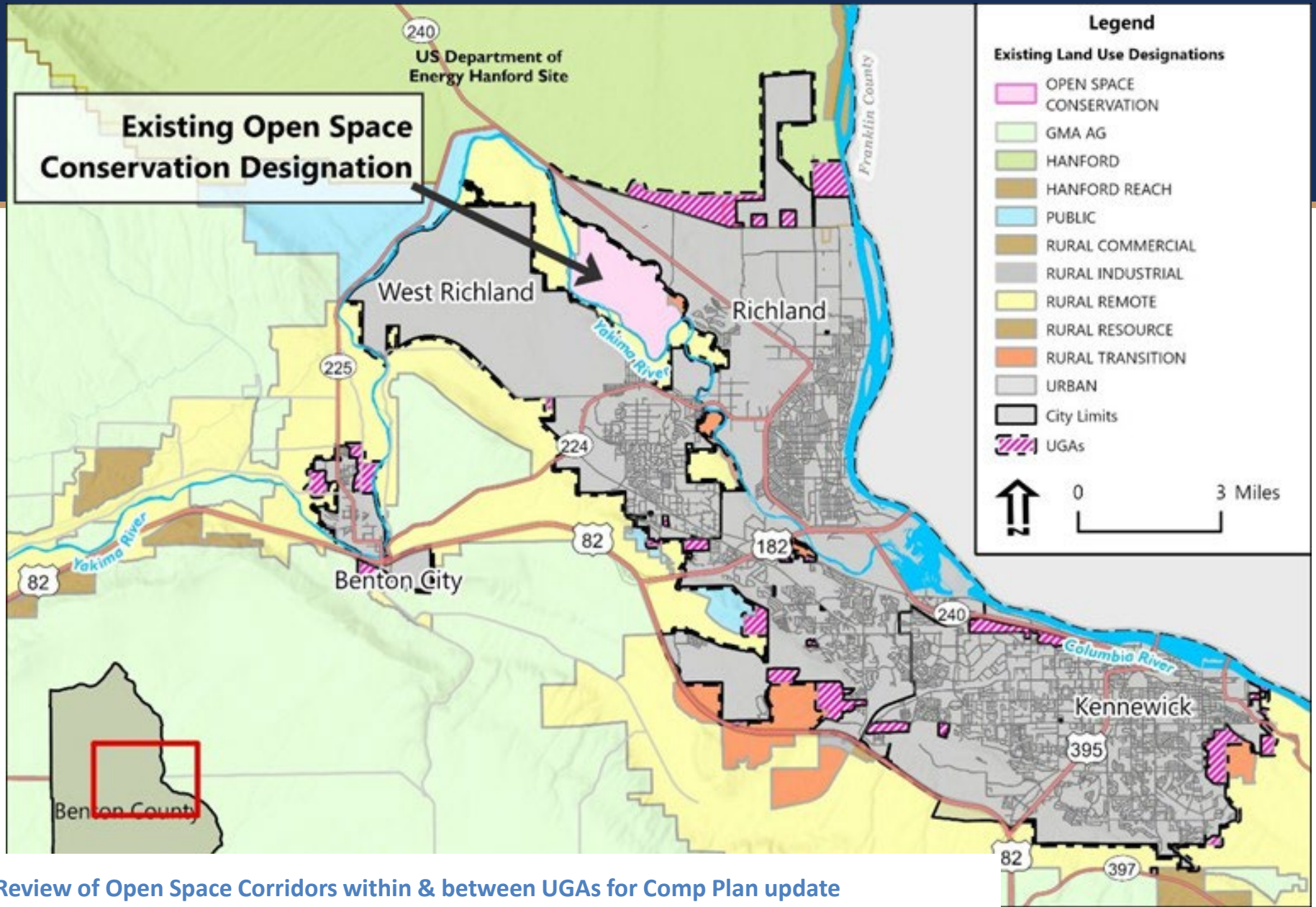
- Chapter 15.14
  - RMZ instead of buffer for streams and rivers
  - Using local studies that can also inform Best Available Science sources

# Draft Open Space Recommendations



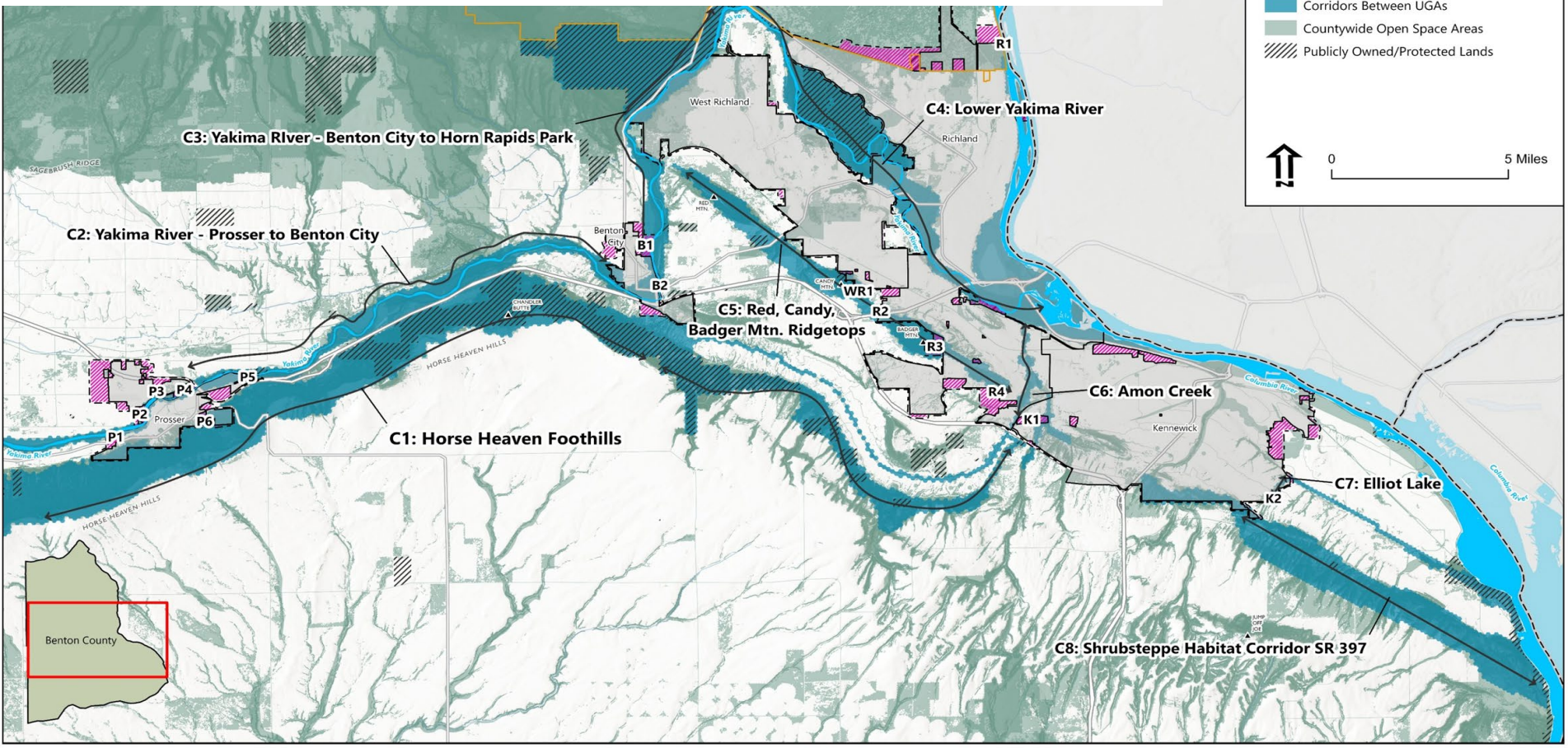
# Latest Requirements

- Identify open space corridors within and between UGAs.
- Characterize the environmental functions and patterns of use within identified open space corridors.
- Review strategies to align protection of open space corridors with other policies and plans and make applicable recommendations.



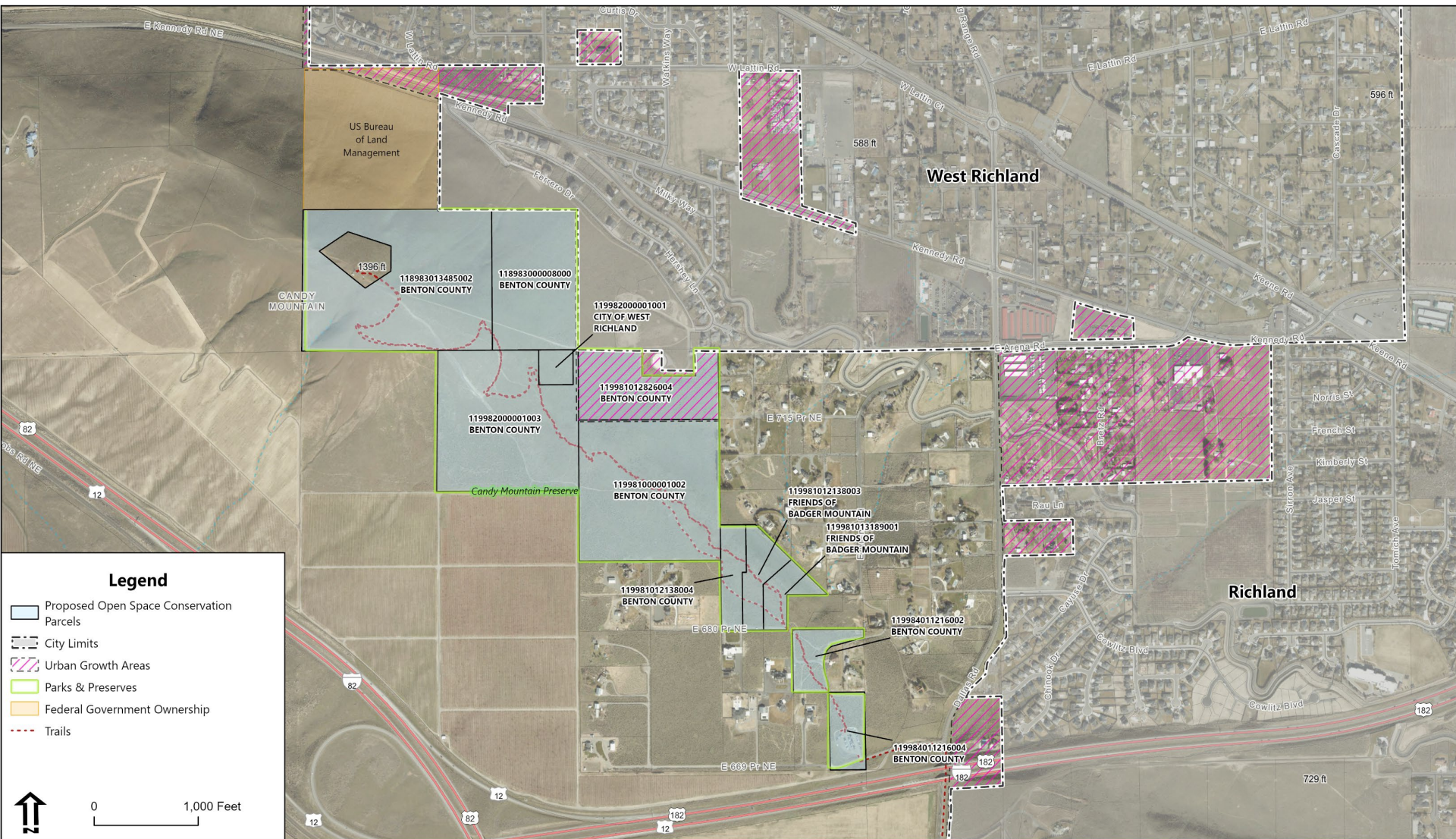
Review of Open Space Corridors within & between UGAs for Comp Plan update

# Review of Open Space Corridors within & between UGAs for Comp Plan update

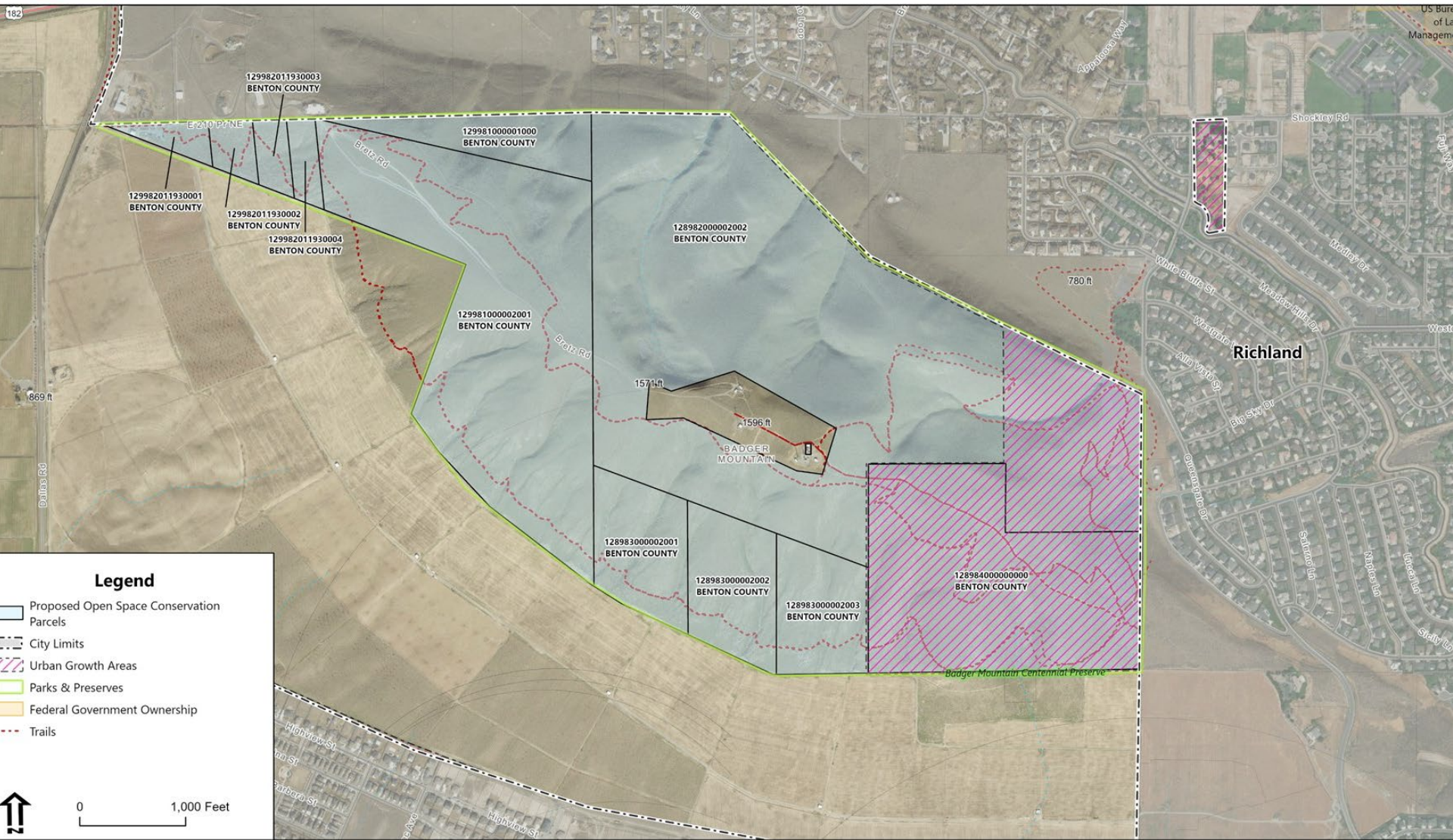


**Figure 4**  
Open Space Corridors Map

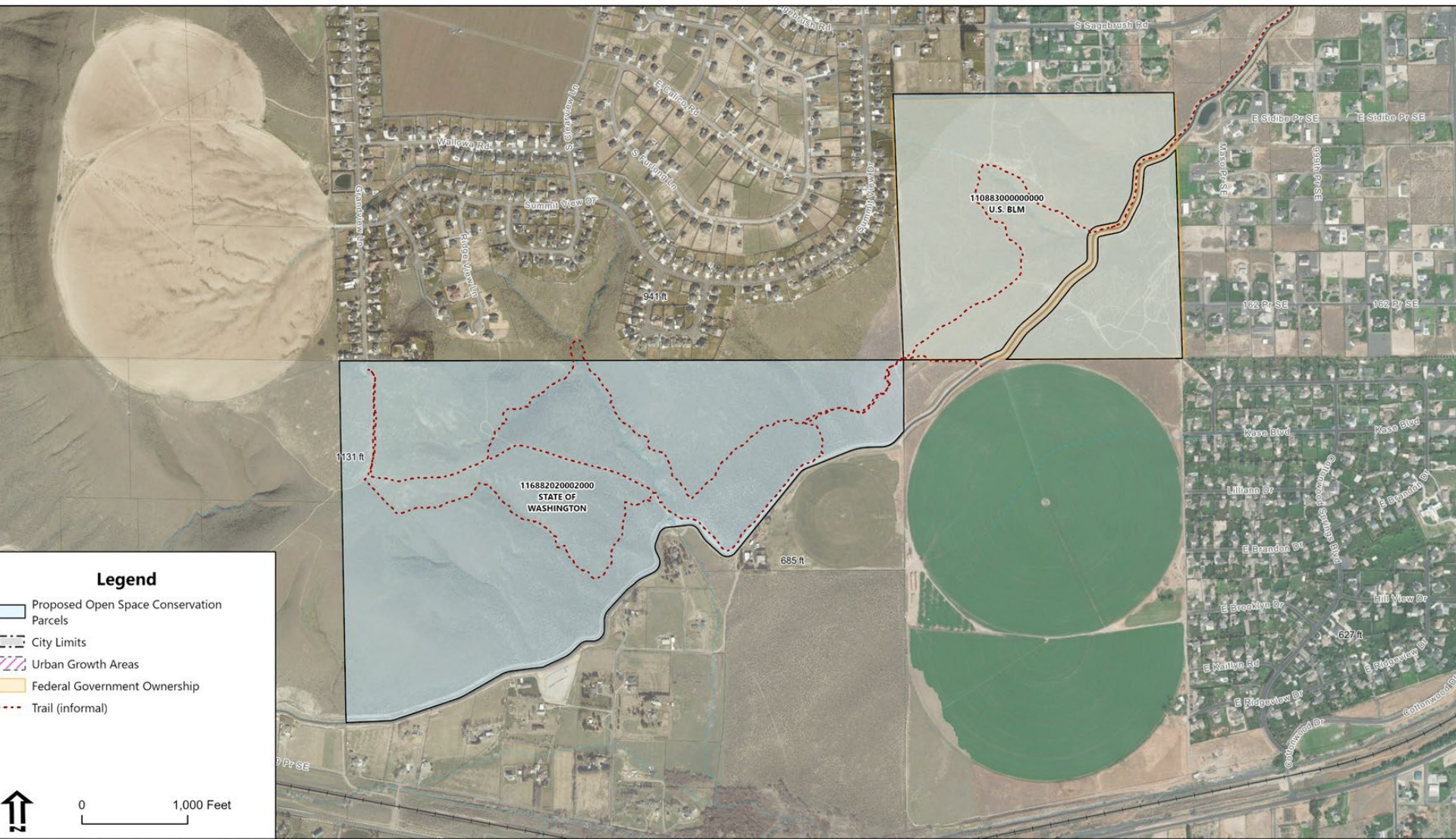




**Figure A-1**  
**Proposed Open Space Conservation Land Use Designation**  
**Area 1: Candy Mountain Preserve**



**Figure A**  
**Proposed Open Space Conservation Land Use Designation**  
**Area 2: Badger Mountain Centennial Preserve**



**Figure A-**  
**Proposed Open Space Conservation Land Use Designation**  
**Area 3: Badger Canyon DNR Property**

# Recommendations

- Consider Open Space Conservation or Public Lands designations for publicly owned parcels adjacent to Candy Mountain Preserve, Badger Mountain and DNR and BLM parcels in Badger Canyon and the Horse Heaven foothills.
- Work with cities to identify and protect identified open space resources within and between UGAs
- Implement a variety of tools and management approaches to protect open space – easement, land trusts, etc.
- Implement early actions/protection strategies for DNR and BLM land in Badger Canyon

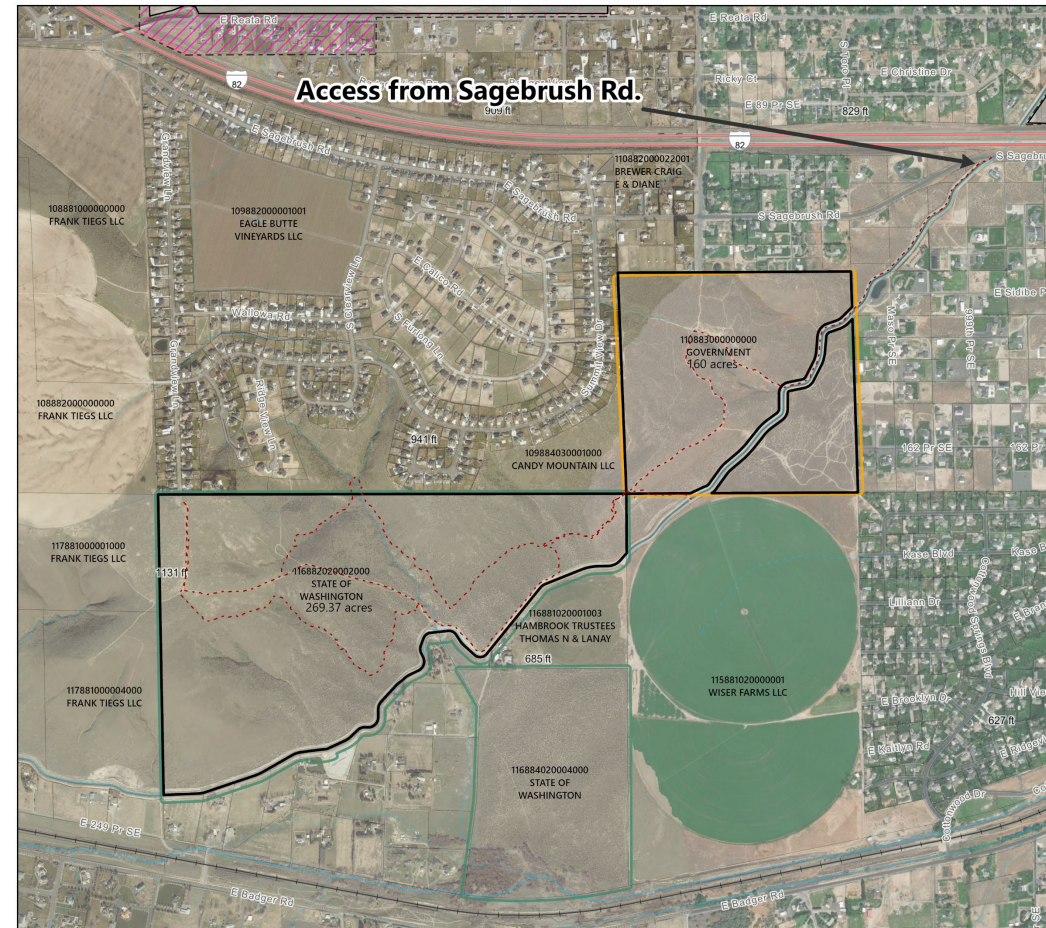


# Property Overview

DNR recreation parcel:  
269 acres

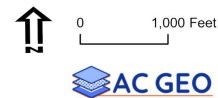
BLM parcel: 160 acres

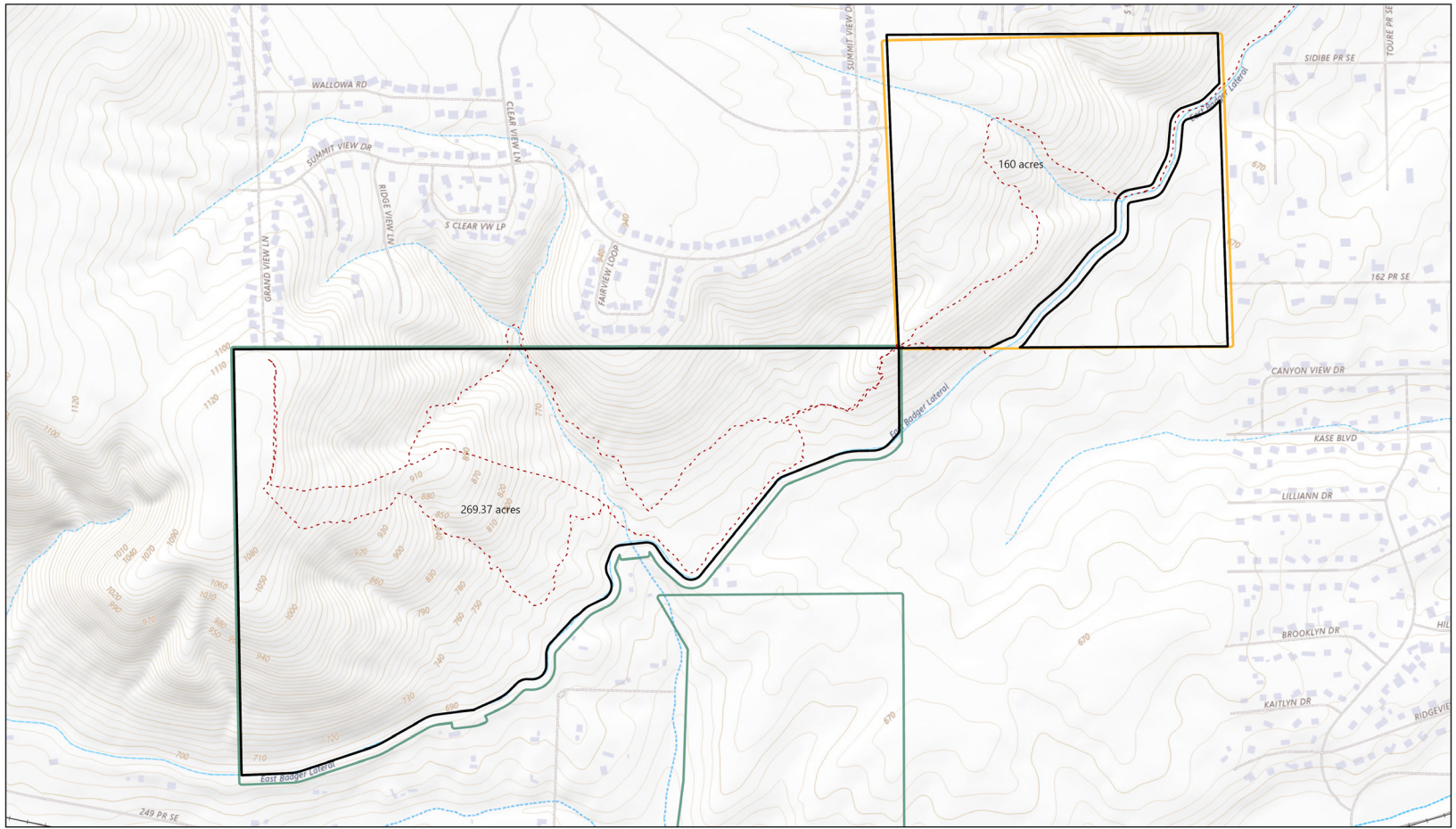
Adjacent DNR property :  
106 acres (currently under  
agriculture lease)



- Proposed Outdoor Recreation Parcel
- DNR Managed Lands
- BLM Ownership
- Trail (informal)

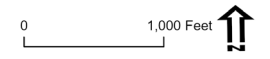
Badger Canyon DNR & BLM Property  
Overview Map





- Proposed Outdoor Recreation Parcel
- DNR Managed Lands
- BLM Ownership
- Trail (informal)

**Badger Canyon DNR & BLM Property**  
Topo Map

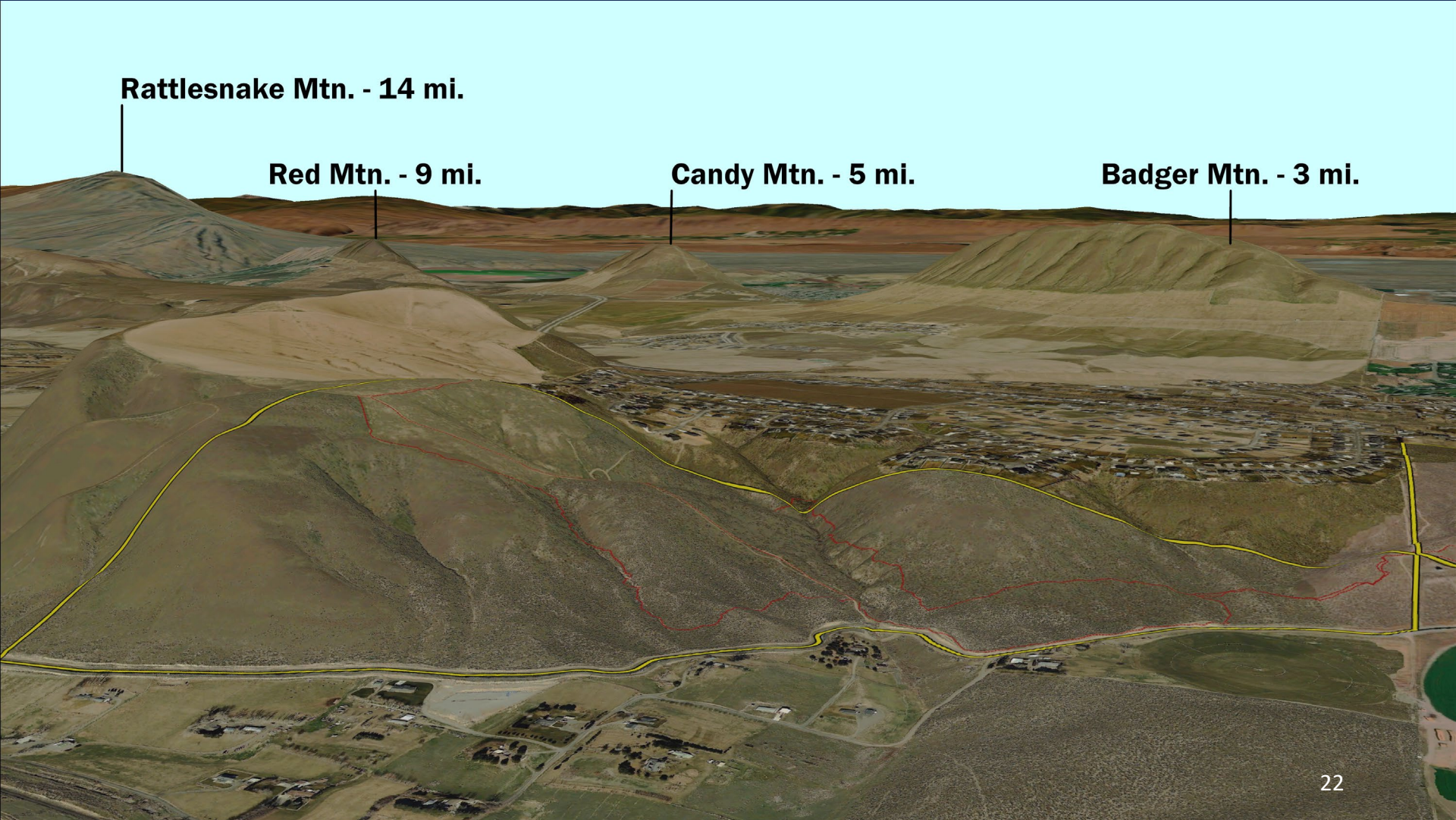


**Rattlesnake Mtn. - 14 mi.**

**Red Mtn. - 9 mi.**

**Candy Mtn. - 5 mi.**

**Badger Mtn. - 3 mi.**





Sagebrush & bunchgrasses



Desert Buckwheat (native), Purple Sage (native), cryptobiotic lichens (and some sweet, non-native ebikes!)

Looking NE



# Open Space Next Steps

- Finalize draft memorandum with recommendations and share with Planning Commission for review
- Receive public input/comment on recommendations (as part of draft plan review process)
- Meet with Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance/local chapter to discuss partnership on DNR (and potentially BLM) property
- Follow up with DNR
  - Trust land transfer process?
- Follow up with BLM (on at least two properties)





# Draft Energy Overlay

# Draft Energy Overlay - Why?

## Existing and Proposed Renewable Energy Projects

\*Estimated project area based on available application documents.

Project Name	Status	Estimated Acres <sup>8</sup>	Capacity (MW)
Columbia Generating Station	Active	1,089	1,207
Nine Canyon Wind	Active – locally permitted	5,120	96
Wautoma	Approved by EFSEC	4,573	470
Horse Heaven	Approved by EFSEC	9,826	1150
Wallula Gap	Withdrawn as of May 2025	437	60
Hop Hill	Under Review by EFSEC	11,179	500

*At least four solar energy projects are proposed but have not yet been made public.*

# Considerations

- Protect and conserve agricultural lands
  - Protection priorities
  - Lower conflict areas
- Protect and conserve habitat
  - Core shrub steppe
  - Sensitive areas
  - Corridors
- Protect other critical areas – wetlands, geologic hazards, etc.



# Scenarios and Recommendations

- Three scenarios considered with various areas/levels of protection, and opportunity areas for new energy projects
- Recommend: Establish Energy Overlay
  - Zone 1 – Restricted in GMA Agriculture to minimize impacts unless demonstrated project:
    - Will not impact suitable soils for agriculture production
    - Can be located on previously disturbed land with non-ag uses
    - Provides rooftop installation on existing structures
    - Will be sited within existing powerline ROW or within road ROW/intersections



# Scenarios and Recommendations

- Recommend: Establish Energy Overlay
  - Zone 2 – Conditionally permitted if:
    - Not on irrigated lands or higher production ag lands
    - Addresses protection of habitat and other critical area requirements
    - Meets County development standards

# Legend

 DRAFT Solar Energy Overlay Area

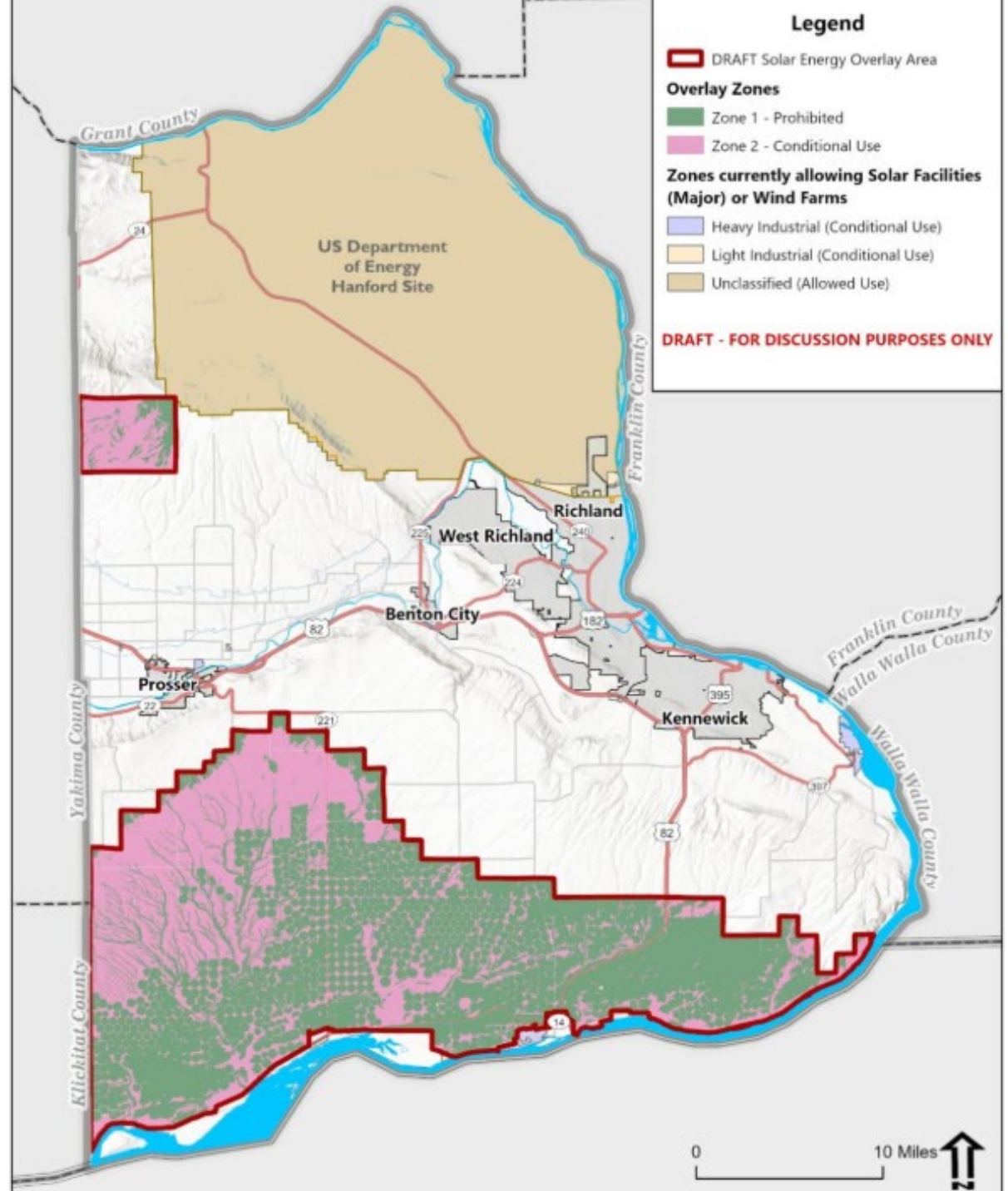
## Overlay Zones

-  Zone 1 - Prohibited
-  Zone 2 - Conditional Use

## Zones currently allowing Solar Facilities (Major) or Wind Farms

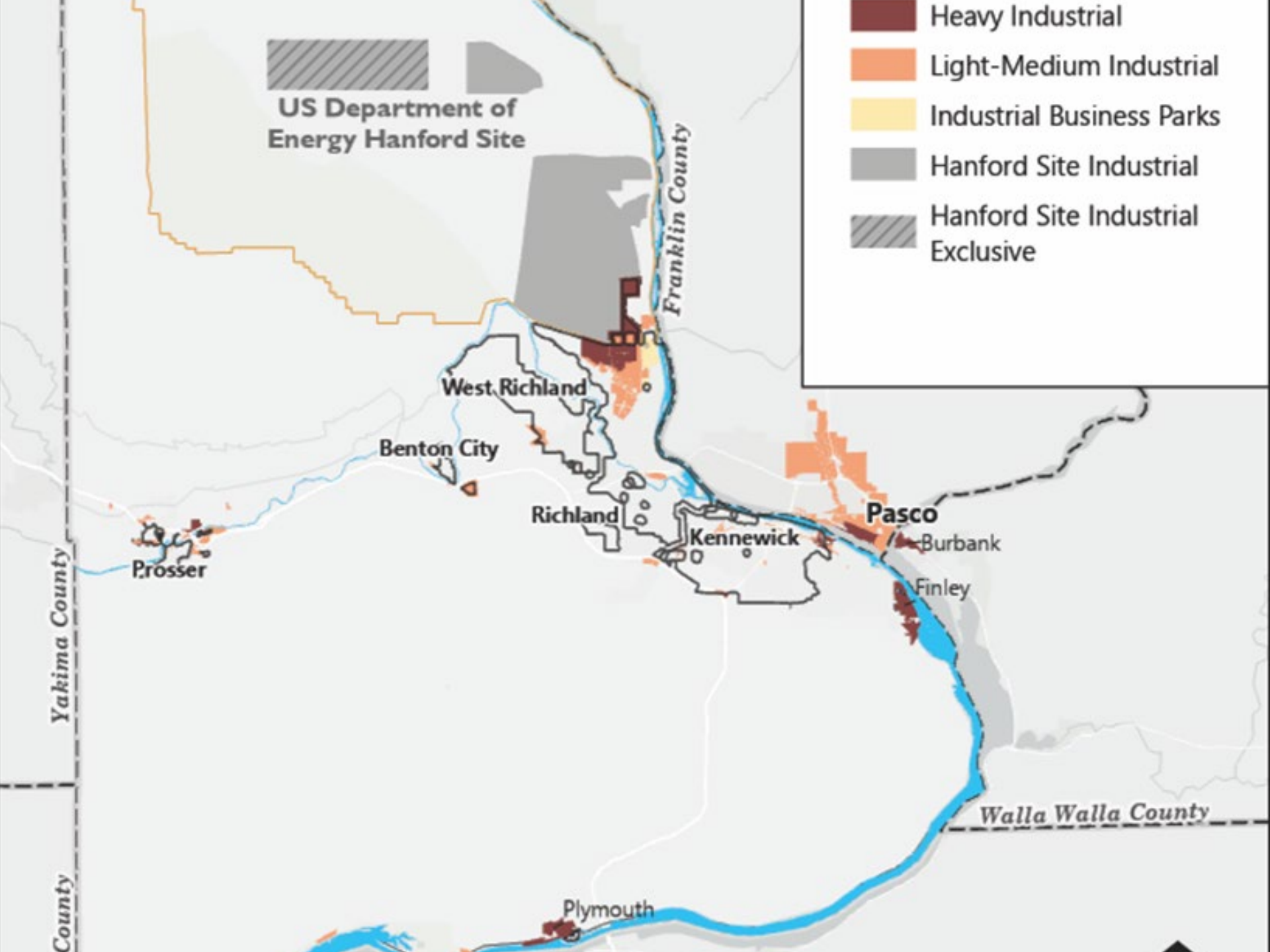
-  Heavy Industrial (Conditional Use)
-  Light Industrial (Conditional Use)
-  Unclassified (Allowed Use)

**DRAFT - FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES ONLY**



# Industrial Lands





US Department of Energy Hanford Site

- Heavy Industrial
- Light-Medium Industrial
- Industrial Business Parks
- Hanford Site Industrial
- Hanford Site Industrial Exclusive

Yakima County

Franklin County

Walla Walla County

County

Prosser

West Richland

Benton City

Richland

Kennewick

Pasco

Burbank

Finley

Plymouth

# Key Facts

- Tri-Cities region has extensive available or underutilized industrial lands – Cities, Hanford, Counties
- Location still provides opportunity for additional development in certain areas



# Projected Industrial Land Needed

Scenario	Growth/Year	Density		Annual Developed Acres	20-Year Developed Acres
<i><u>Buildout Trend Scenario 1 - Higher Density</u></i>					
Lower Buildout	280,000	Ft <sup>2</sup> / Yr	0.15 FAR	43	857
Medium Buildout	430,000	Ft <sup>2</sup> / Yr	0.15 FAR	66	1,316
Higher Buildout	500,000	Ft <sup>2</sup> / Yr	0.15 FAR	89	1,775
<i><u>Buildout Trend Scenario 2 - Lower Density</u></i>					
Lower Buildout	280,000	Ft <sup>2</sup> / Yr	0.074 FAR	87	1,737
Medium Buildout*	430,000	Ft <sup>2</sup> / Yr	0.074 FAR	133	2,668
Higher Buildout	500,000	Ft <sup>2</sup> / Yr	0.074 FAR	180	3,599
<i><u>Employment Growth Scenario 1 - Higher Density</u></i>					
Lower Growth	200	Emp./Yr	12 Emp/Acre	17	333
Medium Growth	339	Emp./Yr	12 Emp/Acre	28	565
Higher Growth	582	Emp./Yr	12 Emp/Acre	49	970
<i><u>Employment Growth Scenario 2 - Lower Density</u></i>					
Lower Growth	200	Emp./Yr	4 Emp/Acre	50	1,000
Medium Growth*	339	Emp./Yr	4 Emp/Acre	85	1,695
Higher Growth	582	Emp./Yr	4 Emp/Acre	146	2,910

Notes:

- \* The *Lower Density - Medium Buildout* and *Lower Density, Medium Growth* scenarios are the closest to current trends.
- High, medium, and low buildout scenarios were estimated based on average building size on industrial lands in the study area and projected buildout per year based on past trends.
- The medium employment growth rate is based on 1.6% average annual manufacturing growth in Benton and Franklin Counties reported by WA ESD for 2001-2023. The low and high growth figures are supported by comparable studies and regional growth trends.



# Unincorporated Benton County

- 3,387 acres total zoned industrial
- 1,420 acres vacant or underutilized
- Finley
  - Fertilizer and chemical plants (1950s/60s) with some limited development over past 30 years
  - Several large parcels over 50 acres available (in ag)
- Northeast of Prosser – 72 acres
  - Parcels 1 to 22 acres in size
  - Mostly residential uses
- GMA Agriculture zone industrial development



# Unincorporated Benton County

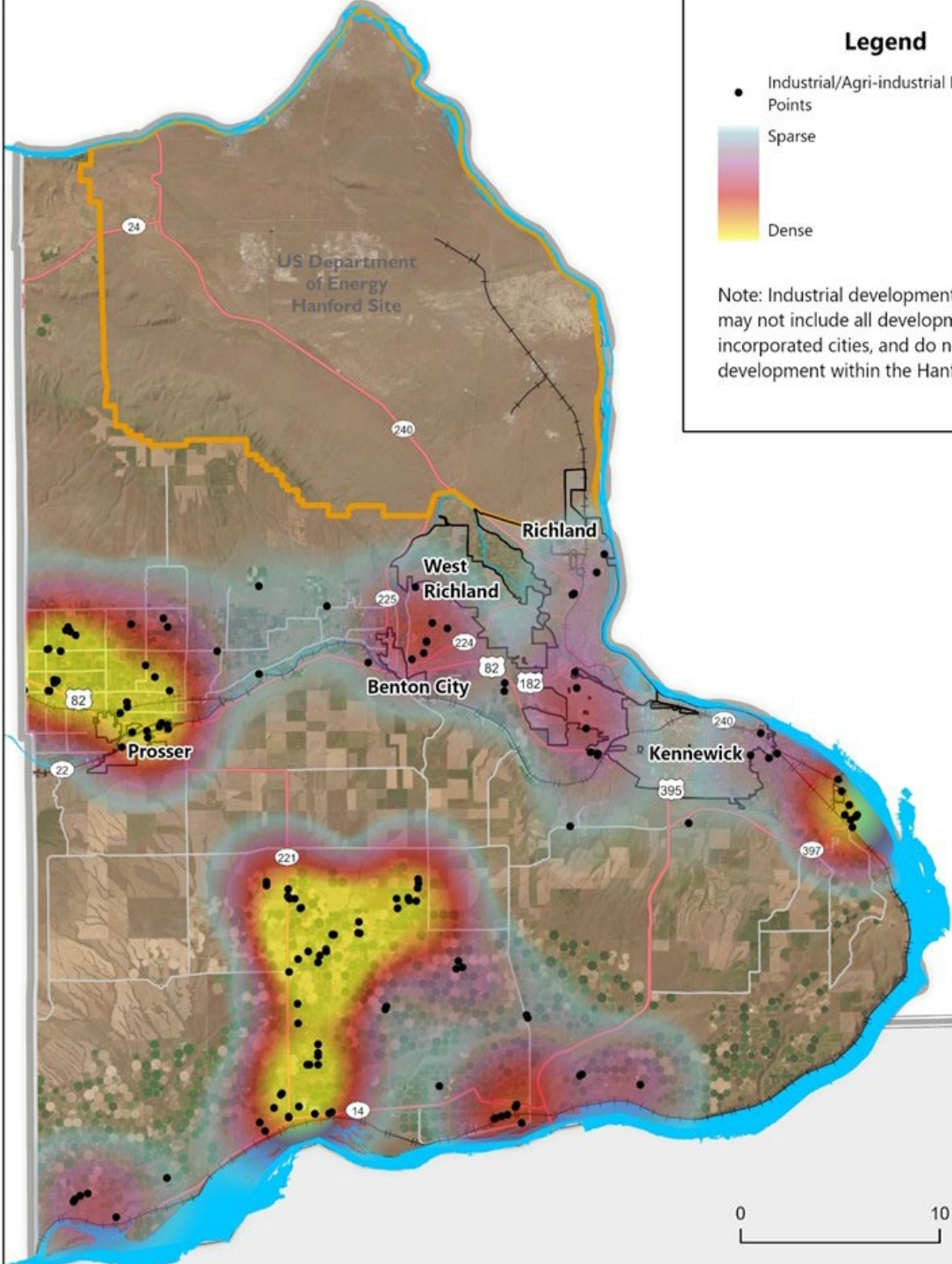
- **Whitstran**
  - 37 acres, 7 parcels, mostly undeveloped
  - Elementary school limits certain industrial uses
- **Plymouth**
  - 773 acres
  - Existing industrial park focused on bulk storage, processing and handling of ag products
  - Seen the most recent development/investment – grain flaking facility
  - Several inquiries on undeveloped parcels and even lands not currently zoned industrial
  - Proximity to rail, river, highway/Interstate 82, power transmission lines, and natural gas



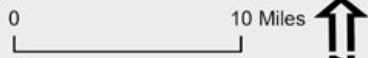
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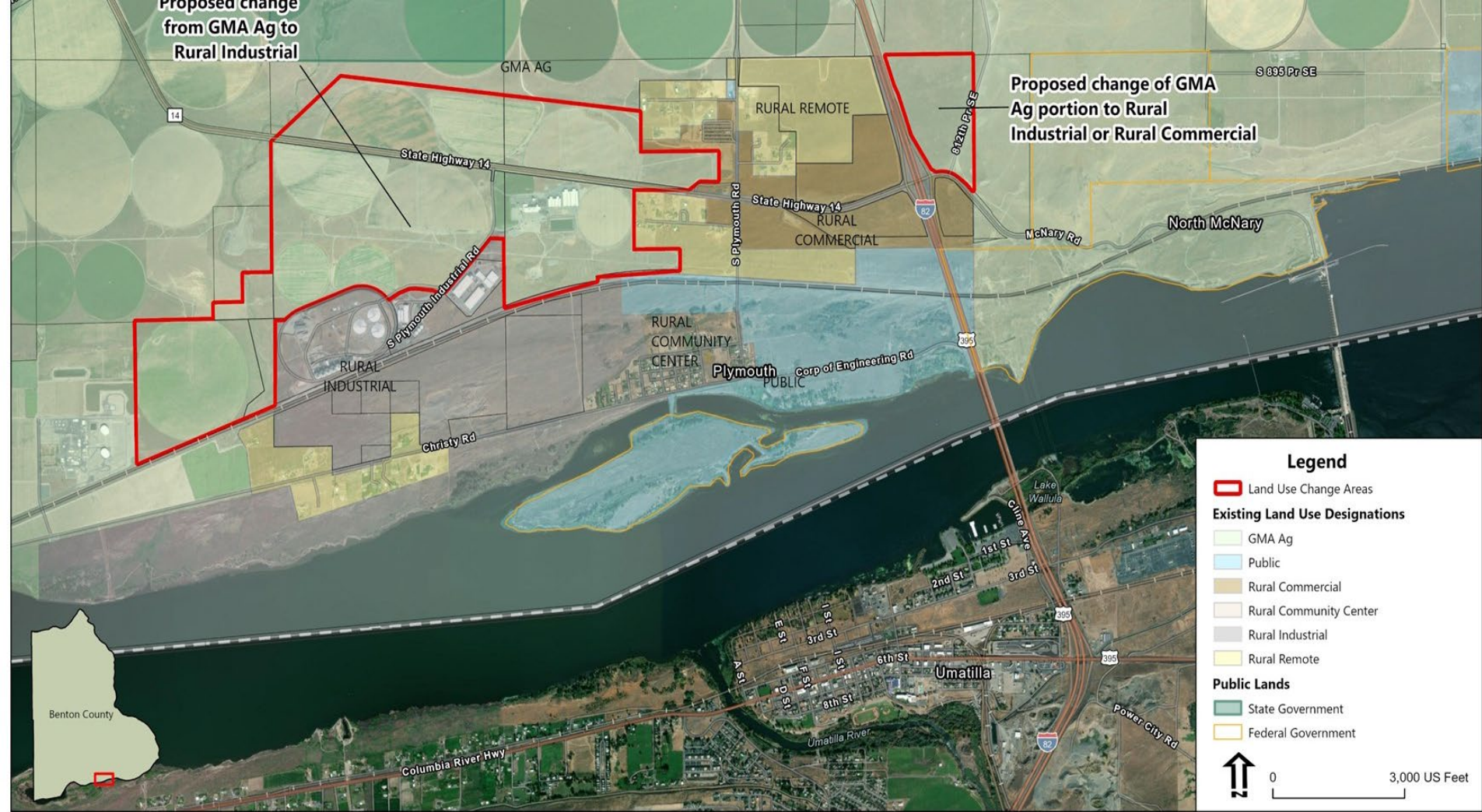
- Industrial/Agri-industrial Development Points
- Sparse
- Dense

Note: Industrial development points may not include all development in incorporated cities, and do not include development within the Hanford Site



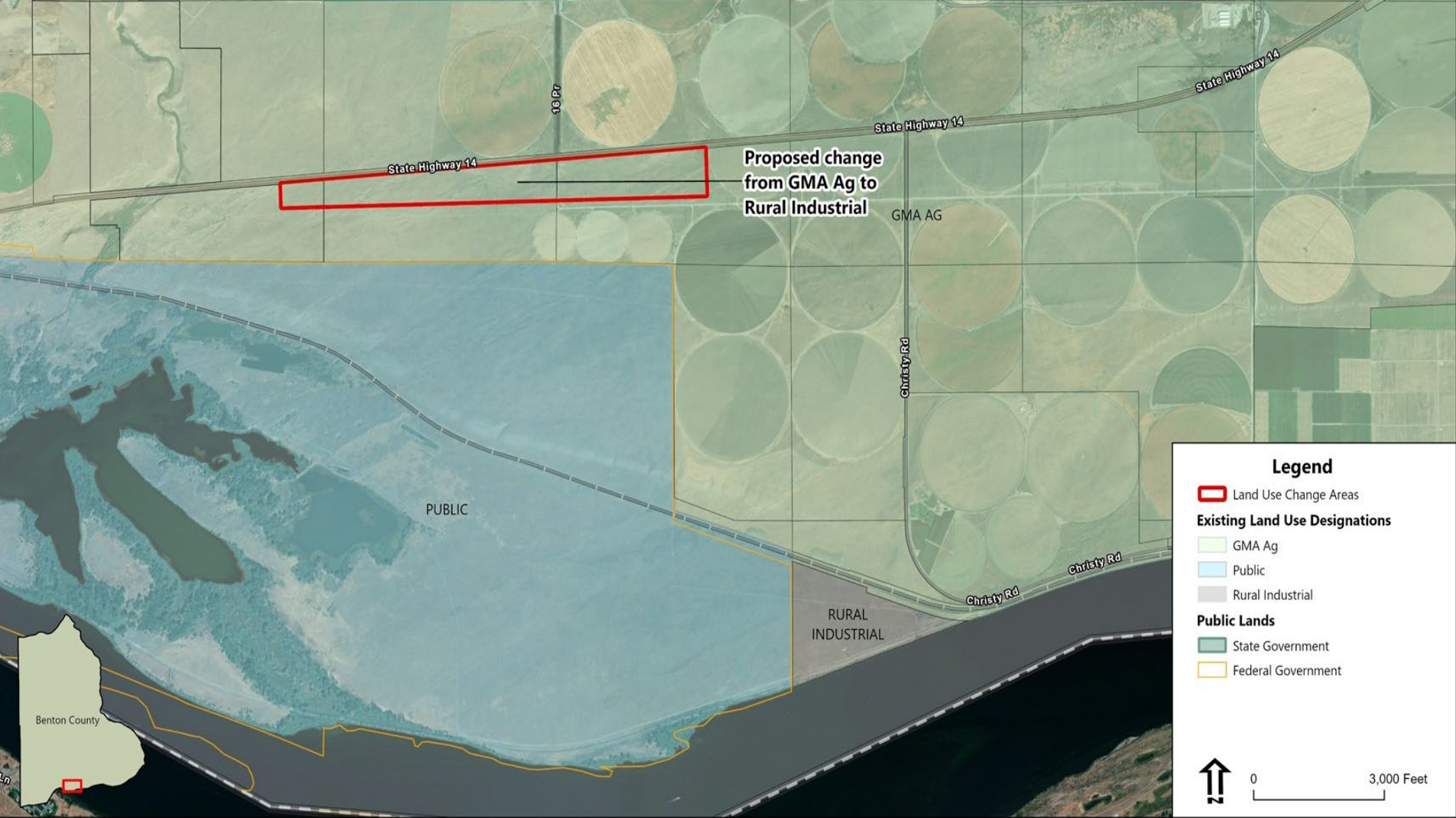
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**Figure A-2**  
**Plymouth Industrial Park Land Use Designation Review**  
 Area 1 & 2 Map





**Figure A-3**  
**Plymouth Industrial Park Land Use Designation Review**  
 Area 3 Map

# Next Steps



# Coordination with the Planning Commission

## 2025 Meetings and Workshops

- June 24 – Housing, Transportation, Capital Facilities (update), Agriculture Lands Review and Updated Draft Land Use Alternatives Map
- Fall– Public open houses, Updates on alternative land use scenarios, goals/policies
- Dec – All plan elements draft updates complete and ready for PC
- Agri-tourism – initiating process
- Draft EIS and Open space – stay tuned for updates



Additional Questions/Comments?



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