

10/29/2025 Draft

Benton County

**Open Space Taxation Program and
Public Benefit Rating System**

Program Description

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1 Summary

RCW chapter 84.34 provides an opportunity for landowners to apply for a reduction in property taxes for certain categories of open space, agricultural and timber lands. This tax reduction is based upon a Current Use Assessment (CUA) of the land rather than on the traditional fair market value system of "highest and best use".

Authority

RCW chapter 84.34 authorizes counties to set open space priorities and adopt, after a public hearing, an open space plan and Public Benefit Rating System (PBRS). (RCW 84.34.055.) The open space plan must contain criteria for determining the eligibility of lands, the process for establishing a PBRS, and an assessed valuation schedule. A PBRS is required to evaluate parcel(s) of land classified as open space for the purpose of determining its CUA. This program, together with related elements of the county Comprehensive Plan, constitutes the open space plan and the public benefit rating system.

Priority Ranking System and CUA Adjustment

Benton County's PBRS establishes a priority ranking system for various open space resources, classifies them into high, medium, or low priority open space resource categories, and assigns a point value for each category and for any additional public benefit features. In accordance with RCW 84.34.055, the assessed valuation schedule shall be developed by the county Assessor and shall be a percentage of market value based upon the public benefit rating system. The Benton County PBRS assessed valuation schedule determines the percentage of tax reduction based upon the total number of points accumulated under its rating. The valuation schedule should work to reduce a property's tax assessment in direct relation to its merit for open space priorities. Applications for CUA open space would, after its adoption by the county, be rated and assessed according to the PBRS.

Tax Shift

The program will cause a modest tax shift from properties in the program to all other properties in the county. When a property enters the program and benefits from a reduced tax rate, the differential is shifted across all other properties in the same taxing district. County landowners effectively support the retention of the benefits recognized in the county's Public Benefit Rating System.

2 Purpose and Intent

This document describes Benton County's Open Space Taxation Program and Public Benefit Rating System. The purpose of this program is to encourage through reduced property tax rates the maintenance, preservation, and conservation of adequate open space lands to protect sensitive habitats ensure the use and enjoyment of natural resources and scenic beauty for the economic and social well-being of the county's citizens. This program description is designed to provide the foundation for a future ordinance that would codify the open space taxation program and public benefit rating system. The following sections outline the specific provisions and criteria that would be included in this proposed future ordinance.

3 Administration

The County Assessor and the Director of the Benton County Community Development Department or designee are vested with the duty of administering, implementing, and interpreting the provisions of this Program. The Director may prepare and/or require the use of such forms and information as deemed necessary to administer the provisions of this Program.

4 Authority and Compliance with Regulations

Benton County will adopt a Program based on information in this program description and under the authority of Chapter 84.34 RCW. All lands proposed for acceptance into the open space open space program shall be in full compliance with all applicable Benton County codes.

5 Scope

This Program shall apply to all public and private lands situated within the unincorporated portions of Benton County over which Benton County has jurisdiction under the constitutions and laws of the State of Washington and of the United States and shall set forth minimum standards in addition to such other standards that may be applicable.

6 Definitions

Those definitions set forth in RCW 84.34.020 and WAC 458-30-200, as adopted and hereafter amended, are incorporated by reference and shall govern and control the application and interpretation of this chapter. In the case of reference to a specific Benton County Code regulation, the definitions within the referenced regulation (for example, the shoreline master program) shall prevail. The following definitions also apply:

- A. "Assessor" means the Benton County Assessor.

- B. "Board" means the Board of Benton County Commissioners.
- C. "Commission" means the Benton County Planning Commission.
- D. "Department" means the Benton County Community Development Department.
- E. "Director" means the director of the Benton County Community Development Department, and or his/her designee.
- F. "Program" means the "Open Space-Open Space Program and Public Benefit Rating System

7 Eligible Lands

All lands within the unincorporated portions of Benton County are eligible to be reviewed for enrollment in this program, provided:

- A. The property proposed for enrollment is no less than 5 acres and contains at least one priority resource as described in Section 14;
- B. The property meets the minimum enrollment requirements of the public benefit rating system found in Section 13;
- C. All fees, assessments, and taxes are paid in full;
- D. The property shall be in full compliance with all provisions of this Program, all applicable Benton County codes, and RCW 84.34.

8 Ineligible Lands

The following lands, or portions thereof, are not eligible for enrollment under this Program:

- A. Parcels less than five (5) acres in size unless otherwise specified herein.
- B. Parcel(s) which do not contain a listed resource in Section 14;
- C. Open space areas or buffers required by zoning or other land use regulations, or as part of an approval for a development or subdivision application; unless the owner provides additional public benefit, such as general public access, resource restoration, or a native growth protection easement. Ineligible lands include open space areas dedicated under zoning or subdivision conditions, or which are used to achieve maximum development potential under zoning.
- D. Parcels that are the subject of a notice of violation of Benton County Code and/or the Benton County Shoreline Master Program.
- E. Golf courses, country clubs, hunting clubs, campgrounds, RV parks, and other fee-based or membership-exclusive recreational uses are ineligible for new enrollment under this Program. Properties currently enrolled in the Open Space Land program that fall under

these categories shall be reviewed and transitioned in accordance with WAC 458-30-330(6) and Section 15.

9 Application and Contents

Applications for enrollment under this Program, together with the specified fee, shall be filed with the Department. The accuracy and completeness of the application shall be the responsibility of the applicant. The application shall, at a minimum, contain the following:

- A. Benton County Planning Division Application Fee of \$XX, in addition to the Benton County Assessor's application fee of \$500 for enrollment in the Open Space program;
- B. Completed and signed Benton County Planning Division Open Space Tax Classification Application;
- C. Completed and signed [Washington State Department of Revenue application](#), if required;
- D. The name, address, and phone number of the landowner/taxpayer, or authorized representative (proof of authorization may be required);
- E. Site plan of the property and vicinity map denoting the general area of the lands showing the location of the property involved.
- F. The total number of acres considered for enrollment;
- G. A copy of a recorded deed describing the property and identifying the owner;
- H. A narrative statement describing the open space resources present, with verification as required by Section 14
- I. A certification of payment of property taxes received from the county treasurer prior to recording of the open space agreement. The certification must indicate that all taxes, assessments, fees, fines, penalties, and/or judgments, outstanding against a parcel of land have been satisfied.

10 Application Review Process

The following timeline shall be used for the processing of all applications for enrollment:

- A. Applications will be accepted during either of two (2) submittal periods as follows:
 - 1. Applications received during the period January 1st through April 30th shall be reviewed for eligibility during the period May 1 through June 30th. Applications shall be deemed

complete by July 1st of each year and shall be approved or denied by the County legislative authority by December 31st.

2. Applications received during the period July 1st through October 31st shall be reviewed for eligibility during the period November 1st through December 31st. Applications shall be deemed complete by December 31st of each year and shall be approved or denied by the County legislative authority by July 1 of the following year. Applicants whose submittal is deemed incomplete, or ineligible shall be notified as soon as reasonably possible to identify additional information required to make the application complete, or to give the applicant an opportunity to withdraw the application.
- B. An application shall be effective for six (6) months. The continuation of an application beyond six months shall constitute a new application and new application fees apply. The Director may waive the application fee or extend the application six months if the Director determines that administrative review is responsible for the application delay or circumstances arise that necessitate an extension (for example, a state representative or consultant is delayed in verifying a resource or plan).
- C. In determining whether an application for open space land classification or reclassification should be approved, the Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners may consider the public benefits of preserving the current use of the subject property, and shall consider at a minimum the following:
1. The resulting revenue loss or tax shift;
 2. Whether granting the application will achieve one or more of the following open space values:
 - a. Conserve or enhance natural, cultural, or scenic resources;
 - b. Protect streams, stream corridors, wetlands, natural shorelines, floodways and aquifers;
 - c. Protect geologically hazardous, landslide hazard, or seismic hazard areas;
 - d. Protect soil resources and unique or critical wildlife and native plant habitat;
 - a. Promote conservation principles or offer educational opportunities;
 - e. Enhance the value of abutting or neighboring parks, forest, wildlife preserves, nature reservations, sanctuaries, or other open space;
 - f. Preserve historic and archaeological sites;

- g. Preserve visual quality along highway, road, and street corridors or scenic vistas;
- h. Affect any other factors relevant in weighing benefits to the general welfare of preserving the current use of the property; and

D. Planning Commission Public Hearing:

1. Set the date and time for a public hearing before the Planning Commission;
 2. Prior to the hearing, circulate the notice of the application and public hearing to county, state, and federal agencies with expertise or interest, for a 30-day comment and review period;
 3. Circulate notice of the application and public hearing to all property owners within 300 feet of the exterior boundaries of the property considered for enrollment. Notice of the hearing shall have been given by publishing a summary of the open space applications in a newspaper of general circulation in the area at least ten (12) days prior to the open record hearing before the Planning Commission. Notification shall also be forwarded to each applicant;
 4. At least 5 days prior to the public hearing, the department shall transmit a written report, findings of fact, public benefit rating, and recommendation to the Planning Commission;
5. Following the public hearing, the Planning Commission shall make a recommendation on each application to the Board of County Commissioners. Such recommendations shall be forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners who will hold a public hearing to approve or deny the applications.

E. County Commissioner Public Hearing:

1. Set the date and time for a public hearing before the Board of County Commissioners. The date of decision by the Board of County Commissioners for the applications shall be within 45 calendar days from the date of receipt of the Planning Commission recommendations.
2. At least 5 days prior to the public hearing, the department shall transmit a written report, findings of fact, public benefit rating, and planning recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners.
3. Circulate notice of the application and public hearing to all property owners within 300 feet of the exterior boundaries of the property considered for enrollment. Notice of the hearing shall have been given by publishing a summary of the open space applications

in a newspaper of general circulation in the area at least ten (12) days prior to the open record hearing before the Board of County Commissioners. Notification shall also be forwarded to each applicant;

4. The Board shall approve, or deny the application at the conclusion of the public hearing.

5. If the Board approves an application, an open space land agreement between the County and the landowner(s) shall be signed. Said agreement may contain conditions of approval necessary to assure that the classification of open space land furthers the purposes of the Open Space Act, Chapter 84.34 RCW. If the Board denies the application, in whole or in part, the applicant has the right to appeal only to the Benton County Superior Court, as specified by [WAC 458.30.250\(4\)\(b\)](#).

11 Land Purchased or transferred while application is pending

In the event a parcel is conveyed while approval of a timely application is pending, the purchaser or transferee shall, upon written request to the Department, be given the same consideration as the original applicant. The purchaser or transferee shall assume the original applicant's rights and responsibilities in the application process. The purchaser or transferee shall be required to satisfy all requirements that otherwise would have been required.


12 State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)

Applications for enrollment into the open space program (Chapter 84.34 RCW) are categorically exempt from review under the State Environmental Policy Act (WAC 197-11-800(6)(c)).

13 Public Benefit Rating System

To be eligible for open space classification under the county's Public Benefit Rating System, property must contain one or more open space resource(s) listed below. These resources are defined in this chapter and ranked as high, medium, or low priority open space resources.

A maximum of seventy-five (75) percent reduction in assessed value for all or a portion of a parcel may result from enrollment in this program. The parcel, or portion thereof, is assigned a rating in the system and given a percentage reduction in assessed value for that portion of land that qualifies. The rating and percentage of reduction is dependent upon the type of resource(s) found on the parcel. Points may be accrued up to a maximum of fifteen (15). Eligibility is based on the following factors:

1. **Resources:** At least three (3) points must be earned under this category to qualify for enrollment. A maximum of nine (9) points may be accrued from resources. Multiple resources may be contained within a parcel; however, a maximum of three resource categories may be used on any one application. Resources are rated according to high, medium or low priority. High priority resources receive three points, medium priority resources two points, and low priority resources one point (see Section 14 for resource priority and definition). Based on  findings, the Commission shall determine whether a parcel qualifies for specific resources.
2. **Optional Bonus Eligibility Points.** Additional points may be available under this category, but no points are required. At least one resource, as described above, must be present to qualify for optional bonus points. A maximum of six bonus points are available.
 - a. **Conservation Easement.** A maximum of **three (3)** points may be scored in this category. This value applies when a conservation or historic easement that permanently preserves the resource is in effect on the property. One to three points may be scored, corresponding with the highest point value of resources on the property and the amount of preservation applied by the easement. For example, a conservation easement permanently protecting a “high priority” resource scores three points. A conservation or historic easement is a legal means by which a landowner can voluntarily set permanent limitations on the future use of land thus protecting the land's particular attributes. The easement is conveyed, through recorded documents, to a qualifying conservation organization or public agency, but the land remains in private ownership and the owner retains full control over public access. A conservation easement shall include those authorized interests or rights to be held or acquired by RCW 84.34.210 or 64.04.130. Historic easements apply to historically important land areas and to historic structures that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places (or are located in and contribute to the historic significance of a National Register Historic District). The easement typically results in a limitation on land development or structure modification which will ensure the ongoing preservation of a historic parcel of land or a historic structure and its setting.
 - b. **Restoration/Enhancement.** A maximum of **three (3)** points may be scored in this category for restored and/or enhanced resources, such as fish and wildlife habitats, plant communities, or wetlands. No points are required under this section. At least one resource must be present in order to qualify for optional point classification. One point is available for each enhanced resource regardless of the priority. Restoration and enhancement plans are required and must be completed by a qualified professional.

- c. **Enhanced Surface Water Quality Buffer.** One additional point may be scored for areas that provide a buffer function for surface water. To qualify, areas must have perennial vegetation in a natural state with a minimum width (perpendicular to the waterbody) of fifty (50) feet and a minimum extent (parallel to the waterbody) of one hundred (100) feet, with these dimensions clearly demonstrated by an annotated aerial photo or site map.
- d. **Contiguous Parcels Under Separate Ownership.** One additional point may be scored for parcels that border other parcels under separate ownership that are enrolled in the program.
- e. **Optional Super Bonus Points (Adapted from Douglas County).** Properties with at least one (1) high priority open space resource and which allow public access, or limited public access due to resource sensitivity at certain times, and which have conveyed or will convey as part of this process to a land trust organization or similar entity a permanent easement, in a form approved by the county, shall automatically score the maximum 15 points and be eligible for current use value at twenty-five percent (25%) of assessed market value (75% current use value reduction).

3. Assessed Valuation Schedule. The reduction in market value of the qualifying land enrolled in this program is determined by reducing the market value of the qualifying land by a percentage, up to a maximum of 75 percent. The relationship of public benefit points to percentage of assessed value reduction is presented in the following table:

Public Benefit Rating Points	Percent Reduction in Market Value
3	25
4	30
5	35
6	40
7-8	45
9-10	55
11-12	65
13-15	75

14 Priority Resource Categories

A. High priority open space resources (3 points each)

1. Xeric, Mesic, and Sage Grouse Ecosystem Cores and Linkage Areas as mapped by the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSSRI).
2. Areas designated as *Natural* Shoreline Environment in the Benton County Shoreline Master Program, including vegetative buffers and associated wetlands, as mapped or defined in the Benton County Shoreline Master Program.
3. Biodiversity Areas and Corridors mapped by WDFW in the Priority Habitats and Species datasets, based on WDFW PHS or Benton County Planning Critical Area maps.
4. Category 1 and 2 wetlands over 2,500 square feet in area, as delineated by a qualified professional per the requirements in the Benton County Critical Areas Ordinance.
5. Geologically Hazardous Areas as defined and mapped in the Benton County Critical Areas Ordinance and/or defined by geologic or geotechnical experts.
6. Properties with significant scenic value, including, but not limited to, the Columbia and Yakima River corridors, and prominent ridges including the Horse Heaven Hills, Rattlesnake Hills, and Red, Candy, Badger mountains, Badger Canyon, or other open space corridors identified in the Benton County Comprehensive Plan.
7. Special Flood Hazard Areas identified as having a 1% annual chance of flooding based on Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Map, Benton County Critical Area maps, or Shoreline Master Program maps, that have:
 - a. no impervious surfaces or permanent structures.
 - b. at least 50% coverage by undisturbed perennial plant cover in a natural condition such as trees, shrubs, or non-cultivated herbaceous grasses.
8. Historical Sites of significance to the county's cultural heritage including, but not limited to, Native American and pioneer settlements, old buildings, forts, trails, landings, bridges or the sites thereof together with interpretive facilities, and which are identified in the Washington Heritage Register or the National Heritage Register.
9. Archeological Sites, including all known sites and locations of prehistorical or archaeological interest, including but not limited to burial sites, camp sites, rock shelters, caves and the artifacts and implements of the culture. Location and details of known sites are on file at Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP).

B. Medium priority open space resources (2 points each)

1. Habitat Growth Opportunity Areas as mapped by the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSSRI).

2. PHS habitats mapped by WDFW, other than those listed in the High Priority category.
These areas may include:
 - a. Shrubsteppe habitat
 - b. Habitat or range areas for individual species
3. Properties with public trails for hiking, biking, and equestrian use
4. Category 3 Wetlands
5. Other shoreline environments
6. Special Flood Hazard Areas not meeting the High Priority Criteria

C. Lower priority open space resources (1 point each)

1. Category 4 Wetlands
2. Degraded shrubsteppe habitat that may be suitable for restoration or long-term habitat recovery
3. Fee based recreation and public access areas.

Point System Example:

An applicant's 160-acre property includes an area with the following open space resource values:

- Xeric habitat core area as mapped by WSSRI,
- Biodiversity Corridor per WDFW PHS,
- Open Space Corridor mapped in the Comprehensive Plan.

The area is protected by a permanent conservation easement. However, the property does not allow public access. Under this program description, the property would score the following points:

Resource Points:

Xeric habitat core area as mapped by WSSRI- 3 points

Biodiversity Corridor per WDFW PHS – 3 points

Open Space Corridor mapped in the Comp. Plan – 3 points

Shrubsteppe Habitat – 2 points, but not included because the property already hit the max of three resources.

Total Resource Points: 9

Bonus Points:

The open space resources on the property are protected by a permanent conservation easement. The highest resource point value of the protected area is 3, so the corresponding bonus is also 3.

Total Bonus Points: 3

Super Bonus Points:

The property does not qualify since public access is not allowed.

Total Points: 12, qualifying for 65% reduction in market value

15 Transition of Existing Parcels

Pursuant to WAC 458-30-330(6), all parcels currently enrolled in the Open Space Land program under RCW 84.34.020(1) shall be reviewed upon adoption of the Public Benefit Rating System. Each parcel will be assigned a score based on PBRS criteria for the purposes of determining assessed valuation. Existing parcels may not be removed from classification solely due to the adoption of the PBRS. Parcels determined to be inconsistent with PBRS eligibility criteria shall retain their classification until such time that the owner requests withdrawal or the property is

removed pursuant to RCW 84.34.108 due to a change in use, sale, or violation of program requirements.

16 Program Review & Administration

The Assessor and the Director shall review the Open Space Program at the inclusion of the first additional ten thousand (10,000) acres approved for open space classification after the adoption of this chapter or, after the first five (5) years after adoption of this chapter, whichever occurs sooner, and thereafter once every five (5) years. The Assessor and Director shall make written recommendations to the Board on the following matters:

- A. The fundamental elements of the Public Benefit Rating System, including such elements as the assessed valuation schedule and the other PBRS procedures defined in this chapter, open space resource definitions, etc.; and
- B. The public benefit of the open space designated properties, the magnitude of the tax shift resulting from the designated properties and recommendations for expanding or restricting the program; and
- C. The overall administrative process, including such issues as staffing, outreach to prospective applicants, application form and application processing, monitoring, etc.

17 Improvements

When determining eligibility of a parcel for enrollment under this Program that includes structural improvements, a one-acre minimum improvement area or home-site will be excluded and not enrolled under this Program. Covenants, conditions and restrictions (CC&Rs) or conservation easements may increase the improvement area to more than one acre depending on the language in the CC&Rs or the conservation easement. This also applies to potential building areas listed in the CC&Rs and the conservation easement. This improved area or potentially improved area will be assessed at market value as determined by the Assessor.

18 Minimum Participation Period

When land has been enrolled in the program, it shall remain under such classification and shall not be applied to another use except as provided by RCW 84.34.070(2), for at least 10 years from the date of the recording of the open space agreement and shall continue under such classification until and unless withdrawn from the classification after notice of request for withdrawal shall be made by the owner. Withdrawal from classification may be requested at any time after the initial ten-year enrollment period. Per HB 1747 (2017), withdrawal is effective

immediately upon the date the owner signs the Notice of Owner's Request to Withdraw Current Use Classification (Form 64 0027). Rollback taxes, interest, and penalties shall apply in accordance with RCW 84.34.108. In the event that a portion of a parcel is removed from classification, the remaining portion must meet the same requirements as the entire parcel did when such land was originally granted classification pursuant to this program. The Assessor shall, when two assessment years have elapsed following the date of receipt of such notice, withdraw such land from such classification and the land shall be subject to the additional tax and applicable interest due under RCW 84.34.108.

19 Change in use

When land which has been classified under this Program is applied to some other use, such landowner shall notify the assessor within 60 days of such change and shall be subject to the provisions of RCW 84.34.080.

20 Open Space Land Amendments

Amendments to the public benefit rating for properties enrolled in the program shall be processed the same as new open space land applications in accordance with this Program.

21 Notice of Decision

The department shall notify the Assessor and the landowner of the approval of an application for enrollment under this Program. All denials of an application shall be in writing to the land owner and shall include the reasons for denial.

22 Request for Information

The Assessor and/or department may require an owner of land enrolled under this Program to submit data relevant to the use of the land or other information pertinent to the continued classification of the land, as specified by WAC 458-30-270.

23 Continuing Enrollment upon Sale or Transfer of Ownership

Property enrolled under this Program may be sold or transferred to new owners subject to the provisions of WAC 458-30-275.

24 Enforcement

Property which has been approved under this Program but which is found to be in violation of any terms of the open space agreement or condition of enrollment, may be removed from the program and all applicable fees, penalties, and interest shall become due pursuant to Chapter 84.34 RCW.

25 Program Review

The Assessor and the Director shall review the Open Space Program at the inclusion of the first additional ten thousand (10,000) acres approved for open space classification after the adoption of this chapter or, after the first five (5) years after adoption of this chapter, whichever occurs sooner, and thereafter once every five (5) years. The Assessor and the Director shall make written recommendations to the Board on the following matters:

- A. The fundamental elements of the Public Benefit Rating System, including such elements as the assessed valuation schedule and the other PBRS procedures defined in this chapter, open space resource definitions, etc.; and
- B. The public benefit of the open space designated properties, the magnitude of the tax shift resulting from the designated properties and recommendations for expanding or restricting the program; and
- C. The overall administrative process, including such issues as staffing, outreach to prospective applicants, application form and application processing, monitoring, etc.

26 Severability

If any provision of this Program or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of this Program or its application to other persons or circumstances is not affected.

Table 1: County Public Benefit Rating System Comparison Table

Feature	Franklin County	Douglas County	Benton
Priority Levels	High = 3 pts Medium = 2 pts Low = 1 pt	High = 5 pts Medium = 3 pts Low = 1 pt	High = 3 pts Medium = 2 pts Low = 1 pt
Max Resource Points	9 pts (from up to 3 resources)	30 pts (from up to 6 resources)	9 pts (from up to 3 resources)
Minimum Resource Points	3 pts required to qualify	Minimum 5 pts (one high-priority resource needed)	3 pts required to qualify
Additional/ Bonus Points Available	Up to 6 pts (1 pt per enhanced or easement resource)	Up to 17 pts across several categories	Up to 6 pts (1 pt per enhanced or easement resource)
Bonus Categories	- Conservation/Historic Easement (1 pt each)- Restoration/Enhancement (1 pt each)	- Water-quality buffers (1/3/5 pts)- Contiguous parcel grouping (2 pts)- Easements (5 pts)- Public access (3–5 pts)	- Conservation/Historic Easement (1 pt each)- Restoration/Enhancement (1 pt each)
Super-Bonus/Max Value Reduction	Max reduction = 75% at 15 pts	Max reduction 75% when “super bonus” criteria met	Max reduction = 75% at 15 pts
Max Total Points	15 pts	47 pts	15 pts
Tax Reduction Scale	3 pts → 25% 4 pts → 30%... up to 15 pts → 75%	Automatic 75% reduction via Super Bonus; otherwise sliding scale based on total pts	3 pts → 25% 4 pts → 30%... up to 15 pts → 75%
Public Access Component	Required unless waived (e.g. sensitive habitat, archaeology)	Bonus for public access (3–5 pts); mandatory for Super Bonus	Used as bonus, not required
Minimum Acreage / Eligibility	Min 5 acres, must meet comp plan & resource criteria	No specific acreage mentioned	Min 5 Acres, with exceptions.
Resource Verification	Field-verified by agencies or professionals (counted per category)	Defined in DCC 3.52.070–100; similar agency verification implied	Qualified professional’s reports or official maps/plans

Table 2: Comparison of County Point System Factors

This table is included for reference to contrast the proposed framework with other County programs.

Priority	Douglas	Franklin	Benton
High	5 pts - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type/Category 1 Wetlands • Type/Category 2 Wetlands Within Columbia River • Natural Shoreline Environments • Privately Owned Trails and Corridors • Historic Landmarks/ Archeological Sites 	3 pts - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archeological Sites • Historical Sites • Shoreline Environment • Special Animal Sites • Special Plant Sites • Category 1 and 2 Wetlands • Major lakes, ponds, and streams • Farm and Agricultural Conservation Land • Floodplains or Floodways • Geologically Hazardous Areas 	3 pts- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xeric, Mesic, and Sage Grouse Ecosystem Cores and Linkage Areas as mapped by the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSSRI). • Natural Shoreline Environments, and associated flood plains and wetlands. • Biodiversity areas and corridors as mapped by WDFW as Priority Habitats and Species. • Category 1 and 2 wetlands • Floodplains • Geohazard areas • Properties with significant scenic value, or open space corridors identified in the Benton County Comprehensive Plan. • Historic Landmarks/ Archeological Sites

Priority	Douglas	Franklin	Benton
Medium	<p>3 pts -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Conservancy and Urban Conservancy Shoreline Environments • Type/Category 2 NOT Within Columbia River • Urban Growth Area Open Space • Fish and Wildlife habitat conservation areas 	<p>2 pts -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> f. Public Lands Buffer g. Minor Lakes, Ponds, and streams h. Scenic vistas i. Category 3 wetlands 	<p>2 pts-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat Growth Opportunity Areas as mapped by the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSSRI). • PHS habitats mapped by WDFW, other than those listed in the High Priority category. • Properties with public trails for hiking, biking, and equestrian use • Category 3 Wetlands • Other shoreline environments. • Flood Hazard Areas with existing development or otherwise not meeting the high priority definition. • Properties abutting or neighboring parks, forest, wildlife preserves, nature reservations, sanctuaries, or other open space

Priority	Douglas	Franklin	Benton
Low	1 pt - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type/Category 3 and 4 Wetlands • Scenic Natural Resources, Viewpoints, and View Corridors • Flood Hazard Areas • Geologically Hazardous areas 	1 pt - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fee Recreation and Public Access Parking • Category 4 Wetlands • Urban Growth Area Open Space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ pts • Category 4 Wetlands? • Degraded shrubsteppe habitat • Fee based recreation and public access areas.
Bonus System	Up to 17 pts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced Surface Water Quality Buffer 1-5 pts • Contiguous parcels under separate ownership 2 pts • Conservation/historic/trail easement effective during the period of classification and market value reduction 5 pts • Bonus public access points 3-5 pts 	Up to 6 Points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation Easement – 1-3 Points • Restoration – 1-3 Points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation/historic/trail easement effective during the period of classification and market value reduction 1-3 points. • Enhanced Surface Water Quality Buffer 1-3 pts • Contiguous parcels under separate ownership 2 pts • Super bonus public access points 6 pts