

STEVENS COUNTY CODE OF THE WEST

The Code of the West was first chronicled by the famous western writer, Zane Grey. The men and women who came to this part of the country during the westward expansion of the United States were bound by an unwritten code of conduct. The values of integrity and self-reliance guided their decisions, actions and interactions. In keeping with that spirit, we offer this information to help the citizens of Stevens County who wish to follow in the footsteps of those rugged individualists by living outside city limits. The body of this document and most of the original wording was taken from a work by John Clark, a Commissioner for Larimer County, Colorado.

INTRODUCTION

It is important for you to know that life in the country is different from life in the city. County governments are not able to provide the same level of service that city governments provide. To that end, we are providing you with the following information to help you make an educated and informed decision when choosing to purchase rural land outside the boundaries of incorporated cities.

Board of Stevens County Commissioners
Malcolm Friedman, Chairman
Larry Guenther, Commissioner
Merrill J. Ott, Commissioner

Access:

The fact that you can drive to your property today does not necessarily guarantee that you, your guests and emergency service vehicles can achieve that same level of access at all times. Please consider:

- 1.1 Emergency response times (sheriff, fire suppression, medical care, etc.) cannot be guaranteed. Under some extreme conditions, you may find that emergency response is extremely slow and expensive.
- 1.2 There can be problems with the legal aspects of access, especially if you gain access across property belonging to others. It is wise to obtain legal advice and understand the easements that may be necessary when these types of questions arise.
- 1.3 You can experience problems with the maintenance and cost of maintenance of your road. Stevens County maintains about 1500 miles of roads, but many rural properties are served by private and public roads which are maintained by individuals or by private road associations. Additionally, there are many miles of county roads that are not maintained by the county – no grading or snow plowing. There are even some public roads that are not maintained by anyone. Make sure you know what type of maintenance to expect and who will provide that maintenance.

1.4 Extreme weather conditions can destroy roads. Many roads were not built to current standards, and the combination of the weather and increased loading will result in high maintenance costs.

1.5 Many large construction vehicles cannot navigate small, steep, narrow roads. If you plan to build, it is prudent to check out construction access.

1.6 School buses travel only on maintained county roads that have been designated as school bus routes by the school district. You may need to drive your children to the nearest county road so they can get to school.

1.7 In extreme weather, even county maintained roads can become impassable. You may need a four wheel drive vehicle with chains for all four wheels to travel during those episodes, which could last for several days.

1.8 Natural disasters, especially floods, can destroy roads. A dry creek bed can become a raging torrent and wash out roads, bridges, and culverts. The repair of these private roads is the responsibility of the landowners who use those roads. Stevens County by law can only repair and maintain roads in the County Road system.

1.9 Unpaved roads generate dust when traffic reaches specific levels. As a rule Stevens County does not treat county roads to suppress the dust. Dust is a fact of life for most rural residents. If you reside near an unpaved County road, you may be able to obtain a permit from the Public Works Department to treat the road for dust suppression using a county approved contractor at your expense.

1.10 If your road is unpaved, it is highly unlikely that Stevens County will pave it in the foreseeable future. Check carefully with the Stevens County Public Works Department when any statement is made by the seller of any property that indicates any unpaved roads will be paved.

1.11 Unpaved roads are not always smooth and are often slippery when they are wet. You will experience an increase in vehicle maintenance costs when you regularly travel on rural county roads.

1.12 Mail delivery is not available to all areas of the county. Ask the postmaster to describe the system for your area.

1.13 Newspaper delivery is similarly not always available to rural areas. Check with the newspaper of your choice before assuming you can get delivery.

1.14 Standard parcel and overnight package delivery can be a problem for those who live in the country. Confirm with the service providers as to your status.

Utilities:

Water, sewer, electric, telephone and other services may be unavailable or may not operate at urban standards. Repairs can often take much longer than in towns and cities. Please review your options from the non-exhaustive list below:

2.1 Telephone communications can be a problem, especially in the mountain areas of Stevens County. If you have a private line, it may be difficult to obtain another line for fax or computer modem uses. Even cellular phones will not work in all areas.

2.2 Before you buy property you should check for septic and water availability. If sewer service is available to your property, it may be expensive to hook into the system. It also may be expensive to maintain the system you use.

2.3 If sewer service is not available, you will need to use an approved on-site septic system or other treatment process. The type of soil you have available for a leach field will be very important in determining the cost and function of your system. Have the system checked by a reliable sanitation firm and ask for assistance from Northeast Tri-County Health District (NETCHD).

2.4 If you have access to a supply of treated domestic water, the tap fees can be expensive. You may also find that your monthly cost of service can be costly when compared to municipal systems.

2.5 If you do not have access to a supply of treated domestic water, you will have to locate an alternative supply. The most common sources of water in rural areas are private wells. Private wells are regulated by the Washington State Department of Health, Division of Engineering and the Washington State Department of Ecology. The cost for drilling and pumping can be considerable. The quality and quantity of well water can vary considerably from location to location and from season to season. It is strongly advised that you research this issue very carefully. Contacts should be made with the Northeast Tri-County Health District, the Washington State Department of Health and the Washington Department of Ecology.

2.6 Not all wells can be used for watering of landscaping and/or livestock. If you have other needs, make certain that you have the proper approvals before you invest. It may also be difficult to find enough water to provide for your needs even if you can secure the proper permit.

2.7 Electric service is not available to every area of Stevens County. It is important to determine the proximity of electrical power. It can be very expensive to extend power lines to remote areas.

2.8 It may be necessary to cross property owned by others in order to extend electric service to your property in the most cost efficient manner. It is important to make sure that the proper easements are in place to allow lines to be built to your property.

2.9 Electric power may not be available in two phase and three phase service configurations. If you have special power requirements, it is important to know what level of service can be provided to your property.

2.10 If you are purchasing land with the plan to build at a future date, there is a possibility that electric lines (and other utilities) may not be large enough to accommodate you if others connect during the time you wait to build.

2.11 The cost of electric service is usually divided into a fee to hook into the system and then a monthly charge for energy consumed. It is important to know both costs before making a decision to purchase a specific piece of property.

2.12 Power outages can occur in outlying areas with more frequency than in more developed areas. A loss of electric power can also interrupt your supply of water from a well. You may also lose food in freezers or refrigerators and power outages can cause problems with computers as well. It is important to be able to survive for up to a week in severe cold with no utilities if you live in the country.

2.13 Trash removal can be much more cumbersome and expensive in a rural area than in a city. It is illegal to create your own trash dump, even on your own land. It is good to know the cost for trash removal as you make the decision to move into the country. In some cases, your only option may be to haul your trash to a solid waste transfer station landfill yourself. Recycling is more difficult because pick- up is not available in most rural areas.

2.14 The State of Washington has laws which prohibit and/or restrict the open burning of trash and yard debris. You will need to contact the Stevens County Fire Marshall, Washington State Department of Ecology and the Northeast Tri-County Health District to determine your ability to burn these types of materials on your property.

The Property:

There are many issues that can affect your property. It is important to research these items before purchasing land.

3.1 Construction of most buildings in Stevens County requires county issued building permits and inspections prior to occupancy. Depending on the building location and use, other permits and approvals may also be required, such as conditional use, zone change, and shoreline substantial development. You should verify all permits required by contacting the Stevens County Building and Planning Departments.

3.2 Not all lots or portions are buildable. The Stevens County Assessor has many parcels that are separate for the purpose of taxation that are not legal lots in the sense that a building permit will not be issued. You must check with the Stevens County Building or Planning Departments to know that a piece of land can be built on.

3.3 Easements may require you to allow construction of roads, power lines, water lines, sewer lines, etc. across your land. There may be easements that are not of record. Check these issues carefully.

3.4 You may be provided with a plat of your property, but unless the land has been surveyed and pins placed by a licensed surveyor, you cannot assume that the plat is accurate.

3.5 Fences that separate properties are often misaligned with the property lines. A survey of the land is the only way to confirm the location of your property lines.

3.6 Many subdivisions and planned unit developments have covenants that limit the use of the property. It is important to obtain a copy of the covenants (or confirm that there are none) and make sure that you can live with whose rules. Check the covenants before you buy. The County is not an advocate for property owners and does not become involved in enforcement of the private covenants. Also, a lack of covenants can cause problems with neighbors. This is a civil matter between the property owners. This County will not assist you or your neighbors in these matters.

3.7 Homeowners Associations (HOAs) are required to take care of common elements, roads, open space, etc. A dysfunctional homeowners association or poor covenants can cause problems for you and even involve you in expensive litigation.

3.8 Dues are almost always a requirement for those areas with a HOA. The by-laws of the HOA will tell you how the organization operates and how the dues are set.

3.9 The surrounding properties will probably not remain as they are indefinitely. You can check with Stevens County Planning Department to find out how the properties are zoned, find out what kind of buildings and uses are allowed, and to see what future developments may be in the planning stages. The view from your property may change.

3.10 If you have a ditch running across your property there is a good possibility that the owners of the ditch have the right to come onto your property with heavy equipment to maintain the ditch.

3.11 Water rights that are sold with the property may not give you the right to use the water from any ditches crossing your land without coordinating with a neighbor who also uses the water. Other users may have senior rights to the water that can limit your use or require you to pay for the oversizing or other improving of the ditch.

3.12 It is important to make sure that any water rights you purchase with the land will provide enough water to maintain fruit trees, pastures, gardens or livestock.

3.13 The water flowing in irrigation ditches belongs to someone. You cannot assume that because the water flows across your property, you can use it.

3.14 Flowing water can be a hazard, especially to your children. Before you decide to locate your home near an active ditch, consider the possible danger to your family.

3.15 The development of lots or portions of lots may be affected by geological hazards, frequent flooding, wetlands, streams, rivers, and lakes. Additionally, priority fish and/or wildlife habitats and species may limit the type and location of development you may perform on your property. Development constraints, extra costs, special studies and/or permits may be required for development of lots or portions of lots affected by the above physical characteristics and attributes.

Mother Nature:

Residents of the county usually experience more problems when the elements and earth turn unfriendly. Here are some thoughts for you to consider.

4.1 The physical characteristics of your property can be positive and negative. Trees are a wonderful environmental amenity, but can also involve your home in a forest fire. Building at the top of a forested draw should be considered as dangerous as building in a flash flood area. "Defensible perimeters" are very helpful in protecting buildings from forest fire and inversely can protect the forest from igniting if your house catches on fire. If you start a forest fire, you are responsible for paying for the cost of extinguishing that fire. For further information, you can contact the Washington Department of Natural Resources, the Stevens County Fire Marshall or the local Fire District.

4.2 Steep slopes can slide in unusually wet weather. Large rocks can also roll down steep slopes and present a great danger to people and property.

4.3 Expansive soils can buckle concrete foundations and twist steel I-beams. You can determine the soil conditions on your property if you have a soil test performed, or consult a geologist or geotechnical engineer.

4.4 North facing slopes or canyons rarely see direct sunlight in the winter. There is a possibility that snow will accumulate and not melt throughout the winter.

4.5 The topography of the land can tell you where the water will go in the case of heavy precipitation. When property owners fill in ravines, they have found that the water that drained through that ravine now drains through their house. Low areas will collect water when snow melts or large rain events occur. Take you're property's topology into account when siting structures and other development.

4.6 Flooding can occur, especially during spring run off. It is wise to take this possibility into consideration when developing your property or building. The county does not provide sand bags, equipment or people to protect private property from flooding.

4.7 Nature can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. Most, such as deer and eagles can be positive additions to the environment. However, even "harmless" animals like deer can cross the road unexpectedly and cause traffic accidents or consume shrubs, plants, crops or domestic animal feeds such as hay. Rural development encroaches on the traditional habitat of coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, rattlesnakes, gophers, bears, mosquitoes and other animals that can be dangerous and you need to know how to deal with them. Raccoons and coyotes will kill your poultry and pets. Deer and elk will destroy your gardens and orchards. Cougar and bear can kill your sheep, goats, hogs, cattle and horses. In general, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance and know that if you do not handle your pets and trash properly, it could cause problems for you and the wildlife. You must provide for your own protection in these situations. The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Northeast Tri-County Health District are two good resources for information. They have many free publications to help educate you about rural living.

4.8 Many areas in the County are open for hunting. Hunting, while providing recreational opportunities, is a tool for managing wildlife populations. It also involves individuals who may trespass, litter, and fire guns. Don't automatically assume that your property is in a shooting or no shooting zone. No shooting zones are designated by the Board of County Commissioners.

Agriculture:

The people who tamed this wild land on the arid east Okanogan Highlands made agriculture and livestock production an important part of our custom and culture. Owning rural land means knowing how to care for it. There are few things you need to know:

5.1 Orchardists often work long hours, especially during growing and harvest time. Orchards are often sprayed and wind machines typically are used at night and in early morning. It is possible that adjoining agriculture uses can disturb your peace and quiet.

5.2 Land preparation and other operations can cause dust, especially during windy and dry weather and affect people with respiratory problems.

5.3 Farmers occasionally burn their ditches or fields to keep them clean of debris, weeds and other obstructions. This burning creates smoke that you may find objectionable or affect any respiratory problems you may have.

5.4 Chemicals are often used in orchards and in growing crops. You may be subject to spray drift or over spray. You may be sensitive to these substances and many people actually have severe allergic reactions. Chemicals may be applied by airplanes that fly early in the morning.

5.5 Animals and their manure can cause objectionable odors. What else can we say?

5.6 Agriculture is an important business in Stevens County. If you choose to live among the orchards, farms and ranches of our rural countryside, do not expect county government to intervene in the normal day-to-day operations of your agri- business neighbors. In fact, Washington has "Right to Farm" legislation that protects farmers and ranchers from nuisance and liability lawsuits. It enables them to continue producing food and fiber.

5.7 The State of Washington has an open range law. This means that if your property is located in an open range and you do not want cattle on your property, it is your responsibility to fence them out. It is not the responsibility of the rancher to keep his/her livestock off your property.

5.8 Before buying land you should know if it has noxious weeds that may be expensive to control and you may be required to control. Some plants are poisonous to horses and other livestock.

5.9 Animals can be dangerous. Bulls, stallions, rams, boars, etc. can attack human beings. Children need to know that it is not safe to enter pens where animals are kept.

5.10 Much of Stevens County receives less than 17 inches (43cm) of precipitation per year. As a result, we have a problem with overgrazing, and fugitive dust. Without irrigation, grass does not grow very well. There is a limit to the amount of grazing the land can handle. The Stevens County Cooperative Extension office can help you with these issues.

5.11 During hot summer months there is danger from fires, especially timbered areas. You should eliminate excess vegetation to protect your homes and property.

5.12 Burning of slash piles, and logging debris can create an excess of smoke in the spring and fall.

5.13 Logging trucks often haul after dark or early in the mornings. Noise from these trucks can disturb your sleep.

In conclusion

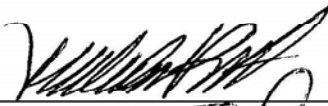
Even though you pay property taxes to the county, the amount of tax collected does not cover the cost of the services provided to rural residents. In general, tax revenues derived from commercial, industrial, agricultural and forest uses and activities in the County subsidize the lifestyle of those who live in the country by making up the shortfall between the cost of services and the revenues received from rural dwellers. This information is by no means exhaustive. There are other issues that you may encounter that we have overlooked and we encourage you to be vigilant in your duties to explore and examine those things that could cause your move to be less than you expect. We at Stevens County have offered these comments in the sincere hope that it can help you enjoy your decision to reside in the country. It is not our intent to dissuade you, only inform you. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call us.

Information Resources:

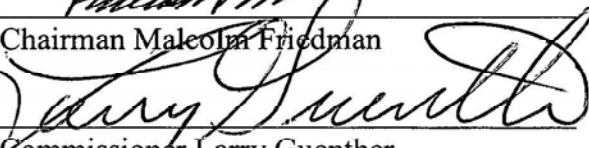
Stevens County Public Works Department	509.684.4548
Stevens County Building Department/Fire Marshall	509.684.8325
Stevens County Planning Department	509.684.2401
Stevens County Sheriff's Office	509.684.5296
Northeast Tri-County Health District (Environmental)	509.684.2262
Stevens County Cooperative Extension	509.684.2588


Adopted at Colville, Washington this 12th day of October, 2009.

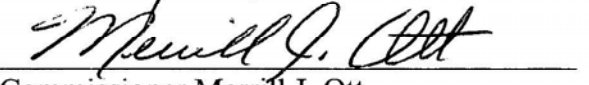
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
STEVENS COUNTY, WASHINGTON


Chairman Malcolm Friedman

Attest:


Commissioner Larry Guenther


Polly Coleman
Clerk of the Board


Commissioner Merrill J. Ott