

Okanogan County Board of Commissioners

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LIVING IN OKANOGAN COUNTY

The Okanogan Country is a very alluring place to live with its peaceful river valleys, rugged alpine mountains, lush green highlands, areas of rugged desert benches, and wide open spaces. The settlers to this area were attracted to the wide variety of opportunities afforded by the abundance of natural resources including timber, minerals, and water. It wasn't long before the timber, livestock and fruit industries became the economic mainstay. In later years, tourism became an important industry as people began to discover the many and diverse recreational opportunities offered year around such as alpine and cross country skiing in the winter and boating in the summer just to name a few. More recently an increasing number of people are finding Okanogan County an attractive place to work or retire. While the Okanogan is a pleasant, attractive place to live, the area is still in transition with much of the flavor of the old Wild West still part of the lifestyle.

LIFE IN OKANOGAN COUNTY

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

This document is not intended to dissuade you from living in the country, but it is important for you to know that life in the country is very different from life in the metropolitan area. County governments are not always able to provide the same level of service in undeveloped, rural and remote areas as they do inside urban or developed areas adjacent to the city. To that end, we are providing you with the following information to help you make an educated and informed decision when choosing to purchase or develop land outside the boundaries of incorporated cities or towns in Okanogan County.

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A C C E S S

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

- 1.1 **Emergency response times** for 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 via privately owned easements or access roads. It is wise to obtain legal advice and understand the easements that may be necessary when these types of questions arise. For more on easements see: **THE PROPERTY**, Section 3.3.
- 1.3 **You can experience problems with the maintenance and cost of maintaining your road.** Okanogan County has 1376 miles of roads which have approximately 650 miles of pavement, 726 miles of gravel (which 571 is Primitive Roads). There are some of these roads which are not maintained on a regular basis or even year around. There are some public roads which are not maintained by anyone. There are some public roads which were dedicated in Plats which have maintenance described within the Plat document. All in all, it is best to know what type of road you will be serviced by and the type and manner you will receive that maintenance.
- 1.4 **Extreme weather conditions can destroy roads.** Some public and private roads may not be built to current standards and may not be sufficient to withstand the test of time.
- 1.5 **Many large construction vehicles cannot navigate small, 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 designated as school bus routes by the school district. If you live on a private road or even on some county roads, you may need to drive your children to the nearest bus stop so they can get to school. Even so, buses travel on so many miles of roads that it is impossible to assign a higher priority to one school bus route than another. Be sure to check with your local school district.
- 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 these episodes, which could last for several days. School buses and other types of vehicles may not be able to travel during these times.
- 1.8 **Natural disaster, floods and spring thaw, can destroy roads.** Okanogan County will repair and maintain county roads. Private roads, including private subdivision roads, are the responsibility of the landowners who use those roads. A dry creek bed can become a raging torrent and wash out roads, bridges, and culverts. Residents served by private roads and/or bridges have had large bills for repairs and/or reconstruction after floods. Whichever road it is, there may be a period of time which the road is impassable.
- 1.9 **Unpaved roads generate dust.** Okanogan County does not treat roads to suppress dust. If you reside near an unpaved county road you may want to have the road treated for dust suppression. The Department of Public Works will provide the labor for this treatment if the landowner buys the material.
- 1.10 If your road is unpaved, it is highly unlikely that Okanogan County will pave it without financing by the adjoining property owners through a **Road Improvement District**. Check carefully with the Department of Public Works when the seller of any property indicates any unpaved roads will be paved.

- 1.11** **Unpaved roads are not always smooth**, often slippery when wet, and muddy during the spring thaw. You may experience an increase in vehicle maintenance costs when you regularly travel on rural unpaved county roads. Also, be aware that vehicles traveling too fast on unpaved roads contribute to the washboard and pothole problems associated with these types of roads. It can also cause excessive wear and/or damage to your vehicle. Presently, there is a county maximum speed limit of 35 mph on all county gravel roads not specifically marked otherwise.
- 1.12** **Mail delivery** may not be available to all areas of the county. Ask the postmaster to describe the system for your area.
- 1.13** **Newspaper delivery** is 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.
- 1.15** **Emergency Road Restrictions** are generally used by the Public Works Department to keep heavy traffic from damaging the paved county roads during spring thaw. If you live on a county paved road, you should expect that such restrictions will be placed on that roadway. If you need some type of heavy loads delivered to your property, plan to do it before or after that restricted time period. These restrictions can also be applied to unpaved roads if conditions warrant these measures.
- 1.16** County, State and other public agency roads exist within what are called **right-of-ways**. Generally these portions are reserved for uses consistent with roadways. The right-of-ways may substantially extend beyond the apparent physical improvements of the roadway. There may be setbacks, permits or other requirements to be considered when evaluating appropriate location of any private usage adjacent to such right-of-ways. The appropriate jurisdiction should be contacted before establishing any improvements in the vicinity of such roadways. The following are only a few examples of improvements: fences, drainage, irrigation lines landscaping, agriculture, utilities, buildings, wells, private roads and earthwork.
- 1.17** Access on to and off of County road is accomplished by a road approach. Getting to and from your property may require that you establish a new road approach, modify an existing approach, or seek other alternatives if a road approach can not be permitted because of safety/maintenance constraints. **Road Approach Permits** are subject to a fee schedule and terms. The financial burden of construction and upkeep of the road approach is your responsibility. The Public Works Department administers the permit process and will respond to your questions.
- 1.18** **Dual use roads** are designated in the winter months to allow snowmobilers to also use them. Check with the Public Works Department if you have questions and abide by the posted signage.
- 1.19** Many obstacles or problems can happen to any roadway at any time. Animals (deer, dog, livestock, etc.) can be hit by a vehicle and left in/on the road. Rocks can roll off of steep shoulder cuts. Signage to help guide you can naturally fall or be vandalized by others. If you cannot help your county by safely correcting the problem yourself, **report the problem** by using the following system:
- 1) During normal working hours, the Roadway Maintenance Shop in your area (see Helpful Telephone Numbers).

- 2) The Department of Public Works administration office in Okanogan.
- 3) After hours or for livestock contact the Sheriff's Dispatch Office at 422-7232.
- 4) For Wildlife: Contact your local Game Agent or the regional office in Ephrata at (509)754-4624.

Report all of the details whichever reporting method you use. Be aware that both the County Road Department and the Wildlife Department both have a very limited staff and are already stretched thin in regards to removing dead animals from the roadway. The County will remove a carcass from the traveled portion of the roadway to prevent a traffic hazard, but will not always be able to take the carcass out of the immediate vicinity.

- 1.20** **Roadside litter** is an increasing problem everywhere. If you would, the department would greatly appreciate you taking care of your property which adjoins the roadway. This would be for noxious weeds as well as litter. Otherwise, the Okanogan Sheriff's Office runs a summertime litter crew for the major routes. The Department of Public Works has an "Adopt the Road" program where groups of citizens do take care of certain portions of roads. You can contact the Traffic and Vegetation Control Supervisor at 422-4610 for details.
- 1.21** The roadway maintenance portion of the Department of Public Works performs many different functions throughout the year. The major effort during winter is snow and ice removal. During the better weather, various work includes (1) seal coating of existing paved roads to prevent surface deterioration; (2) new construction to improve the overall design of a road; (3) pavement striping; (4) right-of-way noxious weed control; (5) grading and drainage cleaning as well as numerous other activities. Your patience during the short delays or inconveniences you may encounter is greatly appreciated. Anytime you are in a **construction/maintenance zone**, drive slower to help protect the work crews and oncoming traffic (i.e. flying rocks, slippery conditions, etc.) and obey all traffic signs.
- 1.22** There are many miles of **primitive roads** in our county. If you choose to live on such a road, realize the possibility of increased wear and tear on your vehicle, possible impassable conditions at times, limited roadway maintenance, etc. Contact your local Area Shop or our main office for details (See Helpful Telephone Numbers).
- 1.23** There are many **different types of roads** in Okanogan County. The State Department of Transportation maintains their state routes while Okanogan County maintains their roads which are on the County Road System. Other roads include Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Federal (USFS and BLM), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Public County Roads, easements, platted roads and private drives to name a few. You can start with the Department of Public Works to determine what road and type of maintenance your property is on.
- 1.24** The Department of Public Works does use **chemicals** to treat the Noxious Weeds along the road right-of-ways. This is the most cost effective method presently available to the County. An adjacent landowner can request a yearly **no-spray agreement** at the beginning of each year if they want to have the County not spray in front of their property. These agreements need to be returned to the county prior to March 1st of each year.
- 1.25** If you rely upon the **State Highway Access** to get to your property, make sure you have

valid access rights for your property.

UTILITY SERVICES

Water, sewer, electrical, 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 list below.

- 2.1 Telephone communications can be a problem, especially in the mountainous areas of the County. If you have a private line, it may be difficult to obtain another line for fax or computer modem uses. Even cellular phones do not work in all areas.
- 2.2 If sewer service is available to your property, it may be expensive to hook into the system. It may be expensive to maintain the onsite system you use.
- 2.3 If sewer service is not available, as is generally the case in rural areas, you will need to use an approved on-site septic system or other treatment process. The type of soil you have available for a drain-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 the Okanogan County Health District.
- 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 (WSDOH) and Department of Ecology (WSDOE). 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 both the Okanogan County Health District and WSDOH. The Department of Ecology also has a role in the permitting and regulation of private wells. Some areas are restricted from even drilling a new well. You should contact these agencies before committing to a specific property.
- 2.6 Not all wells can be used for watering 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. Contacts should be made with both the Washington State Department of Health, the Washington Department of Ecology (WDOE), and the County Water Resources Department.
- 2.7 Electric service may not be readily available in every area of Okanogan County. It is important to determine the proximity of electrical power, as 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 access 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 want to build.
- 2.11 The cost of electric service is usually divided into a fee to hook up to 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. This should be discussed with the appropriate Electric Provider (Public Utilities District (PUD) or Rural Electric Association (REA)) for correct information.
- 2.12 Power outages can occur in outlying areas with more frequency than in more developed areas, particularly if power lines are difficult to access. A loss of electric power can interrupt your supply of water from a well. Interruptions in power may cause you to lose the food in the freezer or refrigerator and may cause problems with computers as well. If you live in the country it is important to be able to survive a week or longer in severe cold with no utilities.
- 2.13 Some property has no electricity and probably never will in the foreseeable future. This will severely limit the ability for any normal convenience without a private generator supply. This can become time consuming and costly.
- 2.14 Trash removal is not available everywhere in Okanogan County. Removal is generally more expensive in rural areas than in metropolitan areas. In some cases, your trash dumpster may be several miles from your home. Your only option may be to haul your trash to the disposal site yourself. Recycling is more difficult because pick-up is not available in rural areas. Check with the Okanogan County Landfill to determine who might be available to pick-up your trash. On - site disposal (bury or burn) has many restrictions. Your questions should be addressed to the Okanogan County Health District.
- 2.15 Okanogan County Landfill and Transfer Stations are owned and operated by the county. There are three transfer stations located at Twisp, Bridgeport Bar and Ellisforde. The dumping fee has been calculated to allow the total operation to be self funded. The perceived high cost is due to all the environmental restrictions which have been placed on us.

The Property

M O T H E R N A T U R E

Residents of the country 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. Homes built in forested areas face the very real potential of being damaged or destroyed by wildland fires. Trees are

not the only natural elements which can provide fuel to a wildland fire. Sage brush and open fields can quickly spread a fire with a small wind. Here are a few simple things a property owner can do to reduce the danger:

- A. Clear land around the house of excess trees and ground vegetation; a minimum of 30 foot clear of "defensible space" around structures, consisting of maintained and watered lawn, pruned shrubs and trees can help mitigate the spread of wildland fires to buildings.
- B. Replace combustible roofs and other building materials with non-combustibles; store other combustible materials such as firewood away from your house.
- C. Maintain adequate access roads and driveways and remove overgrowth and flammable vegetation immediately adjacent to the traveled roadway.
- D. Have your address posted and visible at the intersection of your driveway and the county road. Check with the County Sheriff to insure proper size.
- E. Provide a reliable water supply.
- F. Develop a fire safety plan for your home and your family.
- G. Respect the danger of fire in wildland areas by learning more about wildland fires and BE PREPARED.

If you start a wildland fire, you may be responsible for paying for the cost of extinguishing that fire.

For further information on fire safety, you can contact the Fire District servicing your area and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

- 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 soil classification map.
- 4.4 North facing slopes or canyons rarely see direct sunlight in winter. There is a possibility that snow will accumulate and not melt throughout the winter. This also leads to avalanches/slides on roads as well.
- 4.5 The topography of the land will tell you where water will go in the case of heavy precipitation. Pay close attention to these areas in order to determine how water will flow on your land and develop your land accordingly.
- 4.6 A flash flood may occur, especially during the summer months, and turn a dry gully into a river. It is wise to take this possibility into consideration when building. You need to ask if your property is in the flood zone. If it is, construct your home and outbuildings above the areas that can flood. Consult the County Planning Department before doing anything.
- 4.7 During the winter (snow) months, certain conditions make for a snow slide danger. Looking up from one of our roads can show you the danger of all that material coming down onto the road.
- 4.8 Winter and spring run-off can cause a very small creek to become a major river. Many residents use sand bags to protect their homes. The county does not provide sand, sandbags,

equipment, or people to protect private property from flooding. The Emergency Manager for the County is the Okanogan County Sheriff.

- 4.9 Nature can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. Most, such as deer and eagles, are positive additions to the environment. However, even “harmless” animals like deer can cross the road unexpectedly and cause traffic accidents. Rural development often encroaches on the traditional habitat of coyotes, bobcats, cougars, bears, rattlesnakes, raccoons, skunks, porcupines, mice, mosquitoes, ticks and other animals that can be dangerous or become a nuisance. You need to know how to deal with them safely and effectively. In general, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance. Let the animals be themselves, watch them, but avoid chasing them or allowing your pets to do so. Also know that if you do not handle your pet refuse and trash properly, it could cause problems for you and the wildlife. The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Okanogan County Health District are two good resources for information. They have many free publications to help educate you about rural living.
- 4.10 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 an area where adjacent hunting (and shooting) won’t take place. Contact the Sheriff’s Department for laws governing shooting.
- 4.11 Because of the weather changes, you can expect a summer time road to become a winter driving problem because of snow or ice conditions. Be prepared for such driving problems and react accordingly.

A G R I C U L T U R E

Okanogan County is largely an agricultural area. Much of the rural land is actively used for growing crops, feeding livestock, and providing lumber and mineral resources. Owning rural land means knowing how to care for it. There are a few things you need to know:

- 5.1 Farmers often work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Dairy operators sometimes milk without stopping and hay is often swathed or baled at night. Low-flying crop duster planes may fly overhead during irregular hours and orchardists run wind machines to circulate the air around their trees during frost season, usually in the very early morning hours. It is possible that adjoining agricultural uses may disturb your peace and quiet. Agricultural activities are exempted in the county noise ordinance.
- 5.2 Land preparation and other operations can cause dust, especially during windy and dry weather.
- 5.3 Farmers occasionally burn ditches to keep them clean of debris, weeds and other obstructions; logging operations burn slash piles. This burning creates smoke that you may find objectionable.
- 5.4 Chemicals (mainly fertilizers and herbicides) are often used in growing crops. You may be sensitive to these substances and many people actually have severe allergic reactions. Many of these chemicals are 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 Okanogan County. If you choose to live among the 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 State protects farmers and ranchers from nuisance and liability lawsuits. This enables them to continue producing food and fiber.
- 5.7 Okanogan County has areas described as "open range" (i.e. where cattle are free to roam without fencing) and "stock restricted areas." This revolves around cattle on their property. To check which area your property falls under, you need to call the Commissioners office at 422-7100 with your Township, Range and Section numbers. Other types of livestock are not governed by this law and therefore must be fenced on the owners property and off the road right-of-way. Within areas of open range, the landowner may be authorized to install cattle guards on county roads.
- 5.8 Before buying land you should know if it has noxious weeds. You will be responsible for the expense to control them. Some plants are poisonous to horses and other livestock. Herbicides are used by a various group of governmental agencies (Federal, State and County) for control purposes. Questions concerning noxious weeds should be addressed to the Okanogan County Noxious Weed Board.

Noxious Weeds affect everyone. Since Okanogan County is an agriculturally based county our livelihood depends on our natural resources. This makes the Okanogan County Noxious Weed Control Board very active promoting integrated noxious weed control programs utilizing all methods of control.

Landowners of Okanogan County pay a weed assessment tax that creates a budget, which enables us to do several things. We are able to provide free noxious weed education materials for our landowners and we are able to develop programs that will assist landowners in totally controlling their noxious weeds.

Any ground disturbance should include a noxious weed plan. Once the ground is disturbed noxious weeds will quickly invade and choke out all other vegetation. After the ground has been disturbed, reseeding with a grass mixture is highly recommended.

The Noxious Weed Office provides various free services. Our inspectors will go on site to assist landowners in developing a noxious weed plan. We also give noxious weed control recommendations including plant identifications and control suggestions.

If you are purchasing land in Okanogan County, contact our Noxious Weed Office to see if we have records on the specific parcel. It is the responsibility of the seller to inform the buyer of noxious weed infestations and control actions.

Early detection and prevention is the key to Noxious Weed control success. Please visit our web site at <http://www.okanogancounty.org/WEED.htm>

- 5.9 Animals can be dangerous. Bulls, stallions, pigs, rams, 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 Okanogan County receives less than 11 inches of precipitation per year. As a result, we may 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 Okanogan County Cooperative

Extension Office can help you with these issues if you intend to graze some type of livestock.

C O N C L U S I O N

Even though rural property owners pay property taxes to the county, the amount of tax collected does not cover the cost of the services provided to rural residents. If you examine the tax statement for that property, you will find a breakdown of each agency receiving the specific portion of the total. In general, those living in the metropolitan areas 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.

Any of the Okanogan County offices will be happy to answer any questions you may have. We have offered these comments in the sincere hope that it can help you enjoy your decision to reside in the country. If we can not answer your questions, we can refer you to the proper organization. Copies of county maps are available at our main office to help you around this great (and largest) county in Washington State.