

## 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 to purchase rural land.

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## Roads and Access

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

- 1-1 County roads are grouped into several categories ranging from maintained “county roads” to “public roads of local access”. While “county” roads are maintained by the county, maintaining public “roads of local access” is the responsibility of the adjacent land owners. Make sure you know what type of maintenance to expect and who will provide the maintenance.
- 1-2 Even the rural roads that are maintained by the county may not always be groomed year-round. Road grading may be done only during the autumn. County snow removal is done on a schedule that may mean the road is not plowed the same day as the snow flies, but may be a day or two later. If you live way out in the country, you better plan on not having anybody get to and from your place for a couple of days, or until the snowplow comes.
- 1-3 Emergency response times (sheriff, fire, medical, etc.) cannot be guaranteed. Under some extreme conditions, you may find that emergency response is extremely slow and expensive.

- 1-4 Prospective rural homeowners should check with the County Road Department to find out where their road fits into the maintenance schedule. Also, checking with schools about school bus routes is recommended. Parents may need to drive their children to the nearest school bus stop.
- 1-5 The County Road Department maintains 700 miles of county roads, only 300 of which are paved. Rural homeowners shouldn't expect that to change. Roads that are not paved now are unlikely to be paved by Waco County in the future. Likewise, expect to live with the dust generated by gravel roads, the county doesn't have the resources for dust suppression.
- 1-6 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.
- 1-7 Money for road maintenance and improvements do not come from your property taxes. Funding for maintenance comes from timber receipts and a portion of the state highway funds which are allocated to the county based on the number of vehicles registered in the county.
- 1-8 Rural dwellers who share the same road can form a neighborhood association to band together and contribute a monthly or yearly amount towards the maintenance of the road. So when the road needs gravel, they have a fund to draw from. Talk to the County Road Department if you are interested in finding out more about this.
- 1-9 Mudslides and washouts can mean extra bills for repairs and reconstruction after flooding. Extreme weather conditions can destroy roads. It is wise to determine whether or not your road was properly engineered and constructed.
- 1-10 Building a driveway also takes some advance preparation, and an access permit from the County Road Department. The builder will need to comply with specifications relating to entry onto public roads and other safety issues, as well as drainage and grade.
- 1-11 There can be problems with the legal aspects of access, especially if you gain access across property belonging to others. It is wise to understand the easements that may be necessary when these types of questions arise.
- 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 The County Planning Office must assign your address. Addresses will only be assigned for uses established legally.

## **Utility Services**

Sewer, water, electric, telephone and other services may be unavailable or may not operate at urban standards. Repairs can often take much longer. Be aware of your options .

- 2-1 Most rural properties are not connected to public sewer systems, so they will require construction of a septic system. The type of soil you have available for a leach field will be very important in determining the cost and function of your system.
- 2-2 The first step is to get a soils evaluation to determine whether it's possible to put in a drain field system on the property. To begin the approval process, a property owner needs to get an application from the Wasco County Health Department for a drainfield evaluation.
- 2-3 The County Health Department also looks at setbacks for the drainfield. A drainfield must have an adequate setback from surface water, such as ponds and streams, as well as from any well. The well has to be at least 100 feet away from the drainfield, that means any well including a neighbors.
- 2-4 Drainfields can take up on average, 7,000 square feet.
- 2-5 There are other variables to placement such as power line easements, spring locations, road cuts, and soil type which may affect placement and size of the drainfield.
- 2-6 Drainfield systems come with no guarantee and may not be suited to all the uses any urban sewer system can accommodate. Garbage disposals, for example, are hard on drainfield systems. It may be expensive to maintain the system you use.
- 2-7 The Oregon State University Extension Service recommends pumping septic systems regularly, every three years for a family of four.
- 2-8 The most common source for water on rural properties is from a water well. 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.

- 2-8 Some water uses require establishment of a water right . Residential groundwater uses are generally exempted up to the following levels: lawn or non commercial garden water of not more than one-half acre in area; water use inside of a home. If you have other needs, make certain that you have the property approval 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.
- 2-9 Being informed is the best way to avoid water conflicts and to make sure the water supply to a rural home is adequate to that home's needs. Wasco County's Watermaster can help in gathering well information.
- 2-10 The average (1997) cost to drill a well is about \$14 a foot . When drilling goes deeper than anticipated, the cost can add up.
- 2-11 It is important to determine the proximity of electrical power. It can be very expensive to extend power lines to remote areas.
- 2-12 Some areas require that power lines be located underground to protect them from the possibility of fire. This can add expense to your plans.
- 2-13 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.
- 2-14 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.. It is important to be able to survive for up to a week in severe cold with not utilities if you live in the country.
- 2-14 Trash removal can be much more expensive in a rural area. 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 is to haul your trash to the landfill yourself. Recycling is more difficult because pick-up is not available in most rural area.



## **Fire Protection**

Rural dwellers are expected to show a measure of self-reliance in protecting their home from fire.

- 3.1 When you live in a country home, fire protection is one of the first things you should think about. Not all rural areas in the county have fire protection from a rural fire protection district. The two rural fire protection districts in Wasco County are Mosier Rural Fire Protection, and Mid Columbia Rural Fire Protection District Fire. It is strongly advised that you find out if you are in a fire protection district.
- 3-2 Are you in a fire protection district? If there is not fire protection, the time to find out is beforehand so you can make necessary arrangements.
- 3-3 Wildfire protection is provided by the Oregon Department of Forestry. The Oregon Dept. of Forestry does not protect structures from fire. Fire precaution can be a burden on homeowners in terms of cost. But homeowners are asked to do their fair share in lessening the risk of a fire.
- 3-4 Even if you are in a fire protection district emergency response time varies depending on access to the property and distance. Portions of the areas within the fire protection districts are not accessible for fire trucks.
- 3-5 There are ways to increase fire prevention and make homes easier to protect in the event of a wildfire
- **Be easy to find.**- have a readable address. A lot of home are off of a long driveway. If your mailbox is on the main road post your address within 30 feet of your driveway.
  - **Be accessible** – Driveways and roads need to be able to accommodate emergency vehicles. Codes require new roads to be built to specifications that allow emergency vehicles access, but existing roads and drives should also be examined to make sure they allow access.
  - **Have defensible space** – Defensible space is an area free of burnable materials and overhanging trees close to structures. Homeowners are now advised to maintain fuel-free zones around their homes. Those are areas where combustible shrubs, firewood piles and other readily burnable items are inappropriate.
  - **Have a secure water supply** – when the electricity goes out, a well driven by an electric pump is worthless in fighting a fire. Rural residents are wise ( and sometimes required) to develop alternative water sources, such as pools, ponds, or stream access.

- 3-6 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 floodplain. “Defensible Perimeters” are very helpful in protecting buildings from forest fire and inversely can protect the forest from igniting if you house catches on fire. If you start a forest fire, you are responsible for paying for the cost of extinguishing that fire. The Planning Office requires compliance with development standards aimed at helping ensure safer homesite selection. For further information, you can contact the Oregon Department of Forestry.



## **The Property**

There are many issues that can affect your property. It is important to research these items before purchasing land. The Wasco County Planning Office is a good place to start.

- 4-1 Not all lots are buildable. The Wasco County Assessor has many parcels that are shown on maps 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 Wasco County Planning Department to know that a piece of land can be built on.
- 4-2 Easements may require you to allow construction of roads, power lines, water lines etc. across your land. There may be easements that are not easily found. Check your past deeds carefully.
- 4-3 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.
- 4-4 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.
- 4-5 The surrounding properties will probably not remain as they are indefinitely. You can check with the Wasco County Planning Office to find out how the properties are zoned and to see what future developments may be in the planning stages. The view from your property may change.
- 4-6 If you have an irrigation 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.
- 4-7 Water rights that are sold with the property may not give you the right to use the water from any irrigation ditches crossing your land without coordinating with a

neighbor who also uses the water. Other users may have senior right to the water that can limit your use.

- 4-8 The water flowing in irrigation ditches belongs to someone . you cannot assume that because the water flows across your property, you can use it.

## **Nature and Wildlife**

Residents of the county usually experience more problems when the elements turn unfriendly. Consider the following;

- 5-1 Runoff 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 bags, equipment or people to protect private property from flooding.
- 5-2 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 encroaches on the traditional habitat of coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, rattlesnakes, prairie dogs, bears, and other animals that can be dangerous and you need to know how to deal with them. In general, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance and know that if you do not handle your pests and trash properly it could cause problems for you and the wildlife. The Planning Department and Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife to help educate you about living in the wild.
- 5-3 Even if you require fencing on your property , you can do it in a way that allows passage of wildlife life such as fawns and deer without harming them. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife recommends fencing standards that make it easier for wildlife to pass through or over the fence without damaging the fence or injuring themselves. Standards for constructing deer friendly fences are available from the Planning Office.
- 5-4 Wasco County’s floodplains are what’s known as “un-numbered A zones”. That is, there is no documented base flood elevation or estimate of how high flood waters may rise in the case of a flood. The best way to truly understand the nature of a floodplain is to have an engineer provide some base elevations.