

# Introduction and Guidelines

The following chapter provides the goals and policies meant to guide growth and development in the City of Spokane through the lens of the Natural **Environment** chapter. While reviewing this document, it helps to keep a few things in mind:

- 1. PlanSpokane 2046 is NOT an entirely new document. The existing Comprehensive Plan and ongoing community engagement were the foundation of this document, along with adopted plans, state legislation, and new engagement informing proposed changes.
- 2. The current Comprehensive Plan, Shaping Spokane, can be found at shapingspokane.org. Readers may refer to that document if they wish to see the existing chapter language.
- 3. The Vision and Values, previously found in each chapter, are being combined into a single unified vision for the City. Accordingly, those sections of the chapters do not appear in this document.
- 4. Many policies in the existing plan include "discussion" below the policy. Where those discussions do not provide a better understanding or clarification of the policy, they have been removed from this new document or the language in that discussion has been incorporated into the policy language itself. These removals are not identified specifically here.
- 5. The plan has undergone a review and minor edits throughout. Terms have been updated, language has been streamlined, and many small changes have been made to increase readability and understanding. Minor wording changes aren't marked directly to make sure the proposed language is as clear as possible, but any large updates may be identified.
- 6. A range of helpful notes are provided in the sidebar to the right these are not part of the proposed text, rather they help readers understand certain proposed changes.
- 7. The <u>Climate Planning effort</u> is still ongoing and may affect the language in the chapter later on. Places where we anticipate this *might* occur will be marked with the appropriate icon (see at right).
- 8. Work towards understanding Racially Disparate Impacts and Displacement is ongoing and may likewise have an impact on the language in this chapter. Where we anticipate this happening, an icon has been included (see at right).
- 9. Some policies or goals from the past versions of the Comprehensive Plan may have been omitted. If they have been combined with other

The following icons will appear where:



General information or notation is provided, clarifying changes to the existing text.



Language was streamlined or condensed. Minor changes won't be marked.



New text or policy was added, not sourced from the current plan.



Two or more policies in the existing plan were combined into one.



A policy or language was iiii IIIII iiii added because of a change in state law requirements.



Climate and Resiliency work might impact this language in the future.



Racially Disparate Impacts or Displacement work may impact this language in the future.



Text, goals, or policies were removed—a reason will be provided.



policies or goals, there will be an icon and description in the blue margin. Where policies or goals have been removed entirely, they are listed at the end in their own section.

The currently proposed language for this chapter begins on the following page. Please be sure to note the "version date" at the bottom of the page as we anticipate future changes as this effort evolves.

# A Note on Climate and Resiliency and this Chapter

It is clear this chapter will be influenced heavily by the ongoing work related to Climate and Resiliency (see note 7 above). Reviewers should note that this chapter does not incorporate the many changes that might come from that work—as a result, please note that this chapter might change substantially between the Plan Commission review and the final incorporation of Climate policy, expected in early 2026.





# **Natural Environment**

#### Introduction

This chapter addresses the natural environment of Spokane and the surrounding region. The natural environment element includes topics such as rivers, wetlands, the urban forest, nature areas, the aquifer, clean air, shorelines, trails, energy, agricultural lands, the economy, and wildlife.

Goals and policies address restoration, protection, and enhancement of the natural environment, as well as guiding incentives, regulations, future plans, and public investments. These measures aim to bring back and maintain all that can be great in Spokane: clean rivers and streams, healthy air, natural areas with native vegetation, trails, sacred and historic sites, trees, native landforms, and citizens who understand the impacts of growth on the natural environment and the opportunities to make positive changes.

#### **Natural Setting**

Spokane enjoys an extensive natural environment for an urban area. Not many other cities have the amount of nature space and the presence of native plants and animals as Spokane. Spokane must continue to protect and enhance the natural environment to maintain and improve this region's quality of life.

### **Goals and Policies**

Goals and policies provide specificity for planning and decision-making. Overall, they indicate desired directions, accomplishments, or aims in relation to the growth and development of Spokane along with the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

#### Goal: NE-1, Water Quality

*Protect the Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer and other water sources so they continue to provide clean pure water.* 

Policy: NE-1.1, Aquifer Study

*Continue to study the aquifer and utilize strategies to remedy all sources or activities of contamination.* 

Policy: NE-1.2, Stormwater Techniques and Innovation

Encourage the use of innovative stormwater techniques, including solutions like rain gardens, Wastewater Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) tanks, and other low-impact mitigation tools that protect ground and surface water from contamination and pollution.

# Policy NE-1.3, Regional Coordination of Stormwater Quality

Coordinate with concerned regional partners and agencies for the study, creation, and adoption of new manuals and standards for stormwater quality solutions, creating options for more effective stormwater quality solutions.

# Policy: NE-1.4, Regional Water Board and Stewardship Groups

Continue to support regional watershed groups and boards, including the Spokane Aquifer Joint Board, in their efforts to conduct aquifer planning as well as allocating, monitoring, and studying responsibilities for the entire watershed.

# Policy: NE-1.5, Mining Activities

*Prohibit open pit mining that exposes the aquifer or ground water to potential contamination.* 

# Policy: NE-1.6, Natural Water Drainage

Identify and preserve areas that provide natural water drainage to accommodate future stormwater runoff while protecting surface and ground water.

#### Policy: NE-1.7, Wellhead Protection

Allow only non-polluting land uses to be developed and operated within the water recharge zones of the public water wells, as guided by development regulations and land use limitations within critical areas.

# Policy: NE-1.8, Toxic Dumping Regulations

Develop and enforce restrictions and fines for the dumping of toxic fluids in locations where they may reach the aquifer or surface waters, consistent with state and federal law.

#### Policy: NE-1.9, Sewer Requirement

Ensure that newly developed property in the city and within the City's sewer service area is connected to municipal sewer service, minimizing aquifer contamination.

# Goal: NE-2, Sustainable Water Supply and Sources

*Ensure all aquifers and water sources do not fall below sustainable recharge or flow levels.* 

#### Policy: NE-2.1, Water Conservation

Develop and implement a water conservation strategy that seeks to decreases household, commercial, industrial, and agricultural use citywide, commensurate with the true capacity of the City's water supply, including

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This policy was added following consultation with the City's Stormwater department.

NE 1.4 was broadened slightly to avoid referencing only one body/solution.



The original mention of the urban growth area was made more specific, limiting this policy to the City's service area where the City has influence.



Water conservation will be a significant topic in the Climate and Resiliency work.



incentives for drought-tolerant, native plantings and the use of innovated incentive programs.

Policy: NE-2.2, Landscaping Requirements and Incentives

Expand the use of incentives like SpokaneScape and other programs that encourage use of drought-tolerant plants and the placement of native trees and vegetation, including incentives like water bill credits and discounts.

Policy: NE-2.3, Native Tree and Plant Protection and Preservation

Preserve existing native vegetation in parks and other public lands, incorporating the placement of new native, drought-tolerant species when constructing new facilities.

# Goal: NE-3, Surface Waters

*Provide for clean rivers that support native fish and aquatic life and are healthy for recreational uses.* 

# Policy: NE-3.1, Watershed Plan

Continue to support and develop regional watershed plans in partnership with regional and local partners, concerning all watersheds that are associated with the geographic boundaries of the city and the City's service areas.

# Policy NE-3.2, Zero Pollution Industrial Parks

Develop standards and incentives for zero pollution industrial parks and uses, focusing on manufacturing that utilizes recycled and reused materials sourced from adjacent uses in the immediate vicinity.

# Policy NE-3.3, Impervious Surface Reduction

Continue efforts to reduce the installation of new impervious surface in the city, understanding that there are locations where impervious surfaces have less benefit to surface runoff and absorption, such as areas of drainage concern mapped by the City.

# Policy: NE-3.4, Wetlands

Enforce and monitor regulations that achieve no overall net loss in acreage and functions of the remaining wetland base and, over the long term, increase the quantity and quality of wetlands in the city.

# Goal: NE-4, Clean Air

*Work consistently for cleaner air that nurtures the health of current residents, children and future generations.* 



This policy has been strengthened, expanding SpokaneScape while seeking additional possible solutions.

A cross-reference to Goal NE-7 will likely be provided here, as these topics interrelate.



This policy will likely be influenced by the Climate work. This policy also has ties to Chapter 7, Economic Development.



We are considering including a map of areas of drainage concern in this chapter or, alternatively, a cross-reference to the online map.



This policy was moved here from under Goal 7 as it has relationship with both goals. A cross-reference will likely be provided.

### **Policy**: NE-4.1, Clean Heating Sources

Encourage the use of heating sources that do not negatively affect Spokane's air quality, including through continued membership and support of the Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency (SRCAA) and other similar bodies.

#### Policy: NE-4.2, Facility Review

Review and determine public benefits in comparison to the environmental impacts of new and existing public or private facilities that negatively impact the region's air quality and health of its citizens.

#### Policy: NE-4.4, Vegetation that Improves Air Quality

Plant, preserve, and encourage the use of vegetation known to benefit local air quality, concerning both urban trees and landscaping incorporated into facilities and development.

#### Goal: NE-5, Native Species Protection

Protect and enhance diverse and healthy native species, such as plants, trees, animals, and fungi, for present and future generations and respect the ecological necessity of biodiversity.

#### Policy: NE-6.1, Native and Non-Native Adaptive Plants and Trees

Encourage the use of and development of standards for using native and non-native adaptive plants and trees in landscape designs for public and private projects.

# Policy: NE-6.2, Public Native Species Application and Education

Utilize and expand programs and incentives like SpokaneScape that educate and recognize members of the public who install and maintain native planting in yards and landscaping.

#### Policy: NE-6.3, Habitat Network

Identify, purchase, preserve, and maintain existing and potential links between wildlife habitats, seeking to form a network of wildlife habitats while partnering with regional and state agencies and programs.

Policy: NE-6.4, Fish and Wildlife Protection

*Continue to identify and protect those fish and wildlife and their habitats which are identified as a priority by citizens and scientific experts.* 

Policy: NE-6.5, Protection of Adjacent Wildlife Habitats

Coordinate with adjacent jurisdictions and agencies to designate, protect, and acquire wildlife habitats that abut or straddle the city limits or the urban growth area boundary.

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SRCAA was added to this policy

as they are currently the primary agency related to this topic, though the language was broadened to allow for other actions.



The term 'citizen' was changed, as that term can be problematic in some contexts.



The topic of habitat is a regional one, thus regional agencies were added to this policy.



Landforms are a topic of Chapter 14, Shorelines as

provided.

well—a cross-reference will be

#### Goal: NE-7, Natural Landforms

Preserve natural landforms that identify and typify our region, including landforms of cultural significance.

**Policy**: NE-7.1, Landform Identification

Define, identify, and map natural landforms that typify our region and that warrant protection, including features like pine forests, views of Mount Spokane, aquifer springs, the Palouse Hills, scablands, the Spokane River Falls and rapids, basalt cliffs, Missoula flood stones, granite hillsides, basalt ponds and wetlands, camas fields, and shrub steppe drylands.

Policy: NE-7.2, Landform Protection

*Purchase or preserve lands that contain natural landforms through incentives, clustering, or the transfer of development rights.* 

Policy: NE-7.3, Rock Formation Protection

Identify and protect basalt rock formations that give understanding to the area's geological history, add visual interest to the landscape, and contribute to a system of connected conservation lands.

Policy: NE-7.4, Landforms of Cultural Significance (new)

Recognize and protect views and preservation of significant landforms and features that provide cultural value to the community and its rich tapestry of different cultures, such as views of Mt. Spokane and access to the Spokane Falls and Spokane River.

Goal: NE-8, Areas of Geologic Concern

*Recognize that some landforms and physical geologic and slope features are not suitable for development while warranting protection.* 

Policy: NE-8.1, Rock Formation Protection

Identify and protect basalt rock formations that give understanding to the area's geological history, add visual interest to the landscape, and contribute to a system of connected conservation lands.

Policy: NE-8.2, Unstable Slope Protection

Continue to map and designation areas of unstable slopes as unsuitable for development, including standards and code that prohibit development in these areas.

Policy: NE-8.3, Slope Protection

Integrate the protection of slopes with wildlife corridor and natural area designations and acquisitions.

This policy will likely have a relationship to Chapter 3, Land Use, and may move there in future reviews.



Landforms and their cultural value were a topic of recent public engagement discussions.



Geologic topics were formerly part of the landform discussion above. They have been separated out under a new goal for clarity.



#### Policy: NE-8.4, Geologically Hazardous Areas

*Continue to classify, designate, and protect Geologically Hazardous Areas as identified in the Critical Areas Ordinance.* 

#### Goal: NE-9, Agricultural Lands

*Preserve land and provide opportunities for farming that generates produce for local markets and supports the farming economy.* 

# **Policy**: NE-9.1, Agricultural Lands of Local Importance

Designate areas of the city that have been used traditionally for agricultural purposes, have at least Soils Conservation Services Class II soils or are designated prime agriculture lands, and are at least one acre in size as agricultural lands of local importance.

#### Policy: NE-9.2, Compatible Agricultural Activities

Allow agricultural activities adjacent to urban uses without compromising farmers' rights to farm their land.

#### Goal: NE-10, Sustainable Economies and Employment

Enhance and protect the natural environment while supporting a sustainable economy and incentivizing employment that enhances the natural environment.

#### **Policy**: NE-10.1, Environment and the Economy

Identify, preserve, and enhance the natural environment elements that define Spokane's quality of life and help sustain the economy, including the draw that the region's natural beauty has on those that choose to live and work here.

#### Policy: NE-10.2, Environment Supporting Businesses

*Provide incentives for businesses that restore and benefit the natural environment while providing jobs for residents.* 

#### Policy: NE-10.3, Local Business Support

Support and provide incentives for businesses that employ local people, use local materials, and sell their products and/or services locally to preserve existing businesses and reduce Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) and Greenhouse Gasses (GHG).

**Policy**: NE-10.4, Incentives for Ecologically Responsible Businesses

*Identify and provide incentives for economic activities that combine the goals and principles of economy, ecology, and social equity.* 

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Goals 9 and 10 in the existing plan were combined into NE-10 here, as they were closely interrelated.



This policy's relationship to Climate and Resiliency topics was strengthened—it may change further following that work.

# **Policy**: NE-10.5, Profit from Waste

*Recruit industries that can make use of and profit from Spokane's solid waste in a manner that minimizes or mitigates environmental impacts while maximizing reuse of materials.* 

# **Policy**: NE-10.6, Packaging Reduction

*Create and advocate legislation, education, and other means that reduce product packaging, so that waste disposal is decreased.* 

# Goal: NE-11, Natural Areas

Designate a network of natural areas (natural areas and connecting corridors), distinct from developed parks, throughout Spokane that support native habitats and natural landforms.

# Policy: NE-11.1, Identification of Natural Areas

Identify natural areas throughout the city, based on the Parks Master Plan, neighborhood input, existing city-owned parks and conservation lands, wildlife habitats, steep slopes, wetlands, floodplains, riparian areas, adjacency to county natural areas, and proximity to state parks.

# Policy: NE-11.2 Natural Corridor Links and Connections

Identify and enhance interconnections between undisturbed natural areas, understanding that protected and local species need movement corridors to successfully continue.

# Policy NE-11.3, Acquisition of Natural Areas

Acquire and protect natural areas and connecting corridors through various acquisition techniques, such as tax incentives, purchases, Spokane County Conservation Futures funds, volunteer funding drives, donations, transfer of development rights, clustering, easements, and requirements for contribution when adjacent areas develop, seeking to create a network of natural areas throughout the city.

# Policy: NE-11.4, Natural Area Paths

*Develop soft, permeable, low-impact paths in natural areas while protecting environmentally sensitive areas from encroachment.* 

# Policy: NE-11.5, The Spokane River Gorge

Continue to pursue and encourage the Spokane River Gorge as a natural area, maintaining this place as one of the region's greatest natural resources while developing connections to other important features like Riverfront Park, Latah Creek, Indian Canyon, and Riverside State Park. ANSPOK 🖄

These two policies (10.5 and 10.6) were moved here from Goal NE-4 as they relate more to this goal.

This goal exhibits close relationships to Chapter 12, Parks and Recreation. At a minimum, a cross-reference will be provided.

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This policy was lengthened to include samples of techniques formerly listed in the discussion.



Commensurate with the stronger connection language under this goal, the connection between the Gorge and other natural areas was added here.



#### Goal: NE-12, Urban Forestry

Maintain and enhance the urban forest to provide good air quality, reduce urban warming, and increase habitat.

# **Policy** NE-12.1, Street Trees

Establish standards, incentives, and requirements for the planting of street trees along all streets in the city, public or private, as well as education and standards that ensure the long-term survival and growth of those trees.

# Policy: NE-12.2, Urban Forestry Programs

Participate in the Spokane County Conservation District for urban forestry programs, protection, and maintenance while seeking to grow similar programs in the region.

#### Policy: NE-12.3, Protection Techniques

*Use incentives and acquisition to protect forested areas both on public and privately owned land.* 

#### Policy: NE-12.4, Forest Inventory Database

Maintain an inventory of the urban forest in the city's Geographic Information System and disseminate the information for decisionmakers in a useable, interactive format.

# Policy: NE-12.5, Tree Replacement Program

Develop and implement a program whereby the City maintains "no net loss" of street trees through programs and incentives for tree maintenance and replacement, while considering exemptions for emergencies and public safety.

#### Goal: NE-13, Connectivity and Access to Wildlands and Open Space

Create a citywide network of trails, sidewalks, and pathways that link regional trails, natural areas, parks, sacred and historical sites, schools, and urban centers, maximizing the social and health benefits from access to nature.

Policy: NE-13.1, Walkway and Bicycle Paths Through Natural Areas

Identify, prioritize, and connect natural places in the city with a walkway or bicycle path system that includes connections to regional trails, natural areas, soft path networks, community parks, sacred and historic sites, schools, the downtown area, and community and neighborhood centers.

#### Policy: NE-13.2, Natural Area Path Design

Design walkways and bicycle paths in natural based on qualities that make them safe, functional, and separated from automobile traffic where possible,



Missing from the original policy was discussion of maintaining trees once planted. That language has been added here.

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"No net loss" was formerly only in the discussion of this policy. It has been added to the policy itself to highlight its importance.

Language has been added to this goal and policies to make the relationship with natural areas and wildlands more overt.



The discussion has been incorporated into the body of the policy itself here.



while seeking to maintain a high level of sensitivity to the natural area and its biological value.

Policy: NE-13.3, Year-Round Use

*Build and maintain portions of natural area path systems that can be used year-round.* 

**Policy**: N-13.4, Winter Trail Network

Link soft trails, parks, and golf courses with the wider walkway and bicycle path system to develop a winter trail network.

Policy: NE-13.5, Promote the Growth of an Urban Tree Canopy

Promote policies, programs, and incentives that help the City reach its goal of 30% canopy coverage in every neighborhood by 2023, focusing first on parts of the City where tree coverage is low or missing entirely.

Goal: NE-14, Incorporating Natural Designs in Public Spaces

Develop or revitalize plazas and public spaces using local nature elements, including water, vegetation, wildlife, and landforms.

**Policy**: NE-14.1, Plaza Inventory and Improvements

Inventory existing public plazas and open spaces that lack nature elements and that are not used actively and identify natural element features that will improve them.

Policy: NE-14.2, New Plaza Design

Develop public plazas and open spaces with native natural elements and formations, such as basalt, Missoula flood stones, stream patterns, river character, native trees, and plants that attract native birds.

# Goal: NE-15, Natural Aesthetics

*Retain and enhance nature views, natural aesthetics, sacred areas, and historic sites that define the Spokane region.* 

Policy: NE-15.1, Protection of Natural Aesthetics

Protect and enhance nature views, natural aesthetics, sacred areas, and historic sites within the growing urban setting through collaboration with local Tribes, historians, organizations, and citizens to identify features to be protected.

Policy: NE-15.2, Community Education and Awareness

Coordinate with local and regional agencies and organizations to educate the community on the meaning of sacred and historic sites, fostering greater perceived value in their protection and enhancement.

This goal and its policies have been broadened slightly to incorporate more than just plazas, also considering other public spaces.



#### Policy: NE-15.3, Naming Culturally Historic Sites

Identify local nature views, natural aesthetics, sacred areas, and historic sites that define the Spokane region with the original names local historic cultures gave to them by coordinating with local Tribes.

### Policy: NE-15.4, Nature Themes

Identify and use natural themes in large-scale public and private landscaping projects that reflect the natural character of the Spokane region, incorporating features that harken to local landforms.

#### Goal: NE-16, Natural Environment Education

Educate children and the community on the value the natural environment provides to the community, engaging with the public and fostering greater stewardship.

# **Policy**: NE-16.1, Protection and Recognition

Develop a program that formally recognizes activities, development, businesses, groups, and people that contribute to the protection and improvement of Spokane's natural environment.

#### Policy: NE-16.2, Natural Environment Sources

Create a central source within city government to disseminate information on anything affecting the city's natural environment, programs to enhance the natural environment, and environmental education opportunities.

# Policy: NE-16.3, Environmental Education for Children

Educate children about the interrelationship between people and nature so that an understanding and respect for human impacts and the benefits of nature is developed.

#### Goal: NE-17, Energy Conservation

*Promote the conservation of energy in the location and design of residential, service, and workplaces.* 

# Policy: NE-17.1, Innovative Development Techniques

Encourage innovative residential development techniques that produce low energy consumption per housing unit, including development of middle housing types, solar-enhancing site orientation, earth sheltering, and the use of renewable energy sources.

# Goal: NE-18, Flood Hazards Management

*Protect life and property from flooding and erosion by directing development away from flood hazard areas.* 

A cross-reference to Policy NE-7.1 will be provided here, as they relate to each other (the themes are the same).



The relationship between this policy and middle housing has been added.

Additionally, a cross-reference to pertinent parts of Chapter 3, Land Use, is expected.



Policy: NE-18.1, Channel Migration Zone Management

Determine the channel migration zone of streams and rivers in locations within the city that have a history of flooding and ensure that the entire migration zone is maintained and protected, not only the water.

Policy: NE-18.2, 100-Year Flood Plain Reassessment

Coordinate with federal and state agencies in the reassessment of the 100year flood plain and adopt standards and mitigation that provides for adequate protection in areas where flooding is more likely.

Policy: NE-18.3, Land Acquisition & Home Relocation Program

Consider and analyze a program for the purchasing and/or relocation of homes in the 100-year floodplain, establishing those areas long-term for natural area conservation and potential movement corridors.

Policy: NE-18.4, Discourage Development in the 100-Year Flood Plain

*Discourage development and redevelopment of habitable structures that are within the 100-year floodplain.* 

Policy: NE-18.5, Public Awareness and Education

Develop a public awareness and education program for residents living within flood plains, highlighting the risks involved and ways they might mitigate some of their risk.

Policy: NE-18.6, Downstream Impacts Consideration

*Consider the downstream impacts created by development, erosion control devices, and public works projects within or adjacent to rivers and streams.* 

# **POLICIES REMOVED FROM THE TEXT:**

The following policies have been removed from the text, largely due to redundancy, unclear goals/success, and similar factors.

Policy: NE-1.4, Water Quality Report

*Prepare an annual water quality report that identifies the year's water quality and quantity and compares these to prior years.* 

Goal: NE-3, Shorelines

*Protect the natural state of shorelines while providing community access that does not negatively impact riparian habitats, fragile soils, and native vegetation.* 

This policy has been substantially rewritten to better consider the City's role in floodplain mapping and designation.



This policy is already a requirement of State law-having a policy for it is redundant.



This goal (which had no policies tied to it) is redundant with Chapter 14, Shorelines. **Policy**: NE-15.2, Natural Aesthetic Links

*Link local nature views, natural aesthetics, sacred areas, and historic sites with the trail and path system of the city.* 

Goal: NE-16, Quality of Life

Compile social, natural environment, and economic indicators of a healthy Spokane community on an annual basis, and compare them to prior years in order to assess Spokane's progress.

Policy: NE-16.1, Quality of Life Indicators

*Coordinate with other groups and agencies to develop quality of life indicators based upon what others have previously identified.* 

**Policy**: NE-16.2, Benchmark Adoption

Develop quality of life benchmarks based on identified indicators that the community wants to obtain over time.



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This policy was redundant with another policy elsewhere in the chapter, so it was omitted. (See goal NE-13.)



This goal and its policies would be better if included in Chapter 10, Social Health. These may show up there instead.