

Chapter and Policy Update

The City has completed the first round of review and edits to several Comprehensive Plan chapters. The following document provides the updated goals and policies meant to guide growth and development in the City of Spokane through the lens of the **Natural Environment** element.

As part of the [PlanSpokane 2046 Periodic Update](#), drafts of the non-technical chapters of the Comprehensive Plan are now available for public review and comment. **Please send all comments and recommendations to PlanSpokane@spokanecity.org.** We encourage the public to include the Chapter name and Goal/Policy number(s) as applicable for ease of comment consideration.

Each of the available chapters have been updated from the [current Comprehensive Plan](#) to reflect recent plans and studies, updated state legislation, and extensive community feedback, seeking to create a streamlined plan that will be easier to read and implement.

Updates throughout the draft chapters include the removal of unnecessary text as well as new, moved, or removed policies. Also included are minor edits to the language to ensure clarity and consistency throughout the Plan. Not all minor edits have been marked, but icons and notes (shown in the sidebar on the right) provide additional insight into larger changes. Any policies removed from the chapter are highlighted at the end.

Additional changes to each chapter are likely to occur based on continued [Climate Planning](#) and [Racially Disparate Impacts Analysis](#) as well as public feedback and the selection of a preferred alternative for the final Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). See PlanSpokane.org for more information on all the ongoing work for PlanSpokane 2046.

In summary, to date, this chapter has seen the following changes:

Natural Environment REPORT CARD



Action	Number of Policies
New Goals & Policies	5
Removed Goals & Policies	3
Changed Goals & Policies (Moved, Change in Direction)	6

To help track where changes have been made, 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 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.

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 and water, shorelines, trails, energy efficiency, agricultural lands, the economy, and wildlife.

Spokane enjoys an extensive natural environment for an urban area, including the presence of native plants and animals. Spokane must continue to protect and enhance the natural environment to maintain and improve this region's quality of life.

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

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 as it relates to the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

Goal: NE-1, Water Quality

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

Policy: NE-1.1, Aquifer Study

Study the aquifer and utilize strategies to remedy all sources or activities of contamination.

Policy: NE-1.2, Stormwater Techniques and Best Practices

Encourage the use of evolving best practices for stormwater, 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.



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

Policy NE-1.3, Regional Coordination of Stormwater Quality

Coordinate with regional partners and agencies for the study, creation, and adoption of new manuals and standards for stormwater quality solutions that provide for new effective methods of managing stormwater.

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 or severely limit open pit mining throughout the city, as it 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 and other contaminants 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 local aquifers and water sources stay above sustainable recharge or flow levels.

Policy: NE-2.1, Water Conservation

Develop and implement a water conservation strategy that seeks to decrease household, commercial, industrial, and agricultural uses citywide to ensure that water use does not exceed City water rights.



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.

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 Vegetation on Public Lands

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 and wetlands that support native fish and aquatic life and are healthy for recreational uses.

Policy: NE-3.1, Watershed Plan

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

Reduce 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.

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.



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.



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.

Policy: NE-4.2, Facility Review

Evaluate public and private facilities prior to permitting for their impacts to air quality prior to permitting, weighing the public benefits of the facility against its impact on regional air quality and the health of local residents.

Policy: NE-4.3, Vegetation that Improves Air Quality

Plant, preserve, and encourage the use of vegetation known to benefit local air quality, considering 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-5.1, 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-5.2, 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 drought-tolerant native planting in yards and landscaping.

Policy: NE-5.3, 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-5.4, Fish and Wildlife Protection

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

Policy: NE-5.5, 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.

Goal: NE-6, Natural Landforms

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



This policy was rewritten with the same effect/intent but to better understand the relationship with air quality.



The term 'citizen' has been removed, as that term can feel exclusionary to some.



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 well—a cross-reference will be provided.

Policy: NE-6.1, Landform Identification

Define, identify, and map natural landforms that typify our region and that may 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-6.2, Landform Preservation

Preserve lands that contain natural landforms through purchase, incentives, clustering, or the transfer of development rights.

Policy: NE-6.3, Landforms of Cultural Significance

Recognize and preserve 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-7, Areas of Geologic Concern

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

Policy: NE-7.1, Rock Formation Protection

Identify and preserve 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-7.2, Unstable Slope Protection

Map and designate areas of unstable slopes as unsuitable for development, including standards and regulations that prohibit development in these areas.

Policy: NE-7.3, Slope Protection

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

Policy: NE-7.4, Geologically Hazardous Areas

Classify, designate, and protect Geologically Hazardous Areas as identified in the Critical Areas Ordinance.

Goal: NE-8, Agricultural Lands

Preserve agricultural land and allow farming that generates produce for local markets and supports the farming economy.



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-8.1, Agricultural Lands of Local Importance

Designate areas of the city that have been traditionally used 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-8.2, Compatible Agricultural Activities

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

Policy: NE-8.3, Urban Agriculture

Allow urban agriculture within more typical urban uses where appropriate, ensuring impacts to more intense urban uses are minimized, to allow for evolving best practices in local food production and security.

Goal: NE-9, Sustainable Economies and Employment

Support a sustainable economy and incentivize employment that enhances the natural environment.

Policy: NE-9.1, 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-9.2, Environment Supporting Businesses

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

Policy: NE-9.3, Local Business Support

Support and provide incentives for businesses that employ local residents, 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-9.4, Incentives for Ecologically Responsible Businesses

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

Policy: NE-9.5, 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.



Local food production at any scale has connections to Climate & Resiliency ideals and may be updated as that work continues.



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



A cross-reference to the Economic Prosperity chapter is likely to be added here.



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



These two policies (10.5 and 10.6) were moved here from Goal NE-4 as they relate more to this goal. A cross-reference to deconstruction policy in Urban Design is likely as well.

Policy: NE-9.6, Packaging Reduction

Create and advocate for legislation, education, and other means that reduce product packaging to reduce waste disposal.

Policy: NE-9.7, Spokane's Youth and Green Economy Careers

Support the growth of the local ecologically responsible economy by providing venues, coordination, and opportunities for green businesses to connect with local youth through job training, job fairs, seminars, and other outreach events.

Goal: NE-10, Natural Areas

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

Policy: NE-10.1, Identification of Natural Areas

Identify natural areas throughout the city through park planning, 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-10.2 Natural Corridor Links and Connections

Identify and enhance interconnections between undisturbed natural areas, understanding that protected and local species need movement corridors to navigate the city.

Policy: NE-10.3, 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-10.4, Natural Area Paths

Develop soft, permeable, low-impact paths in natural areas while also protecting environmentally sensitive areas from encroachment by people and domesticated animals.

Policy: NE-10.5, The Spokane River Gorge

Protect and enhance the Spokane River Gorge as a natural area, maintaining it 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.



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



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-11, Urban Forestry

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

Policy NE-11.1, Street Trees

Establish standards, incentives, and requirements for the planting and maintenance 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-11.2, Urban Forestry Programs

Participate in and seek to grow local and regional urban forestry programs for the expansion, protection, and maintenance of the urban tree canopy.

Policy: NE-11.3, Protection Techniques

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

Policy: NE-11.4, Forest Inventory Database

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

Policy: NE-11.5, 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.

Policy: NE-11.6, Promote the Growth of an Urban Tree Canopy

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

Goal: NE-12, Connectivity and Access to Wildlands and Open Space

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

Policy: NE-12.1, 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, cultural resources and historic



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



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



This policy was added to reflect current program goals.



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.

sites, schools, the downtown area, and community and neighborhood centers.

Policy: NE-12.2, Natural Area Path Design

Design walkways and bicycle paths in natural areas based on qualities that make them safe, functional, and separated from automobile traffic where possible, while seeking to maintain a high level of sensitivity to the natural area and its biological value.

Policy: NE-12.3, Pathways for the Whole Community

Design walkways and paths in natural areas to increase access for all members of the community, including areas designed specifically to be accessible for people of all abilities.

Policy: NE-12.4, Year-Round Use

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

Policy: N-12.5, Winter Trail Network

Link soft trails, parks, and other features of the active open space system with the wider walkway and bicycle path network in Spokane to develop a winter trail network.

Goal: NE-13, Incorporating Natural Designs in Public Spaces

Develop or revitalize plazas and public spaces using natural elements, including water, native vegetation, and landforms.

Policy: NE-13.1, Plaza Inventory and Improvements

Inventory those existing publicly accessible plazas and open spaces that lack natural elements, identify natural features that could improve them, and seek to promote installation of those features.

Policy: NE-13.2, 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 and other native wildlife.

Goal: NE-14, Natural Beauty

Retain and enhance nature views, natural aesthetics, areas of cultural value, and historic sites that define the Spokane region.



This new policy was added to be inclusive of those of all abilities when designing pathways.



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

Policy: NE-14.1, Protection of Natural Aesthetics

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

Policy: NE-14.2, Naming Culturally Historic Sites

Coordinate with local Tribes to identify local nature views, natural aesthetics, cultural resources, and sacred or historic sites that define the Spokane region by the original names given to them.

Policy: NE-14.3, Nature Themes

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

Goal: NE-15, Natural Environment Education

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

Policy: NE-15.1, Protection and Recognition

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

Policy: NE-15.2, Natural Environment Information

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-15.3, Community Education and Awareness

Coordinate with local and regional agencies and organizations to educate the community on the meaning and significance of cultural and historic sites, fostering greater support for their protection and enhancement.

Policy: NE-15.4, Environmental Education for Youth

Educate youth 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-16, Energy Conservation

Promote the conservation of energy in the location and design of residential, area services, and workplaces.



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



A cross-reference to policies in the Governance and Public Participation chapter is likely to be added here.



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-16.1, Residential Development Techniques

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

Policy: NE-16.2, Resilient Development Practices

Encourage and allow for new proven technologies and best practices that increase building resiliency throughout the city for all use types, including the reuse of materials, energy efficiency, less environmentally costly materials, local building materials and supplies, and new methods for thermal insulation and structural features.

Goal: NE-17, Flood Hazards Management

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

Policy: NE-17.1, 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-17.2, 100-Year Flood Plain Reassessment

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

Policy: NE-17.3, 500-Year Flood Plain Considerations

Coordinate with federal and state agencies to explore and understand the 500-year floodplain and its effects on potential future limitations on land use and development, with an eye towards being prepared to consider the 500-year floodplain if regulations come forward concerning that area.

Policy: NE-17.4, 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-17.5, Discourage Development in the 100-Year Flood Plain

Discourage development and redevelopment within the 100-year floodplain.



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



The role of the 500-year floodplain is evolving and may become more significant in planning efforts in the future. To that end, a new policy has been added to open the door to its consideration.

Policy: NE-17.6, Public Awareness and Education

Develop a public awareness and education program for residents living within flood plains, highlighting the associated risks and ways to mitigate their risk.

Policy: NE-17.7, 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.

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.



This is already a requirement of State law—having a policy here is redundant.



This goal (which had no policies tied to it) is redundant with Chapter 14, Shorelines.



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.