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# Mineral Resource Lands



Revised November 2015

[WWW.SNOCO.ORG](http://WWW.SNOCO.ORG)

**Keyword: Assistance Bulletins**

## **Q:** What are designated mineral resource lands?

**A:** State and county regulations require the designation and conservation of agriculture, forest, and mineral resource lands. Designated mineral resource lands are lands that the county has inventoried and classified, are not already characterized by urban growth, and that have long-term significance for the extraction of minerals. Currently, 131,000 acres are denoted by the Mineral Resource Overlay (MRO) on the Future Land Use (FLU) [Map 2](#) of the Comprehensive Plan, as adopted with an effective date of July 2, 2015.

## **Q:** When and how was the Mineral Resource Overlay developed?

**A:** The development of the Mineral Resource Overlay (MRO) was a long process involving various stakeholders. Beginning in 1990, the Growth Management Act (GMA) required counties to designate their resource lands, and in 1995, county policies directed the establishment of mineral resource lands to supply the 20-year projected demand. In 1998-1999, a county-wide inventory and classification of mineral lands was completed. This inventory study identified 177,000 acres of potential mineral lands, but this amount was reduced to the current 131,000 designated acres due to several exclusion criteria. The exclusion criteria included consideration for legal, environmental, and policy conflicts such as urban growth areas, tribal lands, land located within a 300-foot Chinook salmon/Bull Trout corridor, and designated agricultural land.

## **Q:** What does the mineral resource land designation (MRO) mean?

**A:** Designated mineral resource land does not automatically imply that mining-related activities will occur there. It means that the excavation and processing of minerals is limited to lands within the MRO, and that the land is eligible for permitting of mineral operations. The MRO was developed to conserve and protect mineral lands from development and potential land use conflicts which might preclude future mineral extraction. Hence, some land use activities are restricted within the MRO.

This bulletin is intended only as an information guide. The information may not be complete and is subject to change. For complete legal information, refer to Snohomish County Code.

**Q: What are the restrictions to lands in the MRO?**

**A:** There are development and land use restrictions regarding land that is situated within the MRO and land which is adjacent to the MRO. The purpose of these restrictions is to conserve mineral lands for future extraction and to avoid incompatible land use conflicts. Subdivision and setbacks within the MRO are stricter. For example, subdivision is prohibited for parcels zoned R-5, which are entirely within the MRO. Subdivision of R-10 and R-20 zoned parcels also require the use of rural cluster subdivision, open space provisions, and adequate setbacks according to Snohomish County Code regulations.

**Q: What are mineral resources, and how are they used?**

**A:** Mineral resources are sand, gravel, and bedrock deposits that can be mined to produce raw materials known as “aggregates.” Aggregates consist of sand, gravel, and crushed stone that can be characterized and marketed according to particle size, shape, hardness, soundness, and mineralogy. In Snohomish County, precious metals, copper, and other minerals are not present in large quantities and are not a primary source of mining activities. Aggregates are heavily used to build roads, houses, buildings, and bridges.

**Q: What types of activities occur in a mining operation?**

**A:** The type of mineral extraction-related activity depends on the type of operation taking place. In sand and gravel operations, the primary activities might include, but are not limited to, mining, extracting, washing, stockpiling, transporting, and recycling of materials.

The common activities in a rock quarry operation might include, but are not limited to, mining, blasting, washing, stockpiling, crushing, transporting, and recycling of materials.

**Q: Where is the Mineral Resource Overlay (MRO) located?**

**A:** You can view the MRO on the Future Land Use Map 2 of the Comprehensive Plan. Map 2 is available for viewing or purchase from Planning and Development Services, 2nd floor of the Robert J. Drewel Building, 3000 Rockefeller Avenue, Everett, or by calling us at 425-388-3311. It is also viewable online by clicking on this [link](#).

**Q: How can I find out when and where a new mining operation is proposed?**

**A:** A notification is published in the official county newspaper when a permit within the MRO is submitted and a public hearing for the conditional use permit and a SEPA determination is scheduled.

**Q: Who do I call if I have a complaint against a mining operation?**

**A:** If you wish to report a code violation, please contact code enforcement officer, Craig Odegaard, at 425-388-3311, ext. 2296.

**Q: What types of regulations are in place in order to address environmental and community concerns?**

**A:** Snohomish County maintains a permitting process for mining operations which considers the on-site and off-site impacts of mineral extraction, processing, and transportation to ensure that they are adequately addressed and mitigated.

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A conditional use permit is the common means by which the County assesses information gathered at an open public hearing and places special conditions on the use or development of land. Conditional use permits are reviewed by the department and consider the compatibility of other permitted uses in the same vicinity and zone.

More detailed information regarding the processes, criteria, and evaluation of a conditional use permit may be found in Snohomish County Code, [Chapter 30.42C](#) Conditional Use Permits and [Chapter 30.31D](#) Mineral Conservation (MC) Zone. Some of the operational and environmental aspects addressed in a conditional use permit are: hours of operation, protection of water quality, landscaping, air quality, protection of critical areas, and noise.

The conditional (or administrative conditional) use permit is one of many local, state, and federal permits, licenses, or processes which a mining company may be required to obtain or undergo for its operation. In addition, Snohomish County regulates operations with a set of standard conditions. These conditions include: performance standards, hours of operation, landscaping, setbacks, protection of water quality, noise, blasting, air quality, and more. Please review SCC [Chapter 30.31D](#) Mineral Conservation (MC) Zone for a more detailed description.

The Department of Ecology (DOE) issues a General Permit (National Pollution Discharge and Elimination System) as required under the Federal Clean Water Act and the State Water Pollution Control Act. DOE regulates and monitors water quality issues stemming from industrial activities such as discharge of process water, stormwater, and mine dewatering water. Please review their [website](#) or contact the Northwest Regional Office at (425) 649-7000.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Earth Resources, administers the Surface Mine Reclamation Act and the Metal Mining and Milling Act. The DNR requires a reclamation permit for mines of a specific acreage and height to ensure that after mining activity ceases, the disturbed soils, vegetation, and water conditions of the site are reestablished. For more information, please contact the DNR—[Division of Earth Resources](#) at (360) 902-1454.

### **Q: Are there any notices available to inform me of mineral resource lands in my area?**

**A:** Property owners whose property is located in or within 2,000 feet of designated mineral resource land, the Mineral Resource Overlay (MRO), are notified about potential mining activity and the location of the MRO. The Snohomish County Code (SCC 30.32C.200) requires the county to send a notice ever 5 years to these property owners.

**Q:** Who can I contact for more information regarding mineral resource lands?

**A:** The following is a list of Snohomish County contacts regarding mineral resource lands:

**Land Use**

Richard Craig, Senior Planner  
Division: Long Range Planning  
Phone: (425) 388-3311 x2642  
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Division: Long Range Planning  
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**Permitting**

Paul MacCready, Senior Planner  
Division: Permitting  
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**Code Enforcement**

Craig Odegaard, Senior Code Enforcement Officer  
Division: Code Enforcement  
Phone: (425) 388-3311, x2296  
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