

### **3.16 Historic and Cultural Resources**

#### *AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT*

The property proposed for the Thurston Highlands Master Planned Community is comprised of seven parcels totaling approximately 1,240 acres. The site was previously managed by Weyerhaeuser Company for commercial timber production. As a result of the forest practices use, the majority of the site surface has been disturbed to depths of 3 to 5 feet during tree planting and harvest activities. The property is surrounded by rural lands in Thurston County, residentially-developed land within the Yelm City limits, and the Fort Lewis Military Reservation, owned and operated by the United States Army.

The Yelm area is largely a “prairie” setting. Historically, the prairie was the crossroads of Native American trails leading north, and east over the Cascade Mountains. The trails were utilized by Native Americans, fur traders, American settlers, and eventually the Northern Pacific Railroad. Prior to Euro-American settlement in the mid-1880s, the prairie was utilized by the Nisqually People for various food resources. After European settlement of the region, most of the area was homestead or ranch land. Extensive logging has occurred in forested areas (ENSR 2006; Kreutzer, et al. 1994; and Dugas and Larson 1998).

Because this property is located within an area used by Native American Tribes in the past, there is a possibility of discovering cultural materials even though much of the property has been largely disturbed by past logging practices.

The Thurston Highlands site has not been surveyed for possible archaeological or historic sites (personal communication with Rob Whitlam, and visit to the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, August 7, 2006). Remnants of a possible farmstead were found in an area located off-site but in the vicinity, suggesting a settlement time frame in approximately the early 1920s. A home listed on the Washington Historic Register dating construction to 1893 is also located nearby.

Evidence of ancient permanent settlement would not be expected on the project site, as it is located a considerable distance from the Nisqually River and other geographic features typical of habitation sites. However, the wetlands and topography on the property could have been used for gathering cultural materials and natural resources.

Communications with staff representatives of the Nisqually Indian Tribe did not indicate significant likelihood of former Native American use of the Thurston Highlands site; however, these representatives offered training opportunities on what to look for during construction (personal communication with Joe Cushman, Planning Director, and Clark Halverson, Water Resources, Nisqually Indian Tribe, May 18, 2006; and personal communication with Thor Hoyte, Nisqually Tribal Attorney, October 2, 2006).

#### *POTENTIAL CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS*

##### **Full Build-Out Conceptual Land Use Alternatives**

The potential to encounter presently unknown historic or cultural resources would be greatest during earthwork activities to implement any of the conceptual land use alternatives. Essentially the entire site – with the exception of large wetland complexes and their buffers, and an area of mature forest habitat to be preserved – would be cleared of “reprod” Douglas fir trees

and significantly graded to accommodate the mixed-use development proposal and road construction (KPFF Consulting Engineers 2008).

### **Phase 1 Development Concept**

Potential impacts during construction within the Phase 1 development area would be similar to those described above for full build-out, though on a smaller scale, as this area constitutes approximately 28 percent of the site (351 of 1,240 acres). On a proportional basis, however, a larger amount of land area within Phase 1 would be undisturbed, as the Wetland H complex and mature forest habitat to be preserved occur within this area of the site (see Figure 3.4-3 in Draft EIS Section 3.4).

### **No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no potential for impacts to historic or cultural resources on the Thurston Highlands site, if any are present.

#### *POTENTIAL DEVELOPED-CONDITION IMPACTS*

### **Phase 1 and Full Build-Out Conceptual Land Use Alternatives**

There would be no anticipated potential for impacts to historic or cultural resources in the developed condition of any of the conceptual land use alternatives, as ground-disturbing activities would only be expected to occur during construction.

### **No Action Alternative**

Given that there are no known sites of cultural or historical significance on the Thurston Highlands site that would be altered or eliminated by the proposed project, potential developed-condition impacts under the No Action Alternative would not differ from those described above related to construction.

#### *MITIGATION MEASURES*

*Incorporated Plan Features.* The Conceptual Master Site Plan that is the subject of this Environmental Impact Statement is not yet developed to a level of detail that addresses how unanticipated discoveries of historic or cultural resources would be handled during construction; however, applicable regulations and standards of practice would be followed.

*Applicable Regulations and Commitments.* The developer will be required to prepare a plan of action prior to initiating ground-disturbing activities, describing procedures to be followed in the event that suspected archaeological or cultural resources are found during earthwork activities. In the event that historic or cultural sites or materials are encountered, work would be stopped in the area, and the Nisqually Indian Tribe and Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation would be contacted immediately to assess the discovery. If suspected human remains are found, work in the vicinity must be suspended, the area secured, and the Thurston County Medical Examiner contacted to assess the remains. If the remains are Native American, interested Tribes, including the Nisqually and Squaxin Island Tribes, must be informed. A plan for treatment of the remains would then be developed by parties with jurisdiction.

*Other Recommended Mitigation Measures.* Contractors should be trained in how to recognize cultural or archaeological resources during earthwork activities in the event that a qualified archaeologist or Tribal representative is not on-site during earthwork activities. Staff representatives of the Nisqually Tribe have offered to provide this training (personal communication with Joe Cushman, Planning Director, and Clark Halverson, Water Resources, Nisqually Indian Tribe, May 18, 2006; and personal communication with Thor Hoyte, Nisqually Tribal Attorney, October 2, 2006).

*SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS*

In the absence of any known historic or cultural sites on the property, and with the proposal to comply with applicable regulations and standards of practice for exercising care and observation during ground-disturbing activities, no significant unavoidable adverse impacts to cultural or archaeological resources are anticipated.

