# Clark County Agricultural Resource Lands Study

## Clark County Council Work Session

November 12, 2025

ECO northwest

# Today's Purpose

- Explain state requirements.
- Discuss methodology.
- Review of key findings.

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# Purpose of this Agricultural Land Study

- Identify agricultural resource lands countywide as required by the Growth Management Act[1] prior to any agricultural designation changes.

- ECO conducted a technical analysis of agricultural land using criteria from WAC 365-190-050 to inform policy decisions by Clark County Council

[1] RCW 36.70A.130(5)

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# Guidelines for Ag Lands Studies

Goal 8 of the Growth Management Act (GMA) prioritizes conservation of agricultural land as a driver of the County economy

**Criteria** (per WAC 365-190-050(3)):

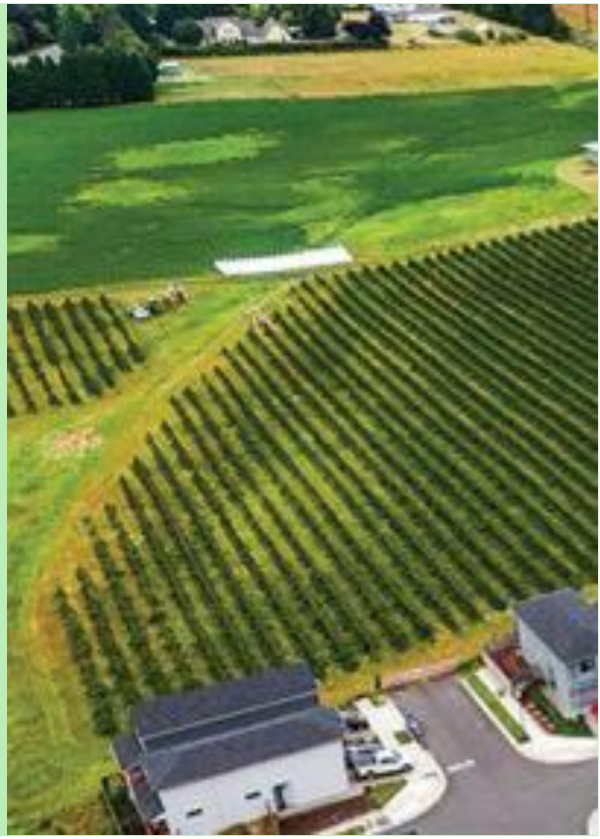
a) **Not characterized by urban growth** (per UGA code[1])

b) **Used or capable of being used for agricultural production** (soils)

Required

c) **Has long-term commercial significance** (11 discretionary criteria)

Discretionary





[1] WAC 365-196-310

# WAC 365-190-050(3)(c): Commercial Significance

**11 discretionary criteria** for determining long-term commercial significance:

i. Soils
ii. Availability of Public Facilities
iii. Tax Status
iv. Availability of Public services
v. Proximity to Urban Growth Areas
vi. Predominant Parcel sizes
vii. Land Use Settlement Patterns
viii. Nearby Land Use Intensity
ix. History of Nearby Land Development
x. Alternative Land Values
xi. Proximity to Markets

# Agricultural Lands Study Overview

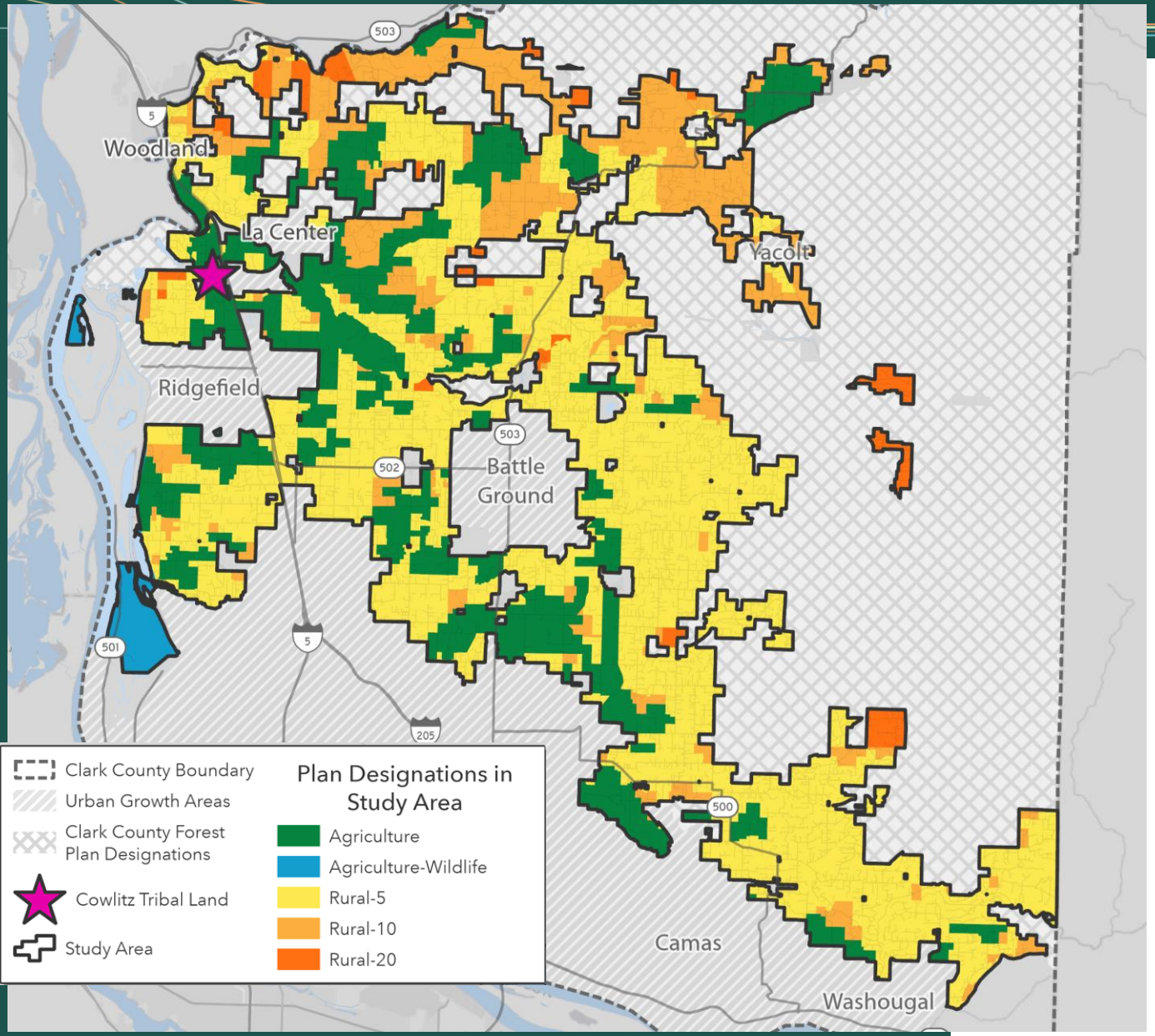
## Analytical Methodology:

1. Define study area
2. Identify land used for or capable of agricultural production
3. Map and analyze WAC criteria indicators of long-term agricultural commercial significance.

## Public Engagement:

- Open Houses
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Commission Meetings
- Reviewed written materials submitted into the record

# Study Area




## Designations Included:

- Agriculture (AG-20, AG-WL)
- Rural (R-5, R-10, R-20)

## Excluded:

- Urban Growth Areas
- Rural Centers
- Forest and Mineral Resources
- Cowlitz Tribal Land

| Study Area Acres by Designation Type | # of Acres | % of Acres |
|---|---|---|
| Agriculture | 32,589 | 25% |
| Rural (Non-Agriculture) | 97,941 | 75% |
| **Total within Study Area** | **130,531** | **100%** |

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# Agricultural Capability

# WAC 365-190-050(3)(b): Agricultural Production Capability

**WAC 365-190-050(3)(b):**

*In determining whether lands are* ***used or capable of being used for agricultural production, counties and cities shall use the land-capability classification system of the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service*** *as defined in relevant Field Office Technical Guides. These eight classes are incorporated by the United States Department of Agriculture into map units described in published soil surveys, and are based on the growing capacity, productivity and soil composition of the land.*

| Class | Suitability for Farming |
|---|---|
| 1 | Highest Suitability |
| 2 | |
| 3 | Higher Suitability for Farming |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |
| 6 | Lower Suitability for Farming |
| 7 | |
| 8 | Lowest Suitability for Farming |



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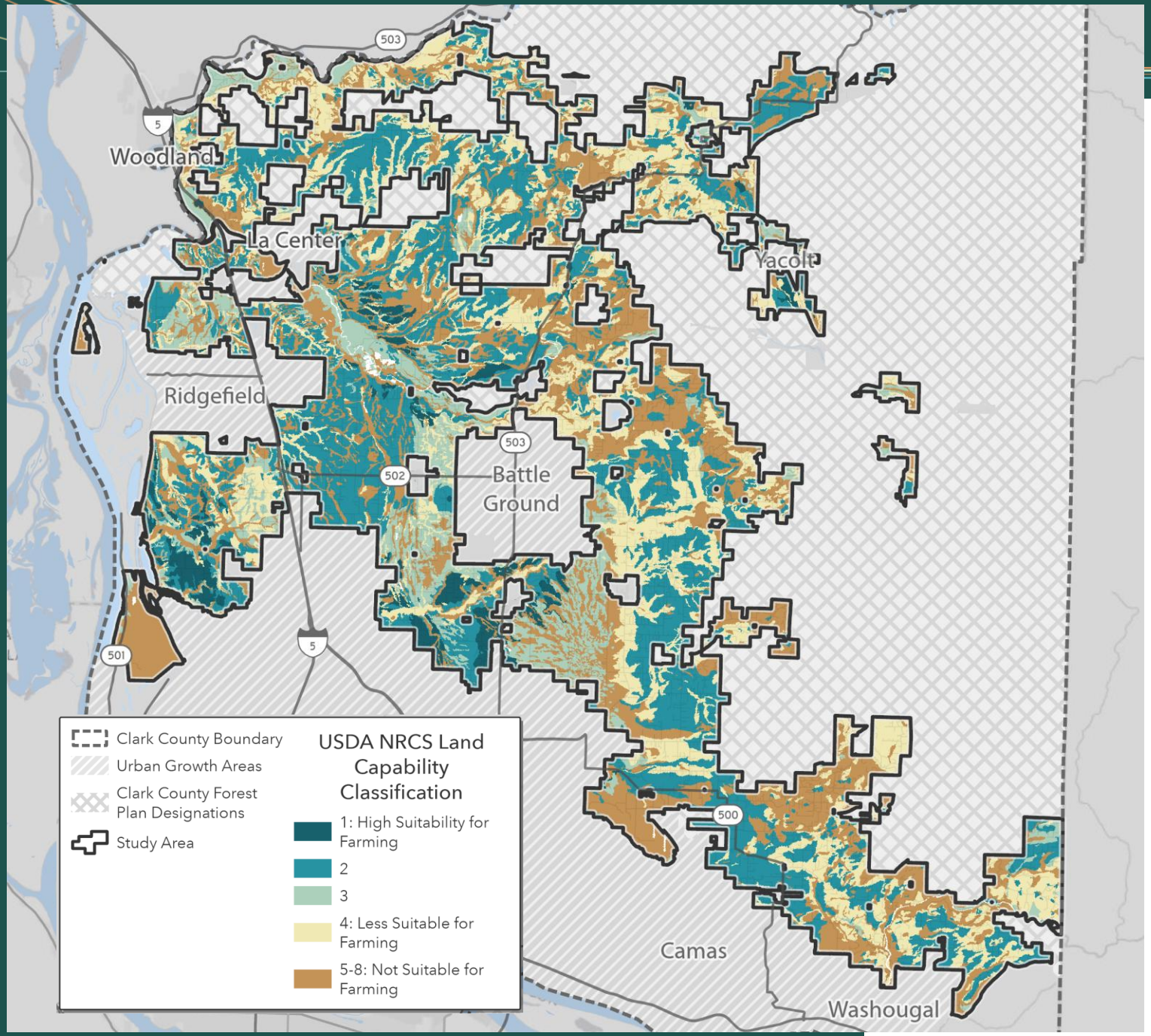
# *Lands are used or capable of being used for agricultural production*

| "Used" | "Capable" |
| --- | --- |
| **Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA)** | **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** |
| Agricultural Land Use Layer | Land Capability Classification (LCC) |
| *What is actively being farmed* | *What is capable of being farmed* |

# USDA NRCS Land Capability Classifications




**Source**: USDA National Resources Conservation Service (https://nrcs.app.box.com/v/soils/folder/233393842838)

**What It Shows:** NRCS land capability classifications show agricultural suitability and physical limitations.

**Takeaway:** Most lands suitable for farming, with ag designations containing a similar share of suitable land (69%) as the overall study area (69%)

| Soil Capability Classifications Across Study Area | # of Acres | % of Acres |
|---|---|---|
| **Agricultural Designations** | **32,589** | **25%** |
| Suitable for Farming | 20,542 | 16% |
| Not Suitable for Farming | 12,047 | 9% |
| **Non-Agricultural Designations** | **97,941** | **75%** |
| Suitable for Farming | 69,157 | 53% |
| Not Suitable for Farming | 28,784 | 22% |
| **Total within Study Area** | **130,531** | **100%** |

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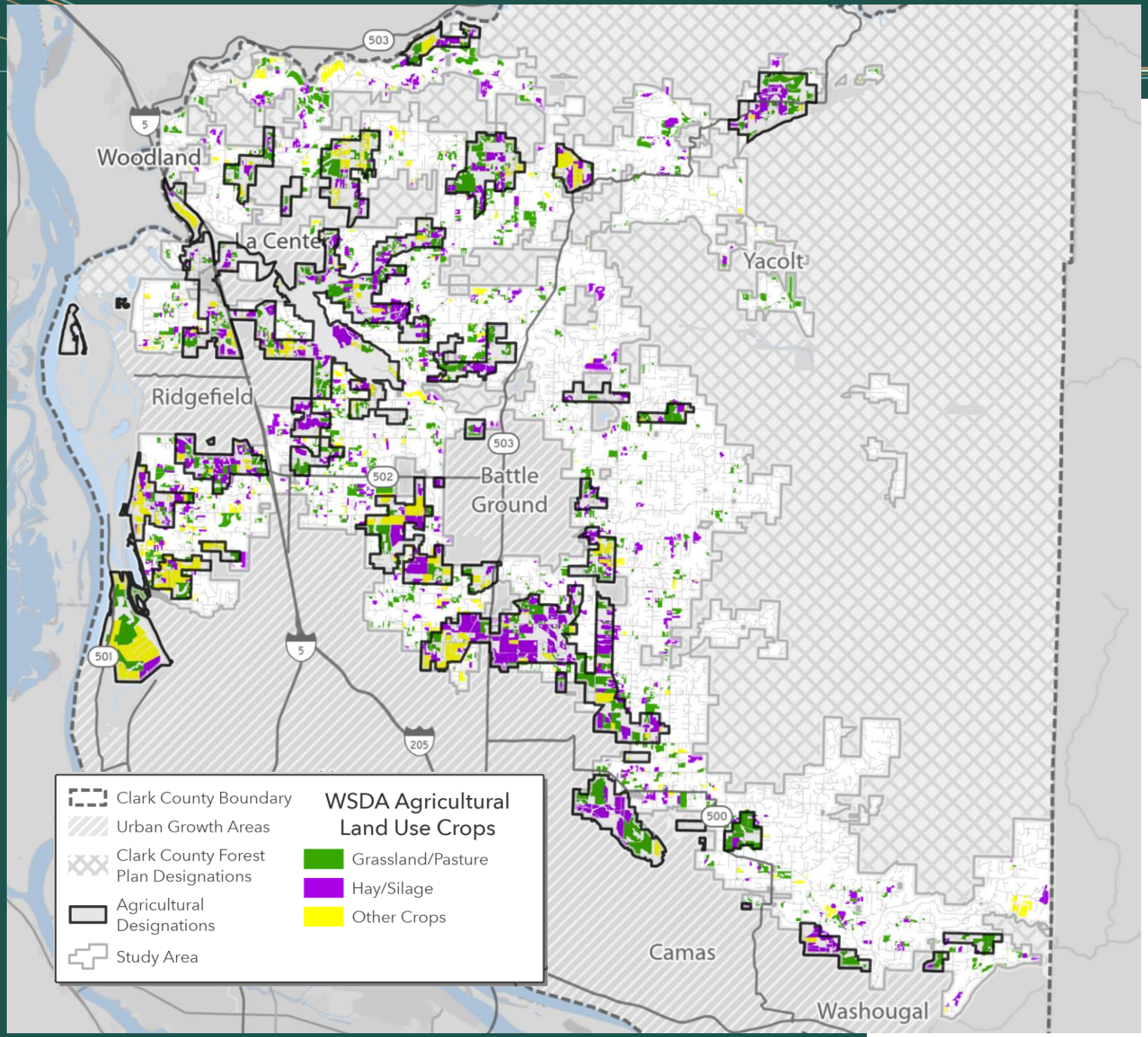
# Why use the Land Capability Classification?

- Ensures consistency with WAC 365-190-050(3)(b)
- Combine with additional data to address limitations noted by Advisory Committee.
- Allows for use of prime farmland and farmlands of statewide importance as indicators of long-term commercial significance.
  - What is the difference between the LCC and farmland classifications?
  - LCC = Evaluates land with considerations for geographic constraints (slopes, risk of erosion, etc)
  - Farmland classifications = Evaluates soil health assuming all constraints mitigated under best farm management practices

# State of Washington Agricultural Layer




**Source:** WA Dept. of Agriculture

**What It Shows**: Crop Coverage by Type

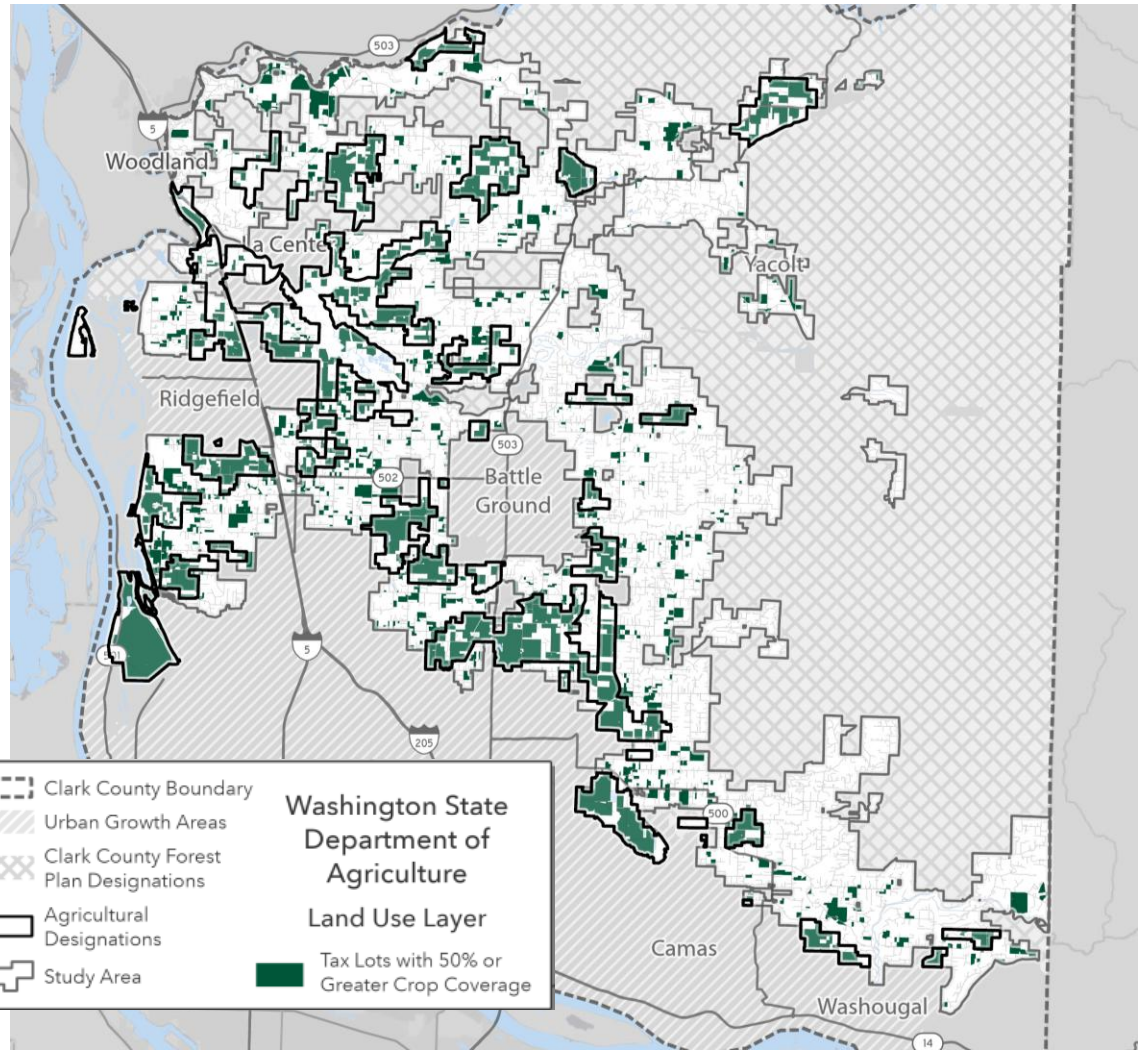
## Key Takeaways:

- 20% of study area is actively being farmed
- Nearly 2/3 of all farmed acres are within an agriculture designation

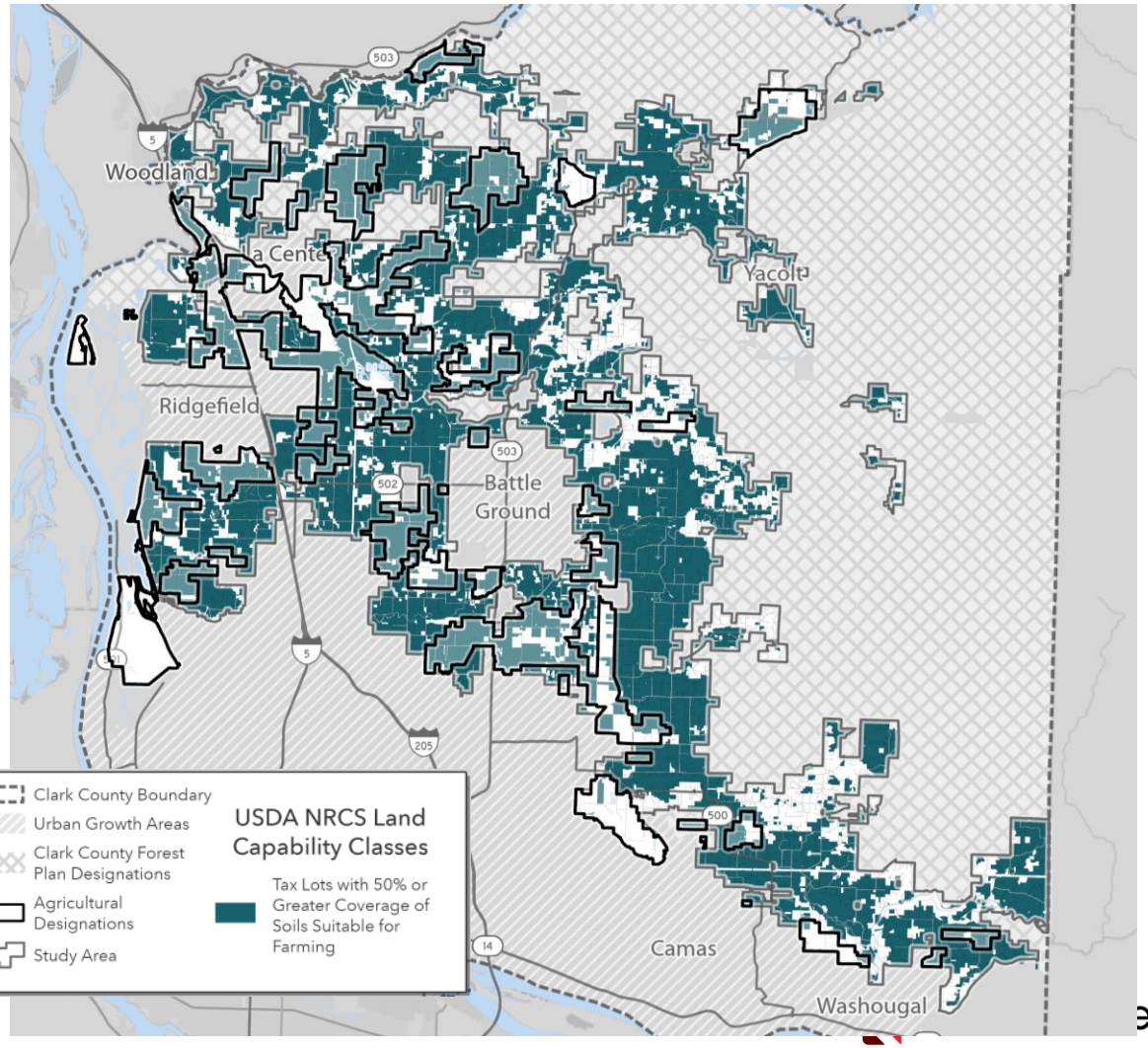
| Crop Type | Crop Acres | Share of Crop Coverage |
|---|---|---|
| **Total Crop Area** | **25,973** | 100% |
| Agricultural Designations | 16,061 | 62% |
| Pasture | 6,145 | 24% |
| Hay/Silage | 6,307 | 24% |
| Other Crops | 3,609 | 14% |
| Non-Agricultural Designations | 9,912 | 38% |
| Pasture | 5,298 | 20% |
| Hay/Silage | 3,168 | 12% |
| Other Crops | 1,445 | 6% |
| **Total Study Area** | **130,531** | **20%** |

# Comparison of Agricultural Capability Layers

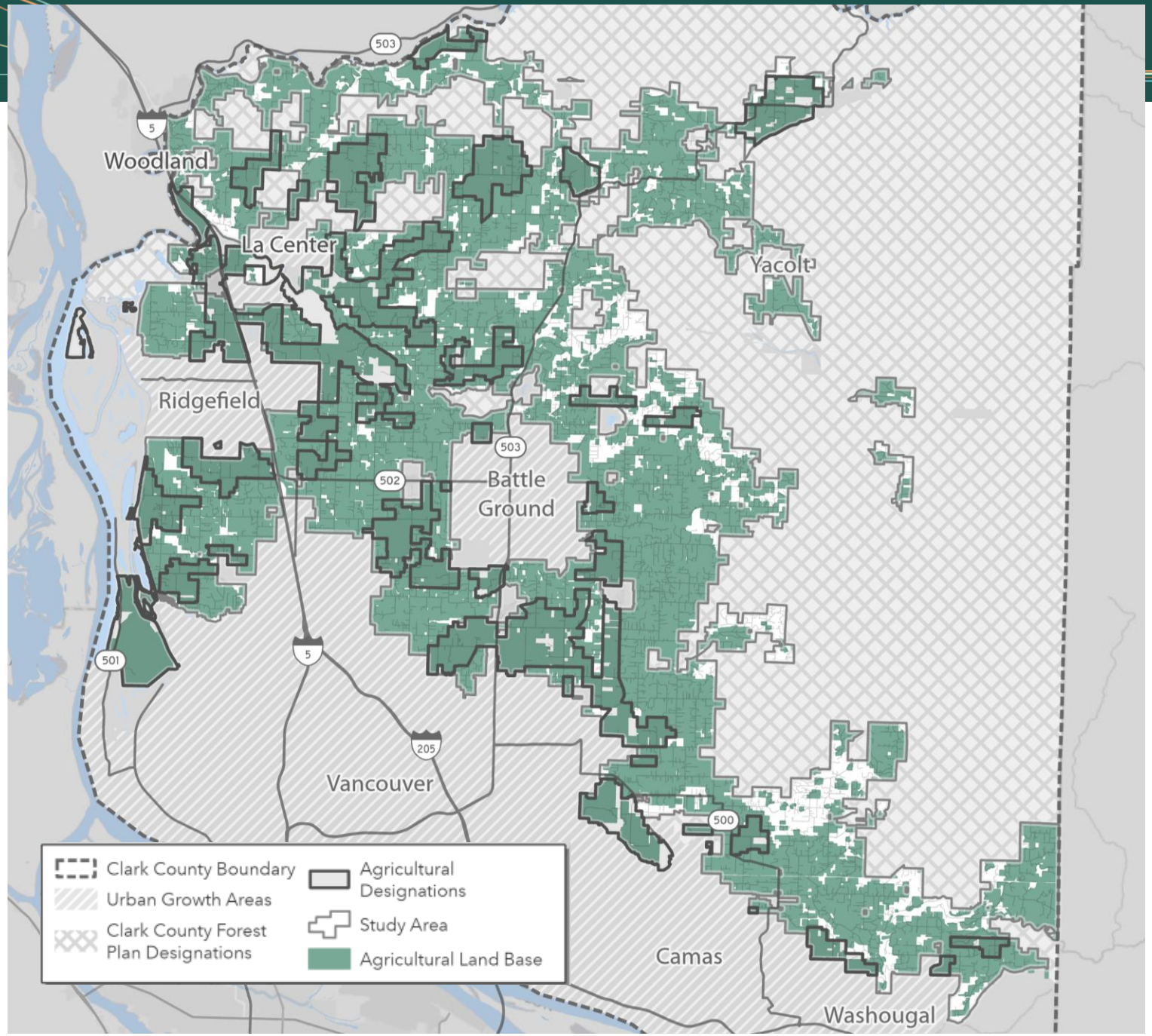
**"Used"**




**"Capable"**



# Final Agricultural "Land Base"




Establishes area on which long-term commercial significance criteria are applied.

Combines LCC higher-suitability areas with WSDA crop coverage.

Land base determined by parcels with at least 50% coverage from LCC **or** WSDA agricultural data.

**Takeaways:**

- 78% of study area meets test of used or capable of being used
- 86% of agricultural designations meet capability test
- 72% of land base is not in agricultural designation

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# Long-term Commercial Significance

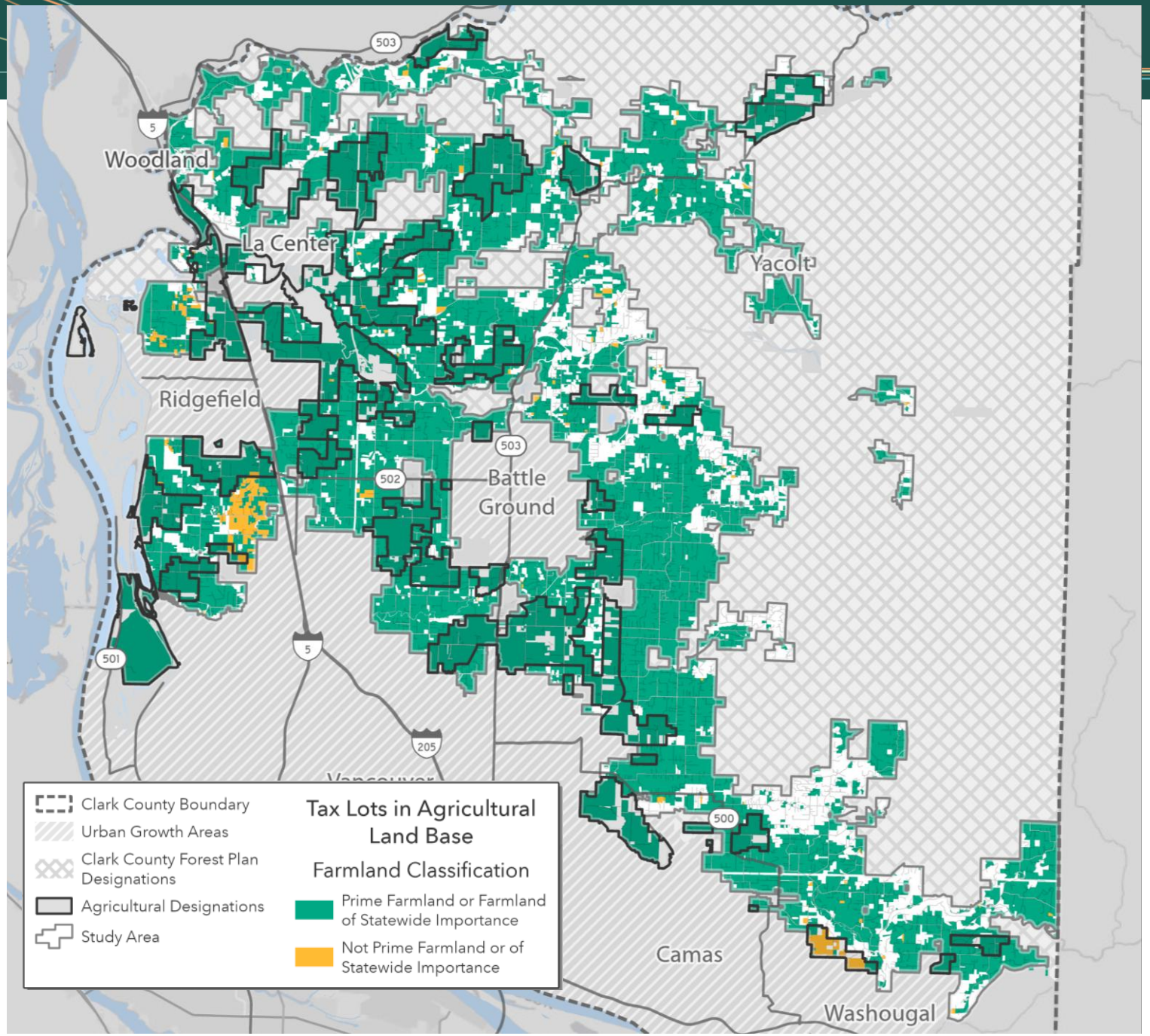
# WAC 365-190-050(3)(c): Commercial Significance

WAC criteria chosen as factors for determining long-term commercial significance:

i. Soils

iii. Tax Status

vi. Predominant Parcel sizes




# Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance

## What it measures:

Ease of agricultural production in optimal conditions based on soil characteristics

## Why is it an important indicator of commercial significance?

- Higher Profitability (Yield vs. Cost)
- Crop choice flexibility (supporting long-term commercial viability)
- Lower Risk, Higher Resilience

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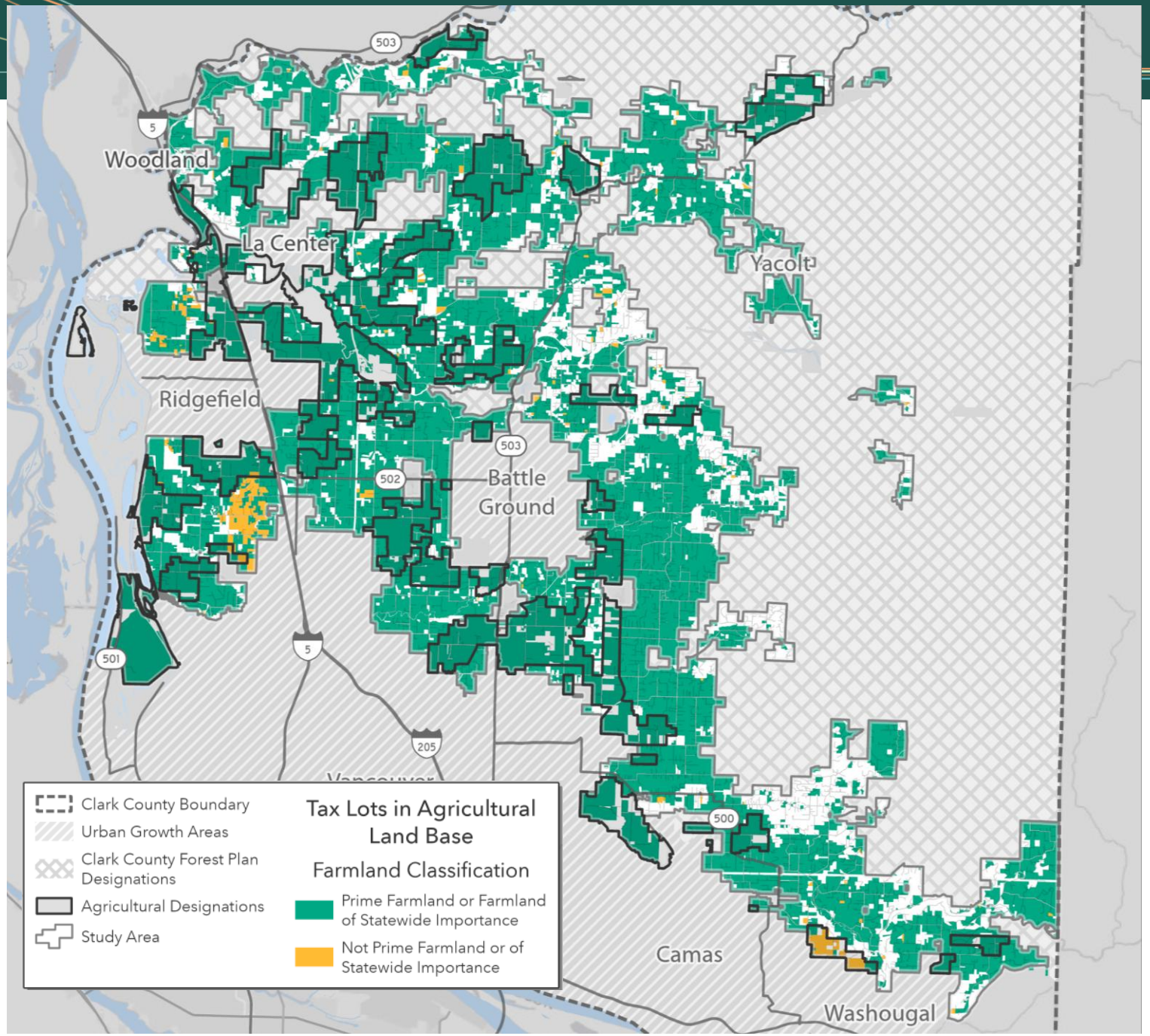


# Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance

## Key Takeaways:

- High-quality soil is a widespread asset, found in 98% of the land base and 96% of agriculture designation.
- 54% of Prime/Statewide acres in agricultural designations are on size conforming lots (20+ acres), compared to only 24% in the overall land base.

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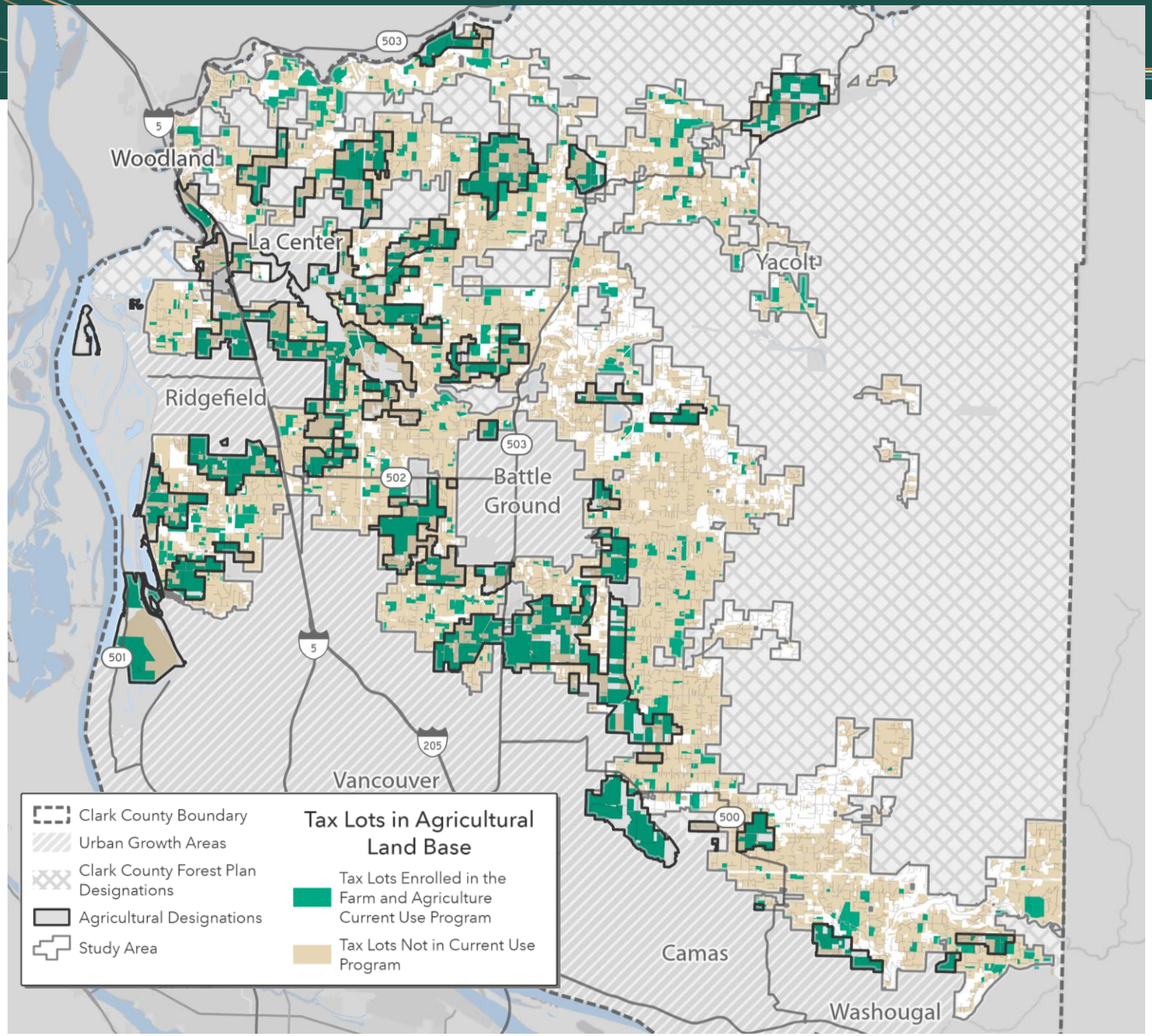
# iii. Tax Status




## Tax lots enrolled in Farm & Agricultural Current Use Program

**What it is:** Tax incentive for land in agricultural use based on farm income

**Why is it an important indicator of commercial significance?**

- Potential indicator of farm infrastructure
- *Caveat: income threshold is low, making a less reliable indicator*

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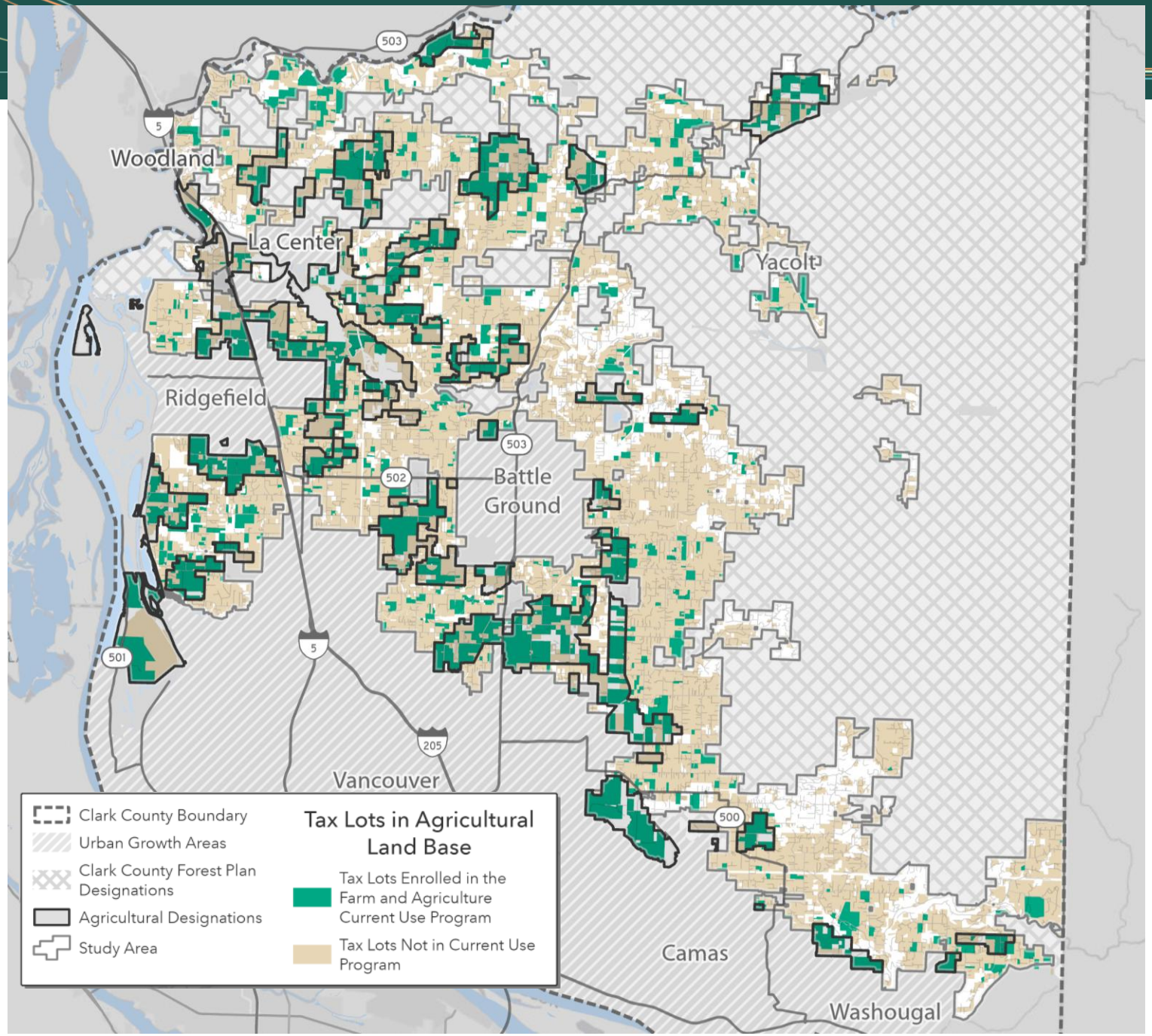
# iii. Tax Status




## Tax lots enrolled in Farm & Agricultural Current Use Program

### Key Takeaways:

- Stronger association between land designations and Current Use Program enrollment (32% of tax lots and 55% of acres) than in the land base (9% of tax lots and 25% of acres).
- Points to a possible indication of greater stability for farm investment

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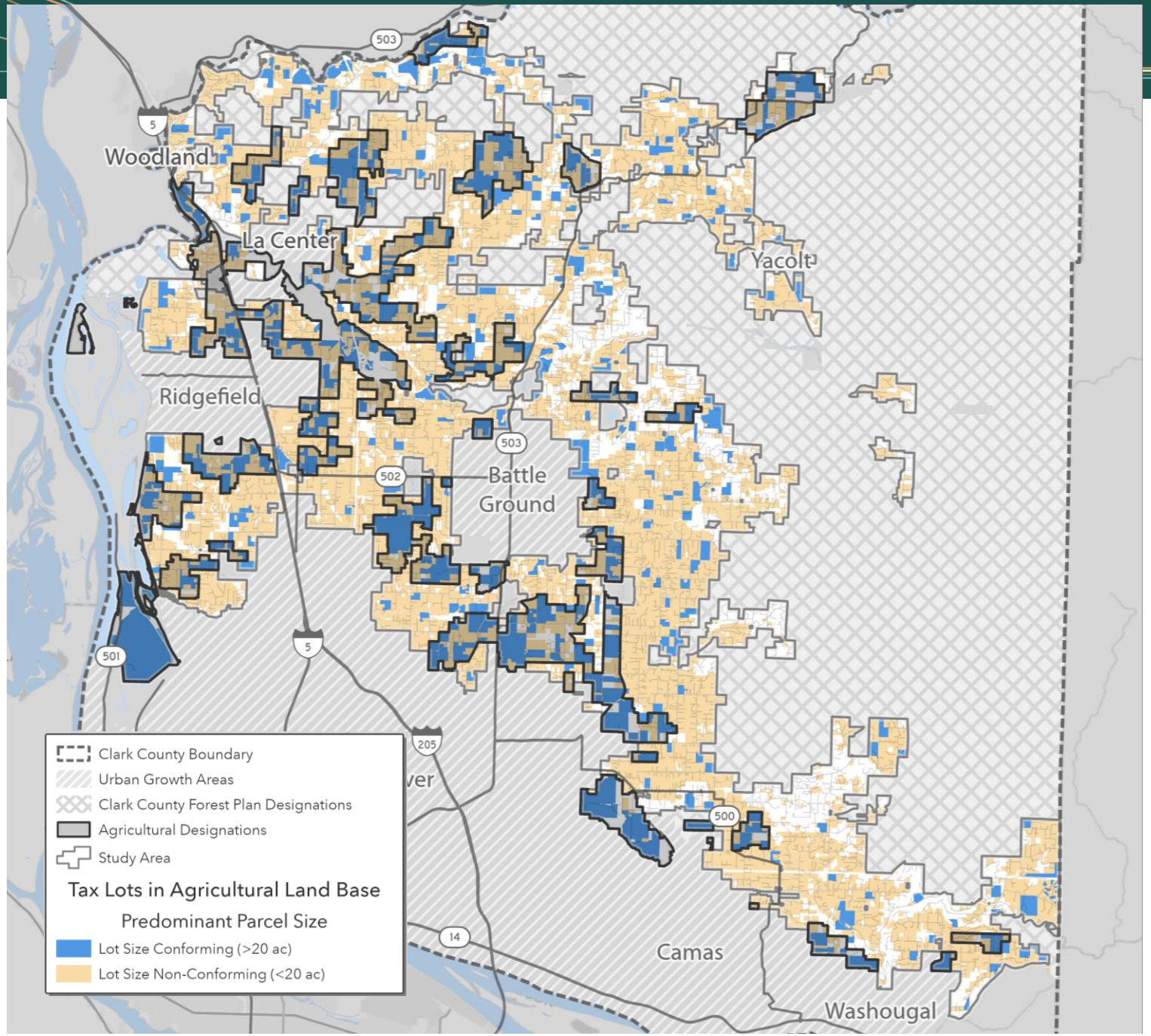
# vi. Predominant Parcel Size




## Why is it an important indicator of commercial significance?

- Identifies conformance with minimum lot size requirements of agriculture land designations
  - *Caveat: smaller parcels may pre-date current lot size requirements*
- Larger parcels better suited for some agricultural uses
  - *Caveat: does not account for consolidated ownership of contiguous parcels*

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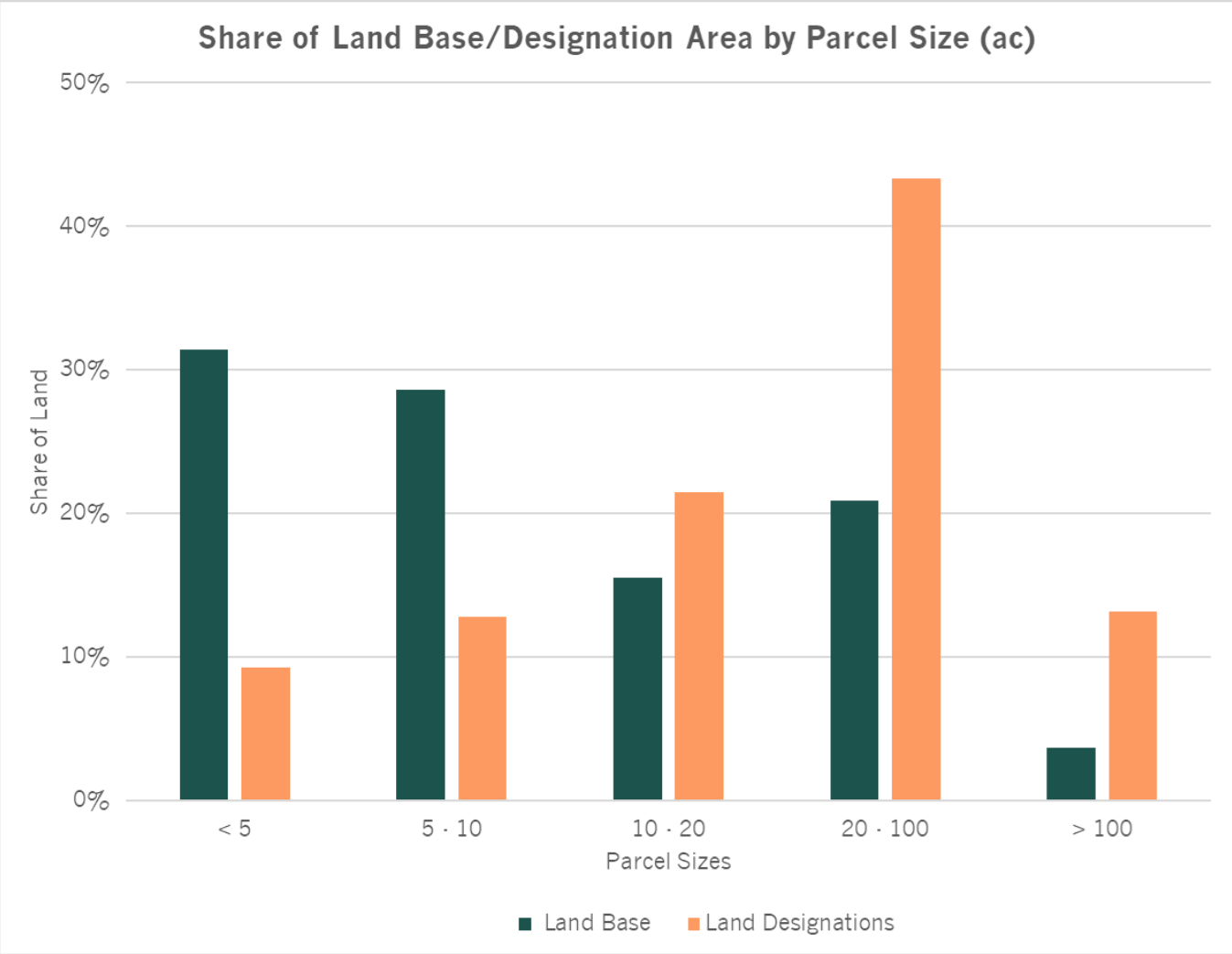
# vi. Predominant Parcel Size




## Key Takeaways:

- Agricultural land base is dominated by smaller parcels with 75% of acres in **non**-size conforming parcels (<20 acres)
- Within current Agricultural designations, 56% of total acreage **are** in non-size conforming parcels.
- Within land base that is **not** in agricultural designations, 87% of its area is in non-size conforming parcels.



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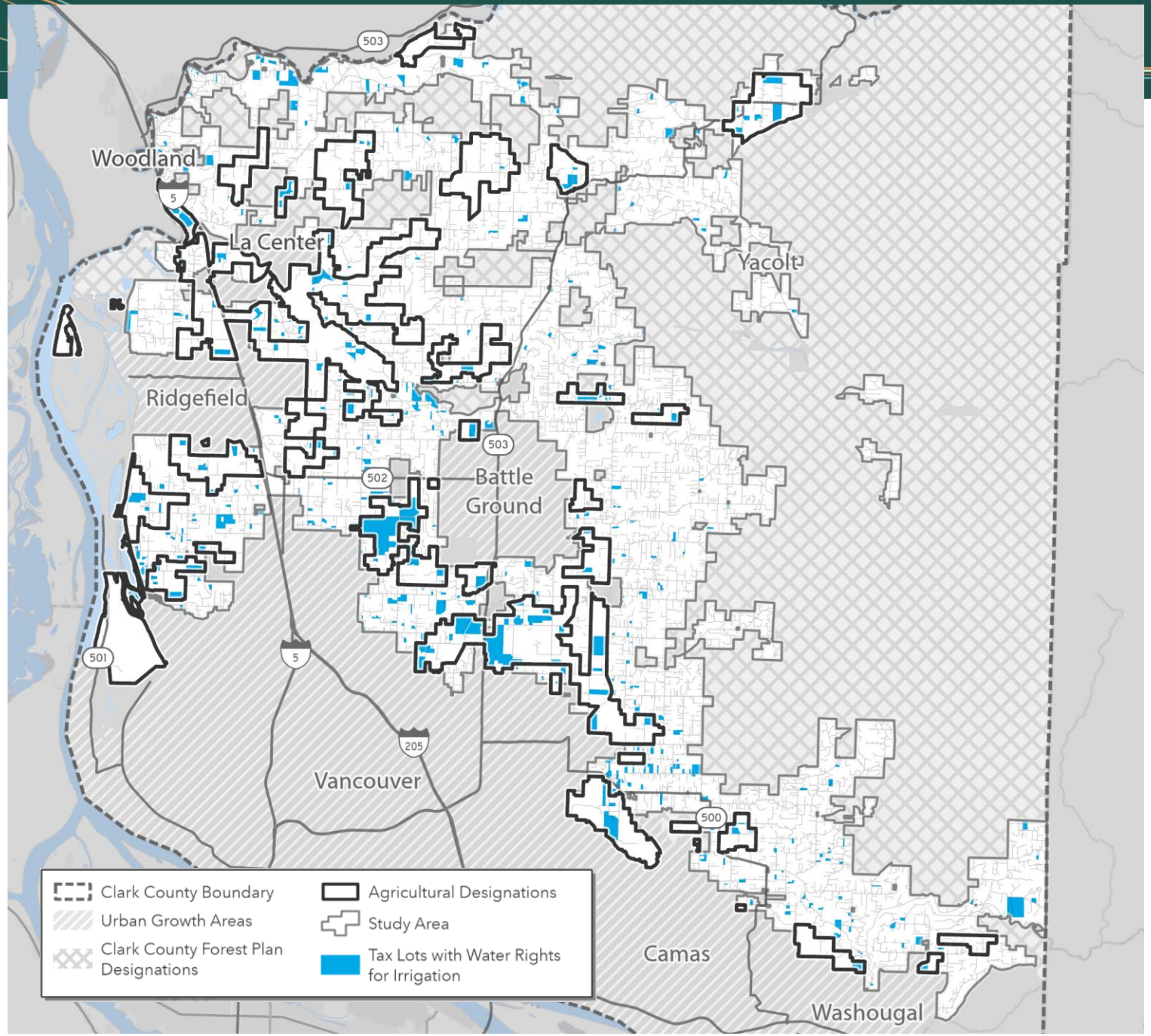
# Water Rights




**Water rights and irrigation have been highly discussed in feedback from Agriculture Commission and in public engagement as a clear sign of commercial significance within Clark County, even though they are not listed as a WAC criterion.**

**Concerns include:**

- Conversion of agricultural land with water rights
- Dryland farms that do not need water rights
- Water rights can be very difficult to obtain

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# Key Takeaways

| WAC Criteria of Commercial Significance | # of Parcels | # of Acres | % Acres of Area |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Agricultural Land Base (Totals)** | **18,420** | **101,844** | |
| **Soils** | | | |
| Parcels with >= 50% Prime Farm or of Statewide | 18,108 | 99,932 | 98% |
| **Tax Status** | | | |
| Parcels Enrolled in Current Use Program | 1,608 | 25,962 | 25% |
| **Predominant Parcel Size** | | | |
| Parcels less than 20 acres | 17,733 | 76,871 | 75% |
| Parcels more than 20 acres | 686 | 24,973 | 25% |
| **Agricultural Designations (Totals)** | **2,625** | **32,589** | |
| **Soils** | | | |
| Parcels with 50% or More Prime Farm or Farmlands of State Significance | 2,519 | 31,366 | 96% |
| **Tax Status** | | | |
| Parcels Enrolled in Current Use Program | 829 | 17,991 | 55% |
| **Predominant Parcel Size** | | | |
| Parcels less than 20 acres | 2,172 | 14,189 | 44% |
| Parcels more than 20 acres | 453 | 18,400 | 56% |

**Comparing current agricultural designations to identified agricultural land base:**

- High-quality soils prevalent in both
- Lower prevalence of Current Use Program enrollment on parcels within identified total agricultural land base than within current agricultural designations
- Higher prevalence of non-size conforming parcels (<20 acres) within identified total agricultural land base than within current agricultural designations