

Welcome to Grant County



Code of the West

The Code of the West was first chronicled by the famous western writer Zane Grey. The men and women who came to this part of the country during the westward expansion of the United States were bound by an unwritten code of conduct. The values of integrity and self-reliance guided their decisions, actions and interactions. In keeping with that same spirit, we offer this information to help citizens of Grant County who wish to follow in the footsteps of those rugged individualists and live outside the metropolitan area.

The general wording of this document is based on a work by John Clarke, Commissioner of Larimer County, Colorado.

Introduction

Living in the country is very different from living in a metropolitan area. County governments are not always able to provide the same level of service in undeveloped, rural and remote areas as they do inside urban or developed areas adjacent to the city. To that end, we are providing you with the following information to help you make an educated and informed decision when choosing to purchase or develop land outside the boundaries of incorporated cities or towns or the developed metropolitan areas in Grant County.



Table of Contents

County History	Page 4
Access	Page 6
Utility Services	Page 8
The Property	Page 9
Mother Nature	Page 11
Agriculture	Page 13
Conclusion	Page 14
Important Phone Numbers	Page 16



County History

One of the youngest Washington counties, Grant County was named after Ulysses S. Grant, Civil War general and eighteenth President of the United States. The county was established in February 1909 by an act of the state legislature and signed by Lieutenant Governor M.E. Hay, acting on behalf of Governor Samuel G. Cosgrove, who was ill.

During the territorial days of the 1850s, stock raising was the principal industry in Grant County. Thousands of cattle and horses roamed the country's grassy hills during the summer. In winter, they could be found in the lowlands of the Columbia River and surrounding basin. By the 1880s, however, the cattle and sheep gave way to agricultural production as the county's primary industry.

During the 1880s, Grant County was opened to homesteading by President Grover Cleveland. Numerous towns were platted during this period as people streamed into the county. Fertile soil and abundant sources of surface and ground water promoted the development of fruit orchards. Large orchard tracts sprang up around towns like Moses Lake, Stratford, Grant Orchards, Coulee City, Quincy, and Trinidad. During this period, tree production – mostly apples – peaked at around 1,000 to 1,200 carloads per harvest.

By laying tracks across Grant County between the late 1880s and the early 1900s, several major railroads provided transportation vital to rapid growth and expansion in the county. The Great Northern, the Northern Pacific, and the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroads provided the means of transporting agricultural products, machinery, supplies, transcontinental passengers and mail into the county.

Most of the gains made during the late 1880s and early 1900s, however, were soon erased. Coinciding with the post-World War I depression, severe and prolonged droughts hit the region. In Grant County, crops failed, the bottom fell out of the agricultural market, and many farmers were forced to abandon their land.

It was not until 1933, after much prodding and debate that the United States Congress intervened. It did so by authorizing construction of the Grand Coulee Dam. The act, however, was not without condition. County landowners were assured no irrigation water until they organized irrigation districts and agreed to pledge a certain dollar sum per acre based on soil quality.

In February of 1939, an election was held to create the first of three irrigation districts which formed the Columbia Basin Project. The Quincy Columbia Basin Irrigation District included more than half the irrigable land in Grant County. The move was successful, as were those to form the East and South Districts a few months later. Consequently, the county was able to irrigate its land with much needed water from the Grand Coulee Dam.

During World War II, Moses Lake became the home of Larson Air Force Base, a training facility for American bomber pilots and their crews. With the conclusion of the war, the base became the primary defense outpost for both the Hanford site and Grand Coulee Dam. It also served as both a testing and outfitting center for the Boeing Company's B-52s and KC-135s until 1962. The base was decommissioned in 1965 with the property becoming the jurisdiction of the Port of Moses Lake.

In terms of agriculture, the Columbia Basin Project's overall plan calls for 1,095,000 acres of irrigated land (60 percent of which lies in Grant County), of which 673,000 acres have been brought under irrigation to date. The extensive irrigation project has fueled steady growth in Grant County's agriculture industry. The county's agricultural success has subsequently fueled growth in complementary industries such as food processing and wholesale trade and trucking. Furthermore, inexpensive electricity from Grant Coulee Dam, Wanapum and Priest Rapids Dams has attracted and retained a solid manufacturing presence in the county.



Access

Access to rural property is not always available, and when it is available, it is not always smooth or without delay.



- **Emergency response times** for the sheriff, fire suppression, medical care, etc. cannot be guaranteed. Under some extreme conditions, emergency response may be slow and expensive.
- **There can be problems with the legal aspects of access**, especially if you gain access across property belonging to others via privately owned easements or access roads. It is wise to obtain legal advice when these types of questions arise.
- **You can experience problems costs associated with maintaining your road.** Grant County maintains over 2,500 miles of roads, but many rural properties are served by privately-owned access roads, maintained by homeowners associations, private parties or other landowners. Some primitive roads are not maintained by the County year round (no grading or snow plowing), and some public roads and right-of-ways that are not maintained by anyone. Make sure you know what type of maintenance to expect and who will provide the maintenance.
- **Extreme weather conditions can destroy roads.** Public and private roads not built to current standards may not be able to withstand the test of time and the combination of weather and use may result in high maintenance costs.
- **Many large construction vehicles cannot navigate small, narrow roads or bridges.** If you plan to build, it is prudent to check out construction access.

- **School buses travel** only on maintained County roads designated as school bus routes by the school district. You may need to drive your children to the nearest County road or bus stop so they can get to school. Check with your local school district to confirm bus routes.
- **In extreme weather, even County maintained roads can become impassable.** Consider that you may need a four-wheel drive vehicle to safely travel during extreme conditions. School buses may not travel at all during such times.
- **Natural disasters**, especially floods, can destroy roads. A dry creek bed can become a raging torrent and wash out roads, bridges, and culverts. Grant County, by law, can only repair and maintain County roads. Private roads, including private subdivision roads, are the responsibility of the landowners.
- **Unpaved roads generate dust.** Grant County does not treat roads to suppress dust. If you reside near an unpaved road you may be able to obtain a permit to treat the road for dust suppression using County approved contractor at your expense. Call the County Public Works Department for information.
- **If your road is unpaved**, it is highly unlikely that Grant County will pave it without financing by you and the adjoining property owners. If the seller of any property indicates unpaved roads will be paved, confirm by calling the County Public Works Department.
- **Unpaved roads are not always smooth**, are often slippery and muddy when they are wet. Travel on rural unpaved roads can increase vehicle maintenance costs and even cause damage to your vehicle. Potholes and washboards usually are created by traffic traveling too fast on unpaved roads.
- **Mail delivery** is only made on well-maintained County roads. Ask the postmaster to describe the system for your area.
- **Newspaper delivery** is not always available to rural areas. Check with the newspaper of your choice before assuming you can get delivery.
- **Standard parcel and overnight package delivery** can be a problem for those who live in the country. Confirm with the service providers as to your status.
- **Canals and Canal Operations and Maintenance Roads** are not for public use or hunting access. The Irrigation Districts use these roads to maintain the irrigation system serving our farms. Keep yourself, your children, and your pets/livestock away from the canals and waste ways; they can be dangerous.

Utility Services

Water, sewer, electrical, telephone and other services may be unavailable, may not operate at urban standards, and repairs may take longer than in cities. Monthly surcharges may be added to cover costs of extending municipal services to rural areas.

- **Telephone communications** can be a problem. If you have a private line, it may be difficult to obtain another line for fax or computer modem use. Cell phones may not work in all areas.
- **If sewer service** is available to your property, it may be expensive to hook into the system. It may be expensive to maintain the onsite system you use.
- If sewer service is not available, as can be the case in rural areas, you must use an approved **on-site septic system** or other treatment process. The type of soil you have available for a leach-field will be very important in determining the cost and the function of your system. Have the system checked by a reliable sanitation firm and ask for assistance from the Grant County Health District (GCHD).
- **If you have access to a supply of** treated domestic water, the tap fees can be expensive. You may also find that your monthly service can be costly when compared to municipal systems.
- **If you do not have access to a supply of** treated domestic water, you will have to locate an alternative supply. The most common source of water in rural areas is a private well. Private wells are regulated by the Washington State Department of Health, Drinking Water Division (WSDOH). The cost for drilling and pumping can be considerable. The quality and quantity of well water can vary considerably between locations and seasons. It is strongly advised that you research this issue very carefully. Contacts should be made both with the GCHD and the WSDOH. The Washington State Department of Ecology (WDOE) also has a role in the permitting and regulation of private wells, and can provide additional input.
- **Not all wells can be used for watering landscaping and/or livestock.** If you have other needs, make certain that you have proper approvals before you invest. It may also be difficult to find enough water to provide for your needs even if you can secure the proper permit. Contacts should be made with both Washington State Department of Health and the Washington State Department of Ecology.
- **Electric service** may not be readily available in every area of Grant County. It is important to determine the proximity of electrical power, as it can be very expensive to extend power lines to remote areas.
- It may be necessary to cross property owned by others in order to extend electric service to your property in the most cost efficient manner. It is important to make sure that the proper easements are in place to allow lines to access your property.

- **Electric Power** may not be available in two-phase and three-phase service configurations. If you have special power requirements, it is important to know what level of service can be provided to your property.
- If you are purchasing land with the plan to build at a future date, you run the risk that **electrical lines** (and other utilities) may not be available to accommodate you if others connect ahead of you.
- **The cost of electric service** is usually divided into a fee to hook up to the system and a monthly charge for energy consumed. It is important to know both costs before making a decision to purchase a specific piece of property.
- **Power outages** in outlying areas can be more detrimental than in more developed areas. Loss of electric power can mean loss of water from a well, loss of heat, and loss of the food in your freezer and refrigerator. If you live in the country it is important to have a contingency plan in the event of power outages.
- **Trash removal** is available everywhere in Grant County, but in some cases you may need to make special arrangements with your provider. Recycling is available at the landfill in Ephrata and in many communities. Burning of trash is strictly regulated by the local fire district and the Department of Ecology.

The Property

There are many issues that can affect your property. It is important to research these issues before purchasing land.

- **Permits and Approvals:** Construction of dwellings and most buildings in Grant County require County issued building permits and inspections prior to use or occupancy. The permitting process not only helps assure that your proposed project complies with applicable state construction codes, but also that it is consistent with other requirements regulating property divisions and uses such as setbacks, minimum frontage, potable water supply and sewage disposal systems. Before commencing construction, obtain the appropriate permits for grading, flood plain development, County road access, and other activities that may require a permit.
- **Not all lots are buildable.** Some parcels of land are separate for the purpose of taxation but are not legal lots for which a building permit can be issued. You must check with the Grant County Building and Planning Departments to verify whether you can build upon a piece of land.
- **Easements** may require that you allow construction of roads, canals, power lines, water lines, sewer lines, etc., across your land. Check easement issues carefully.
- Many property owners do not own the **mineral rights** under their property. Owners of mineral rights have the ability to change the surface characteristics in order to extract

their minerals. It is very important to know what minerals may be located under the land and who owns them. Rural land in Grant County can be used for mining, subject to current land use zoning standards. Be aware that adjacent mining uses can expand and cause negative impacts.

- You may be provided with a **plat of your property**, but unless the land has been surveyed, had pins placed by a licensed surveyor, and been recorded with the County Auditor, you cannot assume that the plat is accurate.
- **Fences** that separate properties may not accurately reflect property boundaries. A survey of the land is the only way to confirm the location of your property lines. Grant County does not verify the location of property lines or become involved in property line disputes.
- **Many subdivision and planned unit developments have covenants** that limit the use of the property. It is important to obtain a copy of the covenants (or confirm that there are none) and make sure that you can live with those rules. Grant County does not become involved in the enforcement of covenants.
- **Homeowners associations** are often formed to take care of common elements such as private roads, open spaces, etc. Specifically: Grant County does not become involved with homeowner's association disputes.
- **Dues** are almost always a requirement of a homeowners association. The by-laws of the homeowners association generally tell you how the organization operates and how the dues are set.
- **Storm water** may flow through low areas at any time. If you build in these low areas you may be flooded; if you fill in these low areas you may be relocating flood waters that could cause problems for others. Be aware of low areas on your property that are likely areas for storm waters.
- If undeveloped, surrounding properties will probably not remain as they are today. Consult with the Grant County Planning Department to find out the **comprehensive plan designation** for the area. Check with the Planning Department to learn how neighboring properties are currently zoned and what future developments may be in the planning stages.
- **Water rights** that are sold with the property may not give you the right to use the water without coordinating with the water district, a neighbor who also uses the water, Department of Health, Washington State Department of Ecology, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, or the appropriate irrigation district. Other users may have senior rights to the water that may limit your use or require you to pay for improvements to the source.
- It is important to make sure that any **water rights** you purchase with the land will provide enough water to maintain fruit trees, pastures, gardens or livestock.
- The **water** flowing in creeks or streams may belong to someone else. You cannot assume that because the water flows across your property, you can use it. Any use of surface water for any purpose requires a water right certificate from the Department of Ecology (DOE).
- Many creeks, streams, rivers, and wetlands are regulated by either the **Grant County Shorelines Ordinance and/or the Grant County Critical Areas Ordinance**. These

regulations establish setbacks and buffer zones adjacent to these various bodies of water. Natural vegetation cannot be disturbed in these areas. If you are contemplating development on property near water, marsh, or other wet areas be sure to check with Grant County Planning Department before commencing any work.



Mother Nature

Residents of the county usually experience more problems when the elements and earth turn unfriendly. Here are some thoughts for you to consider.

- The **physical characteristics** of your property can be positive and negative. Rural rangelands face the very real potential of being damaged or destroyed by **wild land fires**. Here are a few simple things a property owner can do to reduce the danger:
 - Clear land around the house of excess ground vegetation; a minimum of 30 foot clear or “defensible space” around structures, consisting of

maintained and watered lawn, pruned shrubs, and trees can help mitigate the spread of wild land fires to buildings.

- Replace combustible roofs and other building materials with non-combustibles; store other combustible materials such as firewood away from your house.
- Maintain adequate access roads and driveways and remove overgrowth and flammable vegetation immediately adjacent to the traveled roadway.
- Have your address posted and visible at the intersection of your driveway and the County road.
- Provide a reliable water supply.
- Develop a fire safety plan for your home and your family.
- Respect the danger of fire in the wild land areas by learning more about wild land fires and BE PREPARED.

If you start a wild land fire, you may be responsible for paying for the cost of extinguishing that fire. For further information on fire safety, contact the Grant County Building and Planning Departments, Public Works Department, and Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

- **Steep slopes** can slide in unusually wet weather. Large rocks can also roll down steep slopes and present a great danger to people and property.
- **Expansive soils** can buckle concrete foundations and twist steel I-beams. You can determine the soil conditions on your property if you have a soil test performed or consult a soil classification map.
- **Snowdrifts** are a common occurrence in County. They can completely cover a roadway within hours. Winter storms have created snowdrifts over 20 feet deep! See the County's snow removal policy for more details on snow removal.
- The **topography** of the land will tell you where water will go in the case of heavy precipitation. Pay close attention to these areas in order to determine how water will flow on your land and develop your land accordingly.
- A **flash flood** may occur, especially during the summer months, and turn a dry gully into a river. It is wise to take this possibility into consideration when building. You need to ask if your property is in a flood zone. If it is, construct your home and outbuildings above the flooded areas. Construction in frequently flooded areas is regulated by the County Building Department.
- **Winter and spring run-off** can cause a very small creek to become a major river. Many residents use sandbags to protect their homes. The County does not provide sand, sandbags, equipment, or people to protect private property from flooding.
- **Nature** can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. Many, such as deer and eagles, are positive additions to the environment. However, even "harmless" animals like deer can cross the road unexpectedly and cause accidents. Rural development often encroaches on the traditional habitat of coyotes, bobcats, cougar, rattlesnakes,

raccoons, skunks, porcupines, mice, mosquitoes, ticks and other animals that can be dangerous to become a nuisance. You need to know how to deal with them safely and effectively. In general, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance. Let the animals be themselves; watch them, but avoid chasing them or allowing your pets to do so. Also know that if you do not handle your pet refuse and trash properly, it could cause problems for you and the wildlife. The WA State Dept. of Fish and Wildlife and the Grant County Health District are two good resources for information about rural living.

- Many areas in the County are open for **hunting**. Hunting provides recreational opportunities and is a tool for managing wildlife populations. It also involves individuals who may trespass, litter, and inappropriately fire guns. To inquire as to whether your property is in a shooting or no shooting zone, contact the Sheriff's Office.

Agriculture

Grant County is largely an agricultural area. Much of the rural land is actively used for growing crops, feeding livestock, and providing mineral resources. Owning rural land means knowing how to care for it.



- **Farmers** often work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Hay is often swathed or baled at night, as are many other harvesting operations. Low flying

crop-duster planes may fly overhead during irregular hours. Adjoining agricultural uses may disturb your peace and quiet.

- Land preparation and other operations can cause **dust**, especially during windy and dry weather.
- Farmers occasionally burn their fields and ditches to keep them clean of debris, weeds and other obstructions. This burning creates smoke that you may find objectionable.
- **Chemicals (mainly fertilizers and herbicides)** are often used in growing crops. You may be sensitive to these substances and many people actually have severe allergic reactions. Many times these chemicals are applied by airplanes that fly early in the morning.
- Animals and their manure can cause **objectionable odors**. What else can we say?
- Agriculture is an important business in Grant County. If you choose to live among the farms and ranches of our rural countryside, do not expect County government to intervene in the normal day-to-day operations of your agri-business neighbors. In fact, **Washington State protects farmers and ranchers from nuisance and liability lawsuits**. This enables them to continue producing food and fiber.
- Washington State has a **closed range law** except for specified areas described in state law. This means that your neighbor's cattle, sheep or other livestock should not be on your property. It is the responsibility of the rancher or farmer to keep his/her livestock off your property.
- Before buying land you should know if it has **noxious weeds**. You will be responsible for the expense to control them. Some plants are poisonous to horses and other livestock.
- **Animals** can be dangerous. Bulls, stallions, pigs, rams, and other animals can attack human beings. Children need to know that it is not safe to enter pens where animals are kept.
- Grant County receives less than six inches of precipitation per year. As a result, we have a problem with overgrazing, and fugitive dust. Without **irrigation**, grass does not grow very well. There is a limit to the amount of grazing the land can handle. The Grant County Cooperative Extension Office can help you with these issues.

Conclusion

Even though rural property owners pay property taxes to the County, the amount of tax collected does not nearly cover the cost of the services provided to rural residents. In general, those living in the country should not expect the same level of services as those living in urban areas.

This information is by no means exhaustive. There are other issues that you may encounter that we have overlooked and we encourage you to be vigilant in your duties to explore and examine those things that could cause your move to be less

than you expect. Neither this publication nor any content herein should be construed as legal advice.

The County will be happy to answer any questions you may have concerning the content contained in this publication. We have offered these comments in the sincere hope that they can help you enjoy your decision to reside in Grant County.

Who to Contact

Grant County Courthouse
509-754-2011
509-765-2160
800-572-0119

Grant County Departments

Assessor	Ext. 383
Building/Fire Marshall	Ext. 344
Emergency Management	509-762-1462
Planning	Ext. 626
Public Works/County Road Engineer/Solid Waste	509-754-6082

Other Resources

GRANT COUNTY

Health District	509-754-6060
Irrigation Districts	
East Columbia Irrigation District	509-488-9671
Quincy Columbia Basin Irrigation District	509-787-3591
Mosquito Board	509-765-7731
Noxious Weed Control Board	509-754-2011
	Ext. 375
Public Utility District	509-754-0500

WASHINGTON STATE

Office of Rural Health	360-236-2805
Dept. of Ecology	509-575-2490
Dept. of Fish & Wildlife (Ephrata office)	509-754-4624

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