

# Whatcom County Executive

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Candidates reviewed their statements before printing.

Responses were not edited by *Whatcom Watch*.

**Background:** The passage of the Inflation Reduction Act last fall has environmentalists thrilled to envision a ton of money to fund climate and energy projects that they've long dreamed of and needed. But, many cities and other local governments lack the expertise to identify the programs available or to navigate the usually arduous process of applying for a share of the estimated \$391 billion.

We are lucky that both Bellingham and Whatcom County have hired climate directors. However, the opportunity and work required to actually identify projects, apply for the money and make the best use of it requires a team.

**What types environmental projects will you prioritize with the Inflation Reduction Act money and are you willing to hire staff to help make this work happen?**

**Background:** The Lake Whatcom watershed is the source of drinking water for over 100,000 people living in Whatcom County. Climate models indicate that more extreme weather events will impact water quality and forest health in the Lake Whatcom watershed. Accordingly, our local government agencies are planning to conduct a Climate Vulnerability Assessment for Lake Whatcom, which will help us better understand some of these likely impacts.

Nonetheless, the state Department of Natural Resources and private timber companies who own land in the watershed continue to clearcut forests around the lake.

**Would you support a moratorium on all clearcutting in the watershed until a Climate Vulnerability Assessment is completed?**

**Background:** Whatcom County recently adopted a Climate Action Plan, it indicates the need to greatly reduce the amount of single occupancy vehicle travel. The plan suggests we need to significantly expand interconnected multimodal transportation, especially non-motorized trails that are separated from busy and congested thoroughfares, to provide safe options for public commuting.

**Name specific actions you would support to achieve these goals.**



**Barry Buchanan**  
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I would step on the gas with storm water treatment and other projects like the Home Owner Improvement in the Lake Whatcom Watershed. I would also increase funding for the Pollution Identification and Correction (PIC) program to improve the water quality in all of the waterways leading to the Salish Sea. This would provide economic benefits to the shellfish industry as well as further clean up our mess!

Yes, I would. I have signed multiple letters as Whatcom County Council chair requesting the Department of Natural Resources pause these legacy forest timber harvests and to give Whatcom County a seat at the table in helping to develop more conservation oriented forest management practices both in and out of the Lake Whatcom Watershed..

I would support non-motorized trails. I would start with the trail in the Kendall area that would provide not only non-motorized transportation options, but a much needed pedestrian safety piece of infrastructure. Need to better coordinate with the State Department of Transportation to get this project moving. As a Whatcom Transit Authority Board member, I would push to expand routes into the rural area and coordinate with other regional transportation partners to expand service to connect along the I-5 corridor.



**Misty Flowers**  
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There are many ways we can use funding to support environmental projects starting with cleaning up the Treoil toxic site that Satpal Sidhu left for Whatcom to mitigate. This toxic site near Ferndale has left Whatcom vulnerable to an environmental disaster for 25+ years.

Other environmental projects include planting edible landscapes that can be managed organically that will provide those who are houseless with more fresh foods from Spring to Fall. Hiring staff to support environmental projects would be necessary to implement bigger projects.

To make a decision regarding moratoriums, I would need more details on which land is being clearcut and for what purpose. Recently a timber sale was put on hold in Whatcom that supported funding for the Mount Baker School district. It is important to weigh all the information while also protecting our watershed and drinking water. These issues aren't black and white. Who is doing the Climate Vulnerability Study and how much does it cost? More public education and engagement would be helpful in making decisions regarding moratoriums.

One way to reduce congested thoroughfares is consider traffic during the peak of tourism before shutting down roads like the Mt. Baker Hwy from June to September. As for providing more safe options for public commuting, The Kendall community has been asking for and needing a connecting trail for bikes and foot traffic for several years. The projects that serve the most need, especially in the rural areas that have been overlooked for too long, should be considered first.



**Sukhwant Gill**  
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This money should be utilized to further ease financial burden on residents of Whatcom. I lean towards clean energy using renewable sources our County has to offer. Increased production of hydroelectric power as well as wind energy by turbines to help alleviate climate change effects and the burden on people of Whatcom County. I will hire the right team and look for staff with experience, knowledge and achievements in their respective fields to help with effective climate change projects. As the executive it is my responsibility to spend wisely the people's money.

I shall fully support a moratorium on all clearcutting in the watershed until a climate vulnerability assessment is completed and would consider to extend it if needed, to protect the drinking water source for over 100,000 people living in Whatcom County.

There is no doubt that the amount of single occupancy vehicle travel has risen significantly in recent years. In order to counter the effects of traffic, prolonged travel time and pollution, we need an action plan. There is an increased trend and benefit of promoting physical health with use of alternate travel options, it should be encouraged further. I shall prioritize projects on multimodal transportation that that will include safe transit lanes, for bikes, electric bicycles, electric scooters & pedestrian commuting. What we have currently is not sufficient to address the need for safe and effective travel with alternate options.

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**Name specific actions you would support to achieve these goals.**

## Dan Purdy

Dan Purdy in an email said he will not be participating.

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## Alicia Rule

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Protecting drinking water, increasing access to our outdoor spaces, reducing carbon pollution, increasing bikeability and walkability, protecting shellfish beds and salmon, all while elevating the needs of our most vulnerable are key priorities.

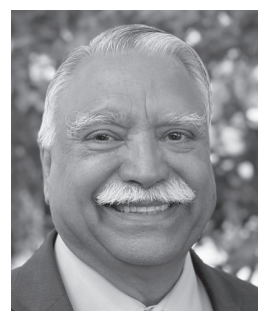
Systematic inclusion of vulnerable populations in nature is an equity and mental health priority, and a practical way to teach environmental protection. When one falls in love with nature, they take care of it.

Economic and environmental goals should be layered together. We can make Whatcom County a blue green economy, employing people with good-paying union jobs while cleaning and greening up our environment.

Protecting our watershed is key to protecting our drinking water as well as keeping our rivers and streams cool to protect our salmon and I look forward to the results of a vulnerability assessment to understand better how we can protect both.

I want to improve bikeability and walkability in all areas, but especially in cities. We need to increase infrastructure for electric vehicles and work toward greener, more accessible public transportation.

We need to evaluate decisions through an equity lens, to not leave anyone behind and align local goals with available funding at the state and federal levels, so we can access more funding for our goals. It is possible and necessary to incorporate our climate goals with economic realities. I've been studying and working pragmatically within these social intersections my whole career and will do so as Executive.



## Satpal Sidhu

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Transportation Electrification Infrastructure - Charging station for cars, busses, commercial vehicle

- County Buildings Electrification
- County Fleet Electrification
- Shoreline Electric Infrastructure for Lummi Island Ferry
- Comprehensive Plan

My decisions in timber harvesting will be based on scientific facts and recommendations by DNR, County Council and the Whatcom County Climate Advisory committee.

As we move away from fossil fuel to more hybrid and electric vehicles, the emissions will reduce drastically per vehicle mile for all single or multi-people occupied vehicles. I support higher density in cities and more cluster development close to mass /rapid transit hubs or stations. More investments in mass and rapid transit infrastructure inside cities and inter-city transit with hybrid and fully electric buses will be my preferred policy choices. Also increasing more road miles both in urban and rural areas, which are bike friendly or suitable for other non-motorized transportation use will be my choice.