

# Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board

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## MEETING SUMMARY March 10, 2009

### ATTENDEES

#### Board Members - Present

|                |               |                 |              |
|----------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Jesse Allen    | Brian Bookey  | Mark Craven     | Dan Douglas  |
| Mike Harnden   | Gerald Labish | Jackie Macomber | John Postema |
| Dave Remlinger | Nick Van Dam  |                 |              |

#### PDS Staff

|                   |               |               |             |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Howard Knight     | Craig Ladiser | Joan Langlais | Tom Niemann |
| Roxanne Pilkenton | Tom Rowe      |               |             |

#### Office of Economic Development Staff

|              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| Ryan Hembree | Linda Neunzig |
|--------------|---------------|

#### Public Works/Surface Water Management Staff

|             |               |              |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| John Hurley | Michael McVey | David Wilson |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|

#### Snohomish County Council

Geoffrey Thomas

#### WSU Extension

Drew Corbin

#### Others

|               |              |                |               |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| Max Albert    | Bruce Meaker | Mark Convey    | Tom Fox       |
| Eric Gleason  | Noah Haglund | Kristin Kelly  | Denise Kryger |
| Mike Rundlett | Alan Shank   | John Spoelstra |               |

### 1. CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chair Bookey called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m., asked all attendees to introduce themselves, and asked for announcements.

The new process of distributing the draft agenda to all members for review seems to have gone well.

John Postema updated the board on legislative bills. Three open space bills regarding reclassification seem to be going forward. One regarding horse breeding was well received but is not yet out of committee. John thinks it may be reintroduced and will go forward. The B & O

tax on farmers is dead; there is still an exemption. The loan program for mobile slaughter units was amended and is going through. Not much money is attached to it, but it has a fiscal note.

The recent ag roundtable was successful. There was a lot of positive interaction among attendees. Skagit County has a once-a month, Friday morning meeting. Members invited the Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board to attend the March 6 meeting. The Skagit Agricultural Advisory Board wants to have a quarterly roundtable. One, with speakers on water rights issues, will be scheduled in May.

Nine growers attended the producers meeting at Cathcart. Final arrangements are being made with the oil crusher contractor. The crusher should be shipped to Cathcart the week of March 16.

## **2. 2009 BUDGET AND STAFFING LEVELS (Craig Ladiser, PDS Director)**

Craig Ladiser announced that because of budget and staffing constraints, less time and emphasis will be placed on meeting summaries. Less emphasis will be placed on documenting overall discussions; continued emphasis will be placed on action items, results, and motions.

## **3. APPROVAL OF 1/13/09 AND 2/10/09 MEETING SUMMARIES**

The January 13, 2009, Meeting Summary was approved as amended. The February 10, 2009, Meeting Summary was approved as written.

## **4. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mark Convey is the on-site manager of a viable horse-boarding business at the River Delta Ranch on Smith Island. He feels that losing the ranch as a result of the Smith Island project would be a tragic loss for both horse boarders and Snohomish County.

Mike McVey, Snohomish County Public Works, is tasked with assisting with the relocation of the business and moving the boarders. He has arranged a meeting on March 20 with all affected boarders. The time and location is to be determined. Mike is not knowledgeable about the project, only the county's interests in adequately relocating people, businesses, and livestock. April 30 is his deadline.

Brian Bookey asked about compatibility possibilities between the ranch and what the county wants to do with the land.

John Postema could not believe that the county is driving farmers away from designated ag land. Smith Island is a no net loss issue. He thought the county and the board were working together.

Dave Remlinger thought the board should have a no net loss subcommittee meeting in the next week and a half.

Chair Bookey thought Smith Island should be an April agenda item.

Mark Harnden said that having Mark Convey on Smith Island benefits the county.

The board decided to have a special meeting on this issue on March 19, 2009, at 10:00 a.m. and invite PDS and Public Works.

Denise Kryger and her husband were trying to decommission a lagoon by filling it. She received an e-mail from the Department of Ecology (DOE) stating that because the manure lagoon was constructed in the flood plain that is historically a wetland, the lagoon itself is a regulated

wetland. She was instructed not to fill the lagoon but to fold the sides of the berm in and let the lagoon lay bare.

Denise feels she may have been singled out but is concerned that DOE may tell other dairy farmers that their lagoons and the inside of them are regulated wetlands. Denise asked for support from the ag board.

The information regarding the wetland lagoons surprised Roxanne Pilkenton. She explained that PDS is trying to put something in code that would allow farmers to decommission their lagoons by filling. Lagoons that are left open are a greater detriment to the ecosystem than those that are filled and topped. She would like the support of the ag board to allow this type of decommissioning.

PDS will continue to look into this issue and report at an upcoming meeting.

Washington State University is considering eliminating nearly all county extension services in the state because of lack of funding. Drew Corbin, WSU Extension Service, asked for the ag board's support for continued funding. Mark Craven moved that the board send a letter of support to the county council. The motion was seconded and passed. Ryan Hembree said that the executive had already written a letter of support. Tom Niemann will use that letter as background and draft a recommendation for the chair's signature.

Craig Ladiser informed the board that the Smith Island Dog Park could not be justified by code and therefore is not an allowed use. More discussion at a later date.

## **5. AG ISSUES FOR THE COUNTY COUNCIL FOR 2009** (County Councilman Brian Sullivan, All)

When the ag board met with the county council, Councilman Sullivan indicated a willingness to be a liaison to the ag board. He specifically indicated an interest in the board's no net loss of farmland concept for which the board has written some policy recommendations and discussed the potential for codifying or establishing them in ordinance or policy.

Councilman Sullivan talked about his history and how it prepared him for his participation on the county council and with agriculture.

Councilman Sullivan said that codification of no net loss would be a good place to start. He and Legislative Analyst Geoffrey Thomas would work with a subcommittee and the board and could present a formal request to the executive for resources.

Discussion regarding the level of support the board might receive from council on no net loss issues followed. Some board members felt that impacts to farming and people by removing prime ag land at Island Crossing and as a result of radio towers in the valley had been ignored. Councilman Sullivan noted that with the time and money already spent on Island Crossing and county budget and staffing constraints, the county cannot afford to go to court again and lose. Instead, the county must begin to change underlying ordinances. Likewise, to stop radio towers in the future, the county must remove the radio tower portion of the utility section of the code and pass ordinances that give stakeholders more power over such uses. In order to really affect change in Snohomish County, we must change the ordinances.

Discussion continued.

**6. OPERATIONS OF WATER SUPPLY AND HYDROELECTRIC RESERVOIRS** (Tom Foss, Seattle Public Utilities & Bruce Meaker, Snohomish County PUD)

Tom Fox, Water Resource Manager for Seattle Public Utilities, spoke about the January 2009 flood and events that followed it. He provided background on the Tolt reservoir, its operations, its appearance, and what it entails. Please see Mr. Fox's PowerPoint presentation ([www.snoco.org](http://www.snoco.org), search "Ag Board" and choose the pdf under March 2009).

A board member asked whether the Tolt system could work in such a manner that Snohomish County would not be damaged during flooding events. Tom Fox answered that his job is to manage the reservoir to provide water supply to Seattle and King County along with some flood management control. That is the best he can do. Discussion followed.

Some board members felt that there have been negative impacts on Snohomish County during flooding events. Brian Bookey suggested that the board determine what it wants to accomplish. He asked the drainage, dredging, and surface water issues subcommittee to gain a better understanding of the flood management objectives, see if there is a way the system could work better, and consider some objectives to pass on to the executive and council who could interact with Seattle, King County, etc.

Bruce Meaker, Snohomish County PUD, talked about the Jackson Project, its flood facilities, how the project is generally managed, and how it is managed during dramatic storms. The Jackson Project is located above the Town of Sultan. The Sultan River feeds into the Skykomish River which connects with the Snoqualmie River and then feeds into the Snohomish River System. Please see Bruce's PowerPoint presentation ([www.snoco.org](http://www.snoco.org), search "Ag Board" and choose the pdf under March 2009). The project operations are complex but allow for operational flexibility. Staff does a good job managing flooding while providing almost all of Snohomish County's water supply, some of its power supply, and many recreation areas.

Some staff from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife are interested in putting additional water in the water systems to do "process flows" at 6,000 to 8,000 cfs to flush woody debris from the system. They want that done every couple of years. Bruce said that the Jackson project does not have the ability to provide process flows and that they could result in uncontrolled events. He has told the Department of fish and Wildlife that he will not comply.

John Postema suggested that the drainage, dredging, surface water issues subcommittee talk with PUD staff.

**7. COMPOSTING AS AN AGRICULTURE OPERATION** (Don Bailey, Snohomish Area Farmer, Marv Thomas, Snohomish Area Farmer)

This discussion was a result of work done in 2008 by the permitting subcommittee and a PDS request for recommendations for guidelines for composting activities and how they fit with ag.

Don Bailey talked about Bailey Compost, a composting operation on his Snohomish farm that has been in operation since 1995 when he got a solid waste handling permit from the Snohomish Health District to compost farm related manure and yard trimmings. The solid waste handling permit allows Don to receive manure from other farms as well. This is an integral part of his farming operation. The ag board expressed general support of this operation.

Marv Thomas has been composting since the 1950s and 1960s. He distributed a handout called "Top dairymen become manure entrepreneurs," described his system, and said he has

applied for a composting permit from the Snohomish Health Department that will allow him to compost waste. Right now, he acts as a transfer station for Bailey Compost.

The county is seeing these sites expand and is asking whether composting has become an activity in its own right. Staff requests a definition of incidental use, more clarity, and the board's opinion, particularly regarding what incidental use is to the farming operation. County staff wants guidance and specificity from the board as to whether this process is being shifted from what originally was a by product of farming to a new product.

There was discussion regarding the necessity of farm plans and infrastructure – where these facilities should be located, but the main issue was defining “incidental to the farming operation.”

Brian Bookey encouraged composting for the good of the ag community and asked why a composter would have to be a farmer. Composters help support his farming activity and give him the ability to survive as part of ag in Snohomish County. He thinks the board's vision is broader than the county's. This is what he would like to see the permitting subcommittee work on, perhaps reach a consensus, and propose a formal recommendation to the county.

Howard Knight, PDS, suggested that the board also look beyond incidental use. Consideration of and a definition of “regional composting” in the use matrix would be a worthy goal. While incidental use dictates that the county look at only one site at a time, a regional site where local farmers could send their waste would eliminate that necessity.

Chair Bookey pointed out that this discussion overlaps with the drainage, etc., and permitting subcommittees and suggested that the committees have a joint meeting. The following people asked to attend the meeting once it is scheduled: Drew Corbin, WSU Extension Service; Howard Knight, PDS; Alan Shank, Snohomish Conservation District; Marv Thomas, citizen.

#### **8. PROPOSED CHANGES TO ARLINGTON AREA TDR PROGRAM (Max Albert, Interested Party)**

Deferred to the next meeting. Will schedule toward the beginning of the meeting.

#### **9. REPORTS FROM BOARD COMMITTEES**

- Use Matrix Committee
- Ag Permitting Committee
- Drainage and Surface Water Issues Committee

Deferred to the next meeting.

#### **10. APRIL MEETING AGENDA**

Discussion deferred.

#### **11. CLOSING : 12:55 p.m.**