

Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board

MEETING SUMMARY August 11, 2009

ATTENDEES

Board Members - Present

Mark Craven	Dan Douglas	Mike Harnden	Gerald Labish
Jackie Macomber	John Postema	Dave Remlinger	Nick Van Dam

Board Members – Excused

Jesse Allen	Brian Bookey	Elizabeth Christianson
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PDS Staff

Linda Kuller	Joan Langlais	Mike McCrorie	Tom Niemann
Tom Rowe	Randy Sleight		

Office of Economic Development

Ryan Hembree	Linda Neunzig
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Public Works/Surface Water Management

Sean Edwards

American Farmland Trust

Don Stuart

Cascade Land Conservancy

Nick Harper

Snohomish County Conservation District

Bobbi Lindemulder	Alan Shank
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WSU Extension

Curt Moulton

Others

Merle Ash	Kurt Bartelheimer	Noah Haglund	Ed Moats
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1. CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS

Co-chair Mark Craven called the meeting to order. Introductions were made. There were no announcements.

2. APPROVAL OF JULY 14, 2009, MEETING SUMMARY

The July 14, 2009, meeting summary was approved as written.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Curt Moulton, Director of WSU Extension in Snohomish County, reported for Drew Corbin.

- a. A land and policy summit is planned for November 4, a day before the Focus on Farming convention. Executive Reardon will invite policy makers, other Western Washington ag boards, and members of the ag community in the region. Curt believes that this summit may help the ag board with its no net loss policy.
- b. Drew Corbin, WSU Extension, will help facilitate work on Smith Island. A larger area on the island has been identified for ag. He will draft a no net loss of farmland proposal. The proposal might support the creation of an ag incubator farm to help train farmers on high quality pieces of land. WSU teaches two levels of beginning ag. The third course will be geared toward intern farmers to give them hands-on experience on the Smith Island properties.

Ryan Hembree said that this effort is a follow-up to last month's board meeting in which Mike Harnden and Nick Van Dam volunteered to work with him, Linda Neunzig, and Drew Corbin on public works' soil studies, alternatives, and possibilities for ag.

Mark Craven gave an update on the Conservation District's proposal. It is scheduled for a hearing before the county council on August 12, 2009, at 10:30 a.m. The county treasurer is asking for 10% of incoming money for implementation costs, while most districts are charged 1% or less. Mark has talked with Ryan Hembree about this. Ryan is working with the executive to resolve the issue prior to the hearing. The assessment may be passed soon, providing the district with steady, permanent funding for the next five years.

4. CONSERVATION MARKETS AND RELATED PILOT PROGRAMS (Don Stuart, American Farmland Trust)

Please review Don Stuart's handout "Draft of how ecosystem markets can transform agriculture and protect the environment."

Don talked about ecosystem service markets and asked for the board's support and to brainstorm about threats to and opportunities for ag.

The concept of ecosystems services is good, and there is an emerging market for these services. Examples are:

- Carbon.
- Water quality trading when it is cheaper and easier for a city or public utility to work with local farmers on rivers to implement best management practices and buy offsets to conserve costs.
- Habitat mitigation, specifically for salmon in Snohomish County, where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will, in many cases, allow a developer to mitigate development damage to endangered species by purchasing easements on local farms.

- Wetland mitigation poses the greatest threat and manifests itself through mitigation banks. Most wetland mitigation has taken place on site, but that is changing. Most on-site mitigation doesn't work. Mitigation in rural, undeveloped areas is more functional and effective than in developed areas.

Current rules drive wetland mitigation to ag land. There are two potential solutions to the problem.

1. Create policy criteria to protect land from being the recipient of governmental actions that remove it from ag.
2. As an industry, find ways to meet increased environmental mitigation without allowing land to be removed from ag. Find ways to use the pressure and money generated from the effort to support and protect the ag industry for ag.

Under the Clean Water Act, if someone destroys an acre of wetland, it must be replaced. This is the basis of the issue. Following are potential solutions.

1. Encourage regulatory rules to utilize ag land that is too wet, already a wetland, or not valuable for ag wetland mitigation.
2. Follow the example of a Skagit County project in which three farmers each rotate 40 acres of wetland over a three-year cycle. One year the acreage is a wetland; the next year it is in pasture; and the following year it is fallow. When the land returns to ag, it is highly productive. The wetland serves as a rotation crop. It would be nice to find a way for farmers to be paid for not taking land out of ag.
3. Change the thought process regarding wetlands and what is really needed. Evaluate the acre that needs to be replaced to determine what it does, such as provide aquifer recharge, wildlife habitat, filtration for clean water, floodwater detention, etc., and then find a replacement acre that serves the same function/s.
4. Puget Sound Partnerships has a fee in lieu of program that could look at the watershed assessment, characterizations, or conditions in a particular watershed for land characteristics that are needed most and use the fee to buy rather than replace the land. This type of program may be a possibility.

Don asked the board to give this serious consideration and contact him with feedback.

5. PRESENTATION OF SNOHOMISH COUNTY AGRICULTURE SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT FINAL REPORT (Linda Neunzig, Economic Development Division)

Linda Neunzig distributed the final report, which is available on line at www.snoco.org, Focus on Farming, under sustainability project.

The report includes sections on economic analysis, land use, community outreach and next steps. This is a working document, and many of the recommendations such as a year-'round farmers' market are already being implemented. For others, such as a mobile slaughtering unit or a small processing facility, there are feasibility studies and documentation to justify them. USDA grants require feasibility studies prior to granting funding. Since most of the feasibility studies are done, staff can begin looking for other funding and begin to take action.

Executive Reardon asked Ryan Hembree to assemble a working group to look at habitat and farmland conservation and strategic policy recommendations regarding farmland preservation and restoration project mandates. The goal is to have a first meeting by the end of August and develop county policy recommendations for addressing farmland and habitat conservation projects and ensure predictably for both prior to the Focus on Farming conference. The following individuals will work with Ryan: Brian Bookey, Nick Harper, Dave Remlinger, and a Tulalip Tribe representative (no name yet).

Jerry Labish asked about the possibility of setting up a group of people from the cattle industry, soil conservation, WSU, etc., to identify different opportunities for farming, not just hobby farming but commercial farming as well. Linda Neunzig will organize a gathering.

6. NPDES (NATIONAL POLLUTION DISCHARGE ELIMINATION SYSTEM) UPDATE (Linda Kuller, PDS; Tom Rowe, PDS; Randy Sleight, PDS)

Copies of a PowerPoint presentation and an example of a shed and driveway <2,000 sq. ft. were distributed. Please review.

The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) is very complex. Tom Rowe and Linda Kuller focused on exemptions to the permit, how they were merged, and put into code; so all are in one place.

Two sets of standard exemptions were in the drainage and grading codes, those that occurred through code writing and the right-to-farm exemptions. Because a landowner would lose the opportunity to get a right-to-farm exemption if another permit were also required, Tom Rowe said the proposed code states that the right-to-farm exemption applies unless another permit is required, with the exception of a flood hazard permit. That change was codified. Staff modified other provisions to comply with the NPDES permit.

The county received its first NPDES permit in 2005. It was reissued in 2007. The county has an agreed order specifying that new regulations shall be adopted in 2009. Staff is working on compliance with DOE.

Code updates include the drainage code chapter 30.63A SCC and grading code chapter 30.63B SCC. They will be replaced with a land disturbing activity code and a new permit called LDA. There are also new provisions for low impact development (LID).

Public works has done a good job of tailoring the Snohomish County Drainage Manual to the county. It relates well with our codes and is easy to use and understand. It will be adopted as a rule and an equivalent to the 2005 DOE Stormwater Manual. The code implements the rules, and the rules have the same authority as code.

Staff proposes that, like previous permits, this permit will apply to all unincorporated parcels in Snohomish County, not just parcels that drain into the MS4 (municipal separate storm sewer system).

John Postema indicated that de minimus ag activities related to farm road construction need to be clarified. Tom Rowe will review that section and amend it as necessary. John also noted that one slide refers to the construction of drainage ditches that are not allowed in floodplains and recharge aquifers. Tom Rowe said they are exempt. John suggested that there be something in writing referring to that exemption. Tom asked John to write something and give it to him to review.

The Appendix1 – Requirements slide is out of date as of August 11, 2009. Instead of the 200 and 400 square feet thresholds, the current threshold as of August 11 is 2000 square feet of impervious surface. The permit allows 2,000 square feet of impervious surface before it is triggered (2000 square feet is the DOE threshold).

John Postema asked for a definition of native growth. Linda Kuller said that the permit does not include a definition of native vegetation, but she will get one and pass it on to the board. Regarding native vegetation, specifically poplars, John asked about the time frame before a

permit is triggered. Tom Rowe reminded John about previous work on fibrous wood plants. He suggested that there may be a need to look at that work again to see how it fits with this permit. He and Linda Kuller will do some research and discuss it at a future ag board meeting.

PDS is working on a fee ordinance. Staff is working with the Master Builders and Professional Consultants of Snohomish County to develop an easy-to-use tier system that will include all reviews for one fee. This will be part of the 2010 budget package. Staff is asking that it be adopted concurrently with NPDES. Linda will bring that to the board when available.

Adoption of the stormwater regulations will go to the planning commission and county council when the review with DOE is done. Changes to Chapters 1 and 5 of the Engineering Design Development Standards (EDDS) and drainage manual will move forward on the same path. These will go to the planning commission for a cursory review only. Staff will time it so all will become effective at the same time. Adoption may take place in July 2010.

Updates will be put on the UDC Update Project website to which board members can subscribe and be notified of changes.

7. DISCUSSION DRAFT AGRICULTURE AND RESOURCE LAND BASE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM REFERRED TO BOARD BY COUNCILMAN SOMERS (All)

This agenda item was tabled due to a lack of time. Board members were asked to email comments to Tom Niemann, who will transmit them to the full board.

8. CLOSING: 12:25 p.m.