

Skagit County Conservation Futures Program Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
March 12, 2019

Members in Attendance

Steve Sakuma	Andrea Xaver	Scott DeGraw	Keith Morrison
Jim Glackin	Owen Peth		

Members Absent

Wendy Pare

Staff and Others in Attendance

Kara Symonds, Skagit County Public Works
Tara Naylor, Skagit County Public Works
Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:00 AM

Member Update

The group discussed two recent articles in the Skagit Valley Herald. One was a discussion on lab grown meats. The second was an article on the new Genuine Skagit Valley campaign. The branding strategy was announced at the 2/8 Skagit Ag Summit. It's a way for local producers to recognize the sources of their products; the full article is in the 2/15/19 Skagit Valley Herald. The group also discussed the merits of the Avalon self-contained community proposal. The applicants recently withdrew their application but it will likely be resubmitted in the future. This led to an overall discussion of growth and what landscape is being created for future generations.

January Meeting Summary

Steve moved to approve the 01/18/18 meeting summary; Andrea seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

SPF Study

Kara invited SPF to present their study of farmland outside of ag zoning at the April meeting to reschedule from February. Allen Rozema will be in attendance to share insights from their research. He'll be on the agenda at 8:00 a.m.

FLP Contractors

An RFQ was distributed in February for the FLP monitoring agent. The advertisement was posted in the newspaper and daily commerce journal. Three submittals were received and reviewed. The group discussed utilizing other distribution methods to ensure the word gets out to the greatest extent. Tara will work the County's communications coordinator to get the post on social media.

Skagit County Assessor Report

Dave Thomas, Skagit County Assessor, attended the meeting to report out on his office's recent Elk Survey. Damages from elk came to light during the Assessor Office's current use valuation rate annual assessment. Elk damage was affecting agricultural landowners and he was looking to generally capture the data to incorporate the information into the current use rates. The survey asked three general questions. Preliminary data shows over 4,600 acres with elk damage, or 34% of east county acreage affected. 80% of the 107 survey respondents were affected. The Assessor estimates that upon completion of the survey, damages could exceed 1.6 million dollars. Dave noted that this is likely an underestimation because they only contacted agricultural landowners; there is potentially damage to smaller parcels that are conducting agricultural practices but not zoned agriculture.

Dave also shared an update to the County's Current Use Farm and Agriculture Land audit. If a landowner was no longer meeting the definition of the Current Use Farm and Agriculture Land classification, the Assessor's Office worked with the property owner to find a Current Use category that was an appropriate fit, if applicable. The majority of the approximately 140 parcels removed from Farm and Agricultural Conservation Land, representing 1,019 acres, were transferred to either: Current Use Farm and Agricultural Conservation, Current Use Open Space, or Designated Forestland. This audit is approximately 80% complete. The Washington Department of Revenue created Current Use fact sheets for more information. The group thanked Dave for sharing his time and updating the group on these farmland matters.

Property Update/Financial Summary

The group discussed FLP 187 and how the landowners were disappointed with the Assessed Value of their Conservation Easement. Allen at SPF reached out to the landowner and offered to share the cost of a new appraisal.

The group discussed FLP 199 and the proposed Ducks Unlimited project on the property. Kara shared recently conversations with Ducks Unlimited staff on their proposal. The borrow pits would not be permanently wetted; they would be shallow (10:1 sloped) depressions with a sluice gate type drainage. The depressions would be wetted in the winter and drain in the summer. The group expressed concern with impacts to the neighboring property. Kara will invite the landowner and DU to the next CFAC meeting to explain their long-term designs for the site. Owen shared some news on the current lease situation of the property.

The group reviewed the Program's fund balance and a list of properties in the queue. The current applicant list includes 1,572 acres and 36 development rights.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 AM