

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Board
Meeting Summary
June 11, 2024

Members in Attendance

Scott DeGraw	Jim Glackin	Audrey Gravley	Margery Hite
Andrea Xaver	Sarah Stoner (<i>ex officio</i>)		

Members Absent

Keith Morrison
Owen Peth

Staff and Others in Attendance

Jenn Johnson, Skagit County Public Works
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:30AM.

Review Agenda, Introductions

Agenda approved.

Review May 14 Meeting Summary

Jim made a motion to approve minutes; Andrea seconded. All in favor.

CFAB Goals: Overview & Discussion

Scott discussed setting annual goals for CFAB, related to the purpose of the advisory board. Purpose:

The CFAB shall make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) and the County Administrator on plans, policies, and programs concerning the Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program:

- 1. Setting the selection criteria of farm, agricultural land and critical areas to be recommended for Conservation Futures funding.*
- 2. Making annual or more frequent recommendations for projects to be funded by the Farmland Legacy Program.*
- 3. Developing strategic, long-term plans for the program.*

All recommendations shall be forwarded to the BoCC for final action.

Three action-oriented goals were discussed by the group:

- **Compliance:** Build systems to best support awareness of ag conservation easement terms, implications including: annual report on monitored properties; tools for new easement holders.
- **Protected acres.** Protect an annual average of 400 acres of farmland. This goal is also part of the Key Focus Area goals adopted by the Skagit County BoCC.
- **Accountability.** Regularly check in for review of subcommittee goals: their status and progress.

Operating Procedures for Advisory Board: Final Draft

The group finalized draft proposal for the operating procedures of the Conservation Futures Advisory Board. These include policies governing procedural function of the board: purpose, meeting attendance expectations, the use of proxy voting, among other procedural items. The procedures are based on operating procedures of the Skagit County Ag Advisory Board.

Audrey made a motion to approve the operating procedures draft; Jim seconded. All in favor.

The operating procedures will be adopted once routed through County review process.

Property Updates

The group discussed updates on the properties currently in queue for agricultural conservation easements. The queued applicants encompass 535 acres and 13 development rights.

Farmland Legacy has 14,820 acres protected to-date! That is 180 acres shy of the 15,000 acre mark. The program expects to surpass 15K acres protected by year-end 2024.

Sarah shared that a second FLP easement included a Notice of Assignment document, in support of the FLP-253 conservation easement. The notice document is intended to facilitate the landowner's interest in using IRS code under section 1031 for a tax deferred exchange. Instead of receiving the funds directly, the landowner uses the easement funds received in the purchase of another farm property. The landowner works at the direction of their financial advisors and attorneys in this tax deferral process.

Marketing & Application Process

Annual Report

Sarah distributed printed copies of the most recent [annual report](#) to members in the room.

Updated Wall Map of Protected Farmland, Skagit County

Sarah reported that updated wall maps are coming. We haven't had an updated wall map since 2019. The maps used to be brought to CFAB meetings, hung on the wall during meetings and discussion.

Monitoring Updates

Kai reported that monitoring work is on track for existing easements, with USDA easement monitoring scheduled for completion end of July (which maintains preferred easement status). He is a little over halfway complete with the annual field monitoring of easement properties. Scott requests that we receive an annual report from USDA's easement review, with a more formal summary of their findings.

The group discussed a local nonprofit who is no longer purchasing ag easements, and that has a more limited capacity to regularly monitor their existing easements. They have 12 ag easements totaling 280 acres. The group discussed the *what* and *how* if FLP were to consider transferring these 12 easements under FLP purview. FLP currently manages close to 200 easements annually.

The benefit to Farmland Legacy: 1) assured compliance of protected ag ground; 2) easements under one management system; 3) added acreage under FLP protection.

The group also discussed ditches and sloughs on existing easements and applicant easements: whether these non-farmable areas counted as impervious surface. Kai noted that rather than reducing the baseline acreage of the overall easement to remove non-farmable areas, a better solution would be to allow a higher impervious surface limitation. Kai pointed out that there is a range of impervious surface limitations across FLP easements of the past 25 years.

Per Skagit County code SCC 14.04.020:

Definitions “Impervious surface” means a non- vegetated surface area that either prevents or retards the entry of water into the soil mantle as under natural conditions prior to development. A non- vegetated surface area which causes water to run off the surface in greater quantities or at an increased rate of flow from the flow present under natural conditions prior to development. Common impervious surfaces include, but are not limited to rooftops, walkways, patios, driveways, parking lots or storage areas, concrete or asphalt paving, gravel roads, packed earthen materials, and oiled, macadam or other surfaces which similarly impede the natural flow of stormwater. SCC 14.04.020.

Member Updates

Sarah shared that agricultural data on skagitcountytrends.org/ may be of interest. From that home page skagitcountytrends.org/aToZ.cfm is a list of indicator topics on which EWU gathers Skagit County data, including agriculture, economic vitality, education, environment, health, housing, public safety, among other data sets.

A sample of the recent ag data provided from skagitcountytrends.org/:

Market value of the Top 3 Commodities: Potatoes, nursery products – especially floriculture - and dairy products were the top 3 agricultural commodities by value in 2022 in Skagit County, that order. Their revenue totaled \$177 million. Yet, as a percentage of all agricultural output, the three amounted to a lower share than a decade ago – 48% vs. 57%. The agricultural sector of the county has become more diversified.

Financial Summary

The financial summary is updated for May 2024 and reflects easement properties closed and recorded.

Administrative

CFAC 2024 Meeting Dates

July 9	September 10	November 12
August 13 (tbd)	October 8 (tbd)	December 10

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 AM