

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Board
Meeting Summary
December 9, 2025

Members Present | Advisory Rep. Affiliation

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|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Scott DeGraw (chair) District 3 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Margery Hite Skagit Conservation District |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Andrea Xaver (vice chair) District 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Keith Morrison At Large |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jim Glackin Skagit Land Trust | <input type="checkbox"/> Owen Peth District 1 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audrey Gravley Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sarah Stoner <i>ex officio</i> Skagit County |

Others Present—Affiliation

Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services, LLC

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

Review Agenda

Agenda approved. Quorum present with minimum of four voting members.

Review November 18 Meeting Summary

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

Property Updates

The group discussed updates on the properties currently in queue for agricultural conservation easements. The queued applicants encompass 160 acres and 3 development rights.

Marketing & Application Process

Year-End Report Card

Sarah shared 2025 recap of farmland protection projects:

- 270 acres protected
- Six (6) development rights (residential) extinguished in Ag-NRL zone
- \$98,500 average paid per development right
- \$585,000 in capital expenses paid directly to farmers and farmland owners for voluntary conservation easement protections on their land (this amount does not include additional protection costs paid by FLP fund: appraisal reports, taxes, etc. paid by FLP)
- Protected farmland in Bow (122 ac.), Mt Vernon (145 ac.) across 5 farm properties/easements

Additional Accomplishments, 2025

- Generated Small Heritage Farms survey, with 100+ respondents. Survey results support strong interest in small farms protection.
- Procured Easement Stewardship/Monitoring Software
- Convened and led an Ag Stakeholder Roundtable on Farmland Succession and Land Access in Skagit County / Meeting of the Minds Feb 2025
- Located and installed visible locations for two (2) Protected Farmland signs, off I-5 corridor interchanges

- Five (5) news articles featuring the FLP program and/or FLP projects
- 15K acres protected mark broken (*late in 2024...into 2025*)
- Monitored 210 easements
- 12K Annual Reports printed/distributed
- Developed an Easement Transfer of Ownership notification system (between IT, Assessor, FLP)
- Developed and hosted Farmland Succession Winter Workshop Series: Farm Transition Planning, in collaboration with WWAA, WSU Extension, SPF, SFB, GSV.
- Established protocols and amendment templates with real-time stewarding of two (2) easement boundary-line adjustments (BLAs)
- Hosted three (3) meeting guests: Whatcom Farmland Preservation Staff, Department of Ecology Water Expert, King County Farmland Protection Staff.

Monitoring Updates

Kai reported that monitoring work is wrapping up for year-end 2025 existing easements, with no issues to report.

Sarah reported that the new software for easement management of 220 existing FLP easements will be managed via [Landscape](#) software starting in 2026. The software procurement is in process, now in review by IT as of November 2025. Sarah has prepared all easement data and files for upload-transfer to new system.

Committee Reports

Program Acceptance Criteria Review & Recommendation Committee

- **Small Heritage Farms' Ag Land Protection**
No report/update.

Easement Review & Recommendation Committee

No report/update.

Valuation Review & Recommendation Committee

Sarah reported that appraisals are in review.

Succession & Land Access Work 'Land Transfer Navigator' Grant

Sarah reported on the series of three winter workshops developed by FLP in collaboration with local partners, with use of the Land Transfer Navigator grant funding. Succession planning and land transfer work is a vital part of farmland protection. The goal of the grant is to support the transfer of agricultural land to the next generation of farmers. The funds applied locally are designed to: encourage more dialogue and action for succession planning and land transfer.

The first of the three winter workshops, *Your Farm's Future: Understand the Journey*, was held on December 3, 4 PM to 7 PM with dinner included. Owen, representing Western Washington Agricultural Association, opened the session with a short introduction to the topic of succession.

Panelists for *Your Farm's Future: Understanding the Journey* included: Elizabeth Bragg (Long Hearing Farm), Anne Schwartz (Blue Heron Farm), Jason Vander Kooy (Harmony Dairy) and Kai Ottesen

(Hedlin's Family Farm) who each shared their journey through the succession process. Following the panel discussion, smaller Peer-to-Peer Learning Groups covered:

Before You Hire the Experts: Identify Vision, Values and Goals (Elizabeth Bragg)
Succession Up-Close: Experience & Assumptions (Jason Vander Kooy)
Identifying, Training, Empowering the Next Generation Successor (Kai Ottesen)
Succession Toolbox: Communication Styles & Conflict (Anne Schwartz)

The workshop was well-received with a robust Q&A that turned into some sharing and audience dialogue. The farmers attending (~35) lingered and left reporting they felt ready to take next steps and the workshop offered support and information/resources they didn't realize existed.

These workshops have broad support and collaboration of Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program, Western Washington Agricultural Association, Washington State University Skagit County Extension, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, the Skagit Farm Bureau, and Genuine Skagit Valley.

The next workshops in the series are scheduled for January 13 (*Planning the Transition*) and February 18 (Moving Forward). The [workshops](#) are free but pre-registration is required.

Member Updates

The group discussed the flooding predicted to arrive this week in Skagit County. Audrey noted the King Tide event in La Conner last year. Scott noted that last year also saw Highway 20 flood, which hadn't happened before. Andrea inquired about the Climate Change Committee being convened by the county, and how to access information on the committee's proceedings.

The group also discussed the status of CREP projects, with Margery sharing that a major change occurred to the program recently. At a federal level, funding was pulled from projects and qualification rules changed which disqualified many existing projects and current applicants. In some cases, plants were torn from the ground of those projects. Scott shared that a CREP project from six or seven years ago on Hannigan Creek was now torn out.

As a follow-up to the water adjudication discussion at November's CFAB meeting, Sarah made note of the article "[Nooksack adjudication won't solve our water-supply problems](#)" by guest writer for Cascadia Daily with his perspective on the multi-decade process, November 26, 2025 article.

Water adjudication is a legal process cementing someone's right to use a certain amount of water and marking their place in line if there are cuts. Because most waterways across Washington state are overallocated, cuts are inevitable.

Sarah shared that the Skagit Valley Herald provided a [recap of the first workshop including a summary of helpful tips in approaching succession](#) after the *Your Farm's Future: Understanding the Journey* workshop in December on succession planning.

Additional ag related articles in the news:

- Salish Current Nov 26 [Skagit County critical areas plan sees updates](#) and Skagit Valley Herald Nov 25 [Skagit County makes changes to critical areas ordinance](#)

- [Washington ranks last in farmer take-home pay in 2024](#) across the nation (Capitol Press, Dec. 4, 2025) and the picture isn't likely to vastly improve for 2025, a Washington State University financial advisor says in the article.
- [Skagit Farm Circle Agriculture Education Event Returns](#) this November (Skagit Valley Herald. More than 500 third grade students from around Skagit County learned about agriculture and the importance of Skagit Farming world-wide. Students visited six stations to learn about dairy, potatoes, water conservation, entomology, wildlife on farms and how the world needs Washington agriculture products. The event was made possible in partnership with Western Washington Agricultural Association and the Skagit County Fairgrounds.

Administrative

CFAB 2026 Meeting Dates

January 13	May 12	September 8
February 10	June 9	October 13 (tbd)
March 10	July 14	November 10
April 14	August 11 (tbd)	December 8

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 AM