

Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB)
Minutes – February 16th, 2005

Members in attendance:

Kim Mower
Murray Benjamin
Mike Hulbert (also proxy for Rose Merritt)
Dave Boon
Randy Good
Oscar Lagerlund
Ron Wesen (for Lyle Wesen)
Bob Hughes
Annie Lohman

Members not in attendance:

Roger Knutzen
Rose Merritt
Lyle Wesen

Others in attendance

Steve Sakuma
Bob Rose
Dyvon Havens
Allison Deets

1. Call to order & introductions:

Chairman Dave Boon called the meeting to order at 6.15pm, and welcomed board members and guests Steve Sakuma and Bob Rose to the February meeting.

2. Minutes:

Dave Boon requested corrections or additions to the January minutes. Randy Good offered a correction to the minutes, noting that there were four caucuses as part of the 2514 Process which requested the County continue working on the issue. Randy Good then moved to accept the minutes as amended. Murray Benjamin seconded the motion. Motion carried.

3. Tribal Ag Alliance – Steve Sakuma

Steve Sakuma, one of the ag representatives in the Tribal Ag Alliance process, gave a presentation on the progress of the Alliance thus far. He provided the Board with an overview of the chronology of ag-tribal relations and the evolution of the Tribal Ag Alliance. There are representatives at the table from the Swinomish and Sauk-Suiattle Tribes, as well as agricultural representatives. David Hedlin, Richard Smith, Larry Lowe, Ron Wesen, and Steve Sakuma are all participating in this process on behalf of Skagit agriculture.

Historically, the tribes have been at odds with the County over the Critical Areas Ordinance, and the ag community did not want buffers on waterways, as recommended by the tribes. This dichotomy of viewpoints resulted in the escalation of the disagreement to courtroom battles. With both tribal staff and farmers on the front lines of this “battle,” “much emotion was raised but no long term solutions achieved.” The Tribal Ag Alliance is a recognition that neither the tribes nor the farmers are going to “go away.”

Swinomish Chairman Brian Cladoosby attended a Shared Strategy workshop where stories of positive outcomes on similar issues were discussed, and he was advised by other Northwest Washington tribes to work with the ag community. Through Commissioner Don Munks, Chairman Cladoosby arranged to go on a tour to meet with farmers from all drainage districts, “to listen and learn.” The outcome of that tour, noted Steve Sakuma, was the initial formation of the Tribal Ag Alliance.

Steve Sakuma outlined the purpose of the Tribal Ag Alliance, which is to resolve political, operational, and scientific issues so all parties win; to promote the importance of fish and agriculture; to develop common strategies to enhance profitability for farmers and tribal fishermen; and to establish a collaborative process based on trust.

Steve Sakuma handed out a draft accord, which he says has been approved for support by the Western Washington Agricultural Association, the Skagit Farm Bureau, the Skagit Dairy Federation, and the Skagitians to Preserve Farmland. He went on to brief the AAB on the principles of the Alliance and a timeline to-date. The Tribal Ag Alliance is asking the AAB for feedback on the written accord and consideration for publicly supporting the written accord.

Oscar Lagerlund asked if other tribes were included in the Alliance, since it appeared that only the Swinomish and Suak-Suiattle have been involved thus far. Steve Sakuma reported that Brian Cladoosby will be going to talk with the Upper Skagit to try to bring them on board.

Randy Good asked about the letter referenced in the document that discusses “specific Recovery Goals as defined by the Skagit Tribes and Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Fisheries Co-managers,” which are “described in a joint letter of March 14, 2002, from WDFW and Tribes.” The Board echoed his question, wondering if anyone has seen this letter. Steve Sakuma reported he has not seen it, but can find out more about it.

After some discussion, Randy Good and others stated that the AAB needs to continue to support the Board of County Commissioners in their effort to keep buffers off of agricultural land. Chair Dave Boon agreed, although he and the rest of the board told Steve Sakuma that they applaud the proactive approach of the participants in the Tribal Ag Alliance. Steve Sakuma agreed, stating that the Alliance has potential and that Commissioner Munks is cautiously optimistic about its prospects.

4. Standing Discussion Items:

a. Drainage

Murray Benjamin commented positively on the letter submitted by the AAB regarding the Bayview Ridge Subarea Plan. Randy Good agreed, noting that the Planning Commission had taken positive action, possibly in part as a result of the AAB’s comments. The Planning Commission is directing staff to work with Dike & Drainage Districts 12, 14, and 19 to address the drainage issues related to upland development.

b. Critical Areas

Annie Lohman reported that the compliance order from the Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board (WWGMHB) is going to be appealed by the County; the WWGMHB utilized an outside expert to develop its position. The only science in the record used by that outside expert was Swinomish Tribal science, and he also utilized evidence not in record. Based on the expert’s opinion, the WWGMHB issued a ruling, finding the County out of compliance. Legal representatives for the County are arguing that due process was not followed, in that both selective in record documents and information not in record was used, and that the County did not have an opportunity to cross-examine the WWGMHB’s expert.

Oscar Lagerlund reported that the proposed rule amendments for the Upper and Lower Skagit Instream Resources Protection Program are currently open to public comment, if anyone has an interest in participating.

5. Elections/Committees

Chair Dave Boon opened the floor for nominations for the positions of Board Chair and Vice Chair for 2005. He stated that he had enjoyed his tenure serving as Chair for the first two years of the Ag Advisory Board, but felt that a rotation and “fresh face” in the Chair’s position might be good. Member Mike Hulbert nominated Oscar Lagerlund. Member Kim Mower nominated Dave Boon. Randy Good moved that the nominations be closed. Mike Hulbert seconded the motion.

After some discussion among the Board, Randy Good moved to accept a proposal by the Chair that he and the Vice Chair (Oscar Lagerlund) exchange positions. Seconded by Murray Benjamin. Put to a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously. Kim Mower moved the withdrawal of nominations for Chairman, Mike Hulbert seconded. Motion carried. Oscar Lagerlund assumed the gavel.

After some discussion, standing committees were established for 2005. The committees are as follows:

By-Laws

Dave Boon, Chair
Murray Benjamin
Kim Mower

Critical Areas Issues

(Chair to be determined)

Annie Lohman
Mike Hulbert
Randy Good

Drainage

Bob Hughes, Chair
Roger Knutzen
Lyle Wesen

Land Use

Mike Hulbert, Chair
Annie Lohman
Rose Merritt
Kim Mower

Ag Economic Viability

Lyle Wesen, Chair
Dave Boon
Bob Hughes
Roger Knutzen

AAB Chair Oscar Lagerlund will participate on a semi-regular basis in all of these committees. The currently vacant board position will also be expected to join one or more committee.

6. Miscellaneous/Member interest

Dyvon Havens handed out the most recent ag calendar from WSU Extension. The Board asked if this is Dyvon's final meeting before she retires; she will be at one more meeting, then Ned Zaugg will be her replacement.

Board member Larry Jensen has indicated he will not seek re-appointment to the Board; the Board and County will send a letter of thanks for his service, signed by new Chair Oscar Lagerlund.

Board of County Commissioners Chair Don Munks will attend the March AAB meeting to bring the County's perspective on the Tribal Ag Alliance in the context of ongoing suits related to agriculture. Don Stuart, from American Farmland Trust, will be making a presentation to the Board about Farm Bill reform. Jon Johnson (WSU) and Carolyn Henri (consultant) will be making a presentation on the economic impacts of buffers on agriculture.

Oscar Lagerlund called for a motion to adjourn. Randy Good moved, and Dave Boon seconded, that the February meeting of the Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board be adjourned. Carried.

Adjourn regular session.