

Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

August 9, 2017, 7 pm

Skagit County Administration Building

Members in Attendance

Nels Lagerlund Michael Hughes Barbara Cleave Kraig Knutzen
Murray Benjamin Sloan Johnson Terry Sapp

Members Absent

Steve Bertelsen Greg Lee- (Proxy- Murray Benjamin) Scott Hanseth (Proxy-Michael Hughes)
Steve Omdal Tim Van Hofwegen

Others in Attendance

Kara Symonds, Skagit County Public Works
Kathy Jewell, Skagit County Planning & Development Services

Call to Order

Nels Lagerlund called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

Meeting Minutes

Michael Hughes moved to approve the July 12, 2017 minutes, Murray Benjamin seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Local Issue - Voluntary Stewardship Program

Kara Symonds reported that the Skagit County work plan was approved by both the statewide VSP Technical Panel (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington State Department of Ecology, Washington State Conservation Commission, and the Washington State Department of Agriculture) and the Washington State Conservation Commission Director. Kara had sent us the markup version of the work plan so we could see the changes that were made to reach approval stage. The approved work plan is on the website [here](#)

What worked in the past for Chelan did not work for Skagit County. Chelan cited their regulatory backstop as a way to protect some critical areas and therefore no monitoring or adaptive management was required; however, when Skagit County submitted their draft plan for review, it was stated that they didn't want to perpetuate that error. She discussed the obstacles they overcame and how they had to list a monitoring system & benchmarks for all 5 critical areas; wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, frequently flooded areas, geological hazardous areas, fish & wildlife habitat conservation areas. Skagit County's approach to monitor FWHCA through aerial photos, beginning with the 2011 photos as a baseline, is still a component of the plan.

The data used in the monitoring system will be gathered by a variety of agencies other than Skagit County as follows:

- Wetlands -Department of Ecology's Wetlands Change Analysis
- Critical aquifer recharge areas – Department of Agriculture groundwater quality data
- Frequently flooded areas – Skagit County Planning by number of permits in floodplains
- Geological hazardous areas – Skagit County Planning by number of permits
- Fish & wildlife habitat conservation areas - Skagit County GIS will monitor & categorize

Kara pointed out Skagit County used systems and tools already in place, but now they will gather the data and reporting on it. Reporting is required every 2 years, which will utilize the new aerial photos the County already collects every 2 years.

Terry Sapp thanked Kara for sending us the track changes document. So much was struck it was confusing. Kara advised him to skip over the beginning and look at the new table summarizing the 5 critical areas and monitoring starting at about page 37. Terry asked for clarification on how this affects the community at the property owner level in the Ag zones, Kara responded that it shouldn't impact a landowner on a site specific level; landowners can keep farming where they're farming currently. The enhancement goals in the plan were extending the trend line of previous enrollments in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and Natural Resources Stewardship Program (NRSP)

Terry wishes the program had a good citizen's component to the VSP. Some recognition that the citizen is actively helping the VSP by replanting trees or something, that they are voluntary without compensation. Nels pointed out that this would show the voluntary component of the program. Kara suggested it could be like the handout of certificates at the Conservation District dinner event, if we were to do a program like that. Sloan suggested a sign the owners could put on their property that they are a good member of the VSP, similar to what he has seen in Whatcom County. Kara stated that the VSP plan is flexible and they are open to ideas.

Terry complimented SC on putting in the time and effort on coming up with this program and supporting Agriculture in our valley.

Nels asked Kara about tide gates and flooding issues. Kara stated Skagit County has been working with other districts on this. There are several Inter-Local Agreements (ILA) between the Drainage Utility and drainage districts to cooperate on conveyance improvement projects. Kara is currently discussing a flood flow pipes with Dike District 5 and Drainage & Dike District 25. The County is preparing a contract with a consultants to design these pipes or emergency outlets at three locations: sea dike at the outlet of the Samish River, additional pipes at the WDFW property near the outlet of the Samish River, and at the Samish River at Farm to Market Road. This work is being done with federal funds.

Kara suggested that the agricultural community get involved from the start with Seattle City Lights (SCL) as they prepare to relicense their dam. The current license expires in 2025. The ag community has an interest in how they manage the dam during July-Sept and staying above 10,000 CFS. Skagit County Public Works staff involved in flood risk management will be encouraging SCL to begin their flood storage in October as opposed to December, as it is now.

Public Works has many learned lessons from participating in the PSE re-licensing experience. Moving forward it's best to get involved in the process early, be clear and consistent in messaging, and look for commitments in black and white in the text of the Settlement Agreement. Kara will share information with AAB about the process and new information comes out. She has a meeting in Sept. to tour the facilities and talk about the relicensing process.

NEW BUSINESS –

AAB will come up with some bullet points as to what they need/goals and what our message to SCL will be. Will discuss with Skagit County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and will then draft a letter. Encourage BOCC to support PW with SCL for their work for Flood/Irrigation.

Nels asked Michael for a draft or bullet points/ideas and discuss them in the September meeting. And send letter in October to the Board of County Commissioners. And then consider if we want to send letter to SCL, after we get guidance from BOCC.

Terry attended the EDASC seminar on Agri-tourism and feels it's a topic AAB wants to stay on top of. A lot of representatives present from the tourism industry, but only 2 agricultural representatives; Terry Sapp & Randy Goode. He felt the tone of the meeting was prioritizing the tourists interests above the ag interest.

Andrew Miller from EDASC will present at the Sept. 13th AAB meeting.

NO COMMITTEE REPORTS

Adjourn

Murray motion to adjourn, Terry seconded. Adjourned at 7:57 pm

Next meeting will be Sept. 13, 2017 at 7 pm.