

**Skagit County Conservation Futures Program Advisory Board**  
**Meeting Summary**  
April 9, 2019

**Members in Attendance**

Steve Sakuma            Andrea Xaver            Scott DeGraw            Keith Morrison  
Owen Peth

**Members Absent**

Wendy Pare  
Jim Glackin

**Staff and Others in Attendance**

Kara Symonds, Skagit County Public Works  
Tara Naylor, Skagit County Public Works  
Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland  
Greg Hinton, Landowner / FLP Applicant  
C.K. Eidem, Ducks Unlimited

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:00 AM

**Member Update**

Andrea brought forward two recent articles in the Skagit Valley Herald. One covered the brassica species and proposed County code and protocols for growers. Cross-pollination is a growing worry as more people move into the Valley who are unfamiliar with rules around the distance needed between fields of brassica seed crops. Andrea also shared an article that discusses the City of Anacortes' 900% rate increase to agricultural water rates.

**March Meeting Summary**

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

**FLP 199 Applications**

The committee invited a landowner and Ducks Unlimited representative to discuss FLP application 199; this is a 160 acre property with 4 development rights located off of Farm to Market Road. Greg, one of the landowners, shared a history of his interest in the property, an old Poplar Farm. The landowners have been focused on clearing and preparing the land and are also in discussions with other local farmers regarding the future of the land. About half of the land is registered organic. In addition, the landowners are working on an agreement with Ducks Unlimited to complete a project on the site. C.K. shared some background on the grant that he acquired to work on 12 regional projects, including this property. In general, DU is moving away from permanently wetted ponds so for this site, the plan is to have very

shallow (10:1 sloped) depressions that are connected by gates and ditches. This way, the property can retain water in the winter, but drain when necessary in the Spring.

The group discussed any coordination with the drainage district. Greg has been in contact with one of the District 25 Commissioners, but this group is his first meeting where he's able to outreach to a larger group. C.K. added that they do not anticipate affecting neighboring landowners; when DU believes they are going to affect a neighbor, they seek an easement from them as well. Greg added that if the project doesn't work as designed, they will re-grade until it works. The group discussed other possible impacts to neighbors, including lost crops from waterfowl. C.K. added that there are already a lot of birds on the property and by DU's calculations, there is more than enough food for the overwintering waterfowl. C.K. thought that ultimately the project will help the land become more farmable, because of the additional ability to manage water. The group discussed other aspects of the land, including salinity.

### **Farmland Outside of Ag-NRL**

Allen Rozema of Skagitians to Preserve Farmland shared a summary of a grant funded study they are conducting which examines the land access barrier for beginning farmers. They are currently writing their final report, are able to share some initial findings. They started with some assumptions: farmland designated Ag-NRL is near maximum utilization; crop rotation practices make it difficult to find land for small scale farming; the 40 acre minimum in Ag-NRL makes land cost prohibitive for start-ups, and; potential farmland within Rural Resource and Rural Reserve zones may be less expensive to lease, rent, or acquire for start-ups. In addition, from the USDA census, there is approximately 20,000 acres outside of Ag-NRL.

With these assumptions, they conducted a GIS analysis of lands in these zones. In their first GIS run, they found 52,000 acres over 4,100 parcels (greater than one acre) of potentially farmable land east of the Swinomish Channel. If this, approximately 41% are being farmed, or 21,000 acres. In their second GIS run, they focused on parcels five acres or larger and included Skagit County Assessor data on land enrolled in Current Use Farm and Agriculture and Current Use Open Space. This analysis showed approximately 9,300 farmable acres in the RR and RRv zones. Allen and the group discussed other barriers to start-ups, including up-front capital costs. SPF's next steps are to conduct some ground verification, develop outreach strategies, and research tools that connect willing landowners to new and beginning farmers.

### **FLP Contractors**

The group reviewed FLP monitoring agent submittals. Each committee member will rank the submittals then a roll up of the evaluations will be discussed at the May meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 AM