

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
July 12, 2022

Members in Attendance

Andrea Xaver	Jim Glackin	Scott DeGraw	Trisha Logue (ex-officio)
Audrey Gravley	Margery Hite	Owen Peth	Hal Hart (ex-officio)

Members Absent

Keith Morrison

Staff and Others in Attendance

Grace Kane, Skagit County Public Works
Heather Spore, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services
Mike See, Skagit County Public Works
Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:10 AM.

Review Agenda

Agenda approved.

June 14 Meeting Summary

Andrea made a motion to approve, with no changes; Owen seconded. All were in favor.

Easement Status, Property Updates

The group discussed updates on the five properties currently in queue for agricultural conservation easements. The queued applicants encompass 320 acres and 8 development rights.

The group discussed the implications of an existing residence being included in an easement along with the farmland. Kai reported that an estimated five percent of easements within the Farmland Legacy program (FLP) have an existing residence wrapped into the protective easement.

Monitoring Update

The group discussed the issue of compliance and annual monitoring regarding a hypothetical easement with an illegally occupied dwelling. Kai points out that the best time to clear up these issues is before the easement is in place. The group discussed ADUs (accessory dwelling units) as they relate to the FLP conservation easement template and to County code. It was determined that ADUs are only allowable if there is an existing residence.

Annual Monitoring Notices: 2022 monitoring letters are on track to mail to all 150 Farmland Legacy easement landowners on July 15, 2022. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)/USDA easement monitoring is due by end of August for preferential review status. Some NRCS easements require in-person review by an NRCS rep every five years, which is 2022 in the NRCS cycle. A clause in the NRCS easements of which the Farmland Legacy Program (FLP) has three such easements require

this every-five-year easement monitoring by NRCS. Kai points out that FLP has many more than three NRCS easements; he will find out why it's only three easements with this particular clause.

Marketing & Application Process

Annual Report 2021

Stacks of printed 2021 Annual Reports were distributed to brick and mortar ag-related stores around Mount Vernon and Burlington—including Farmers Equipment, Scholten's, Farmers Supply, Northwest Farm Credit Services, etc. Conway Feed is still on the list for a stack delivery.

National Farmland Protection Statistics

Sarah shared that she attended the American Farmland Trust release of their latest report: *Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future*.

- View a recording of the webinar at <https://www.agri-pulse.com/media/videos/play/887>
- View the report and interactive maps at www.farmland.org/farmsunderthreat

Recent Study: "Economic Benefits of Conservation Easements for Montana's Farms, Ranches and Communities"

Sarah shared that she reviewed a May 2022 study released on [economic benefits of conservation easements on Montana's farms, ranches and communities](#). She would love to see a similar study completed on Washington state or Skagit County. Sarah approached the PNW Director of American Farmland Trust Addie Candib to inquire about developing such a study for our area. Addie suggests that perhaps when a new director is in place at WALT (Washington Association of Land Trusts), they could be approached with the idea.

The new collaborative Montana report was produced by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Montana Association of Land Trusts, and the Heart of Rockies Initiative. It focuses on the Farm Bill Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program and documents the economic contributions of conservation projects. The 20-page report, titled [Working for Montana Agriculture: Economic Benefits of Conservation Easements for Montana's Farms, Ranches, and Communities](#), tells a compelling story:

- Between 2014 and 2021 the NRCS, farm and ranch families, and land trusts (or state agency) teamed up to invest \$109 million from the Farm Bill ALE program to conserve 289,000 acres of ag lands in 22 Montana counties.
- Every Farm Bill ALE dollar allocated to farm and ranch conservation yielded \$1.89 of economic activity, nearly doubling the positive impact of the Farm Bill funding.
- 95% of the allocated funds were used to directly assist with farm and ranch agricultural operations and expansion, farm and ranch family succession planning, business strength and stability, and direct purchase of farm and ranch equipment. These funds keep working lands in working hands.
- These dollars produced a total economic impact of \$182 million for Montana's economy, supported 1,057 local jobs and \$41.5 million in labor income, and contributed \$99 million to Montana's Gross Domestic Product.

FLP on Social Media

Sarah shared that regular posts on [Skagit County's Facebook page](#) highlighting a Farmland Legacy property continue to be popular, well liked and well-received within the general social media audience

of the main [Facebook government page](#). Posts appear one to two Fridays a month – “Faces of Farmland Legacy.” This July features the John Roozen family’s protection of 33 acres through FLP in July 1999.

Easement Review Subcommittee

(Members: [Andrea](#), [Keith](#), [Owen](#))

Purpose: 1. Review the current FLP easement template to identify what might be obstacles to a landowner signing the Conservation Easement; recommend what might be considered for elimination, and/or not relevant to conservation of the ag land; 2. Review the current FLP conservation easement and the Subcommittee’s recommended changes from a legal standpoint to ensure that the contract is watertight and ironclad.
Subcommittee chair: Owen

Owen reports that the subcommittee has completed their suggested changes to the easement document and submitted this to Sarah to forward for County legal review prior to any change proposals for review by the Skagit County Board of Commissioners. Skagit County legal counsel pointed out that the Board of Commissioners would circle back for legal counsel

Owen will give an overview of the subcommittee’s findings and suggested changes to the full CFAC at the upcoming meeting, August 9.

Valuation Process Review Subcommittee (Members: [Scott](#), [Margery](#), [Audrey](#), [Jim](#))

Purpose: make recommendations, if needed, to improve the overall valuation process (versus the appraisal process which is simply one tool for valuation. Evaluate barriers to participation: Is it our appraisal amounts that is the issue? Or do we need to have our appraisals approached differently? See below including a review of the FLP Property Ranking/Scoring Process Review—how the scoring process relates to valuation.
Subcommittee chair: Scott.

Scott reports that he only recently received an appraisal on an agricultural property from an appraiser who has worked with FLP’s current contracted appraiser. Scott will gain the client’s permission before he shares the appraisal report with FLP staff for review. With FLP’s contracted appraiser retiring in the near future, identifying an ag-experienced appraiser is time wisely spent.

Member Updates

Members discussed the number of acres needed in Skagit County for dairy cattle—currently, about one to three acres of land per one head of cattle. It was mentioned that, with this year’s wet spring weather, there are still puddles on the land, in terms of the ability to mow for cattle feed. Time will tell in terms of the wet spring’s impact on access to local cattle feed.

Margery has an update for the group regarding her recent meeting to discuss land conservation with Swinomish Tribe community members; however, the update must be tabled due to time constraints.

Financial Summary

Tabled due to time constraints.

Administrative Business

CFAC 2022 Meeting Dates

August 9	October 11	December 13
September 13	November 8	

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 AM