

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
August 9, 2022

Members in Attendance

Andrea Xaver	Jim Glackin	Trisha Logue (ex-officio)
Keith Morrison	Scott DeGraw	Hal Hart (ex-officio)

Members Absent

Audrey Gravley	Margery Hite	Owen Peth
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Staff and Others in Attendance

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 7:00 AM.

Review Agenda

Agenda approved.

July 12 Meeting Summary

Jim made a motion to approve, with one typo correction (NCRS to NRCS); Andrea 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 consideration of a late fall committee meeting focused on review of inquiries.

Monitoring Update

Farmland Legacy's easement monitor Kai Ottesen reported that the final NRCS-FLP joint monitoring session with Robyn Buckingham from NRCS is happening today, after this meeting. Kai and the NRCS monitor will be walking the easement site in person. Easement owners that Kai and Robyn have met with so far have commented that they are very happy to be in the program.

Kai referenced a new 2022 easement, FLP 244. Typically, newly recorded easements are not monitored until the following year since all easement requirement boxes would be checked during the application process. Kai happened to be in the area and noted derelict farmworker housing on the property. Sarah told Kai she will connect with the Prosecuting Attorney's office since this easement is a special condition easement through the Skagit County Prosecuting Attorney. Sarah will send Kai the [link to this Farmland Legacy easement](#).

Marketing & Application Process

National & Washington State-Specific Farmland Protection Statistics

American Farmland Trust released their latest report: *Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future*. View a [recording of the webinar](#) and view the [report and interactive maps](#). American Farmland Trust (AFT) also offered a Washington state-specific overview of the report. Sarah attended the state-specific overview where AFT reported that nation-wide 11 million acres have been lost. In Washington state 238,000 acres could be lost in AFT's Worst-Case Scenario overview.

Also included in the AFT overview: For every five farmers 65 years of age and older, there is only one farmer 35 years of age and younger. AFT stressed the need for strengthening land transfer options, one of their four main areas of focus (three other areas of focus: protect farmland; pursue smart solar siting; support equitable farmland access). Kai points out that perhaps there are farmers of the younger generation who are active in the farm operation, but those younger folks simply are not listed as the farmer of record in the operation—that 65-year-old is listed as the farmer of record.

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 was to give an overview to the full CFAC membership of subcommittee's findings and suggested changes, tabled due to Owen's absence.

Group discussion ensued regarding difficulties for farmer advisory members to attend August CFAC meetings. In 2021, CFAC cancelled the August meeting. Scott said this is something for the group to consider in the future due to typical low attendance in August.

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 has yet to receive permission to share (with FLP staff) an agricultural property appraisal by an appraiser who has worked with FLP's current contracted appraiser. FLP's contracted appraiser plans to retire soon; it's wise to identify another trained ag appraiser, since they are less common.

Scott mentioned that this ag appraiser is also willing to meet with the Planning Department's Brandon Black to discuss valuation options on the 39-1 perspective of valuation.

Member Updates

Members discussed the conflict between residential homes in farmland – and the issues of dust and chemical spray complaints.

Andrea references July 30, 2022, Skagit Valley Herald article, “Preserving farmland must be a priority” (first printed in The Daily Astorian). Andrea also shares that she is considering a letter to the editor response regarding a recent editorial in SVH. She wants CFAC members to know that the Big Lake Historical Tour is scheduled for this coming Saturday, August 13, 2022, 10 AM to 5 PM.

Financial Summary

Sarah reports that preliminary budgets have been submitted to Finance in July. She put in a request for \$1.8 million of Conservation Futures Fund 122 to be earmarked for easement purchases in 2023. This is the same amount budgeted for easement purchases as this year.

Trisha clarifies that the Board wants to see best estimate of projected acreage to be protected. And that, as needed, if there are additional funds in the budget, can process a Budget Amendment.

This year, 2022, looks like an estimated \$500,000 will be spent on easement purchases due to delayed easements process for several queued easements.

Budget projections can be verified using average Farmland Legacy statistic (program averages looking at the data from the last 25 years:

- An average of **565 acres are protected by FLP each year** (1996-2021)
- Farmland Legacy **extinguishes an average of 10.6 development rights per year.**

For budget projections, the purchase of 10.6 development rights translates to roughly \$1,200,000 in easement purchases. Making room for an above-average year with a \$600,000 buffer means \$1.8 million for 2023 is about right. If Skagit County maintains these averages, in the next 25 years Skagit County Farmland Legacy will have roughly 30,000 acres of farmland protected by 2046.

Scott requests for the CFAC group to annually review a bar graph of protected acres for the past few years. He suggests perhaps timed for an early spring CFAC meeting annually.

Administrative Business

Heather Spore had put a question in the chat that was brought to the group’s attention. She wants to know if CFAC and FLP’s long-term planning strategies target certain areas. Sarah clarifies that it does not. As this is a County-wide program, all owners of land zoned Ag-NRL qualify and are invited to apply. FLP depends on willing landowners. Scott adds that FLP hasn’t been in a position in recent years where we’ve had to turn down applicants or source additional funding.

CFAC 2022 Meeting Dates

September 13	November 8
October 11	December 13

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 AM