

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
September 14, 2021

Members in Attendance

Andrea Xaver **Owen** Peth
Margery Hite **Scott** DeGraw

Members Absent

Jim Glackin Audrey Gravley Keith Morrison

Staff and Others in Attendance

Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Dan Berentson, Skagit County Public Works
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services
Mike See, Skagit County Public Works
Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:05 AM.

Member Update

Andrea brought to the group’s attention the September 2, 2021 *Capital Press* article titled [‘Who Owns the West: Foreign Investors are buying Wester U.S. farmland. Who’s investing and why?’](#) by Sierra Dawn McClain. Andrea will circulate the PDF, or can send a hard copy. 35 million acres of farmland owned by foreign holdings, per the article. Margery weighed in that the same issue happened in Europe.

Allen shared that Chris Bowling wants to enroll in FLP. Allen has been helping him prepare his paperwork; referred him to Lot Cert NW. Chris has 70 acres right near the Conway interchange, south on Pioneer Highway. It borders Wiley, which was preserved in 2010. This addition will create a block of preserved farmland of about 100 acres. Chris stopped farming his land about five years ago, and leases it to the Morrisons. This land was farmed before I-5. It was farmed with horses, originally by his grandfather. His kids are out of state and don’t want to farm. Enrolling it in FLP ensures that the land will stay farmland.

Margery shared that in a recent visit to a local seed store, the staff had received a call from a realtor who’s been soliciting them to sell—they had received an offer that they felt was not a proper valuation. Margery spoke with them about FLP; the store staff knew of the program and it would be worth following up with the seed store owners again.

July Meeting Summary

Kai noted in the Monitoring section of the meeting minutes there’s one sentence to strike, the 2nd sentence, as the monitoring status is incorrectly reported. As an aside to monitoring, Kai reported issues

with one property that he cannot observe from the road and asked the group's advice on how to best proceed with contacting the owner for access.

Andrea made a motion to approve, Owen seconded. All were in favor.

Existing Easement Update

Sarah provided update on Breckenridge/Nelson boundary line adjustment (BLA) request.

The group discussed the how-to's of the Paulus' property removal of the former blueberry farm. Owen brought up the Edison Fields's property and their poplar farm. Owen asked the group what they recalled about commitments to farm the existing Edison Field property easement. The group recalls that the owner did agree to farm, but it looks like it is not being/won't be farmed as well as rumblings of a potential PR issue. Scott weighed in that the program will likely continue to be challenged by changing use of easement land designated open space. Kai brought up that one of the retained uses on the Edison Fields easement from October 2020 allows recreational use.

Allen suggests that when an easement/application involves a drainage district, that FLP pulls in the drainage consortium that now exists. To make it a point of protocol to alert the drainage district.

Scott brought up the concern about FLP easement contracts being varied and thus hard to monitor if each one is unique. Sarah clarified that FLP easements have remained consistent since about 2015.

Margery wants to clarify that FLP easements don't require people to farm. Owen agrees, but wants to be clear that the goal of FLP should be to keep the land actively farming. He stressed that we should keep that goal in mind as we look at a new piece of FLP property: to choose properties that suit the goal of production agriculture. Andrea agrees with both Margery and Owen and to see both sides of the coin, and she adds that right now the program needs to attract properties.

Scott wants to know, if an agency like Northwest Lot Certification Services is hired, how long of a timeframe would a certification takes. Allen explained that you would be hiring NW Northwest Lot Certification Services for a flat fee to compile all that data. But it still comes down to the county lot of record certification process. Dan suggests that FLP staff identify current program barriers; and, for example, to sit down with Planning to establish reasonable expectations for lot certification reviews.

Allen brought to group's attention that the [County's comprehensive plan](#) proposes the idea of putting FLP, DNR all under one entity—Allen wants to be sure all of us our aware that a road map currently exists for goals and proposed policies. Allen will forward to the group the links related to this topic (found on page 121: "Goal 4-A-2", with a series of policies listed under it, and specifically mentioning the FLP.)

Monitoring Update

Kai reported that all the federal field monitoring is complete. Reports should be in to the FLP staff office by week's end for submission to the USDA by their September 30 deadline.

Marketing/Application Process

Sarah discussed recent marketing and outreach activities. A front-page article by Jacqueline Allison ran in the Sunday September 5, 2021 *Skagit Valley Herald* covering the Farmland Legacy Program and its 25-year legacy: '[Skagit County farmland protection program has preserved 13,500 acres.](#)' Sarah has shared the article to various ag-friendly Skagit agencies along with a summary overview. The [Office of Farmland Preservation newsletter](#), American Farmland Trust's [National Ag Land Network](#), and [EDASC](#) were among those to share the FLP 25-year recap and *Skagit Valley Herald* news article. Supporters including Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland and Genuine Skagit Valley posted mentions of the *Skagit Valley Herald* article to their social media pages, with much attention garnered.

Other contacts resulted in community connections plus content about the FLP posted to various ag- and ag-tourism websites: [Visit Skagit Valley](#), [Genuine Skagit Valley](#) and the [Festival of Family Farms](#) websites now reference the FLP. The Festival of Family Farms "Preserve Farmland" tab previously lacked any mention of Skagit's farmland preservation program! Host farms in the 2021 Festival of Family Farms were offered 'It's Not Farmland Without Farmers' bumper stickers to hand out to festival goers on the upcoming October 2-3 weekend.

Annual report 2021 preliminary planning is taking place: pricing, distribution dates and costs.

All annual monitoring letters sent this July included an invitation to the now-cancelled 25th Anniversary Celebration along with a postage-paid Business Reply, requesting verification of correct contact information and requesting current phone/email of easement holders. Nominal return rate on these, around 10 responses returned in the mail total.

The group tabled review of the current Farmland Legacy application process due to meeting time constraints.

Property Update/Financial Summary

Sarah provided updates on the properties in the queue and reviewed the financial summary.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 AM