



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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January 5, 2012

Ron Shultz
Director of Policy and Intergovernmental Relations
Washington State Conservation Commission
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via email to rshultz@scc.wa.gov

Mr. Shultz:

On December 19, 2011, the Skagit County Board of Commissioners approved Skagit County's enrollment of the entirety of unincorporated Skagit County, and all of its watersheds, in the Voluntary Stewardship Program established by ESHB 1886. This letter serves as formal notification to the Conservation Commission of the County's election to enroll.

The Board also nominated the Samish and Skagit watersheds for consideration by the State Conservation Commission as priority watersheds. In making that nomination, the Board considered the factors required by the legislation, a discussion of which you can find in the Analysis Evaluating Enrollment in VSP that staff prepared.

Our webpage at www.skagitcounty.net/agcao contains:

- the ordinance enrolling the County in the VSP and nominating the Samish and Skagit watersheds as priority watersheds;
- the staff analysis evaluating required factors for enrollment in the VSP;
- comments from local and statewide interests, nearly all of whom supported enrollment.

As you know, Skagit County is often called the "last, best hope" for salmon recovery in Puget Sound. The Skagit River watershed is the third largest watershed on the west coast of the contiguous United States and the largest and "one of the most unspoiled strongholds of fish and wildlife habitat in the Puget Sound."¹ As the largest source of Puget Sound's fresh water and home to a third of its threatened wild Chinook salmon, the Wild and Scenic Skagit River is a natural resource important to both the state and the nation.

¹ Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan 2005, at 2.

Skagit County's Clean Samish Initiative ("CSI"), in partnership with the Department of Ecology, the Skagit Conservation District, and many other entities, was a model that the Ruckelshaus Committee used in developing the VSP. Skagit County and its partners have recently redoubled efforts toward implementation of the CSI work plan and have made real progress toward cleanup of Samish Bay. In considering enrollment in the VSP, the County's Ag Advisory Board recommended nomination of both the Samish and Skagit watersheds as priorities. In recognition of the importance of protecting our riparian resources, we hope that the Conservation Commission will designate the Skagit and Samish as priorities so that we can extend an effective holistic program like the CSI countywide.

The Board's ordinance enrolling the County in the VSP directs staff to immediately begin preparations, including work to appoint a watershed group and outlining a work plan. Skagit County is uniquely positioned to hit the ground running on implementation, and we hope you will strongly consider our watersheds in determining statewide priorities.

Sincerely,



Betsy Stevenson
Senior Planner & Team Supervisor
Natural Resources Division
Planning & Development Services

cc: Skagit County Board of Commissioners
Dan Berentson, Public Works Natural Resources Division Manager
Carolyn Kelly, Skagit Conservation District Manager
GMA Record