



OFFICE OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Washington State
Conservation Commission
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APPROVED MINUTES

The Farmland Preservation Task Force met on June 4, 2008 at the Walla Walla Community College in Walla Walla Washington. Chair Bob Hart called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

Task Force Members

Bob Hart, Chair	Senator Mary Margaret Haugen
Sheryl Cox	Jacob Anderson
Fred Colvin	Rudy Plager
Dee Caputo	Greg Schoenbachler
John Mankowski	Representative Joel Kretz
Lee Faulconer	Gus Hughbanks
DonMunks	Richard Thomason
Lynn Bahrych	Jeff Emtman

Commission Staff

Steve McGonigal, OFP Manager
Mark Clark, Executive Director
Mary Anderson, Executive Assistant
Ron Shultz, Special Assistant to the Executive Director
Lori Gonzalez, Administrative Assistant

Guests

Mike Rundlett Western Washington Agriculture Association
Don Larsen, Fish & Wildlife
Darrel Olson, Columbia Snake River Irrigation
Bob Lee, Senate Agriculture Committee
Chris Below, Salmon Recovery Board
Kirk Mathewson, Citizen from Manson
Beth Thiel, Blue mountain land trust
Vernon Bodoe, Citizen

Approval of Agenda

Chair Hart noted changes in the agenda, Frank O'Leary from the Cattlemen's Association will be moved to after the lunch hour. Jerry Anhorn and Greg Farrens from the Irrigation Technology Program will speak before lunch.

Meeting Minutes from April 2, 2008

**Rudy Plager moved to approve the April 2, 2008 Task Force Meeting Minutes,
Greg Schoenbachler seconded,
Motion passed**

Develop Recommendations for Adoption in August

Chair Hart suggested that because of the time crunch for the budget timeline for 07-09 the Task Force should start identifying issues and come to a consensus for Conservation Commission staff to begin drafting recommendations for the Task Force to review and adopt in August. Steve McGonigal walked through the items that were under tab 3 and tab 4 in the meeting packet.

Mark Clark, Executive Director of the Conservation Commission summarized the matrix of factors and solutions to the Task Force. Mr. Clark has been working with the Commission members and keeping them up to speed with the development of these issues. Mr. Clark has been continuing conversations with Department of Agriculture on the Future of Farming and to discuss the coordination with other programs, agencies and organizations on who will be able to work and come up with resolutions and necessary budget items for these issues.

Mr. Clark, also spoke a little bit on the open space issues in our state and others referring to the June 2007 report from the Washington State Department of Revenue Open Space Taxation Act. A contractor has been retained to research other open space issues that are currently out there and see if there are opportunities to look at what open space has done and what it's meant to do and what possible changes that might be done. Commission staff will bring recommendations forward to the Task Force at the August or October meeting and if there were any budget items to be brought forward to the legislature, August would be within the budget timeline for discussing and preparing to bring forward to legislature in September/October.

Discussion on water rights, water relinquishment, and exempt well issues. Mr. Clark has been in contact and working with folks in the Governor's Policy Office and the Farm Bureau to see where they are at and reported that there have been meetings in progress. There is an attempt to bring this to legislation this coming session that would address some of these issues. Mr. Clark hopes to have a report for the Task Force in August as well. The Conservation Commission has a facilitator on staff and would like to do different focus groups with stakeholders to try and get additional information from farmers and conservation districts.

Chair Hart recommended the Task Force concentrate and pin point an area or issue the Task Force can accomplish and move forward with.

Definition of Agricultural Land

There will be a meeting with Natural Resource agencies to discuss and review the many definitions and define what it means to farmland preservation. Mr. Clark suggested the subcommittee formed a couple of meetings ago that consisted of Fred, Lynn, Bob, Ron and John work together to try and come up with a recommendation for a definition through the natural resource meetings that occurred and present it to the Task Force in August. Chair Hart recalled that the Task Force in February asked for a definition. It seemed to him that the Task Force instead received a page of definitions. He stressed that the request was for one recommended definition.

Mapping

Mr. Clark mentioned that the Conservation Commission is obtaining comprehensive maps from different sources such as the University of Washington, Department of Natural Resources, County Assessors and taking a look at the past 10 years of farmland being purchased for other use. He will provide this data some time in the near future for the Task Force to take a look at. Sheryl Cox requested that Mr. Clark provide for the overlay maps from these sources of the open space to also include lands that are currently owned by both State of Washington and the Federal Government. There was discussion of conversion of farmland to other uses under government ownership and in response to government mandates such as mitigation. Lee Faulconer said that WSDA has comprehensive and complete maps of crop lands. Senator Haugen spoke about the value of having policies of not converting farmland adopted by the Governor for cabinet agencies and by entities such as the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Future of the Office of Farmland Preservation

Mr. Clark promised to provide the Task Force with a copy of the Conservation Commission's final strategic plan as it concerns the OFP.

He said that the future of OFP may include getting assistance to local programs, not necessarily through counties as was done with RCO money this fiscal year. Further information will be available in August.

Conservation districts were asked by the Commission what their financial needs will be in the next biennium for farmland preservation.

Open Space Taxation

Task Force members read the report from Fred Colvin provided under tab 4 in their meeting packets. Fred reported that Department of Revenue said that there have been no changes in the rules. To change the RCW would require legislation, and there is hesitancy to seek that.

Don Munks discussed state agency rules that require the farmer to feed and breed and manage and perform a number of other functions concerning their commodity. He said it is inconsistent with modern agriculture.

WSDA Future of Farming Program Update

Lee Faulconer, Task Force member from Department of Agriculture briefly reported the status of the Future of Farming focus group meeting recently held in Skagit County and have been making an effort to have a focus group every week in different areas of the state. They have an on line survey and have received over 200 submittals so far from diverse farming groups that have responded. Discussed how the two programs benefit each other. The Future of Farming are personally reaching out and meeting with farmers and trying to come up with a series of recommendations to bring to the legislation for a healthy viable agriculture in our state. June 12th will be their next listening session in Walla Walla. Date is locked in but not location.

Jake Anderson requested information on land conversions and water.

State Government's Budget Development Process

Presented by Mark Clark, Executive Director

Mr. Clark walked through the Commission's time line for the 07-09 budget time line. As currently listed by OFM, the OFP has less money per year after the next fiscal year, with \$320,000 per biennium listed instead of the current level of \$500,000 per biennium. Budget building for the new biennium proposals are due to the Office of Financial management by September 2nd. Office of Farmland Preservation will be hiring a full time employee (FTE) to take off some of the workload and assist Steve McGonigal. Mr. Clark sees the need for a third person a year from now. Staff will provide the Task Force a budget package in August.

The Commission is reaching out to each Conservation Districts and specifically asking budget wise what their needs are on farmland preservation in acres and dollars.

Steve McGonigal discussed budget levels as they relate to on-the-ground OFP activities, like citizen outreach through the media. The Task Force binder Tab 5 includes a one-page report on the budget needs of the OFP.

Water and Irrigation

Presented by Darryll Olsen, Columbia/Snake River Irrigators

Mr. Olsen wanted to note that Speaker of the House, Frank Chopp, Jay Manning, Executive Director of Department of Ecology, Representative Grant and other government entities will be meeting July 10, 2008, 3:30 p.m. at the Columbia Center Red Lion. Economic Impacts will be discussed and water relinquishment. Information can be found on www.csria.org.

Water Use Charts & Water Relinquishment Formulas

Presented by Greg Farrens, Walla Walla Community College (WWCC) Irrigation Technology Programs

Walla Walla Community College Water Center

Presented by Gerald Anhorn, WWCC Irrigation Technology Program

Mr. Anhorn went through his power point presentation and provided the WWCC website: www.wwcc.edu from this website you can enter into the Water Center Program's website.

Jerry suggested the Task Force look on Google, Eastern Colorado and see how they lost their agriculture production due to how they handled the relinquishment issue. His message was to be careful on what we do with relinquishment because that incident could happen to us here in our own state.

Lunch

Announcement

Chair Hart made an announcement that the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) are looking to see if someone from the Task Force would like to participate in reviewing proposals that they have received. Jacob Anderson will work with Ron Shultz, Commission Staff in taking part in the reviewing process.

Jake Anderson proposed to Chair Hart that the Task Force consider making water a top priority for the Task force and to continue to work with Jerry Anhorn and Gregg Farrens with WWCC. Chair Hart suggests that staff work on this and come back to the Task Force in August with a recommendation and report.

Sheryl Cox commented that it is imperative to continue support with the colleges in researching these issues. It is money well spent when we see their efforts and their knowledge as the Task Force just saw through Mr. Anhorn's and Mr. Farrens' presentations.

Easements for and by Cattlemen

Presented by Frank O'Leary, Oregon Cattlemen's Association

Mr. O'Leary presented his power point presentation. Mr. O'Leary noted the projects for Land Trust Association (LTA) are funded by The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and NRCS. Operational costs are funded through grants from National fish and Wildlife Foundation, Oregon Community Foundation through the Gilmore foundation.

Mr. O'Leary also noted that there are other models out there that do not involve perpetuity, one is called "term easements" that are available but the value is less and finding funding is a lot tougher.

Staff Activity Report

Steve McGonigal went into further detail on what he learned from the conference he attended in New Jersey regarding purchase and development rights. Some of the programs have been running up to 15 years. Almost all of them had a Farm & Ranch Lands Protection Program. Maryland got hit hard by the auditors by not monitoring their programs.

It was mentioned that Rich Doenges with the Department of Natural Resources is a good resource to talk to about Pennsylvania getting funding from both local and counties.

Mr. McGonigal is doing an interview through a Seattle affiliate of National Public Radio to talk about the Office of Farmland Preservation and the Task Force's mission.

Mr. McGonigal announced to the Task Force about the outreach materials the Office of Farmland Preservation has produced with their input from the April Meeting. Susie Vanderburg, Commission staff, helped with this effort in creating and ordering the brochures, restaurant placemats, and two traveling exhibits that are for the Task Force's or partners use to display and help "get the word out" at different venues.

South East Regional Report

Reported by Ron Shultz, Commission Staff

Mr. Shultz provided the Task Force with a corrected version to the North West Regional Report that was handed out at the February Meeting.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting

Various data reports back from Commission staff

Chair recommends for next meeting to minimize the amount of presentations. This will help the Task Force move along with discussions on coming up with recommendations and policy for the legislature.

Richard Thomason handed Mr. McGonigal a position paper from a Commodity Group he belongs to. Would like Chair Hart and Mr. McGonigal to review and consider putting in August Meeting Packet for Task Force to see.

Public Comment

Meeting adjourned at 3:10 p.m.