



OFFICE OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Washington State
Conservation Commission
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APPROVED ON DECEMBER 3, 2009

The Office of Farmland Preservation (OFF) Task Force met on September 2, 2009, in Okanogan, Washington at the Virginia Grainger Building in the Commissioners Hearing Room. Chair Bob Hart called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m.

MEMBERS ATTENDED:

Chair Bob Hart
Senator Honeyford
Senator Haugen
Representative Joel Kretz
Representative Larry Springer
Commissioner Rudy Plager
Sheryl Cox
Lynn Bahrych
Richard Thomason
Don Munks
Dee Caputo
Fred Colvin

COMMISSION STAFF:

Mark Clark, Executive Director
Ron Shultz, Policy Director
Josh Giuntoli, Project Coordinator
Lori Gonzalez, Administrative Assistant
Jon Culp, Regional Manager

GUESTS:

John Larson, Executive Director WACD
Craig Nelson, Okanogan CD District Manager
Kitty Craig, Trust for Public Land
Peter Dykstra, Trust for Public Land
Don Larsen, Dept. of Fish & Wildlife
Mary Lou Peterson, Okanogan Co. Commissioner
Andrew Lampe, Okanogan Co. Commissioner
Don Hover, Okanogan Co. Commissioner

ADMINISTRATIVE

Lynn Bahrych moved and Don Munks seconded approval of the May 6, 2009, Meeting Minutes with the adoption of minor clerical corrections. Motion passed.

THOUGHTS OF TOUR

Chair Hart opened discussion on the tour held the day before hosted by the Okanogan Conservation District. Fred Colvin spoke of the Nelson Ranch. It was a good opportunity for the members to see emerging issues going on throughout the state in regard to farmland preservation. Different funding sources were discussed. Chair Hart mentioned that in Skagit County they have roughly eight to ten funding sources to do one project.

Representative Joel Kretz noted, as we move forward and preserve farmland; we must get input from the local producers that are affected. The Task Force should focus on how to preserve the farmer.

Ms. Bahrych, mentioned in regard to Fred's comment on farm and ranchland funding, that the new Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist, Roylene Rides at the Door, was able to receive federal funding of \$3.5 million in the beginning of August. NRCS was able to fund 25 out of the 32 projects submitted. Initially, there were 8 projects and because of the additional funding, 25 can now be completed. Lynn noted that the State Conservation Commission (SCC) has been working closely in partnership with NRCS. This is a great opportunity for the Task Force to know of another funding resource.

The Task Force discussed when making recommendations for policies and moving forward should be supportive of the needs and issues that arise for the Eastern Washington farmer and the Western Washington farmer.

ACTIVITY REPORT

Commission staff, Josh Giuntoli, talked about the colored maps that were provided in the members, meeting packets. The maps were able to show 2007 data of farms by size in each county. The maps also show the differences between the Westside and the Eastside as mentioned earlier.

Mr. Giuntoli informed the Task Force that the Conservation Commission submitted a letter to the legislature recommending the Task Force continue their task and allow them to sunset in the time originally allotted of December 2010.

Commission staff, Ron Shultz, noted that both he and Executive Director, Mark Clark, met with Rogers Weed, Executive Director of the Department of Commerce, formerly known as Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED). They discussed the role of the Commission, and discussed the work of the Task Force and how the two can engage together in working with the Economic Development Council on agriculture, so policies do not conflict with one another.

STATE POLICY ON FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Mr. Shultz did a presentation on State Policy on Farmland Preservation. He walked through with the Task Force why there is a need for state policy on farmland preservation. It is to help guide state policies and programs, help guide local policies and programs, support nongovernmental organization efforts, support landowners and operators.

There was discussion around no net loss; should accurately reflect what the Task Force is trying to accomplish. Should specifically be no net loss policy for farmland. Currently, there is a no net loss policy for wetlands.

Ms. Bahrych suggested a step the Task Force could take is to go to legislature. Productive agricultural land should not be used for wetland mitigation, this should be as one of our policy statements.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Members from the Okanogan Commission Board and several members from the public gave comment to the Task Force.

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LANDS

Kitty Craig and Peter Dykstra from Trust for Public Lands did a presentation to the Task Force on their organization.

Materials of this presentation can be found on their website, and the report: [Land Ownership Change and the Ranching Economy in The Okanogan Valley and Eastern Okanogan County, Washington](#) from November 2008, can be found at: www.headwaterseconomics.org.

OKANOGAN CONSERVATION DISTRICT MARKET UPDATE

Okanogan District Manager, Craig Nelson, updated the Task Force the struggle the district is having in purchasing a 29,000 sq. ft. grocery store that would sell local foods and goods. The local food market would have local ranchers and producers selling their goods locally, with opportunity to form relationships within the community as well as doing outreach and retail via the internet.

ISSUES BRIEFS: WATER

Mr. Giuntoli updated the Task Force on the first Stock Water Working Group meeting he attended in August. The first meeting was an informational, meet and greet. Their next meeting is tomorrow (Sept. 3), in Olympia. He will be attending.

Mr. Giuntoli briefed the Task Force on exempt wells, water transfers data, the current status on the issues in the Upper Kittitas County, and the Department of Ecology's Water Resource Program.

SUCCESSION PLANNING

Mr. Giuntoli was introduced to a group called the Wealth Council. The Wealth Council is a group of nationwide attorneys. Part of their normal day to day business is a group that pools different expertise. They specialize in estate planning, land transfers and land planning. He met with the lead attorney in Kirkland for the Wealth Council in Washington. He explained they have been looking for the opportunity to get into this arena of land transfers and succession planning and are eager to partner with the Task Force in getting something together.

Commission staff proposed for consideration different educational opportunities for attorneys to earn their Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits specifically on land transfers, land use, etc. This would be able to provide people seeking assistance to have legal resources.

INDICATORS

Commission staff categorized the suite of indicators presented at the May 2009 Task Force meeting. Commission staff is seeking direction from the Task Force to recommend the indicators to the Conservation Commissioners to move forward.

Discussion.

Representative Larry Springer moved and Lynn Bahrych seconded the motion for the task force to approve the indicators and recommend them to the Conservation Commission Board to move forward. Motion passed.

Members of the Task Force made some suggestions to the indicators. Staff will include the suggestions prior to forwarding on to the Conservation Commission board.

*A list of the indicators is included at the end of the meeting minutes.

STATE POLICY ON FARMLAND PRESERVATION- (*continued from earlier discussion*)

The Task Force continued discussion around state policy on farmland preservation.

Lynn Bahrych moved and Senator Mary Margaret Haugen seconded the motion that agricultural resources which include land and water not be used as mitigation for other resources. Motion passed.

* Agriculture resources meaning: The land and water necessary for agricultural activity and the profitability of the farmer and rancher.

To implement the policy statement:

1. Appropriate funding should be made available to counties to develop strategic plans for agricultural resources in the county.
2. Temporary moratorium on acquisition of land by state agencies. These funds should go to #1 above.
3. Agriculture resources should not be taken out of use by mitigation. When funding habitat restoration projects, the Task Force believes the most cost efficient and effective use for all funds is for the less-than-fee simple interest in agriculture resources with a range of options, including easements and leases. Fee simple acquisition is a tool that should be used in very specific and limited circumstances. When ranking state funding for projects, easements should be given a higher priority over acquisition of working farm and forest lands.
4. Regulations should not negatively impact agriculture resources. The Commissioners could implement the OFP Task Force recommendation on regulations by examining the impact of regulations on a variety of farms and identifying strategies to reduce the specific impacts.
5. The Governor should issue an executive order acknowledging the priority of agricultural resources in our state, and directing agencies to protect agriculture resources in their policy actions.

DIRECTORS UPDATE

Mr. Clark reported that the Natural Resource agencies will have a press release on the Governor's work on reorganization ideas for public and stakeholder input. There will be about a month time frame for this process. Mr. Clark encouraged the Task Force to take a look at them, i.e., permitting, GMA and SMA. As soon as the report goes out for comment, staff will forward on to the Task Force. Commission has lost about 20 percent of their funding and may have another five percent in September.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:00 pm

NEXT MEETING

Next meeting will be at the Mirabeau Park Convention Center and Hotel in Spokane, WA on December 3, 2009

*Indicators on next page.

Farmland Preservation Indicators

Indicators are measurements that enable monitoring of progress made toward achievement of the goal. Indicators are used to supply information about the state of systems, in this case the farmland preservation system. They identify key factors into measurable values. Potential indicators or data that could be recorded and monitored are offered for consideration. Indicators can be used for issue management and to develop or adjust policy actions. Reflect the factors contributing to the loss of farmland.

The indicators described are reflective of the Farmland Preservation Task Force's desire to continue its focus on achievement of farmland preservation goals.

Making agriculture a priority

Indicator: Competition of Land Use and Conversion

Measure: Calculate the change in total farm acreage in a given period. A high score indicates that there is a high degree of farmland loss and thus competition of land use in the county. Monitor and evaluate changes to land use utilizing current mapping processes developed by the University of Washington and pair with WSDA Crop Mapping efforts.

Descriptor: Competition of land refers to the danger of farmland loss due to changes in surrounding land uses.

Indicator: Characteristics of Principal Farm Owners

Measure: Average age, principal occupation, race.

Descriptor: Upward trend in age may indicate fewer new farmers are entering the occupation. If current farm is a second job, may indicate the farm is not producing a living wage income. Minority farmers the fastest growing farmer demographic.

Regulatory Barriers

Indicator: Number of Food Processors

Measure: Number of new processors entering and leaving market.

Descriptor: The more access a farmer has to processors, the lower the transportation costs and increased potential for viability.

Indicator: Farm Employment

Measure: Farm employment based on number of workers engaged in direct production of agricultural commodities.

Descriptor: Number of workers engaged in direct production may indicate the general health of the industry.

Indicator: Farm Related Employment

Measure: Employment numbers in farm-related industries.

Descriptor: Number of workers engaged in farm related industries may indicate the general health of the industry.

Indicator: Water Use
Measure: Water use by use category and source.
Descriptor: Measure would include estimated withdrawals from groundwater and surface sources for a variety of uses, including irrigation, public supply, and industry.

Indicator: Open Space Enrollment
Measure: New acres enrolled in open space agriculture and acres coming out of open space agriculture.
Descriptor: New acres are those identified as lands not currently in current use and may reflect a desire to continue farming. Acres coming out may indicate the potential for conversion.

Resource Availability and Access

Indicator: Farm Size Diversity
Measure: Size diversity indicator is based on the number of farms in the difference ranges/categories. There are 6 broad scales (1-9 acres, 10-49, 50-179, 180-499, 500-999 and 1000+ Acres) and the degree of disbursement (variation) of farms over all six categories provides a measurement of size diversity. A high score indicates that there is a high diversity of farm size in the county,

Descriptor: Diversity in farm size indicates a flexibility and resiliency of a county's agriculture. Flexibility can meet different kinds of demand; resiliency can survive different types of hardships as a county.

Indicator: Farm Contiguity
Measure: Contiguous parcels zoned agriculture
Descriptor: Contiguous farm acreage improves on right to farm conflicts and improves resiliency.

Indicator: Actual Acreage in Production
Measure: Total land available (US Census) matched with WSDA Crop Mapping
Descriptor: Track the trends in planting to gauge the productivity of agriculture.

Indicator: Public Ownership of Land
Measure: Number of acres of land in state, local, and federal ownership.
Descriptor: Maintains a concurrent accounting of ownership trends in Washington.

Indicator: Current or Potential Working Land Converted to non working Public Land
Measure: Agricultural Impact Statement
Descriptor: Working land converted to non working land has a net decrease on available farmable land in the future.

Strengthen Competiveness

Indicator: Prime Farmland
Measure: Acres of class 1 and class 2 soils zoned for agricultural production.
Descriptor: Farming on prime farmland is more economically viable.

Indicator: Farm Viability
Measure: Net cash return from agricultural sales divided by total number of harvested acres in the county. High per acres indicates average farm in county is economically viable.
Descriptor: Profitable and viable farms help farmers and their families stay on their land and protects against conversion.

Indicator: Value Added Potential
Measure: Farms output compared to the value of the intermediate and final goods produced from these crops.
Descriptor: The potential for a farmer to achieve greater profits by adding value added processes or products can increase agricultural viability.

Indicator: Number of Farmers Markets
Measure: Number of new farmers markets entering and leaving the market.
Descriptor: The greater the market potential, the better for a farmer to market fresh produce, lower transportation costs, and enable better access to customers, all of which can increase profitability.

Indicator: Energy Use on Farms
Measure: Value of petroleum products and electricity purchased by farms.
Descriptor: Agriculture is one of the most energy intensive industries, consuming about 2 percent of total energy consumed in the U.S. Recent rising costs for diesel and gas, and trends towards increasing electricity costs, are adding to the expenses and decreasing economic viability.

Indicator: Market Price of Food
Measure: Calculate the overall price of food over time
Descriptor: The trend in cheap imports and food prices directly impacts the economic viability of farms.

Emerging Opportunities

Indicator: Farms with Easements
Measure: Number of working farms with working easements
Descriptor: Easements eliminate the pressure to convert farm ground due to their very nature of preventing development.

Indicator: Agriculture Related Degrees
Measure: Calculate the number of agriculture related degrees over time
Descriptor: A college trained workforce may indicate the interest and potential for new farmers

Indicator: Farms by Organization
Measure: Percent of total farm acreage and sales by type of organization. (NASS data)
Descriptor: Measures would be divided in categories of: non-family corporations; partnerships; family-held corporations; individuals/family, and sole proprietorships.