Watershed Work Group

Meeting Minutes

January 24, 2017

Opened: 6:15 pm – Adjourned: 8:15 pm

Attendance

Members: Larry Boltz, Jeanne Rehwaldt, Allan Borden, William Short, Katie Ladner, Carmen Echeverria, Socorro Villeda, Laurie Hagar, and Michelle McCallum

Washington Farm Bureau: Evan Sheffels

Mason Conservation District Staff: John Bolender, Jennifer Holderman, Barbara Adkins\*

Facilitator: John Kliem, Creative Community Solutions, Inc.

Agenda

1. Quick overview of agriculture in Mason County
2. What can you share about the status of agriculture in Mason County? SWOT analysis
3. Selection of chair
4. Next meeting date

Minutes

**Quick Overview of Agriculture in Mason County**

Facilitator Kliem provided a map of the designated agricultural areas of Mason County. The map reflects a compilation of parcels in the Assessor’s Agricultural Open Space programs, parcels designated as Agricultural Resource Lands in the Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Map, and properties from the Conservation District’s database of those receiving farm and agriculture technical assistance. There was some discussion noting the concentrations of agricultural throughout the county, as well as those farming practices that may not be as of yet mapped.

Mr. Kliem also provided an overview of the USDA National Agricultural Statistical Service’s 2012 Census of Agriculture. Comparing Mason County against Washington State as a whole shows that the trends and patterns this County is experiencing are not unique. The numbers of farms in Mason County, as well as the State, have declined since 2007; however the size of farms and their market values have increased. One notable difference in this comparison is that more than 50% of the County’s agricultural land use is woodland, with only 20% considered croplands. The inverse is substantially true for the state, where more than 50% of the agricultural land use is cropland and nearly 15% is woodland. Reviewing the types of crops in Mason County and their state rankings, it can be logically deduced that crop farming is not as copious here compared to other areas in Washington.

Even with notably fewer farms and farm lands, Mason County still ranks (or ranked in 2012) 2nd in the State for cut Christmas trees and 3rd for cut flowers and cut florists greens. The County’s aquaculture, debatable as to its place in the agricultural spectrum of this process, is the State’s number one producer. A snapshot of farmer operators as of 2012 was provided to the group as another point of interest in statistical trends. What it revealed is that fewer farm operators consider farming their primary occupation, and most of them are while males approximately 59 years of age.

**What Can You Share About The Status Of Agriculture In Mason County? SWOT Analysis**

Reminding the Group of the VSP’s primary goals:

* Protect & enhance critical areas within agricultural lands while maintaining & improving long-term viability of agriculture
* Reduce the conversion of farmland to other uses
* Includes commercial and noncommercial agriculture

…the next item was to do a **SWOT** Analysis.

**S**trengths

**W**eaknesses

**O**pportunities

**T**hreats

This exercise looks at those factors within and outside of the County that impact the future viability of agriculture and reduce the conversion of farmland to other uses. Individual group members completed a four-part worksheet and provided the following responses to each category:

Strengths

* Ag science classes being taught in school
* Moving Mason Forward program to have a collective and collaborative impact on making a healthy environment
* Local markets are strong for local produced goods – location dependent
* State and local elected officials who are pro-agriculture
* Mason Conservation District and WSU Extension Office provide a robust series of programs with highly qualified and educated staff for technical assistance
* Affordable land costs
* Workforce development programs
* HOPE – school and community gardens
* Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group is an excellent resource
* Strong community; sense of family
* Good professionals available

Weaknesses

* No livestock/cattle auction
* No processing or cold storage facilities
* “lazy” youth culture, not interested in farm work – not glamorous, not high paying, hard
* No focus on early education; employing youth raises safety concerns and employer liabilities
* Transportation costs of operation
* Non-agricultural political influences
* No staffing capacity
* Lack of local support – fairs, 4-H, etc.
* Lack of financing and working capital; assistance not available due to financial constraints
* Aquaculture overshadows agriculture; protection of critical areas limits farm opportunities
* Topography
* Amount of publically owned land
* Lack of nurseries, lack of marketing

Opportunities

* Technology; improved communications
* Demand in the aquaculture market
* Pacific Mountain Private Industry Council – programs for employment in Mason County
* HOPE Gardens
* USDA Food and Nutrition programs to assemble wellness programs; Farm to Table, Farm to School
* Collaborate with Enterprise for Equity, making connections
* Utilize educational institutions – create internships for students to work on farms
* South Sound Food System Network – assist in attracting processors, people interested in sustainability
* Farm to Table
* Economic Development Council Strategic Plan for Agro-Tourism
* Multi-purpose/-use lands

Threats

* State legislature’s reductions on small farm tax exemptions
* Climate change
* Aging operators – losing people to work or take over farms
* Increase in number of restrictions for the transportation of livestock
* Water allocation and availability issues
* Non-Agricultural political influence – Waters of the United States

Any Big Surprises from this Analysis?

That there are not more networking opportunities

That water will be the biggest and most central issue

That more people are not participating in the VSP process

**Selection Of Chair**

Two members offered to act as Co-Chairpersons:

* Jeanne Rehwaldt
* Carmen Echeverria

**Next meeting date**

The next meeting will be on **February 28, 2017 at 6:00 PM** in Conference Room A, Mason County Public Works, 100 West Public Works Drive in Shelton.

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Mason Conservation District

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