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Planning and Development Services Procedure

Subject/Title: Farm Plan Approval
Number: PL2-85-001C
Effective Date: 05/06/2010
Submitted By: Peter Gill, Senior Planner
Reviewed By: Natural Resources/Long Range Planning
Approved By: David Stalheim, Director 

Statement:

Farm conservation plans shall be presented directly by the farm owner, Whatcom Conservation District, or a qualified planner to Whatcom County Planning and Development Services (PDS) to approve, conditionally approve, and/or deny.

Rationale:

The Critical Areas Ordinance is clear that PDS shall review and approve farm plans (16.16.290(C)(1)), however, clarification of methods utilized to obtain approval of farm plans is needed by the public and coordinating agencies. When site visits are needed is not specified in the CAO, this Administrative Procedure provides some additional certainty to the public and staff.

Farm operators may prepare their own Standard Farm Conservation Plan consistent with Whatcom County Critical Areas Ordinance Appendix A, Section 1(3). Review of farm plans by PDS may require more review time than one prepared by WCD, so standard fees apply.

Consistent with other commercial, industrial or residential development, structures should not be placed based on the critical area features shown on farm plans (16.16.290(B)(2)). Assessment of critical areas on a property to support farm planning does not qualify as an official delineation of regulated features.

1) Standard Farm Plans:

- a. If prepared by the Whatcom Conservation District (WCD) the plan will not require a PDS site visit. The farm operator will specify whether they will allow the WCD to submit the farm plan to PDS for approval. The farm operator can seek approval directly through PDS, or through the District to PDS.
 - b. If prepared by the farm operator PDS will conduct a site visit prior to plan approval in order to assess critical areas and sufficiency of the Plan to protect water quality and riparian areas.
- 2) Custom Farm Plans for moderate impact farms will be prepared in accordance with the Critical Areas Ordinance Appendix A, Section 2. PDS will inspect site prior to approval of plan in order to assess critical areas only.
- 3) PDS will seek compliance with the WC CAO on Ag Lands through outreach rather than enforcement, except where there is reason to believe that there is an imminent threat to public health or significant pollution with major consequences occurring as a result of the agricultural operations, as assessed by the planning director.
- 4) The critical areas and management zones depicted on farm plans are approximate and not appropriate for citing new structures and permanent infrastructure.