

# Watershed Protection & Restoration Land Use Grant

## Description of Project Benefits and Outcomes



Prepared jointly by the Whatcom County Executive's Office and  
Department of Planning and Development Services, with input from the Project Partners

This grant will fund two landowners to voluntarily implement environmental enhancement projects under a pilot Watershed Protection and Restoration program. This work will help create:

- A policy governing agricultural land impacts
- A framework for providing payments to landowners for voluntary environmental improvements
- A prioritization process for future restoration projects

### Background

Agricultural planning and watershed planning have been underway in Whatcom County for decades. While both are critical for our economy and health, they are often perceived to be at odds with one another. This project aims to advance the ability to achieve shared priorities for both agricultural and watershed planning by compensating farmland owners for their voluntary actions that go above and beyond what is required, and enhance the environment in areas where especially valuable ecological features exist.



*Great AG soils, topography, clean water, and fish habitat: One of many areas in Whatcom County where agricultural and watershed priorities intersect.*

### Project Benefits

Within the three-year period of the grant, Whatcom County will achieve:

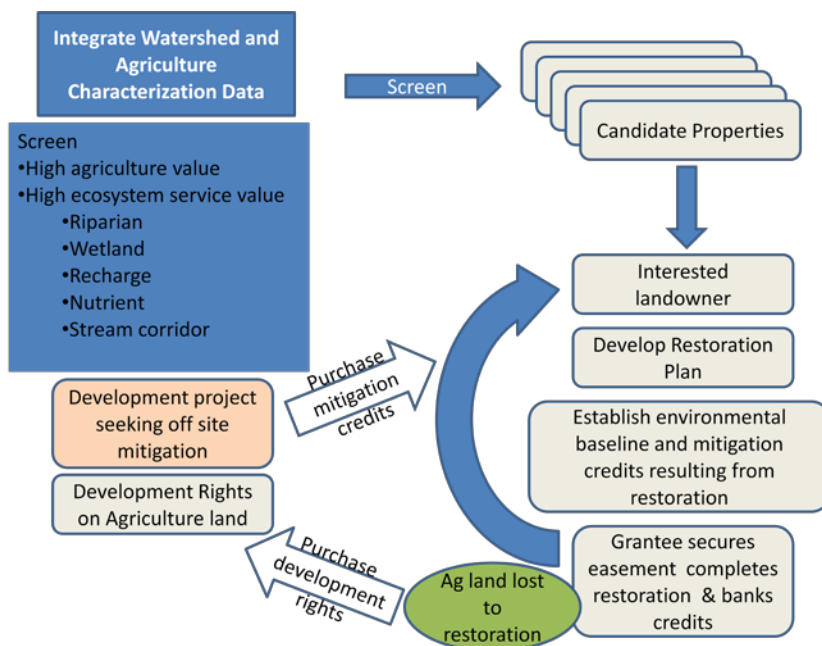
- *Better integration of watershed and agricultural planning* through utilization of a subcommittee to coordinate the project.
- *A consistent policy to govern impacts to agricultural lands*, including under what circumstances and at what cost agricultural lands may be converted for watershed enhancement uses.

- *Procedures to mitigate for the loss of agricultural lands* that help achieve Comprehensive Plan goals for resource lands.
- *Implementation of two restoration and enhancement projects* with long term protection on high quality habitat areas within the bounds of the agricultural areas that lie within the north Lynden or Bertrand watersheds.
- *Evaluation of ecological credits* from restoration projects and easement purchases that lay the groundwork to achieve the long term outputs.

## Desired Long-Term Outcomes

The above grant benefits are short-term targets that help lead the way to the outcomes we are trying to achieve in Whatcom County in the arena of agricultural and watershed planning, and the overall goal of greater efficiency in local government. Some of these include:

- An environmental mitigation program that would allow private and public developers to pay in-lieu fees for certain environmental impacts. The fees would pay for already-implemented quality restoration projects located on appropriate land within the impacted watershed.
- An opportunity for public agencies to more effectively and efficiently mitigate for environmental impacts of necessary public works projects such as road construction or flood control levy work.
- A non-regulatory mechanism that provides an economic incentive to protect water resources and agricultural lands critical to the long term viability of agriculture in Whatcom County.



## Funding

The roughly \$350,000 in funds would come to Whatcom County through the WA State Department of Commerce.<sup>1</sup> The Whatcom Conservation District, local Department of Fish and Wildlife office, and Whatcom Farm Friends are each project partners, and are committing staff resources as in-kind support for the project. Existing staff from both County Planning and Public Works departments would assist with implementation of the work, in addition to the project partners and consultants involved.

<sup>1</sup> Commerce is jointly managing funds for watershed protection and restoration with the Department of Ecology, who received an Environmental Protection Agency grant for implementing portions of the Puget Sound Action Agenda. The “watershed protection and restoration, land use” focus area is one of many different focus areas that the EPA funded as part of a coordinated six-year strategy to protect and restore Puget Sound.