

## **Agricultural Advisory Committee**

### **Special Meeting**

**Approved** meeting notes for July 30, 2009

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 P.M. by Vicki Hawley.

#### **Topics Discussed**

The topic for the special meeting was how the Critical Areas Ordinance is administered as it relates to agricultural operations in Whatcom County.

A **quorum** was present with 10 of the 13 voting members at the meeting:

Vicki Hawley	John Bayer	Lesa Boxx	Brian Cieslar
Larry Helm	Wesley Kentch	Todd Jones	Tom Thornton
Dick Yoder	Debbie Vander Veen		

Ex officio members present:	George Boggs	John Gilles
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County staff members present.	Samya Lutz	Erika Stroebel	
Oliver Grah	Peter Gill	Elke Daugherty	Dean Martin
Wayne Fitch			

There were many guests at the meeting, over 90 signed the register. Many people had questions and a number of them took the opportunity to address the Committee regarding agriculture, the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) and the Conservation Program on Agricultural Lands (CPAL) program.

George Boggs, Whatcom Conservation District, gave an overview of the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) and how the Conservation Program on Agricultural Lands (CPAL) can be used by farm operators as a way to comply with the Critical Areas Ordinance.

There are 100,000 cows in Whatcom County and we have 41% of the cow-calf operations in the Puget Sound Region. We also have had critical water quality issues with most of our streams not meeting state and federal clean water standards and with closures of shellfish areas due to bacterial contamination

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(Christy Douge) Do you need a new farm plan for each species? For instance, if you change from cows to swine do you need a new farm plan. No, if you think you might be changing from one kind of livestock to another, or varying the number of animals you have, a farm plan can be developed that takes those things into account. You may also modify the farm plan from time to time (i.e.: substitute one pig for one cow) for no fee. If you make significant changes such that your farm plan doesn't work for the operation any more, then you should update or replace the farm plan.

Bill Knutson – Do you have the information available on the sampling sites? The Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) wastewater sampling data is available from Ecology. Information and reports are also available from the county on the sampling that they have been involved with. Some of the Drayton Harbor data is at: <http://whatcomshellfish.whatcomcounty.org/Drayton/reports.htm>

A comment was made that the contamination in Drayton Harbor was coming from untreated sewage from Victoria, British Columbia. In response, it was stated that circulation studies show that this is not causing the problems in Drayton Harbor.

Kim Schnackleberg – What is a farm? The term “farm” is not defined in county code; however, a farm for this purpose is defined in the Critical Areas Ordinance as agricultural activity - having on-going agricultural activities (within past 5 years); Oliver Grah.

Lesa Starkenburg asked what the situation would be if someone wanted to take advantage of the CPAL program on rural land (say R5) that had not been used as Ag during the past 5 years. The response (Oliver Grah) was that under the current code, that would not be eligible for CPAL, but if the agricultural activities were approved to be in critical areas and/or protective buffers in compliance with the standard regulations they could potentially operate for a period of time according to the Critical Areas Ordinance and then come into the CPAL program. However, to the county's knowledge, this has not been done.

**Open Session for People to Address the Agricultural Advisory Committee**

Samantha Douge – Have been involved in 4-H and plan to go on to college. 4-H helped me to understand how to manage the land and pastures.

Tammy Bennett – I was recently in 4-H. This is a big thing these animals, a big impact on the students. 4-H programs have been hugely helpful to students; don't want to see 4-H projects decrease or lose potential. It helps the community and the schools. With the county ordinance these projects will decrease. I urge the Agricultural Advisory Committee to go to the County Council and urge them to make this work for us.

Katy Nelson – I have two horses. Be a part of the 4-H family; go to the NW Washington Fair. If we can't have the horses on the land, our family can't

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**Agricultural Advisory Committee Discussion:**

Wesley Kentch, AAC member, provided information on why he had requested the special meeting of the Ag Advisory Committee. CPAL has been in effect since 2005 (Wesley read part of a 2005 letter from AAC endorsing the CPAL approach). I don't want this area to grow into a Redmond. Want it to be a nice open natural place that I grew up in. If people are causing pollution they should take care of it. BMPs need to be specific to specific properties and individual situations. We need to identify the actual source of contamination; need better evidence than what I've seen. There is information available that shows that grazing riparian areas can be done in a way that doesn't cause water pollution. We need to revisit the CAO – it isn't working for Ag.

Howard Van Andreason – Drayton Harbor watershed – water comes in here in just the one opening. If you put a couple of culverts in there (Semiahmoo sand spit), it would promote natural circulation and improve the water quality.

Debbie Vander Veen (Ag Advisory Committee member and dairy farmer), discussed what her operation has done to prevent water pollution. The conservation district helped with our farm plan. They have helped us find ways to farm the way we want to farm and protect the water. We now test the soil, do lab tests for our manure, and then match our application to what the soil needs for the crops. These tests and BMPs cost thousands of dollars. These help keep the water clean. It was noted that the Vander Veen dairy was the Dairy Farm of the year for 1998. Ecology used to do the inspections, now it is the Washington Dept. of Ag. Do we want to talk with Skagit about their process? They've done this too.

George Boggs – Three levels of intensity are contemplated through CPAL; high, medium, and low impact. Low impact farms plans are for one animal unit per acre or less. Moderate impact farm plans are for a situation with more complexity. How can you tell if you need a farm plan? There are 29 fairly simple questions you can respond to. People can also come to the conservation district for help in determining if there is a critical area.

Doug Erickson – State legislator. George and the Conservation District are only here to help. This is the County's program. Let's help out people. You guys (the AAC) are incredibly powerful. If you speak with a voice and say we can make it better – we can make changes. It is out of whack, out of balance. The message is that we need to get it back into balance.

Larry Helm (Ag Advisory Committee member): I went to the County Council meeting two meetings ago when they discussed the Birch Bay drainage area and shellfish critical areas. They created a new critical area of Birch Bay. This puts a burden on landowners. Citizens asked the council to do an EIS to assess the burden placed on citizens.

Motion by Larry Helm; second by John Bayer:

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Information on future meetings will be posted on the County's web site – on the Ag page.

[http://www.whatcomcounty.us/pds/planning/agricultural\\_program.jsp](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/pds/planning/agricultural_program.jsp)

The meeting notes will also be placed there as soon as they are available.

Dick Yoder suggested that future meetings be held in the evenings to allow more public participation. Dean Martin (staff) will contact committee members to establish the next meeting time, date and location. The next meeting will be posted on the web site, provided to the media, and provided to members and others by email.

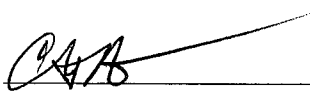
A question was asked by Bob Van Weerdhuizen about access of inspectors to determine if farming operations were being conducted according to the regulatory requirements or farm plans. The response was that county inspectors, consistent with state law, work with landowners to establish reasonable times and alternatives with the landowner to conduct inspections. Someone from the audience stated that this was not always the case.

Someone asked how many farm plans had been completed. There have been about 70 farm plans completed with the landowner and approved by the conservation district. About 5 have been submitted to the county. There have been hundreds of high impact facilities that have completed and have approved nutrient management plans.

What is holding people back from doing the farm plans? There are many possibilities including the \$100 filing fee, the cost of implementing the plan, and others. It was suggested that it would be helpful if there was funding to help pay for the BMPs that the farm plans call for.

Randy Schnackenberg – Ferndale, Drayton Harbor. Need to attend and express your views to the Planning Commission and County Council, as well as the Ag Advisory Committee.

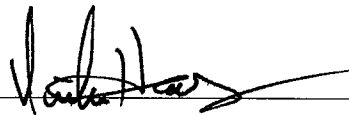
Meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.



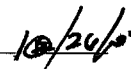
Chuck Antholt, Chair



Date



Vicki Hawley, Vice Chair



Date: