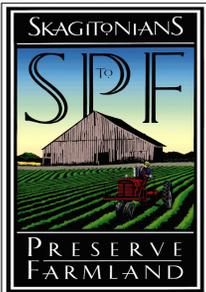


SKAGITONIAN

Summer 2008



www.skagitonians.org

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A Message from SPF Board President Alan Mesman

Commercial Wetland Banks Placed on Farmlands Need Scrutiny

As this edition of the *Skagitonian* goes to press, local farmers are hard at work with the beginning of harvest season, and SPF is hard at work on a land use appeal hearing on a privately owned commercial wetland mitigation bank project. The project is currently set to convert 395 acres of prime farmland into a commercial mitigation bank so that wetlands within the County's municipalities can be filled. SPF is asking the hearing examiner to require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be prepared in order to evaluate the trading of one natural resource for another—prime agricultural lands for natural wetlands—and to evaluate the induced and cumulative impacts to farmland and other natural resources.



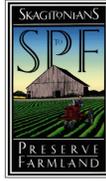
Alan Mesman
Photo courtesy of www.kp-studios.com

SPF is concerned not only with this project, but also with the precedent set if left unchallenged—namely that farmland in the Skagit Valley and around the State can be used to make up for the loss of biological diversity caused by urban sprawl. The private commercial wetland mitigation banking industry, as currently run by the Washington State Department of Ecology, is functionally just another form of land development. Private wetland mitigation bankers are using economic forces to locate mitigation banks in agricultural areas where land is less expensive, not necessarily where they will achieve the most ecological benefit. And the rush to promote the private commercial banking industry by federal, state and local government agencies assumes that specific ecological functions can be relocated without any consequence.

With this being the second of two mitigation banks in Skagit County, no one is evaluating the induced and cumulative impacts to both prime farmland and the ecological values of naturally functioning wetlands left in place. For instance, filling in of wetlands that drain into one of our 11 agricultural drainage districts will increase the amount of water and impact the water quality, ultimately forcing the drainage district and its taxpayers to address the increased runoff and pollution. The developer who filled in the wetlands that were providing ecological benefits to that district will be mitigating the fill impacts in the mitigation bank. And with the commercial mitigation banker not having to consider and/or address the induced and cumulative impacts of their project, there is no one left to mitigate the impacts to the affected drainage district. Our legal appeal requests an EIS so these types of impacts can be identified and evaluated.

SPF has a long and proud history of working with the environmental and development community to find solutions to these difficult natural resource management issues. We are currently working with the City of Burlington on an Agricultural Heritage Credit program to protect farmland flanking the City's boundaries and we are also working with The Nature Conservancy and others on a Farming For Wildlife project to determine if it's possible to "lease" farmland in order to provide habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds.

While we don't take legal action often, when we do, it means there is a significant threat to the long-term viability of agriculture in Skagit Valley. Your support and your voice are key to SPF's ability to achieve our mission. Together with your help, we can keep the Magic Skagit alive and prosperous for wildlife, fish and farming! Thank you!



Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
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**Join us Saturday, September 27
 for an evening of Diamonds & Denim!**

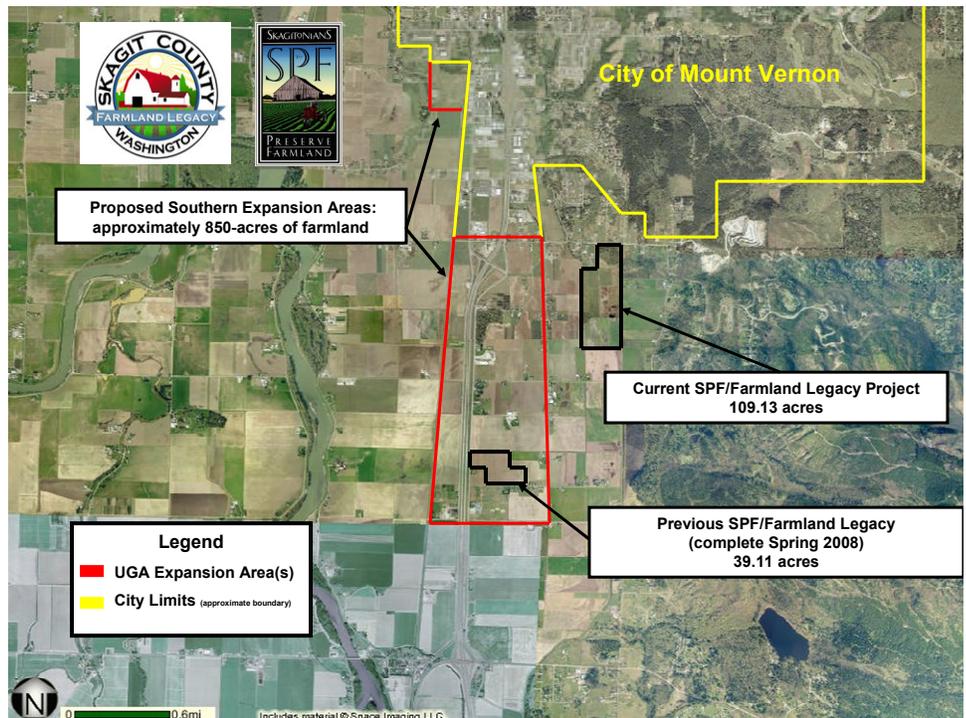
St. Joseph Center, Mount Vernon

**Tables Go Quickly!
 Call Maureen at 360-336-3974**

SPF Donors and Skagit County's Farmland Legacy Program Partner to Protect Critical Farmland

SPF and Skagit County's Farmland Legacy Program (FLP) have joined forces to protect critical farmland that is under development pressure. This past spring SPF and the FLP, with support from the Osberg Family Foundation and Lucky Seven Foundation, protected 39.11 acres within the City of Mount Vernon's proposed Urban Growth Area (UGA).

Now, for the second time, SPF and FLP are working together to protect 109 acres of farmland southeast of Mount Vernon. The partnership with the FLP represents a triple win for all involved as our donors' dollars are matched with local, state and federal funds from grants received by the FLP to buy developments rights.



“By collaborating on common goals, SPF and the county’s Farmland Legacy Program can preserve more land than previously possible,” said Allen Rozema, SPF executive director. “The partnership also allows for the FLP to hold the conservation easement rather than SPF, eliminating the need for SPF to set aside an endowment fund for easement monitoring and enforcement. This means that 100 percent of our donors’ contributions go toward protecting this great valley.”