

Agriculture & Critical Areas: A Framework for Stewardship

March 25, 2011

To: Legislators and Tribal Leaders

From: Agriculture and Critical Areas Caucus Chairs

RE: ESHB 1886 Agriculture and Critical Areas Voluntary Stewardship Program

For many years, interests represented by our three caucuses—agriculture, counties, and environmental organizations, have been in court and at the Legislature arguing over issues related to critical areas and agricultural activities. In 2011 we united around a framework for a voluntary stewardship program to protect and enhance critical areas. ESHB 1886 is the legislative form of this carefully negotiated framework, and is currently pending in the Washington State Senate. We would like to draw your attention to the stated purpose of the draft legislation and address a few issues that have come up during the Legislature's deliberations on this bill.


In 2007, after a protracted legislative debate over whether agricultural areas should be entirely exempted from critical area ordinance requirements, the Legislature asked us to develop recommendations for a new approach to protecting and enhancing critical areas while maintaining and improving the long-term viability of productive agriculture. We were instructed to maximize voluntary stewardship approaches for agricultural landowners and operators, using regulations as a backstop. We believe we have met this directive through the proposed incentive-based program. ESHB 1886 builds on existing programs and will help leverage and coordinate funding to get restoration projects done more efficiently. The bill requires every county to address agricultural activities in critical areas--either through the voluntary stewardship framework or via the existing provisions of the Growth Management Act.



The stewardship program, when implemented, is designed to improve critical areas in a coordinated and prioritized way. Documentation is required to track the participation and performance by counties and agricultural landowners, and specific timelines and checkpoints are built in. If local efforts fall short, counties are required to take action under state oversight.

It is important to note that this program will complement, not replace, existing authority and efforts to protect water quality. The bill's scope addresses only critical area activities, and promotes real on-the-ground gains in the health and resilience of riparian areas. While the program is founded upon an assumption of increased resources for water quality compliance, it in does not alter RCW 90.48.

The point of ESHB 1886 is to stay out of court and start implementing actions to protect and restore critical areas while maintaining and enhancing the viability of agricultural lands. This program will succeed if we have strong collaboration between our caucuses, tribes, and local watershed residents to achieve these goals.



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Agricultural Caucus



Len Barson
Environmental Caucus



Eric Johnson
County Caucus

The Agricultural and Critical Areas Committee includes representatives from the following organizations:

- Futurewise
- King County
- The Nature Conservancy
- Washington Cattlemen's Association
- Washington Environmental Council
- Washington Farm Bureau
- Washington State Association of Counties
- Washington State Dairy Federation
- Washington State Nursery & Landscape Association
- Western Washington Agricultural Association