



JEFFERSON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 3-12-04

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PUBLIC MEETING ON AG, FISH & WILDLIFE PLAN FOR CHIMACUM WATERSHED

A **Public Meeting on Monday, March 22, 2004, from 7 pm to 9 pm** at the WSU Cooperative Extension "Spruce Room" in Port Hadlock will provide the community with the opportunity to review and comment on a plan for the protection of Agriculture, Fish and Wildlife in the Chimacum Creek Watershed.

In February 2002 Jefferson County entered into an agreement with the Washington Environmental Council (WEC) to settle an appeal filed before the Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board. One of the issues the WEC raised was the categorical exemption for existing, ongoing agricultural activities from regulation as Environmentally Sensitive Areas. The settlement was negotiated with the following understandings:

- Preservation of commercial agriculture is important for Jefferson County.
- Preservation of commercial agricultural lands is an important component of the Growth Management Act.
- In some cases, agricultural activities and fish and wildlife habitat may not be completely compatible. Thus in some cases it may be challenging to fully protect fish and wildlife habitat, and still preserve commercial agriculture.

A voluntary agreement between the County and WEC was developed that calls for people who have agricultural property located in the various watersheds to develop voluntary solutions to protect fish and wildlife habitat while promoting agriculture, starting with the Chimacum Cr. watershed. A public meeting was held in July 2002 to talk about the process and several landowners volunteered to serve on a committee of stakeholders to develop a plan for the Chimacum Cr. watershed.

Since then this committee, with assistance from the Conservation District and County, has developed a plan for the protection of fish and wildlife habitat on agricultural lands which maintains the categorical exemption for existing, ongoing agricultural activities from regulation as Environmentally Sensitive Areas.

The plan recognizes that agriculture, fish and wildlife are important components of the Chimacum Cr. watershed. The plan also recognizes the extensive efforts of many agricultural landowners to protect and improve fish and wildlife habitat on their farms. The plan provides a voluntary framework for the protection of fish and wildlife habitat in a manner that conserves and protects existing and ongoing agricultural operations in the watershed. "Existing and ongoing agriculture" is defined as "agricultural activities on lands designated as Agricultural Lands of Long-Term Commercial Significance on the County Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map and/or enrolled in the Open Space Tax program for agriculture."

Important aspects of this plan are:

- ***Maintains the exemption of agricultural operations from regulation as Environmentally Sensitive Areas. It does not propose mandatory buffers along streams.
- ***Landowners are responsible only for conditions caused by their own operations, not from those resulting from the actions of others or natural conditions.
- ***Emphasizes the extensive, voluntary efforts of landowners to protect/improve fish and wildlife habitat that have taken place in the watershed.
- ***Sets up a framework for voluntary compliance based on neighbors working together to address problems and find solutions.

A copy of the plan is on the Jefferson County Community Development Agriculture website under "new items"

(www.co.jefferson.wa.us/commdevelopment/Agriculture.htm) or a hardcopy is available by contacting the Conservation District office (385-4105). Questions should be directed to Al Latham, Jefferson Co. Conservation District Manager.