

THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

October 12, 2010

Christine Gregoire, Governor
Lisa Brown, Senate Majority Leader
Frank Chopp, Speaker of the House
Richard DeBolt, House Minority Leader
Mike Hewitt, Senate Minority Leader

RE: Preserving Agricultural Viability and Protecting Critical Areas

Enclosed is the framework for a voluntary stewardship program to address the goals of SSB 5248/6520 for achieving a "successful agricultural economy and a healthy environment" for Washingtonians. The William D. Ruckelshaus Center was asked to facilitate discussions between our constituents to resolve this long-standing controversy over agricultural activities and critical areas related to provisions of the Growth Management Act. The Agriculture and Critical Areas Committee is pleased to inform you that we have now concluded discussion on a set of recommendations, and we are working together to translate these concepts into draft legislative language.

In your letter to us dated November 7, 2007 you asked us to develop a set of effective recommendations, and indicated that the Legislative and Executive branches would be ready to "seriously consider [our] recommendations, knowing they will be fiscally responsive, innovative, and practical." We believe the proposed stewardship framework meets all those criteria. It builds on existing programs for preserving agriculture and protecting critical areas, including salmon recovery, watershed planning, and agricultural land conservation. It provides focus and direction for stewardship actions related to agriculture, and relies on local watershed groups to set the direction for making effective use of existing programs and resources. Local people know their watersheds best and are the ones who must commit to doing the work.

The framework for stewardship is characterized by choices at the county and landowner level. As directed in the 5248/6520 legislation, one of our key principles is to emphasize voluntary stewardship first. In those places where agricultural activities intersect with sensitive critical areas, we want to promote incentives for agricultural landowners and operators to voluntarily enhance the condition of critical areas through restoration projects and farm management practices. Counties have been in the middle of the agriculture and critical areas controversy for several years. The framework offers

them the option to engage in the voluntary stewardship program, or review and if necessary revise their critical areas ordinances under existing provisions of the Growth Management Act.


The enclosed framework also contains many checkpoints to ensure that progress is being made. We want to be able to determine that the proposed stewardship activities are scientifically sound, that the stewardship actions get implemented, and that the voluntary program is effective in protecting and enhancing critical areas on the ground. A key element of the voluntary program is a complementary effort toward the enforcement of existing water quality regulations. We agree that education and incentives are the first approach in encouraging stewardship, but the knowledge that an effective enforcement program is operating is also an important motivator.

We are very aware of the fiscal situation of Washington State at the moment when we have completed the mandate of SSB 5248/6520 to deliver a set of recommendations. Funding for technical assistance to landowners, program operations and enforcement are essential to making the voluntary stewardship program a success, and we are actively seeking federal and private sources in addition to state support. The agriculture and critical areas controversy has been long and expensive and will continue to drain resources from valuable efforts to support agriculture and the environment if we do not implement this unique accord.

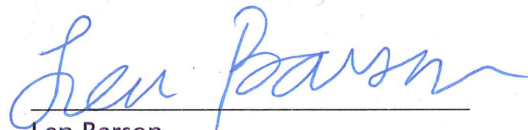
We look forward to answering your questions and working with you to move the Agriculture and Critical Areas project into the next phase. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Caucus Coordinators of the Agriculture and Critical Areas Committee



John Stuhlmiller
Agricultural Caucus



Len Barson
Environmental Caucus



Eric Johnson
County Caucus