

WHATCOM WATERSHED IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2016

ISSUE 1

WID BEST PRACTICE SUPPORT PROGRAM

WIDs offer farmers many important advantages. One of the biggest is the ability to work together to improve farm practices. WID Board members have come to understand that our ag community is only as strong as our weakest link. We want to ensure that all our farms are contributing to clean water and fish and wildlife habitat. And are not constantly under the clouds of threatened lawsuits and regulations.

WID Boards are currently reviewing a potential new program called **Best Practice Support Program**. In short, this would be a WID-driven program to identify possible water quality problems, properly address them and help direct farmers to the appropriate resources to assist them. Meeting water quality standards is essential for the future of farming. This will not only help do that, but should decrease the need for regulatory inspections, enforcement and penalties. And that helps everyone!

The working draft of the Best Practice Support System is located on the Ag Water Board website at www.agwaterboard.com.

We welcome your review and comments.



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF AG WATER BOARD

A lot has been happening since the formation of four new WIDs which joined the two existing WIDs and formed the Ag Water Board in the end of 2014. WID board members have spent many hours of their valuable time in meetings and discussions. This time has not been wasted. Landowners are invested in these WIDs and it is important we keep you informed of activities, progress and challenges.

Working Together in Unity

No doubt the most important benefit the WIDs and the Ag Water Board have provided to our greater farm community is the structure and ability of farmers to unite and present a united front. This is particularly important as we deal on

a government to government basis with our local tribal governments as well as city, county and state governments. In dealing with each of these, and particularly in our important discussions with the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribal leaders, we have seen that this unity has become extremely important.

Reaching Out - Communication

In early 2015 the WIDs were asked to support a public relations effort aimed at building awareness in the community of some of the major challenges our farmers face and begin developing a stronger base of community support. We asked the Whatcom County Dairy Federation which was already engaged in a

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, CONT'D

strong public outreach program, to join us in forming Whatcom Family Farmers. Since August, when this was formed, a tremendous amount of work has been done and much has been accomplished.

Dealing with Potential Litigation

Just as we were beginning what we believed would be very constructive discussions with the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe on comprehensive water negotiations, we were informed that the Lummi Tribal Council had voted to retain lawyers to sue some of our dairy farmers over the closure of shellfish harvesting beds. We concluded that constructively discussing long term water solutions with the tribe would be impossible should lawsuits proceed. We continue to discuss this issue with tribal leaders focusing on establishing a framework for talks that can address all tribal concerns about water quality and water quantity. It appears we have support from the Governor's Natural Resources staff in encouraging and possibly coordinating this process. While we remain cautiously optimistic that the Lummi Nation will not bring lawsuits, the threat of litigation requires us to help prepare our farmers for this possibility.

WID Water Improvement Efforts Beginning

You will see in the reports from each WID that there are some interesting and valuable initiatives underway. These activities, when communicated to our government officials and community, are making it clear that farmers are leading the way in environmental protection and improvement and are very serious about continuous improvement in how we farm and how we protect our community's precious resources in the process.

Looking ahead in 2016

Weather, global supply issues of dairy and berries, and the exceptionally strong US dollar provide continual challenges. But, we are cautiously optimistic that the work that has been done by and through the WIDs and the Ag Water Board in 2015 will help us move forward on issues important to our future. Our structure and unity provide strength in our government to government discussions with tribal leaders, local and state government officials. We believe this can enable us to address some long term issues that threaten the future of farming here.

Thanks for your continuing support and we look forward to a productive year. I encourage you to attend the meetings relevant to your concerns. We all benefit from your ideas and experiences.

Scott Bedlington, Ag Water Board President

WID Boards & Meeting Schedule

Bertrand 2:00 pm First Tuesday

Board: Vern Vande Garde, Scott Bedlington,
Mike Schoneveld, Peter Vlas, Greg Ebe

Laurel 10:00 am Second Monday

Board: Mike Boxx, Leroy Plagerman,
Jon Maberry, Rich Appel, Roger Blok

Sumas 1:00 pm Second Tuesday

Board: Brad Rader, Andy Enfield,
Keith Boon, Terry Lenssen, Rod Perry

South Lynden 3:00 pm Second Tuesday

Board: Ed Blok, Jeff De Jong, Landon Van Dyk,
Rod Vande Hoef, Rolf Haugen

North Lynden 10:00 am Third Tuesday

Board: Larry Stap, Roger Bajema, Brad Rader,
Don Van Mersbergen, Darryl Vander Haak

Drayton 3:00 pm Third Tuesday

Board: Marty Maberry, Greg Ebe, Scott James,
Jeff Bedlington, Rod Tjoelker

Ag Water Board

quarterly, 3rd Wednesday, 1pm

Board: Marty Maberry, Andy Enfield, Mike Boxx,
Scott Bedlington, Rod VandeHoef

**All meet @ 1796 Front Street
Lynden, WA**

These are your WIDs!
Plan on attending a meeting soon.



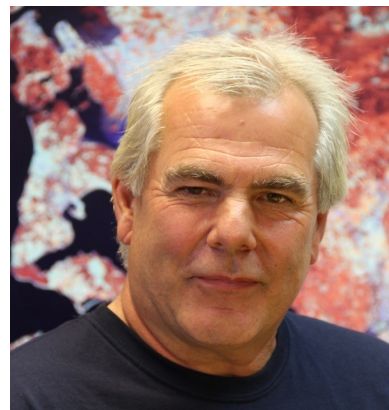
Scott Bedlington, potato farmer, is the president of the Ag Water Board and a board member of the Bertrand WID and Whatcom Family Farmers.

Laurel WID

WID REPORTS

The major focus of the Laurel WID is on water quality testing including source identification. The Ten Mile citizens group formed a number of years ago to address water quality issues in Ten Mile, Fourmile, and Deer Creek drainages. Laurel WID has partnered with this group and with RE Sources to conduct regular water quality testing and additional testing if needed to help identify sources. RE Sources is supporting the citizen's group with a grant. Because the Laurel WID lies in the rural-urban interface, information gained here could be very helpful in addressing multiple water quality source issues. The Laurel WID is also working on finalizing a comprehensive plan to be used as a blueprint for further actions on drainage, habitat improvements, and water supply.

More information @ www.laurelwid.com



Mike Boxx, President Laurel WID

South Lynden WID

The South Lynden WID is split by the Nooksack River incorporating the floodplain in the Kamm Creek and Scott Ditch drainages. Flood management, and the subsequent ability to drain floodwater off farm fields is a high priority. The WID has also committed to a regular water quality monitoring program which provokes a rigorous search to better understand the sources of high fecal counts. We are committed to both identifying sources of contamination and communicating concerns to our landowners in order to proactively address this issue. Water Supply was a major concern in 2015 as our WID has a higher percentage of surface water users than others due to a lack of groundwater. Low flows in the Nooksack River restricted the water available to farmers. A Comprehensive Plan for the WID is also in development.

More information @ www.southlyndenwid.com



Ed Blok, President South Lynden WID

Sumas WID

Sumas WID represents a unique portion of the County where the water flows north into the Fraser River. Much of our WID is in the floodway of the Nooksack River and most farmers remember the floods of the early 1990's. As such, flood management and drainage are large concerns. The WID works cooperatively with the Saar Creek and Johnson Creek Drainage Districts to jointly fund some projects. The Sumas WID has also established a systematic water quality testing program so we can better understand the area of risk. WID members have been willing to share this information with their neighbors in order to make them aware of the impacts their practices have on water quality. The WID is developing a Comprehensive Management Plan that will document current conditions and outline an action plan for the future. We are meeting monthly and looking at each issue carefully. We welcome your participation.

More information @ www.sumaswid.com



Brad Rader, President Sumas WID

Drayton WID

Drayton WID was organized in 2014 along with the Laurel, South Lynden, and Sumas WIDs. Like the Sumas WID, Drayton WID land does not affect the Nooksack River as it is drained by Dakota and California Creeks into Drayton Harbor. WID members are proud that water quality monitoring is pointing toward the reopening of the Drayton shellfish beds in the near future. The WID conducts its own water quality monitoring program and is committed to continual improvement in farm practices. The WID also commends Birch Bay Water and Sewer District for its aggressive research on finding new water sources that will benefit both the coastal cities and farms to the east. They have already drilled one well into a deep aquifer and are planning 2-3 more. Drayton WID will be cooperating with them wherever possible to ensure that these projects are realized and that new water sources can contribute to needed water supply for irrigation, residential, and flow enhancement.

More information @ www.draytonwid.com



Marty Maberry, President Drayton WID

North Lynden WID

Water quality testing with Whatcom County is a major focus of the North Lynden WID. Our emphasis is on source identification and when specific sources are identified the WID is taking the lead in making contact with the farmer-landowners to make them aware of the concern and help them make full use of resources and best practices and work to avoid any regulatory enforcement. The WID is also working with City of Lynden on improved monitoring and water improvement projects including helping locate volunteers to assist with storm drain cleaning, etc. A Comprehensive Plan for our WID was developed when we formed in 2009. We just completed a review of the Plan. Farmers within the WID are also involved in specific water projects such as the Twin Brook Creamery farm working closely with the Conservation District on an "Edge of Field" water monitoring to determine appropriate buffers to protect against runoff during heavy rains.

More information @ www.northlyndenwid.com



Larry Stap, President North Lynden WID

Bertrand WID

Bertrand has faced the challenge of adequate flows to protect fish habitat since it was created in 2003. Most of our projects have been focused on finding the balance between water use for agriculture and improving flows which come out of Canada at levels that are far below the goals throughout most of the summer. Projects have included: storage, imported water, stream augmentation, and water banking. We have also invested in habitat improvements, levee setbacks in the lower watershed, and drainage projects. The Bertrand WID has had strong support from the State Legislature through the Department of Ecology in funding these projects. Just like farmers and fish advocates, the state agencies are frustrated with the outdated portions of State Water Law that work against common sense solutions. They have been willing to invest in the ideas proposed by the Bertrand WID that advance creative solutions.

More information @ www.bertrandwid.com



Vern Vande Garde, President Bertrand WID



Check out the Ag Water Board's Story Map @
www.agwaterboard.com
to learn more about farms and water in
Whatcom County.

Ag Water Board
1796 Front Street
Lynden, WA 98264
360-306-8495
info@agwaterboard.com
www.agwaterboard.com