

Whatcom Ag Water Board SB 6091 Foster Pilot

Joint Task Force on Water Resource Mitigation September 10, 2019

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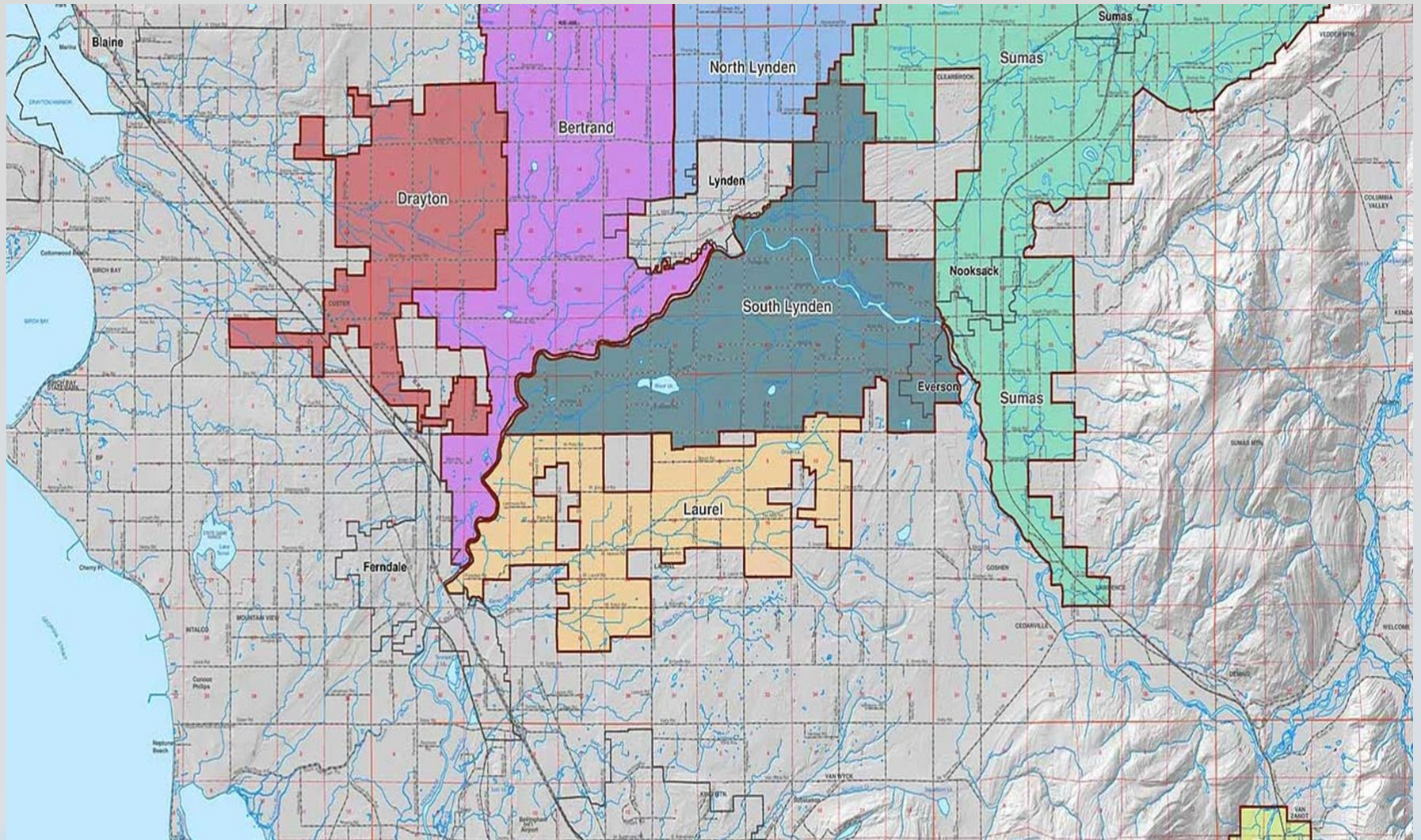


Whatcom Ag Water Board

- 6 Irrigation Districts in Whatcom County, Districts established by vote of agricultural landowners.
- Original concept of voluntary surface to groundwater changes, combined with tributary flow augmentation, started by Bertrand WID in 2010 and partially funded by Ecology.
- Between 2010 and 2016, 2.2 cfs (1000 gpm) transferred from direct surface water diversions to groundwater withdrawals.
- 2017 Bertrand WID Flow Augmentation: 1.1 cfs (515 gpm) increase in streamflow from augmentation.

The Foster Problem

- ✓ The project increases instream flows through flow augmentation during the critical low flow period of late summer/early fall.
- ✓ The project reduces direct impacts on tributaries from irrigation withdrawals.
- ⊗ But, it could violate the Foster decision by decreasing flows during other times of the year (Late Fall/Early Winter).



Purposes of Pilot Project

- Reduce direct impacts of irrigation withdrawals by converting tributary irrigation surface diversions to deeper groundwater withdrawals;
- Use direct flow augmentation to increase instream flows for fish in critical tributaries, without the permanent loss of agricultural water rights;
- In many areas of Washington State, mitigation of new exempt wells results in permanent loss of agricultural water rights – SB 6091 has potential to continue this trend;
- Integrate streamflow restoration efforts with habitat restoration through Drainage Based Management = Net Ecological Benefit

Status of Pilot Project

- Project is partially funded as a SB 6091 project in the Nooksack Basin to offset impacts of new exempt wells;
- Funding in 19-20 will be used to finalize locations for flow restoration projects;
- Applications to be filed during 2020
- Funding needed for certain capital costs, farmers will contribute funds for costs as well;
- Location of projects included in local Drainage Based Management (DBM) planning.

Questions?

