

## Stillaguamish Valley Protection Initiative



Puget Sound is home to 19 major rivers systems and deltas. These river systems define how people use, protect and rely on these systems for clean water, local food, habitat, flood storage and a place we call home. The foothills and mountains hold our forests; our lowlands and floodplains hold our prime farmland and residential development; and our deltas hold our industrial and commercial development.

In the Stillaguamish delta and floodplain, the rich alluvial soils support large blocks of contiguous farmland, producing food, fiber and seed that sustains our local economies and provides local food and food security. The floodplain also supports endangered Chinook salmon and Steelhead populations that have thrived in this dynamic river system for thousands of years. These floodplain lands are threatened by urbanization pressures driven by a rapidly growing population (NWF, 2013).

In the Stillaguamish Valley, farmers, tribes, environmental non-profits, federal and state and county staff have come together through the Sustainable Lands Strategy to realize a unified future vision that protects these large blocks of resource lands, and preserves opportunities to optimize land use (i.e., for farms, habitat, parks) to adapt to sea level rise, changing snow and rain patterns, and other changes.

As part of the Sustainable Lands Strategy Natural Resource Lands Program, the Stillaguamish Valley Protection Initiative (SVPI) is aimed to preserve large continuous blocks of farmland in the valley that supports habitat restoration, but limits future development. By purchasing the development rights for agricultural land, it can remain in agricultural use and allows landowners to remain on their land and continue to use it for the best use for the community.

The Stillaguamish Valley Protection Initiative is:

**INNOVATIVE-** A new approach to protecting lands that supports local stewardship decision making and unites the interests of farming communities, tribes, and habitat recovery.

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INDESPENSIBLE - If we don't proactively re-design our vital floodplains, our existing systems supporting fish and farms will fail. This kind of collaborative conservation is mission critical and creates middle ground.

INSPIRATIONAL - Recognizing the treasure of this landscape, we can secure its future for generations to come with a sound financial investment, but we must start today.

This new approach utilizes a flexible conservation easement that helps local communities preserve local habitat and local food production. A multi-benefit easement that limits housing, but is flexible for agriculture and provides for critical habitat for salmon recovery. An easement that will preserve large contiguous blocks of farmland to maintain a connected viable landscape in perpetuity. And at the same time limit fragmented urban development and continue to provide wildlife habitat. This is a habitat friendly easement, recognizing that local farms are providing habitat as well as local food and that those two factors should continue to coexist without the pressure of fragmenting urban style development forever.

Our Geographic Focus:

From the city of Arlington to the mouth of Port Susan bay, farmers are producing local crops of vegetables, berries, cereal grains and seed crops for our local families and region. This effort would focus on maintaining a viable agriculture land base for the Stillaguamish Valley.

Our values:

The SVPI operates under the core principles developed through the Snohomish Sustainable Lands Strategy. These are:

**Principles:**

- Net gain for fish, farm and flood control interests
- Mutual respect through communication
- Start with common information base

**Outcomes:**

- Agreed upon principles
- Neutral, collaborative forum to discuss interests
- Better understanding of net gain
- Road map for implementation

**Value Proposition:**

- Non-regulatory, “opportunity, not obligation”

Reference:

National Wildlife Federation. 2013. *Changing Course: Why protecting floodplains is good for people and wildlife*. [https://www.nwf.org/~media/PDFs/Water/2013\\_Changing-Course\\_Protecting-Floodplains.ashx](https://www.nwf.org/~media/PDFs/Water/2013_Changing-Course_Protecting-Floodplains.ashx)