



## Snohomish County

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### Media Advisory – April 12, 2011

## Reardon, Somers approve of land strategy protecting farms, fish

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon and Council Chairman Dave Somers commemorated Tuesday the completion of the first phase of the Snohomish Sustainable Lands Strategy, which provides simultaneous protection for agriculture and environment.

Launched in June 2010, the land strategy reconciles agriculture and environmental restoration interests through “net gain” for both farms and fish and wildlife, bringing together differing and competing interests.

“The purpose of this agreement is to define the principles upon which future farmland and fish and wildlife preservation should be based,” Reardon said. “The Sustainable Lands Strategy recognizes the importance of other issues as well, including clean water, economic viability and tribal cultural concerns.”

“Sustainability of the land and our communities is the essence of this agreement,” Somers said. “We’re proving that preserving our farmlands and restoring our salmon runs are not mutually exclusive goals, we can and must have both.”

Standing with Reardon and Somers for the signing were members of the Tulalip and Stillaguamish tribes, state representatives as well as agriculture and restoration community groups.

The agreement is non-regulatory in nature and requires further development to become fully effective, yet it reflects a commitment by all parties involved to continue good-faith efforts toward balancing farmland protection with habitat protection.

“The only way to succeed here is by recognizing that we all have a place here,” said Glen Gobin, the Tulalip Tribes’ vice chairman. “I know we can go forward together and find real sustainability for all of us.”

“As we got into the process, the conflicts were clear: farm versus fish,” said Brian Bookey, a member and former chairman of the county’s Agricultural Advisory Board. “But we learned that we can get past the butting heads and that we have a means to find and protect the best farmland and best fish habitat.”

Next steps include developing more specific plans geared toward the protection of farmland and habitat as well as proposed county code changes to promote use of the land strategy. Under the “net-gain” model, these should be done in a way to enhance both without a land loss for either when possible.

The primary areas of focus under the Sustainable Lands Strategy will be agricultural and restoration interests in the estuaries of the Snohomish and Stillaguamish rivers, the county's two main river systems. Much of the county's designated agricultural land lies within these estuaries, as do some of the most crucial salmon recovery efforts to date.

Under the Sustainable Lands Strategy, steps taken will be reviewed in three years.

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