

## Stillaguamish Valley Natural Resource Easement

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Natural resource management is at the core of what human beings are tasked with doing, AKA Stewardship. Salmon and wildlife need habitat and they need it to be as wild as possible and suitable for them to live, eat, reproduce and continue that circle of life. Stewardship allows us to enter into this world and work within it to also live, eat, reproduce and continue our circle of life. The goal is creating one habitat, multiple species and humans-sharing and co-existing in this common landscape.

Balancing all of the needs will not be easy as population increases, demand for food increases, and habitat is threatened or marginalized. Agriculture operates in the Stillaguamish delta and floodplain, with rich alluvial rich soils to produce food, fiber and seed that sustains our local economies and provides food security. Agriculture also provides habitat and acts as a buffer from urban type development at the same time coexisting with the wildlife community.

Recognizing the importance of local food and local habitat, a new type of easement may be necessary to help 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 landscape in perpetuity. And at the same time limit fragmented urban development and continue to provide wildlife habitat. This easement should be habitat friendly, 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 urban style development forever.

We are looking for a mechanism to accomplish several strategic purchases that will positively impact the local community of citizens, farmers, tribes, and species of wildlife using a competitive bid model and a flexible easement.

The easement should be flexible and work for the Stillaguamish agriculture community and the Restoration community and be adaptable to climate change impacts overtime. This easement will help the farm community with an infusion of capital by compensating in exchange for removing development as an option in the future. It will also maintain a critical mass of contiguous acreage in the Stillaguamish Valley helping to insure the land remains focused on production agriculture and limiting non-complimentary uses.

Once the easement language is settled upon, a legally binding document needs to be generated for prospective land owners to sign committing them to “sell their development rights” if funds are secured.

In order to continue an easement of this importance, a broad coalition will need to be developed ~local farmers, tribes, concerned citizens and members of the restoration community. And the County will need to be engaged and encouraged to increase the Conservation Futures Fund (or some other fund) as a dedicated source of monies to secure easements at a higher pace than is currently being executed. This could be accomplished by using an annual competitive bid model, maximizing the use of tax payer funds and providing another tool for landowners to steward their property.

This easement will provide stability for the Agriculture community and the Restoration community allowing both to focus on their work, limiting urban development in this resource rich landscape.