

Agricultural Viability

Description

Agriculture is fundamental to the communities of the Chehalis Basin. Much of the Strategy's work is and will be concentrated in floodplains and valley bottoms, which are predominantly farmland. Population growth in the Basin is putting pressure on farmers to develop their land, converting more flood-compatible fields and pasture to less flood-compatible homes and businesses. Promoting agricultural viability by supporting a robust, profitable, and resilient farming community in the basin will reduce development in flood-prone areas and increase community support for the Strategy.

Potential Principles

Principle 1: Protect essential agricultural resources like high quality farmland and water rights.

Principle 2: Engage with the agricultural community to remain aware of essential concerns and adapt the Strategy to those concerns.

Principle 3: Protect farmers from major and catastrophic flood damage.

Key Components

- **Implement Strategy-wide principles for acquisition** of land and water rights (currently underway). Property acquisition is an essential tool for habitat restoration and preservation. Acquiring water rights to augment base flow can be a key tool to restore degraded streams. By only acquiring the minimum necessary to accomplish goals, negotiating in good faith with landowners, and seeking advice from local agricultural experts during each transaction, ag viability and habitat restoration goals can be balanced, and in some cases simultaneously advanced in the same project.
- **Directly fund resilience projects on farms** such as installing farms pads and flood fencing, developing livestock evacuation plans, and other best management practices designed to reduce agricultural exposure to flood damages. Farm pads provide safe locations for livestock, equipment, and other valuables during floods. Flood fencing reduces costly and potentially

toxic debris from being deposited on fields after floods. The Strategy will support these and other management practices on farmland to protect it from flooding.

- **Enhance, augment, and fill gaps in existing programs** like the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP), riparian funding, and other state and federal initiatives. Some programs can be extended by providing matching funding, like CREP. Others, like VSP, may have unfunded goals that the Strategy could step in to support. These programs are already active in the Basin and support Strategy objectives, so start-up and administrative costs would be reduced.
- **Support programs to diversify Basin agriculture** through initiatives such as the SW Growers Co-Op and the Initiative for Working Riparian Lands (IWRL). Creating a broader array of profitable agricultural activities in the Basin makes the local agricultural community more robust to market and climate changes. It also creates more opportunities for projects that both reduce flood damages and improve outcomes for aquatic species while simultaneously benefiting farmers and the broader farming community.

Cost

Total Estimated 30-Year Cost: \$5,000,000 to \$7,000,000

Costs to support Agricultural Viability initiatives and projects are estimated to vary between \$25,000 and \$350,000 per year, depending on the level of need and the projects that are active. These costs are based on current and historical OCB funding of IWRL, farm pad, SW Growers Co-Op, and acquisition program activities. The 30-year cost range is narrower than the annual cost range because spending is anticipated to vary according to need per biennium.

More Information

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