



2057 SW Salsbury Ave. – Chehalis, WA 98532-4225 – Phone (360) 996-4560

Supervisors

<u>D. Fenn</u>	Chairman
<u>M. Courtney</u>	Vice-Chairman
<u>D. Moir</u>	Secretary/ Treasurer
<u>C. Aldrich</u>	Member
<u>B. Anderson</u>	Member

September 22, 2021

Office of Chehalis Basin
Attn: Andrea McNamara Doyle
P. O. Box 47775
Olympia, WA 98504-7775

Subject: Landowner Incentives

Dear Office of Chehalis Basin Board,

The Lewis Conservation District has been concerned with the landowner incentive options for cooperators willing to complete salmon habitat projects since the spring of 2018. With the turnover of employees at the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), we feel like a resolution has not been reached in a timely manner.

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) has had soil rental rates go to levels that were under 50% of original rates. The rates have gone up some but still are not close to what some landowners in our Early Action Reach (EAR) stretches were already receiving.

We fear that WDFW may have taken the wrong lesson from some successes in Grays Harbor. On the Satsop and Wynoochee Rivers, the higher rates of erosion have been enough incentive to get some landowners to cooperate without need of significant compensation. Some landowners in Thurston and Grays Harbor have been willing to offer property under conservation easements and/or acquisition options. The only site in Lewis County this occurred is where landowners had passed away and the heirs sold a portion of the property to the Capital Land Trust.

We have worked diligently to get landowners to stay involved and allow WDFW to complete in-stream projects. But we will not be successful until most landowners see cooperation in both their economic interest as well as helping the fishery. In early 2019, we were informed there will not be any additional alternatives available to incentivize our landowners to complete salmon habitat projects and plant needed riparian vegetation along the rivers.

Conservation - Development - Self-Government

Unfortunately, all of cooperators continue to decrease agriculture areas they are willing to plant without any incentive. They are using the property for their own agriculture use or leasing the property to local agriculture producers. Why would they give up land that they are already being paid for under a lease agreement? During the Science Symposium in January of 2020, the Lewis Conservation District reiterated the importance of getting an alternate incentive for landowners to ensure the success of implementing the Aquatic Species Restoration Plan.

Specifically, in the South Fork Newaukum EAR, we have had landowners back out of the process for several reasons. The number one obstacle is the lack of any incentive beyond acquisition or conservation easements. One landowner in particular was appalled at the offer of a conservation easement, because of what the easement would not allow him to do on his property, and the price that he was offered. Other landowners did not like the way the large wood structures were going to be installed using pilings, or decided not to sign the landowner agreement because their neighbors were not signing. One landowner backed out because the project would obstruct their picnic area along the river.

During a public meeting of the Office of the Chehalis Basin, a local landowner called the ASRP "a big land grab by the state". This is a very dangerous message and unless most landowners understand that all transactions will involve a mutually beneficial agreement, that message will gain momentum.

We are told that WDFW employees are working on an alternate incentive program for the landowners, but it needs to happen soon to keep positive relationships with our cooperators. Recently we were told even if there will be another incentive in the future, the landowners we are currently working with will not have that option. This puts us in a very difficult situation. Why would we tell landowners we have known and worked with for over twenty years that they should sign a landowner agreement to complete a project with no incentive. Then, when an incentive becomes available, we will lose the respect of those cooperators.

The Lewis Conservation District is here to assist landowners in the protection and enhancement of natural resources. The assistance needs to work for the people as well as the resources to ensure projects get implemented. We value the process working with WDFW and Inter-Fluve and look forward to providing assistance with implementing the Chehalis Basin Strategy to ensure the quality of life for future generations in the basin.

Sincerely,



Dave Fenn
Chair

cc: Emily McCain, WDFW
Celina Abercrombie, WDFW