

**THURSTON COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**McLane Building Conference Room
5033 Harrison Avenue
Olympia, WA 98502**

APRIL 25, 2013

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Pat Labine, Chair
Chery Sullivan
John Lentz
Eric Johnson
Robert McIntosh
Eric Hagan
Doug Wiseman
Dave Nygard

MEMBERS EXCUSED: E.J. Zita

STAFF: Lucas Patzek, WSU Thurston County Extension
Polly Stoker, WSU Thurston County Extension

GUESTS: Scott Clark, Thurston County Planning
Tom McDowell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

CALL TO ORDER – 7:12pm, Chair Pat Labine

ADOPTION OF MINUTES – Minutes were approved from March.

REVIEW AGENDA – remove from agenda: Poultry Update (Scott McCormick will attend May’s meeting)

ANNOUNCEMENTS & OTHER BUSINESS –

DIRECTOR REPORT: n/a

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

Impacts of USFWS endangered species listings on Thurston County Farms

Tom McDowell, Manager of the Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), gave a presentation to the Committee which included an overview of the Endangered Species Act, an overview of the federal rule-making process, and an overview of conservation planning options as relating to South Puget Sound prairies. The three candidate species which were discussed in some detail are the Taylor’s Checkerspot Butterfly, Streaked Horned Lark, and Mazama Pocket Gopher. The butterfly is being proposed for “threatened” status, while the other two species are being proposed for “endangered” status. The

Committee discussed how the 4(d) rule, which removes the take prohibition for certain activities, would be applied to “normal farming and ranching activities” in Thurston County. The Committee was concerned that the list of allowable activities, permissible only between November 1st and February 28th, was not drafted with normal production practices of Western Washington farmers in mind. There was also a concern that field cultivation was not included in the list of permissible activities, as the Committee pointed out that a number of farms which till their soil most likely lie within the boundaries of the prairie ecosystem, including dairy farms, mixed vegetable farms, tree farms, berry farms, and forage/hay farms. The public comment period for the proposed listings will be officially concluded on May 3rd, but feedback on this issue will still be welcome after that date.

Scott Clark gave a presentation on the process that Thurston County is developing with regards to Habitat Conservation Plans associated with South Puget Sound prairies. These plans will be long-term (30-50 year) agreements directly between the County and the federal government responding directly to ESA listings impacting prairie uses (agriculture, development, etc). The County has applied to a third year of funding with the USFWS to support the Habitat Conservation Plan process. The County hopes to complete the process within 36 months.

Both Tom and Scott have requested that the Committee help with these processes by providing contacts of local farmers who may have valuable information about how these restrictions or plans may affect their businesses and land. Farmers may have insights on methods of production which have not yet been considered by USFWS and County (i.e. tree farmers). Tom’s contact information is the following:

Thomas L. McDowell
Manager, Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
510 Desmond Dr. SE, Suite 102
Lacey, WA 98503
Office: 360-753-9426
Cell: 360-951-3756

ADJOURN – 9:00pm, Chair Pat Labine