



P.O. Box 2632 (mailing)
110 N. First St., #C
Mount Vernon, WA 98273
friends@fidalgo.net
www.friendsofskogitounty.org

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 40
Mt. Vernon, WA
98273

Return Service Requested

**Please consider a gift to Friends in
honor of someone you love!
Happy Holidays!**

THANKS for GIVING!

At the end of each year, the Board of Friends of Skagit County reviews the work we have done for the year. We plan for the new year with the same optimism that led us to organize in 1991.

We believe that citizen participation and support of good land use decisions have made a big difference in preserving rural Skagit County. And we know that continuing this work will do the same in the future.

If you haven't made a contribution this year, please take the time to do so TODAY! We appreciate your continued support of Friends' work to preserve Skagit County for the future.

FRIENDS OF SKAGIT COUNTY... working for you in Skagit County! Please send your donation TODAY!

NAME _____ E-MAIL _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

I'm a REGULAR *Friend!* (\$35) I'm a FAMILY *Friend!* (\$50) I'm a NEIGHBORLY *Friend!* (\$100)

I'm a SPECIAL *Friend!* (\$250) I'm a UNIQUE *Friend!* (\$500) I'm a _____ *Friend!* (\$_____)

I'm making an additional \$_____ contribution to the LEGAL FUND.

I'm making an additional \$_____ contribution in honor/memory of: _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please send me a free bumpersticker – “A Valley need FRIENDS”.

I CAN HELP WITH: - research - monitoring county meetings - newsletters - mailings
 - making a scrapbook of news articles - managing the website - other (_____)

DONATIONS TO *FRIENDS* ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE TO THE EXTENT ALLOWED BY LAW. (Please consult your tax accountant.)

PLEASE MAIL THIS FORM AND YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO **PO BOX 2632, MOUNT VERNON, WA 98273** OR CHARGE IT TO YOUR CREDIT CARD ON THE *NETWORK FOR GOOD* or at **www.friendsofskogitcounty.org** — click on “get involved.” 021010

FRIENDS TO CELEBRATE 20 YEARS of WORK in 2013!

In April of 2013 Friends of Skagit County will celebrate 20 years of work for good land use decisions. Here's some of the work that benefits every citizen in Skagit County:

- Monitor the weekly public notices published in the local newspapers for development proposals and policy changes which may threaten Skagit's rural way of life.
- Write letters of comment about questionable developments or proposed changes to the GMA, County Comprehensive Plan, County Code, County Planning Policies and other environmental laws.
- Present information to citizen groups, both formal and informal, about land use issues and proposed changes and work with individuals and groups on their choices for action.
- Join with and support other groups who have similar concerns about proposed land use changes.
- Promote Skagit's rural economy of farms and forests as critical to a sustainable future.
- Serve as a resource on public participation, process, ethics and civic responsibility.

Here are some of the documents that we review and comment on when changes are proposed:

- Skagit County Comprehensive Plan
- Skagit County Codes
- Skagit County Planning Policies
- WA State Growth Management Act
- Skagit Shoreline Management Plan
- Policies & proposals of the State Departments of Ecology (DOE), Fish & Wildlife (WDFW), Commerce (DOC – formerly CTED), Transportation, Natural Resources, etc. especially in Skagit County, but also where the changes may affect Skagit County in the future.

THANK YOU for your past donations and we trust you will continue your support in the next 20 years!

Who Is In Charge and Why You Need to Watch What Is Happening to YOUR Water

In a democracy, the people rule. If the process is working well, elected officials and public staff do the bidding of the majority of the citizens. If the process is compromised or held hostage to “special interests” the decisions made to benefit the “public” end up benefiting only the decision-makers or those who influence them.

Effective public participation requires both a willingness to serve on the part of citizens and a willingness to accept citizen decisions on the part of the elected officials. Continuing to appoint the same individuals to “stakeholder” committees is not effective, nor is it democratic. Allowing a small number of people to make important decisions is costly as well, as the decisions are often challenged legally and we all pay for that.

The public deserves the best decisions possible from elected officials and staff. When that doesn't happen the public has the right to “unelect” the officials and challenge their decisions. This applies to decisions which breach the “appearance of fairness” rule as well as actions which may be totally illegal.

In many places, citizen led committees are taking over government decision-making and involving the public in a fair and equitable process to do so. Standing neighborhood groups that are more than advisory have been in place for some years where cities could not properly manage the budget or where the proposed planning process was too narrow and benefited only a few. While these processes require more attention and time from citizens, the outcomes mean that everyone has a say in decisions and these decisions are owned by everyone.

In Skagit County, a number of citizen groups have formed to address various land use and resource issues which include county and state policies on water, inappropriate developments, decisions about urban growth areas and zoning. These citizens are key to good government and their work is making changes that are better for everyone in the community.

The Skagit Public Utility District #1 (PUD) has held two meetings in the past month where 160 people attended the meeting with concerns about water and public process. Some of the questions asked included why are employees of agencies chairing a committee made up of cities, agencies, tribes and the county, why are agencies allowed to continue making decisions that end up in court and cost the taxpayers thousands of dollars and when are citizens going to take back the right to make reasonable decisions if the elected officials and staff are failing to do so?

If you are concerned about government decisions and actions, get involved in groups working on the water issue. Discuss these problems with your family, friends and your neighbors. And plan to schedule time to attend and make comments at public meetings. Remember you can only make a difference if you turn up and speak up.

Some comments presented by Diane Freethy at the meeting of the Skagit River Flow Management Committee, November 30, 2012.

“In Washington State water is considered a public resource. Contrary to the opinions of some individuals the people of Washington State own the water. Water itself does not belong to any particular individual, organization or government agency -- not even the Department of Ecology.

Neither the city of Anacortes nor the Skagit County Public Utility District #1 own the water of WA State. Utilities may have the ability to sell their water rights, but they cannot “sell” water, per se.

This building (Skagit PUD #1) is publicly owned. The utility is governed by three publicly elected commissioners who are charged with overseeing the utility's distribution of the public's water to its customers. The public has a right to know how publicly owned water utilities are conducting their business.

In conclusion we question the existence of a Skagit River Flow Management Committee if it does not represent the right of all the people who have a right to Skagit River water.”

Diane Freethy is on Friends Board of Directors and is a founder & president of the Skagit Citizens Alliance for Rural Preservation.

Reprinted from the Skagit Valley Herald December 1, 2012

Water committee votes against adding landowners

By KATE MARTIN, Staff Writer

MOUNT VERNON — A group that provides water policy recommendations to member governments and Native American tribes voted not to add landowner representatives in a Friday afternoon meeting that saw record public attendance.

The Skagit River Flow Management Committee was intended to include only representatives of agencies that signed a historic 50-year water agreement in 1996. Those entities are Anacortes, Skagit Public Utility District, the state Department of Ecology, state Fish and Wildlife, Skagit County, the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe.

In June 2011, Ecology closed the Carpenter-Fisher creek basins south of Mount Vernon. This led to many upset residents calling county offices trying to restore their access to water so they could build on their property.

But Skagit County commissioners say Ecology — not the county — controls access to water. As a result, commissioners have backed out of the water fight over the past year, even though for more than a decade, the county has spent millions of dollars on largely unsuccessful courtroom battles over water rights.

With Ecology poised to close yet another basin, this time near Big Lake, commissioners sent a letter Nov. 5 saying the county withdrew from that 1996 agreement and asked the committee to add a rural landowner and an agriculture representative to its ranks.

Committee members talked for more than an hour Friday about whether to add two additional members.

The county did not send a representative to the meeting.

While committee members ultimately voted against the proposal, David Hawkins, an attorney for the Upper Skagit tribe, urged them to find a way to bring the county back to the table rather than further isolating it.

Hawkins suggested that the county could appoint someone from the agricultural community or a landowner as the county's representative on the board, and that person would have full voting rights. Hawkins ultimately abstained from the vote.

"We are a collaborative and advisory group," said Fred Buckenmeyer, committee member and public works director for Anacortes. "We have no budgetary authority. We have no decision-making power. We do not control water rights or approve well permits. ... We represent the interests and concerns of the respective decision makers."

It was the county's job to represent rural landowners, Buckenmeyer added.

Bob Powell, general manager for Skagit PUD, said it has been an intent to add new members as necessary, but only entities like cities that might have a future water right. Members of the committee generally report back to an elected official or board.

"If you add voting members who can't go back to a constituency ... who do they go back to get guidance?" Powell said.

While public comment was not on the agenda, committee members allowed people in the audience to speak.

It's rare when spectators show up to the committee meetings. In the past two years, fewer than a dozen nonmembers have attended. But Friday, more than 90 people packed into the Skagit Public Utility District Aqua Room, with many standing around the edges of the room.

John Roozen said the committee's purpose allows it to be "dynamic over time" and adopt new information, such as newly available science regarding the water continuity of deep wells, to guide policy decisions.

Peter Janicki criticized the committee's reasoning behind denying landowners representation because they would not have anyone to report to.

"We'll figure out how to make them an elected official," he said.

Janicki also said the committee was full of people who represent agencies that make money selling water.

The committee members will address the county's withdrawal from the agreement through separate letters to the county.

The next Skagit River Flow Management Committee meeting will be next year.