

WHATCOM WATERSHED IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2016

ISSUE 2



Canadian dam on Jackman Ditch--one of many issues facing farmers dealing with complex water issues. (Photo: Jayson Korthuis)

Message from the President

In addition to a busy harvest season, many involved in WID and AWB leadership have been busy on a number of important issues.

Negotiations with Lummi Nation

We have been meeting frequently with leaders at Lummi Nation to respond to the continuing threat of lawsuits against some of our dairy farmers. While we continue to provide the facts about sources of water quality problems, it is apparent that this information challenges the strong desire of a segment of the Tribe to pursue lawsuits.

Canadian impact on our water

The WID's have been very active in fish habitat restoration focused on stream flows. One concern we have been addressing is stream flows. A couple of our WID's who receive water from Canada have noticed lower flows by the border than in past years and, in some cases, streams that are completely dry. Since we have been making efforts to address stream flows through converting surface water withdrawals to ground water, and through enhancing flows by pumping groundwater into the streams, this is a concerning development. This highlights how all our actions in a

watershed are interrelated. Even if one party is doing their part, the actions of another can completely undo that effort.

The Ag Water Board sent a letter to Governor Inslee about this and the letter prompted a number of major media reports in Canada that highlighted the diversions and also the concerns about water contamination coming from Canada. It is important for farmers, the Lummi leaders, and our government leaders to understand that while we are working hard on the water issues we can affect, it will take the participation of all those involved to solve these complicated problems.

Farmer Unity Means We All Share in the Costs and Responsibilities

With the formation of the WID's and the Ag Water Board our farmers have been able to operate much more effectively as a unified group. The importance of this unity cannot be overstated; it has had a positive impact in our discussions with tribal leaders as well as in ongoing discussions with government officials on regulatory issues. Our unity has created

continued on page 2

Message from the President, cont'd.

a powerful voice, and others are taking notice. However, the effort we make to counteract these regulations and accusations can't always be done at a WID/AWB level. Some of the issues surrounding the threats of litigation, and much of the proactive work done in the media can only be handled by farm advocacy organizations. Groups such as Whatcom Family Farmers play an important role in our efforts to stop unwarranted attacks against our farmers. Opponents pushing expensive regulations and lawsuits won't stop at just dairy farms. I encourage all farmers and agriculture industries to support this effort.

One of our AWB members spoke at a recent meeting "In the good old days when a farmer's barn burned down the neighbors/ community came together and helped him rebuild that barn." It is our hope that the AWB and WID organizations, together with Whatcom Family Farmers, will start to provide the same climate that existed back then. We will not necessarily always agree, but we commit to working out those differences and putting forward a unified front as a farming community. Together we will be much more effective than when we speak separately. We must all be involved in this fight for our future or there will be no future.

More than financial contributions, we are in this together in environmental stewardship. We know there are those dedicated to seeing an end to our family farms. They use the few "bad apples" to hammer all of us. When just a few farmers do not operate as responsible stewards, it threatens all farmers. That's why in July we sent a letter to all farmers appealing for everyone to comply with regulations and do their best to protect water and the environment. Through the Best Practice Support Program, the WIDs and AWB stand ready to assist farmers struggling to meet regulations or take actions they know will protect water and the environment. If you are contacted by a WID member as part of our Best Practice Support Program, welcome them and understand the intent: our future as farmers is directly related to the environmental stewardship every last one of us demonstrates.

As always, we encourage your comments, criticisms and active support.

Scott Bedlington



Scott Bedlington, third generation seed potato farmer, is the president of the Ag Water Board.

WID Reports

North Lynden WID

Water quality testing with Whatcom County Public works still is a major focus of the North Lynden WID. Our emphasis is on source identification and when specific sources are identified the WID is taking the lead in making contact with the farmer-landowners to make them aware of the concern and help them make full use of resources and best practices and work to avoid any regulatory enforcement. Some interesting results are beginning to develop as data is starting to accumulate. We have had high bacteria counts where no known sources are identifiable so we are looking into the next potential source of contamination and that is the sediment loaded with bacteria. Thanks to some land owner participation a permit was obtained to do some cleaning this fall of Assink and Bender Rd. ditches and finish the culvert cleaning under the Badger Rd on Benson. This is a big step as no drainage ditch maintenance has been done on those ditches for years. With the sediment removal, we are hoping to see reduced bacteria counts this winter. Testing will tell. The WID is also working with City of Lynden on improved monitoring and water improvement projects including helping locate volunteers to assist with storm drain cleaning, etc.

A Comprehensive Plan for our WID was developed when we formed in 2009. We just completed a review of the Plan. Farmers within the WID are also involved in specific water projects such as the Twin Brook Creamery farm working closely with the Conservation District on an "Edge of Field" water monitoring to determine appropriate buffers to protect against runoff during heavy rains.

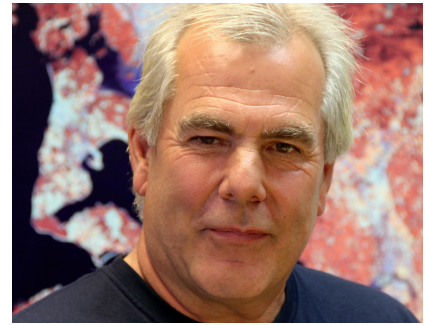


Larry Stap, dairy farmer, is president of North Lynden WID, serves on a state ag committee and is president of the state farm advocacy group, Save Family Farming.

WID Reports

Laurel WID

The Laurel WID devotes most of its time and resources to water quality monitoring, identification of the sources of fecal coliform contamination, and education of landowners who may have some effect on these numbers. We have partnered with community citizens in the Ten Mile watershed to better understand the challenges and solutions. As a result the Ten Mile system is meeting water quality goals at the fastest pace of all the ag watersheds! The Board has identified several areas where drainage could be enhanced and have begun to develop projects ideas for the future. Board members have been active in community education events and are very willing to demonstrate the impacts of new policies and ideas that impact farmers.

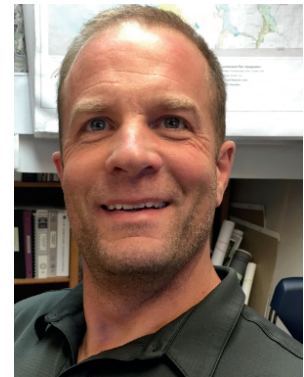


Mike Boxx, berry farmer, is the president of the Laurel WID, serves on Ag Water Board and is a member of the Administration Committee of Whatcom Family Farmers.

Sumas WID

The Sumas WID represents a unique portion of the County where the water flows north into the Fraser River. The Sumas WID has established a systematic water quality testing program so we can better understand this area of risk. Counts have generally been within acceptable ranges with occasional spikes. WID board members and contractors have been following up with landowners to address these concerns.

The WID is committed to sharing this information with their neighbors in order to make them aware of the impacts their practices have on water quality. The WID has gathered maps and data in cooperation with Whatcom County leading toward the development of a Comprehensive Management Plan that will outline an action plan for the our area's future. We welcome your participation through conversations with our board or by attending our monthly meetings.



Brad Rader, berry farmer, is president of Sumas WID and president of Whatcom Family Farmers.

Drayton WID

The Drayton WID is partnering with the Birch Bay Water and Sewer District to explore the potential of using deep aquifers to supply needed water for ag, stream augmentation, and other members of the community. We plan to drill 2-3 exploratory wells this fall and test the boundaries of the aquifer and the volumes and quality of the water available. Drayton landowners are also moving stream withdrawals to wells so the impact on streamflow is both reduced and delayed. These projects become part of the "toolbox" of potential solutions to the water supply challenges in the northeast part of the County. The WID is also monitoring water quality reports and is pleased to see an end to the partial closures of the Drayton Harbor shellfish beds in sight.



Marty Maberry, berry farmer, is president of the Drayton WID.

WIDs Meeting Schedule

Bertrand	2:00 p.m.	First Tuesday
Laurel	10:00 a.m.	Second Monday

Sumas	1:00 p.m.	Second Tuesday
South Lynden	3:00 p.m.	Second Tuesday
North Lynden	10:00 a.m.	Third Tuesday
Drayton	3:00 .m.	Third Tuesday



Ag Water Board

PRSRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LYNDEN, WA
PERMIT NO. 20

Ag Water Board
1796 Front Street
Lynden, WA 98264
360-306-8495

info@agwaterboard.com
www.agwaterboard.com

South Lynden WID

The South Lynden WID has focused most of its efforts on water quality monitoring and drainage improvements. Both the Scott and Kamm drainages are being regularly monitored with generally positive results. There are a few sites of concern that challenge the WID Board's commitment to determine and address problem areas. There is interest in developing technology that would provide clarity on sources of fecal coliform. The SLWID has explored several ideas of potential focus in 2017 including river management, deep aquifer exploration, and microbial source tracking. The WID is committed to continued education efforts as demonstrated by its sponsorship of a Conservation District Speaker Series. The WID also invites research proposals that address a better understanding of water quality concerns.



Ed Blok, dairy farmer, is president of the South Lynden WID and serves on the board of Whatcom Family Farmers.

Bertrand WID

The Bertrand WID continues to be actively involved in exploring tools to address the challenge of adequate stream flows to protect fish habitat along with providing assurances there will be adequate water for irrigating crops and watering cows. We have called attention to the low flows which come out of Canada complicating our efforts to increase flows through taking withdrawals off the stream and actually adding water into the streams in the fall. The Bertrand WID has had strong support from the State Legislature through the Department of Ecology in funding these projects. The Bertrand WID has also helped fund the development of a groundwater model which can better predict the relationship of streams and aquifers. The WID worked with Diking District #4 and the County Flood Control Zone to replace a failing floodgate on a tributary to the River.



Vern Vande Garde, retired dairy farmer and current berry farm manager is the president of the Bertrand WID.