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Return Service Requested

A holiday thank you from Friends!

In 2012 Friends of Skagit County begins its 19th year of incorporation. Friends organized in 1991 and formalized the organization in April, 1993. Over the years many people have provided support for our work in advocating for good land use decisions in Skagit County. We are especially indebted to the major donors who stepped forward when Friends had special projects, legal appeals or other activities that required extraordinary funding. These members recognized the importance of timely giving and how important it is to longevity of a community based non-profit group.

This year we again thank each and every one of you who have donated to Friends of Skagit County.

If you haven't made a contribution this year, please take the time to do so TODAY!

Happy Holidays!

FRIENDS OF SKAGIT COUNTY WORKS FOR YOU IN SKAGIT COUNTY!

PLEASE JOIN 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 _____

- I CAN HELP WITH: - research - monitoring county meetings - newsletters - mailings
 - computers - 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.friendsofskaaitcountv.org** — click on "aet involved." 021010

Quote du jour:

The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie – deliberate, contrived and dishonest – but the myth, persistent, persuasive and unrealistic. Belief in myths allows the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.

-John F. Kennedy –

Local myths we have heard lately -

Skagit Valley is safe from development and will always be farms and forests.

Farmers will continue to farm regardless of the cost of farming.

The 500 years flood is not likely to happen in my lifetime.

State and local governments will always do the right thing when faced with a choice.

Conservation groups do not make money from land sales.

Holiday Suggestion: Drink Wine & Support Friends!

Nell Thorne Restaurant, LaConner serves their own Elephant Head (label) wine and donates a portion of the proceeds to FOSC. To make reservations call 360.466.4261 or e-mail nellinfo@nellthorn.com. Nell Thorne serves lunch and dinner in their restaurant and bar and features a variety of local foods sourced from Northwest and Skagit producers. Thank you to Susan and Casey!

North Sound Alliance (NSA) Activitites & Information

The North Sound Alliance has hired a community organizer to bring additional community organizations into the alliance. The NSA researches and selects community issues on which to take action as a group, finding common ground amongst the organizations and creating a stronger and larger group to take action on the selected issue. NSA delegates each receive 2 partial days of training and are expected to attend as many NSA monthly meetings as possible during the year. Friends still needs 2 additional delegates to NSA Are you willing to help? Please contact us if you wish to have a "seat at the table" in deciding NSA actions. Thanks very much! Ellen Bynum, Executive Director, FOSC, (360) 419-0988 or friends@fidalgo.net. Howard Pellett, Board Member, FOSC (360) 293-8128 or howardp71@gmail.com.

Friends of Skagit County Needs YOU!

To volunteer call Ellen Bynum at 360-419-0988 or e-mail friends@fidalgo.net or Gene Derig, President 360-293-3928 at gderig@eanacortes.com and let us know you are willing to join Friends Board of Directors for a 2 year term.

We Can't Do This Work Without YOU!!

FRIENDS NEW BUMPERSTICKERS – COMING IN 2012 – ORDER YOURS TODAY!

When Friends put out the word that we were looking for a new phrase for a bumpersticker we received half a dozen suggestions. The Board selected Roger Ridgeway's phrase (Because a valley needs friends....) and with some editing has settled on "A Valley Needs Friends....". If you would like to order a Friends bumpersticker (free to members who request one), please let us know and we will send you one after the first of the year. Send an email to friends@fidalgo.net or send us a note to P.O. Box 2632, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-2632. Thanks!

SKAGIT PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIRECTOR STEPS DOWN.

On November 5th, after 7 years as head of PD&S, Gary Christensen stepped aside to continue with the department in a different role. Gary has worked in Skagit County for 23 of his 25 years in planning and carries the institutional memory of implementing the Growth Management Act and other regulations. We hope the Board of County Commissioners can work with Gary to allow his leadership to continue to provide certainty to and good policy decisions for developers, environmentalists, land use advocates and good government groups.

PD&S was originally funded out of the County's General Fund. A number of years later the budget process was amended to require the department to "raise its own" revenue from permits and fees. This change was put in place in many counties. While this sounds like a reasonable idea, the effect is that unless you have continued development bringing in revenue from permitting fees, you won't have enough funding for staff to do the planning work. The League of Women Voters recommended in a state-wide study of planning departments that counties consider returning to funding planning departments from the general funds in order to remove any conflict of interest in making permit decisions.

Friends of Skagit County agrees with the LWV report and urges the County to re-budget planning as a part of the cost of general government and remove the incentive to say "yes" to any development in order to keep jobs.

SKAGIT PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES LOSES 5 STAFF IN BUDGET CUTS.

On December 5th, the Board of County Commissioners held a public hearing on the proposed 2012 budget. Despite citizen and organization opposition to the staff reductions, the Commissioners implemented the dismissal of 5 staff in the planning department. As a result, the planning activities which are required under the Growth Management Act and other state and federal laws is in jeopardy.

Friends proposed the County develop a citizen organized and managed Community Land Use Committee in neighborhoods, villages and areas of the county, so that work can continue on items like code updates and revision, annual comprehensive plan amendments, review of proposed projects in each neighborhood and other planning activities. The County currently appoints citizens to Advisory Committees which do not have authority to change the comprehensive plan or the codes. These committees can only make recommendations to the Planning Commission, Board of County Commission, or other implementing authority. The officials are under no obligation to follow the Advisory Committee recommendations, although many of the recommendations are eventually adopted by the County. The Planning Department has stated that while community councils and other forms of neighborhood planning groups are desirable, there would need to be a change in the law to allow their recommendations to become the guide for land use decisions. Let us know what you think about this concept of community councils being responsible for planning and land use policy and decisions.

We also want to thank Carly Raicho, a County PD&S staff who is included in the reduction in staff. Carly has worked for the County for 12 years and has always understood and delivered incredible public service. Her dedication and willingness to uphold the planning rules, preserve resource lands and do the difficult detailed work on the codes has been much appreciated by all of us. Thank you Carly!