



TAX INCENTIVE FOR LOCAL LAND CONSERVATION RENEWED

SKAGIT COUNTY – A powerful tax incentive which helped conserve more than a million acres of farm, ranch, forest and wildlife habitat across the United States has been renewed until December 31, 2009 as a result of the new Farm Bill passed by Congress.

The incentive makes it more economically feasible for thousands of landowners of modest means to conserve their land and keep it in agricultural production or in its natural state. Voluntary donated conservation agreements, also known as conservation easements, can protect working farms and forests and make it easier for families to leave important natural heritage lands to the next generation.

The incentive, which applies to a landowner's federal income tax, will:

- Raise the deduction a donor can take for donating a voluntary conservation agreement from 30% of their income in any year to 50%;
- Allow farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and
- Increase the number of years over which a donor can take deductions from 6 to 16 years.

As an example, under the prior law, an agricultural landowner earning \$50,000 a year who donated a conservation easement worth \$1 million could take a total of no more than \$90,000 in tax deductions. Under the new law, that landowner can take as much as \$800,000 in tax deductions – still less than the full value of their donation, but a significant incentive for those wishing to conserve their land for future generations.

Donated conservation easements give individual landowners a nongovernmental way to conserve special natural areas and traditional ways of life that are important to them and their communities. Non-profit organizations such as Skagit Land Trust, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland and The Nature Conservancy have protected thousands of threatened acres here in Skagit County using conservation easements.

Landowners in Skagit County who are interested in selling conservation easements through Skagit County's Farmland Legacy Program can also benefit from this incentive, according to Program Director Kendra Smith. This program selects threatened agricultural land and uses county tax dollars to purchase conservation easements on these properties, however funds are limited. The new tax incentives will help more landowners participate.

For further information, contact Molly Doran, Skagit Land Trust 360-428-7878.

