

Land Use & Climate Change Advisory Committee

Ruckelshaus Center Overview

Substitute Senate Bill 5248: Critical Area Ordinances Project

Excerpt from <http://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/projects/caop.html>

Critical Area Ordinances Project

The William D. Ruckelshaus Center, a joint service of the Washington State University and the University of Washington, has been asked by the Governor and the Washington State Legislature to assist in resolving conflicts surrounding agricultural activities and the development and implementation of critical areas protections. Controversy over agricultural and other land use issues played out strongly in the Initiative 933 campaign last fall and also within the 2007 legislative session and resulted in SSB 5248, which has been signed into law.

SSB 5248 directs the Center to work and consult with willing participants, including, but not limited to, agricultural, environmental, tribal and local government interests, and to involve and apprise legislators and legislative staff. Accordingly, the Center will work to establish a safe and objective forum in which issues can be candidly examined and discussed. The aim will be the development of potential solutions that can result in effective policies and practices that ensure protection of environmentally sensitive areas in ways that support the preservation of farm lands and a strong farm economy. The legislation calls for exploration of solutions that will enable the benefits of a successful agricultural economy and a healthy environment, while also preventing the unnecessary conversion of valuable agricultural lands.

In accordance with SSB 5248, the Center will carry out a two-phased approach. The first phase will include initial stakeholder input and fact finding efforts, followed by a second phase that includes arranging and facilitating discussions between parties with the objective of developing policy recommendations to bring forward to the Governor and Legislature. In conjunction with these discussions, the Center will bring its research and analytical capabilities to bear in supporting the development of recommendations. The Center will issue progress reports under the legislation in December, 2007 and December, 2008, and a final report in September, 2009.

In order to accomplish these goals, the Center expects to reach out broadly across the state and seek input from across the spectrum of agricultural and environmental interests and from tribal, state and local governments.

Environmentally sensitive or critical areas are defined within RCW 36.70A as aquifer recharge areas, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, frequently flooded areas, geologically hazardous areas and wetlands.