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Testimony given at the hearing for
WRIA 18 In-stream Flow Rule
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Sequim, Washington

By

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Chimacum Grange #681

I am here to represent a voice of caution on behalf of agriculture in the Dungeness basin. This basin, like the Chimacum Creek basin, has some of the absolutely best soils for agriculture in the world! The agricultural base has already been decimated by urban residential growth, leaving only a fraction of the former open space available for cultivation, all at a time when we see a resurgence of interest and activity in consumers for "eating local" for the health benefits of fresh, more nutritious food which would once again make agriculture profitable! At the same time, fuel prices have quadrupled, making food "from there" far more expensive, and traveling "there" to shop becomes more difficult, making food "from here" much more attractive. Ultimately, maintaining the wherewithal (that is, the farmland and farmers) to grow enough food to feed ourselves locally seems like a better and better idea.

Safety and health are not the only positives. We are seeing small farm agriculture, growing for local and nearby markets, become an economic driver in Jefferson County, and know that Clallam is experiencing similar growth in this sector. There are tremendous opportunities for economic development, increasing the tax base of businesses, and creation of jobs in the small ag area.

None of this can happen without water. Closing the basin to new development in Chimacum valley has killed the opportunity to develop new uses for old ag land and new, small niche growing operations on the rural residential 5, 10, and 20 acre parcels. We know that the levels set for in-stream flow in Chimacum Creek were for the MAXIMUM needs for fish, rather than the minimums required. We believe that actual usage rates are important, even if they are not metered, and that includes the fact that the bulk of water users are residential only and NEVER use their maximum allotment--but that is the factor used by DOE in determining the "shortage" of water. If one looks at historic usage rates, even with projected future increases, the picture is one of abundance!

In the Dungeness Basin, figures are available to show that overall usage has declined dramatically over the last 20 years or so--irrigation needs and practices have changed, the type of crop has changed, and residential needs are significantly lower than those of large herds of cattle and hayfields. Conservation efforts have been extensive and effective. More is being done with less, and there is more water in the river now than ever. Don't let environmental extremists and fear-mongers override actual data and the state mandate for balanced use. High fees for mitigation and use of water will kill farming and small agriculture. (As you know, farmers are a lot like starving artists--they usually operate on a shoestring.)

The Chimacum Grange asks that you consider carefully the unintended consequences of your decisions on such a critical sector of water users. They are critically important to the well-being and even the sustainability of the citizens who live here. Please make a rule which will support the continued presence and success of our farmers in feeding us all.