

# County farmland TDR program proposed

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senior writer

After a year of work, the nonprofit Cascade Land Conservancy has developed a proposed transfer of development rights program specifically tailored for Kittitas County.

Goal of the program is to help relieve the economic pressure on agricultural land owners to get out of farming or ranching and sell their rural property for housing and other development.

Yet the program also aims to accommodate reasonable development in areas of the county targeted for growth, according to the draft proposal.

The Cascade Land Conservancy, or CLC, was hired by county commissioners last year as a consultant to develop a countywide proposal that could be reviewed by farmland owners and others concerned about

land-use issues in the county.

County commissioners recently met with CLC transfer of development rights Project Manager Skip Swenson and Jill Arango, CLC's Kittitas County conservation director, on the draft proposal. Commissioners directed county staff to initiate a wide-as-possible public review of the document.

Arango said the 120-page proposal for a voluntary, market-based transfer of development rights, or TDR, program in Kittitas County reflects the specific conditions and patterns of growth found only in this county.

Arango said it also reflects comments, recommendations and ideas received by nearly a 100 property owners, residents, business people and local officials.

"Skip (Swenson) really did all the heavy lifting in this report," Arango said. "Although Skip helped

develop a program for Pierce County and is working on one for the city of Sammamish, this proposal fits Kittitas County's unique situation."

Swenson, in the TDR report, said between 2004 and 2007, the county lost 14,000 acres of farmland and 1,900 acres of its upland private forest property in conversion to other land uses.

"Looking into the future, county growth is expected to continue, with the population increasing as much as 65 percent by 2030," Swenson said in the report. "This growth will more than likely increase development pressure on resource lands."

The report said pressures can be relieved by connecting conservation with economic and population growth.

The report explains that through individually negotiated transactions, development rights are sold and transferred from privately owned farmland and forest-

land (known as sending sites) to areas that can accommodate additional growth (known as receiving sites).

Landowners in sending areas receive compensation for giving up their right to develop, while developers in receiving areas pay for the right to develop at greater densities than would otherwise be allowed by zoning.

When development rights are removed from a sending site, a conservation easement is placed on it, allowing for permanent conservation of the parcel.

"TDR does not limit growth; rather, it allows communities to plan more effectively by directing that growth into the areas most appropriate for it, Swenson said in the report.

"In so doing, it allows a community to grow while simultaneously conserving its resource lands, helping keep farming and timber production viable industries."

## Transferable development rights

### Online info available:

■ Cascade Land Conservancy  
— [www.cascadeagenda.com/tdr/kittitas](http://www.cascadeagenda.com/tdr/kittitas)

■ Kittitas County Community Development Services  
— [www.co.kittitas.wa.us/cds/landuse.asp](http://www.co.kittitas.wa.us/cds/landuse.asp), then click on "proposed transfer of development rights program for Kittitas County"

## Want to comment on the proposal?

■ E-mail — [cds@co.kittitas.wa.us](mailto:cds@co.kittitas.wa.us)

■ Writing — Kittitas County Community Development Services Department, 411 N. Ruby St., Ellensburg, WA 98926

## Where does it go from here?

■ Darryl Piercy, director of the county's Community Development Services Department, recently said the proposal is now being

circulated in the county for early comments.

■ More formal comments will be sought in October during public meetings and hearings before the Kittitas County Planning Commission. The meetings will parallel public meetings on the proposed, annual amendments to the county's comprehensive land-use plan.

■ Hearings will, eventually, come before county commissioners who make the final decision on whether to adopt the program.