

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

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COUNTY COURTHOUSE

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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

March 7, 2023

Senator Christine Rolfes, Chair
Ways & Means Committee
Washington State Senate
303 John A. Cherberg Building
Olympia, WA 98504

Representative Timm Ormsby, Chair
Appropriations Committee
WA State House of Representatives
315 John L. O'Brien Building
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Chair Rolfes and Chair Ormsby,

The Whatcom County Council urges your support to advance net ecological gain through the budget proviso sponsored by Rep. Debra Lekanoff. We believe this proviso will assist interested counties in developing a net ecological gain element in their comprehensive plans under the Growth Management Act. We support a voluntary, incentive driven framework and hope counties will be included in any established workgroup tasked with identifying and developing criteria and systems for measuring, reviewing, and monitoring net ecological gain.

Last year, the Whatcom County Council passed a resolution establishing our priorities for Whatcom County's Comprehensive Plan update due in June 2025. Among our priorities are promoting sustainable ecosystems and protecting and restoring healthy habitats for fish and wildlife. This includes adding a salmon recovery goal, updating our culvert inventory with a proposed schedule for elimination, and working with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife to evaluate a voluntary, incentive driven framework and strategy for achieving net ecological gain for all public projects.

The effects of climate change have hit Whatcom County hard, through unprecedented heat waves, drought, smoke from wildfires, increased coastal and river flooding, and more frequent extreme weather events. Whatcom County has been working to increase our capacity for climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience. We believe planning for climate change is a critical component, and should include assistance for achieving net ecological gain for all public projects. Net ecological gain can be a daunting concept, but nonetheless an imperative one if we are going to protect our environment and natural resources for generations to come.

Today, we are asking for the State to be our partner in this work and to give counties, including Whatcom County, a seat at the table to work collaboratively. Through this proviso, we hope you will provide us with the tools and resources necessary to develop and implement a net ecological gain element in our comprehensive plan, including technical assistance, building staff and contractor capacity, and sufficient planning and implementation funding.

Please include the net ecological gain proviso in the Senate and House operating budgets so that interested local governments can meaningfully participate in this important work. Thank you for your time and consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Barry Buchanan, Chair
Whatcom County Council

CC: Senator June Robinson
Senator Lynda Wilson
Senator Chris Gildon
Rep. Steve Bergquist
Rep. Mia Gregerson
Rep. Nicole Macri
Rep. Drew Stokesbary
Rep. Kelly Chambers
Rep. Chris Corry

Senator Sharon Shewmake
Rep. Alicia Rule
Rep. Joe Timmons
Senator Liz Lovelett
Rep. Debra Lekanoff
Rep. Alex Ramel

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