

Applicant	Sarah and Nicholas George
Address	12221 Case Rd. SW, Olympia, WA 98512
Location of Property	Rochester
Acres in Application	12.12
Parcel number(s)	12732430000

A. Site Characteristics & Context

The parcel under consideration totals 13.12 acres, all but one acre of which are proposed for the open space–open space tax program. The property owners are applying for the classifications of Significant Wildlife Habitat Area and Resource Enhancement, with no public access.

The zoning of this parcel and the adjacent parcels is Rural Residential Resource 1 unit per 5 acres (RRR 1/5). Additionally, the subject parcel lies within 0.11 miles (562 feet) of a large parcel to the north zoned as Long-Term Agriculture (LTA).

The subject parcel is part of the Upper Chehalis Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA 23) and lies within the Allen Creek basin, which drains into the Black River and Black River National Wildlife Refuge. Allen Creek is known to support Coho salmon, sea run and resident cutthroat trout, the Olympic mudminnow and the federally listed Oregon spotted frog among other aquatic species. A tributary of nearby Allen Creek runs north to south through the central portion of the subject property, and a connected ditch flows from the east under Case Rd. SW and onto the property. The site is bounded by private properties with residential and agricultural use on the east, west, and south, and lies within 600 feet of mapped Designated Critical Habitat (DCH) for the Oregon spotted frog (OSF) to the north. Additionally, two parcels within 562 feet to the north contain a conservation easement for the OSF, recently acquired by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), where numerous OSF egg masses have been detected by WDFW biologists for over 10 years.

Approximately half the parcel (7.41 acres) is mapped with Category I Palustrine Freshwater Emergent Wetlands (PEM1C), with three quarters of the property mapped with wetlands and wetland buffers. Mature Douglas-fir trees and a red alder grove lie on the western end of the property. The parcel has been observed, by a qualified biologist, to provide habitat for a variety of wildlife, some of which are included on the Thurston County priority species and WDFW Priority Habitats and Species lists (TCC 17.15.705, Table 9; PHS, TCC 24.25.065): The Olympic mudminnow, OSF, northwest salamander, red-legged frog, Pacific chorus frog, great blue heron, bald eagle, red-tailed hawk, pileated woodpecker, nighthawk, American kestrel, mallard, northern shoveler, killdeer, western meadowlark, northern flicker, big brown and hoary bats, and geese, and riparian habitat adjacent to tributary 0670 (WRIA) which may support Coho salmon. Olympic mudminnow have been mapped and photographed onsite, and an adult OSF was observed by Nicholas

George, who is also a biologist with US Fish and Wildlife Service. OSF surveys to further document the presence of this species onsite are currently underway.

Management Proposed: Resource Enhancement

The objective of the applicants is to maintain open spaces in active agricultural and conservation practices to benefit the people of Thurston County, improve aquatic habitat connectivity and quantity, and support habitat restoration activities that benefit rare, imperiled, and game species.

Beginning in the 2022 growing season, the applicants propose to manage non-native invasive vegetation such as reed canarygrass within 100 feet of the tributary, primarily through mowing and grazing. These activities will maintain short-stature vegetation favored by the OSF. Any herbicide application will be conducted sparingly and according to the recommendations on the label and with the proper permits, if necessary. The applicants also propose to remove non-native aquatic predators such as bullfrogs from the site, in accordance with WDFW rules and regulations. Seasonally inundated areas will be mowed regularly or grazed by livestock during the dry season, and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is working with the applicants to develop a prescribed grazing management plan. Rotational grazing will be practiced, using features such as a moveable electric fence and moveable livestock watering facilities, and livestock will be excluded from suitable frog breeding habitat when frogs may be present. Wetland enhancement to maintain connectivity between seasonally flooded portions of the pasture and the ditch, to favor habitat of species such as the OSF and other amphibians, Olympic mudminnow, wading birds, and waterfowl, will also be applied. This will be achieved by managing tall invasive vegetation, and additional options will be explored by 2025.

B. Public Benefit Rating System

1. *For which Priority Resources categories does the property qualify?*
 - Significant Wildlife Habitat Area
 - Resource Enhancement
2. *Which public access category has the property owner agreed to?*
 - No public access is proposed.
3. *Does a conservation easement or historic easement apply to the property?*
 - No conservation or historic easements
4. *Summary of Public Benefit rating:*

Category	Points
Significant Wildlife Habitat	3
Resource Enhancement	1
TOTAL	4

5. *Estimated tax shift:*

The parcel is eligible for 4 points under the Thurston County Public Benefit Rating System, qualifying the 12.12 acres of the 13.12 acre property for a potential 50%

reduction in market value of the land, for the purposes of property tax calculations.

C. Additional Considerations

1. Does the property meet the definition of open space?

Yes, the George property appears to meet the criteria for an area which is characterized by the presence of important habitats and species or other animals in such frequency and diversity for critical ecological processes occurring such as breeding, nesting, nursery, feeding and resting.

- Significant Wildlife Habitat was assessed by a qualified biologist on November 5, 2021 and also throughout the summer and fall of 2021. The subject parcel was investigated for the presence of Important Habitats and Species regulated under the Thurston County Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) and documented in the attached Habitat Management Plan (HMP), and adjacent areas within 1,000 feet are mapped with such species (the OSF and Olympic mudminnow) based on Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife data. The important habitats and species found, in addition to a variety of other amphibians and birds, include:
 - Olympic mudminnow (photographed and mapped onsite)
 - Oregon spotted frog (adult frog observed by landowner)
 - Pileated Woodpecker
 - Bald Eagle
 - Great Blue Heron (state priority species of vulnerable aggregations)
 - Nighthawk

The George property is surrounded by mapped OSF locations and is directly connected to Allen Creek which is known to support OSF, providing a high likelihood that OSF use the property. Allen Creek is also known to support priority fish species such as Coho salmon and sea run/resident cutthroat trout. OSF surveys to take place in 2022 may further substantiate OSF presence onsite, in addition to past observations. While a wetland delineation has not been conducted, the property is mapped with a PEM1C wetland, and the ground on the eastern portion of the property is clearly inundated for a significant portion of the year, based on saturated ground and wetland vegetation observed during a recent site visit by county staff.

Habitat findings detected by Nicholas George, a qualified biologist, have been substantiated by other biologists with USFWS and NRCS who have in-depth knowledge of the OSF. Onsite resources have been included in an HMP developed by a qualified habitat biologist. The Resource Enhancement eligibility is met, with a grazing plan under development in cooperation with Marty Chaney of NRCS.

2. *Any other factors relevant to the application in weighing the benefits to the public?*

Providing an incentive to limit development will provide desirable fish and wildlife habitat and reduce aquatic and terrestrial habitat fragmentation for priority species protected under the CAO and WDFW PHS. Coupled with the recently acquired WDFW conservation easement on nearby Parcel 12732310000 and mapped OSF presence on Parcel 12732420200, the immediately adjacent parcel to the north (APN 12732340100) which has similar habitat and owners interested in OSF conservation efforts, and mapped OSF locations to the south, enrollment of the subject parcel in the Open Space Tax Program would provide a large area of connectivity between known OSF locations and continuity of habitat management objectives while conserving farmland.

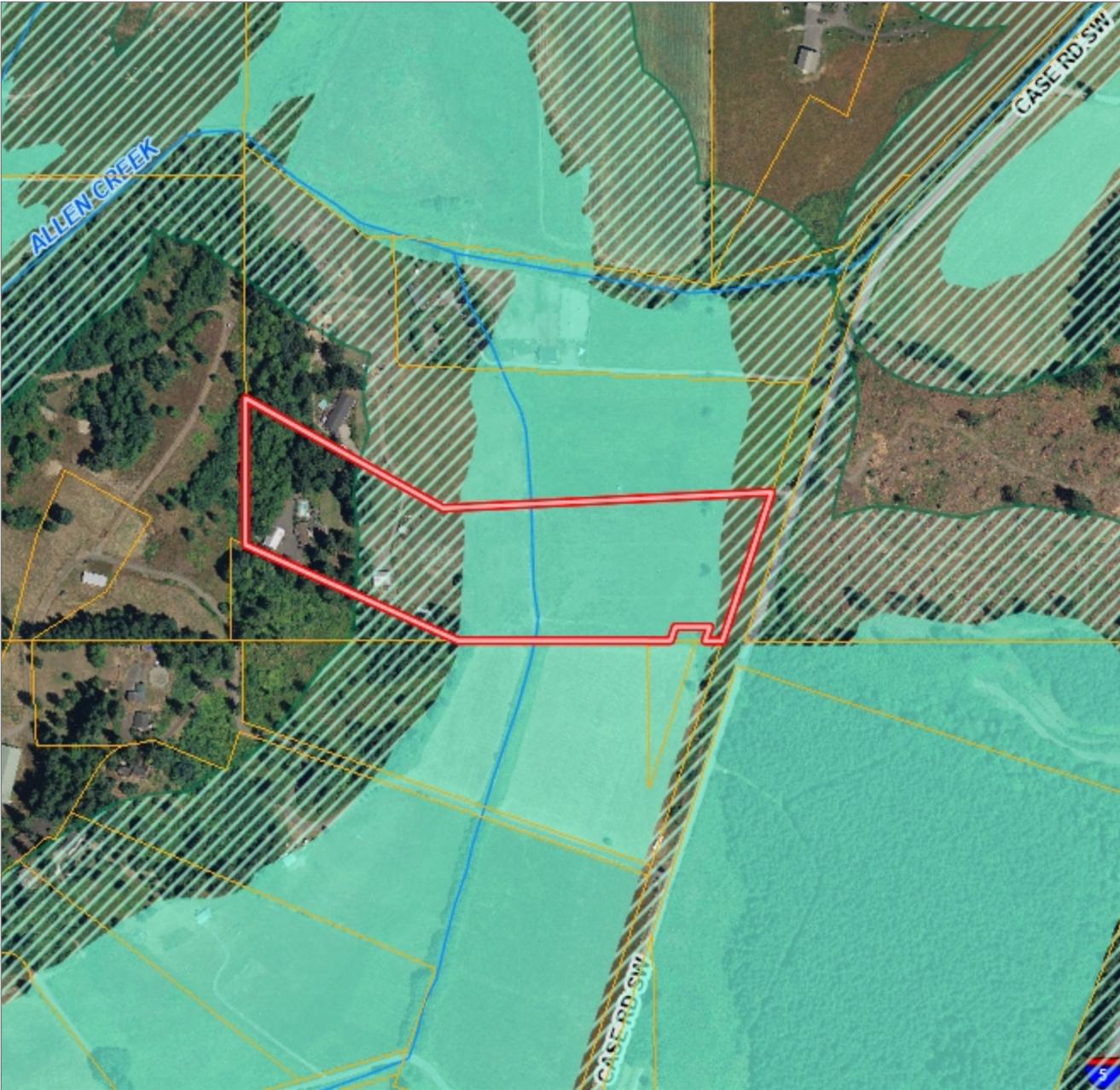
The management of the property as open space is consistent with other properties in the area. The classification of this land as open space and the subsequent tax relief to the landowner is also consistent with the county's initiatives to preserve open space, significant wildlife habitat, wetlands and water resources, in particular the Thurston County Strategic Plan, Item 7, "to balance development with the preservation of the County's rural character, natural areas, and open spaces."

D. Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the classification of 12.12 acres qualifying at a 50% reduction owned by Sarah and Nicholas George as open-space land for current use assessment.

- Attachments:
1. Master Application and Open Space Application
 2. Geodata map of George parcel
 3. Geodata map of wetlands and Allen Creek
 4. Wetland and wildlife photos.

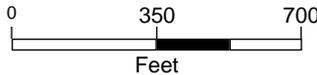
George Parcel Mapped Wetlands & Allen Creek



Legend

- Parcel Boundaries
- Streams
- Wetlands
- Wetlands (300 ft buffer)
- Roads - Major
 - Ramp
 - I 5; US 101
 - Major Roads
- County Border

Scale 1: 8,112



Author: Marisa Whisman
 Published: 4/12/2022

Note:



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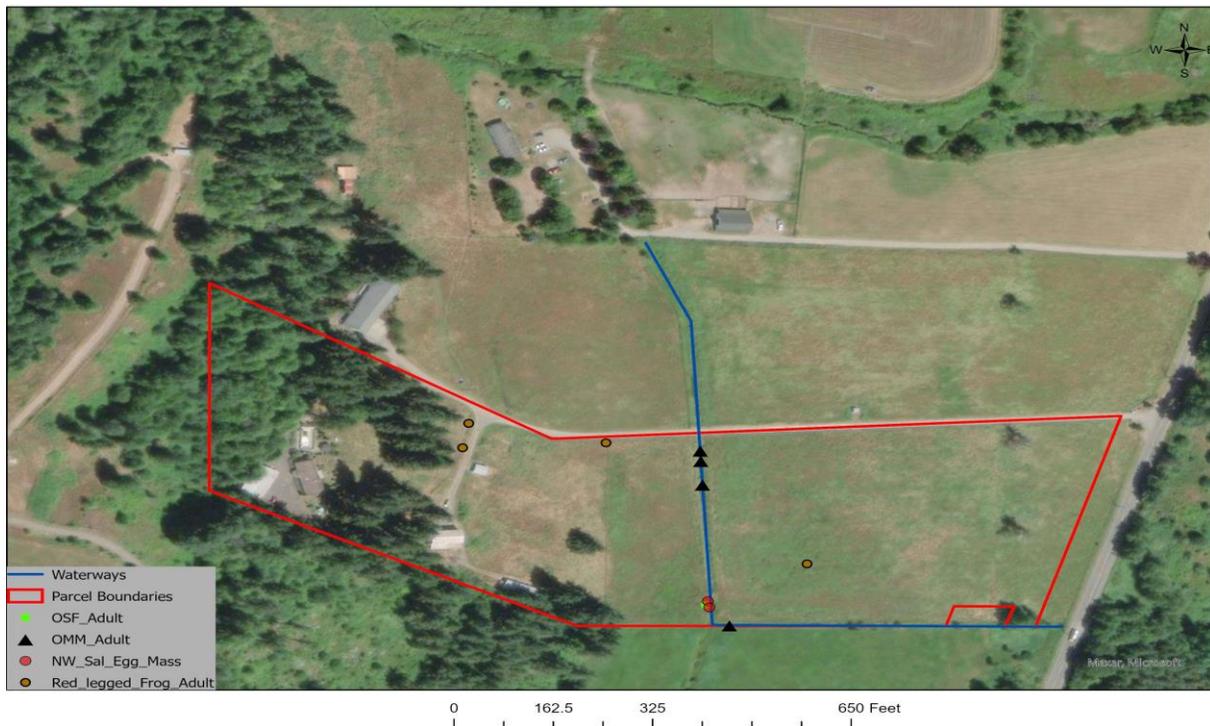
Features and Wildlife Sightings from Sarah and Nicholas George Property



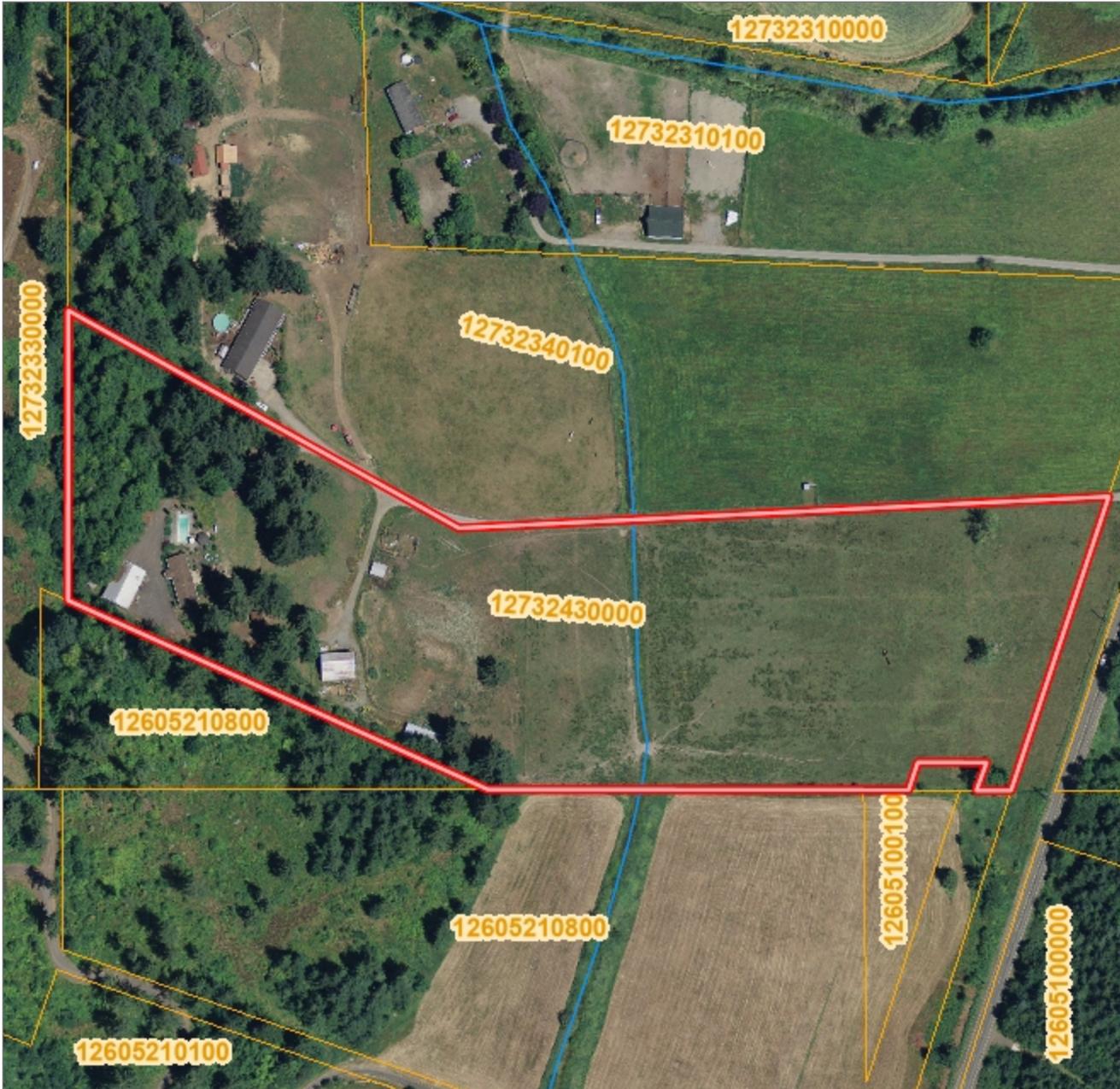
Wetland during seasonal high water

George Property

Significant Wildlife Observations



Map of Allen Cr. tributary, Olympic mudminnow and amphibian sightings

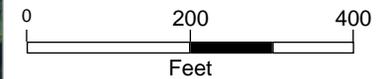


George

Legend

- Parcel Boundaries
- Streams
- ▲ Gopher Sites
- Roads - Major
 - Ramp
 - I 5; US 101
 - Major Roads
- Roads (Large Scale)
- Railroads
- County Border

Scale 1: 4,110



Author: Marisa Whisman

Published: 10/5/2021

Note:



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