

# THURSTON COUNTY OPEN SPACE PROGRAM

PLANNING COMMISSION – APRIL 20, 2022



MARISA WHISMAN

ASSOCIATE PLANNER, COMMUNITY  
PLANNING

[MARISA.WHISMAN@CO.THURSTON.WA.US](mailto:MARISA.WHISMAN@CO.THURSTON.WA.US)



## OPEN SPACE TAXATION ACT (RCW 84.34)

- **Open Space Taxation Act:** Enacted by the WA State Legislature in 1971 (RCW 84.34)

“for the purpose of maintaining, preserving, conserving and otherwise continuing in existence open space lands for the production of food, fiber and forest crops, and to assure the use and enjoyment of natural resources and scenic beauty for the economic well-being of the state and its citizens.”

## BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW



THE OPEN SPACE TAX PROGRAM PROVIDES  
AN INCENTIVE FOR LANDOWNERS TO KEEP  
THEIR LAND IN AN “OPEN SPACE” STATE.



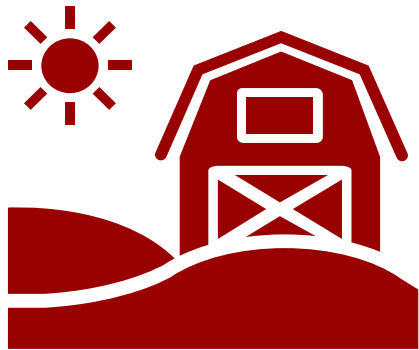
ASSESSORS OFFICE AND THE BOARD OF  
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS (BOCC) BOTH  
HAVE OPEN SPACE PROGRAMS:

RCW 84.40.030: All property shall be valued at 100% of its true and fair value unless exempted by law

## OPEN SPACE PUBLIC BENEFIT RATING SYSTEM: STATE OPEN SPACE TAX ACT (RCW 84.34).

Total Points	% Reduction in Market Value
0 - 2	0%
3 - 6	50%
7 - 11	70%
12 - 13	90%
At least 1 priority resource <i>and</i> conservation or historic easement	90%

# BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW



Farm/agriculture open  
space and forest land  
Assessor Program



Timber land and open  
space/open space  
BoCC Program



**Land no longer meeting the  
Assessors' criteria can apply for  
BoCC**

# BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

**BoCC is the legislative authority, as per RCW 84.34 to approve applications for their Open Space Program**



**Applies to various types of priority resources, including:**

Farm and Agricultural conservation

Fish and Wildlife Habitat

Private recreation areas

Urban Growth Area open space



**Home sites and other non-resource areas are typically ineligible for open space classification**

# CRITERIA



Applicants must meet the criteria in **RCW 84.34** and the **Thurston County Open Space tax program guidelines**.



A **property tax reduction** results from open space classification because the land is valued (for tax assessment purposes) on the basis of its current use and not its 'highest and best use'.



The % reduction of market value is based on the **Public Benefit Rating System score**.

# PUBLIC BENEFIT RATING SYSTEM CRITERIA

Priority resources (such as farmland) are given a point value:

3 points for high priority  
resources

2 points for medium priority  
resources

1 point for low priority  
resources and resource  
enhancement

Points are also awarded for  
public access and/or  
historic/conservation easements



**Removes a minimum of 1 acre from the classification for existing residential structures & uses**

A contiguous area of 20 acres or more results in homesite allowance

## PRIORITY RESOURCE CATEGORIES

High	Medium	Low
Archaeological sites	Public land buffers	Resource Enhancement
Farm & Agricultural Conservation Lands (FACL)	Scenic Vista or Resources	
Fish Rearing Habitat: Ponds & Streams		
Geological & Shoreline Features		
Historical Sites		
Private Recreation Areas		
Rural Open Space Close to UGAs		
Significant Wildlife Habitat Areas		
Special Plant Sites		
Urban Growth Area Open Space		

## 2022 PROCESS

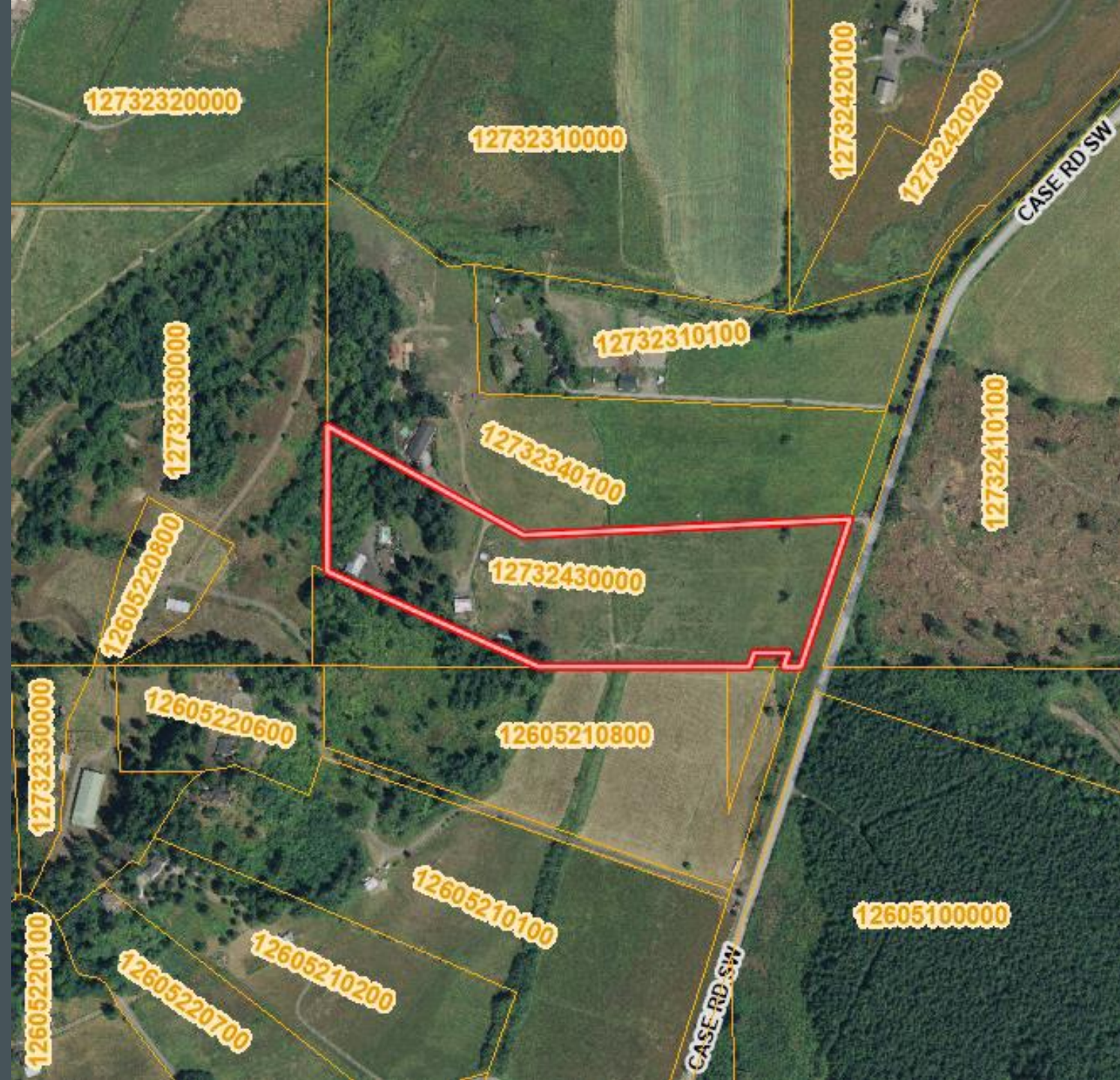
- One application:
  - George: Significant Wildlife Habitat Area and Resource Enhancement open space, no public access

“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”

Stated by applicants

# GEORGE

- The parcel under consideration totals 13.12 ac.
  - 12.12 acres proposed for the Open Space program



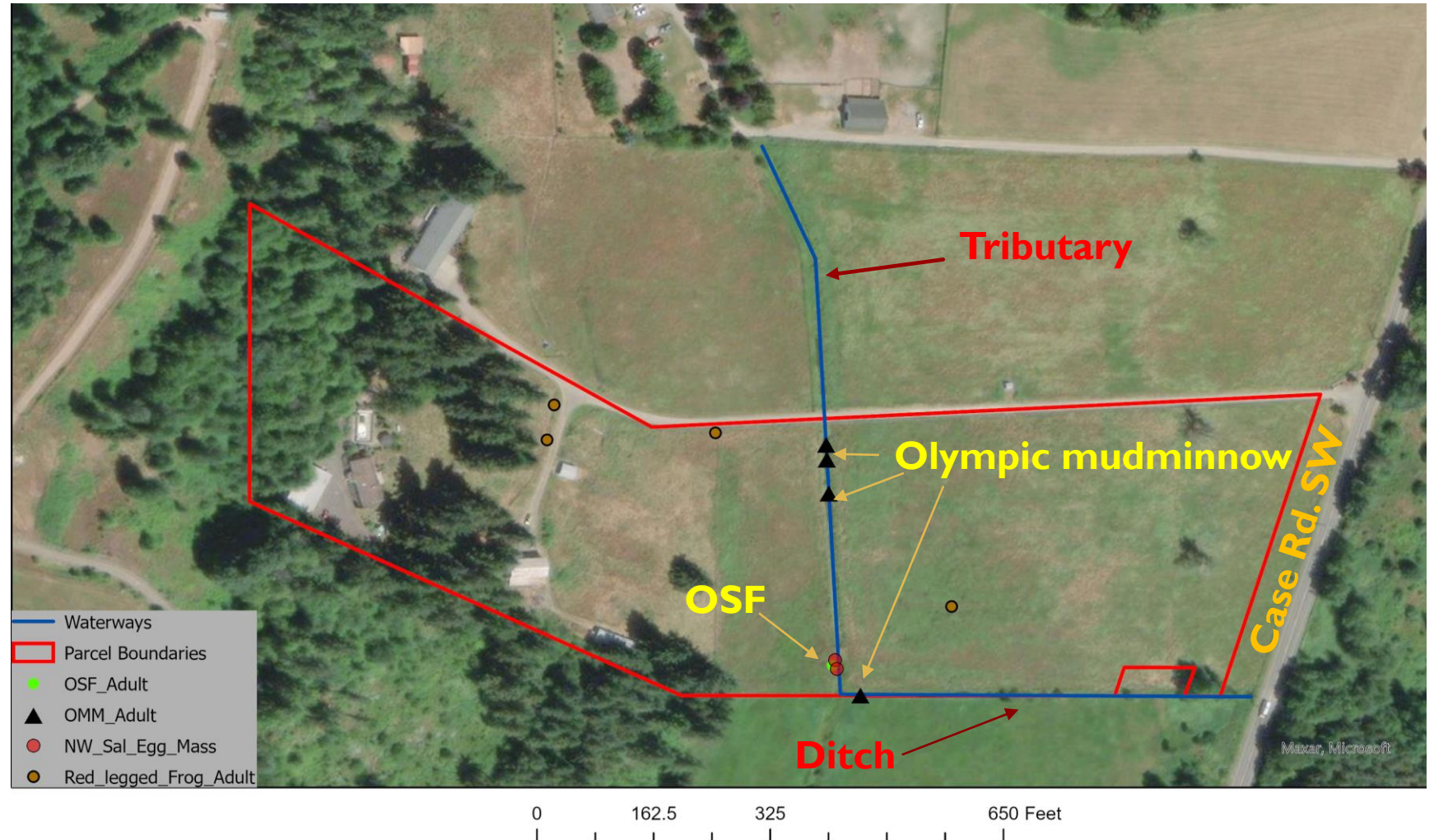
# GEORGE APPLICATION

- Applying for **Significant Wildlife Habitat Area** Open Space & **Resource Enhancement**, no public access
- Upper Chehalis Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA 23) and the Allen Creek basin.
- Within 1000' of known Oregon spotted frog (OSF) locations and < 600' from OSF Designated Critical Habitat
- A seasonal PEMIC wetland covers > half the property
- The majority of the property is open pasture used for seasonal livestock grazing



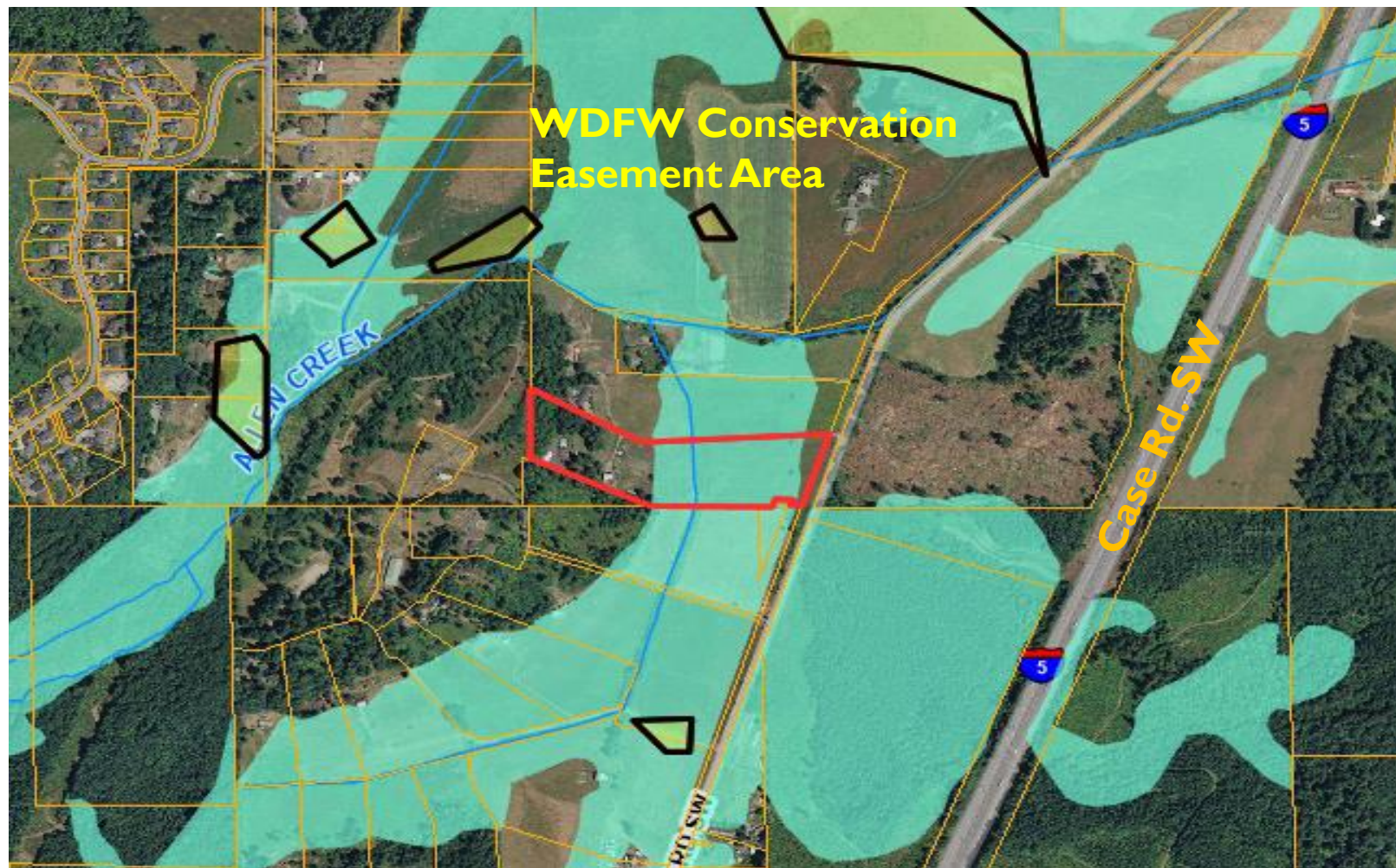
# ALLEN CR. TRIBUTARY, DITCH, AND MAPPED IMPORTANT SPECIES

## TCC 17.15.705 & 24.25.065



# WETLAND, ALLEN CREEK & NEARBY MAPPED PHS SPECIES

- **Green polygons** = WDFW PHS Areas (OSF, OMM)
- **WDFW Conservation Easement Area** = Managed for OSF habitat/known OSF occupancy



# ADDITIONAL WILDLIFE SPECIES OBSERVED ON THE GEORGE PARCEL: BOLD PRINT = CAO IMPORTANT SPECIES

- Northwest salamander
- Red-legged & Pacific chorus frogs
- **Great blue heron**
- Big brown & hoary bats
- **Nighthawks**
- American kestrel
- **Red-tailed hawk**
- **Bald eagle**
- Mallard & northern shoveler ducks
- **Pileated woodpecker**
- Killdeer
- Western meadowlark
- Northern flicker



# CONSERVATION PROPOSAL

- Maintain open pasture for seasonal grazing
- Manage non-native plants within 100' of the tributary (rotational grazing, mowing)
- Maintain short stature vegetation for seasonal connectivity to surrounding water bodies, improve water quality for Priority Species habitat by maintaining grass filter strips to capture sediment and nutrients.
- Grazing in accordance with NRCS-approved prescribed grazing management plan; riparian habitat management in accordance with WDFW OSF Recovery Plan
- Removal of aquatic predators (i.e., bullfrogs)

# GEORGE CRITERIA ANALYSIS



- The proposed 12.12 acres are eligible for **4 points** under the Thurston County Public Benefit Rating System, for a **50% reduction in market value**
- Meets the eligibility requirements for **Significant Wildlife Habitat Area Open Space & Resource Enhancement**
  - The proposed Significant Wildlife Habitat Area is documented to support CAO Priority Species
  - The applicants are proposing riparian resource enhancement to support the OSF and other amphibians & fish. Conservation grazing and invasive plant management will be applied as restoration techniques.

## GEORGE STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

- Opportunity to connect existing habitat/reduce habitat fragmentation for the OSF, Olympic mudminnow and other amphibians & fish associated with Allen Creek
- The classification of this land as open space is consistent with the **Thurston County Strategic Plan, Item 7**, “to balance development with the preservation of the County’s rural character, natural areas, and open spaces.”
- 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

---

# QUESTIONS

- Open Space Staff Contact:  
Marisa Whisman  
[marisa.whisman@co.thurston.wa.us](mailto:marisa.whisman@co.thurston.wa.us)