

Comprehensive Approaches to Local Farmland Protection

Thurston County, Washington

American Farmland Trust Conference
October 20-23, 2014
Lexington, KY

Sandra Romero
Thurston County Commissioner

Cynthia Wilson
Thurston County Long Range Planning Manager



Background

- Population 262,388 (2013) and is one of the fastest growing Counties in the State
- 722 square miles (462,080 Acres)
- Growth Management Act (GMA)
- Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO)& Endangered Species
- Current agriculture inventory 68,247 acres of farmland represented by 3,338 parcels and 1,518 ownerships. Over 2,900 acres of certified organic acres.* Only 15,000 acres are zoned Long Term Agriculture, with 300 acres in the Nisqually subarea

*Thurston County Farmland Inventory For the South of the Sound Community Farm Land Trust, 2009

Conservation Futures Program

- Conservation Futures is a land preservation program for protection of threatened areas of open space, timberlands, wetland, habitat areas, and agricultural and farm lands within Thurston County.
- Conservation Futures funds, acquired through a property tax levy, are used to purchase the land or the rights to future development of the land (acquisition vs. easement).
- The authority for a Conservation Futures tax levy was first granted by the Washington State Legislature in 1971 and was reaffirmed by a vote of the people in 1972.
- In 1989, Thurston County became the first county in the State to implement the tax levy.
- In 2013, Thurston County taxpayers paid a rate of approximately 5 cents per \$1,000 assessed value.



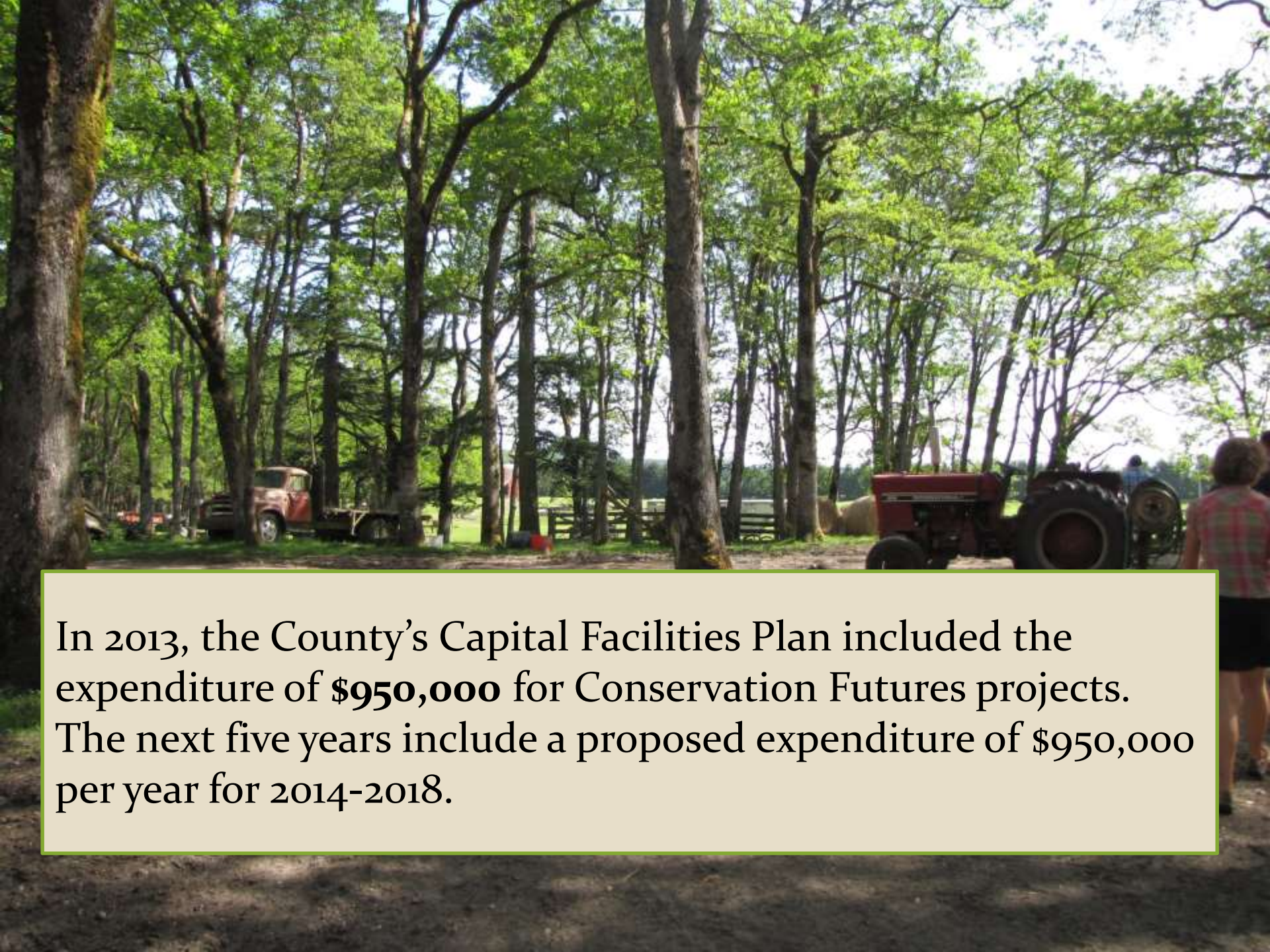
Projects are selected and prioritized by the Ranking Committee which is comprised of members that represent a variety of interests:

- Agriculture Advisory Committee
- Historical Committee
- Storm and Surface Water Advisory Committee
- Parks Board.

Subject matter experts are also included from:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (for prairie and fish habitat)
- Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (historical and cultural resources)
- Thurston Conservation District (agriculture).

All proposed appointments to the Ranking Committee are approved by the Board of County Commissioners. The process is guided by a dedicated County staff person.



In 2013, the County's Capital Facilities Plan included the expenditure of **\$950,000** for Conservation Futures projects. The next five years include a proposed expenditure of \$950,000 per year for 2014-2018.

Estimated Total Conservation Futures Program Statistics (1990-2013)

Total Projects	36
Amount Allocated from Conservation Fund	\$17,528,000
Acres Conserved	4,729.89



Thurston County's Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)

- 2007 - Legislature charged the Ruckelshaus Center to examine the conflict between protecting agricultural land and protecting critical areas in local ordinances adopted under the GMA.
- Legislature placed a hold on CAO updates until the Ruckelshaus Process is complete.
- Ruckelshaus Center - VSP was the result of the negotiations and facilitated stakeholder discussions.
- 2011 – Legislature passes and Governor signs. No funding
- 2012 – Thurston County updates their CAO. Agriculture regulations remain under 1996 CAO
- 2013 Legislature funds two Counties for two years. Thurston and Chelan

Intent of VSP Legislation



- The voluntary stewardship program is managed by the Washington Conservation Commission.
- The program is an alternative approach for counties to protect critical areas on agricultural lands.
- Counties are given two options:
 - Opt-in to the Voluntary Stewardship Program, or
 - Continue under existing law in GMA to protect critical areas on agricultural lands.

Opting IN or Opting OUT

28 of 39 counties opted-in.

COUNTIES OPTING-IN TO THE VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM



Funding



Currently only 2 Counties have been funded for the first 2 years

- Thurston County
- Chelan County

Future funding will need to be appropriated by the legislature for the rest of the process...and the rest of the state.





Challenges and Successes

- Work Group has been formed
- 2 of the 3 tribes are at the table
- Progress is being made on the Work Plan
- 1 of the 3 tribes is not at the table
- Funding for next steps is unclear
- Completion of Work Plan by June 2015 may not happen
- Outreach and Participation Plan is still to be developed
- Monitoring Plan needs to be developed.....and funded to determine success.



Where we are now

- Work Group has been formed
- Work plan is progressing based on NRCS 9 step Stewardship Plan guidance, including Critical Area Best Available Science

Next Steps

- Complete the Work Plan by June 2015 including developing measurable benchmarks for program and resource results
- Seek additional funding from the legislature for next steps
 - Develop Participation Plan
 - Develop Monitoring Plan
 - Submit for Approval
 - Implement Work Plan
- Monitoring successes and improvements

Questions?

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Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge



Thurston County Scenic Tour Route

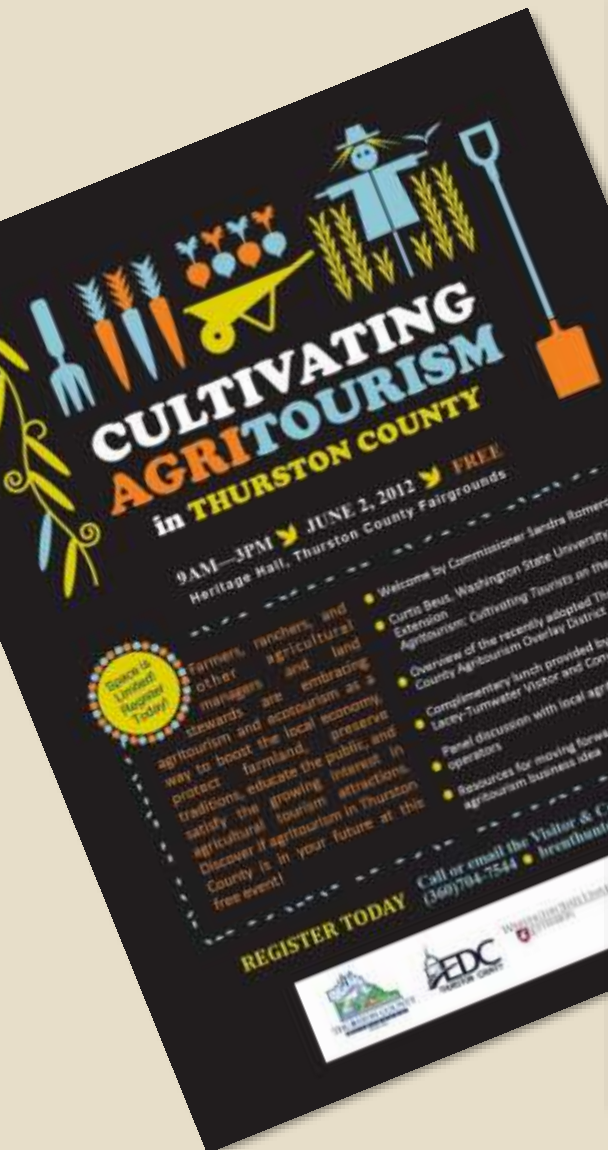


Agritourism, the Beginning

- Began meeting in 2010
- Purpose to:
 - Promote farming through agritourism
 - Share information & connect “agripreneurs”



Agritourism Events



CULTIVATING AGRITOURISM in THURSTON COUNTY

9AM—3PM JUNE 2, 2012 FREE
Heritage Hall, Thurston County Fairgrounds

Don't Miss This Event Today!

- Farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers are embracing agritourism as a way to boost the local economy, protect farmland, preserve traditions, educate the public, and satisfy the growing interest in agricultural tourism in Thurston County is in your future at this free event!
- Welcome by Commissioner Sandra Romero
- Curtis Beus, Washington State University Extension Agritourism: Cultivating Tourism on the Overview of the recently adopted Thurston County Agritourism Overlay District
- Complimentary lunch provided by Lacey-Tumwater Visitor and Convention Center
- Panel discussion with local agritourism operators
- Resources for moving forward with agritourism business idea

REGISTER TODAY

Call or email the Visitor & Convention Center
(360) 704-7544 • breaththru@thurstoncountyparks.com

EDC
Economic Development Center

THURSTON COUNTY



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
THURSTON COUNTY EXTENSION

PRESENTED BY
THE THURSTON COUNTY FAIR FOUNDATION

FISH TALE ALE

**FRIDAY & SATURDAY
AUGUST 1-2
THURSTON COUNTY FAIR
3054 CARPENTER RD SE OLYMPIA, WA 98503**

SAVOR SOUTH SOUND 2014

CIDERIES
Reverend Nat's Hard Cider, Portland
Whitewood Cider, Olympia

BREWERIES
Fish Tale Ale, Olympia
Kastellan Brauerei, Olympia
10 Barrel Brewing Co, Bend
Dicks Brewing, Centralia
NoLi Brewhouse, Spokane

WINERIES
Vino Aquino Winery, Tacoma
Stinas Cellars, Lakewood
Bateaux Cellars, Toledo
Madsen Family Cellars, Lacey
Hoodport Winery, Hoodport
Stottle Winery, Lacey
NW Mountain Winery, Lacey

**5PM - 10PM
MUST BE 21+ TO ENTER.**

\$7 FAIR ENTRY // \$10 SAVOR SOUTH SOUND ENTRY
Entry includes commemorative glass and 2 complimentary tastes.
www.THURSTONCOUNTYFAIR.org



Harvesting Energy
Get the Scoop on Cow Poop!

...with an anaerobic
a community can
over quality, help protect
ating, reduce the
te in its landfill,
de A compost-

**2:00pm—4:00pm
Thursday, March 14**

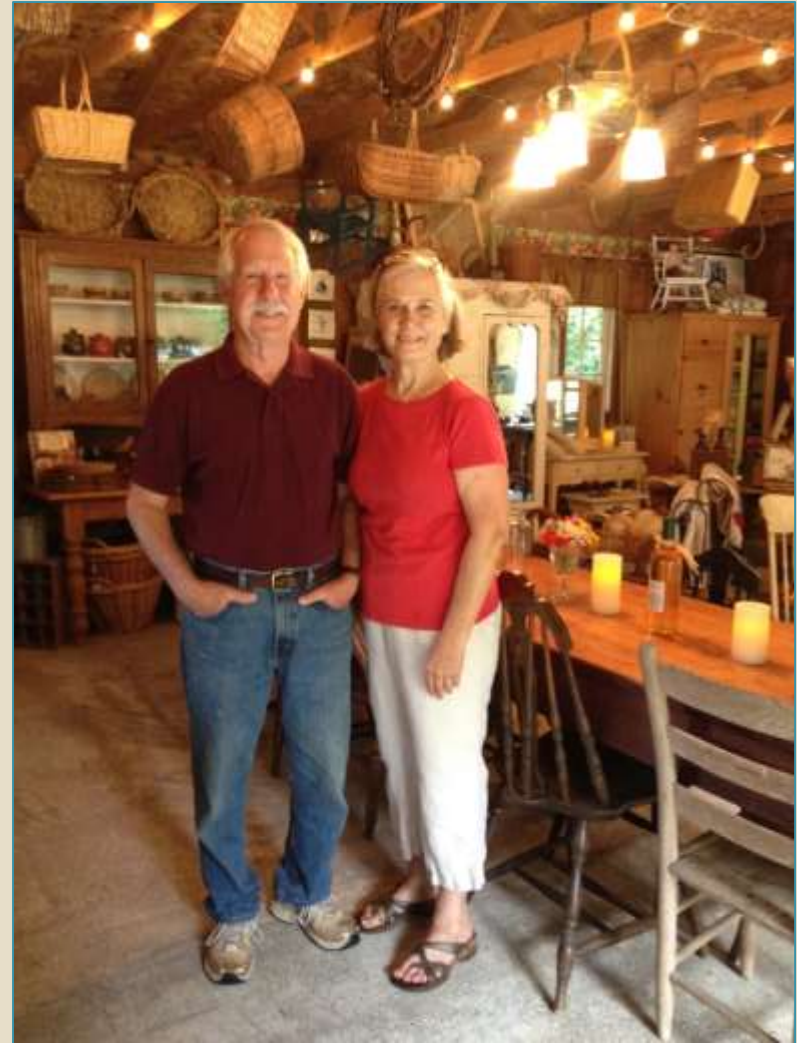
LOTT Clean Water Alliance
Board Meeting Room
500 Adams Street NE
Olympia, WA 98501

**To RSVP or get more
information, contact:**
Becca Pilcher
(360) 786-5747
pilcher@co.thurston.wa.us

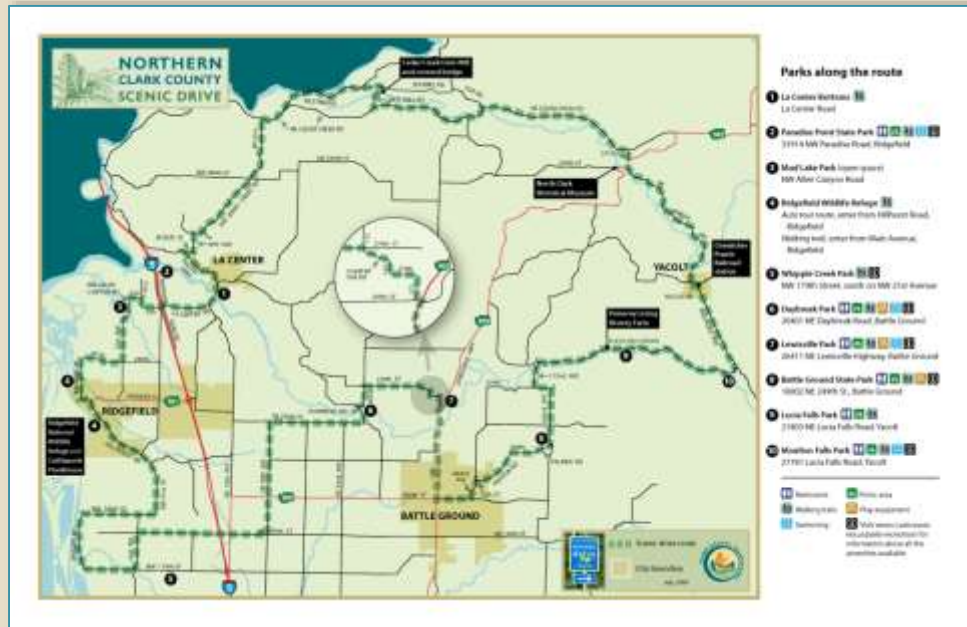
LOTT
Clean Water
Alliance

Scenic Byway

- Concept began in 2012
- An established scenic route helps support agritourism
- Byways have found success in other areas



Examples



Clark County, Washington
Scenic Drive (above)



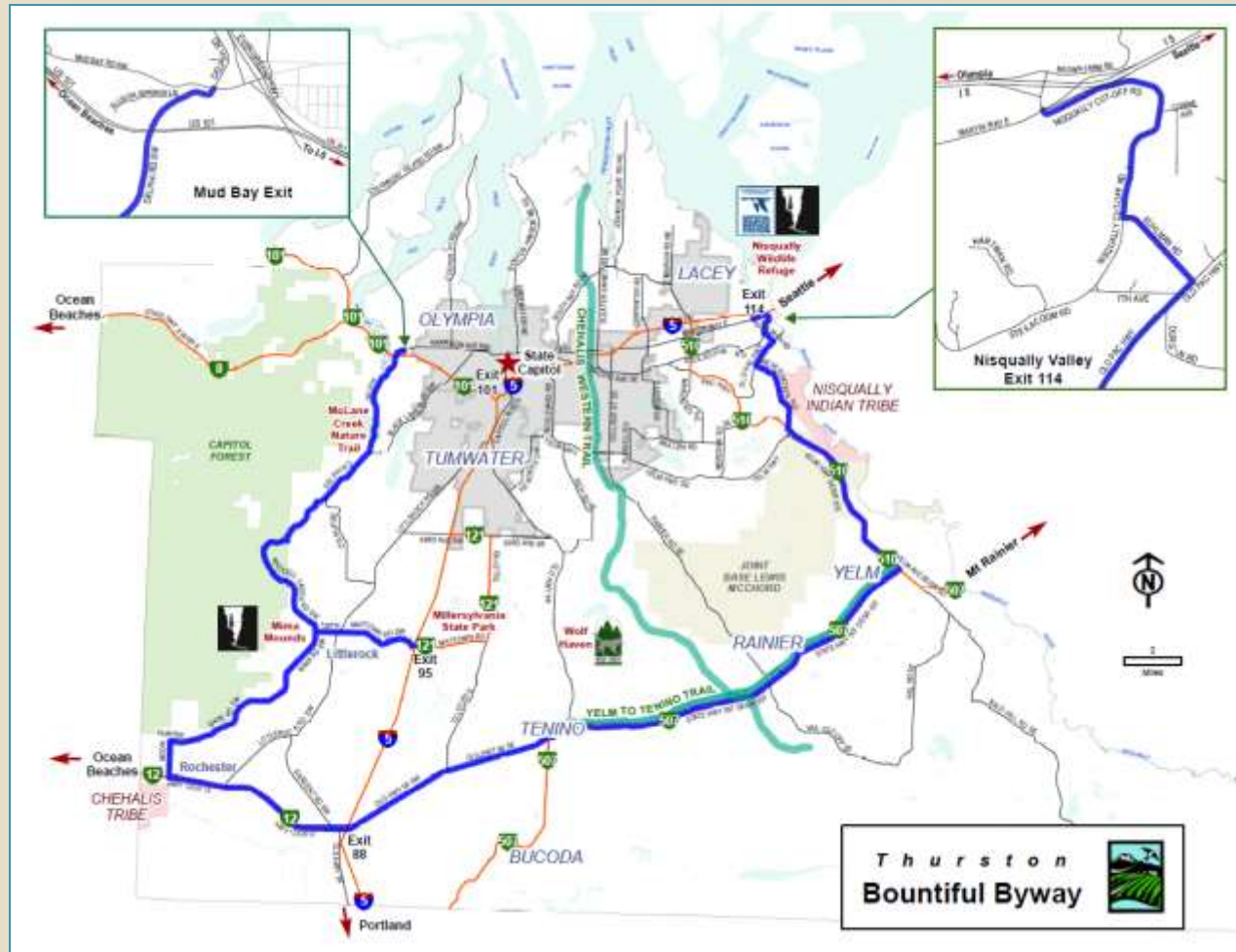
Hood River County, Oregon
Fruit Loop (right)

Considerations

- Scenic quality of the route
- Tourism and local agritourism opportunities
- Natural aspects, such as geological formations (e.g., Mt Rainier)
- Recreational activities
- Roadway Conditions
- Community involvement and support for the route



Experience the Bounty of Thurston County!



“Taste the wholesome fruits, vegetables, wines, meats and other local products that Thurston County offers.

Experience ecotourism, farmers’ markets, historic small towns, and learn what is behind food production. Simply follow the Bountiful Byway...”

Establishing a Scenic Byway

The Bountiful Byway was officially launched Monday, October 13, 2014.



Next Steps & Discussion

- Develop Marketing Plan with Interested Partners
- Market byway to potential members and tourists



For more information...



Contact:

(360) 786-5747

Romeros@co.thurston.wa.us

www.co.thurston.wa.us

www.thurstonbountifulbyway.com