



Pioneers in Conservation

Grants to secure the future of farming and salmon

A program of the Washington State Conservation Commission and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation



■ *We can't save salmon unless we work with farmers. The Pioneers grant program is unique in that the projects are not just for fish that happen to help agriculture or agriculture projects that might help fish – the two are intertwined in the program, just like on the ground.*

■ **Dale Reiner, Cattle Rancher, Board Member Snohomish Farm Bureau, Board Member WRIA 7**

■ *It is in the interests of salmon to have farms remain as farms and not be converted to other uses such as development. Responsible stewardship of agricultural land is essential to the species' survival.*

■ *What is so important about Pioneers in Conservation is that it recognizes this and rewards landowners for their leadership in conservation.*

■ **Elizabeth Gray, Director of Conservation Science, The Nature Conservancy of Washington**



■ **In the past 100 years,** salmon numbers have plummeted to a small fraction of what they were due to a spectrum of human activities. In 1999 the Puget Sound Chinook was designated as a federally threatened species. To bring back this iconic creature, and avoid imposition of new federal regulations, an unprecedented collaboration of Washingtonians known as Shared Strategy produced a draft “Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan.”

■ An important and new insight surfaced as a result of the years of work behind the Shared Strategy plan – Restoring salmon runs requires us to protect our agricultural land base while encouraging farmers to help fish.

■ To achieve those objectives, Shared Strategy proposed a revolutionary idea – “a partnership for salmon and farms.” *Pioneers in Conservation* makes that partnership a reality through actual protection and restoration projects.





■ *Shared Strategy was a collective effort and it contains good information about tools for implementation. Now we have to figure out who is going to put those tools to use, where, when, and how to pay for it. Pioneers in Conservation is one way to get the implementation started by supporting organizations and entities that are working with farmers.*

■ **Larry Nussbaum, Stewardship Partners**
 ■ **Salmon Safe Program Coordinator**

Farming, not just salmon, is threatened. The Plan notes that, "more than 20% of the farmland in the region, greater than 100,000 acres, was lost to other uses... between 1982 and 1997." Global competition, low prices for farm products, high operating costs, and increasing conflict with suburban sprawl are all seen as contributors to the shrinking profitability of farming and corresponding temptation for farmers to sell their land for development.

The Pioneers in Conservation grant program was created to advance the Plan by helping farmers improve both their ability to be stewards of Puget Sound rivers, and their business' bottom-line – thereby keeping salmon-friendly farmland in farming. Funds benefit private farm and forest lands and a healthy natural environment.

This is the exciting first step in implementing the Plan's call for a partnership among environmentalists, farmers, foresters, and the government, to encourage actions that improve and protect salmon habitat.

■ *Pioneers in Conservation says to farmers 'society wants a change in behavior in how products are produced, and here are the resources to make that change'.*

■ *Fundamentally, it is a better and cheaper route because there are cooperative relationships established.*

■ **Jay Gordon, Chehalis Dairy Farmer**
 ■ **Executive Director, Washington State Dairy Federation**



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The beauty of the Pioneers grant program is it gives tribes, farmers, and the flood agencies an incentive to start working together for the benefit of all. Through this program we can build up trust between parties that are usually on opposing sides and gain an understanding of each other's requirements and find places where our goals coincide.

Bob Kelly, Director of Nooksak Natural Resources



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Saving farms and salmon are explicitly linked through the objectives of *Pioneers in Conservation*. Grant-funded projects demonstrate the breadth of opportunity available for achieving these dual goals. Activities eligible for Pioneers' grants include projects to:

- ☑ Increase irrigation efficiency to keep more water in the river for fish and save farmers money.
- ☑ Install fences to keep livestock out of waterways and tanks to provide farm animals with healthy drinking water.
- ☑ Plant trees and shrubs in riparian zones to improve habitat and prevent erosion which damages spawning beds and steals precious farm acreage.
- ☑ Replace culverts and bridges that block salmon access to their habitat while improving access for livestock and farm equipment to nearby fields.
- ☑ Rebuild failing levees further back from the river so that stream habitat can be restored while productive fields are kept dry during floods.
- ☑ Implement new drainage practices that allow farmers to expand their growing season while giving fish the cleaner, cooler water they need.
- ☑ Replace tide-gates and pumps that increase water flows, improve water quality, and provide better access for salmon while creating drier, more productive farms.
- ☑ Provide economic development and marketing support for the agricultural community.
- ☑ Help farms make improvements that will make them eligible for *Salmon Safe* certification, creating a market advantage for their product.
- ☑ Increase conservation programs, such as the purchase of development rights.

More information about the spectrum of potential project types can be found at www.farmland.org/pioneers





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I'm very excited that we are getting money to do work that lets us upgrade our irrigation system while providing better in-stream habitat for salmon. Anything that helps keep us farming also keeps the land from being developed for non-agricultural use, and that's good for farmers, fish and the community.

Gary Smith, Dungeness Valley Farmer
whose farm will be impacted by a *Pioneers'* grant

The strong, positive response to *Pioneers in Conservation* from both advocates for salmon recovery and from the agricultural and forestry communities demonstrates that this program fills an important need. Most encouraging is how *Pioneers'* grants have brought together farmers and environmentalists with partners ranging from tribes, to flood control agencies, to irrigation districts, to conservation districts.

Future grantees are expected to include family-owned forest-farms since they have similar opportunities and needs. The number of applications, range of partnerships, and level of

creativity shown by the applicants suggests that farmers and small forest landowners can and will have a crucial role in bringing back thriving populations of Puget Sound salmon.

As more farmers think of salmon as one of their stewardship responsibilities, consumer spending is more supportive of farms that care for Puget Sound rivers, and the public is more aware of the positive role of agriculture in bringing back salmon runs, a new future will emerge for both fish and farming. The investments in *Pioneers in Conservation* are making that future possible.

With Pioneers in Conservation grants, local governments can support private landowners in working toward the goal of creating a future for both salmon and farms. With these grants, we can support partnerships that offer incentives for land stewardship instead of relying only on regulation. These incentives can support the viability that our farmers need in order to be a part of the local economy for generations to come.

Pete Kremen
Whatcom County Executive



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Pioneers in Conservation Grant Program
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