Introduction

Essential 1: Know Your Property
The first of the 10 Essentials is to simply have a basic knowledge of your property. The more you know, the more effectively you can manage your land.

Essential 2: Water Conservation & Well Protection
As the population continues to grow in the Northwest, so do the demands on our water supply. Water conservation and well protection are more important than ever to ensure that we have plenty of clean, safe drinking water for people and wildlife.

Essential 3: Septic Care & Maintenance
Taking care of your septic system can save you big money in the long run. It’s also important for water quality—a failed septic system can cause waste to leak into our groundwater, streams, rivers and lakes. How septic savvy are you?

Essential 4: Weeds & Pesticide Use
An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure when it comes to weeds and pests. Taking steps to avoid the need for pesticides can save you time, money and trouble. It can also keep dangerous pesticides out of our water.

Essential 5: Hazardous Substance Safety
Potentially hazardous products such as paints, solvents, oils, fertilizers and pesticides require special care when it comes to storage and disposal.

Essential 6: Manure Management
If you’ve got livestock, you’ve got manure. A good manure management plan can mean the difference between a mountain and a molehill—it can also mean the difference between clean and polluted water.

Essential 7: Livestock Pastures & Confinement
Pastures full of mud can lead to higher vet bills and increased water contamination from soil and manure. A pasture full of healthy grass is good for livestock and prevents pollution by holding soil in place and absorbing nutrients from manure.
Essential 8: Woodlot Management
A well managed woodlot can contribute to your income, reduce water pollution, provide habitat for wildlife and help reduce the impacts of periodic flooding. How is the health of your woodlot?

Essential 9: Fish & Wildlife Habitat
Some kinds of wildlife are probably more welcome on your property than others. For example, swallows provide natural, effective mosquito control while mice can cause hundreds of dollars worth of damage. What are you doing to encourage the wildlife you want and discourage the wildlife you don’t?

Essential 10: Cropland
Certain irrigation and erosion control techniques can prevent soil, fertilizers and pesticides from entering our water. Even better, the same techniques that prevent pollution can also keep valuable topsoil where you want it…on your land.

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Essential 1: Know Your Property

The first of the 10 Essentials is to simply have a basic knowledge of your property and where your property is located. The more you know, the more effectively you can manage your land. See how much you already know by filling in the answers below.

I live in the __________________________ watershed in incorporated/unincorporated (circle one) Skagit County.

☐ I know my property’s zoning, acreage and square footage.

Current Zoning: ___________________ Total Acreage: ___________________

Total square footage (one acre = 43,560 square feet): ___________________

Parcel Numbers: _______________________________________________________

The area I live in receives approximately ______ inches of rain each year.

The predominant soil type on my property is _____________________________

I am able to estimate the percentage of impervious surface on my property. (Impervious surface includes roof, driveway, patios, outbuildings, etc.) Approximate percentage of impervious surface _________ %
Resources

What watershed do you live in? Visit the USGS Water Science Center
wa.water.usgs.gov/realtime/rt_latest_map.html

For property and zoning information
www.skagitcounty.net (click on the iMap image. You may also click on the Assessor tab to look up your parcel numbers)

For rainfall averages
www.countrystudies.us/united-states/weather/washington/

Want to know your property’s soil type? Call the Natural Resource Conservation Service at 360-428-7758 ext. 5 or visit
websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/
or
soils.usda.gov/

For tips on ways to reduce impervious surface on your property, visit
nemo.uconn.edu/tools/stormwater
or
www.recycleworks.org/greenbuilding/sus_impervioussurfaces.htm
As the population continues to grow in the Northwest, so do the demands on our water supply. Water conservation and well protection are more important than ever to ensure that we have plenty of clean, safe drinking water for people and wildlife.

I conserve water by doing the following (check those that apply):

☐ I use water-saving fixtures such as low-flow toilets and faucet aerators.

☐ I only water/irrigate during the evening or early morning hours.

☐ I use mulch in my garden and landscape to conserve moisture in the soil and reduce the need for watering.

☐ I use rain barrels, cisterns or other techniques to collect rainwater.

☐ I only water my lawn as needed. (Grass only needs an inch of water per week, at most.)

☐ Any unused or abandoned wells on my property have been properly plugged or sealed to prevent groundwater contamination.
Resources

For more information on safe drinking water contact:

Skagit County Public Health (Phone: 360-336-9380)
www.skagitcounty.net/health

Washington State Department of Health
www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/

For more information on rain barrels and cisterns, visit
www.skagitpud.org

For more information on water conservation, visit
www.bewatersmart.net

DID YOU KNOW?

Skagit Valley receives less average rainfall than Atlanta, Baltimore, Houston, Memphis, Miami, New York & Philadelphia.
Taking care of your septic system can save you big money in the long run. It's also important for water quality—a failed septic system can cause waste to leak into our groundwater, streams, rivers and lakes. How septic savvy are you?

- I have my septic system inspected at least every three years and pumped as needed.

Date of most recent inspection: ____________________________

- I avoid system overload by spreading water-intensive chores (such as laundry) throughout the day and week.

- I never put garbage down the drain or in toilets.

- I avoid products that kill the beneficial bacteria in the system, such as lye-based drain cleaners and household cleaning products with a danger or toxic warning label.

- Livestock, vehicles and heavy equipment are excluded from my drain field and tank area.
Resources

For information on septic maintenance:

Skagit County Health Department (Phone: 360-336-9380)
www.skagitcounty.net/septic

Septic Sense, Scents, Cents
A guide to septic tank care and maintenance.
http://wsg.washington.edu/mas/pdfs/SepticSense.pdf

Environmental Protection Agency
A Homeowner’s Guide to Septic Systems

DID YOU KNOW? Using a garbage disposal frequently can dramatically increase the accumulation of sludge in your septic tank, causing you to have it pumped more often.
An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure when it comes to weeds and pests. Taking steps to avoid the need for pesticides can save you time, money and trouble. It can also keep dangerous pesticides out of our water.

☐ I frequently survey my property for weeds and pests to enable early detection.

Weeds and pests that have been identified on my property and targeted for control:

☐ I mow my pastures/fields at least once during the growing season before weeds have a chance to go to seed.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Does Not Apply

☐ I consider biological controls (such as fly predators and nematodes), cultural controls (changes in watering, fertilizing techniques, etc.) and mechanical controls (e.g., hand weeding, pruning out infested branches, dethatching turf) before using pesticides and herbicides.

☐ When using pesticides and herbicides, I choose the least toxic product and apply it at the most effective time in the life cycle of the target weed or pest.
Resources

For information on weeds and pest control:

WSU Publications
(search here for weed and pest bulletins): pubs.wsu.edu

WSU Skagit County Extension Agriculture Program
call 360-428-4270

Pacific Northwest Weed Management Handbook
www.pnwpest.org/pnw/weeds

Skagit County Noxious Weed Control Board
www.skagitcounty.net/noxiousweeds

Skagit Conservation District
www.skagitcd.org

Salmon Safe
www.salmonsafe.org

Biological control: A Guide to Natural Enemies in North America,
published by Cornell University:
www.nysaes.cornell.edu/ent/biocontrol/

Washington Toxics Coalition publishes fact sheets on safe ways to deal
with a variety of pests:
www.watoxics.org/homes-and-gardens/lawn-and-garden
(scroll down to find fact sheets on common outdoor pests)
Essential 5: Hazardous Substance Safety

Potentially hazardous products such as paints, solvents, oils, fertilizers and pesticides require special care when it comes to storage and disposal. How are you doing when it comes to hazardous substance safety?

☐ I dispose of hazardous substances such as antifreeze, oil, paints and solvents at approved locations. I never pour hazardous substances down a sink or storm drain, in a ditch or on the ground.

I avoid storing or using pesticides and other chemicals near wells, streams, ditches and other waterways.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Does Not Apply

Pesticides and other chemicals are stored in an area that is:

☐ Covered ☐ Paved ☐ Locked ☐ Surrounded by a berm

☐ I keep supplies on hand to clean up spills, such as spill pads, hydrated lime or kitty litter.
DID YOU KNOW?

One quart of oil can contaminate two million gallons of drinking water!

Resources

For information on the disposal of household hazardous waste, visit this Skagit County website
www.skagitcounty.net/recycle

For information on safe cleaning products, lawn and garden chemicals, indoor pest control chemicals, and home repair and building materials, visit the Washington Toxics Coalition website
www.watoxics.org/homes-and-gardens
If you’ve got livestock, you’ve got manure. A good manure management plan can mean the difference between a mountain and a molehill—it can also mean the difference between clean and polluted water. How is your manure management plan working for you?

I have a successful system for managing manure. To avoid the buildup of excess manure, I regularly:

- Compost (composting can reduce the size of a manure pile by half!)
- Spread compost on pastures and crops
- Give away/sell manure or compost
- Haul away excess
- Other

Manure is stored at least 100 feet away from my well, streams, ditches and other waterways. There is also a buffer strip of healthy vegetation downslope of my manure storage area.

- Yes
- No
- Does Not Apply

- I only spread manure/compost during the growing season (April-October).

- My manure storage area is covered with a tarp, roof or other cover.

- Manure is picked up from stalls and confinement areas on a regular, frequent basis.
Resources

For more information on manure management, visit:

**Skagit Conservation District**
www.skagitcd.org

**Natural Resources Conservation Service**
www.nrcs.usda.gov

**WSU Extension**
gardening.wsu.edu/stewardship/compost/compost.htm

**Cornell University**
www.manuremanagement.cornell.edu

**Horses for Clean Water**
www.horsesforcleanwater.com

To learn more about buffer strips, visit
www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/buffers/
If you own livestock, good pasture management is one of the key essentials. Pastures full of mud lead to higher vet bills and increased water contamination from soil and manure. A healthy pasture with healthy grass will hold soil in place and absorb nutrients from manure.

During the winter I remove my livestock from pastures and put them in a dry, well-drained paddock.

☐ Yes       ☐ No       ☐ Does Not Apply

During the growing season (April-October) livestock are allowed to graze in areas where the grass is at least six to eight inches tall. Livestock are removed from pastures when grass has been grazed down to about three inches.

☐ Yes       ☐ No       ☐ Does Not Apply

My livestock shelters have gutters and downspouts that direct roof runoff away from animal confinement areas and manure storage areas.

☐ Yes       ☐ No       ☐ Does Not Apply

Streams and ditches on my property are fenced to prevent livestock access.

☐ Yes       ☐ No       ☐ Does Not Apply

☐ I routinely have my soil tested to determine the level of available nutrients in the soil. I use this information to guide the application of compost, fertilizer and lime to pastures.
Resources

Check out these websites for information on issues such as soil testing, winter paddocks, buffer strips, rotational grazing, stream fencing, gutters and more.

Skagit Conservation District
www.skagitcd.org

WSU Organic Farming Systems
www.puyallup.wsu.edu/soilmgmt/soils.htm

Natural Resources Conservation Service
www.nrcs.usda.gov

WSU Skagit County Extension
www.skagit.wsu.edu

Horses for Clean Water
www.horsesforcleanwater.com
A well managed woodlot can contribute to your income, reduce water pollution, provide habitat for wildlife and help reduce the impacts of periodic flooding. How is the health of your woodlot?

When planting new trees, I select species adapted to my site, plant at the appropriate time of year (January-March) and remove competing vegetation within a one-foot radius around the trunk.

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Does Not Apply

Dominant tree species in my woodlot: ____________________________________________

☐ I protect trees from browsing, rubbing, trampling and soil compaction by livestock.

☐ The trees in my woodlot are spaced far enough apart to allow some sunlight to reach the plants growing on the ground.

☐ I retain some dead and fallen trees as wildlife habitat (as long as they do not pose a hazard to people, livestock or structures).
DID YOU KNOW?

About 400 species of wildlife depend on Washington forests for their survival.

Resources

For information, visit:
Skagit Conservation District Forestry Program
www.skagitcd.org or call 360-428-4313
WSU Extension
snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry or call 206-205-3132
Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Resources for Small Forest Landowners
www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/fp_sflo_resourcesforsflo.pdf
Natural Resources Conservation Service – EQIP Program
http://www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/forestry/
or call 360-428-7758 ext. 132
Firewise Communities/USA
www.firewise.org
Some kinds of wildlife are probably more welcome on your property than others. For example, swallows provide natural, effective mosquito control while mice can cause hundreds of dollars worth of damage. What are you doing to encourage the wildlife you want and discourage the wildlife you don’t?

Streambanks, wetlands and other waterways on my property are lined with a protective buffer strip of trees, shrubs, grasses and ground cover. (Recommended buffer width is typically 50-100 feet.)

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Does Not Apply

Types of vegetation in buffer strip:

I provide habitat for wildlife with the following:

☐ Nest boxes designed for native birds  ☐ Non-living trees such as standing snags and downed logs
☐ Diverse mix of grasses, shrubs and trees, including natives  ☐ Mason bee houses and bat houses

To prevent nuisance wildlife (such as rodents, opossums, coyotes and raccoons), I put dog and cat food away at night and keep trash bins secured.

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Does Not Apply

To reduce breeding grounds for mosquitoes:

☐ I have removed old tires and other items that could collect water.
☐ I clean my rain gutters out regularly and make sure they drain properly.
☐ I empty and refill pet dishes and birdbaths once a week.
Resources

**Backyard Conservation Stewardship Program**
www.skagitcd.org (click on Backyard Conservation Link)

**Riparian forest buffers for fish and wildlife**
www.skagitcd.org (click on CREP link)

**National Wildlife Federation: Garden for Wildlife**
www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife

**Washington Dept of Fish & Wildlife**
Backyard Wildlife Program: wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/
Living with Wildlife: wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/

**Audubon: An Invitation to a Healthy Yard**
www.audubonathome.org/yard/

**WSU Extension- Native plants**
gardening.wsu.edu/nwnative/

**Washington Native Plant Society**
www.wnps.org/

**Skagit County Lake Management Districts**
www.skagitcounty.net/publicworks/ (click on Water Resource Management)

**Reducing mosquito habitat**
www.skagitcounty.net/health/

**Pollinator Conservation**
www.xerces.org/
Certain irrigation and erosion control techniques can prevent soil, fertilizers and pesticides from entering our water. Even better, the same techniques that prevent pollution can also keep valuable topsoil where you want it…on your land.

I use farming practices that minimize soil erosion and increase water infiltration, such as:

- Cover crops, mulching and grassed access roads.
- Vegetated field borders, filter strips and planted buffers.
- Contour farming, terracing, windbreaks and conservation tillage.
- Crop rotation that includes perennial or high residue crops.

- I minimize irrigation demands by selecting crops suited to our local climate.

- I follow an irrigation program that monitors water use and soil moisture. I adjust water applications to meet crop moisture needs and avoid water loss due to surface runoff or deep percolation.

- I routinely test plant tissue and soil to determine plant needs and the level of available nutrients in the soil. I use this information to guide the application of compost, fertilizer and lime to crops.
Resources

Visit these websites for information on erosion control, irrigation, plant tissue testing and a variety of other issues:

**WSU Skagit County Extension Agriculture**
Skagit.wsu/agriculture/
or call 360-428-4270

**WSU Small Farm Connection**
smallfarms.wsu.edu/crops/

**Natural Resources Conservation Service**
www.nrcs.usda.gov/

**Pacific Northwest Regional Water Program**
www.pnwwaterweb.com/

**Northwest Integrated Pest Management**
www.nwipm.info/industlinks.asp

**Salmon Safe**
www.salmonsafe.org
Notes and Records

Use this space to make notes, keep records or write your to-do lists. For example, record results of soil or well tests, dates of septic inspections or weed and pest control actions. You may also want to use this space to sketch a map of your property, noting key features like your septic drainfield, plant and tree varieties or soil types. This information will be helpful for your own memory and may someday be useful for any future owners of the property.
Thanks for doing your part to protect our natural resources!

For more information, contact the Skagit Conservation District at (360) 428-4313
or visit our website at www.skagitcd.org

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Landowner Name: ________________________________

Property Address: ________________________________

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Adaptations by Cindy Pierce, Skagit CD and Andrew Phay, Whatcom CD.