



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Economic Development Group supports regional retail and conservation project

ELLENSBURG, Wash. – At its Friday, September 23rd Board meeting the Economic Development Group of Kittitas County agreed to support the concept of regional retail in Kittitas County and the Skookumchuck Conservation Project because of the economic benefit both will likely provide the area.

The decision to support regional retail was based several factors. The findings of three recent studies on retail leakage commissioned by different entities, including one by DesCo Solutions commissioned by the Economic Development Group, contributed heavily to the decision. All three studies found that a substantial amount of retail sales leave our county each year. Capturing only a small amount of these sales could provide substantial benefits. Additionally, as an economic development group the Board recognizes the importance of creating additional commercial and industrial activity to enable local government entities to support the current explosion of residential growth in our county. Studies by entities such as Ohio State University, American Farmland Trust and the Sonoran Institute uniformly state that for every dollar a residence pays in taxes, the services provided cost a government entity somewhere between \$1.15 and \$1.30, resulting in a net loss. Conversely, for every dollar paid in commercial or industrial taxes the demand for services costs the government entity between 30¢ and 65¢, or a net gain. Creating a diverse economic base is essential to support future growth and to maintain the quality of services that the current population expects.

Debbie Strand, Executive Director of the Economic Development Group noted, “Recent leakage studies show that there is an opportunity for retailers to develop businesses in our county whether they be small niche businesses or regional retail operations. Market research and good business plans are vital to the success of either, but clearly there are opportunities for a savvy retailer.”

As a countywide organization the Board did not support any particular site for regional retail but rather stressed the need to create appropriate zoning within the county where these entities can site their operations. The support was given with the stipulation that regional retailers sited anywhere in the county provide appropriate mitigation for existing commercial districts.

The second project endorsed by the Board was the Skookumchuck Conservation Project, a proposed acquisition by the Trust for Public Land of approximately 17,500 acres surrounding the Wild Horse Wind Project near Whisky Dick Mountain northeast of the City of Kittitas. The land would remain open for recreation, hunting and grazing, which have been its traditional uses. The majority of Board members felt that due to its remote location near the wind project the land had marginal development value but provided clear long-term economic benefit to tourism and agriculture, two important economic sectors in our county.

“A balanced economy – one that can weather recession and changes in consumer trends – is as broadly based as possible. Recreation and agriculture fill a vital role, which is why the board voted to support this project,” said Jim Armstrong, Chair of the Economic Development Group.

The Economic Development Group of Kittitas County’s mission is to provide leadership that stimulates business and promotes economic opportunities to support the needs of Kittitas County. The Economic Development Group focuses on business recruitment, retention and expansion. Business assistance is provided to businesses of all sizes.

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