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OKANOGAN COUNTY  
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

April 24, 2016

To: Okanogan County Regional Planning Commission,  
Perry Huston, Director of Planning,  
Okanogan County Commissioners

From: Jessica McNamara, 1177 North Pine Creek Rd., Tonasket, WA

Re: Comments re Marijuana growing operations in the county

Current regulations in regard to zoning for marijuana farms ignore their environmental impacts. A case in point is the siting of 4 "farms" within a 2 mile stretch of North Pine creek about 5 miles out of Tonasket in the Aeneas Lake area. A fifth landowner is considering opting in. These farms appear to have been permitted without any environmental review as regards water use, waste discharge, traffic, noise, air pollution, aesthetics and negative effects on the surrounding residential and rural community. Nor was there any consideration of cumulative effects of siting so many operations within such a short distance...3 are next to each other! It also appears that though there are several buildings and greenhouses which give these operations an industrial rather than agricultural appearance, that only the land is being taxed, not the improvements.

Aeneas Lake is a closed basin watershed, with irrigation pumped up from the Okanogan River to replenish the lake and serve as irrigation water to the farms and orchards. Most residences use private wells, which also tap into the aquifer, therefore the area is particularly prone to loss of water through overuse, as well as pollution from waste materials migrating into the lake and groundwater aquifer. Although these farms may have irrigation water rights, the runoff from pesticides and organic plant waste needs to be examined more closely to see that the THC is not migrating into the groundwater and possibly into Aeneas Lake, a popular fishing lake. It would be disastrous if this chemical were widely dispersed throughout the basin.

In rural areas where there is no irrigation system, the DOE is allowing the use of exempt wells if farms don't take more than the 5,000 gpd. But one marijuana plant can use 6 gpd, so that an average sized grow of 1,000 plants can consume as much as 6,000 gpd. This is the same amount as showers taken by 333 people, (Colorado's 800 to 900 pot farms use as much water per day as a town of 49,000 people and the state is already experiencing water wars between pot and conventional farmers.) There are no meters or controls on exempt wells to keep the usage to permitted levels. Since most of the county is zoned 1 to 5 acres, and since M. farms are in demand, it is easy to see how high water usage could overwhelm these already drought stressed watersheds affecting both groundwater and stream flows.

Given the possibility of all these negative impacts, it is incumbent on the county to regulate the siting and zoning of these farms according to SEPA. A conditional use permit is not enough.

Sincerely,

Jessica McNamara