

# Washington Environmental Council

Protecting our land, air and water

SPRING 2009

## Challenging Legislative Session for the Environment

by Kerry McHugh, Communications Manager

While some progress for the environment was made, the 2009 legislative session did not bring big movement on key environmental issues ranging from climate change to restoring Puget Sound to health.

What this session did see was an outpouring of public support for the Environmental Priorities. At every event – from the Environmental Priorities Coalition Legislative Workshop to Environmental Lobby Day – WEC and our partner groups saw record attendance with new faces from all over the state. During session, over 5,000 people contacted their elected officials to share their support for smart solutions to protect our state's future.

### Climate Change

In this tough session that was focused on the state's budget woes, bills that would have limited our state's climate pollution, and reduced traffic, while increasing transportation choices, stalled early. Then a new version of the Governor's climate bill that would have delivered real reductions in carbon pollution failed to make it past the finish line. While the lack of progress on a comprehensive approach was

disappointing, Governor Gregoire continues to show real leadership on climate change. WEC and our partners will continue to work with her and legislative leaders to move Washington forward on this critical issue.

However, some progress was made. The Efficiency First law will gradually raise standards for new building construction, while improving energy efficiency in existing public buildings through insulation, better windows and improved heating and cooling systems. (For more information on how this Priority ties in with past wins, turn to page 6.)

The legislature also made progress in preparing Washington for the damaging impacts that climate change will cause. A new law takes some important steps to move our state forward in planning for climate change impacts, and requires any entity receiving grants from the capital budget to have a plan in place to meet state climate emission reduction goals.

The legislature also passed tax credits for renewable energy projects in Washington, which will benefit communities by creating new jobs and provide incentive for renewable projects of all sizes. Renewing these tax credits keeps Washington in a position to attract new, green business.

**Session Wrap Up • Continued on page 4**

Learn how green buildings are growing in Washington – see page 6



Photo by Thomas Willumstad

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## Executive Director's Message

While 2009 is not even half over, it feels like a year's worth of action has been packed into a few short months.

This legislative session was one of the most challenging I can remember. We faced a record budget deficit, which drew attention from almost every other issue, even ones as vital to our future as climate change and the restoration of Puget Sound. These are not issues that we can afford to ignore, as the costs of inaction are high, and the benefits of progress are real. WEC is committed to finding smart solutions on these critical issues and building the partnerships needed to make them a reality.

While this legislative session was not all smooth sailing, we did see good progress on energy efficiency, continued funding for Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, and the extension of renewable energy tax credits.

In this newsletter, we also check in to see how things are going with two past environmental priorities: High Performance Green Buildings (Page 6) and Local Farms – Healthy Kids (Page 3). Hearing how these community wins are now impacting people across the state reminds me that the work we do truly does help to build a better Washington.

As with most Washingtonians, for me spring marks the beginning of a magical time. Light-filled evenings when neighbors gather. More time to take my kids out hiking or beachcombing. Farm-fresh fruit and vegetables at the farmer's market. These are all part of what makes our state such a special place to live. We thank you for working with WEC to help keep it that way!

One note of business. Enclosed in your newsletter is a ballot for the 2009 WEC Board of Directors election. Ballots may only be completed by WEC members (check your newsletter mailing label for your status) and must be returned to the WEC office by June 2, 2009 in order to be counted.

Thank you again for your support,



Joan Crooks,  
Executive Director



# Local Farms-Healthy Kids School Update: Yakima's Moxee Elementary



by Kerri Cechovic, Outreach Director

In 2007, Washington Environmental Council joined with children's health advocates, anti-poverty activists, farmers, school nutritionists, and parents for the *Local Farms – Healthy Kids* campaign. Together, we passed groundbreaking state legislation in 2008. The new *Local Farms – Healthy Kids Act* firmly established Washington as a national leader in promoting policies to get healthy, locally-grown food into our schools.

One component is the popular Washington Grown Fruits and Vegetables Program. This grants program funds fresh fruit and veggie snacks in schools with high numbers of low-income students. This year, 10,000 kids ate fresh, locally-grown snacks thanks to the program. Early feedback reports classroom improvement in attentiveness, learning, and healthy eating habits.

Moxee Elementary School in Yakima was one of the 25 schools that received a grant this school year. Recently, I spoke with Darlene LaBella, who manages food services for Moxee Elementary to see how the program is working for their school. I was inspired by her report.

Every Tuesday and Thursday, each classroom receives a bushel basket full of fruits or vegetables for an afternoon snack. This year, the students have experienced a wide range of fresh, Washington-grown snacks: cherries, pears, apples, nectarines, corn, zucchini, carrots, and even eggplants. Darlene has also employed some creative preparation techniques including fresh salsas, and roasted local vegetables which were met with rave reviews by the kids. For some students, it was the first time they had ever tasted a zucchini.

The school has partnered with local farmers at Valicoff Orchards which grows pears, apples, peaches and nectarines. The four Valicoff brothers were par-

ticularly excited to partner with the school, as they each have children who graduated from Moxee.

Darlene credits the success of this program with the enthusiasm of Moxee's principal, teachers, and food service staff. For example, Moxee's physical education teacher developed an entire curriculum around local foods to teach kids about the importance of both nutrition and exercise.

This spring, teachers, staff, and students put on a family program night which centered around locally-grown fruits and vegetables. With music, costumes, and a bright, colorful fruit-themed background painted by the students, the kids performed a short play about the importance of eating nutritious and locally-grown fruits and vegetables. The show packed the house – Moxee's gymnasium was standing room only!

Students at Moxee Elementary in Yakima sing an apple song at their local foods assembly.

## Growing Our Future — Local Farms-Healthy Kids

### *How parents can help get locally grown food into our schools*

By connecting local farmers with schools, our farms become more economically viable, less energy is required to transport food over great distances, and people from all walks of life have greater access to locally-grown, nutritious foods. The *Local Farms – Healthy Kids Act* removed barriers and got us started in the right direction, but it is just the beginning.

With support from the Gilman Family Foundation, WEC has produced a *Local Farms-Healthy Kids* toolkit to help parents and interested community members get a farm-to-school project started at your school.

To learn more and download the toolkit, go to [www.wecprotects.org](http://www.wecprotects.org) or contact Kerri Cechovic at [kerri@wecprotects.org](mailto:kerri@wecprotects.org) or 206.631.2607.



## Session Wrap Up • Continued from page 1

### Budget

Core environmental protections, essential for making Washington a healthy place for families to live, took a hard financial hit in the state budget. Some key programs were defended, but included in the cuts was the complete elimination of the Water Quality Account, which has in the past provided tens of millions of dollars for sewage treatment and other clean water efforts.

The budget passed by the legislature also included a dramatic cut to the state's toxic cleanup program, which means that communities will have less help in dealing with abandoned hazardous wastes near schools, daycares, and homes. Additionally, most natural resource agencies suffered unsustainable cuts in their operations, which will result in less enforcement of our core environmental laws.

In a follow up to past environmental priorities, the final capital budget included \$70 million for Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, which will fund 95 parks, trails, wildlife habitat and farmland preservation projects all over the state. This is down from \$100 million in the previous state budget. Similarly, while funding for Local Farms – Healthy Kids programs was reduced, the core functions of the new Farm-to-School Office, the Farmers Market Nutrition Program, and the Washington Grown Fresh Fruits and Veggies Snack program were preserved.

### Water

The Invest in Clean Water Priority addressed the stormwater pollution that is the number one threat to Puget Sound. It would have imposed a modest fee on oil companies in order to pay for prevention and clean up. Unfortunately, it did not pass before the end of session. Without it, cash-strapped local governments will have to find funding elsewhere, and less will be done to stem ongoing pollution in our streams, lakes and Sound.

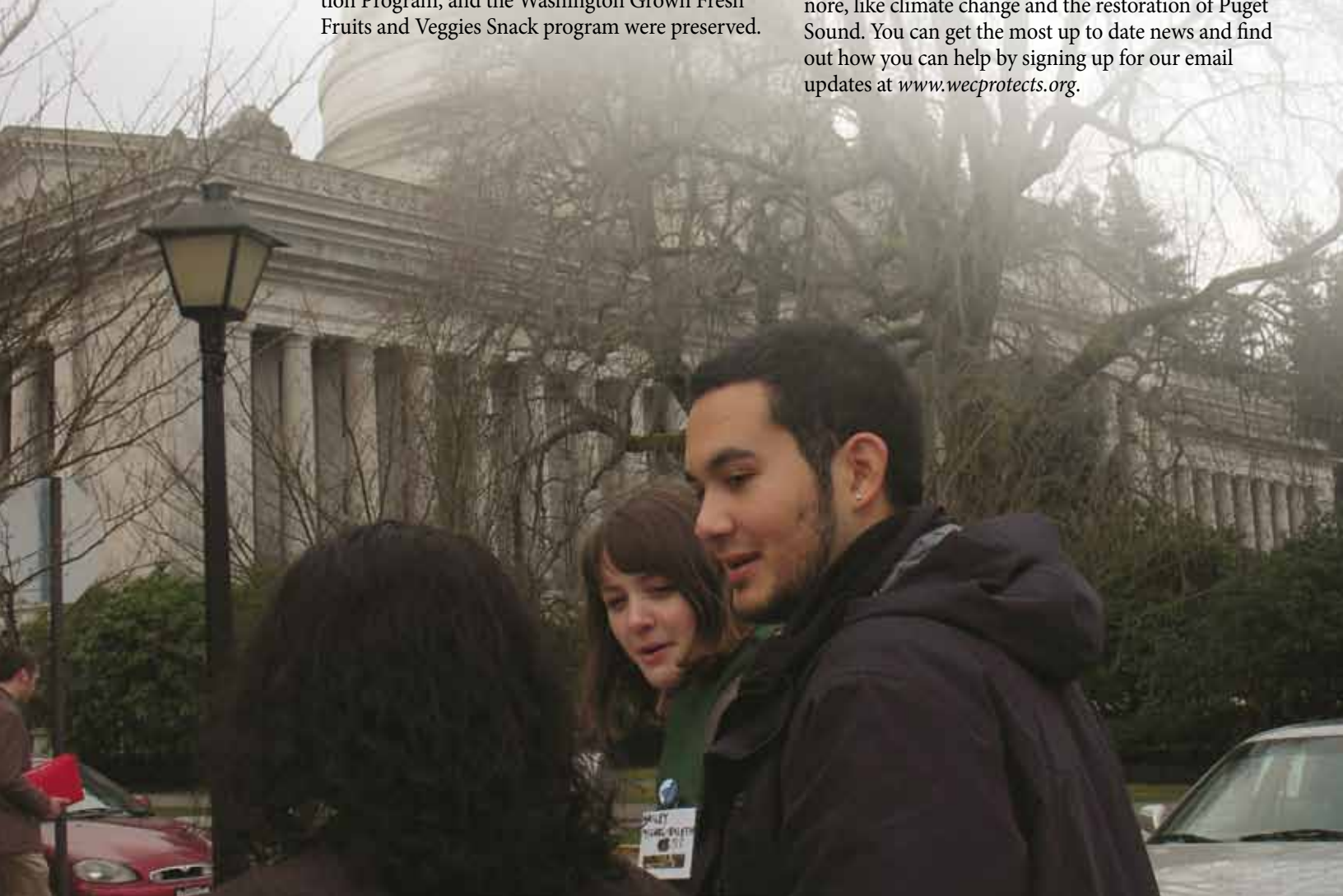
In a win for Puget Sound, an oil spill response tug at Neah Bay was made permanent. The rescue tug, which is dispatched to intercept oil tankers and other vessels in distress, has proven to be one of the most effective tools at the state's disposal to prevent a major oil spill.

### Moving Forward

That we achieved the victories we had in a tough session is due to the tireless work of our legislative champions. One exciting new development was the formation of a legislative Blue-Green Alliance, where legislators who care about environmental and labor issues organized themselves into an effective coalition to push for important progressive policies.

WEC will continue to work with our partners to achieve the progress on issues we can't afford to ignore, like climate change and the restoration of Puget Sound. You can get the most up to date news and find out how you can help by signing up for our email updates at [www.wecprotects.org](http://www.wecprotects.org).

Environmental Lobby Day participants from the 37th District head to meet with their legislators. Photo by Karen Uffelman



# Industrial Feedlots Threaten Eastern Washington Water Supply

by Mo McBroom, Policy Director

Changes in agriculture are threatening Washington's already overstretched water supply. When combined with the pressures of climate change, population growth, and the rise of industrial agriculture, the need to re-examine our water laws – most of which were enacted over 100 years ago – becomes more urgent. In some parts of the state, this issue has come to a head more quickly. As *The New York Times* wrote in April 2009, “The groundwater problems in eastern Washington are among the most serious in the country, in part because the region is among the driest in the country, averaging about 7 inches of rainfall a year.”

Many longtime eastern Washington residents realize groundwater is limited and must be treated as a valuable resource, but family farmers have been unable to prevent large corporations from exploiting an interpretation of the law that creates a legal loophole. This loophole essentially exempts industrial feedlots, like mega cattle farms, which can use millions of gallons of water a day, from all water regulations.

This loophole poses a serious threat to our streams and aquifers statewide. Not only is this bad news for the environment, but unlimited water use by these industrial feedlots threatens other users, such as family farmers who rely on groundwater wells in the area.

This issue came to a head in the summer of 2008 when Easterday Ranches Inc. proposed a cattle

feedlot in southeast Washington, which would use almost a million gallons of water a day. To put this in perspective, the city of Ellensburg uses a total of 1.5 million gallons each *year*. The project was opposed by neighboring farmers and environmentalists concerned that the water used by the feedlot would drain down the Grande Ronde Aquifer and deprive nearby farms of the water necessary to keep their crops growing.

Reform of this problem could be slow going, as industrial agriculture is deeply invested in the status quo. During the 2009 legislative session, WEC worked with our partner American Rivers to negotiate an agreement in law requiring the Department of Ecology to convene a work group that will be tasked with coming up with recommendations to limit and regulate stockwatering withdrawals.

Over the next year, WEC will participate in this process to change stockwater management in the state so it allows our local farms to thrive, while protecting our long term water supply. And as part of our Water for Washington campaign, WEC will continue working with partners and stakeholder groups to find commonsense and collaborative solutions for a sustainable water future for Washington.

Teanaway River



# Green Buildings Update

by Lexi Fish, Outreach Associate

**“Without the Green Buildings law, there would probably be less than twenty projects working towards a LEED Silver-standard... instead of the over 100 happening now.”**

*– Stuart Simpson,  
Green Building Advisor,  
Department of General  
Administration*

**M**ore than 30% of Washington’s greenhouse-gas emissions come from energy use in buildings, so it is important for us to make them as sustainable and low impact as possible. WEC was a pioneer in this effort when, in 2005, we joined with Cascadia Green Building Council, the American Institute of Architects Washington Council, and progressive developers to pass the High Performance Green Buildings law, the first of its kind in the nation. This law requires state-funded buildings, including colleges, universities and government facilities to be designed, built and certified to at least a Silver LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) ranking.

According to Stuart Simpson, the Green Building Advisor to the Department of General Administration, there are over a hundred state projects in design or construction that will meet the LEED Silver standard. Simpson said, “Without the Green Buildings law, there would probably be less than twenty projects working towards a LEED Silver standard at a minimum, instead of the over 100 happening now. Since this law passed, state projects try to maximize energy efficiency, high levels of construction waste recycling, water conservation, and good indoor air quality.”

Additionally, many projects are currently pushing to achieve the higher LEED Gold certification. Although most of these projects are still in the design or construction phases — about 20 are estimated to be completed this summer — we can say with

confidence that passage of this law has already and will continue to help Washington reduce its climate change pollution from the built environment.

One standout project that is a direct result of the High Performance Green Buildings law is at Spokane Falls Community College. Completed in December 2007, the building for Business and Social Sciences was certified as LEED Gold in February 2009. According to Dennis Dunham, the Director of Capital Projects for the Community Colleges of Spokane, the building was constructed using mostly local products that came from within 40 miles away. They were able to use many recycled and renewable materials as well. Sustainable concepts such as maximizing natural daylight and energy efficiency, focusing external landscaping on native plants and low-drip irrigation systems, and including natural ventilation were all incorporated into the new 70,000 square-foot building. Additionally, over 95% of the construction waste material was recycled.

According to Dunham, “Everyone is excited about the abundance of natural daylight in the classrooms. And, in the first year of monitoring the building the energy savings is beating our expectations.”

Now we’ve taken another big step to improve buildings in Washington, through the recently passed Efficiency First legislation (see page 4). WEC will continue to look for creative opportunities to ensure buildings are green, efficient, and enjoyable to occupy.

Photo by Rick Keating





## VEP: Keeping Voters Engaged

by *Brendon Cechovic, Voter Education Program Director*

**W**EC's Voter Education Program works to engage environmentally-minded citizens in the democratic process. Our nonpartisan programs are designed to train activists, build connections with elected officials, and grow the capacity of Washington's environmental community. In 2009, the Voter Education Program is focused on tackling the challenges we face in passing strong environmental legislation over the next few years.

The 2008 elections brought a record number of environmental voters to the polls, many of them casting ballots for the first time. We're currently working to identifying these voters and will keep them engaged throughout 2009. From city councils to county commissions, the choices we make in local elections this November will have lasting impacts on Washington's environment. To learn more and to get involved, visit [wecprotects.org/votereducation](http://wecprotects.org/votereducation).

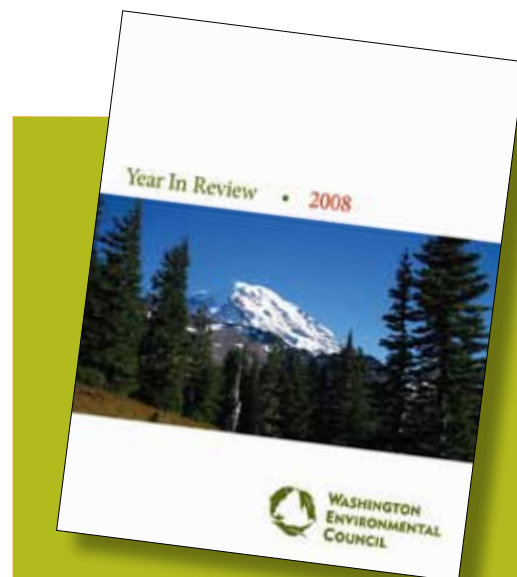
## EPA Hearing & Rally on Climate Change in Seattle on May 21st

**T**he U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will hold a public hearing (one of only two nationwide) in Seattle on May 21st on the threat global warming poses to public health and welfare. The hearing is a critical step toward national climate policy.

Please join WEC, Climate Solutions, the Sierra Club and many others to show the nation and our state decision-makers that Washingtonians demand action on climate change and clean energy!

Come show your support at the rally being held at 12:00 noon on Thursday, May 21st in downtown Seattle.

For more info on the hearing and rally, please contact Kerri Cechovic at [kerri@wecprotects.org](mailto:kerri@wecprotects.org) or 206.631.2607.



Our 2008 Annual Report is now online.  
To read it, please visit  
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# WASHINGTON ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

PROTECTING OUR LAND, AIR AND WATER

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**W**ashington Environmental Council protects what Washingtonians care about — our land and water, fish and wildlife, and our special way of life. We engage citizens and decision makers to improve and enforce protections for the health and well-being of our communities. Our work ensures that we will all enjoy natural areas, clean air and clean water for generations to come.

## Save the Date

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6TH

**H**ere at WEC, we are all getting excited for our annual fall dinner and auction, to be held on Friday, November 6th! The evening – filled with silent and live auctions, a delicious dinner featuring local food and wine, and a film that’s sure to get your feet moving – will truly be a time to relax, have fun, and celebrate!

WEC is pleased to announce that our celebration will be held in downtown Seattle at the Hyatt at Olive 8, which will be partnering with us to create an inspiring and environmentally-aware celebration. Olive 8 is expected to be the first LEED Silver-certified hotel in Seattle. Their building and approach align with things WEC values: energy efficiency, water conservation, and use of local foods.

For more information on the event or to become a sponsor, contact Allison Schulte at 206.631.2609 or [allison@wecprotects.org](mailto:allison@wecprotects.org).

Special thanks to our 2009 “early bird” sponsors for their generous support:

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