

## WESTERN INNOVATOR

# He's the point man on elk intrusion

By DON JENKINS  
EO Media Group

To focus minds on the damage caused by elk, Western Washington cattleman Randy Good talks to decision-makers, organizes bus tours, seeks allies and attends meeting after meeting.

He's been at it for several years. Asked if he's seen results, he says "no," but that he won't give up.

"I learned a long time ago, you just keep at it and sooner or later, you'll hit the right person," said Good, 70.

Good has been at the forefront of a long-running struggle by eastern Skagit County landowners to get elk off their pastures and fields. Farmers report extensive damage to fences, pastures, hay bales and plants. They worry about elk droppings contaminating crops and elk spreading hoof disease to livestock.

An ongoing survey of farmers suggests elk are causing roughly \$1.5 million damage to agriculture a year, according to the Skagit County Assessor's Office. Good estimates his losses at \$46,000 a year because he's had to abandon raising beef cattle in a field occupied by elk. "It's a sad, sad situation," he said.

Fish and Wildlife and Native American tribes imported elk from Mount St. Helens in 2003 and 2005 to enlarge the North Cascades herd. The plan worked. The department agrees too many elk have moved from the hills, where they were released, onto agricultural land.

Fish and Wildlife and tribes have helped landowners haze elk and put up fences, but landowners say the problem has outgrown



Sedro-Woolley, Wash., rancher Randy Good stands in his field and by a fence damaged by elk. Elk are a continuous problem for farms in eastern Skagit County, as Good continuously reminds the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Don Jenkins/Capital Press

## RANDY GOOD

Age: 70

Job: Rancher, former dairy farmer

Positions: Vice president of Skagit County Cattlemen's Association, president of Friends of Skagit County

Education: Skagit Valley Community College

Cause: Getting elk off farms and ranches, including his, in eastern Skagit County, Wash.

mission meeting and spoke during the period when people have three minutes to talk about whatever they want.

Good presented the case in his typical way.

First, he reminded the commissioners of their role. "You are our only voice with the DFW," Good said. He stated the problem: "Our frustrations are at a tipping point in eastern Skagit County with the intrusion of elk onto our agricultural valley floor for the past 10 years."

Then, he quoted state law: Nothing in Fish and Wildlife's mandate shall be construed to infringe on landowners controlling their property.

"Please advise the DFW to follow the law as mandated," Good said.

Several Fish and Wildlife commissioners agreed something should be done.

Jonasson said their cause usually gets a good reception in Olympia.

"We do feel generally pretty good when we leave there," he said. "But at some point, a human being needs results, not just talk."

Good said he learned a lot about working in the public arena beginning in the early 1990s by being on a committee that advises a high school agricultural program. "You don't want advisory committees to be a rubber stamp for the government," he said.

Good's tips for farmer involvement include: Document everything, attend every meeting possible, find allies who are willing to speak up and get to the top officials.

"I learned many years ago you have to get to the right person and inform them, or otherwise you're spinning your wheels," he said.

hazing and fences.

The department issues some kill permits to let landowners shoot an elk, but the permits are meant to control damage and are too few to stop the herd from growing. At least some of the nine tribes involved in managing the herd oppose more hunting.

Lawmakers directed Fish and Wildlife to reduce the number of elk on farmland, but the department has not had any apparent success.

State Sen. Keith Wagoner, a Republican who represents eastern Skagit County, said Good and allies have kept the issue in front of wildlife officials.

"They have their attention. I'm sure they do," said Wagoner, who said he's interested in testing beefed-up fencing to keep elk off farms. "I think it's been very helpful. Randy has been persistent to the point of annoyance."

Good's remarks — written and verbal — about Fish and Wildlife's inability to move elk are pointed. He delivers the comments as a landowner, vice president of the Skagit County Cattlemen's Association and president of the Friends of Skagit County, a group founded to promote protection of rural land.

Asked if he's enjoying

the political arena at all, he says no.

"I'd rather be home farming all the time," he said.

For more than three decades, Good and his wife, Aileen, had a dairy farm. Good now raises beef cattle on a field not occupied by elk.

In lobbying Fish and Wildlife for action, he's joined by other landowners, such as beef rancher John Jonasson, who figures elk have breached his fences 25 to 30 times.

"Randy does most of the actual coordinating," Jonasson said. "He's doing an outstanding job. He's been staying in their face about it.

He's not going to back down if he knows he's right."

Good organized a bus tour in early December for new Fish and Wildlife Director Kelly Susewind to see the elk. Good said he was hoping for four hours, but got two. The tour ended at a library, where farmers described the damages.

"Randy did a great job on that. He had everything timed down to the minute," Jonasson said.

Good has organized other bus tours and also gone to Olympia.

Last April, Good, Jonasson and three other Skagit County residents went to a Fish and Wildlife Com-

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