

**Spokane County VSP
Work Group Meeting
Minutes
February 15, 2017**

Work Group Members Present: David Boleneus, Brent Burger, Judy Crowder, Casey Flanagan, Doug Greenlund, Ty Meyer, Crystal Oliver, Amanda Parrish, Kevin Paulson

Staff: Lindsay Chutas, Seth Flanders

Facilitator: Andy Dunau

Welcome, Minutes and Announcements: Andy Dunau welcomed participants to the meeting. Brent made a motion to accept the October 19 minutes and Casey seconded. The motion passed.

Andy announced the H2O Breakfast on March 17th, 2017 from 7:30am-10:00am. The H2O breakfast is an annual event sponsored by the Spokane River Forum. This year it is hosted at the CenterPlace Regional Event Center 2426 N. Discovery Place, Spokane Valley, WA 99216 with guest speaker Craig Mackey from Colorado.

Proposed Resolution Clarifying VSP Work Plan Goals:

Judy presented a draft resolution “clarifying no intent to request state or federal agencies enforcement authority to achieve VSP work plan goals.” Andy also provided additional background language from draft ag viability framework reviewed by the work group at December meeting. Discussion points included:

- Concern by Judy and other members that the legislation provides an option for the work group to request state or federal agency assistance to use their enforcement authority to meet plan protection goals and benchmarks.
- Judy’s draft resolution is based on what was adopted by Stevens County VSP.
- District staff reiterated that as an organization their programs work with agricultural and other interests on a voluntary basis, and they have no intention of requesting enforcement activities on behalf of VSP or any other initiative.
- The charter and ag viability framework already anticipate reasserting the voluntary principles of VSP as the foundation of activity.
- SCD and Lands Council expect that VSP will follow the same protocols and work within the same environment as currently exist. Specifically, they will perform outreach and education to landowners, focus efforts on priority areas and need, identify funding and technical assistance available to achieve desired outcomes, and implement projects as proposed.
- VSP has no direct effect on whether agencies seek to enforce water quality and other regulations. Agencies, for instance, may send letters to landowners noting perceived violations and asking for compliance measures. Whether this prompts, encourages or discourages a landowner to seek assistance from VSP or another program is part of the working environment, but not part of a VSP work plan or collaborative effort with agencies to assist with their enforcement activities.

Along these lines, Andy distributed a memo from Ecology clarifying their support of VSP while maintaining their full regulatory authority under Shoreline Master Programs. The memo states,

“A local VSP work plan does not replace the shoreline regulations of SMP. VSP work plans identify voluntary practices to promote existing regulations, including SMPs and water quality regulations (e.g. Clean Water Act), still apply.”

- Passage of a resolution as policy to be included in the work plan or charter does not bind future votes by the work group that may revise or eliminate this resolution.
- Options were discussed to revise and or delete the third and last paragraph of draft resolution.

Judy motioned that the resolution become a) part of the work groups charter and used within the work plan, and b) that the facilitator edit the resolution per committee discussion and bring back to the next committee meeting for a vote to approve or disapprove. Kevin seconded. The motion carried with two dissenting votes. Doug opposed saying the group has already supported the principle that VSP is voluntary and the work plan will reflect this. Brent also opposed.

Mapping Report and Progress

Lindsay distributed and reviewed a matrix showing the GIS layers identified for mapping, their source, when they were created, and expected updates to them. She also contacted other VSP work groups, determining that the layers SCD has identified and recommended for use are consistent with other work groups using the same strategy. Discussion points included:

- Intersections will be summarized and reported by watershed area. No parcel level data will be shared or used in the work plan.
- All GIS layers are publicly available. In the case of Priority Habitat Species (PHS), WDFW requires that no information be shared as to specific location of species.
- There is significant diversity in when GIS layers were created and when they will be updated. The state technical team is aware of the situation, understanding that the base line being created can only approximate critical areas at the watershed level as of July 22, 2011.
- Future reporting to the conservation commission will note changes only reflect which layers were updated.
- Layers for mapped landslides, slope steepness and ground response will be combined to create geologic hazard critical area.
- For agricultural lands, staff recommended use of WSDA ag layer and rangeland data extrapolated from USDA CropScape tool. Other USDA census data is not recommended for mapping use because, due to privacy considerations, they will not provide a GIS layer with the granularity of information needed to consistently tabulate intersections with critical areas. Put differently, WSDA is able to show parcel level interaction with critical areas in a way USDA does not.

Andy and Lindsay passed out a memo written by Andy summarizing conversations they had with USDA as to what their census data includes, protocols for development, strengths and weaknesses and reasons for why it may differ from WSDA layer. The biggest difference is WSDA only reports “prime” pastureland. By including rangeland data from CropScape, the data is being normalized to the greatest extent possible. To illustrate this, Lindsay passed out a county map showing the intersection of rangeland from CropScape and WSDA ag lands in Spokane.

While this method shows much more rangeland being accounted for with CropScape, work group members noted there are more areas that could be shown if fully ground-truthed. Lindsay will work with available data to fine tune as much as possible.

- Use of DNR rangeland data was not recommended for use as Lindsay was unable to decipher the attribute table coding by date of meeting. She has contacted DNR and is awaiting response.
- Although various layers have limitations of one sort or another, there is consensus that at a watershed level mapping will provide a base line tool for a) articulating intersections between ag lands and critical area functions and values, b) inform development of appropriate goals, benchmarks and monitoring, and c) express changes to the intersections (positive or negative) over time.
- Based on work group questions, staff clarified that mapping data is not being used to determine who does or doesn't qualify for technical assistance, outreach or priority funding. One reason for this is that parcel level data is only being used to provide watershed level analysis needed to support development of base line information, setting benchmarks, and monitoring. For future reporting purposes, the working assumption is that a project implemented in a critical area after July, 2011 will count toward addressing legislative intent to demonstrate either no net loss or enhancement of critical area functions and values.
- WSDA will also be helpful in identifying crops grown by watershed, thus further informing ag viability and benchmark needs of the work plan.

Doug motioned to use distinguishing colors on ag layer to show rangeland extrapolated from CropScape and ag lands as reported by WSDA. Casey seconded. All agreed except Judy and David whom opposed.

Ty motioned to use current ag layers and critical area layers to create tables, Amanda seconded and all agreed. David opposed.

For the purposes of creating tables that show intersections, Judy motioned that WSDA and additional rangeland data be summed to express all ag land. Burger seconded with unanimous approval.

Lindsay clarified that this means the following for next step in mapping process:

- tables would be created for each of 5 watershed areas being reported out;
- the intersections will show the number of acres of ag parcels that intersect with a critical area;
- when comparing data to establish benchmarks for intersections, data will be normalized to be statistically comparable between years.

Agricultural Viability

Andy reported working with economist from USDA NRCS Central National Technology Support Center in Forth Worth, Texas to gather data indicating economic impact of agriculture in Spokane County. Their office uses a modeling tool called IMPLAN, which draws from multiple data sources such as Department of Commerce Economic Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics and the USDA Census. Two spreadsheets were distributed summarizing what was learned. This includes:

- Gross Regional Product of agriculture in Spokane County is between 159 million and 240 million dollars. This represents between .42% and .63% of the total regional economy.
- Employment accounts for between 2,600 and 3,400 jobs. This represents between 1% and 1.27% of the regional economy.

The ranges shown for gross regional product and employment indicate the difference between whether indirect and induced output (multiplier effects) are included.

Agriculture represents a small percentage of the regional economy occurs because it is nested within a large and dynamic urban/suburban economy driven by diverse service, manufacturing and government activities. This understanding needs to be balanced against agriculture also representing 48% of Spokane County's land mass, and the historic custom and culture values agriculture brings to the region.

The group discussed how these dynamics fit into previous research indicating urban encroachment contributing to farm land losses; increases in the number of small farms; and decreases (or breaking up) of large farms (see summary in previous minutes).

The second IMPLAN spreadsheet provided specifics regarding total economic impact and employment by agricultural sector. Gross sales by sector are generally consistent with USDA census results, e.g.— grain farming and ranching operations are critical features of Spokane County's agricultural profile.

What's not shown by IMPLAN or USDA Census is the emerging role and effect of cannabis production to Spokane County's agriculture economy. Research conducted by Crystal indicates that cannabis accounts for 62 million dollars in sales; has 149 producers and processors; and occurs on less than 50 acres of total land. The average farm is .68 acres in size. By comparison, USDA Census shows wheat to be the highest value commodity crop at 75 million dollars, occurring on 276 farms and representing 159,047 acres of farm land.

Once Lindsay completes draft of map, puts them in table form, and identifies watershed areas where agricultural activities predominate, Andy will combine with USDA Census, IMPLAN and other data to present the group an "agricultural profile" of Spokane County for discussion. This will provide the necessary background and context for the group establishing agricultural viability objectives for the work plan.

License to Farm Video

Due to time constraints, this agenda item was moved to the next meeting.

Additional Business

Andy summarized some of what was learned at the Moses Lake regional meeting hosted by the Conservation Commission. The meeting featured presentations on development of Chelan and Thurston County VSP plans, which appear to be consistent with the direction being taken by Spokane County. There were also presentations by Grant County and their consultant Anchor QEA on a specific modeling approach they are using to indicate no net loss and critical area enhancements. Presentations are on the Conservation Commission VSP web page.

State technical team members shared thinking on work plan approaches to develop benchmarks, goals and objectives; use of regulatory backstops; and monitoring. In addition, WDFW shared a tool called High Resolution Change Detection that may be helpful when developing the monitoring program. SCD staff will follow-up.

Closing and Action Items: Follow-up and action items include:

- Andy will draft and distribute February minutes.
- Andy will prepare updated resolution clarifying VSP non-enforcement principle.
- Lindsay will complete next steps for GIS mapping and tables.
- Seth will continue summarizing related plans.
- Walt will continue to identify field trip opportunities.

The next VSP meeting will be Wednesday, March 15th, 6:00—8:00 p.m. at the Spokane Conservation District. The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.