

**Spokane County VSP
Work Group Meeting
Minutes
May 17, 2017**

Work Group Members Present: David Boleneus, Casey Flanagan (phone), Doug Greenlund, Robyn Meenach, Ty Meyer, Crystal Oliver, Amanda Parrish, Kevin Paulson

Staff: Seth Flanders, Walt Edelen

Facilitator: Andy Dunau

Welcome, Minutes and Announcements: Andy Dunau welcomed participants to the meeting. April minutes were discussed. Andy was asked to include Scott Kuhta's last name in guest list, and add Rob Lindsay to guest list. Robyn made a motion to accept the March 15 minutes and Crystal seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

David asked if the work group could have a discussion to change the meeting night beginning in September. The group agreed to add this to the next agenda.

Field Trip Debrief: The group thanked Walt for organizing VSP field trip. A wide diversity of practices, needs and solutions were observed, and the farmers were very forthcoming with comments and insights. Some of the thoughts shared by the group included:

- Robyn commented on differences in response by farmers to regulatory actions. In one case, the producer pushed back against an enforcement letter from Ecology as part of getting to an agreed upon solution. In another case, an agreed upon solution was implemented, but due to other variables another regulatory action was taken and is in dispute. In the third case, a landowner is "bending" to the enforcement letter without legal counsel and the result regarding ag viability is uncertain.
- Doug commented on the economic viability of farms based on their size and differences between ownership and leasing of lands. "The complexity and size of the issue makes it seem like we might not have any significant impact on ag viability."
- Kevin had concerns about the type of people moving into ag land when they don't understand practices and necessities of farming. Kevin also wants the greatest degree of flexibility in being able to sell off portions of lands to remain economically viable. The group noted there are different zoning ordinances with minimum sections of land that can be sold, e.g.—40, 20, 10 acres; and that farmers themselves have different opinions about whether there should be a minimum size for sale. This goes to the issue of development and pros/cons of a) the viability of small acre lots for housing coexisting with farming areas and practices, and b) purchasing a 40-acre lot without knowledge or ability to properly maintain acreage beyond the housing perimeter, e.g.—weed management.
- David was struck by the minimum size of a farm to be economically viability. This also correlates to statistics showing increased number of small farms and high percentage of farmers with one or more person in the household with a full-time non-farm job. He also

liked the contrast and reasoning of farmers on tour using no till vs. conventional till vs. a combination.

- Amanda was interested in diversity of zoning to determine minimum parcel size for sale. She was also interested in what farmers had to say about the practical aspects of farming in Hangman.

Chelan and Thurston VSP Plans Approved:

Chelan and Thurston VSP work plans were approved. Andy distributed “VSP State Technical Team Practice Pointers” that were distributed by the Conservation Commission on behalf of the technical team. The pointers are to assist development of future work plans based on “lessons learned.” The group discussed each “pointer,” and believe they can be incorporated appropriately.

SCD clarified that the pointer regarding how agricultural practices will protect critical areas will be addressed by researching, listing and categorizing the BMP’s that have been done since 2011. A tool is in development to do this. SCD also clarified that BMPs align with and are based on NRCS standards. Current scientific studies will also be used.

Also of note is that Chelan used HRCD (satellite imagery) as part of monitoring. Thurston did not, although Andy’s understanding is that Thurston added this component during the review process.

Andy explained that he had been in contact with WDFW about a presentation on HRCD. Based on the conversation, Andy clarified that the satellite information used is publicly available via USDA. WDFW uses a software package to produce high resolution change detection to compare conditions from one time period to another. The group has questions about the algorithms used and other variables that can affect results. For instance, “Does HRCD apply to any other critical area monitoring other than riparian?” The group is also very concerned that any use of this tool must include strict privacy features to avoid parcel level information being given out to other agencies that may use it for enforcement action.

The group agreed to a webinar for the July meeting. Andy asked the group to email him any specific questions they would like the presentation to cover.

Regarding monitoring, Spokane Conservation District will have both edge of field monitoring and drone monitoring available if the group decides that they want to use these tools. Edge of field monitoring monitors surface water runoff from fields to find effects of certain conservation practices on water quality. The drone technology can be used to monitor plant viability and water retention levels in specific fields. Both methods would be used based on land owner approval and consent. Given that VSP is not focused on the parcel level, this technology would be used to further inform best practices and effectiveness for protecting critical area functions and values at a watershed scale.

Mapping, Critical Area Intersect and Benchmarks Progress Report:

Lindsay met with Corey Smith and Tom Vandervert from Spokane County's Planning Department about Frequently Flooded Areas and its placement within Critical Areas Ordinance. Within the Critical Areas Ordinance, 11.20.010(B) "Purpose", states:

"Goals for frequently flooded areas are listed in the Spokane County Comprehensive Plan and implemented by the Spokane County Code Chapter 3.20, Flood Damage Protection, also referred to as the "Flood Ordinance", or as amended."

That ordinance is adopted in Appendix J of the CAO

Within the Shoreline Master Program, it is clear that a more integrated approach is necessary for shoreline protection. Flood hazard issues, however, are discussed throughout the SMP, including the following sections:

Section 2.9 "Element 9 – Special Flood Hazards"

Section 5.2.6 "Protecting Channel Migration Zones" (CMZs) - discusses restrictions on development within CMZs, which are categorized into the 50-year CMZ and the 100-year CMZ.

Section 8.4 "Application of the Critical Areas Ordinance and Flood Damage Protection Ordinance Regulations within Shorelines of the State"

Section 8.5 "Shoreline Master Program and Relationship to other Regulations"

Appendices III and IV - The CMZs were mapped as part of the SMP review/approval process, and those maps are found in these appendices.

Links to each ordinance and appendices can be found here:

<https://www.spokanecounty.org/DocumentCenter/View/1210>

<https://www.spokanecounty.org/616/Shoreline-Master-Program>

From a process perspective, the planning department receives a call regarding a property that is in a floodplain. They forward the inquiry to the floodplains department, where permitting questions and requests are subject to the ordinances that are referenced in the Shoreline Master Plan.

The initial thinking is that, like the Chelan Plan, the robust nature of the current regulatory backstop and that it applies to all new activities will suffice to meet Spokane County VSP needs. Lindsay will continue due diligence with the county and further report back.

Further, Lindsay confirmed that the floodplains map for Spokane County and other counties in the state are maintained by FEMA and updated when available.

Lindsay is also coordinating availability of Karin Divens at WDFW to begin work on fish and wildlife habitat goals, objectives and benchmarks.

Review of Agricultural Viability Options:

The work group reviewed elements of what might be included in Spokane Agricultural Viability section. Andy stressed that what the work group is reviewing is a tool for the committee to discuss priorities and what should be included or excluded. It is not a staff recommendation. The group reviewed the first half of the document. Highlights of input include:

- The committee is comfortable with the ag viability definition put forth in a document from WA State Conservation Commission and cited by Chelan.
- The three underlying principles to the definition are also acceptable. The work group did some wordsmithing to fine tune, and this will be incorporated into the next draft.
- Staff will, per “practice pointers,” cross reference ag viability objectives with critical area benchmarks.
- The work group is interested in SCD developing a strategy for a staff person to be an ag viability liaison to better coordinate and promote these issues, including carrying out of work plan objectives long term.
- It’s important to distinguish between objectives with which there is some level of local or county influence vs. objectives that can only be addressed at the state or federal level. For instance, water rights adjudication is a state issue; a water bank is something being worked on locally.
- Examples of promoting streamlining of regulation include ditch management plans and emergency Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA). For example, in order to maintain ditches to remove sediment deposits without get stopped or slowed by regulatory process, Walt suggested a program where farmers could be given the opportunity to proactively develop a ditch management plan. By doing so, the farmer could maintain ditches without needing regulatory approval for every maintenance operation.
- There are also distinctions between efforts that VSP will work directly on, e.g.—offering technical assistance or funding opportunities; efforts VSP can provide partnership leverage to, e.g.—Farm Smart Certification; and efforts VSP can acknowledge its support of, e.g.— Shepherd’s Grain branding, agritourism and farmer’s markets.
- The work group recognizes the rise and importance of micro farms, also called ranchettes or hobby farms, and the need to support these via agritourism, branding and farmer’s markets. That said, it’s considered unlikely there will be sufficient VSP funding to provide direct assistance to related branding and promotional efforts. This becomes an example of how an agricultural viability liaison can show support and possibly identify and promote partnerships that may be of assistance.
- There continue to be differing perspectives about the degree of flexibility landowners should have regarding selling portions of their property.
- Distinctions were also made about loss of viability due to regulation that reduces the availability of a landowner’s property for farming (“a taking”).
- Partnering and pointing landowners to the wealth of information and resources available via WSU extension is important.
- The commodity buffer program is an example of an innovative ag viability and conservation practice developed and led by SCD that others in the state are watching closely and may adopt. In this program farmers are compensated for loss of crops that are

converted to buffers. The buffer is often grass filter strips along river systems and water channels water bodies to help reduce sediment and nutrient runoff. The required buffer size and compensation varies based on a score that accounts for such things as upland farming practices such as no till on the amount of soil disturbance from the upland farming operation and the type of water body present. The producer is then compensated for that buffer through payments that provide the current commodity (crop) price plus additional incentives that make the buffer even more valuable than the crop produced on that site. The VSP work group recommended that the commodity buffer program be highlighted in the work plan.

- The work group began the discussion of evaluating the possibility of an objective that would see approaching the Spokane County Board of Commissioners to potentially amend Conservation Futures funding options to include supporting commodity buffers and/or purchase/transfer of development rights. As an example, SCD estimates the first year of the commodity buffer program will see approximately \$45,000 used to support approximately 39 miles of riparian implementation and protection.
- The work group also began the discussion of approaching the Spokane County Board of Commissioners to develop an off-set development fund. This would require that developers contribute to the fund when farmland is converted or re-zoned for non-farm purposes. The group asked SCD to research these options with the county.

The work group will complete review of ag viability options at the next meeting.

Spokane County VSP Introduction

A draft of the first section of the VSP work plan was distributed, including notations of information to be filled in later. Drafts will be regularly updated as the plan is developed. The next section to be worked on is an overview of agriculture and agricultural viability in Spokane County. Work group members are encouraged to review and provide comments to Andy.

Additional Business

There was no additional business to review.

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

- Andy will draft and distribute May minutes.
- Andy to include possible change in meeting days on next agenda.
- Lindsay will continue meetings to develop benchmarks and refine mapping.
- Staff will follow-up with NRCS to identify CRP acres in Spokane County.
- Andy will follow-up with WDFW on July HRCD presentation.
- Seth will continue summarizing related plans.
- SCD will develop a strategy for a staff person to possibly be an ag viability liaison.
- SCD will begin to research with county opportunities to amend Conservation Futures Funding options and develop an off-set development fund.