

Minutes
Work Group
Spokane County Voluntary Stewardship Program
March 11, 2020
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Work Group Members Present: Jay Cronk, Casey Flanagan, Doug Greenlund, Ty Meyer, Kevin Paulson

Staff: Doug Phelps

Facilitator: Andy Dunau

Guests: Levi Keesecker, Leslie Michel

Printed Handouts: Today's agenda, January minutes, Quarterly Budget Update, Wheat Life Article, Conservation Project and Development List

Items Viewed on the Projector Screen: KPBX Radio Interview (audio only), Conservation Map

Welcome and Administration: The meeting convened at 6:45 (45 minutes late) due to a train blocking the tracks. The group called Andy by phone for the first few minutes to get the meeting started until he and Kevin could arrive.

The group thanked Jay for bringing snacks to the meeting. Doug Greenlund volunteered to bring snacks to the next meeting.

A quorum was not present. Approval of January minutes will occur at the next meeting.

Leslie Michel (WSDA) introduced herself. She has a background in dryland wheat and is here to provide WSDA technical assistance to CDs for VSP, especially with respect to monitoring. Leslie shared legislative updates including SB3606, SB5947, SB6518, HB2713 and HB1622.

Levi Keesecker introduced himself. Levi was hired by WSCC as a Natural Resource Scientist to assist VSP, particularly with monitoring. He has a very strong background in GIS and met recently with SCD to begin review of aerial imagery monitoring activities.

The other members of the group introduced themselves.

Outreach:

Print copies of the Wheat Life article were passed out. The article will also be posted on the Wheat Life website March 15. The group reviewed this article before submission. The article was published as written with the exception that the editor asked for and received a quote from a landowner involved in the VSP program.

Andy handed out copies of the RCPP article he wrote that was published in the Spokane River Forum and the SCD e-newsletters.

Doug explained the role of the Spokane Farmland Preservation Working Group and that he attends monthly meetings of the group. The group's presence inspired Steve Jackson at station KPBX to become interested in the group. Steve interviewed Doug as part of a radio story that aired on February 19, 2020 and can be found on the KPBX website. The radio story was played for the group.

The outreach presentations at Ag Expo, AgLink and the South Spokane Farm Corridor (SSFC) were discussed. Doug explained that some of the other SCD members presented alongside him at AgExpo and AgLink, including Jake (RCPP coordinator at SCD) who was especially helpful in generating questions and interest in RCPP. The SSFC farm members were receptive to the presentation and out of that group of 12 farms, two requested livestock technical assistance visits. According to VSP's Table 8, which helps VSP focus its efforts, livestock projects (Heavy Use Areas) are the one objective not yet fulfilled. Doug suggested that he focus his efforts on smaller livestock producers like those represented by the SSFC. Kevin suggested that he also focus on larger livestock producers. There was consensus for Doug to pursue these actions.

Although "Video: On Farm Livestock Interview" was on the agenda, the group was unable to see the video because the SCD server was down at the time. Doug will send the group a link to the video.

The Conservation Map was reviewed. Doug is continuing to work with farmers to add projects. Adding a "grown local" checkbox was discussed as a way to appeal to non-commodity farmers (includes produce, custom meat, Christmas trees, pumpkin patches, apiary, eggs, poultry, etc.). It was discussed that this is one way to increase conservation and technical assistance opportunities for this fast-growing farm sector. These farmers are generally receptive to conservation but have not been significantly targeted to receive assistance. Also adding a repository for videos on the Conservation Map was discussed. There was consensus for Doug to pursue these updates with Mapseed.

Conservation Project Development and List Review

The list was passed out and discussed. The group was reminded that it only shows projects that are 1) active, 2) have an application for assistance submitted or in progress, or 3) is a prospect (shown interest only). Only completed projects are entered into the conservation data base and tabulated for Table 8.

RCPP, 319 and WSCC funding are the primary sources of funding. The group agrees that these programs do a good job of reaching mid to large-scale operations. Additional effort, however, needs to be focused on small farm activities. As shown in the last review of the USDA census data, the number of smaller farms is growing rapidly and the larger operations are getting larger.

The group reached consensus that VSP can make an important contribution by targeting small farm operations. This is also consistent with what Doug has found when making presentations to farming groups.

Casey noted that Doug should add a Spokane Tribal project occurring in Spangle. She will send him info.

Aerial Imagery Acquisition and Next Steps

Doug explained that SCD is making strides toward a partnership with the county that will see VSP buy the imagery the first year and the county would continue the subscription into the future. The alternative is for VSP to purchase the imagery every 5-years to meet reporting needs. We are working toward having a MOA by end of April. The group supports this plan.

Project Development

Vicki Carter and Doug applied for an Urban Agriculture Grant through NACD. There was a lot of competition and the grant application was not funded.

Doug discussed with the group that SCD's 319 applications are very high on the list and likely to get funded. Details on how SCD would use the grant money if funded were discussed at the previous meeting.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Doug explained that RCPP renewal requires utilization of ACEP funds allocated to SCD's 2016 RCPP program. An example of ACEP funds is the purchase of a farmer's development rights, thus protecting agricultural lands from being rezoned for commercial or residential use. A valid use of these funds must be identified and in progress by the end of 2020. Doug has some applicable skills to use toward this end. Since farmland preservation is relevant to VSP, Doug requested to use some of his time on this part of the RCPP program. Time spent on ACEP can be billed to RCPP instead of VSP. The group asked Doug to look into using ACEP funds for the preservation of the Pilcher property in Vinegar Flats. Other potential projects noted by the group: Linke Ranch off Barker and Morningstar Boys Ranch.

Action Items and Closing:

Outreach:

- Conservation Map web site.
 - Continue reaching out to producers to populate map
 - Add grown local and video features.
- Continue development of articles and seek opportunities for presentations.

Technical Assistance and Project Development:

- Conservation Project Implementation and Development List.
 - Continue updating, including addition of Spokane Tribe Spangle Project.
- Support SCD identification of ACEP project.
- Follow-up on interest shown by livestock operations.

Monitoring:

- Complete aerial imagery MOA with county
- Subscribe to imagery and initiate next monitoring steps with contractor.

The next meeting was scheduled for May 13, 2020. Andy thanked everyone for coming. There were no further comments and the meeting adjourned.