

Minutes
Work Group
Spokane County Voluntary Stewardship Program
May 13, 2020
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m

Work Group Members Present: Casey Flanagan, Dave Boleneus, Doug Greenlund, Ty Meyer, Kevin Paulson, Alene Lindstrand

Staff: Doug Phelps

Facilitator: Andy Dunau

Guests: Levi Keesecker, Bill Eller

Handouts: Agenda, January Minutes, March Minutes, ACEP Flyer, Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) Grant Summary, Sample Livestock and Land Report, Conservation Project and Development List, VSP Video Series Plan

Welcome and Administration: The meeting convened via WebEx video and phone conference technology.

Members, staff and guests introduced themselves. Bill Eller, Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) VSP Coordinator, was pleased to be able to attend a Spokane VSP meeting for the first time. Bill updated the group that 5-year reports from Thurston and Chelan will be delayed due to pandemic. These counties also don't have the benefit of the template for filing the 5-year report, which is not expected to be complete until this summer. Kittitas, Garfield and Mason counties will most likely be the first to use the template when their reports are submitted in November. While the WSCC may extend the 5-year report deadline for additional counties, WSCC recommends that development of the 5-year report should proceed as though no additional extensions will be given. Spokane's is due April 22nd, 2021.

Casey made a motion to approve the January and March minutes. Ty seconded. The motion passes unanimously.

Project Development

New Projects: Doug announced that a Terry Husseman grant from WA Department of Ecology was approved. This will support fencing, a heavy use area, roof run-off structure, a grass buffer and riparian planting.

Doug also announced the Emtman Livestock Project. This project consists of a roof runoff structure and site re-grading for improved drainage around a barn. This project will be completed in late May/early June.

Livestock Technical Assistance Reports: Doug walked the committee through a farm plan technical assistance report, also known as an Individual Stewardship Plan. This came through a requested site visit that occurred because of an outreach meeting. Several improvements were recommended. Next steps include either the owner making improvements at their expense and/or SCD helping identify funding to assist with improvements. Procedurally, this project is entered on to the Project Development list as a prospect.

Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) Grant: The group reviewed a summary of a three-year, \$50,000 grant to establish one or more additional farm corridors using the existing South Spokane Farm Corridor as the prototype. This solicitation comes from USDA-AMS. The Green Bluff farm corridor is already in existence. New opportunities were identified in the west plains, Spokane Valley and northern Spokane. Assistance from SCD would primarily come from technical assistance, promotion and facilitating initial meetings. An example of technical assistance is SCD working with a producer in the South Spokane Farm Corridor on a pollinator project. Discussion also clarified that selling of produce occurs through farm stands that are open at least once a week. There are also opportunities for farm tours.

Doug asked for, and received consensus, from the group to use VSP funding of his time to provide the required 25% match (\$12,500 over three years). As the grant strongly aligns and supports VSP objectives for outreach and technical assistance to small farm viability and conservation, consensus was achieved. Doug was asked to proceed forward and provide the group the opportunity to comment on the necessary letter of support.

Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP): A flyer was distributed and reviewed for promotion of ACEP to interested farmers. This is part of the SCD's RCPP program. Essentially, an easement is purchased to assure high value farmland that may otherwise be sold for development or other purposes remains in a state that it can or is being used for agricultural use. Kevin and Casey provided additional ideas for farmers to contact that may be interested in participating.

Sustainable Farms and Fields Legislation: This state legislation was approved and extensively reviewed by Doug. Currently, however, there is no funding to implement activities. WSCC and the WA Department of Agriculture have asked for additional funds for staff to work on implementation and related funding. Doug will continue to track and let the group know of any opportunities.

Other Conservation Project and Development List Updates: A property owner near Deer Park requested assistance from SCD regarding the intersection of riparian habitat with one of their fields that they lease to a local farmer. Pandemic restrictions on in-person site visits are in place, so Doug is currently assisting the landowner remotely without having seen the site. Doug provided guidance over the phone in the form of planting recommendations at the edge of the farmed field and contact information of a neighbor nearby that has experimented with similar

farming/habitat margin plantings. Doug will follow up with the landowner when pandemic restrictions loosen.

Ty suggested that the bio-farming and loan programs he is working on be added to the development list. These activities support changing practices to build healthy soils, thus driving both ag viability through efficiency and conservation through improving soil health. Doug will follow-up with Ty and add to list.

Outreach:

Conservation Map Enhancements: Committee reviewed enhancements to include new category and producer form for Locally Grown, Locally Sold produce and addition of link to highlight VSP videos.

VSP Video Series: A plan to develop video series of about two minutes per video was reviewed. The purpose is to showcase good works being done, increase public awareness and promote producers seeking technical assistance. Themes and possible stories discussed. The work group liked the plan and encouraged finding time to pursue.

Aerial Imagery Monitoring

The aerial imagery has been acquired and delivered to the VSP consultant to work on the monitoring report called for in VSP plan. SCD provided the imagery to the county to help them pilot use for property assessments and other activities. The county has also taken steps to develop an MOU with SCD that supports the county paying the annual license fee in the future and SCD accessing the imagery to support VSP and other uses.

Action Items and Closing:

Project Development:

- Submit Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) Grant
- Follow-up on Deer Park technical assistance request
- Continue to support ACEP outreach, including leads suggested by Casey and Kevin.
- Project Development List
 - Continue updating
 - Add bio-farming category and projects
- Continue to identify new project opportunities and offer technical assistance

Outreach:

- Conservation Map
 - Continue reaching out to producers to populate map
 - Add enhancements
- Continue development of articles and seek opportunities for presentations

Monitoring:

- Continue aerial imagery work with contractor
- Update other monitoring activities and schedule of activities for review at next meeting

The next VSP meeting will be July 8th. Whether it is held in person or via WebEx video conference will be based on status of phased reopening.