

**Minutes**  
**Work Group**  
**Spokane County Voluntary Stewardship Program**  
**September 14, 2022**  
**6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m**

**Work Group Members Present:** Methea Sapp, Kat Hall, Doug Greenlund, Alene Lindstrand, Ty Meyer

**Staff:** Lindsay Chutas, Walt Edlen

**Facilitator:** Andy Dunau

**Welcome and Administration:** The meeting convened via MS Teams video conference.

Kat Hall made a motion to approve the May minutes. Ty seconded. The motion passed. Kat made a motion to approve the July minutes. The motion passed.

Lindsay and Walt are in the process of submitting a VSP proposal to do riparian planting as part of a project on the Little Spokane in the Waikiki area. This is part of supplemental Washington State Conservation Commission funding for VSP habitat projects supporting salmon restoration. At the same time, Walt secured funding to do a complete engineering design to fully scale up the project to include fish barrier removal and a channel to support spawning. The Spokane Tribe is a strong supporter as it ties into salmon reintroduction efforts. This is also made possible through the cooperation of a private landowner. The work group reviewed and approved submission of the proposal at the July meeting.

The workgroup welcomed Robin O’Quinn. Robin is a biology professor at EWU with experience in plant systematics. Currently, she’s also involved in a EWU prairie restoration project and helped create a Sustainability minor. Robin grew up on a small farm and helped manage livestock. The group sees her as a great asset in supporting conservation and ag viability objectives. Walt will be submitting Robin and Kat’s names to the County Commissioners to serve full VSP terms. Kat is currently filling in for Amanda.

Per emails sent out, Joe Zimbric took a position at Ecology and is no longer the VSP coordinator. Lindsay is filling in until a new coordinator is hired. The new position will combine VSP activities and managing the commodity buffer program, which is a key VSP conservation practice. Fortuitously, Joe’s departure occurred at the same time SCD was hiring a Habitat Specialist. That person, Eric Allen, will start with SCD at the beginning of October. Through that process, several resumes that fit the VSP job description are already available. Interviews for the VSP position are expected to be complete by mid-October. The group asked to receive a copy of the updated job description.

**Informational Updates and Program Planning**

Lindsay and Walt did a presentation to the State Technical Team that included a full review of monitoring and project development activities the previous week. They went through this

presentation with the group, taking many questions with facilitated discussion. The link to the presentation is: <https://files.constantcontact.com/ca8b444e501/7ab78a94-ead5-4f45-9f91-eaba2bcd8000.pdf>

Subject areas with some key discussion points:

- Purpose of Check-in
- Monitoring:
  - A suite of monitoring tools is being used to determine changes on the ground and whether benchmarks are being met. The challenge continues to be working at the watershed scale and closing data gaps. New tools, particularly around wetlands monitoring, continue to progress.
  - The key conservation practice database is not monitoring in terms of detecting critical area gains and losses. Rather, it shows 1) the level of effort and conservation practice additions to the landscape, and 2) compares these additions to a 2011 baseline to determine if conservation benchmarks are being met.
  - Phase 2 of edge of field monitoring is complete and the report will be released shortly. This also is not a monitoring tool showing on the ground changes. But it's an essential study affirming that incenting no-till production is a key conservation practice priority to protect critical area functions and values. Similarly, monitoring at Bear Creek is affirming function and value assumptions regarding riparian projects.
  - Incorporating related partner studies and SCD 2022 streambank erosion assessment is also very helpful. The erosion study showed significant changes from the 2003 assessment, areas where riparian planting has clearly been beneficial, and helps target priority areas for future projects. Data collection from plans being developed by the Spokane Salmon Lead Entity will also add future value.
  - VSP is making a vital contribution to supporting collaborative efforts and data collection that provides much needed watershed monitoring and analysis.
- Project Development:
  - The list of project activities is long, impressive and diverse.
  - Walt provided updates on new funding and projects being implemented. This includes an additional \$1.8 million of RCPP funding, progress implementing Ecology's \$1 million Hangman Creek Riparian Restoration and Conservation Pilot Program, and \$500,000 in Ecology funding for other conservation projects.
  - Because partners are being very successful in funding and implementing projects, Spokane VSP is both meeting benchmarks and able to maintain a strong focus on updating existing monitoring tools and developing new ones.
- Outreach. Highlights of calendar year activities include:
  - Holding February and March Hangman Watershed Meetings. Farmers both learned about available technical assistance and expressed frustrations regarding regulation.

- Walt and Andy thanked the group for attending a July workgroup tour, and thanked landowners and project proponents for showing excellent and diverse practices.
- A targeted mailing re available technical assistance and program support went out to the Upper Rock Creek drainage of Hangman Creek. When the new person starts, another targeted mailing will go out.
- The conservation map has been updated with additional projects.
- The new farm corridor website is in development. Hopefully a presentation can be given at the next meeting.

## **Member Updates**

- Kat reported the Lands Council is deep into fall riparian planting and adding Beaver Dam Analog projects.
- Andy noted Casey has shared with him the Spokane Tribe is also very active with riparian planting, and that the Spokane River Educational and Cultural Salmon release was very well received.
- Ty reported that a 5-year, \$82 million USDA grant to support development of regenerative farming was declined. The grant featured 15 partners and 18 farmers working 14,900 acres of land to intensively pilot and study activities. The discussions and business planning that went into development of the grant will have long term benefits. This includes partners being committed to seeking funding from other sources to implement as many aspects of the grant as possible.

Regenerative agriculture farming and grazing practices strives to rebuild soil organic matter and restore degraded soil biodiversity. This helps address climate change by supporting carbon sequestration and improving the water cycle.

## **Action Items and Closing:**

### Administration:

- Update, resend roster to workgroup
- Send VSP job description to workgroup

### Project Development:

- Continue identifying new project opportunities

### Outreach:

- Set-up new farm corridor website presentation
- Identify new area to send targeted mail materials

### Monitoring:

- Incorporate EWU Prairie Restoration project into data base
- Complete acquiring aerial imagery with Spokane County

- Complete contract for critical area change assessment using aerial imagery.
- Work UW professor or CORE GIS on wetland assessment contract.
- Send group link to Phase 2 Edge of Field Monitoring study.

### **Next Meeting**

The next VSP meeting will be November 16<sup>th</sup>. This is the third rather than second Wednesday of the month to avoid conflict with SCD Food and Farm Expo.