

Minutes
Work Group
Spokane County Voluntary Stewardship Program
May 12, 2021
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Work Group Members Present: Jay Cronk, Casey Flanagan, Amanda Parrish, Methea Sapp

Staff: Lindsay Chutas, Walt Edelen

Facilitator: Andy Dunau

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

Minutes: Due to lack of a quorum, motion to approve minutes was delayed to the next meeting.

VSP Biennium Funding: The biennium budget approved by the legislature has VSP funding at a slightly reduced amount. The CD will attend a budget workshop at the end of May and prepare the next biennium budget for review with the workgroup.

VSP Coordinator Recruitment: A job description for a new coordinator is almost complete. The CD expects to “fly” the position in the next week or two. The workgroup will be informed and is encouraged to circulate for potential candidates.

5-Year Report Update and BOCC Presentation: Based on guidance from the Commission, review and approval of the 5-year report is expected to follow the following timeline:

- 45-day technical panel review and evaluation. Complete by circa June 18.
- Public meeting for technical panel to discuss each members’ review and evaluation. September 9.
- Decision by Commission Executive Director to approve and disapprove. Between October 9 – November 9.

The CD has also drafted a letter to the Board of County Commissioners summarizing submittal of the report and offering to provide them a presentation.

2-Year Report Development: Andy will begin development of the 2-year report in June. As the timing coincides with the 5-year report, the information will largely be the same. Both the 2 and 5-year reports are RCW requirements of opting in to VSP. The 2-year report, however, is not reviewed or evaluated by the Commission, the VSP Technical Panel, or the VSP Statewide Advisory Committee.

RCPP Funding and Grant Status: NRCS did not approve another round of RCPP for Spokane. The Conservation District has developed a rotating schedule to continue support of the Commodity Buffer Program. Contract negotiations with Ecology to carry out approved 319 grants is complete.

Informational Updates

Conservation Map Additions: Lindsay showed additional updates to the Conservation Map that Seth entered for commodity buffers. Lindsay will work with Seth to add more diverse projects.

County Shoreline Master Plan Updates: The County is updating their master plan. Lindsay will attend related meeting and review to determine if there is any significance to VSP.

CAO Commission Advisory: The Commission issued advisories regarding 1) definition of new or changed agricultural land status that include critical areas and 2) jurisdictional application of critical area ordinance activity on ag land. The advisories are in response to inquiries from other counties opting into VSP. In a call with Commission staff, Spokane VSP was reassured that these advisories do not affect the adopted work plan principle that Spokane VSP activities occur on a voluntary basis. Enforcement activities will only occur through the county and/or applicable state agency. That said, VSP is working collaboratively with the county to identify VSP related policy and ordinance activity that the work group will, as it deems appropriate, provide an opinion.

Processing County Planning Notifications: The county is now notifying VSP of all planning and proposed zoning changes that relate to critical areas on ag lands. The group discussed a process to both assure transparency for work group members and offering input to the county when desired by either staff or a work group member. The following was agreed to:

- 1) Lindsay will establish a google drive folder that all county notifications and related documentation will be placed.
- 2) The VSP Coordinator will email the group when a notification has been received and a link to the google drive with the materials.
- 3) The VSP Coordinator will review all notifications and make recommendation as to whether the work group should provide feedback to the county.
- 4) If either the Coordinator or work group member wishes to provide feedback to the county, it will be put on the next VSP work group agenda for discussion. In the event feedback is required before the next VSP meeting, a combination of email and/or an ad-hoc virtual meeting will occur to review the matter.

Other: Walt reported that the CD has begun “phase 2” of the River Mile 17 stream bank stabilization project. Located just downstream of the River Mile 17 project in Valleyford, an additional 3000’ of stabilization will occur. In 2022, the CD will initiate an erosion and ag inventory on the Hangman Creek mainstem. This will include comparing and assessing new vs. old erosion that has occurred since the last inventory in 2004.

Walt also noted that the Palouse CD is interested in Spokane VSP adding a corner of Whitman County that includes the Little Hangman to Spokane’s reporting. They have limited resources and this tributary connects with Spokane VSP activities in the Hangman drainage. Further staff discussions will occur and, if appropriate, a recommendation will be made to the work group at the next meeting. Casey reported that Ecology contracted with the Spokane Tribe of Indians to conduct habitat restoration work, inclusive of fencing and planting, in the Chattaroy and Little Spokane drainages.

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Listening Session Report

Amanda presented on listening sessions The Lands Council organized to better understand producer perspectives on participating in riparian buffer adoption in Washington State.

There were 17 participants representing crop and/or livestock producers. 14 of these participants had participated in a NRCS program, state program, or self-funded projects. 3 had not adopted a riparian restoration activity.

Participant identification of major benefits from participating included improved ecology (e.g.—water quality), relationships with conservation staff, and improved management of their operations.

Significant challenges included management (e.g.—weeding and fuel load), lack of program flexibility (e.g.—buffer width), relationships with Ecology, and cost (e.g.—insufficient payment for land value).

Recommendations included increase program flexibility, better align what's allowable based on-site specific conditions, increase financial support based on site specific costs, and improve Ecology delivery of initial contact.

Action Items and Closing:

- Develop 2-year Report
- Biennium Budget Development
- VSP Coordinator Recruitment, Send Job Description to Group
- Additions to Conservation Map
- Create Google Drive for County Notifications
- Further investigate adding corner of Whitman County

Next Meeting

The next VSP meeting will be Wednesday, July 14th.