

**Minutes
Work Group
Spokane County Voluntary Stewardship Program
January 20, 2021
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m**

Work Group Members Present: Chad Atkins, Jay Cronk, Casey Flanagan, Doug Greenlund, Ty Meyer, Amanda Parrish, Kevin Paulson, Methea Sapp

Staff: Doug Phelps, Lindsay Chutas

Facilitator: Andy Dunau

Guest: Levi Keesecker

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

Minutes: Casey made a motion to approve the November minutes. Ty seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Spokane County Planning Department Letter: Doug reported that the planning department has now added him to the list of individuals receiving notices regarding comprehensive plan updates. This will assure the VSP work group can comment on actions affecting agriculture and critical area intersections.

5-Year Report Development

Doug started by explaining that staff was going to first share the key statistical updates that are the foundation for reporting and get input from the group. He'd then show how staff is inputting this information into the report template for wetlands and participation benchmarks, again asking for group input. At the next meeting, staff will provide any further updates on the underlying data and further review input into the template. The expectation is that by the March or April VSP meeting, the work group will be able to take a vote on submission of the report to the WSCC.

Table 8: Key Conservation Practice Data Base: Doug shared Table 8 gains for key conservation practice targets included in the work plan. Compared to the 2011 base line used for VSP, all conservation practices met or exceeded targets. In several instances, the target was significantly exceeded. For example, the Conservation Tillage target was exceeded by 637%. This shows both the priority given to these practices and the effect of additional funding from USDA and WSCC. Kevin asked if this could work against VSP in the next reporting period as that level of growth is not likely to be sustainable. Staff responded this wouldn't be the case because meeting or exceeding targets is based on percentage increases against the 2011 baseline. Doug also clarified that results only reflect reporting for newly installed practices. Further, the group discussed how mulch vs no till practices are determined.

Comparative GIS Mapping: Lindsay shared a table showing comparisons of agricultural and critical area intersection net changes between 2011 and 2017. She first reviewed the sources of GIS data and changes in data sets from 2011 to 2017. She then reviewed types of changes that could occur, e.g.—ag lands could increase or decrease based on whether owners stopped or started farming. There is also some inherent error in the GIS data sets. Rather than simply comparing the difference in critical areas between the time periods, staff only analyzed the acreage of critical areas that intersected with ag activity. This normalized the datasets to the focus of VSP. Staff is still working on interpreting the results.

Aerial Imagery, Spatial Analysis: Lindsay walked the group through a PowerPoint with images and tables showing gains and losses calculated using aerial imagery analysis. As with GIS mapping, there is a margin of error inherent to the process. At this point, staff is still interpreting the results to determine a margin of error for the analysis.

Lindsay went on to show how a variety of factors can affect the data set and comparisons. For instance, the Yale Road fire accounts for roughly half vegetation loss between 2011 and 2017. Other sources of loss include development, silviculture, ag expansion, and other vegetation removal. If it is determined that losses exceed the margin of error, those factors will be evaluated to determine whether any loss is attributed to agriculture. Levi reported other VSP projects are going through the same analysis, and VSP is not responsible for losses out of its control including loss due to climate change.

The group discussed that it was encouraging that GIS Mapping and Aerial Imagery were showing similar results. Had they not, further analysis would be needed to understand why they are significantly different.

5-Year Report Template Input

The work group was satisfied with how data is being input into the template for wetlands and participation benchmarks. As also discussed at the previous meeting, there are rows and rows of data that need be included because we're matching up each goal and its benchmarks with each watershed planning area. Doug estimates about 550 rows of data will ultimately be entered for the report.

Staff is also working with Levi on how to provide watershed wide data for the county as well as data separated out by each WRIA in the county. The work plan, per the legislation, emphasizes meeting county wide watershed benchmarks. Staff appreciates why the state wished to have WRIA by WRIA data as well. Fortunately, the data collection tools developed can support this additional analysis. Meeting the overall goal and benchmarks, however, is based on a county-wide watershed assessment.

The group also discussed that the template does not provide a focus on demonstrating contributions to ag viability because that's encouraged but not mandated in the legislation. Staff believes, and the work group is encouraging, use of the participation benchmarks section as a way to highlight ag viability assistance. For instance, securing funding to enhance and expand

farm corridor activities clearly assists ag viability for the fast-growing area of small farm operations.

Project Development and Technical Assistance

Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP): Doug discussed progress being made. The South Farm Corridor is developing new marketing materials and web site updates. They are also making progress on inspiring more farmer led leadership. Membership in this corridor has now increased to 22 farms. Meeting participation includes members plus other interested community members.

Initiation of the Spokane Valley Farm Corridor is scheduled for May. SCD is currently generating a list of farmers that may be interested in joining and encourages VSP members to provide any input.

Changes to Conservation Project and Development List: Casey noted that two projects, a riparian planting in Tekoa and a livestock exclusion and planting project in Spangle, are complete. Doug has updated the list.

Ty explained that a new grant for bio-farming is allowing them to pilot innovative approaches to reducing or eliminating synthetics to improve soil health. This also provides the benefit of improving water quality due to runoff. They are working with 8 large providers working 70 to 80 thousand acres of farmland.

RCPP Submission: The SCD submitted a new \$2.7 million RCPP funding request in December to USDA. Focused on Spokane County, it includes funding for conservation practices to support the needs of 50,000 acres; 2,000 acres of bio-farming practices, 400 acres of streambank stabilization; and 4 fish barrier removal projects.

Lands Council Listening Sessions: 319 funding is being used by the Lands Council with assistance from the University of Idaho to conduct two virtual listening sessions with farmers at the end of February. They want to learn more about opportunities and barriers to farmers engaging in installation of conservation practices. Incentives to participate include a \$40 cenex gift card. Amanda will share a flyer with Doug, who will distribute to VSP group and try to cross promote through SCD electronic newsletter.

Draft 319 Selection List: Ecology released the draft list of 319 projects to be funded in 2021. The SCD is on the list for developing a feasibility study for new septic system technology to support Newman Lake homeowners. And the Lands Council is on the list for Newman Lake and Hangman Creek work that will focus on installation of Beaver Analog Dams, a tree give-away to support bank stabilization, and riparian planting.

Action Items and Closing:

Administration:

- Update budget and expense report

5-Year Report

- Lindsay to complete aerial imagery analysis
- Lindsay to develop maps showing gains and losses
- Doug to enter template data for Fish and Wildlife, Frequently Flooded Areas and Geologically Hazardous Areas

Monitoring:

- Continue development of Edge of Field Monitoring report

Next Meeting

The next VSP meeting will be February 10th.