Walla Walla County VSP
July '17 Work Group Meeting Minutes

Date: July 11th, 2017 Time: 1:00 p.m. Place: Conservation District Conference Room

Board Members Present:
Brian Burns, Tri-State Steelheaders
Judith Johnsons, Kooskooskie Commons David Haire, CTUIR

Board Members Absent: Jonathan Hellburg-Wilson, Ag. Community, Brian Maiden, Ag. Community, Jason Bulay, Blue Mtn. Land Trust, Mark Klicker, Ag. Community, Robert Riley, Ag. Community

Also present:
Heather Kosaka, DOE Tom Glover, WW County Planning
Tom Schirm, WDFW
Audrey Ahmann, Renee Hadley, Lisa Stearns, Joanna Cowles of WWCCD
Zoë Hanley, member of the public

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Vice-chair David Haire

Minutes: The minutes were reviewed by those present, but in the absence of a quorum were not approved.[1]

Updates:

1) **Results of the informal public comment period.** Hadley told the group that the plan had been released via the website and hard copies were placed in all of the public libraries in the county. There were also two news articles inviting comments. Each comment was reviewed in turn (attached). The first was in regard to pollinator protection and requested adding pollinators due to their importance to agriculture. The group discussed ways to incorporate pollinator protection in the plan and advised that pollinator protection be added to the stewardship plan template. Pollinator protection is already part of NRCS conservation planning. Hadley agreed to work it into the section on wildlife and will look at adding a list of pollinator plants. The second set of comments were discussed. The group considered ways to clarify the difference between VSP and other government approaches and suggested adding a paragraph to the beginning of the document. The group agreed that it will be important to be sure landowners are committed to the goals of their stewardship plans. Part of VSP includes suggested enhancements; landowners will be encouraged to begin these and be given, at a minimum, technical assistance. The last comment was primarily about starting a stewardship plan for the landowner, not a comment on the Work Plan itself.
2) **Draft VSP Conservation Planning Worksheet:** The group dicsussed adding an explanation of the consequences of not protecting critical areas. Ecology has a focus sheet that might be helpful explaining how certain practices benefit water quality. The

[1] Draft minutes were posted to the website.

group discussed adding links to websites showing what has happened to areas when critical areas are not protected.

3) **Regulatory Assurance** Hadley found that Ecology was not able to offer regulatory assurance to VSP participants because so much varies at any one site. For example, the steepness of adjacent slopes, farming practices and flow present can affect the width of a buffer needed to protect water quality. The Farmed Smart program was developed with work from the Direct Seed Association with Idaho and Oregon producers and goes beyond the statutory requirements of VSP.

Work Plan Review: Those present agreed it would be best to respond to the comments and make changes to the document before submitting for state review. David Haire mentioned that the CTUIR is conducting an internal review. Hadley said the state has offered an informal review process but informal reviews will only be done on a time-available basis—if another plan is submitted for formal review the informal review will be bumped.

General Discussion

Tom Schirm asked how state priority species were addressed in the plan. Hadley explained they are not directly addressed but are protected through Fish and Wildlife Habitat Critical Areas. Schirm's concern is for remnant endangered species that rely on the last of the shrub steppe in the county. Hadley thought the planning worksheet (part of the Stewardship planning process) could have an endangered species section in the Wildlife Supplement. Cowles mentioned that NRCS has a general habitat assessment tool called Tech. Note 14, as well as species specific assessments that could be useful in stewardship planning.

Lisa Stearns is working on developing the county map to show critical areas on parcels without displaying landowner information. The current map is also slow to load due to its many layers so she is working on that issue as well.

Public Comments: There were no public comments.

With no further business on the agenda, the meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Audrey Ahmann	David Haire
WWCCD	Vice Chairman

Next meeting: August 1st 1:00

Public Comments to Walla Walla County VSP work plan as of July 6, 2017

1) Doug Venn via phone (509-629-8808 and 509-849-2476) 6/27/2017

He would like to see the plan include pollinator protection. He specified leaf cutter, alkali, and honey bees. He said all are important to agriculture producers, especially to orchardists and alfalfa seed producers. He also said they are threatened by spraying star thistle which is an important nectar source for bees and pesticide/insecticide use. In addition, he expressed appreciation for the plan and the amount of work it represented.

2) Mike Denny via in person walla2.birder@outlook.com 6/26/2017

In general, the VSP work document is fairly cohesive. The main weakness of the plan are listed below.

- Plan appears reactive to regulation instead of taking a proactive approach.
- Need more correlation between regulatory enforcement and the landowners due diligence. If WWCCD is investing time and resources to aid landowners, the landowners need to be vested for the long term gain.
- Need clarification: how do we make VSP clear that it is not the same as other gov't programs?

  Education on the risks of certain practices/areas will be essential. Specifically, what consequences can occur with no action? What are options/BMPs to reduce regulatory risk? What BMPs are currently working vs. which practices might trigger concern?

3) C. landowner via email (prefers to stay anonymous)

We have looked it over and are interested in the program. We need to meet to discuss at some point. We have made quite a few changes already to deal with the erosion issues and water...would like to know what other improvements could be done aside from previous improvements.