



Walla Walla County VSP

Dec. Work Group Meeting Minutes

Date: Dec. 2, 2016 Time: 1:00 p.m. Place: Conservation District
Conference Room

Board Members Present:

Robert Riley, Ag. Community	Jason Bulay, Blue Mtn. Land Trust
David Haire, CTUIR	Mark Klicker, Ag. Community, via phone
Brian Burns, Tri-State Steelheaders	Judith Johnson, Kooskooskie Commons
Jonathan Hellburg-Wilson, Ag. Community	Brian Maiden, Ag. Community
Tom Schirm, WDFW, by phone	

Representatives of Other Agencies: Perry Beale, WA Dept. of Ag.; Evan Sheffel, Washington Farm Bureau, by phone

Also present:

Joanna Cowles, Lisa Stearns, Audrey Ahmann, Jeff Klundt, Renee Hadley, WWCCD:
Kevin Scribner, Brian Mahoney, Brandy Pettit, all of Anderson Perry

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Chairman Mark Klicker

Minutes: The minutes were reviewed by those present. Robert Riley moved and Judith Johnson seconded to approve the minutes as presented, motion passed.

- 1. Anderson-Perry and work plan development:** Brian Mahoney of Anderson Perry met with the Conservation District staff to determine which sections of the work plan various personnel would draft. He plans to gather the information and submit it to the work group for editing, additions, and approval.
- 2. Discussion: Ag. Viability:** The group discussed Geologically Hazardous areas. Most of the county (94%) has been designated as Geologically Hazardous critical areas susceptible to wind erosion (silty soils) and/or water erosion. These are either highly erodible land or seismic hazardous, that is, subject to liquefaction during an earthquake. In general, the protection goal for areas susceptible to erosion is to limit soil loss which is also the major concern for protecting the viability of farming.

The purpose of the discussion was to determine the following:

- What are the obstacles to maintaining agriculture viability when farming ground prone to erosion?
- What actions can be taken to mitigate those obstacles?
- What are the obstacles to protecting these critical areas?
- What actions can be taken to promote protection of these?
- What are factors out of the control of the producer in these critical areas?

Obstacles to continued agriculture viability described by the members included:

- Cost of adopting no-till/low-disturbance tillage, both in transition and yield
- Loss of fertility due to erosion of soil
- Increased weed-resistance due to increased chemical application under low-till systems
 - Could lead to return to conventional tillage, increasing erosion
 - Increasing Russian thistle and cheat grass
- Higher costs of preserving residue: managing residue raises short-term per-acre costs, burning impacts air quality, also some concerns about baling and long-term fertility

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- Access to some of the ground prone to eroding is limited by seasonal factors (e.g., steep saturated field access roads)
- Participation of landowners. Since WW Co. is at the cap each year for CRP, no new ground is allowed into the program unless others drop out.

Actions described by the members to mitigate these obstacles included:

- Continue programs such as CRP and CSP to reduce the costs of transition to low-till
- Installing wind breaks, currently done in neighboring counties and by orchardists, to reduce soil loss
- Soil testing
- Information sharing: new research, new technology
- Crop selection; perennial crops to reduce soil disturbance
- Residue management techniques and maintaining organic matter in and above the soil; baling chaff to control spread of weed seed

Obstacles to protection of these critical areas are similar to those that affect continued ag. viability.

- Cost of adopting low-till systems, both in transition and yield
- Increased weed resistance, weeds outcompeting native plants
- Soil loss due to wind and water erosion, conventional tillage
- Residue removal
- Outside program limitations such as CRP caps that limit enrolling steep and difficult to manage erodible ground, programs do not necessarily target the most vulnerable acreage
- Unintended consequences of other agency's actions (e.g., public road maintenance that cuts into the road banks making them steeper and more susceptible to additional erosion. WA vs. OR water use, DNR vs Ag burns, historical actions with unforeseen negative consequences)

Actions to mitigate these obstacles also mirror those that maintain ag. viability

- Support and expand farm programs such as CRP and seek other sources of funding
- Conservation easements
- Edge of field buffers, grassed waterways
- Produce a comprehensive list of sources and programs to aid producers in meeting protection goals
- Reduce burning
- Seek additional support such as Floodplain By Design to manage stream erosion
- Continue with Irrigation Efficiency/local water plans on farms to promote best management of water

Factors out of the control of the landowner/ag. producer:

- Weather events such as quick snow melts that overwhelm erosion control efforts
- Types of soils and steep slopes
- Changes in weather patterns (warmer winter leads to faster snow melt, more stream bank erosion, earlier drought, earlier use of irrigation water, faster depletion of river flow, drier soils which are more susceptible to wind erosion)

- Prior damage such as the work done on Dry Creek which resulted in increased stream bed incision (deepening)
- Natural disasters like fire (reducing vegetation cover and moisture retention, increasing wind erosion)
- Air quality/water quality water use activities outside of WW political boundaries, such as DNR prescribed burns, upper WW River and tributaries (irrigation and flood management)
- CRP caps and other federal-state restrictions on program

The group agreed these need to be included in the work plan and acknowledged as limitations so that our county is not penalized for things we are unable to mitigate or plan for.

Renee Hadley discussed seismic liquefaction as it applies to critical areas identified by the County. There are about a dozen active faults in WW county (some major). Liquefaction occurs where sandy silty soils are below groundwater. This can affect the WW River corridor and other river corridors. Agriculture users could adopt practices to decrease water saturation but this would in turn diminish another critical area, aquifer recharge, which is a more immediate concern. The plan must address all critical areas and concerns; when it comes to liquefaction, the plan could simply state that individual stewardship plans will address liquefaction by encouraging adoption of the best available science for irrigation water resource management. This is the only measure related to liquefaction that ag producers can control.

3. Open Discussion:

The group discussed the limitations of compiling information to be used to establish the baselines and benchmarks. For example, a lot of HEL ground is in grass cover but not enrolled in CRP. Due to privacy regulations, NRCS and FSA are not at liberty to disclose what ground is enrolled in which program, and do not keep statistics on enrolled acreage. It was suggested that gathering and organizing this information might be a goal of the plan. Perry Beale suggested using available land imagery through Dept of Ag to assist with quantifying existing land use with an overlay of mapped critical areas

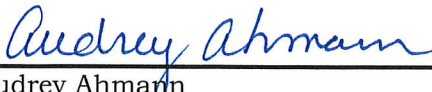
Columbia County has continued to express an interest in collaborating to avoid replication of efforts. Columbia has suspended meetings until the state responds to the two piloted county VSP work plans.


In response to a question regarding how much the work plan should focus on HEL when it is so broad (94% of the county) Mark Klicker suggested the work plan identify areas most in need of attention, determine what programs have been successful and can address the financial burden on producers, and then what needs to be done to protect critical areas. Individual stewardship plans can have components to address all critical areas on any producer's farm, but the work plan itself can set outreach goals and target efforts to particular areas of concern. Priority areas should be identified after identifying general overviews of each critical area.

Public Comments: There were no members of the general public in attendance.

With no further business on the agenda, the meeting adjourned at 2:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted


Audrey Ahmann
WWCCD


Mark Klicker
Chairman

Next meeting: January 3, 1:00

