



Walla Walla County VSP
April Work Group Meeting Minutes

Date: April 4, 2017

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Place: Conservation
District Conference Room

Board Members Present:

Jason Bulay, Blue Mtn. Land Trust

David Haire, CTUIR

Judith Johnson, Kooskooskie Commons

Mark Klicker, Ag. Community

Robert Riley, Ag. Community

Tom Schirm, WDFW

Board Members Absent: Jonathan Hellburg-Wilson, Ag. Community, Brian Burns, Tri-State Steelheaders, Brian Maiden, Ag. Community

Also present:

Joanna Cowles, Lisa Stearns, Audrey Ahmann, Renee Hadley, of WWCCD

Kevin Scribner, Eleanor Schroeder, Laurie Parry, of Anderson Perry

Lauren Prentice of WW County Planning

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 David Haire seconded to approve the minutes, motion passed.

1. Update: County Commissioners meeting

Hadley presented progress on the Work Plan to the County Commissioners who then voiced their appreciation and support of the work done thus far by the Work Group.

2. Review of Work Plan excerpts related to Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas.

Hadley reported that Burns suggested a formatting change so the listed goals have a similar structure. She said that goals are not listed in order of importance. The group agreed that the first goal listed (Improve wildlife habitat by maintaining edge of field buffers/strips) was too specific; it should instead state something like "Enhance and improve wildlife habitat" with specifics such as "maintain edge of field buffers" listed as actions. The group agreed to add a goal of increasing incentive programs to help ag. producers improve habitat. In looking at the goal listed fourth (Coordinate with WW County Planning regarding zoning, annexations and rural development) Johnson suggested including other agencies that do conservation and restoration work. Johnson also mentioned developing maps showing these critical areas which is listed in table 3-1 under "What can we do?" Prentice explained the county maps were developed using the county's 2008 Best Available Science Review document.

Hadley reported that sections 1,2, and 3 are drafted and section 5 almost done, and requested that the Work Group take a closer look and bring comments to the next meeting.

3. Discussion, monitoring:

Hadley opened with the Commission's monitoring toolkit which shows state monitoring programs. http://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/VSP-Monitoring-Toolbox-framework_Mar9.pdf

Parry directed the group to some basic opening questions: before we can monitor, we need to know what information we have and what we want to know. Stearns said that at the regional meeting, work groups were encouraged to choose metrics with care; metrics need to be both doable and provide the information needed. Several groups (TSS, RCO, Kooskooskie Commons) are doing some monitoring. Monitoring could be a simple count such as how many instream structures have been installed and how many have been added.

Johnson asked about funds to implement monitoring, which is generally underfunded. Ahmann noted that one of the draft work plans has a budget page; something similar could be developed for the WW Work Plan and added as an appendix for legislative consideration.

Hadley was asked what happens to VSP after work plan development if no funding is provided. Because VSP is voluntary, there is no plan for additional state implementation funds. Thus the Work Plan should look to existing programs for improvements. However, under VSP, while the county must show no net loss from 2011 benchmarks, enhancement is not required.

In response to a question, Hadley explained that the table of Restoration and Conservation Efforts (table 2-4) is linked to a spreadsheet detailing each project listed and the agency that led the effort. Other conservation work in the county such as the Mill Creek Channel restoration is not included because it is not linked to an ag. producer.

Monitoring was discussed using number of fish screens installed as an example. Hadley explained one cannot just rely on total numbers installed as some were replacements. Questions arose such as must we count each item, or should we determine what a representative sample would be? Prentice suggested monitoring overall health of the critical areas and number of Individual Stewardship Plans, with some sampling to ensure the plans are enacted. Even so, as Klicker pointed out, 5 of 7 adjacent ag. producers could do everything right, but if two do not, then overall health of the critical area may degrade from the 2011 benchmark, so metrics showing individual work is important.

This led to a discussion of incentives for reluctant participants. While funding is an important incentive, the ag. producers agreed that social incentives are also very effective.¹ It was also mentioned that publicizing success stories could be an incentive by showing how stewardship can benefit viability. For example, Klickers found that new fish screens resulted in far less nozzle plugging on their irrigation systems. They could switch to finer nozzles and targeted irrigation; less irrigation improved orchard health. Stories like these can provide an incentive.

Monitoring of ag viability is also difficult. One indicator is farms remaining in production which is reported in the USDA census of agriculture. However, there is a three year lag between the census and the release of the results, which limits its usefulness.

¹ This could be a Good Stewardship sign, banquets to honor outstanding VSP producers, newspaper list of farmers participating in VSP. Century Farms were also mentioned; these are farms with more than 100 years continuous operation under one family (considered therefore sustainable) and recognized with an attractive sign.

Klicker volunteered to discuss monitoring with Evan Sheffield and report back to the group. Sheffield has mentioned the monitoring described in the Whitman Work Plan may be worth a look. David Haire will present the draft work plan to CTUIR for their response.

Public Comments: There were no public comments.

With no further business on the agenda, the meeting adjourned at 2:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted



Audrey Ahmann
WWCCD



Mark Klicker
Chairman

Next meeting: May 2, 1:00