



## Walla Walla County VSP May Work Group Meeting Minutes

Date: May 2, 2017

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Place: Conservation  
District Conference Room

### **Board Members Present:**

Jonathan Hellburg-Wilson, Ag. Community

David Haire, CTUIR

~~Tom Schirm, WDFW~~

Mark Klicker, Ag. Community

Robert Riley, Ag. Community

**Board Members Absent:** Jason Bulay, Blue Mtn. Land Trust, Brian Burns, Tri-State Steelheaders, Judith Johnson, Kooskooskie Commons, 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

Tom Glover of WW County Planning , Tom Schirm, WDFW

*Correction: Tom Schirm, WDFW  
is not a voting member.*

***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 Tom Schirm seconded to approve the minutes, motion passed.

### **Update: Sections 1-2-3 & 5**

Hadley sent the draft of the Work Plan to Work Group members for discussion at this meeting.

- 1. Section 1:** This section is primarily background material.
- 2. Section 2:** The tables (2-1 through 2-3) show actively farmed areas according to the 2012 USDA Census of Ag. Table 2-4 shows projects/practices implemented after 2011 to protect critical areas. Hadley was asked about total no-till/low-till conversions prior to 2011. She explained there are no overall numbers. NRCS provides numbers based on program enrollment but there was no tally of all *non-program* acres where producers adopted low-disturbance tillage. The total program acres is an undercount of all low-disturbance acres.
- 3. Section 3:** Each critical area is defined with goals, obstacles to protection and ag. viability, and lists of factors out of the control of the ag. producer such as seasonal drought. The Work Group had no comments.
- 4. Review of Table of Goals:** A table (see handout) was presented and is intended to show the critical areas (e.g. fish and wildlife habitat) with associated goals (e.g. Identify Fish passage barriers) and a measurable outcome (e.g. maintain fish passage) along with the benchmark and adaptive management, etc. The table was modeled on one suggested by the state modeling toolkit. [http://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/VSP-Monitoring-Toolbox-framework\\_Mar9.pdf](http://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/VSP-Monitoring-Toolbox-framework_Mar9.pdf) The Group discussed the adaptive management threshold. The state technical team found that Chelan's adaptive management action thresholds were too broad and vague. Hadley will review Chelan's and compare to our draft.

- 5. Other plans:** Hadley showed the Whitman County draft document. It has visual appeal (good graphics) and identified the functions of the critical areas. Schirm described some of the Technical Panel's thoughts on the Chelan and Thurston plans. Most of the Chelan plan's level of detail was good. It gave an estimated cost of implementing the plan (not installing on-farm practices but the monitoring of the VSP). The goals and the *who* and *how* on monitoring were clear. Thurston was less complete and considered too vague, with non-quantitative goals lacking clear strategy, plus the technical panel wants to see monitoring of the watershed and not just individual program participants. Thurston took the comments, amended their plan, and it was approved. Tom Schirm offered to forward the Technical Panel's comments on the two work plans. Asotin has developed a draft plan meeting all the requirements of the VSP legislation and a "working plan" derived from it that has only on the action part of the plan. (Implementation, monitoring)

It was suggested that the WW Watershed Management Partnership group be contacted to see what efforts they might have underway to monitor the watershed. Hadley agreed to do this.

### **General Discussion**

The question returned of what would happen if, after adaptive management, it was determined that the County was not meeting the protection goals of VSP. Hadley explained that to her knowledge, this would be taken as failure of VSP and the County would revert to the regulatory requirements of the Critical Areas Ordinance.

Scribner suggested that the adaptive management plan include review of the original benchmarks and monitoring to see if these are effective and appropriate for the critical area in question.

The group discussed the adaptive management threshold and it needing to be a specific measurable number. A statement like "Improve wildlife habitat" is too vague because that could mean restore existing areas or increasing # of acres or both.

### **Farmer Incentives:**

Mark Klicker again discussed Fish Friendly Farming; for VSP an equivalent could be VSP Program Participant plus signage. The Salmon Safe program requires participants adhere to land management standards approved by fish biologists and independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party verification. Consumer products from vineyards, orchards, legumes, even barley (harvested for beer) can have the Salmon Safe label. The Farmed Smart certification requires producers to implement a series of BMPs such as Weed Seeker technology and low-disturbance tillage. The Farmed Smart BMPs were verified as effective by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party and accepted by regulatory agencies. Like Salmon Safe labeling, Farmed Smart provides eco-labeling for products plus participating farmers are granted some regulatory protection.

**Set-asides** (that is, taking sensitive land out of production) were discussed. According to work group members, the bottom line is, if a farmer can set aside the land and break even on that land, s/he'll participate. The only other tool we have (beyond FSA/NRCS programs) is to remind the farmers of the consequence of failing in VSP.

It was asked if NW Grain Growers would be interested in helping pay for set-asides. The consensus was no, as they have such a large producer base they will not be affected by regulation under CAO, hence they don't have enough financial incentive to justify investing in VSP.

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It was suggested that Hadley contact Ecology about giving farmers regulatory protection if they participate in VSP. Shielding from Ecology would go a long way toward encouraging participation.

It was suggested that if the county agrees that participation in VSP is sufficient to declare a parcel Open Space, this would be an incentive for small holdings. Hadley will look into this.

The question of partial or inadequate funding of VSP by the state came up. If that happens, it will become a county decision: WW could continue VSP with County funds or end the program and revert to regulation under the CAO.

**Public Comments:** There were no public comments.

**With no further business on the agenda, the meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted



Audrey Ahmann  
WWCCD



Mark Klicker  
Chairman

Next meeting: June 6th 1:00