



Walla Walla County VSP  
Oct. '17 Work Group Meeting Minutes

Date: Oct. 3rd, 2017

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Place: Conservation  
District Conference Room

**Board Members Present:**

Brian Burns, Tri-State Steelheaders  
David Haire, CTUIR  
Robert Riley, Ag. Community

Mark Klicker, Ag. Community  
Jonathan Hellberg/Wilson, Ag. Community

**Absent:** Judith Johnsons, Kooskooskie Commons; Jason Bulay, Blue Mtn. Land Trust; Brian Maiden, Ag. Community

**Also present:**

Tom Glover, WW County Planning  
Evan Sheffel, (via phone) Farm Bureau  
Renee Hadley, Lisa Stearns, Audrey Ahmann, Joanna Cowles of WWCCD

Tom Schirm, WDFW  
John Wells, Anderson-Perry

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

**Minutes:** The minutes were reviewed. Jonathan Hellberg/Wilson moved and David Haire seconded to approve the September minutes as presented, motion passed.

- 1) **Summary of the Presentation of VSP and responses:** Hadley reviewed the presentation to the State Technical Panel held on the preceding Friday. She explained that formal review comments will be released on October 12<sup>th</sup>, then we have until the 24<sup>th</sup> to respond and adjust the Work Plan. She is planning to send a first round of edits before the 12<sup>th</sup>.
  - a. The reviewers wanted the goals listed in Table 5 tied back to the RCWs.
  - b. Reviewers pointed out that mapping is not a goal and suggested mapping be listed as a tool to achieve the goal of increased and rearing habitat. Schirm and Haire offered to supply additional maps of identified fish spawning and rearing habitat.
  - c. Reviewers suggested that the current monitoring goal of inventorying 10% of the wetlands a year be increased to 20%. This would mean the inventory could be completed within the first 5 years and could be included within the 5 year report. A concern was brought up that if VSP funds didn't continue, would the County be responsible to complete monitoring as stated in the goals? It is understood that yes the County would be responsible. The County does not have funds for inventories. Hadley clarified that the 1600+ wetland acres are private ground in the ag. interface. It was suggested that we specify the 10 or 20% goal is contingent on receiving supplemental state funds for VSP implementation, and that the inventory prioritize by the wetland size. Also, the plan needs to define further what is meant by inventory; is it a simple GPS location, an examination of aerial imagery, or a full delineation? Haire volunteered that he has wetland delineation training and may be available on a volunteer basis. It was suggested that Hadley see if the Watershed Council has any wetlands inventories. Burns suggested using student interns to inventory for quick presence of water and vegetation association photos and GPS coordinates. Since goals are intended to be monitored using existing available resources, Burns also suggested working with other agencies that are already monitoring known wetland (BLMT, TSS, KC, others).

- d. Ecology's review stated that the Work Plan focuses on critical aquifer recharge quantity (using Irrigation management BMPs) without addressing water quality. The group discussed how the ag community can improve water quality, noting that nitrate levels may climb due to past nutrient applications still percolating through the substrate. They also mentioned other sources of nitrates, especially septic. The group suggested adding that BMPs to address nutrient management (buffers, reduced tillage, weed-seeker technology) be listed as measures producers can take to protect water quality.
- e. Geological Hazardous Areas: A reviewer questioned how farmers will protect ground coming out of CRP. Work Group members said this happens for a variety of reasons: missed deadlines, economics, uncertainty over the farm bill, etc. The VSP statute specifies a producer can't be required to continue a cost shared practice under VSP, further, ag viability requires that producers have income from ag. land. Producers are not required to maintain grass cover but need to continue to protect this critical area. The group suggested the Work Plan encourage acres converting from CRP meet residue requirements (to prevent wind/water erosion) and use low-disturbance tillage. A reviewer also noted that mapping land cover, listed as a goal, should instead be a tool to meet a goal of protecting these critical areas.
- f. A reviewer asked how the Walla Walla VSP would address fire. The presentation of the Yakima Plan preceded the presentation of the Walla Walla plan and included an example of critical area impacts relative to fire. Specifically, how will the Work Plan protect critical areas from fire damage caused (directly or indirectly) from ag. activity. (Note by Schirm: the fuel load present in the shrub steppe is such that fires burn so hot, the shrub steppe is destroyed. But this level of damage is not seen in all critical areas that burn.) Hadley mentioned that periodic fires can reduce fuel load and keep the fires controllable. It was noted that the Indigenous People used fire as a tool for weed control and to maintain stands of native grasses and open forage as opposed to dense Hawthorne stands and weeds. Producers agreed that a controlled burn that gets away or a fire due to accident (e.g., combine fire) and damages a critical area is not the same as a producer taking deliberate action to damage a critical area. Sheffel said the reviewer who mentioned fire is new to the process. The group asked Hadley to add to the plan that fire is a possible event that could damage certain critical areas, though it can also improve them (grass cover, controlled burn to reduce fuel load), and unanimously agreed that damage to critical areas from fires<sup>1</sup> should NOT be counted against the county when determining if the benchmarks have been met.
- g. The revision in Table 5 to use zoning laws (to prevent structures from being built in the flood plain) seemed regulatory to the reviewers. The producers were stumped as to what action an ag. producer could take to address flood-plain connectivity, given the generally deeply incised stream banks and that normal ag. activity does not interfere with flood plain function. Hadley said a reviewer asked how VSP would impact a producer who graded and filled a flood area. Given the non-regulatory approach of VSP, continued educational efforts were suggested by the work group to ensure producers understand the importance of flood plain connectivity and manage their operation accordingly. Also, the normal BMPs about residue management and low-disturbance tillage are to be encouraged; high residue to diffuse river energy, buffers to allow sediments to settle out, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> It was taken as a given that an ag. producer would not knowingly and deliberately use fire to damage a critical area.


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- 2) **Next Step:** Hadley asked the group if they wanted to return for a meeting to approve changes made to the plan in response to reviewers. The group consensus was that Hadley has approval to make revisions to respond to reviewers and asked that she send these to the Work Group members. In turn she asked them to check their email accounts regularly over the next several weeks.

**Public Comments:** Evan Sheffel said written comments tend to reflect the discussions that occurred at the meeting.

**With no further business on the agenda, the meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted

  
Audrey Ahmann  
WWCCD

  
Mark Klicker  
Chairman

Next meeting: November 7th 1:00