



Walla Walla County VSP Work Group March 2020 Meeting Minutes

Date: March 3rd, 2020 Time: 1:30 p.m.

Place: Conservation District
Conference Room

Board Members Present:

Mark Klicker, Ag. Community

Judith Johnson, Kooskooski Commons

Brian Burns, Tri-State Steelheaders

Brian Maiden, Ag. Community

Guest: Leslie Michel, Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA)

Absent: Jonathan Hellberg-Wilson, David Haire, Robert Riley, Tom Schirm (WDFW, advisory)

Also present: Renee Hadley, Joanna Cowles Cleveland, Cat Garza, Audrey Ahmann of WWCCD

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m. by Chair Mark Klicker

Minutes: The December 2020 minutes were presented and reviewed. Johnson moved and Maiden seconded to approve the minutes as presented, motion passed.

Discussion:

- 1. Flooding impacts to ag. and critical areas:** Hadley reported staff action has been limited to collecting damage reports and cost estimates, which were forwarded to the county to be included in their FEMA request. The irrigation districts report it will take years to repair damage to infrastructure. Hadley spoke of landowners who asked for willow cuttings to plant in areas where the flood damaged vegetation. Several ag. producers allow district staff to take willow cuttings for restoration work like this. Work group members approved of the idea and asked that staff track the work and report back to them.
- 2. Reporting:** Quarterly reports were completed and the 5-year report is in the works. The report is to document protection of critical areas; if this is not achieved the county must implement the Adaptive Management Plan. Hadley expressed concern about screens and meters. The Work Plan calls for no more than a 10% drop from the number of screened diversions in 2016 and the same holds for meters. It is quite possible that more than 10% of the screens and meters were damaged or lost in the flood. The district is seeking screen and meter replacement funds. Screen funds may be available from BPA and WDFW. Hadley observed that NRCS does not fund irrigation pump pads or screen booms, just the screens. For meters, it was suggested that we approach Ecology for more funds; Hadley stated the district has been doing this without success. Johnson said metering with telemetry—monitoring water usage in the Basin—is one of the early-actions in the 2050 plan for Walla Walla. Maiden stated that meters are one of many tools to measure water use. There was frustration expressed regarding the “Use it or Lose it” rule as it applies to water rights. Regarding other water forum developments in the basin, Hadley mentioned the Bi-state flow study proposed two solutions to low-water flows: a 34,000-acre-foot reservoir or a 170 CFS pipeline. These projects are estimated to cost between 250 and 350 million dollars. Hadley was asked to determine the total number of irrigated acres in the Walla Walla Basin.

- 3. Outreach:** Hadley reported that recent outreach included discussion of VSP at the district Annual Meeting. The Touchet River Pesticide monitoring study conducted by WSDA was presented at the meeting. Michel explained as a non-regulatory agency WSDA is looking to find areas where producers need assistance, not regulation. For example, in another county, due to the nature of the pesticide found, WSDA was able to identify the source of contamination and worked with the producer to change application timing, stopping the downstream contamination. The current plan is to monitor the Touchet River for two more years and then move on since thus far, the Touchet River looks good. Returning to the annual meetings, Hadley reported that attendees were pleased with the information presented although the meeting did not result in new signups.

New Projects for review:

Project: Hadley presented a 3-landowner project to improve a riparian area. The project area is too small for existing programs such as CREP and consists of pasture and dryland wheat ground. Landowners have water rights and will irrigate the project site. Discussion included seeking lower cost plants and using more cuttings to reduce costs. **Maiden moved and Burns seconded to approve the 3 Landowner project, motion passed.** ¹

Cowles Cleveland presented a project on the Walla Walla River. This is a narrow site of about 12 acres coming out of alfalfa production. It is possible that 4 acres could be enrolled in CREP; the balance of the site would be seeded to native grasses. **Maiden moved and Johnson seconded to approve the project on the Walla Walla River as described, motion passed.**

Misc.

Approve Budget: Staff presented a draft budget for the biennium. Ahmann explained that the SCC had requested an approved budget. The contract with the county is for \$225,000.00 but the grant contract is for 216,000; some funds are being retained to ensure Work Plan goals are met. Discussion included that the funds show for implementing projects are primarily for staff time in developing projects for implementation. Maiden moved and Johnson seconded to approve the budget as presented, motion passed.

Hadley noted that The Blue Mountain Land Trust has not yet assigned a staffer to take Jason Bulay's place. Johnson said that there will be another River Restoration film festival at the Powerhouse theater.

Public Comments: Leslie Michel spoke of legislative bills her agency is following. SB 6303 will fund a soil health initiative with assistance from WSU, the Conservation Commission, and WSDA. SB 6514 will further restrict the use of Chlorpyrifos. SB 5947 is called the Carbon-Farming bill and supports a variety of sustainable ag. practices such as precision ag. and tree planting. HB 1622 directs Ecology to develop a drought emergency response plan and sets forth some elements it should include.


Mark Klicker informed those present that he would like to step down from the chairmanship so this will be an agenda item at the next meeting.

¹ The Work Group has asked that landowner names not be revealed when approving projects.

VSP March 3rd Work Group Meeting Minutes

With no further business on the agenda, Maiden moved and Burns seconded to adjourn the meeting at 2:45, motion passed.

Respectfully submitted

 /S/: David H. Haire 3-3-21

Audrey Ahmann
WWCCD

David Haire for
Vice Chairman

Mark Klicker
Chairman

Next meeting: June 2nd, 2020 at 1:00