



## Walla Walla County VSP Work Group July 2021 Meeting Minutes

Date: July 6th, 2021 Time: 1:00 p.m. Via: Zoom, call-in only

**Board Members Present:**

Robert Riley, Ag. Community

Judith Johnson, Kooskooski Commons

David Haire, CTUIR

Lindsey Williams, WWCC Ag. Dept.

Jonathan Hellberg-Wilson, Ag. Community

**Absent:** Brian Burns, Tri-State Steelheaders, Brian Maiden

**Also present:** Renee Hadley, Audrey Ahmann, Grant Traynor of WWCCD; Donald Sims and Lauren Prentice, WW County Planning; Tom Schirm, WDFW

***The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Vice-Chair David Haire.***

**Introduction:** Hadley introduced new WWCCD staff Grant Traynor. Traynor has a degree in Biology and Environmental studies and his family has an olive farm in California. He will be focusing on VSP.

**Minutes:** The May 2021 minutes were presented and reviewed. Johnson moved and Williams seconded to approve the minutes, motion passed.

**Action items/Discussion:**

- 1. Contract Status:** The county was sent two contracts for signature: one between it and the State Conservation Commission and the other between it and the district. Prentice said she would see if these are on the Commissioners' radar.
- 2. 2-Year and Quarter reports:** The quarter report is due July 10<sup>th</sup> and the 2-Year report at the end of August. Traynor is working on the 2-year report. Hadley said this will include the effects of the 2020 floods on critical areas, completed projects, the monitoring of CRP and lessons learned. Erosion is included though it is not a critical area per-se but does have a direct affect on ag. viability.
- 3. 5-Year Report:** Hadley reminded members that the 5-Year report is a summation of VSP work from May 2016 to the present. It has been submitted and the VSP Technical Panel will review it Thursday. The initial reviewers' comments were sent to work group members. Hadley stated the reviewers had similar comments on other counties' 5-Year reports. She is working with the Dept. of Ag and Ecology to make sure our monitoring plan meets expectations. Hadley will send updates on the 5-Year report to Work Group members.
- 4. May meeting revisited; Implementation Criteria:** Discussion of this at the May meeting was abruptly ended due to technical issues. Hadley reviewed the earlier criteria from the Work Group which focused work on projects near streams with multiple critical areas, e.g., an eroding stream with endangered fish species present and aquifer recharge potential. Hadley also mentioned the Work Group put a cap on funds for screens and meters. After discussion, the Work Group left criteria as is. Hadley then asked the work group to approve funding for two projects. The Yellowhawk project would restore the riparian area of 200

linear ft near the confluence with the Walla Walla river. The Russell project restores a riparian area of roughly the same distance and is planned in conjunction with an instream project funded by another source. Hadley said there was no direct ag. connection to the Yellowhawk Creek property and asked Work Group members for comment. Haire supported both, stating that these are important areas that need restoration. In response to a question, Hadley said the Work Group has the authority to direct the cost share spending as they see fit, providing the VSP connection is evident and that sufficient funds remain to fulfil the statutory requirements of the program. The remaining Work Group members supported the projects with Riley commenting that all such work is connected in one way or another to protection of critical areas.

5. **Updates:** As per the request from Haire, Hadley updated the Work Group on recent work by the conservation district. **Grants:** The district focused on grant writing and obtained some substantial grants: Floodplains by Design (Upper Mill Creek) to fund outreach, project installation, and river surveys; National Water Quality Initiative to assess another Mill Creek reach and identify projects that qualify for NRCS funding, and 5 Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) grants to complete 4 project designs and 1 construction project. VSP funded much of the staff time spent obtaining these grants. **CRP** work includes CRP field assessments completed for NRCS (89,000 acres in 2020, a more manageable 11,000 this year). Staff worked with several producers on a **Soils** project to get baseline soil information to add to the NRCS national database of US soils. Staff worked with the **Walla Walla 2050** plan where Ecology stated all local water plans will remain in effect for the next two years and not be subject to extent and validity checks. Johnson added that the final 2050 plan is out and asks for continued participation. Hadley then spoke of **Ecology letters** sent to two area livestock producers about possible water quality issues. These letters are resuming after a 4-year hiatus due to short staffing and Covid. Ecology generally responds to public complaints and observations from public roads. Finally, Hadley passed along a request from the Conservation Commission and Dept of Ag that folks report **drought impacts**. A producer asked Williams to request legislators declare a drought.
6. **Other agency updates:** Hadley asked members to update the Work Group on their respective agencies' actions. Haire said his department didn't issue a drought declaration as their sources are the deep basalt aquifer, which is steadily declining but not subject to seasonal water variations. Schirm of WDFW reported they are doing a lot of permitting for natural resource projects in Asotin, Garfield and Columbia counties and implementing another Tucannon habitat project. Johnson is back to doing field work installing projects which were paused during Covid restrictions and is also doing water quality monitoring. Williams said there is a public perception that there is not much demand for graduates in ag related fields, so the CC is working with legislators to help them see this isn't the case. Hellberg-Wilson reported that harvest is starting and 2<sup>nd</sup> cutting alfalfa is underway. Riley said the Farm Bureau is engaged and on top of ag.related issues at the state level. Sims stated that they are very busy with permitting and grateful for additional staff.
7. **Project presentations:** Hadley gave a slideshow presentation of planned projects with maps and site parameters. The project downstream of the Gose St. project will be coordinated with the County and USACE.

Respectfully submitted



Audrey Ahmann  
WWCCD

/s/: David H. Haire (10-5-2021)

David Haire  
Vice- Chairman

Next meeting: September 7th, 1:00 pm