



Walla Walla County VSP Work Group March 2022 Meeting Minutes

Date: March 1st, 2022

Time: 1:00 p.m. Via: Zoom, call-in only

Work Group Members Present:

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

Brian Maiden, Ag. Community
Judith Johnson, Kooskooski Commons
Jonathan Hellberg-Wilson, Ag. Community

Absent: Lindsey Williams, WWCC

Also present: Grant Traynor, Renee Hadley, Lynda Oosterhuis, Audrey Ahmann, Joanna Cowles Cleveland of WWCCD; Brian Cochrane, SCC; Morgan Morris, TSS; Tom Schirm, WDFW; Don Sims, WW County Planning; Corrie Thorne-Hadley, WDFW, joined the meeting in-progress.

The meeting began with introductions followed by an invitation for public comments. There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes: The Work Group members reviewed the December minutes. **Brian Burns moved and Judith Johnson seconded to approve the minutes as presented, motion passed.**

Updates on VSP Activities:

- 1. Commodity Buffers rolled out:** Traynor reported that the Commodity Buffer program has been launched and he has been getting the word out to producers. This program allows for rental payments on buffer acres based on adjacent crop value.
- 2. Outreach:** Traynor said there were about 55 in-person attendees at the WWCCD annual meeting and he received some good feedback on his presentation. There is a CRP maintenance meeting for growers this evening (March 1st). He presented VSP information at the Northwest Grain Growers meeting where he spoke to about 30 producers about the importance of VSP as an alternative to regulation.
- 3. Monitoring Feedback:** Traynor is developing a monitoring plan that meets the expectations of the VSP Technical Panel. He met with several agencies (CTUIR, USACE, WDFW) about their efforts and methods.
- 4. Projects.** Traynor had more information about projects introduced at the December meeting. These are two riparian buffers and a raptor habitat project. Traynor presented project specifics and draft budgets for each.
 - East Little Walla Walla: this project is a buffer somewhat greater than 35' in width totaling .57 acre along a small alfalfa field. The project is too small for contractors to install under hold-down rates for CREP. The neighbors declined to participate. The critical areas are habitat, frequent flood area, and summer steelhead spawning. Schirm offered to check into a possible fish barrier near the site and stated that even if there is a barrier the stream is still considered fish habitat. The E. Little Walla Walla is a perennial stream with historical fish use. DOE has a stream gauge; there may be a record of historical flow. Haire mentioned the Watershed Council

also has a gauge on it. After discussion, **Judith Johnson moved and Brian Burns seconded to approve the project as presented provided staff seek volunteers to help reduce labor costs, motion passed.**

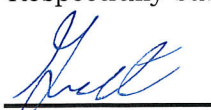
- Dry Creek Buffer and Pasture/Native grass establishment: The .55-acre project is 715 ft long. Due to the small size and possible landowner eligibility issues CREP is not considered a good fit. The buffer will be 30' minimum width and the neighbor is also interested buffering downstream acres. The critical areas are floodplains, habitat, and summer steelhead. Most of the area is bare without heavy weed cover. The landowner will remove a fence. It is contiguous with an upstream buffer project. There was discussion of including a livestock exclusion requirement in the landowner agreement. **Jon Hellberg-Wilson moved and Brian Maiden seconded to approve the project as presented with the caveat that staff seek volunteers to help reduce labor costs, motion passed.**
- Habitat planting and edge of field buffers: The landowner is interested in providing raptor habitat. In discussion with WDFW, Traynor found that pollinator habitat is advised for raptors as it attracts the prey animals needed by raptors. The landowner will establish pollinator habitat on small plots of outground near irrigation circles and field edges. The landowner is an organic producer and plans to control weeds by mowing. **Brian Burns moved and Jon Hellberg-Wilson seconded to approve the project as presented but exclude cost sharing of mobilization and maintenance mowing, motion passed.** The work group requested that the project be monitored for success.

5. Work Group Feedback: Equipment cost-share: Traynor reported that landowners are seeking cost share for weed-it systems which are cost-prohibitive. The Spokane CD has an equipment loan program but it requires 25% as a down payment. There are several ways to cost-share adoption of the new technology which can substantially reduce the amount of farm chemicals applied. The VSP could cost-share via a per-acre payment for fields sprayed under the new system or offer a flat amount to be applied to the down payment. After discussion, the work group consensus was that cost share be reserved for buffers and other priorities but not equipment.

6. Vacancy: There is still a vacancy on the Work Group. Those present agreed to help recruit a new member. David Haire said he would continue to run meeting as Vice -Chair.

The meeting was closed at 2:55 without a formal motion.

Respectfully submitted


Audrey Ahmann
WWCCD

/S/: David H. Haire

David Haire
Vice- Chairman

Next meeting: June 7, 1:00 pm