



Walla Walla County

VSP Work Group

March 7th 2023 Meeting Minutes

Date: March 7th, 2022

Time: 4:00 p.m. Via: Zoom and in person

Work Group Members Present:

Lindsey Williams, WWCC

Morgan Morris, TSS (alternate)

Judith Johnson, Kooskooski Commons

Phil Neuman, Mainstem Malt

Absent: Randy Bright, Ryan Rea, David Haire

Also present: Grant Traynor, Audrey Ahmann, Kayla Peterson, Renee Hadley of WWCCD; Tom Schirm, WDFW; Leslie Michael, WSDA soil scientist

The meeting began with an invitation for public comments. There were none.

In the absence of a quorum the minutes were not approved.

Project Updates: Traynor gave the following project updates:

- One of the two fish screens is complete (not billed yet) and the other in progress.
- Walsh Creek is planted with willows; the fence should be done by the end of the month.
- Pikes Peak reforestation: Trees are ordered, work crew is being lined up.
- Dixie Creek Catch Basin: Landowner was unresponsive; staff needed signatures to proceed. Staff tried multiple means of contacting landowner but eventually had to return the funds as without a landowner signature (commitment) plants and materials could not be ordered. The landowner had originally contacted the district seeking assistance.

General Updates: SCC is seeking funding to develop a Science Hub where SCC, Ecology, WSDA, and other agencies can share data and expertise to increase the partnering for natural resources.

There is a monitoring symposium March 9th via Zoom to discuss monitoring methods and how water quality data can be shared.

Traynor asked those present about using VSP funds to complete Soil Health Initiative sampling for dryland wheat producers. The goal is to assist the state in developing a baseline for soil health across the state. WSDA covers the cost of the soil analysis and the information is shared with the landowner. No identifying information is shared; ten landowners have requested the assistance. The Work Group members present agreed it was a good use of VSP resources.

VSP Monitoring, Work Plan: Traynor explained the state review of the WW Work Plan included a request to do more than monitor number of acres. The review panel would like to see evaluations of complexity, habitat diversity, etc., but it would require a significant increase of funds to do this given the number of acres. The best we can do with current funding is to spot check sites. For **Fish Habitat**, the suggested change is to focus on man-made barriers and not include natural barriers, as these are almost impossible to document due to the number of streams that would need monitoring. Schirm mentioned a state "Barrier Board" but most of the projects listed there have been addressed. Hadley

mentioned the district has a partial list from WDFW and will contact Dave Karl to see if there are additions. As for **Upland**, staff are completing CRP status reviews that include diversity and density of native plant species, but FSA is evaluating whether this information can be shared. The number of CRP acres is monitored using other sources. **Fish screen** monitoring is an enhancement goal because when screens are no longer used it is due to things outside producer's control like natural disasters. Of the 30 irrigators with screens surveyed, 25 were either functioning or had been replaced and 2 were no longer irrigating, which approaches the 90% goal. The baseline for screens is 343 fish screens installed by the district through a previous program. Staff also try to connect producers to other cost share sources. For **wetlands**, staff verify and map acres but the review panel would like staff to monitor function. Staff may be able to verify species present with landowner permission. Blue Mountain Land Trust has information but it cannot be shared for confidentiality reasons. **Frequently flooded acres** are counted via aerial imagery. Consistent LiDAR data would be ideal but is cost-prohibitive. **Critical Aquifer Recharge** is problematic as proving benefit (or harm) is virtually impossible. There is some talk of dropping it from the Work Plan. Hadley mentioned she attended a ground water conference and there were no solutions discussed. Ecology can identify some things like a pesticide bloom but no BMP can be proven to address such an issue. The benefits of ag. practices to reduce inputs and improve soil health take too long to show in an aquifer and in any event can't be traced back to the practices. It was suggested that springs be monitored but Hadley explained springs are a ground water exit, not an aquifer. It was suggested that a spring from a large ag. catchment basin feeding it might show how ag. practices affect water. **Wind/Water erosion** is monitored via aerial imagery and staff try to focus on acres in perennial cover. We are working with NRCS to see what information can be shared.

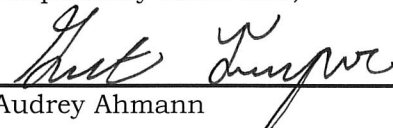
Partner Updates:

J. Johnson, Kooskooski Commons is preparing to plant a Yellowhawk and WWRiver site.
P. Neuman: Mainstem Malt is working with the Port of Columbia to develop a malt house which give ag. producers an additional market.

Hadley suggested at the next Work Group meeting, the rules regarding a quorum might be reevaluated. Traynor asked those present to spread the word that we are still short an ag. producer on the Work Group.

In the absence of a quorum, the meeting was ended at 5:35 without a formal motion.

Respectfully submitted,


Audrey Ahmann
WWCCD

 12/5/2023
David Haire
Vice-chair

Next meeting: June 6, 4:00 pm