



Walla Walla County
VSP Work Group
June 6th 2023 Meeting Minutes

Date: June 6th, 2023 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, Cat Garza, Annie Byerley, Renee Hadley of WWCCD; Tom Schirm, WDFW; Brian Cochran, SCC; Brian Burns, TSS, Jean Dolling (member of the public)

The meeting began with an invitation for public comments. A member of the public raised concerns and prompted discussion of aquifer recharge, the absence of beavers, new wells and high-water events.

In the absence of a quorum the minutes were not approved. Hadley suggested at the next meeting where a quorum is present, the work group define a quorum as 60% of the current board to accommodate times when the board lacks full membership.

Project Approval: The following two projects were presented for consideration:

- Yellowhawk meter project: this is for an older water right that irrigates a small orchard. Traynor confirmed the surface water diversion has a screen. The project was approved by consensus (the work group has previously approved using VSP funds for screens and meters but asked to be informed of projects).
- There are options for several projects along Yellowhawk and Cottonwood. Costs vary depending on the width of the buffers; increased funding may allow for larger (up to 75') buffers. A homeowner's association (Soaring Hawk) is involved. The proposed project has three components: two riparian buffers and replanting a previous site damaged by flood, along with maintenance funds.

VSP Monitoring, Work Plan: Traynor presented continued work on developing new goals. For Frequently Flooded Areas, considerations include how riparian projects can (or should) be used as an indicator of floodplain improvements. Riparian restoration can raise flood levels but also dissipate energy and trap and hold debris. The main concern is evaluating the impact of one project. A narrative can be presented and demonstrate buffer development, but proving effectiveness is almost impossible (given the variability in year-to-year flows, temperatures, flood events, development, etc). Cochran said the watershed scale by which VSP is evaluated adds complexity; can VSP show the lift of projects overcomes the drag of the areas where projects are not installed. For example, if of 10 landowners, 6 are using BMPs and 2 moving toward adopting them, can we demonstrate that the 6 are doing enough to make a difference? VSP is being asked to provide robust evidence and demonstrating that shade has increased will not be considered adequate. **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, which meets the 90% goal. For **wetlands**, staff worked to verify "wetland sites" that had been labeled as such based on

VSP June 6 2023 Work Group Meeting Minutes

topography maps but not field checked. Staff found the maps inaccurate; for example, creeks were labeled as wetlands. Three quarters of "wetlands" surveyed have not been wetlands.

Project Updates:

Traynor reported on projects completed with Supplemental VSP funds. There were 40 acres planted on Pikes Peak. Screens on Stone Creek and the WW River, and the Walsh Creek project with include buffer, livestock exclusion fence, and native grass planting. The latter has had good survival due to the high-water table.

Partner Updates:

J. Johnson, Kooskooski Commons completed a Yellowhawk and WWRiver confluence site but beaver and deer predation took a toll.

P. Neuman: Mainstem Malt continues to work with the Port of Columbia on a feasibility study to develop a malt house to give ag. producers an additional market.

L. Williams reported that the Community College has many vacancies and is increasing focus on agriculture.

Tri-State Steelheaders are continuing work on Mill Creek channel with strong funding support and projects in progress.

WWCCD completed 9 riparian projects and had a ceremonial tree planting on Caldwell Creek. Staff observed a large adult steelhead moving up and down Yellowhawk and it was observed resting in the shade afforded by a 2008 CURB project. The water was shallow but the fish successfully navigated it.

In the absence of a quorum, the meeting was ended at 5:20 without a formal motion.

Respectfully submitted,

Renee H. for WWCCD 3.6.2024

Audrey Ahmann
WWCCD

David Haire; 3/5/2024

David Haire
Vice-chair

Next meeting: October 4th, 4:00 pm