

Douglas County Voluntary
Stewardship Program

PRODUCER'S
HANDBOOK



*Everything you need to
know about the Voluntary
Stewardship Program in
Douglas County*

Contents

VSP Overview.....p.1
Frequently Asked Questions.....p.2
VSP Producer Survey.....p.5
Farm-Scale Plans.....p.6
Implementing Conservation Activities.....p.7
Educational Opportunities.....p.7
Technical Service Providers.....p.10

*The Voluntary Stewardship Program aims to protect critical areas where they intersect with agricultural activities, **through voluntary, incentive-based measures**, while at the same time improving the long term viability of agriculture.*

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Foster Creek Conservation District



Voluntary Stewardship Program Overview

The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) provides a **non-regulatory, incentive-based** method of critical area protection on lands that intersect agricultural activities. **VSP is an alternative** to the traditional method to protect critical areas, which is to enforce regulations adopted under Critical Area Ordinances of the Growth Management Act.

The primary goals of the VSP in Douglas County are:

- Promote conservation activities that protect and enhance critical areas, while maintaining and improving the long-term viability of agriculture;
- Focus and maximize voluntary incentive programs to encourage good land stewardship;
- Rely on voluntary conservation activities as the primary method of protecting critical areas. VSP will not require the cessation of agricultural activities or the use of regulations.



Figure: Anchor QEA

Frequently Asked Questions

What are critical areas?

Critical areas are specifically defined by the Growth Management Act (GMA). The five critical areas the GMA identifies are:

(1) fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas (2) wetlands (3) geologically hazardous areas (4) frequently flooded areas (5) areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water.

Are there critical areas on my land?

Critical areas are designated by the county, and each critical area has unique characteristics that are used for identification. Maps are a useful tool to help identify where critical areas occur, however, presence of critical areas is determined on an individual site basis.

To see if you have critical areas on your land, visit the Producer's Corner tab on the Douglas County VSP Webpage. There, you will find a link to the Critical Areas Web Map, which allows you to zoom in on your operation and see for yourself!

<http://www.fostercreekcd.org/programs/voluntary-stewardship-program/producer-s-corner/>

Who is eligible to participate?

All Douglas County producers can participate in VSP, regardless of whether or not critical areas occur directly on the land.

What is the difference between VSP and Critical Area Ordinances?

Critical Area Ordinances	Voluntary Stewardship Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection achieved through a regulatory pathway known as Critical Area Ordinances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection achieved through voluntary, incentive-based measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection of critical areas must be demonstrated and enforced on the individual parcel scale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection of critical areas must be demonstrated on the watershed scale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to your operation would require a critical area permit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No additional permits or regulations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Damage to critical areas must be offset at the landowner's expense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical area functions and values monitored at the watershed scale, and all producers in the watershed contribute to their protection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection typically achieved through measures such as mandatory no-touch buffers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A wide variety of conservation activities are available to protect and/or enhance critical areas, including many that you are already doing!

What happens if VSP fails in Douglas County?

Failure of the VSP work plan will trigger the regulatory approach described above to ensure critical area protection for areas with agricultural activities occurring. This would subject Douglas County producers to new regulations!

How could VSP fail in Douglas County?

The VSP work plan for Douglas County bases critical area protection on the amount of conservation activities that are implemented across the county. This means that the implementation of conservation activities that also enhance your agricultural viability is all that is needed to make VSP succeed! VSP in Douglas County could fail if producers do not continue to implement conservation activities that protect and/or enhance critical areas, or the implementation of activities is not communicated and accounted for.

What is a conservation activity?

Conservation activities are all stewardship actions being implemented by Douglas County producers that protect, preserve, and/or enhance natural resources. These include NRCs Conservation Practices, and all other stewardship actions.

Examples of conservation activities include, *but are not limited to*: conservation cover, conservation tillage (reduced till and no till), Global G.A.P IFA Fruit and Vegetables Standard Certificate, wildlife habitat management, irrigation water management, nutrient management, prescribed grazing, riparian buffers, integrated pest management, and organic certification.

Descriptions of these and other conservation activities can be found on the VSP webpage (see back page for web address).

How does VSP protect my privacy?

All VSP reporting is done at the watershed scale, not the individual parcel scale. This means that no personally identifiable information is necessary to implement VSP.

How do I benefit from participating in VSP?

- Participating in VSP contributes to its success, which means less regulatory burden on you and most Douglas County producers.
- FREE technical assistance is available to you to help plan and implement conservation activities.
- Cost-share funding is available to help offset any costs associated with implementing conservation activities.
- VSP only encourages the implementation of conservation activities that also are intended to benefit your agricultural viability.

How can I participate in VSP?

The rest of this handbook outlines the ways producers can participate in VSP. Participation in VSP is 100% voluntary.

VSP Producer Survey

Once every five years, a VSP producer survey will be administered. This is the simplest and easiest way to participate in VSP, and filling out the survey should take only a few minutes. The purpose of the survey is to identify current conservation activities being implemented, and landowner interests to implement future activities. **Every producer in Douglas County is encouraged fill out a survey each time it is administered (once every five years).**

Here are 3 important reasons to take the producer survey:

- **TO AVOID FURTHER REGULATIONS!** The survey is one of the primary ways the VSP accounts for all of the great voluntary conservation activities that you are doing out there. VSP succeeds by demonstrating to the state that Douglas County producers are protecting critical areas by implementing voluntary conservation activities. This means that your responses in this survey are necessary, and contribute to the success of VSP.
- **The information you provide in the survey will inform and direct future cost-share and educational opportunities.** This is your chance to tell us what cost-share and educational opportunities will benefit your operation. The conservation districts will use this information to apply for funding that benefits you.
- **It's anonymous and confidential.** VSP reporting is done on the watershed scale, so there is no need to match your answers to a spot on the map.

The survey can be completed online (see the VSP webpage for details), but will also be available at all technical service provider offices when it is currently being administered.

Farm-Scale Plans

There are three different types of farm-scale planning activities available to Douglas County producers **at no cost**. Farm-scale plans are used to help identify and implement conservation activities that address natural resource and agricultural viability concerns. The process provides you a one-on-one opportunity to discuss your operation with technical service providers, receive feedback, and ultimately develop a stewardship plan that meets your needs. **There is no requirement in VSP to receive any type of farm level planning to implement conservation activities.**

Each of the three plans fulfills a slightly different purpose, so the plan(s) you choose will depend largely on your own operational goals and concerns. The table on page 8 will help you choose the plan that is right for you.

The three types of farm-scale planning activities and their goals are:

- **NRCS Conservation Plan:** Identify resource concerns and the appropriate conservation activities to address them.
- **Multiple Species General Conservation Plan Site-Specific Plan (Site Plan):** Identify conservation activities and create a plan necessary to protect shrub-steppe habitat for four species of conservation concern. **The Site Plan is necessary to apply for an incidental take permit.**
- **Individual Stewardship Plan (ISP):** Identify critical area and agricultural viability concerns and develop a plan to address them.

Implementing Conservation Activities

The implementation of conservation activities is the goal of all levels of VSP participation. **Ultimately, the success of the Douglas County VSP depends on the implementation of conservation activities.**

There are many ways you can receive cost-share or technical assistance to implement conservation activities. NRCS offers funding and cost-share for a wide variety of conservation activities through various Farm Bill programs. Foster Creek Conservation District and South Douglas Conservation District offer several technical assistance and cost-share opportunities including programs for riparian restoration, biocontrols, fuels reductions, direct seed, and construction.

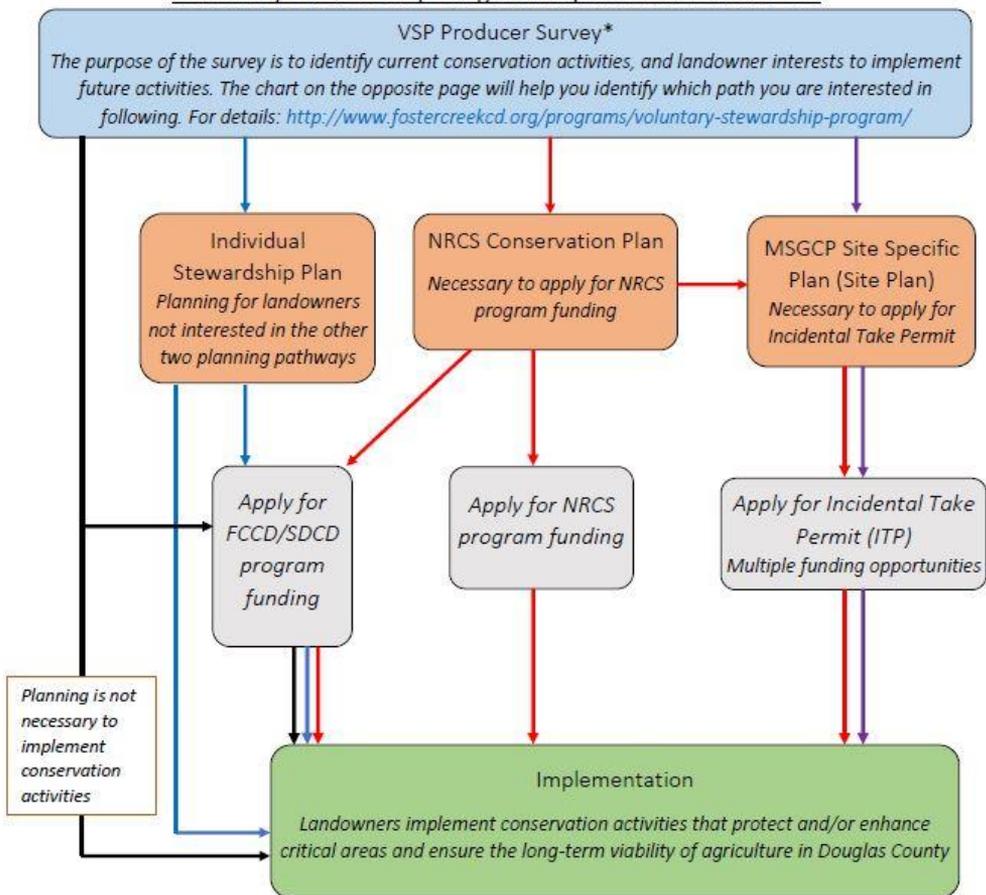
Even if you are not participating in one of the above programs, free technical assistance is available to you through VSP to help plan for future conservation activity implementation.

Educational Opportunities

Attending educational events and/or activities is another way you can participate in VSP. Educational events provide useful and demonstrated information, allowing you to make more informed decisions. Educational opportunities to be offered will include workshops, field tours, demonstrations, and meetings. If you are interested in a particular educational activity or topic, please let one of the Technical Service Providers know and be sure to include your request on the VSP Producer Survey!

	3 Types of Farm-Scale Plans Available to Douglas County Producers		
	Individual Stewardship Plan (ISP)	NRCS Conservation Plan	Multiple Species General Conservation Site Specific Plan (Site Plan)
Purpose	Identify critical area and agricultural viability concerns, and develop strategy to address the concerns	Identify resource concerns and conservation practices to address them	Identify resource concerns; identify conservation activities to conserve and enhance shrub-steppe habitat. The Site Plan will be used to apply for an Incidental Take Permit, which provides regulatory assurances to continue the course of lawful agricultural activities without imposing additional future regulatory restrictions.
Necessary to apply for...	ISP not necessary to apply for funding/cost-share or implement conservation activities	NRCS program funding/cost share	Incidental Take Permit (ITP)
Applicable Programs	VSP, other FCCD and SDCD programs	EQIP, SGI, CSP, VSP, MSGCP	MSGCP, VSP
Entities Responsible for technical assistance	FCCD, SDCD	NRCS (FCCD and SDCD may do work under an agreement with NRCS)	FCCD, USFWS
Field inventory required	No	Yes	Yes
Monitoring required	No	NRCS certifies that practice has been completed	Yes, per conditions of the permit
Plan intensity level	Varies, depends on landowner needs and concerns, but generally low-moderate	High	Moderate
Products	Narrative describing plan, including conservation activities to address critical area and agricultural viability concerns	Field inventory; narrative of resource concerns; suggested conservation practices to address resource concerns	Description and map of covered agricultural activities; map of habitat maintained with acres for each; description of voluntary conservation activities benefitting covered species' habitat; a monitoring plan
Fee	No	No	None to receive the Site Plan, but the Incidental Take Permit application fee for USFWS is \$100
Relationship to other plans (no plan is mutually exclusive)	Planning used if operator is not interested in Incidental Take Permit or NRCS programs. Applicable information from this plan will transfer to either of the other plans as long as the operation and circumstances remain consistent.	Will commonly be used as a first step towards applying for an Incidental Take Permit. Information from the NRCS Conservation Plan is used to develop the Site Plan.	Can be acquired without any other plan, although a common route will be to receive a NRCS Conservation Plan prior to a Site Plan. Information from the NRCS Conservation Plan is used to develop the Site Plan.
Point of Contact	Aaron Rosenblum (FCCD) 509-423-5990 Cell 509-888-6376 Office	NRCS Waterville Office 509-745-8561	Elizabeth Hanwacker (FCCD) 509-630-2369 Cell 509-888-6372 Office

Voluntary Stewardship Program Implementation Process



Key

Participation

Baseline for participation in VSP, Informational Level participation



Planning Level participation



Implementation Level participation



Apply for funding or permit



Planning Pathway

Individual Stewardship Plan (ISP)



NRCS Conservation Plan



MSGCP Site Specific Plan (Site Plan)



**A VSP Producer survey is not required to receive a plan, apply for funding, or implement conservation activities. However, it is requested because it helps to better understand and meet producer needs, as well as helps to show that Douglas County is protecting and enhancing critical areas.*

Technical Service Providers

Foster Creek Conservation District

203 S Rainier St. Waterville, WA 98858

509-888-6372

fostercreekcd.org

Contact for: General VSP inquires, incidental take permits, riparian restoration, biocontrols, direct seed cost-share, Farmed Smart program, all other cost-share projects within district boundaries.

South Douglas Conservation District

206 N Chelan Ave. Waterville, WA 98858

509-745-9160

Southdouglascd.com

Contact for: Firewise, fuel control projects, Vets on the Farm, tree and shrub plant sale, all other cost-share projects within district boundaries.

Natural Resource Conservation Service – Waterville Office

203 E Locust St. Waterville, WA 98858

509-745-8561

nrcs.usda.gov

Contact for: All Farm Bill program funding including EQIP, CSP, and SGI.

Douglas County VSP Webpage:

<http://www.fostercreekcd.org/programs/voluntary-stewardship-program/>

Questions?

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