



Douglas County Voluntary Stewardship Program

Work Group Meeting

January 13, 2020 at 5:00 PM
Conference call via Zoom

In attendance:

Name	Affiliation	Voting Work Group Member?	Watershed WG Member?
Amanda Barg	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife		X
Tim Behne	Landowner	X	X
Britt Dudek	Orchardist, Chelan-Douglas Farm Bureau	X	X
Elizabeth Jackson	VSP DC Coordinator (FCCD)		X
Levi Keesecker	WA State Conservation Commission		
Carolyn Kelly	South Douglas Conservation District (SDCD), Public		
Alex McLean	Landowner	X	X
Leslie Michel	Soil Scientist, WA Dept. of Agriculture		
Angie Orpet	Water Quality/Natural Resource Specialist, FCCD		
Jeffrey Rock	Dryland Farmer, SDCD	X	X
Amanda Ward	District Manager, FCCD		

Voting and Watershed Work Group Members not present: April Clayton, Lee Hemmer, Robert Ramm, & Norman Tupling.

Meeting Summary

- **Welcome and Meeting Purpose**

- Review and approve completed portions of the five-year report.
- This meeting is an informational meeting – a simple majority quorum was not present.
 - Meeting minutes from December 15, 2020 were not approved due to the lack of a simple majority quorum.

- **Protection and Enhancement Benchmark Updates**

- Liz shared details about a FOIA request put to FSA to collect data for the five-year report. A potential fee of \$250 is expected to be invoiced for this information. The Work Group supported the nominal fee to acquire FSA data (see Supplemental information).
- The group reviewed Benchmark-5 (BM-5). SDCD recommended to contact Carol Cowling to confirm the conservation activities installed from 2016-2021 is accurate (see Supplemental information).
- The group reviewed BM-6. SDCD recommended to contact Carol Cowling to confirm the conservation activities installed from 2016-2021 is accurate (see Supplemental information). The Work Group expressed interest to re-visit the annual action thresholds (VSP Work Plan, p. 138) of BM-6. According to the Programmatic Adaptive Management Matrix (VSP Work Plan, p. 140), the WG is meant to review “Key Conservation Activities” every two years.

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Review of BM-6 can take place during this action. WG members commented that they wish to “align the spirit and goal [of VSP] to reality.”

- The group reviewed BM-8. The WG expressed interest to evaluate and re-assess BM-8, specifically how it is tracked, to use a “better method of assessment” since the conservation activities in BM-8 are standard industry practice. SDCD recommended to contact Carol Cowling to confirm the conservation activities installed from 2016-2021 is accurate (see Supplemental information).
 - The group recommended to: (1) re-evaluate organic certifications countywide; (2) attempt to obtain data from GlobalG.A.P. and other organic certifiers; and (3) use technical assistance outreach to help determine the realness of organic certification trend data (e.g. realistically how many acres will be put in organic or is the “enhancement” goal unrealistic). Potential to include transitional acres of organics.
- The group reviewed BM-15. BM-15 is the single protection that has not been met in our plan since not enough data was collected to set every five-year protection and enhancement benchmark. The WG expressed interest to re-assess BM-15 to determine whether the benchmark and objective is relevant to the goal to “protect and/or enhance baseline fish and wildlife habitat”.
- The Work Group agreed to assert that the protection and enhancement goals and benchmark have been met through our adaptive management measures.
- Benchmarks 1-4, 7, 9-14, & 16-18 were not reviewed as the protection and enhancement benchmarks have been met.

- **Review and Approve Participation Goal**

- The Work Plan is currently written with a goal to have 30% of producers in the county participate in the program in one of the four-levels of VSP participation.
 - The five-year report will use a benchmark goal of 30% of 1,306 Producers (NASS, 2017).
 - It is difficult to track number of producers. It is difficult to define a “Producer”.
 - Leslie recommended to use number of farms.
 - Britt recommended to use number of acres surveyed or planned.
 - Liz recommended to set quantifiable goals for each of the four levels of VSP participation, such as a realistic number of ISP’s developed annually or presenting at a set number of outreach events.
- The Work Group agreed to adopt a different measure besides “Producers” while undergoing adaptive management after the five-year report.
- Britt inquired what opportunities exist to change the language in the plan itself (as adaptive management advances).
 - Levi believes that the Work Groups are able to make changes as long as the new goals and benchmarks are within the original spirit of the plan. Bill Eller can provide more insight to incorporate major amendments into the Work Plan.

- **Review and Approve Completed Indicator (monitoring) results**

- I-1: Work Group emphasized that Douglas Co. is not always losing habitat, but it can become a different land cover (e.g. shrubland to herbaceous cover).

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- Amanda W. said that FCCD is working with Grant CD to conduct drone mapping of the Pearl Hill fire burn scar, particularly in those inaccessible sites.
- I-2: no comments.
- I-3: A former wetland was converted to an orchard packing shed. Is this situation (e.g. development) applicable to VSP? Britt mentioned that this packing shed may be within the urban growth boundary. Jeff asked what definition of wetlands is used by VSP compared to the Douglas Co. Planning department. He suggested to use the same definition for consistency between both programs (see Supplemental information).
 - Levi mentioned there may be caveats with remote sensing evaluations, especially when evaluating a large region such as an entire county. Over time, rapid wetlands assessments could be performed for more useful data.
- I-4: The Work Group emphasized that expired CRP/SAFE acres is out of the county's control as it adjusted based on the 2018 Farm Bill, however, some of the expired acres may be enrolled into the NRCS EQIP program as Conservation Practice 645 (Upland Wildlife Habitat Management).
- Angie presented data for I-6, I-7, I-8, I-9, I-10, and I-12.
- I-6: Compared 303(d) list of 2004 to 2020. 2004 had much insufficient data. Angie recommended to adopt the 2020 303(d) lists as the baseline for future five-year reports.
- I-7 & I-12: The analysis is being performed with available data and make it more comparable such as focusing on diurnal times and monitoring in certain months (March-November). Only two parameters had significant data in three clusters: DO and pH in Mid-Foster; pH in Rock Island; DO in West Foster, but the number of data points differed significantly. Angie recommended to collect more water quality data in areas that are lacking data points for more robust analyses, such as Rock Island or Douglas Creek, however, high quality data is dependent on funding, primarily provided by the Dept. of Ecology. Angie also recommended to monitor sites where conservation activities are installed, such as above and below a stream restoration site.
- I-8: Dept. of Health well quality baseline data includes 2010-11 and comparative data includes 2012-19. Angie will be evaluating nitrate with an action threshold of 5 mg/L and MCL 10 mg/L. So far nine wells have been evaluated and most showed improvement. Only one well, located near Waterville, showed a worsening of nitrate contamination.
- I-9: Groundwater quantity monitoring was a former FCCD program. Angie and Tim Behne retrieved loggers that were still deployed through VSP funding. Angie is using information from the Pacific Groundwater group as a resource. Angie will assess whether a decrease of greater than 10% occurred in the well-level. She will determine whether precipitation from weather stations or drought indexes have a relationship with groundwater levels (see Supplemental information).
 - Britt and Tim inquired whether infiltration rates could be correlated (See Supplemental information).
- I-10: Not assessment due to lack of available data (none found) and no data was collected for this indicator.

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- **Meeting wrap-up**
 - Received a VSP Work Group Applicant. Carolyn Kelly is applying to replace Jeff Rock as the VSP voting member as the SDCD representative. The application will be forwarded to WG members and the Douglas Co. Commissioners.
 - Liz will be leaving the DC VSP Coordinator position on January 29th. An announcement is already posted to hire a replacement.

- **Adjourn 7:32 pm**

Supplemental information (post-meeting):

- As of 1/22/2021, all available data requested has been provided by FSA. No fee will be invoiced to pay for the data processing.
- As suggested, Liz contacted Carol Cowling. BM-5 installments were updated prior to the submission of the five-year report. BM-6 installments did not have any changes. BM-8 NMP installments were updated prior to the submission of the five-year report.
- I-3: The wetland conversion occurred in the urban growth boundary. It is not applicable to VSP.
 - The Statewide Advisory Committee (SAC) and Conservation Commission are formatting an Ag Activities Decision Tree to determine future situations of whether VSP is applicable or not. The Ag Activities Decision Tree will be reviewed at the January 29, 2021 Joint VSP Technical Panel and SAC Meeting (<https://www.scc.wa.gov/vsp/technical-panel>).
 - The definition and more information about Douglas Co. VSP Wetlands, including where they intersect with ag activities, can be found on pages 67-76 in the VSP Work Plan. Essentially, the Douglas Co. Code and VSP adopted the Federal definition and procedure for delineating wetlands (p. 67), however, irrigation efficiencies that dry a wetland up will not count against Douglas County's wetland acreage for VSP tracking and reporting" (p. 69).
 - VSP Work Plan states that 20,312 acres of wetland exist in the county, of which 3,365.1 acres intersect with cropland (baseline acreage). The acreage amount of wetlands that intersect with grazing/rangeland was not provided (p. 68).
- I-9: Angie discovered there is an inverse relationship with groundwater-level and drought indexes (e.g. the worse the drought condition, the lower the groundwater well-level).
- I-9: infiltration rates may be estimated through Web Soil Survey, by hiring an engineering firm to take core samples, potential for WSDA new soil sampling program to inform us about infiltration rates, or release isotopes to measure how long it takes to get into the well.

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