



Douglas County Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Group Meeting

April 1, 2021 at 3:00 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
Lee Hemmer	Rancher, Foster Creek Cons. District	X	X
Levi Keesecker	WA State Conservation Commission		
Carolyn Kelly	South Douglas Conservation District (SDCD), Public		X
Alex McLean	Landowner	X	X
Malcolm Macleod	VSP DC Coordinator (FCCD)		X
Angela Orpet	Resource Specialist, FCCD		
Robert Ramm	Landowner	X	X
Amanda Ward	District Manager, FCCD		

Voting Work Group Members not present: April Clayton, Norman Tupling, Jeffrey Rock, Britt Dudek

Meeting Summary

- **Welcome and Meeting Purpose**
 - Introductions and discuss VSP implementation in new five-year cycle
 - Informal meeting, quorum not present (4/8).
- **New Producer Checklist**
 - Douglas is only VSP county with survey instead of a checklist. Producer Self-Assessment is a service not just a survey hence changed to be the Producer Checklist instead.
 - Improvements include a more user-friendly and streamlined version that only requires producers to answer questions on the type(s) of production relevant to them.
 - Went through new Conservation Activities Guide to be used with Checklist as reference.
 - VSP Work Plan states new producer self-assessment should be made and distributed at beginning of new five-year cycle. Will include in newsletter and send to DoCo producers.
 - Comments: Tim – “looks good”. Bob – “does this make it faster to fill out?”
AW – “we had very little response to original survey, aim was to simplify the message and process”. Bob – “sounds good, simple is best”.
- **Five-year Report**
 - Report and adaptive management actions under review of Technical Panel, will receive comments on July 8th. After panel meeting WG should reconvene to discuss the results.
 - No comments received

- **Adaptive Management**

- First level is monitoring stewardship activities and modifying them to meet goals. Second level is monitoring benchmark progress and adapting implementation strategy so that they are met. Third level is adapting the program itself to be more DoCo specific.
- Start with ground rules: there is currently no written-down procedure for bringing on new WG members, this has caused confusion with the County.
- MM mentioned that each VSP county was given standard ground rules, some programs have made them county specific and others accepted them without revision. Having term limits and defined procedure could facilitate accountability and new membership.
 - Comments: Carolyn – “we have original VSP rules. Currently WG gives formal approval to applicants and county commissioners have final say, this was not the process for original WG”. MM – “What about a chairperson?”
 - Alex – “we’ve never had a chairperson” Carolyn – “no one has been interested”
 - MM – “current ground rules specify a chairperson as the tie-breaking vote, when WG decides whether or not there is a need for a chair, this should either be removed or expanded upon. Role of chairperson is voting member who is WG point of contact and can call meetings”. Alex – “that is what you are doing”. MM – “unlike VSP coordinator, chairperson is a landowner/voting member who could work closely with the coordinator to lead the group. Terms can be set to give everyone who is interested a chance to take on a leadership role in the group”.
 - Alex – “no need to change”. Lee – “would rather have a vote of consensus as that has worked fine. It is easier for WG to follow the coordinator”. AW – “a more formal approach would be better for the group. FCCD can still organize the meetings but we can’t direct the group or influence decisions”. Carolyn agrees.
- MM mentions bringing in people who have previously not participated in WG. County?
 - AB – “VSP in other counties have benefitted from including county planning personnel on their WG. County staff tends to have a good understanding of critical areas and is well versed in GMA”. Carolyn – “gathering different perspectives is a good thing to work on”.

- **WSU Well Monitoring Program**

- Angie: WSU and Bureau of Reclamation are funding FCCD to monitor 5 DoCo wells. We’re giving priority to wells that have been previously monitored for continuity.
 - Comments: Alex – “can we monitor city wells like Waterville and Mansfield?” Carolyn – “Waterville already monitors”. Lee “can you use wells drilled by Ecology on DNR land? They drilled and left many in northern Douglas”. Tim – “we monitor wells that have drilling logs, Ecology would have those logs”.
 - Angie – “we will try to prioritize those original wells amongst the 5, let me know if there’s any you can offer”.

- **2021 Field Season Purchases**

- Soil probe, 2 measuring tapes, hip waders for a total of \$305
- Alex motions to approve, Tim and Lee second

- **Framing the VSP Message**

- MM states “how we present VSP to the public determines their response to the program. How does this WG feel about our current slogan “volunteer or voluntold”?
 - Carolyn – “it has a negative connotation and doesn’t explain the program. It makes people think that if they don’t participate then they’ll be told to”
 - Alex – “is voluntold even a word?” MM – “voluntold seems like a threat, let’s take that out. Change message for people to work together and know it’s completely voluntary”. Tim – “I like that better”. Carolyn – “Sounds good”.
- MM – “New 5-year cycle is opportunity to reintroduce program with clear messaging”.
 - Carolyn – “at beginning of another 5 years, another outreach strategy is in order. Even if people know about it, it’ll remind them that it’s still going on after all these years”. “For outreach we should remind people what critical areas are and why we care. In reaching out through newspapers and newsletters let’s emphasize the positive”.
 - Alex – “Good Life magazine would be good if we write up a nice article”. MM – “celebrating producers with stewardship success stories is a hopeful way to frame VSP”. AW – “producer spotlights are popular. After technical panel meeting we can also celebrate getting a positive review on our 5-year report”.
- MM – “what has affected VSP implementation in the past?”
 - Lee – “People associate VSP with gov’t and don’t want to participate thinking that it’s mandatory or part of an agency. Producers are gov’t shy and think water rights will be limited due to well monitoring. Court ordered the state to monitor all wells but they can’t do it, so some think that VSP well monitoring is a way to sneak that in. Younger generation of farmers is especially anti-gov’t, keep that in mind when communicating”.
 - Levi – “although people are still subject to other regulations, VSP is to be anonymous at watershed level so no single producer or well will be identified”.

- **Increasing county-wide collaboration**

- VSP is a county-wide program and should have ISPs from producers in both north and south. Carolyn – “agreed, could FCCD send a write up on what reporting is needed?”.

- **Malcolm Leaving**

- MM accepted a PhD position at Baylor. Has been serving as interim VSP coordinator until a permanent replacement is found, will be leaving after April’s quarterly report.
- Timing works out since VSP is in transition zone between two 5-year cycles, however, a new coordinator should be well established by July when technical review comes out.

- **Meeting Wrap-up**

- MM will send out VSP outreach materials with updated messaging. Next task is to hire new coordinator and reconvene in July at the latest. Keep thinking about revising ground rules to be more clearly defined.

- **Adjourn at 4:30pm**