



May 2016 VSP Newsletter

Hi folks! This is the May installment of a Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) informational newsletter. Feedback is welcome at beller@scc.wa.gov.

COMMISSION VSP WEB PAGE: As a reminder, the VSP web page at the Commission's web site is available [here](#): <http://scc.wa.gov/vsp/>. It will be updated as permitted by staff availability, and hopefully that means at least monthly. Let me know if you see any errors, mistakes, or edits that need to be made.

VSP MONTHLY CONSULTANT Q&A: The second monthly teleconference/webinar for all those interested in VSP at a statewide level is coming up on Thursday May 12. This conference call is meant to be a Q & A on VSP for all 27 VSP opt-in counties. The purpose of the call is to be a forum to disseminate information about VSP on a statewide level and to answer VSP related questions. It is open to any who want to phone in, but mainly directed at County staff, Conservation District staff, and consultants and facilitators responsible for VSP. The next call is Thursday, May 12, from 9am-10am. Please register [here](#).

ELEVEN VSP CONTRACT AMENDMENTS: 11 Counties (Asotin, Columbia, Cowlitz, Garfield, Grant, Kittitas, Mason, Okanogan, Pacific, Pend Oreille, and San Juan Island County) entered into the VSP contract with the Conservation Commission only through June 30, 2016. This was before the Commission determined it could contract for VSP through the next fiscal year (FY17). Those 11 counties needed an amendment to their VSP contract with the Commission to extend funding through June 30, 2017. By now, those 11 counties should have received the Amendment and cover letter in the mail. Please follow the directions in the cover letter. The other 16 counties are not affected by this as their original VSP contract with the Commission is effective to June 30, 2017. The amendment simply extends the same funding available to all counties (\$270,000) to those 11 counties through June 30, 2017, so they can continue to receive reimbursement for work on the VSP workgroup and work plan through June 30, 2017. For all 27 counties, the Commission is seeking

funding for the next biennium (FY17-19) through its budget development process.

REQUESTS FOR VSP PRESENTATIONS: Commission staff is available to give presentations on a variety of VSP topics (history, background, current status of program, etc). If you receive requests for presentations, the Commission asks that you contact us before you fulfill that request. If we can fulfill that request, we will do so. For requests we cannot fulfill, the Commission believes that a VSP presentation inside your county boundaries is a recoverable expense as part of VSP and VSP work plan outreach. For requests we cannot fulfill outside of the boundaries of your county, the Commission will not reimburse you for that expense. Please contact [Bill Eller](#) if you have presentation requests. Requests must be approved in writing by Commission staff in order to receive reimbursement.

STRATEGIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT AT THE WORK GROUP LEVEL: “A county must confer with tribes and interested stakeholders before designating or establishing a watershed group”, and “[t]he watershed group must include broad representation of key watershed stakeholders and, at a minimum, representatives of agricultural and environmental groups and tribes that agree to participate. The county should encourage existing lead entities, watershed planning units, or other integrating organizations to serve as the watershed group.” [RCW 36.70A.715 \(2\) and \(3\)](#), emphasis added. Some suggested strategies for workgroup participation by environmental groups, tribes, and other stakeholders:

- Engage stakeholder groups early in the process – before establishing the workgroup. Engagement should take the form of written communication, but can also include direct face-to-face meetings, phone calls, or other outreach methods.
- Engage stakeholder groups after the workgroup has been established. Continue to engage those stakeholders with written communication through workgroup progress updates.
- Document all attempts to communicate with those stakeholders in writing.

STATE AGENCY INVOLVEMENT WITH VSP: Various state agencies (in particular the Department of Commerce, Department of Ecology, Department of Agriculture, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Conservation Commission) are very involved in VSP in numerous ways. The Commission’s web page can be a reference for each agency’s level of involvement in VSP, how its programs interact with VSP, and staff contacts for VSP. Specifically, each state agency listed above has a seat on the VSP Technical Panel (TP). Each agency has agreed to provide the necessary staff to participate in the TP. The TP is to review the VSP work plans of the 27 counties who have opted-in to the VSP. The TP will assess whether the plan, in

conjunction with other plans and regulations, will protect critical areas while maintaining and enhancing the viability of agriculture in the watershed. Each agency has agreed that agency staff will participate in the local VSP workgroups at the agency's discretion. Agency staff will also be responsible for responding to requests for data and information from the local workgroup. Further information on agency involvement is set out below.

ECOLOGY INVOLVEMENT IN VSP: The Department of Ecology is interested in helping VSP Watershed Groups achieve clean water, and protect and enhance critical areas. At this time, Ecology has limited capacity to engage with the multiple VSP work plans being developed this biennium. While we are not able to participate actively in VSP technical committees or routinely attend meetings, we can provide the following support:

- The most current information on wetlands, aquatic habitat, frequently flooded areas, groundwater protection, and water quality that we recommend be included as you develop the VSP work plan.
- GIS data layers useful for wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, and frequently flooded areas.
- Response to technical questions and review of draft VSP sections on wetlands, frequently flooded areas, aquifer recharge areas and clean water requirements.
- Information on existing technical resources that may be helpful as you develop your plans (such as TMDLs, groundwater and surface water studies, and information on known water quality impairments)

Our email address for inquiries is: VSP.Coordinator@ecy.wa.gov. We are still sorting out staffing for our VSP engagement work. We will provide an update as work progresses.

WSDA INVOLVEMENT IN VSP: The Department of Agriculture is interested in helping VSP Watershed Groups promote and enhance the viability of agriculture while protecting and enhancing natural resources. We are devoted to assisting as much as possible at the local level with the development of work plans as well as assessments of available and relevant data sets. WSDA will:

- Participate in as many work plan meetings as possible (either in person or on the phone)
- Provide every county with an ArcGIS online map that includes wetland, stream, and agricultural land use data (this can be used as a starting point for your assessment or in conjunction with other data sources).
- Respond to technical questions and review draft work plan sections on agricultural viability and enhancement, monitoring and assessment benchmarks, etc.

- Provide information on existing technical resources that may be helpful as you develop your plans (such as WSDA-led groundwater and surface water studies, agricultural research on BMP's, and ag water quality impairments)

Our email address for inquiries is: kmclain@agr.wa.gov. Kelly McLain, our senior Natural Resource Scientist and land use policy lead is the point of contact for VSP engagement. Please contact her for access to maps, datasets, and participation on your workgroups.

WSF&W INVOLVEMENT IN VSP: Conserving WA's fish and wildlife through VSP begins with the important role that agriculture is already playing in providing habitat. The WDFW is interested in helping agricultural producers understand how best to achieve conservation while maintaining agricultural viability. We plan on being active throughout the state as technical experts for conservation of fish and wildlife:

- Providing a technical expert to watershed groups that can identify where and how Priority Habitat and Species overlap with agricultural activities and what activities might be impactful. We plan on attending as many technical meetings as possible.
- Providing useful GIS layers for Priority Habitat and Species
- Technical review of VSP drafts on fish and wildlife.
- Help with understanding elements of successful monitoring including baseline conditions, benchmarks and goals. In addition, we can provide expertise on adaptive management to ensure long term success of local plans.

NRCS INVOLVEMENT IN VSP: Many of you are wondering how the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) will participate in Washington State's VSP. NRCS has a legacy of providing excellent customer service and supporting their natural resource partners. However, due to limited staff availability and some limitations on federal participation in county governmental matters, NRCS personnel can comment and provide input on the following related to VSP:

- Information on NRCS conservation practices and associated standards
- Application of NRCS conservation practices on private agricultural, range, forested land
- NRCS conservation and voluntary incentive programs
- Input and guidance on development of watershed level conservation plans as they relate to conservation on private agriculture, range, or forest land
- Discuss ecosystem stewardship as it relates to voluntary conservation

- Information on NRCS's planning initiatives and pilots such as the Voluntary Natural Resources Conservation Plan or Resource Stewardship Pilot

NRCS personnel will not be able to:

- Serve in an official capacity on any VSP committee or work group
- Vote on any resolutions or participate in any polls that may be before the County Commissioners with regard to VSP
- Provide an opinion on the County's designation of critical areas
- Comment on determination of best available science
- Review or comment on non-NRCS best management practices that may be under consideration
- Review or comment on regulations pertinent to agriculture/forestry or use of natural resources

For more information on the extent of NRCS involvement in VSP, please contact Larry Johnson, NRCS point of contact for VSP. Larry can be reached at (509) 323-2955 or Larry.A.Johnson@wa.usda.gov.

VSP WORKGROUPS AND THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS

ACT: Remember, VSP workgroups are subject to the Open Public Meetings Act ([RCW 42.30](#)). As such, there are some requirements that need to be met, such as the requirement for training of workgroup members ([RCW 42.30.205](#)) and for posting of agendas on a county's website 24 hours in advance ([RCW 42.30.077](#)). A flyer explaining this in further detail is available on our web page here.

VSP WORKGROUPS AND EQUIPMENT PURCHASES: Some VSP workgroups will need to purchase equipment in order to do their work. The procedure to purchase equipment has been established and can be found in our revised FAQ on billing on our web page and is outlined briefly below. To purchase equipment, please follow the following procedure:

- Send an email to [Karla Heinitz](#) at the Conservation Commission, making the request.
- Include in the emailed request information on what the equipment will be used for and how it is essential for the VSP. Any equipment purchased must remain with the governmental entity (conservation district, county), and requests must specify which entity will retain the equipment.
- If the request is under \$1,000, it will be reviewed by Karla. Once she is finished with her review, she will send an email to you on whether or not the expense has been approved.
- If the request is over \$1,000, Commission staff will further review the request. Once that review by additional Commission staff is finished, Karla will send an email to you on whether or not the expense has been approved.

- Purchase cannot be made and is not authorized until approval from Karla is received.

VSP TECHNICAL PANEL MEETINGS SET: The TP met on April 26, 2016, and decided on a meeting schedule for the rest of 2016. Notes will be posted to the VSP web page soon. The next meeting of the TP will be Tuesday, May 24, 2016 at the North Bend train depot, 205 McClellan St, North Bend, WA 98045. All of the rest of the TP meetings will be held at the Department of Ecology Building, 300 Desmond Drive SE, Lacey, WA 98503 on the 4th Tuesday of each month. For 2016, they will be held on the following dates: June 28, 2016, July 26, 2016, Aug 23, 2016, Sept 27, 2016, Oct 25, 2016, Nov 22, 2016, and Dec 27, 2016. The schedule will be posted on the VSP web page.

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