



Washington State

Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)

VSP is a collaborative process that helps Washington communities ensure healthy landscapes and strong farms for the future. Through VSP, counties work with local residents to develop a plan to manage growth, protect critical areas, and maintain viable agriculture.



WHAT ARE CRITICAL AREAS?

There are five critical areas identified in Washington's Growth Management Act that each county must designate and protect:

1. Wetlands
2. Frequently flooded areas
3. Critical aquifer recharge areas
4. Geologically hazardous areas
5. Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas (emphasis on anadromous fish)

Find more information on the Washington State Department of Commerce website:

<http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Services/localgovernment/GrowthManagement/Growth-Management-Planning-Topics/Critical-Areas-and-Best-Available-Science/Pages/default.aspx>

Managing population growth and development

- Our state's Growth Management Act (Chapter 36.70A RCW) requires all counties to develop plans for managing population growth and development.
- The plans must identify and protect critical areas (see left sidebar), including critical areas on agricultural lands.
- Plans also preserve farmland by preventing urban growth from crowding out agriculture.

A voluntary approach supporting agriculture and natural resources

- Prior to 2011, the main tool for counties to ensure protection of critical areas on agricultural land was regulation.
- Regulation of agricultural landowners can threaten farm viability and lead to legal battles.
- VSP was created in 2011 to give counties the option to use locally driven watershed plans and voluntary, incentive-based tools to protect critical areas.

HOW IT WORKS - THREE PHASES OF VSP

Phase 1: Develop a watershed work plan. Key local stakeholders — including agricultural, environmental, and tribal representatives — are invited to participate in VSP work groups. Groups develop work plans to protect critical areas and maintain viable agriculture in their watershed. Work plans are sent to the Washington State Conservation Commission for approval. The group begins outreach to agricultural landowners who might participate in the program.

Phase 2: Implementation and stewardship plans. VSP work group works with local technical assistance providers to conduct outreach to agricultural landowners in priority areas identified in the approved work plan. Technical assistance providers create stewardship plans for landowners who choose to participate. Stewardship plans provide site-specific best management practices to help landowners meet agricultural and natural resource conservation goals.

Phase 3: Monitoring. Existing incentive programs and on-the ground help is directed to fully implement the VSP work plan, which includes helping landowners install practices according to their stewardship plans. The work group monitors work plan success over 5- and 10-year year intervals. If progress toward goals is not being met, new incentive programs can be sought or created to meet those needs.



VSP Administration

Local

Counties have designated themselves or another local entity, such as a conservation district, to administer the VSP work group. This includes:

1. Coordinating the VSP work group,
2. Administering program funds, and
3. Designing an outreach plan and establishing stewardship plans using best management practices.

Learn more about VSP administration and entities involved:

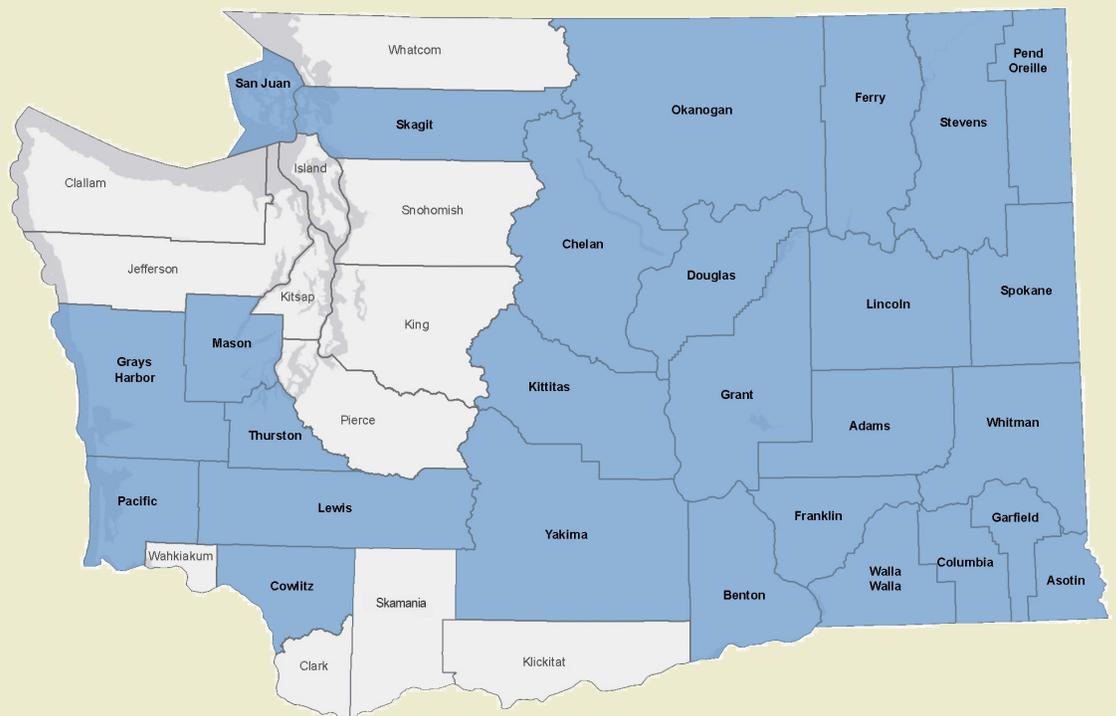
http://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/VSPEntitiesWeb_Mar16.pdf

State

The Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) is the state-level administrator for VSP.

The SCC Executive Director is in charge of reviewing and approving VSP watershed work plans with help from a state advisory committee and technical panel.

*27 counties
are participating
in the Voluntary
Stewardship Program*



Partners supporting VSP:



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