



Washington State

# Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)

A collaborative process that helps Washington communities ensure healthy landscapes and strong farms today and for the future.



## WHAT ARE CRITICAL AREAS?

Washington's Growth Management Act covers five critical areas that counties must identify 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)

## BACKGROUND: MANAGING GROWTH IN WASHINGTON

- ▶ The Washington State Growth Management Act (Chapter 36.70A RCW) requires counties to develop plans for managing population growth and development.
- ▶ Plans must:
  - » Identify and protect critical areas (see left), including those on agricultural lands.
  - » Preserve farmland and prevent urban growth from crowding out agriculture.
- ▶ Prior to 2011, the main tool for counties to protect critical areas on agricultural land was regulation.
- ▶ Regulation threatened farm viability and led to legal battles.

## WHAT MAKES VSP DIFFERENT?

- ▶ VSP (created in 2011) gives counties the option to develop locally led work plans that use voluntary, incentive-based tools to protect critical areas and viable agriculture.
- ▶ The process to develop and implement a work plan is:
  - » *Inclusive*: It brings local stakeholders — including agricultural, environmental, and tribal interests — to the table.
  - » *Informed*: Plans fuse best available science with local knowledge of landscape, economy, and “on-the-ground” conditions.
  - » *Proactive*: Stakeholders discuss and resolve conflicts during VSP planning and implementation.



## WHAT DOES VSP MEAN FOR YOU?

If you own farmland in a VSP county, the program can be a big help for your operation:

- ▶ VSP is voluntary and non-regulatory. You can choose whether to do a stewardship plan for your farm.
- ▶ If you choose to do a stewardship plan, you will balance protecting the critical area with keeping your agricultural operation economically viable... so it works for you!
- ▶ Funding will be available to help you put in practices that protect critical areas, such as fences or improved pastures and paddocks.
- ▶ You can help by participating in your county VSP work group – building the future of your county, your farm, and our environment.

## HOW IT WORKS - THREE PHASES OF VSP

### Phase 1: Develop Work Plan

- ▶ Local stakeholders form a VSP workgroup and develop a work plan.
- ▶ Work plan is sent to the Washington State Conservation Commission for approval.
- ▶ Workgroup begins outreach to agricultural landowners about the program.

### Phase 2: Implement Stewardship Plans

- ▶ Local technical assistance providers conduct outreach in priority areas and create stewardship plans for agricultural landowners who choose to participate.
- ▶ Stewardship plans provide best management practices that meet agricultural and resource goals.
- ▶ Existing voluntary, incentive-based programs are used to help landowners implement stewardship plans.

### Phase 3: Monitor Results

- ▶ Workgroup monitors workplan progress over 5-10 year intervals.
- ▶ Workgroup delivers status reports to Washington State Conservation Commission — must show progress on measureable benchmarks.
- ▶ If progress toward goals is not met, new incentives can be sought or created.



## VSP ADMINISTRATION

### Local

Counties designate themselves or another local entity (e.g. conservation district) to administer the VSP workgroup. The workgroup administrator:

1. Coordinates workgroup meetings,
2. Administers program funds, and
3. Oversees the outreach plan and establishment of stewardship plans using best management practices.

### 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.

*Learn more about VSP administration and entities involved:*  
[http://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/VSPEntitiesWeb\\_Mar16.pdf](http://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/VSPEntitiesWeb_Mar16.pdf)

## PARTNERS SUPPORTING VSP:



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