

September 2017 VSP Newsletter

This is the monthly installment of a Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) informational newsletter. Please sign up to receive the newsletter [here](#). Feedback is welcome - please direct it to [Bill Eller](#).

VSP 2017-2019 BIENNIUM BUDGET AND COUNTY CONTRACT: During the last legislative session, the state legislature continued to provide additional funding (\$7.602 million for the biennium) for the VSP into this current fiscal year (2017-2019). As a result, funding for VSP continues to be available to those counties that have opted-into VSP. For the 2017-2019 biennium, the amount available to counties for VSP reimbursement is \$220,000.

The Conservation Commission sent out 2017-2019 biennium contracts to all 27 VSP counties on July 20, 2017, by regular mail and email. **If your county did not receive one, please contact Bill Eller immediately at 509-385-7512 or beller@scc.wa.gov in order to remain eligible to be reimbursed for VSP expenses.**

If you are interested about the specific funding status of a particular VSP county, please contact that county directly. County VSP contacts can be found by clicking on the appropriate county on the map [here](#).

VSP BILLING: Billing, reimbursement and vouchering procedures for VSP expenses have been updated. All requests for payment should be emailed to sccgrants@scc.wa.gov. For other details of the changes, please see the updated Billing FAQ [here](#) on the [VSP County and work group web page](#). If you have any questions, please contact [Karla Heinitz](#) at the Commission.

AMENDMENT TO VSP STATUTE: During the last legislative session and as part of the operating budget bill ([SSB 5883](#), [§961](#)), the legislature amended RCW 36.70A.725 (2) to change the time period in which the Technical Panel conducts a review of a work plan formally submitted to the Conservation Commission. The Technical Panel now has ninety days (instead of forty-five) to review the work plan and report to the Commission whether or not at the end of ten years after receipt of funding, the work plan, in conjunction with other existing plans and regulations, will protect critical areas while maintaining and enhancing the viability of agriculture in the watershed. This important change will give the Technical Panel some breathing room in which to conduct work plan reviews.

SUBMITTAL OF VSP WORK PLANS TO THE COMMISSION: The Commission has set up a schedule for the formal submittal of VSP work plans. Two plans can be reviewing in any given month. Plans must be formally submitted no later than the first of the month in which the review meeting is set for that plan. Counties wishing to formally submit work plans must contact [Bill Eller](#) at the Commission before submitting their work plans so that the plan can

be assigned a meeting. [Bill Eller](#) can be reached at 509-385-7512 or by email at beller@scc.wa.gov. *Action by Work Group on Work Plan:* remember, the action the VSP work group needs to take in sending the work plan to the Commission is that the work group should move to submit the work plan to the Commission and VSP Technical Panel, not “approve” the work plan.

VSP TECHNICAL PANEL CHANGE IN MEMBERS: Please welcome two new members to the VSP Technical Panel, both representing the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) - Matt Muller and Stacey Polkowske. Matt is the Land Use Change Outreach Coordinator for WDFW and Stacey is the Division Manager for the Ecosystem Service Division of the Habitat Program. Both will be filling the shoes for the foreseeable future for Amy Windrope who has left the Technical Panel for a new position in WDFW as the Regional Director for WDFW’s Region 4 - North Puget Sound. The Technical Panel agency member list has been updated and is available [here](#).

UPCOMING MEETINGS OF THE VSP TECHNICAL PANEL: The VSP Technical Panel has revised its meeting schedule. The most complete and up-to-date meeting schedule can always be found on the Technical Panel web page [here](#). All meetings will be held at the Farm Bureau building, 975 Carpenter Rd NE #101, Lacey, WA 98516, unless otherwise noted. A summary of the revised meeting schedule is below:

Friday, Sept 29, 2017, 9:00 am - 3:00 pm - Agenda TBD. To register for this webinar, use this link:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7567335286241042433>

STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE POLICY ADVISORIES: The Statewide Advisory Committee has been meeting over the last few weeks in order to provide guidance to the Conservation Commission on some aspects of the VSP. The Commission, after consultation with the VSP Statewide Advisory Committee, has created two policy advisories for county work groups to use. The first addresses the confidentiality of VSP individual stewardship plans and landowner checklists, and the second advises VSP county work groups on the schedule of the remaining VSP work plans to be reviewed by the VSP Technical Panel. Both advisories can be found on the VSP web page [here](#) and on the Statewide Advisory Committee web page [here](#).

VSP IMPLEMENTATION: Now that some counties have approved VSP work plans, those counties are moving into the implementation of VSP. What does that look like? It depends. First, there is a continuing obligation under the VSP statute for the county to maintain a relationship with the VSP work group as the entity that is involved in implementation and reporting on progress made under the work plan. Nothing in the statute relieves the county of its continuing obligations under RCW 36.70A.715 (1) through (4) to

- (1)(a) Acknowledge the receipt of funds; and
- (1)(b) Designate a watershed group and an entity to administer funds for each watershed for which funding has been provided.
- (2) A county must confer with tribes and interested stakeholders before designating or establishing a watershed group.
- (3) The 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.

(4) The county may designate itself, a tribe, or another entity to coordinate the local watershed group.

Similarly, there is nothing in the statute that relieves the county of the obligation to establish a work group that creates a work plan “to protect critical areas while maintaining the viability of agriculture in the watershed.” The obligation to create a work plan that meets the goals of the VSP statute (RCW 36.70A.700-760) is a continuing one, requiring at various times for the work group to adaptively manage the work plan and report to the Commission. See RCW 36.70A.720 (2) (b) (i) - (iv), (c) (i) - (iv); RCW 36.70A.730.

In order to meet these obligations, the county must continue to support the work of the work group during implementation and reporting periods.

In addition to these county-specific obligations, for those counties with approved work plans, there are the deliverables in the County’s VSP approved work plan that the work group identified as needed to achieve the goals and benchmarks of the work plan. Those could include outreach, education, and technical assistance to landowners, cooperators, and producers; monitoring, and adaptive management actions. These deliverables may have multiple parties responsible for these items, or there could be one entity responsible (in many cases, that one entity is the local conservation district). All of those deliverables would also need to be part of implementation.

HOW TO FIND VSP WORK PLANS: To find VSP Work Plans that have been submitted to the Commission, please go to the main VSP web page [here](#). Once there, click on the map the county that you are interested in. An informational box will appear that has the link to the county work plan (if it has been received by the Commission) and whether any public comment was received by the Commission on the plan.

VSP WORK PLAN “PRACTICE POINTERS”: The VSP Work Plan practice pointers have been updated. All of them can be found at this [link](#). Three new practice pointers have been added. They are listed in no particular order. The practice pointers were identified by the Voluntary Stewardship Program’s Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee after reflection on the VSP work plan approval process during March 2017-July 2017. The pointers can be used by VSP county work groups to help in the creation and successful submittal of their work plans to the Technical Panel.

VSP MONTHLY CONSULTANT Q&A: The next scheduled consultant webinar is Thursday, September 14, 2017, from 9:00 am - 9:30 am. Please register for Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Monthly Q&A on Sep 14, 2017 9:00 AM PDT at:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6181637274857322242>

The 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.

Links to past webinar recordings are available on the [VSP Workgroups web page](#).

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