Voluntary Stewardship Program
Technical Panel Meeting
Friday, June 9, 2017
1:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Facilitator – Bill Eller, VSP Coordinator, WSCC

Attendees in Lacey: Brian Cochrane, WSCC (TP); Lauren Driscoll, ECY (TP); Kelly McLain, WSDA (TP); Amy Windrope, WDFW (TP); Alicia McClendon, WSCC; Ron Shultz, WSCC; Evan Sheffels, WSFB; Dan Berenson, Ryan Walters, Mike See, Kara Symonds, Ben Floyd, Harold Crose, John Small, Tess Brandon, Sarah Sandstrom, Neil Aaland, Ron Shultz, John Stuhlmiller

Webinar: Barbara Adkins, Tess Brandon, Don Brigham, Vivian Erickson, Renee Hadley, Brandon Roozen, Aaron Rosenblum, Kelly Rupp, Glenn Leland, Michael See

VSP TECHNICAL PANEL MEETING

Session Objective:
Conduct an initial review of Grant and Skagit County VSP work plans.

1:00 pm: Opening Comments, Introductions, Session Objective & Agenda
Intros made, Bill Eller reminds us of the purpose of the initial meeting – first change to discuss work plans submitted. June 20 is the vote on both plans.

1:05 pm: VSP update (if any) – Bill Eller, Ron Shultz, WSCC
No news is good news from the legislature. WSCC policy imitative – (1) confidentiality of ISP’s – seek legislation. Bring to SAC for consideration.

1:10 pm: Initial review – Grant County work plan
Discussion starts on the Grant County Work Plan. Bill Eller brings up the one public comment that we received on the plan. Not really substantive; previously presented to the Technical Panel by email – yesterday.

Discussion about Grant County work plan

Lauren Driscoll says that the functions and values of critical areas (CA’s) seem to be lumped together. How would that work?

Harold Crose explains how that gets to protection of critical areas. Says monitoring the effect. Conservation practice physical affects is what is being used.

Monitoring the quantity of activity and effect of specific practices – on farm or adjacent.
Difficult to quantify specific effect of practice.

Assess affect of specific practices.

Lauren Driscoll asks about the relationship of practice to CA is how you would get at numbers.

Harold Crose says will look at if a CA is on a farm or not and the planner will look at the whole farm system to address CA needs.

Protection and enhancement line. Look to baseline – 2011. Almost always any conservation since then is enhancement.

John Small – adaptive management section says which indicators will be monitored. That is part of the work plan. Draw lines between the benchmarks and physical results.

Ben Floyd – Section 5.3 is where those indicators are located. Even indirect affects. Direct effects (next to or in CA) and indirect affects. There should be credit if any of the 4 identified CA functions are protected.

John Small says irrigation affects many CA functions.

Ben Floyd says the affects vary by practice.

HC says water in Columbia Basin can be used in different ways. A primary objective is to manage the farm as efficiently as possible. That is a benefit to the producer for Agricultural viability. Protect what is on the farm.

Lauren Driscoll says the rolling-up of everything should give me a net number. How to know if there isn’t degradation to wetlands over time....

John Small says be cautious in thinking – water conservation will result in loss of wetland function. To put that together with a benchmark is fraught with difficulty. Changes to physical landscape will tell the story of what has changed since 2011 on the private ag lands.

Amy Windrope says she talked with Carmen and Eric [WDFW employees] about the Grant County plan. Lots of good feedback. Good logic train, internally consistent. Good WDFW engagement. We really appreciate that.

A concern – similar to Thurston’s plan – links within the plans that the Technical Panel doesn’t see – we are trying to find those links. We may have not fully connected the dots. Thurston was going to monitor only those lands with individual stewardship plans. That doesn’t deal with the
rest of the watershed. What is happening in the watershed writ-large? For all the lands.

Harold Crose says the answer is in the way we approached VSP in Grant County. WRIA wasn’t going to work since no WRIA plans were completed. Not a traditional watershed. Divided the county into communities – diverse county. We have a pretty good indication of the land use today at the 20,000 foot level – also by quantity. We also know the amount of conservation activity from 2011-2016 in conservation programs. In our outreach efforts we found out lots of other private conservation going on. We will gather that information in our outreach. About $1 million in government dollars are put on the ground for conservation in the County through government programs. Only about 5% of who comes through the door. We are only able to monitor what we are able to see. USDA, WDFW, and local knowledge – rapid watershed assessments is where we get our data.

Ben Floyd says Appendix B (1) and (2) has baseline conditions summary. We have lots of information, but it is on the Columbia Basin project – outside of the VSP. Section (5) talks about goals and benchmarks from existing sources to back check the conservation measures.

Amy Windrope does an exercise. Appendix B(2) page 2 – Black Sands. Shrub step identified. Game species waterfowl. Look at the table. How many acres are in the different AG use. I like the CA functions table – very clear. Looking for monitoring and this is where you lose me. I want to know if you are monitoring the acres or the practices? I don’t see the connection between the objectives and how they are protecting the species.

Ben Floyd says this is a baseline. The monitoring is in Section (5) of the plan.

[Discussion about what will be implemented]

Ben Floyd – maybe the summary isn’t clear. Go to Section (5) (3) – pg 62. There is the data, remote sensing, change detection, primarily PHS or whatever else is supplemented from WDFW.

Amy Windrope says one challenge is that the WDFW is not designed as a monitoring tool. It says what to monitor, but doesn’t monitor. The data isn’t QA / QC’ed. It isn’t in the timeframe you need.

Ben Floyd asks what should be used? Trying to use existing data.
Amy Windrope says bring back to the Black Sands area – local area. What is the ag activity that threatens sage grouse? I don’t know the answer. But I would want something listed there to say what could be done. How can that “thing” be monitored. What should be counted?

Harold Crose says the incidence of irrigated agriculture creeping into shrub steppe is small – no expansion of water. We will monitor is the type of practice, in acres – grazing systems. Those will have the most impact to shrub steppe. Within the communities we anticipate having a lot more grazing management in place.

Amy Windrope asks if, in the work plan, the section with the equations would become the protection benchmark – a certain number of acres in grazing management. That way you would get at the ecosystem based on the numbers involved.

Harold Crose says we keep going back to the baseline in 2011, then what has changed in 2016. We can quantify that. We know some enhancement has occurred.

Amy Windrope asks if that was captured in the work plan?

Harold Crose says it was in the rapid watershed assessment.

John Small says to look in Appendix C, Table 4. Before attachment #1. A bar graph. From 2011 – 2016 what are the changes the conservation district has observed on the ground. That is what that table shows. Protection and enhancement are shown there.

Amy Windrope says Figure 4 gives us the baseline number. Loss and gain.

Ben Floyd says we don’t think the information is out there to really know exactly how the baseline is doing.

Lauren Driscoll says you captured that well with irrigation efficiencies. Could still capture information about wetlands, if only at the producer level.

Ben Floyd says we are focused on what is changing, since the baseline of 2011. That is fundamental to the work plan.

Brian Cochrane says if the premise is that we are monitoring the change by participating producers....

Ben Floyd says anyone – not just VSP participants. The self-assessment checklist in the work plan is designed to capture all that information. We hope to capture more information over time.
Brian Cochrane says I didn’t see the target in steps from how many folks you’ll be talking to in order to get that information. Not seeing in the work plan how to capture that. Indicators might not line up with timing reporting requirements. There is a disconnect between what we are monitoring and the information we are getting. The folks we don’t know about are a concern.

Kelly McLain says some of it is described. Water quality. 303 listing are updated on a 2 or 3 year basis. Are there new listings? Monitoring would capture that. Grant County would then go back to that community and that area to see what could be done. It is there in places. It is harder to see how all of it connects.

John Small says it is difficult to know the dynamics of modern agriculture and that is a factor in how to reach agriculture producers. What a producer is a challenge. We’ve stuck largely with acres.

Brian Cochrane says that is reasonable.

Harold Crose says that this work plan was written to be implemented. We will become more efficient and effective at targeting professional, technical assistance to do conservation. We’ve already worked with local work groups to mold programs to impact critical areas.

Amy Windrope asks how you know?

Harold Crose says because we know the kind of farming that occurs in the county. Flood irrigation is an example – not a bad thing, but you will get movement of sediment. We can quantify how much surface irrigation is going on.

Amy Windrope says show me where that is in the work plan. If technical assistance is going to be focused on those areas, where is that in the work plan.

Harold Crose says look at the rapid watershed assessments.

Ben Floyd – Table 5 (A), pg 67 – goes back to how you know what is happening with those who are not participating. There is a gap there. We are trying to implement something on about $125,000 a year budget. We won’t be able to answer definitively change, but we hope to capture them with our indicators.
Kelly McLain asks Harold Crose about the irrigation districts in Grant County if they track conversion of rill irrigation to other types.

Ben Floyd says Quincy and East Columbia Basin does gather that data.

Kelly McLain says we gather that kind of data every three years. WSDA might be a source of that information – rill irrigation conversion.

Harold Crose says Ephrata rapid watershed assessment in Appendix B is an example. There are practices that can be used to make water clean. Planning area EPH example. Look at the baseline – irrigation subsurface. Page 127 of the PDF. 2,380 acres. -2 is an indicator of a problem. This points to a resource issue that needs to be addressed and focused on.

Amy Windrope says this is useful if it can be turned into adaptive management. This appears to be the baseline to see changes and if things get worse. If you look at Table 5 (10), I would want to see that metric.

Ben Floyd says we took existing data source and turned it into a performance metric. These are county-wide goals.

Amy Windrope says the performance metric cross-walk isn’t 100% clear. What you are telling me is helpful, but the work plan goals are generalized. Maybe in the performance metric should be referenced in each rapid watershed assessments.

Brian Cochrane asks if the rapid watershed assessments apply to all producers?

Harold Crose says yes.

Brian Cochrane says that needs to be stated clearly in the work plan.

Kelly McLain says the performance metric should be looking at relative change. Should the acres be the unit of measure, or the score?

Ben Floyd say we should look at both. Look at them combined and the relative change.

Kelly McLain says you have to look at both over time. How to explain what the work plan says versus what is means.

Ben Floyd says there could be linkages in the work plan that the work group members know but the Technical Panel doesn’t and can’t find in reading the work plan.
Amy Windrope says the county might understand how they are measuring change, but the reader of the work plan needs to have it described in the work plan. The performance metrics don’t seem to match up. Needs more explanation of how the acreage relates to the resource concern.

Ben Floyd is not sure how to bridge the gap of how to explain the work plan framework.

Kelly McLain says 8 areas in the work plan that the work group has broken the county out into.

Ben Floyd says those 8 areas will all be rolled up in the metrics and reporting.

Kelly McLain says there are 6 different WRIA portions in Grant County. We need to better describe how to get from county-wide goals to the 8 areas and back up so that the person 8 years from now who does the analysis for the reporting knows what is being measured.

Harold Crose says we struggled with what to put in to the work plan. What practices will go “backwards.” We won’t go backwards. The 2011 benchmark is behind today’s technology. We won’t have much more land use that what we have. Land and water is fixed in the county. The level of management of agriculture land isn’t going backwards. 2011 is the baseline. Harold describes a situation where a landowner planned 7 acres of new habitat in one week. We are not going backwards with agriculture technology. What we can show in the work plan is that we will go further, quicker. Not sure we can list the connections asked for. There will be lots of new technology implemented that won’t participate in government programs.

Ron Shultz says that we are getting overly complicated in the work plan in that we should still be able to prove that we won’t go backwards. What that means in the context of the work plan is that. If we know the status and conditions of the 5 CA’s now, as you move forward and working with producers, what you say (we are not going backwards) might be true. VSP allows us to capture that. That can be documented in the work plan in individual plans. We can document if we’ve impacted, stayed the same, or enhanced. That seems pretty straight-forward.

Ben Floyd says we thought we put that in the work plan. We have the goals, but not the details since we haven’t gathered the data yet – in the reporting.

Ron Shultz says there might still be a disconnect.
Brian Cochrane gives an example - says rapid watershed assessments are the tools that will be used today and in the future. The term “rapid watershed assessment” is only mentioned once in the work plan.

Harold Crose says the rapid watershed assessment has been done. Then we will gather other data that will be able to better characterize the watershed at that time for adaptive management. We can only measure what exists now. We have a goal structure in place for the future.

Amy Windrope says that is the great strength of the work plan – it is great at capturing changes in behavior. I am trying to cross-walk that with, at the end of 10 years, will this protect CA’s and maintain agricultural viability? The rapid watershed assessment captures some of that now. The reporting piece – it is like you’ve changed units – reporting units and baseline units seem different.

Ben Floyd and John Small says it is all acres.

Ben Floyd says the future numbers are the changes that happen. Changes in the baseline. Changes since 2011 in conservation practices and in the CA functions and values.

Amy Windrope asks how that has been cross-walked into the performance measures in Table 5(10).

Kelly McLain says look at Table 5(9) for the cross-walk. If you trust the NRCS PPE science, then the goals and measures in the work plan make sense.

John Small says the work group spent lots of time analyzing NRCS practice codes.

Amy Windrope says Table 5(9) has a metric for acres on an annual basis. Adaptive management trigger would be 10%.

John Small says we built into the metrics a cushion to ensure we don’t fall below the baseline. Most metrics we are talking about tens of thousands of acres. We are assuming worst-case. We have disenrollment rates established for each practice – they are conservative. We set our protection goals to include that.

Kelly McLain says the initial baseline number isn’t there.

Ben Floyd says we don’t really know that number. We know, but don’t know.
John Small says there are different things happening every year that affect agriculture and the market. We want to hit the protection goals.

Amy Windrope says that the things in Table 5(9) on pg 68 are the most important to WDFW. Could these things be listed as the most important to be counted? If these things would be measured, would give us the most comfort.

John Small says those practices affect agricultural viability the most.

Amy Windrope says if we have 2 acres now, then a meaningful metrics would still be 2 acres – the PCCE score isn’t so meaningful to WDFW.

John Small says if there is a change in acres, that is the trigger point to see what is going on. Everything is set up to look at change since 2011. Doesn’t make sense to do a GIS analysis of every area of the county. No net loss.

Amy Windrope asks, how we know if the zero we have now is the same as the zero in the future.

Kelly McLain says if you look at Table 5 (9) those numbers are the minimum that would require change. If there is a loss of acres great enough, that would trigger the adaptive management.

Amy Windrope says that works if we know if the “zero” is meaningful – county-wide. We need to know which are county-wide versus just those producers who are enrolled in VSP.

Ben Floyd – at 10 percent now, we hope to have better data after reporting in a few years. This is the “poor-man’s version” of VSP monitoring. Did Thurston and Chelan have this locked in?

[Technical Panel says yes.]

Kelly McLain says the counties are very different from one to another, and from eastern to western sides of the state.

[Discussion of available monitoring and what other counties are doing].

Kelly McLain says Grant County is difficult – artificially created by the Project. The irrigation system is artificial.

Ben Floyd asks the Technical Panel what monitoring the county could do that is cost-effective.
Amy Windrope says to focus on the most important pieces. Tables 5 (9) and (10) make sense. Not sure Table 5(3). Need to say which are indicators and which are benchmarks and performance objectives. How is PHS being cross-walked?

Ben Floyd says the indictors are backstops to begin to focus on that problem. The benchmarks are the practices implemented.

Amy Windrope says PHS can’t be used as an indicator backstop.

Ron Shultz asks if that process makes sense to Amy Windrope? Indicators show a decline, go to adaptive management. Table 5(10).

Kelly McLain asks if Amy Windrope sees what she needs to see to address PHS?

Amy Windrope says Tables 5(10) and 5(9) together hypothetically will measure.

Ben Floyd asks if there is any other information that can be used besides PHS to use? If more, we want to put it in the work plan.

John Small says the only data is on public lands – not private lands.

Amy Windrope says the metric needs to be tied to something that can be measured.

John Small says the implementation of conservation practices can be measured.

Ben Floyd says we all want the same thing, but we have to be able to get useful data on a budget.

Kelly McLain says new data can be incorporated as it is developed into the work plan.

Amy Windrope says if we could understand how much of the county that intersects with agriculture is already enrolled and intersects with CA’s. How much are we missing in the county – so we know what we are missing – so we know how much we are not monitoring.

John Small says that goes against the approach we proposed several months ago. These are agricultural landscapes. Complicated to talk about how they intersect with CA’s.

Amy Windrope says you have acres in the work plan.
John Small says if a landowner changes a practice is difficult to deal with on a whole ecosystem scale. Ecosystem processes – high level and holistic.

Lauren Driscoll says she needs a walk-through of the table in the watershed plans. Ephrata table.

Amy Windrope appreciates the work group representative’s efforts to help them understand the work plan.

Ben Floyd thanks the Technical Panel for their understanding of the work groups efforts.

[BREAK]

3:00 pm: Break

3:15 pm: Initial review – Skagit County work plan

Skagit work plan review. Bill Eller explains this initial review is the first time the agencies can talk about the work plan in put together.

Ron Shultz talks about the Commission’s analysis. One CA. Talked with County previous about how to reference the regulations that are to be relied on. Said before – my read is that the county can opt into VSP, but no choice on CA’s – must address all. How to address the 5 is in the work plan, 4 of the 5 continues the regulatory approach. That is fine. However, the CAO that is being relied on becomes part of the work plan and must be monitored. In the work plan, the characterization is kind of backward – statement on pg 30 – ½ way down – identifies the 4 CA’s – “these CA regulations have essentially no affect on agriculture – that is backwards – they do have an effect on the ca’s. in a GMA context, every 7 years must review and review. This language in the work plan is that the CA isn’t being impacted by the regulations. Ag activities in CARA’s – ag allowed, but could still have an impact on the CA. the statements are almost dismissive of any impact. Analysis and reference to the WAC – going to rely on these in the existing regulatory approach. Argument is that the county is taking a precautionary approach under the WAC 920. This is effective when there is a lack of information – when there is harm to the critical area. County asserts the first section – precautionary. County relies on that one. But the WAC goes on to say that an adaptive management program would be created. If they want to incorporate those 4, they would need to be monitored and adaptively managed. Because they are not, fatal flaw for the 10 year determination.
Amy Windrope says that are you saying this doesn’t take a precautionary approach?

Ron Shultz says the county is asserting that the regs in the 4 CA’s are not affecting CA’s and that is an assumption. It is OK to say the 4 CA’s can use regs to relay on – they would become part of the VSP and would need to be monitored. Describe the relationship. Consistent with Chelan County’s work plan.

Kelly McLain – same as how we dealt with Chelan County. Regulation included, but they had specific monitoring and adaptive management tied to it. It wasn’t robust, but it was in there. Somewhat agree with Ron Shultz – must include all 5 CA’s in VSP. It is very difficult to get past.

Amy Windrope says she doesn’t have the same problem with it. VSP makes references that existing regs can be used. The regs are precautionary and meet the standard. Skagit has that statement in their work plan. That doesn’t bother me.

Ron Shultz says there is an assumption around regulatory approaches that assumes they work, without checking. Regulations protect oak woodland habitat, but are they? We don’t know. We aren’t tracking. Don’t think you can assume that if a regulation is in place that you can assume it is working. VSP is supposed to be a different way to approach this. There is a statutory provision in VSP that says you can incorporate existing regs, but VSP also says you must monitor and adaptively manage. If you are going to put those into VSP, you can’t assume they are working.

Amy Windrope asks if VSP’s requirement to monitor trump GMA? I am not convinced. Need to go back to look at Thurston and Chelan.

Lauren Driscoll – I tend to agree with Ron Shultz. If you enter into VSP you acknowledge you are going to monitor and adaptively manage.

Kelly McLain asks about work group makeup – who are the farmers in the work group.

[Skagit representatives go through the work group make up.]

Amy Windrope says that in Chelan County’s plan - adaptive management matrix – mentioned that they relied on the regs.

[General discussion about the meaning of “incorporation” in RCW 36.70A.720]
Ron Shultz says if listing regs into the work plan is all that is necessary, that doesn’t meet the purpose of VSP.

Amy Windrope asks if there are any goals and benchmarks for the regulatory pieces in the work plan.

Ryan Walters says he doesn’t think there are any goals other than for habitat.

Amy Windrope says if you create goals for the other CA’s, that would work.

Ron Shultz says yes, and if they include adaptive management if not achieving the results.

Ryan Walters says they added a line in the work plan that the 4 CA regs would remain in place.

Ron Shultz says in a GMA context, that may be appropriate. Under VSP, that doesn’t work. Under GMA, every 7 years, review and revise. VSP is different. It is an alternative approach, and requires certain things. One of those is evaluating with a benchmark, how you are doing since 2011.

Lauren Driscoll says under GMA, now we are start looking at the effects of the regulations. If VSP says we are supposed to see if we are being protective, but if we don’t know if we are because we are not studying it – you can’t assume that a regulation will protect. I am questioning relying on the precautionary approach. On that line, the only standard on the 4 CA’s is that the CAO for those doesn’t change – as long as it doesn’t change, you are protecting.

Ryan Walters says that is what we proposed. On pg 33, we described how each of the CA’s are dealt with in each zone. We could add some other line incorporating them by reference or 104 other pages into the work plan. We take your point of not having separately monitored metrics for the other 4 CA’s. Frequently Flooded Areas and Geologically Hazard areas – we are trying to protect people from those. How you monitor those is different. We’ve always focused on habitat in Skagit.

Lauren Driscoll says on that table on pg 33, those are for habitat, I was confused on if the other 4 CA’s apply to ag lands as well?

Ryan Walters says Ag-NRL and RRC-NRL apply to all zones. The table may not capture all possibilities.
Ron Shultz says this table is your intention that the regs are included in the work plan and actually incorporating the regs into the work plan.

Ryan Walters says yes.

Ron Shultz says that could be clarified. I think if you said that under the VSP work plan, we would use regs for the 4 CA’s besides habitat. But, you are saying “because the county’s standard CAO is precautionary, monitoring is not required (WAC .920).” I don’t see where WAC .920 says that. It is incorrect to say that monitoring and adaptive management don’t have to be done if you take a precautionary approach. Monitoring and adaptive management must still be done. It is OK to use an existing regulatory approach for the 4 CA’s, but still have to monitor and adaptively manage. I don’t think that is overly burdensome. Every 5 years, reporting that you are protective because you are monitoring the results. That is where I am coming from.

Brian Cochrane says that puts the Technical Panel into looking at, in 10 years, will CA’s be protected and agricultural viability maintained? I don’t see the picture of how the regulatory piece is protecting and allowing for voluntary participation. The regulatory process doesn’t always protect, unless you are looking / checking. Unless you are looking to see if the regs are doing what you say they are doing. Not just bringing the regs in to the work plan, but knowing they are doing what they are supposed to be doing.

Amy Windrope asks what else do you think, Ron?

Ron Shultz says for now that is a fatal flaw without being fixed. VSP says create measurable benchmarks that will, in 10 years, ensure protection and enhancement.

[General discussion about buffer width’s table]

Kelly McLain asks about pg 58 and what is in the County’s Comp plan – goals for agricultural viability there. Were there any things that the agricultural community brought up that were not in the Comp plan.

Kara Symonds – Drainage and irrigation infrastructure be maintained is something that came up. Conservation Futures fund be maintained. Also as outlined in the plan – protecting the land base. 40 acre minimum.

Amy Windrope asks if farmers think that there is a wildlife threat to their agricultural viability.

Ryan Walters says they didn’t really analyze that in the work plan.
Ron Shultz says there is some of that analysis in the plan.

Brian Cochrane says the spotted frog wasn’t analyzed in the work plan.

[General discussion about agricultural concerns with wildlife in Skagit County].

Ron Shultz says that maybe on pg 29 participation benchmarks – having a figure that describes how many producers are in the universe so we could compare the pace of participation would be good.

Amy Windrope asks Kelly McLain about why she asked about farmer involvement?

Kelly McLain says she was concerned about farmer involvement in the work plan development. There are three dairy farmers on Skagit’s work group. There is 60,000 acres of farm land in the County. I am still concerned. I’ve talked to 80 farmers and they didn’t know about Skagit’s effort.

Amy Windrope asks about the agricultural viability section.

Kelly McLain says she liked the agricultural viability section seemed like an improvement from what we’ve seen in the past.

Amy Windrope says this is hard for me – they focused on what WDFW cares about – habitat.

Lauren Driscoll says I have not had a chance to get feedback about Skagit’s wetlands CAO. Part of why I want monitoring to show protection. Am waiting to talk to some Ecology staff.

Ryan Walters – There is a summary of public outreach in Appendix 5.

Amy Windrope says that Appendix 5 was good – more detail than what we’ve seen from other work groups about what the work group actually talked about.

Ron Shultz says there is a story to tell in Skagit County. I think they did what they could to get a productive document out of the County. Fights going on for decades.

Ryan Walters says when we started this process, we went to the Agricultural Advisory group and they wanted landowner participation, not state agency or other involvement.
Ron Shultz says he thinks they did a good job with the situation they have.

Kelly McLain says one thing that could be helpful – talk about how farming is rotational in Skagit County. It isn’t about land ownership, it is about land utilization. Almost like a lease / lessee. More complicated than in other areas.

Brian Cochrane loves the riparian monitoring piece and the imagery. Areas of loss and gain are identified. How is that being handled at the watershed scale.

Ryan Walters says we will monitor habitat at both the individual and watershed level. Landowners can’t clear riparian. VSP doesn’t fail if that happens. If there is a net loss, then VSP loses.

Ron Shultz says you still have to show results – which is why monitoring is important.

Mike See says gain can be looked at by looking at what other organizations are doing to protect or enhance. We can look at that and take credit for that wherever it happens in the county.

Ron Shultz says that is what VSP is about – looking at the broader picture – not just the individual landowner.

Kelly McLain asks a hypothetical – landowner comes into the technical service provider – will install a buffer – the buffer becomes regulatory once it is put in.

Ryan Walters says basically yes, but can do some emergency removal.

Kelly McLain says how do you get growers to do that?

Ryan Walters says we’ve had the program in place for 15 years, and we have the new NRSP.

Kara Symonds says that is an incentive for taking land out of production. Work group focused a lot of discussion on that.

Ron Shultz says if we had to vote on this today, the Commission would vote no. To many fatal flaws. But, those could be corrected. Changing the language and being more deliberative about how to incorporate the regulations. It matters how you incorporate. Include it in your monitoring and adaptive management.
Amy Windrope says pick the really important thing to monitor and do that – too expensive to do otherwise.

[General discussion on what can be monitored]

Kelly McLain says CARA’s can be monitored with precision agriculture.

Amy Windrope says Chelan had some programs listed that would meet the protection goals of the CA’s. Maybe like Chelan that there was an international standard (global gap) that would apply.

Kelly McLain says there should be some options that could be used for monitoring.

Lauren Driscoll says that if Skagit can make a better link and highlight practices that support wetlands protection that would be nice. I am still mulling wetland protection regulation as a step backwards – need to demonstrate effectiveness. Incorporating the regs also.

Ryan Walters says incorporating the regs can be easy. Monitoring more difficult.

Kelly McLain says participating metrics could be used for the other 4 CA’s.

Amy Windrope says other counties have ecological monitoring that we are happy with.

Ryan Walters asks if other counties are measuring the ecological monitoring.

[General discussion about indicators that help to measure effectiveness]

Ron Shultz asks, given the construct of the Skagit work plan, there is a regulatory component to the habitat CA with the buffer that can’t be gotten rid of once it is established. Can you say that your plan is primarily voluntary?

Dan Berentson says yes – through the programs we incorporate into our plan. We also have 59 inter-locals with culvert replacement and helping them.

Ryan Walters says we have voluntary programs.

Ron Shultz says VSP says the spirit of the VSP is to primarily rely on voluntary approaches, not the regulatory approach. An argument could be
made that you are relying on a primarily regulatory approach since 4 of the 5 CA’s are being regulated. The Technical Panel cannot turn down a work plan that doesn’t rely on voluntary practices as the primary method of participation in VSP. How would you respond if someone says your plan isn’t voluntary?

Ryan Walters – all VSP work plan’s are different. We have both components in our plan.

Kara Symonds says that agriculture can keep farming as you are farming under our VSP work plan. If farmers are interested, they can voluntarily enter into other programs we have available. Habitat conservation is our biggest concern.

Dan Berentson uses an example to describe how the Skagit plan is voluntary and how the County can protect CA’s and still have farmers participate in the plan. Net gain of farmable ground and protection of CA’s at the same time in the middle Skagit.

Ron Shultz says the Skagit plan doesn’t allow agriculture activities to expand into wetlands. If a farmer wanted to have cattle in a wetland, would that be allowed?

Ryan Walters says some uses are allowed.

Ron Shultz asks if there is a situation where a farmer might want to voluntarily do something but it wouldn’t be allowed under VSP.

[General discussion about possible scenarios]

Ryan Walters says if you don’t have 100% code compliance, you still might meet the benchmark. Many other counties completely exempt AG, but Skagit doesn’t. We don’t want to go backward. Don’t want to dig out of a hole if VSP fails.

[General discussion on how to proceed from here? Can make changes. 45 day clock. September 2018 deadline to submit to Technical Panel. Can restart clock.]

4:50 pm: Next meeting – Tuesday, June 20, 2017 – Grant and Skagit County work plans – formal review meetings and votes on each plan

Schedules to be looked at during the June 20th meeting to see if any other meetings dates might be available.

5:00 pm: Adjourn