Voluntary Stewardship Program
Technical Panel Meeting
Friday, July 28, 2017
9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Facilitator – Bill Eller, VSP Coordinator, WSCC

Attendees in Lacey:  Brian Cochrane, WSCC (TP); Lauren Driscoll, ECY (TP); Kelly McLain, WSDA (TP); Matt Mueller, WDFW (TP); Matt Mueller, WDFW (Technical Panel); Alicia McClendon, WSCC; Ron Shultz, WSCC; John Stuhlmiller, Lisa Grueter, Bryce Anderson, Frank Hendrix, Mike Tobin, Nell Lund, Michelle Cooke, Benton County

Webinar:  Betsy Bloomfield, Renee Hadley, Don Brigham, Ron Harle, Bill Eller, Mike Ritter, Jennifer Nelson, Scott Downes, John Raap, Mark Neilson, Debbie Berkowitz, Greta Holmstrom, Barbara Adkins; Aaron Rosenblum; Greg Wendt; Kathie Davies; John Stuhlmiller; Eric Bartrand; Steven Woodley

VSP TECHNICAL PANEL MEETING

Session Objective:
Conduct informal reviews of Yakima and Benton County’s VSP work plans.

9:00 am: Opening Comments, Introductions, Session Objective & Agenda

9:05 am: VSP Program update (if any) – Bill Eller, Ron Shultz, WSCC
VSP budget passed, funding available to counties. County contracts went out to the counties last week. Just need to return them.

9:15 am: Yakima County informal review presentation – Lisa Grueter.
Bill Eller introduced this topic. Says informal review different than formal review. Neither of these plans today have been formally submitted. Informal review only. Yakima work plan due July 2018. Benton work plan due July 2018.

Lisa Grueter – begins PowerPoint presentation. Work group met 16 times so far. Lots of subcommittee meetings.

Frank Hendrix – Yakima county unique – one of top 10 agriculture producing counties in the world. $1.2B value in livestock in Yakima County. Dairy and tree fruit. Lots of entities represented on VSP work group - environmental, agriculture, industry, government.

Lisa Grueter and Frank Hendrix talk about how the VSP would fit into Yakima County’s agriculture community.

Mike Tobin – lots of equal participation in the work group meetings. Anticipate equal or greater participation in work group meetings.

Frank Hendrix says all the work group members want the same thing.

Brian Cochrane asks how can you know if the right people are on the work group – not just participation, but how does the Technical Panel know that the right people were participating – put something in the work plan so the Technical Panel knows.
Lisa Grueter says all the Yakima County watersheds were included in VSP; one was selected as priority. The Wenas watershed is a priority.

Mike Tobin says the Yakima Integrated Plan is important to the county. Yakama Indian Nation is a key member of the valley. The Tribe supported Yakima County’s participation in VSP and in highlighting the Wenas watershed.

Lisa Grueter shows a map of agriculture lands in Yakima County. 25% of the county is private. Federal government owns a lot more. Agriculture lands intersection with critical areas guides the goals and benchmarks. A groundwater management plan is being created for the county. WDFW priority habitat species map. Rangelands overlapping with shrub steppe.

Mike Tobin – work group looked at land use overlaps.

Lisa Grueter – conservation since 2011 was looked at – practices and projects.

Mike Tobin – says there was some education of the work group members of what conservation practices are for some projects in Yakima County.

Lisa Grueter – says past watershed plans were looked at.

Frank Hendrix says big issues the work group talked about included shrub steppe habitat and sage grouse; wildfire.

Mike Tobin talks about wildfire and how that would work in VSP for meeting goals and benchmarks.

Lisa Grueter – monitoring for shrub steppe habitat was a topic of discussion – imagery interpretation and how that will be done. The county will collect it, and the work group will figure out who will use it.

Matt Mueller asks where the monitoring methods are in the work plan.

Lisa Grueter says they are in the appendices.

Lauren Driscoll asks what the imagery will be of.

Lisa Grueter says it is not limited to any particular critical area.

Lauren Driscoll asks if the county is doing on-going mapping.

Lisa Grueter says yes. Work group would choose the entity to do the imagery interpretation.

[General discussion on imagery capture and interpretation and who would do that, how and why]

Lisa Grueter presents some example goals and benchmarks in the work plan. Hydrologically related critical areas – from the Yakima County critical area ordinance. Protection benchmarks developed by a sub-committee.

Mike Tobin talks about the sub-committee’s work to develop benchmarks. Example – shrub steppe habitat intersect with critical areas.

Ron Shultz – asks about Table 7-1, page 73. Protection benchmark related to that is a narrative that talks about progress, but don’t see any numbers attached to that. There is nothing to measure against this.

Lisa Grueter says the adaptive management matrix will address that for protection – there are numbers / triggers for protection.
[General discussion about what to measure, what the indicators are]

Brian Cochrane says the question is, what are you measuring, why is it important, and what will you do about it?

Ron Shultz asks what the standard you are trying to achieve is.

Lisa Grueter says there are acres of overlap in the plan. The work plan indicates we are going to look at acres or miles for initial screening. The goals and benchmarks relate to functions and values of the critical areas. We would start with mapping, then use expert panels to tell us what is happening on the ground. If there is a change, what is the reason for that change?

Ron Shultz says it might be semantics – what is a goal, what is a benchmark. For VSP, to say you are protecting – maintain the function as of what. Not just the date. What is the existing state of the function – in a numeric value? If you don’t, it would cut both ways. Thinks there should be a numeric value. Look at the critical area impacted by VSP, so need to say we have x number of riparian habitat. Our goal would be to maintain that x number of riparian habitat. If not, why? A narrative doesn’t give a good indicator of what is being measured against.

Lisa Grueter says we have the information we use to get to this point. We do say if we are using linear feet or aerial views.

Ron Shultz says to indicate where the critical areas and agriculture intersect.

Ron Shultz says if critical areas exist in 2011, then they are there. What is the existing state of those critical areas and how are you protecting those.

Frank Hendrix says what to do about areas that burn?

Ron Shultz says if shrub steppe is a critical areas, and agriculture interacts with it, then there is a fire. If the fire causes the loss of the critical areas, then that needs to be explained in the reporting in the work plan. You won’t know, without numbers, that you’ve lost that critical area space.

Lauren Driscoll asks if you are using Chapter 5 exhibits – 5.4, 5.5, page 48. It should be linked to Table 7.

Lisa Grueter says we have mapped the critical areas and included that in the work plan. The county is doing the mapping.

Kelly McLain says an easier analysis of monitoring, benchmarks, goals and adaptive management needs to be linked in Table 7 so that those who come after us can easily read and understand. Put it all in one place. Add another column to connect to those pieces in section 5.

Lisa Grueter we can certainly do that linkage. There is a concern that the work plan numbers be based on functions and values. We don’t want to get into every acre being equal in term of importance.

Brian Cochrane says why use acres then – why not measure function?

Lisa Grueter says the available data is in acres. This is a first screen of the information. We will use other methods (expert panels, reports) if the numbers of acres tell us to.
Nell Lund says if a function index (water quality) is used, the problem is that there are so many other things that impact that.

Matt Mueller says that if not every acre is important, Table 7 and Appendix G – if there was a way to break out the numbers based on agriculture type (Pacific County) and give performance metrics for each one – that would weight each one to clearly show which area important.

Kelly McLain says can’t use the same as Pacific County for Yakima County – Pacific has few agriculture types while Yakima has hundreds. VSP designed to review at the watershed scale, not parcel scale. Numbers are one component to measure – there are many other points to consider.

Lisa Grueter says can add a column to show the level of intersect in the agriculture lands.

Ron Shultz says should include some of the numbers in Chapter 7. Just add more explanation around those numbers. We need numbers to measure against at the 5 year reporting point.

Lisa Grueter wants to make sure that the functions and values are kept the focus of the work plan.

Mike Tobin says that new shrub steppe won’t be created, it will be converted. So, need to make sure there is more than just a number.

[More general discussion about if numbers / data is necessary versus a narrative of functions and values]

Lisa Grueter says the work group did talk about land use conversion as an issue.

Brian Cochrane says more specificity is better. Remote sensing is large. What are you looking for and what the threshold is. That would be helpful to the future users of the plan.

Kelly McLain says there is a variety of sources in the work plan for remote sensing, but whoever ends up doing it needs to know how those data sources will be used is important.

Brian Cochrane says we need to know the purpose of the effort of the remote sensing and imagery. Not a lot of guidance in the work plan as to the parameters of the remote sensing for the entity that is going to do it.

10:20 am: Break

10:40 am: Continue Yakima County informal review

Lisa Grueter continues with the work plan adaptive management process. Will use a cloud-based system for the individual stewardship plans. Both conservation districts will use that as they provide technical services. Monitoring also covered – annually and every two years.

Brian Cochrane asks if non-participating producers will be part of the survey.

Mike Tobin says that we know who is in a critical area and those who are not, so they should be included.

Brian Cochrane wants to make sure the non-participants are included.

Mike Tobin says windshield surveys will also be done.

Lisa Grueter says the work plan identifies the two conservation districts are the primary service providers.

Mike Tobin explains what RC&D is – an entity that can obtain grants for conservation work.
Lisa Grueter goes through entity roles in the work plan.

Brian Cochrane says what kind of support the work group will give to statewide monitoring.

Lisa Grueter says the work group will share information with state agencies.

Kelly McLain asks for more specifics about what support would be.

[General discussion about how the state and work group would work together on monitoring]

Lisa Grueter says the stewardship checklist is in two forms – one more detailed than the other. Outreach plan is in the appendix. Agriculture operators by watershed – 3,253, but really just a few large landowners.

Lisa finished the presentation.

Brian Cochrane – Appendix D regulations and the work plan reference to the incorporated existed regulations, where is the connection? Don’t see that in the work plan. Also in the piece about the other plans referenced – what was important about those other plans or why were they reviewed? Need the connections between those and the work plan.

Lisa Grueter says the goals and benchmarks list or refer to those plans specifically. Chapter 4 has the list of plans looked at, and the goals that came out of those.

Lauren Driscoll wants to know where the participation benchmarks are. Doesn’t know what those are or where to find them.

Ron Shultz has the same question based on the statute. If targeting a particular watershed (Wenas) where is that mentioned in detail in the work plan.

Lisa Grueter says the participation objectives are similar to Chelan – no clear numbers of participation. We have specific outreach on page 56. We chose the word “sufficient” participation because we were not sure how much we would have sooner in the process.

Brian Cochrane says getting as close to a number is better than not. Sufficient isn’t connected to a number, so not specific and subjective.

Kelly McLain agrees – there should be more specificity. Doesn’t have to be a number.

Lisa Grueter says the work plan does reference that this would be a first pass at what would be important. In Chapter 8 the Wenas watershed would be important. On page 96. Section 8.2.4. We’ve also worked on a draft budget with the two conservation districts based on participation numbers.

Brian Cochrane asks about tribal participation. Is there a discussion of the critical areas and agricultural acres in the work plan?

Lisa Grueter says that the tribal lands are included in the numbers in the work plan. WSDA maps fee simple lands in reservation; those were included. They can be broken out.

Mike Tobin asks if the work plan should include the tribal lands or at least a discussion of them.

Brian Cochrane says yes.
Ron Shultz again asks about the Wenas.

Lisa Grueter says it is on page 96 of the work plan.

Ron Shultz says that is fine, but more explanation would be helpful. What are you doing in that watershed and when will you get to the other watersheds.

Kelly McLain says RCW 90.64 is called out, is it a way to meet protection goals on dairy farms in the lower valley? I would say that CARA’s would be protected under those dairy nutrient management plans.

Lisa Grueter says we can add more on that in the work plan.

Brian Cochrane says to add more specifics on what in other plans is relevant to this work plan.

Lisa Grueter says we can include that.

Kelly McLain says RCW 90.48 is called out, would add more in the main work plan about the regulatory backstop in the state regulations. Also, RCW 90.58 shoreline management act.

Kelly McLain asks about the ground water management area (GWMA) process in the Lower Yakima Valley and agriculture practices that they are working on for groundwater protection. Might be helpful to include more of a discussion about that in the work plan.

Lisa Grueter says that could be included. Yakima County has brought some of our information to the GWMA meetings.

Kelly McLain says the tool kit the GWMA process develops might be helpful.

Lauren Driscoll asks about the monitoring – implementation monitoring versus effectiveness monitoring. There isn’t much commitment other than to say “we will look at x”.

Lisa Grueter says we can be clearer about the kinds of monitoring and how that gets done. Direct and indirect monitoring will be done.

No more questions or comments from the Technical Panel.

11:20 am:    Break for Lunch

12:30 pm:    Benton County informal review presentation – Lisa Grueter.

Lisa Grueter begins the presentation. Covers uniqueness of Benton County.

Michelle Cooke says the work group has 24 participating members. Reaching all sectors of agriculture. 14 meeting.

Brian Cochrane says to write down the work group participants (whey they are relevant and important to the process) and put that in the work plan.

Lisa Grueter covers the agriculture intersects with critical areas and the conservation practices since 2011.

Brian Cochrane asks what qualitative change is. Would like more specificity rather than subjectivity.

Kelly McLain asks if there is a 2011 invasive species intersect number from the County Weed Board or someone else. How much would a 10% increase be? Is there is starting point.

Lisa Grueter says remote sensing or land cover would show this.
Mike Ritter says that aerial imagery will be used. Asked the conservation district to assist with that baseline data gathering. The baseline would be from 2011.

Brian Cochrane asks if there is any idea what 10% of a number of acres might be, as that might be a big number as it relates to invasive species. Is 10% meaningful in terms of scale.

Lisa Grueter says we can bring that back to the work group. We’ve defaulted to 10%.

Brian Cochrane says if 10% is 300 acres, ok; but if it is 3,000 acres, the costs might be too high.

Lisa Grueter says we can talk to the producers and the Weed Board.

Kelly McLain says 10% might be ok with some invasive species, but not with others.

Lisa Grueter says the conservation district would be responsible for technical assistance.

Lauren Driscoll says if the base maps have a margin of error, there may not be a critical area on the map, but there could be one there.

Lisa Grueter says that we are sure how the conservation district will handle outreach on ground truthing the maps.

Mark Neilson writes in to say that “all projects will be evaluated on a sight specific basis in regards to critical areas.”

Matt Mueller asks if the mapping tool is in the appendix. The information on page 83 in the work plan should have more detail.

Lisa Grueter says it is not yet in the appendix. It has been referenced in the work plan. Will add it in the appendix.

Lisa Grueter says that the work group members like the conservation district interaction on the ground and a windshield survey.

Michelle Cooke says she and other work group staff have briefed industry groups and environmental groups on the work plan. There was an open house in June 2017. The work group is planning on doing more outreach and producer group meetings.

Lisa Grueter says the work group has developed some one-page information sheets for producers.

Michelle Cooke says that a lot of education has to occur with producers about VSP and critical areas. WSU Extension agent has helped a lot.

Matt Mueller says the outreach plan is good, but a lot of goals in the work plan are programmatic goals. It would be helpful to get a benchmark that shows participation.

Michelle Cooke says the work group has talked about that and the producers were worried about putting a number on participants so that the number will flatten out over time.

Brian Cochrane says a number is important because it is helpful to know how many you might need to reach.
Lisa Grueter says there is a table that shows how many producers and by agriculture type. We can work with the work group to see what they think. They wanted some ramp-up time.

Ron Shultz says the purpose of the number isn’t to set the work plan up for failure, but to try to determine what can be achieved. The number is there to help explain and describe how implementation is doing. If you hit all producers and can’t get any more to participate because of that, that is great.

Michelle Cooke says that is the producers fear – that if we have a number, it might not be able to be achieved.

Mark Neilson writes in to say “Acres/projects are more important than number of producers. For instance I can get 1 producer and cover 50,000 acres or 10 producers and get 50 acres.”

Ron Shultz says that is correct, it just needs to be explained and documented in the work plan. If that is what is going on, then say that so the Technical Panel knows what is going on in your county.

Brian Cochrane says we can measure failure and success, but only if we have an idea of what the numbers are.

Kelly McLain says that if we focus on practices or protection standards, the measure is against the success or failure of those practices or protection standards, not producer numbers.

Lisa Grueter says the adaptive management matrix for the work plan has language in it that allows for different ways to measure success. How adaptable are these plans. How formal does that have to be?

Bill Eller says there is a portion of the statute that would apply after the work plan is approved where a more formal adaptive management plan might have to be created.

Brian Cochrane says to focus on what the right question to ask is, then you can use different tools to get at the answer.

Lisa Grueter ends presentation

Ron Shultz says that he has the same issues as with Yakima’s work plan – more numbers would be helpful. For example, on page 56, Exhibit 7-1. Metrics that are mentioned there should have a number associated with it.

Lisa Grueter says we can add columns that say, as of 2011, this is what we saw. But, the work group really wanted to use that information for functions and values. The metrics are feet or acres, but the focus is functions and values. We can put that information in, but it will be blended with the expert panels and other ways to measure.

Ron Shultz says he understands that. Uses the example of the 10 parcels. If 6 of 10 parcels are protecting, do we care about the last 4? Traditional GMA, yes. In VSP, maybe. We need to have the context to make the appropriate evaluation. The Technical Panel would have to do that.

Lisa Grueter says she thinks we can get there with the numbers and other information.

Lauren Driscoll says there are numbers in the adaptive management thresholds.

Lisa Grueter says Ron Shultz described the work plan measuring method. We are using acres to see how we are doing.

Brian Cochrane says that something may affect critical areas like a fire, which isn’t caused by agriculture, but the response is something that agriculture can be involved in. What is the range of options that agriculture has in response to that event.
Kelly McLain says agriculture could assist in enhancement.

John Stuhlmiller says that is part of enhancement. Incentives could be used.

[General discussion about how adaptive management would be affected if agriculture or critical areas were affected by fire or something out of agriculture’s control]

Lisa Grueter says there are things in the work plan to address that in the enhancement benchmarks and practice identification.

Michelle Cooke says fire is a huge concern for our producers in our areas.

Ron Shultz says that if plans are being relied on in the work plan, what are those plans and how are they being relied on.

Kelly McLain says that there is really good performance metrics, but no number or way to identify how much will be done. I understand an adaptive management aspect to that, but can’t determine from that information if the critical areas functions and values are being protected. The information might be in other places, but it needs to be put together.

Brian Cochrane wants more links to be made between plans relied on in the VSP work plan goals and benchmarks.

Lauren Driscoll likes the discussion on the watershed plans and how the work plan picks out specific actions from those plans.

Lauren Driscoll asks if RCW 90.48 is referenced, and if not, it should be there.

Yakima County is meeting August 3rd to talk about this meeting.

2:00 pm: Next meetings –
- Monday, August 7, 2017 – final formal review and vote on Whitman and Pacific County work plans – WSCC conference room
- [NO PLAN ANTICIPATED TO BE SUBMITTED IN JULY (MEANS NONE TO CONSIDER IN AUGUST)]
- [ONLY PLAN ANTICIPATED TO BE SUBMITTED IN AUGUST – YAKIMA’S (MEANS REVIEW IN SEPTEMBER)]
- Friday, August 25, 2017 – Agenda TBD
- Tuesday, September 5, 2017 – Agenda TBD
- [mid-September]
- Friday, September 29, 2017 – Formal review - Yakima County
- October 27, 2017 - TBD
- November 17, 2017 - TBD
- December 29, 2017 - TBD

3:00 pm: Adjourn