Voluntary Stewardship Program
Technical Panel & Statewide Advisory Committee Meeting
Friday, August 25, 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); Amy Windrope, WDFW (TP); Matt Muller, WDFW (Technical Panel); Stacy Polkowske, WDFW (Technical Panel); Alicia McClendon, WSCC; Ron Shultz, WSCC; John Stuhlmliller (SAC), Linda Lyshall, Adam Cares, Eric Johansen, Stevens County; Evan Sheffels

Webinar: Barbara Adkins; Ron Wesen (SAC); Scott Kuhta, Sarah Sandstrom, Carmen Andonaegui, Shannon Laun

VSP TECHNICAL PANEL AND STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

9:05 am: VSP Program update (if any) – Bill Eller, Ron Shultz, WSCC
Bill Eller introduced this topic. VSP county contracts coming in, a full report will be available this afternoon. Stacy Polkowske has joined the Technical Panel from WDFW for the next few months.

9:15 am: San Juan County – informal presentation on work plan monitoring, goals and benchmarks – Linda Lyshall

Linda Lyshall presents. Work plan 200 pages. Document provided just has key areas. Page 2 shows work group makeup. Lots of diverse agricultural representation. Ag cultural resources committee. Good meeting with the tribes, but not so much involvement on their part in the work group process. Tulalip tribe has been supportive.

Brian Cochrane wants to make sure the work group includes the right list of people involved in the work group, not just representatives from each stakeholder group. Brian recommends having something in the work plan that explains how the workgroup members were solicited and selected.

Linda Lyshall continues to explain the work plan and table of contents. Table 1 is a cross-walk of each of the elements in RCW 36.70A.720 (a) – (l). 10 work group meetings and numerous sub-committee meetings. Agriculture summit. Presentations to the BOCC. Other county events.

A focus in San Juan County was agriculture viability. It is part of the culture. Agriculture has been mapped from 2011. There is also USDA census data, NRCS and SJICD data. There is measurement since 2011 from NRCS and SJICD, as well as an agricultural survey that the work group sent out in 2015. They hope to repeat that every 2 years. Figure 3 – agricultural viability goals and strategies. Table 3 detail on agricultural viability. Linda asks for feedback on agricultural viability measures.

Brian Cochrane suggests putting meaningful data points in as a measure rather than a statement of increase or decrease.
Linda Lyshall says some percentage for variability can be added in.

Lauren Driscoll asks about access to capital and how that is measured?

Linda Lyshall says we ask about that in our survey.

Kelly McLain asks about skilled labor?

Linda Lyshall says those are addressed in the survey.

Kelly McLain says to add a note on the table to that affect.

Matt Muller says the more actual numbers and data, the better, along with what Brian Cochrane said.

Brian Cochrane says better data will build a better response to the change the data shows.

Kelly McLain says agricultural viability can’t fail you out of VSP, but it is extremely important to the work group and agriculture. As much for them as well as for people 5-7 years down the road. That end message is just as important as the approval of the work plan.

Linda Lyshall moves on to farm retention. Same type of measure being used.

Brian Cochrane says a decrease might be something to look at, but might not necessarily need a response.

Linda Lyshall says a question keeps coming up of how to measure the potential decrease in agricultural viability due to BMP implementation? BMP’s are a good thing in my world, but others are concerned about that. The statute says we must address that question.

Kelly McLain asks in the conversation around that question, there is pressure both ways – development v. environmental protection. You could include in your work plan an assessment of how that is affecting agricultural viability in the county. Easier to turn a farm into a Wal-Mart, but harder to turn a Wal-Mart into a farm. Is restoration or protection impacting agricultural viability? The work plan does a pretty good job of describing the use of appropriate BMP’s.

[General discussion about BMP’s and how they might affect agricultural viability]

Stacy Polkowske asks about adding another data point to the table.

Linda Lyshall says that could be added. Continues with presentation.

John Stuhlmiller asks about the stewardship and sustainability on Table 3. BMP’s will show up elsewhere as protection. Might want to take a non-regulatory approach to the language of BMP use so people don’t misconstrue the voluntary nature of VSP.

Linda Lyshall says we might have to change the language a little. We’ve gotten pushback on the terminology. Continues with presentation. Asks about externalities effect on agricultural viability.

Kelly McLain says a discussion of external factors to agricultural viability should be discussed in the work plan. There are a lot of unique external factors in San Juan County so those should be documented and whether or not the work group has any control on those.

Linda Lyshall asks what happens if agricultural viability decreased in 5 years? Is the county kicked out of the program?

Lauren Driscoll says you won’t be kicked out, but you’ll want to track that.
Kelly McLain says data may show that the wrong metric is being looked at. Metrics may change in the future. The analysis would need to be done at that point.

Brian Cochrane says the reason agricultural viability is in the program is the perception that a regulatory route would kill agricultural viability. This program will measure agricultural viability to see how we are doing with that.

Linda Lyshall asks if we see agricultural viability taking a dive and we’ve tied that to efforts to protect critical areas, what happens. The County could exit VSP.

Kelly McLain would hope that would drive a course correction under the work plan to try to figure out why.

Linda Lyshall moves to critical areas on the table on page 12 of the materials. Not a lot of data for baseline of critical areas. Benchmarks and thresholds for each of the critical areas. Water quality monitoring in 5 watersheds. Plan is to document changes in 2 and 5 year increments.

Lauren Driscoll wonders if you wait until you’ve got evidence of a failure to meet water quality instead of just a decline it would be late to take action versus acting when there is a decline. – what would trigger action? Moving toward a decline.

Linda Lyshall water quantity – wetland acreage. 5 % was just picked as a number. Planning on HICD WDFW model.

Matt Muller has experience with that WDFW model. If you have the wetlands mapped, then you can use the WDFW HICD model. Would need another data source (a map).

Linda Lyshall says wetlands are mapped, but we know the maps are not accurate.

Matt Muller – for wetlands, not sure if we can trust the data on that. A better thing to look at would be the riparian areas.

Lauren Driscoll says wetlands are difficult since we don’t have a good dataset. Could use a windshield survey.

Kelly McLain says you could analyze a subset of the wetlands each year as a measure. Could also get that data through a survey.

Matt Muller says if we could get some idea of the wetlands ground-truth-ed, then could create your own map and use the WDFW model.

[General discussion about wetland mapping and county data]

John Stuhlmiller says VSP is looking at the 5 critical areas for protection and enhancement. There are 4 elements listed as the metrics to measure. The benchmarks might be a little different under VSP. July 22, 2011 is the date. So, if you look only at wetlands, water quality is an important quality of that, but that is not the test. Water quality isn’t the metric – the metric is the critical area function and values. Can’t make producers do anything under VSP. Looking at the watershed scale, not the individual producer or BMP implementation level.

Linda Lyshall says to make sure the roll-up of data is in the aggregate, not the individual.

John Stuhlmiller says and only how agriculture is affecting the critical areas.
Kelly McLain says to look at the Pacific County plan as they use water quality as an indicator. The threshold is explained well, but there are so many other things that could impact water quality. But, it might not be the best indicator without more.

Lauren Driscoll asks which goals are being met with the increase in wetland acres – protection or enhancement.

Linda Lyshall continues with presentation – Habitat. Not much livestock in the shoreline area. Focusing on streams, not shoreline area intersection. SMP can protect the shoreline areas. Will use SVAP2 (Stream Visual Assessment Protocol).

Brian Cochrane says any monitoring involves the size of the sample and what is possible to get a meaningful dataset. What does SVAP2 show now in San Juan County and is it cost-effective to use now?

Linda Lyshall says if SVAP2 isn’t used, what else could be used?

Brian Cochrane says could use pieces of SVAP2. There are other stream measuring tools that could be used. SVAP2 is easy to use and faster and cheaper.

Linda Lyshall says the work group also included species of local importance. Will monitor the areas and measure the acres. It will be difficult.

John Stuhlmiller points out the protection and enhancement. Protection applies as of July 22, 2011. Better than what was is enhancement. Protection is required, enhancement is great if you can get it. Should separate those out in the work plan.

Linda Lyshall says the individual stewardship plans will gather data about species of local importance.

Brian Cochrane asks if that can or will be extracted up to the watershed level so as to avoid any confidentiality issues.

Linda Lyshall moves on to geologically hazardous areas.

[General discussion – not a lot of these in San Juan County]

Linda Lyshall says the whole county is a critical aquifer recharge areas (CARA). Not sure what the measure would be for that.

Kelly McLain says one option for a threshold could be to investigate any known impact that agriculture has on the CARA.

Linda Lyshall says there are externalities there that are out of our control.

Kelly McLain says there are questions that could be asked to help you evaluate the CARA and whether agriculture activities are affecting it.

Linda Lyshall moves on to frequently flooded areas. The work group added climate change there – not a requirement. Moves on to monitoring metrics across the critical areas – Table on page 39.

Brian Cochrane asks, what the question to be answered is. That will determine frequency and type of monitoring that needs to be done.

Kelly McLain agrees.

Linda Lyshall continues the presentation and moves on to water quantity and habitat. Says the HRCD will be run every 5 years.
Matt Muller asks about why 5 years for the HRCD change detection?

Linda Lyshall says likely that was due to cost and difficulty in gathering data.

Matt Muller says HRCD data will be available every 3 years.

Linda Lyshall says we can change that in the plan. Moves on to the individual stewardship plan in Appendix C. Says it was modeled on the Chelan individual stewardship plans.

Brian Cochrane says the SVAP2 elements. The change in SVAP scores might be more useful for you as you are really interested in the change.

Matt Muller asks about when they would formally submit their work plan.

Linda Lyshall says would like to come in January and February. Would prefer to go earlier. Maybe in November.

Bill Eller says to contact him when the work group thinks it will formally submit their work plan.

[General discussion about BMP’s and livestock]

10:45 am: Stevens County – informal presentation on work plan monitoring, goals and benchmarks – Adam Cares, Eric Johansen

Eric Johansen introduces the work plan process to the Technical Panel.

Adam Cares begins the presentation. Says Stevens County is very different from San Juan County. Monitoring is the biggest question we have right now. Fertile valleys is where agriculture occurs. Colville River valley. Flooding can be a big issue. Heavily modified hydrological system. Work group process was driven by local citizen involvement. Work group formed, but did outreach and contacted lots of people. Distrust for government and government programs. The county commissioners formally appointed work group members with an application process. Work group staff take an advisory role in the work group process.

Eric Johansen says we invited everyone to be part of the work group. We had lots of people showing up. We are contacting groups that have yet to participate. Likely we will see more participation when we get closer to formally submit the work plan. It has been a struggle.

Adam Cares continues with a review of the structure of the work plan. No maps yet of the intersection of the critical areas and agriculture. Protection strategies inform the BMP’s we are using to achieve those. We followed a lot of what Grant County has done. We rolled up existing BMP’s in Stevens County. Used CPPE tool to figure out which BMP’s could help with the critical areas. Page 31 has a table to connect the critical areas functions and values with the BMP’s. Tried to narrow down to a core set of BMP’s and baseline protection of ca functions and values.

Ron Shultz asks if that is similar to the Grant County approach.

Adam Cares says yes. Continues the presentation. Uses an example of the goals and benchmarks table. Page 38, Table 5.2.1. Reliance on existing plans and data – we tried to explain why we relied on those plans.

Matt Muller asks about Table 5.2.1 on page 38. WDFW PHS data is an existing plan for some BMP’s for wetlands protection. How will PHS be used for wetlands protection?
Eric Johansen says we are using that to identify those areas, not for monitoring.

Adam Cares agrees.

Eric Johansen says this is the best available information to identify riparian and wetland areas.

[General discussion about how to apply PHS]

Adam Cares says PHS is used as a tool to direct the work group’s attention to what needs to be looked at. Continues with presentation. There is table that integrates benchmarks for protection and enhancements. How to make the cross-walk between the different items in the plan is difficult. We want to make the work plan usable.

Lauren Driscoll says the efforts made so far are good.

Adam Cares moves on to monitoring – participation. Individual stewardship plans checklist and education and outreach will help inform that. Adaptive management techniques are identified as well. Effectiveness monitoring is more difficult. How are the ca functions and values doing? We are not sure what those are yet – we are working on those. Adaptive management in a voluntary program means we try to get people to do more stuff and to do further outreach and education. There are a few monitoring table which are the control center of the plan. Table 6.1 is participation monitoring. We used thresholds from other counties as a basis. We tried to determine an average per year and how many might stop. The numbers are kind of low, but that is based on improvements made since July 22, 2011. We’ve been doing a lot since then.

Lauren Driscoll asks about the annual protection metric and what that means – does 110 acres mean that is what is needed?

Adam Cares says yes. Continues presentation. Asks if the table should be rolled up into the entire county, or broken out into watersheds.

Eric Johansen says reporting would be by watershed. There are really 3 watersheds with significant agriculture presence in Stevens County. It might be unnecessary to break out planning for each.

Matt Muller says that it is on the work group to explain why they chose to do something.

Brian Cochrane says the risk is that if you aggregate up, you’ll have to decide if you dive into a particular watershed to see where the problem is.

Eric Johansen says, from a risk perspective, it makes sense to aggregate. We have very active watershed planning groups in Stevens County.

Kelly McLain says she would expect the watershed planning groups to identify problems as part of this process.

Adam Cares says that the watershed scale numbers for effectiveness monitoring are built to address this. Continues with the presentation. Page 53 in the PDF. Table 6-2. Effectiveness monitoring and adaptive management table. Uses 303d list initially, then analyze that. We used “significant trends” language from other plans rather than data points as indicators. Hydrology, soil health, habitat. Aerial imaging is the preferred method. There is a trust issue there. The work group is tentatively ok with aerial imaging as long as it is at the county scale and not the individual scale. Adam goes over how the aerial imaging monitoring will be done at the county scale and address privacy concerns. Participants and non-participants will be looked at. Variety of data sources – NAIP, WSDA, DNR, WDFW PHS regions.
Eric Johansen says we kept away from maps because they were inaccurate in showing the critical areas.

Adam Cares continues the presentation about how the aerial monitoring will be done.

Matt Muller understands the work group is doing what they can with the data available. Asks about the DNR buffer in the comparison pictures. How can you look at the images in 2011 versus when you next do the aerial analysis? Be thoughtful on the protocol for how you analyze that.

Adam Cares says that in plans that have been previously approved, the level of detail we are going into here isn't in their plans.

Matt Muller how can this be repeated is the question. You have taken this a step further than Whitman. But you need to be clear on the protocol so that those who come after you can repeat this.

Eric Johansen says a cookbook can be created on how to do this analysis.

Brian Cochrane says let the machine tell you where the change detection is, rather than having two individuals who might have a reviewer bias. More work up front, but less work down the road. Consider that for how good of a product you want at the end of this process.

Adam Cares says we appreciate the feedback.

Eric Johansen says we are trying to balance what we feel we can do from a people’s hour’s perspective. Surveying agencies, windshield drive-by survey is also part of this, but the bulk of this work would happen this way (the aerial photo analysis) because it protects privacy while getting the data we need. It is a balance of all of those things together.

Stacy Polkowske asks about the Q/A, Q/C process – are their producers you can collaborate with to make sure the numbers are accurate?

Adam Cares says that can be included. The work group wants us to do ground-truthing.

Eric Johansen says there is a range of participation in the individual stewardship plans that will be captured.

Adam Cares asks for more suggestions on how monitoring can be done and how the aerial monitoring could be used for other critical areas without more cost or effort?

Lauren Driscoll says this could be used for wetlands – natural, outside the riparian areas.

Kelly McLain says the majority of the agriculture in the county is related to that riparian area so wetlands should be able to be reviewed as well.

Eric Johansen says steep slopes can be identified with other GIS efforts. The important part will be identifying the score sheets on the other critical areas.

Kelly McLain affirms making the monitoring repeatable so that others later could be done.

Eric Johansen says a cookbook will be created.

Lauren Driscoll says that documenting how the monitoring was done the first time could work.
Eric Johansen says this is the first time this VSP process has been done state-wide. It will drive changes that will give us better data and make us better at monitoring.

Adam Cares asks if it is possible for some critical areas to, through a work plan narrative, not have an effectiveness monitoring check. Thinking about Geologically Hazardous Areas.

Eric Johansen says Stevens County is 99% rural. Zero development. Little commercial development. The likelihood of a steep slope causing a problem is highly unlikely.

Brian Cochrane says there is a way to take an image of a steep slope and see if there is a change in vegetation and then have the machine do the change detection. It isn’t that hard to do.

[General discussion about monitoring of other critical areas]

Kelly McLain says there should be something in a narrative that explains how CARAs or Geologically Hazardous Areas could be addressed through the use of available data. Those should be looked into. We need to have something for the CARA’s and Geologically Hazardous Areas.

Brian Cochrane says it makes a stronger plan to say “here is the assumption and here is how we are going to check the assumption.”

Lauren Driscoll says this is a good start on the work plan. Likes the aerial monitoring.

Kelly McLain says really happy to see Stevens County at this stage.

12:30 pm: Statewide Advisory Committee meeting

- Statewide Advisory Committee policy advisories
  - Confidentiality of individual stewardship plans
  - Submittal deadline for work plans

Bill Eller introduced this topic. Discussed the policy advisories.

Ron Shultz explained the confidentiality of individual stewardship plans and how that issue was presented to the Commission.

Bill Eller discussed the submittal deadline for work plans.

3:45 pm: Next meetings –

- Friday, September 29, 2017 – first formal review - Yakima County
- Friday, October 27, 2017 – final formal review – Yakima County
- Friday, November 17, 2017 – Stevens formal? San Juan formal?
- Friday, December 29, 2017 – TBD
- January 2018
- February 2018
- March 2018
- April 2018 – Mason informal review

Bill Eller introduced this topic and discussed the upcoming bottle neck of work plans to be approved. Most of us believe they would start coming this fall and winter. Technical Panel added the following meetings: Dec 8, 15 (Dec 29th cancelled); Jan 12, 26; Feb 9, 23; Mar 16, 30; Apr 13, 27 and May 11, 25. All meetings from 8am-3pm at the Farm Bureau.