Voluntary Stewardship Program
Joint Technical Panel & Statewide Advisory Committee Meeting
Wednesday, August 7, 2019
9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Facilitator – Bill Eller, VSP Coordinator, WSCC

Attendees in Lacey: Lauren Driscoll, Mary Huff, Charissa Waters, Alison Halpern, Kelly McLain, John Stuhlmiiller, Brian Cochrane, Alicia McClendon, Lisa Grueter, Brandon Roozen, Rick Mraz, Caleb Gwerder

Webinar: Brent Dixon, Britt Dudek, Renee Hadley, Anna Lael, Wes McCart, Natalie Osowski, Hannah Pygott, Graham Simon, Megan Stewart, Ron Wesen, Barbara Adkins, Lisa Grueter, Graham Simon

9:05 am: VSP Program update – Bill Eller, Ron Shultz, WSCC
- Policy Advisory 05-18 - guidance on 5 year report content - edits
- VSP & 2 year / 5 year reports – draft WAC chapter - status
- SCC-county FY 19-21 contracts – status update
- VSP regional meetings – Monitoring options and lessons learned – Nov/Dec?
- WDFW HRCD
- VSP BMP Gap Analysis Budget Proviso
- Next joint meeting

Lauren Driscoll introduced Rick Mraz, Ecology Wetland Policy Lead, as her upcoming replacement on the VSP Technical Panel.

Bill Eller brings up current contacts with counties involving training about VSP for new county commissioners and new county staff. A general discussion ensues about providing training, making training available, and communications between all those involved in VSP.

Bill Eller says the Commission is always available to provide trainings and that notices have be put in the past about trainings in the VSP newsletter. He also said he’s provided new commissioner training as part of the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC). Technical Panel members express their desire that the Commission train their new (and maybe some long-term) staff on VSP. Bill Eller says he will work with them on the details for a training either in-person or by webinar or both before the year is out.
John Stuhlmeiller says Eric Johnson at WSAC is a good resource to use.

Mary Huff brings up Commission-Agency (WDFW, ECY, WSDA) contracts and when those might be moved on by the Commission. Each agency should receive $200,000 for the biennia of VSP funding to support their work on the Technical Panel and for assisting work groups with their efforts.

Bill Eller said that our first priority was working through the Commission-County VSP contracts, but can now shift to focus on Commission-Agency contracts. He will contact Commission staff and get the ball rolling on that.

Bill Eller presented the other items. There has been no progress on Policy Advisory 05-18 edits and the draft WAC chapter due to Commission staff workload, but that is also subject to discussion here at today’s meeting. He also indicated that the VSP regional meetings that have been held in the past during December or January might again be held at that time as staff cannot organize a meeting time earlier in the year due to work load.

Bill Eller explained that the Commission is starting to receive the two year VSP status reports from the 27 VSP counties. Currently, Mason, Benton, Franklin, Chelan and Thurston have provided their 2 year reports.

**9:30 am:  Presentation by Chelan County on their 2 year and 5 year reports.**

Lisa Grueter is here to present on behalf of the county. She indicates that Britt Dudek and Hannah Pygott will also contribute, along with Graham Simon.

Lisa Grueter begins the PowerPoint presentation. She begins with an overview of the participating watershed basins. She presents a summary of the 2 year and 5 year reports.

Hannah Pygott says that she conducted 12 “side-walk” assessment of landowner property for the county.

Brian Cochrane wants to know how many parcels on the ground were checked to arrive at the error rate.
Hannah Pygott thinks there were 100 parcels with small amounts of change - .1 acre or higher. She checked approximately 12 parcels.

Britt Dudek explains that the work group tried to develop a tool. It isn’t quite done yet. Looking at protection of critical areas – that isn’t just about a number, but quality. Value can change just like acres. We want to be sure that even if the acres stay the same, that the values have improved.

Rick Mraz asks what the largest single loss was that was looked at.

Lisa Grueter it was conversion from non-agriculture to agriculture, but doesn’t recall which of the 12 parcels looked at.

Lisa Grueter continues the presentation and explains that the participation goals were qualitative rather than quantitative – were there sufficient participants to meet goals. There were 23 projects with 54 owners from 2011-2018 and none were funded with VSP monies. 33 checklists were completed, but since they were done anonymously, follow-up is proving difficult.

Mary Huff asks about the checklist question “does not apply” and asks what that means and suggests asking a different question – “I don’t want to do this.”

Lisa Grueter says they could add an interpretive statement to the checklist. She also says the checklist was envisioned as a process that the technical service provider would go through with the producer on a one-on-one basis, rather than without that level of interaction. Lisa explains the 2019-2021 implementation plan for the county work group.

Britt Dudek adds more to the discussion about outreach and trying to reach the larger partner entities in the county – growing houses, packing houses, the farm bureau, grower associations. He says that implementation is different than trying to put the work plan together. NRCS and the local CD can help the work group do VSP projects. He said that they have a project list they are working on and they are trying to work with the constraints of the VSP funding to get projects done.

Rick Mraz asks about monitoring in riparian areas.

Lisa Grueter says that occurs mostly along stream corridors.
Kelly McLain says she knows of habitat loss in Chelan County, and asks how the work group will do outreach on that.

Lisa Grueter explains the work group’s outreach plan and says that they will work with packing houses and recruit for the work group. It’s been difficult during the growing season to do outreach. Lisa finishes the presentation.

10:40 am: Break

10:50 am: Resume agenda items discussion

Bill Eller brings up two items not discussed before Chelan’s presentation. The first is an update on WDFW’s High Resolution Change Detection (HRCD). He says that the Commission has met with WDFW about how much work could be done under the current funding ($575k), and the option that was chosen was to try to provide all the counties currently using or who would like to use HRCD Chelan, Thurston, Kittitas, Mason, San Juan, Pacific, Cowlitz, Columbia, Pend Oreille, Grays Harbor and Lewis) for data for all years from 2011-present. The Commission and WDFW will begin working on that contract agreement.

Bill Eller then brings up the Budget Proviso related to VSP that passed the Legislature this past session.

Alison Halpern provides and update on the Budget Proviso. She explains that the Proviso was the result of discussions during the legislative session related to SB 5947. The Proviso was to research and report on a gap analysis related to VSP work plans and other voluntary conservation efforts and funding. She said the Commission is working on a tight timeline as the preliminary report was due August 1 to the legislature and the final report on November 1. There was some discussion of the meaning of the Proviso language related to what exactly the intent of the area of study was.

10:40 am: Resume discussion about the 2 year and 5 year reports, process and procedure

Bill Eller provides a PowerPoint summary of the current state of the VSP statute and our Policy Advisory 05-18 that relates to the policy and procedure around 2 year and 5 year reports. He explains that current policy and procedure flows from the VSP statute and the PA 05-18, and includes the Technical Panel in the review and
evaluation of the 5 year reports. He explains there is no timeline for finishing the review under our current procedures. He then presents the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee with two options – to continue with the current procedure, or to proceed with creating a new WAC chapter that would specifically address how the 5 year reports would be reviewed and evaluated. He reminds the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee that the Commission has been working on a draft WAC chapter for the past year or so, but hasn’t been able to release it for comment.

John Stuhlmiller says it’s only been 8-9 months for some of the counties to have approved their work plans, and Chelan and Thurston were the pilot counties that were supposed to help inform the process. Both Chelan and Thurston couldn’t have made much progress since this is the first review and they should be treated as a special circumstance since they were the pilot counties. The counties, if they have not already, should provide a clear statement of whether or not they feel they are succeeding in implementation of their work plans.

Mary Huff asks if the Technical Panel could meet alone, without the Statewide Advisory Committee, to deliberate. Deliberation among the Technical Panel members might be helpful in their review and evaluation, since the Technical Panel only provides a recommendation to the executive director of the Commission.

Bill Eller isn’t sure if the Technical Panel can meet without abiding by the Open Public Meetings Act, but will investigate.

John Stuhlmiller says the context is important – the review and evaluation isn’t an opportunity for agencies to get another bite of the apple – the plan is in place, the goal is in 10 years, will the goals be met.

Kelly McLain says that at every 5 years comes the chance for adaptive management and we should be able to provide input into that process.

John Stuhlmiller says it should be advisory input only.

Brian Cochrane says we should be concerned about the adequacy of the tools used and the adequacy of the benchmarks in the work plan. We approved work plans based on anticipated participation rates. Two important aspects of adaptive management – how to measure and the bar for measurement. We need a place to express what we think.
John Stuhlmiller says that advice should be given, but as feedback.

Commissioner Wes McCart says that he would be OK with pursuing putting more structure around the 5 year review and evaluation process if that structure is put in the guidance document PA 05-18 and not in a new WAC chapter. Of, if there are some more important aspects, those could be put in a new WAC chapter but content, procedure and timelines should be put in the guidance document.

There was a general discussion on how to add more procedure related to content of the 5 year reports and timelines involved in review into the guidance document rather than the WAC. A general consensus was achieved around moving most of the 5 year report content and review timelines into the guidance document and retaining just important policy choices, directives and definitions, as needed, into a new WAC chapter.

Commissioner Wes McCart explains the difficulties he has experienced at the county level with regard to additional requirements put in WAC rather than in a guidance document.

Bill Eller says he will work on updating PA 05-18 to reflect what was decided today, and the draft WAC chapter. When those are ready, he will release them for consideration by the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee, hopefully before the next meeting. The guidance document PA 05-18 can be amended and adopted quickly, but a new WAC chapter would involve a more protracted process. Regardless, he hopes to have this work completed before November 2020 when the rest of the 5 year reports come due.

The next joint SAC/TP meeting will be October 3, 2019, 9 am -12 noon, here at the Farm Bureau Office.

12:00 pm: Adjourned