Voluntary Stewardship Program
Joint Technical Panel & Statewide Advisory Committee Meeting
Wednesday, November 6, 2019
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Facilitator – Bill Eller, VSP Coordinator, WSCC

Attendees in Lacey: Lauren Driscoll, Mary Huff, Kelly McLain, John Stuhlmiller, Brian Cochrane, Alicia McClendon, Brandon Roozen, Rick Mraz, Ron Shultz, Deborah Johnson, Ron Wesen


1:00 pm: Opening Comments, Introductions, Session Objective & Agenda

Kelly McLain explains that Leslie Michel, has joined WSDA and will assist with VSP.

1:05 pm: VSP Program update – Bill Eller, WSCC

- VSP Natural Resource Scientist 2 position

  Bill Eller explains that the Commission is currently hiring for a new Natural Resource Scientist 2 (NRS2). The position was created to assist the VSP with a technical review of required reports, development of technical resources to assist counties, and conduct spatial analyses of critical area functions. The position anticipates a short-term need to review the first round of reports due for submission within the coming year, development of technical resources for monitoring a variety of ecological indicators (soils, wildlife, wetlands, groundwater, streams), provide in-person assistance for county staff developing or analyzing monitoring data, and generate geographically broad analyses for critical area functions that span more than one county.

  The NRS2 will be tasked to work with County, Conservation District, or VSP Technical Service Provider staff to improve monitoring effectiveness if current methods aren’t providing clear enough indications that voluntary conservation is protective of critical areas.
Brian Cochrane is the main contact for this position at the Commission (bcochrane@scc.wa.gov, (360) 407-7103) and more information can be found at the link on our VSP web page (https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/washington/jobs/2603881/natural-resource-scientist-2-nrs2?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

- **State agency staff introduction to VSP training – October 3rd**
  Bill Eller gave an update on the introductory VSP training for state agency staff (specifically invited WDFW, ECY, WSDA, and Commerce) to attend. The training was held as a webinar on October 3rd, and the webinar was recorded and is available on the Commission’s VSP web page. Approximately 40-50 persons attended in person and 24 on-line from WDFW, ECY, WSDA and federal wildlife agencies. Shoreline management and how that interacts with VSP as well as the definition of agricultural activities were topics that came up that were beyond the scope of the training that might be addressed in a more advanced class / training on VSP at a later date.

  A general discussion ensued where comments were made that the training was helpful and that it should be offered annually. There is a lot of turnover not only at state agencies, but with county work group members, and all would benefit from this training.

- **SCC-county FY 19-21 contracts – status update**
  Bill Eller explained that all 27 VSP contracts between the Commission and counties are in place.

- **SCC-agency FY 19-21 contracts – status update**
  Bill Eller explained that all the agency contracts (WSDA, ECY, and WDFW) are in place, but that WDFW’s contract is awaiting signatures. A brief discussion was held about WDFW’s efforts related to its High Resolution Change Detection (HRCD). Mary Huff says that she has an informational sheet that she can provide at the next meeting outlining details.

- **Yakima County letter**
  Bill Eller explains that the Commission responded to Yakima County’s VSP letter from August 2019 and that he sent a copy of both letters to the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee members. Members wanted the letters sent out again. A general discussion was had about the issue of the
Statewide Advisory Committee membership that was brought up in the letter. Bill Eller explained that the purpose of the SAC is to advise the Commission on the VSP, so it serves an important role in VSP. The SAC is to be made up of two representatives from county government, two representing agricultural organizations, and two persons representing environmental organizations, but the statute doesn’t require tribal participation, but invitation. He explained that the Commission continually seeks representatives from the environmental community when vacancies are available, and has continually made efforts to invite tribal representatives to serve on the SAC, though that is not a requirement under the statute. The Commission welcomes your thoughts and strategies for obtaining more representation from both the environmental and tribal interests, and Technical Panel and SAC members agreed to provide some leads and names. The Nature Conservancy was identified as a possible environmental representative.

- **VSP BMP Gap Analysis Budget Proviso**
  Ron Shultz gives an update on the budget proviso. Explains that the proviso, its report, and VSP are linked. The purpose of the report is to try to estimate the cost to implement practices under VSP and then to extrapolate that statewide. The deadline to submit the report was extended beyond November 1st.

1:35 pm: **Policy Advisory 05-18 and VSP & 5 year reports and continued review of Chelan and Thurston county five year reports**

Bill Eller summarizes the past discussions we’ve had on this topic over the last few meetings, and explains that at the last meeting Commission staff committed to reviewing both reports, using them as real examples and analyze those for what is in them – the things we might want to include in the 5 year reports, those things that might not be necessary, and that things that are missing.

During that process, Commission staff met internally and discussed the five year report content and process, and couldn’t finish this work by this meeting. The discussion involved the quality and quantity of information needed in order for the Commission’s executive director to concur in the work groups assertion of whether or not their efforts are meeting the goals and objectives of their work plan. A process similar to the process used to approve the work plans was suggested wherein the
Technical Panel members would work individually on each report, and then come together to discuss the reports as needed.

Ron Shultz says the issue is between required versus optional information in the reports. The Commission’s role is different than during the work plan approval process. With five year reports, the Commission has a choice to concur or not with the work group’s determination. The work group needs to “show its work” so that the Commission can make that decision. The Commission needs to know how the work group and its efforts met the goals and objectives of the work plan.

Rick Mraz says there are summary statements in Thurston and Chelan’s five year reports that do not have conclusory statements, so it is difficult to know what they are asserting.

Brian Cochrane brings up the short time frame from plan adoption to this first round of reports.

Ron Shultz says that the five year report is supposed to report on whether the work group is meeting the 10 year goals and objectives in the work plan. The report shouldn’t tell us what is in the plan, but it should tell us what they are doing to meet the plans’ goals. They should tell us in the report those things we need to make the decision. They should describe how they are meeting the goals and objectives of the work plan so that we can make the decision.

A general discussion ensues about written comments from the Technical Panel back to the work group on their five year report and how that should occur.

Ron Shultz says we should create a template where the work group pulls out the goals and objectives from their work plan and answers if they are meeting each of them and then explains why.

Rick Mraz brings up an example from Thurston’s submittals for their five year report – Appendix C and its changes. He isn’t sure what the purpose of that appendix is for, nor why it has lots of mark-ups in it.

Bill Eller suggests that it could be that the appendix represents something in the work plan that was adaptively managed and was changed. The Commission has asked that if work plans are adaptively managed and changes made, that those changes be submitted as part of the five year reporting process. Perhaps we should require, as
part of the five year report, that each item submitted with it be clearly identified and accompanied with an explanatory statement.

A general discussion ensues about how VSP differs from GMA in that VSP is measured for success at the watershed scale and not at the parcel scale.

Further discussion is had on the focus of measurement (i.e. area) and how that might not be an effective measurement for whether or not the functions and values of critical areas are being protected.

Bill Eller explains that the Commission will attempt to put together a draft guidance document for consideration by the next meeting.

**2:45 pm: Set next joint meeting - Wednesday, December 11 (proposed)**
The next joint SAC/TP meeting will be Wednesday, December 11, 2019, 1 pm - 4 pm, here at the Farm Bureau Office.

**12:00 pm: Adjourned**