Voluntary Stewardship Program
Joint Technical Panel & Statewide Advisory Committee Meeting
Wednesday, December 11, 2019
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Facilitator – Bill Eller, VSP Coordinator, WSCC

Attendees in Lacey:  Mary Huff, John Stuhlmiiller, Brian Cochrane, Alicia McClendon, Rick Mraz, Ron Shultz, Deborah Johnson, Scott Kuhta; Charissa Waters, Ron Shultz

Webinar:  Brandon Roozen, Amy Martin, Ron Wesen, Megan Stewart, Riley Zionce, Wes McCart, Christian Hardt, Elizabeth Jackson, Marguerite Abplanalp, Alex Martinsons, Carrie King, Amanda Ward, Bradley Johnson, Rodney Heit, Barbara Adkins

1:10 pm:  Opening Comments, Introductions, Session Objective & Agenda

1:15 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.

  Interviews were conducted yesterday and the Commission will conduct further review and intends to have someone in this position by January 1.
- **VSP presentation at WSAC – November 20**
  Bill Eller gave an introduction to VSP presentation at the Washington State Association of Counties convention on November 20. The presentation was only 30 minutes long, but we got some good information out there and some questions about VSP answered. It was apparent from the five or six new commissioners in attendance that VSP training or presentations to county commissioners is a priority.

- **WDFW HRCD update**
  Questions at the November joint meeting were asked, and between now and this meeting answers given by WDFW. No further issues or questions presented. Bill Eller explains that last week the contract was signed by both parties, so is now in effect and work has begun.

- **VSP BMP Gap Analysis Budget Proviso**
  Ron Shultz gave 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 report has been submitted and will become available on the Commission’s web page and when it is, we will link to it on the VSP web page.

- **VSP Update at Conservation Commission meeting**
  Bill Eller explained that Commission VSP staff routinely update the Conservation Commission commissioners on VSP, and did so at their latest meeting last week.

Discussion was had on the issue related to **Policy Advisory #04-19** regarding the definition of agricultural activities and how county planners are applying that definition to agriculture in VSP counties.

Scott Kuhta says that the guidance the Department of Commerce (COM) has put on related to this issue is explicit, but there is still some disagreement between it and the Commission’s guidance (in **PA #04-19**).

Charissa Waters says there is still some issues with new and expanded agriculture and that more dialogue is needed.
Commissioner McCart says that there is a sub-group at the Washington State Association of Counties made up of planners and county commissioners who are working on understanding VSP, the county’s responsibilities, and this issue in particular.

Rick Mraz asks Commissioner McCart if the Department of Commerce is involved with that sub-group.

Commissioner McCart says COM has been involved in the past, but it really depends on the county. This is an issue for planners at the local level.

Charissa Waters says that many counties don’t have staff and they need guidance on how to update the code to include new and expanded agriculture.

Commissioner McCart says that there is a caution that pertains to the amount of farmland converted out of farming to other uses. He would love to see fallow land re-farmed again. That is a valid concern.

Ron Shultz points out the challenge with this issue is that it goes to the heart of VSP. VSP was a negotiated piece of legislation. It is fundamental to what and why VSP is. When and where will agriculture be regulated. Some counties are challenged to grasp how VSP operates. New agriculture involves regulation and how it is to be treated. We thought we cleared up this issue with the guidance the Commission produced, but could revisit it. The debate is the regulation of agriculture and how and when it occurs. Shifts VSP from a negotiated process to a political dynamic and there are new persons involved now since VSP first was passed.

John Stuhlmiller says that we are not talking about new agriculture, but the expansion of agriculture. It is becoming over-complicated. The Commission and COM should continue discussions. Should satisfy local decision makers.

A flow charge was discussed that would aid county planners in making decisions. Bill Eller explains that the Commission has created a draft flow chart and can have that available at the next meeting.

Charissa Waters says the counties have examples of grey areas that they could provide to assist.
Bill Eller asks that any examples from counties would be welcome and to forward them to him.

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 months, 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. 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.

Ron Shultz says the issue is between required versus optional information in the reports. 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. We need to know if the statements made support the conclusions.

[A discussion of the draft 5 year report guidance document ensues and edits made to the draft]

Bill Eller explains that Brian Cochrane has already provided some edits, and those were presented on the screen.

Members of the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee generally agreed that once the draft guidance is finalized that we should use the two five year reports already submitted to see how well the guidance works.

Rick Mraz suggests that we also pick out one goal and run through the process outlined in the guidance and see how well that works.
John Stuhlmiller reminds us of the short time frame from plan adoption to this first round of reports.

[Discussion ensues about how early in implementation we are with VSP]

John Stuhlmiller says that a letter should go back to Thurston and Chelan counties explaining where we are in the process with their five year reports.

Bill Eller indicates that a status letter could be crafted to the counties.

[A discussion ensues about crafting a template from the draft guidance, or incorporating a template into the draft guidance, for counties to use]

Bill Eller believes he can revise the draft guidance either into a template or incorporating a template and have that available within 10 days.

2:30 pm:   Set next joint meeting - Friday, January 10 at 10 am
The next joint SAC/TP meeting will be Friday, January 10, 2020, at 10 am at the Farm Bureau Office.

4:00 pm:   Adjourned