

Chelan County Voluntary Stewardship Program
VSP Advisory Committee meeting
Tuesday, December 1, 2015
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

The meeting began at 1:00 p.m. Facilitator Neil Aaland reviewed the agenda and asked each participant to introduce themselves.

Update: What has happened since last meeting in March 2015?

Neil explained this is the fourth meeting related to VSP. The first meeting was a general public workshop in July, 2014, and the next was the initial meeting of this advisory committee in October, 2014, followed by another meeting in March, 2015. A smaller staff workgroup has been meeting to review information and produce drafts for review by this larger group.

Neil reviewed a PowerPoint presentation. He started by reminding attendees about the purpose of VSP and then discussed the Chelan County process. He reviewed earlier meetings of the work group, and explained that a smaller staff workgroup has been utilized to develop much of the plan. We are working toward submitting a workplan by the end of March, 2016. This is a flexible date and may shift. Neil noted that he attended a meeting of the VSP Technical Panel in November; the panel has agreed that Chelan can informally provide a copy of the plan and we can have some back and forth before formally submitting.

Current iteration of draft work plan

Lisa Grueter reviewed the present draft of the work plan. She discussed the plan's structure and summarized the contents, referencing the checklist (which is a key component of the Chelan approach). The baseline date is July of 2011. It was also noted that the Conservation District has been designated the lead technical provider, along with three other providers in Chelan County. The plan notes that range land is significant in terms of acreage, but not significant in terms of economic value in the county. Dave Holland asked if there is any information on the cost to agriculture of implementing conservation practices. Mike Rickel thought it would be valuable to have that information. Lisa thinks that information could be tracked down.

Carmen Andonaegui asked about the best way to provide feedback on the work plan. Neil suggested that a "track changes" version of the plan would be helpful, and the agency might want to sit down with the staff workgroup and have a detailed conversation. Lisa mentioned that input on the measurable benchmarks would be really helpful.

Commissioner Goehner is concerned about practices with benefits that are difficult to measure. He wants to be sure that benefits are quantifiable. Britt Dudek talked about the checklist. This serves as a connection between the farmer and the county. He noted that the checklist/plan is relying on NRCS code. The big benefit of VSP and the checklist is awareness. For example, a farmer is already monitoring actions on the property, but this might not be documented. It is important to document what is happening, but we're trying to set out ways where individual parcels are not tracked. We're trying to collect information on a broader scale.

Vicki Malloy talked about the incentive piece of the plan. One key goal is to replace regulations with an incentive-based approach. It has to both protect critical areas and improve the viability of agriculture. It's a way for growers to take control of what is happening. Norm Gutzwiler suggested that the plan should be very careful in how it references programs such as "Global Gap"; these programs were presented as cost-effective but it's not worked out that way. Be sure not to over-promise.

Dave commented that the primary benefit is VSP is the "lesser of two evils". He suggested tailoring messages about benefits both for agriculture in general, and then for individual farmers.

Mike Kaputa said we need to think more about the incentives listed in the checklist. Perhaps we should take incentives out of the checklist; we don't want to create a perception that we are overselling incentives. Instead, ask them questions about what they would like in terms of incentives. People thought that was a good idea.

Commissioner Walter said enhancements of critical areas are incentive-based, and the incentive to improve critical areas is the funding to do it. Norm commented that we should keep it simple in the plan. Neil said the staff workgroup needs to think about how to modify the incentives portion.

Outreach Strategy

Neil referred attendees to the list of outreach ideas that are printed on the back of the agenda. He quickly reviewed the list of potential contacts. Commissioner Goehner asked how many growers are impacted by critical areas; Lisa Grueter noted that we have prepared maps that show the intersection so we could calculate the number.

Norm reminded us that there are cattle ranchers and wheat growers in the county; the plan focuses on tree fruit. The staff workgroup needs to think about outreach for these other agricultural uses. Mike will connect with Tim Smith to confirm the agricultural meetings following the MLK weekend.

General discussion

Commissioner Walter suggested that the plan separate grower incentives from program incentives. For example, recording actions that the industry as a whole is doing. Norm suggested we ask individual growers some questions – are these the incentives that would help you? Do you have any other ideas?

John Stuhlmiller noted that the biggest incentive for growers is to have an alternative to being regulated under a GMA Critical Areas Ordinance.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:10 p.m.

Attendees:

Commissioner Keith Goehner
Commissioner Ron Walter

Michael Rickel, Cascadia Cons. District
Lynda Jamison, Ecology

Norm Gutzwiler
Britt Dudek, CDFB
James Wiggs
Vicki Malloy, Farm Bureau
David Holland, Ecology
Carmen Andonaegui, WDFW
Graham Simon, WDFW
Ranie Haas
Dennis Berdan, WHRD

On phone:
John Stuhlmiller, WSFB
Evan Sheffels, WSFB

Other attendees:
Neil Aaland, Facilitator
Mike Kaputa, Chelan County
Lisa Grueter, Berk Consulting