

**Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Project
Workgroup Meeting #7 Summary
September 17, 2014 3:00-5:00pm
Farm Bureau
975 NE Carpenter Rd, Lacey, WA 98516**

In attendance: Karen Parkhurst, James Weatherford, Kathleen Whalen, Addie Candib, Theresa Nation, Bruce Morgan, Jon McAninch, Ben Rau, Jim Goche, Dean Pigman, Rick Nelson, Evan Sheffels, John Stuhlmiller, Eric Johnson, James Myers, Erin Ewald, Alex Callender Mike Gaffney, Christina Sanders.

Communicated inability to attend: Cindy Wilson, Laurence Reeves, Glen Connelly, Raul deLeon

Summary:

Eric Johnson from the Washington State Association of Counties and John Stuhlmiller from the Washington Farm Bureau led a presentation and discussion with the group about the Voluntary Stewardship Program in Washington State. Eric discussed the involvement of four main groups (agriculture, counties, tribes and environmental communities) that came together to develop a different way to go about the protection of critical areas engaged in agricultural activities. Eric and John both emphasized that the program focuses on activities not land and that the two counties, Thurston and Chelan are the pilot projects of what is hoped to be a successful process that will accomplish the goals of the program while avoiding the costly litigations of the past. They are very hopeful that this will be a process that is beneficial to other counties who are funded in the future and spoke of the working groups' efforts as "cutting edge".

Several questions came up during the presentation and discussion. Responses that may be of interest to the group are listed below:

- Our VSP plan can and should replace the CAO however it still must meet the protection standards.
- Because it is the goal of the program for the voluntary measures to meet the protection and enhancement standards – it is very different than what has been done in the past. This fact could be both a strength and a weakness in development of a plan as there is no roadmap.
- Protection will be measured at a higher, aggregate level; a whole group of activities will be factored into the measurement. This is a more fluid, dynamic process as opposed to a regulatory process.
- The developed plan will be submitted to the four state agency technical panel. Their review will be a back and forth process. When ready the plan will then be submitted to the Conservation District.

General Discussion:

The group again discussed potential strategies for engaging those who might not want to participate in the plan and the need for some word of mouth marketing as well as a more planned advertising as we move forward with development of documents. Mike Gaffney briefly discussed the Thurston Watershed Management document that was included in the agenda document for meeting #6. He asked that all review this and provide feedback, especially if there is any information missing, at the next meeting.

Kathleen and James from the Conservation District handed out a NRCS document and asked that all review the steps. James pointed out that although this process might look like a linear process, it actually is a process that loops back repeatedly and never really comes to an end. Kathleen and James believe that the CD would be a good candidate to provide technical assistance in developing the draft plan. Funding would need to be made available for them to be able to do this work.

Future Meetings:

Our next meeting will be at the Farm Bureau (address above) on Wednesday, October 1st from 4-6pm. Because we have had several requests to set up more than one meeting at a time, a Doodle Poll will be sent out to all members.

As an ongoing reference:

Information the group would like to learn from presentations:

- Kinds of uses for agriculture and impacts of types of agriculture on water quality
- Their understanding of agriculture impacts regulation development).
- Impacts of agriculture and challenges associated with modification of practices, understanding the impacts of different levels (intensity) of farming, and the time frame for seeing the impacts of modifications.
- Regulatory requirements and environmental threats in the County. What issues does CAO regulate, what were the issues behind the regulations and what were the anticipated goals?
- Habitat and compatibility with agriculture.
- Thurston County Extension's data on farming in the county. (Lucas's data)

Additional information the group would like to obtain:

- Historical studies
- Existing data collection efforts
- Current/best practices
- Challenges/threats/barriers
- Opportunities – incentives
- Mitigation potential – deliberate trade-offs
- Sustainability

- Markets/economy/transportation
- Prioritization