

VSP Work Plan Existing Information

Report Outline – Dec 8, 2014

This is the Voluntary Stewardship Work Plan created under RCW 36.70A.720 by the Thurston County Watershed Group (aka “Stakeholders”). The Watershed Group was constituted by the Thurston County Commission in mid 2014 and given the task of developing a work plan to protect critical areas while maintaining the viability of agriculture in the watersheds designated by the County. (RCW 36.70A.715)

1. Introduction

- a. *Purpose: The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) was enacted by the Legislature to create a voluntary process which counties could “opt into” to achieve Growth Management Act (GMA) goals. (See ESHB 1886/Chap. 360, Laws of 2011 codified as RCW 36.70A.700 et. al.).*

- i. According to [RCW 36.70A.700](#), two of the purposes of the VSP are to:

- (a) Promote plans to protect and enhance critical areas within the area where agricultural activities are conducted, while maintaining and improving the long-term viability of agriculture in the state of Washington and reducing the conversion of farmland to other uses;

- (b) Focus and maximize voluntary incentive programs to encourage good riparian and ecosystem stewardship as an alternative to historic approaches used to protect critical areas

- b. Scope: The Thurston County VSP is intended to use voluntary incentive programs to encourage the protection and enhancement of critical areas within the areas that agricultural activities are taking place, while also improving the long-term viability of agricultural and reducing farmland conversion in Thurston County.

c. Project Background

- i. In 2011 a voluntary stewardship program was established and added to the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.700 to 760) with the intent to protect critical areas as they related to agricultural activities.

1. WA Conservation Commission VSP background and overview [handout](#)

- ii. The Thurston County Commission opted in to protect critical areas through the Voluntary Stewardship Program on January 12, 2012. All five watersheds in the county were nominated to be considered as “priority watersheds”.

1. The [Thurston County Critical Areas Ordinance](#) (title 24) was updated in 2012 and further amended in 2013 to clarify that the provisions of the title do not apply to agricultural activities, which are regulated under [Chapter 17.15](#) of the Thurston County Code, now titled Agricultural Activities Critical Areas Ordinance

- a. **The above link includes Attachment C: Chapter 17.15- Agricultural Uses and Lands Critical Areas Ordinance.**
- b. **For VSP we are primarily using the Agricultural Activities Critical Areas Ordinance (Ch. 17.15) as it applies to critical areas within agricultural areas.**

d. Definitions, as per [RCW 36.70A.703](#)

- i. "Agricultural activities" means agricultural uses and practices including, but not limited to: Producing, breeding, or increasing agricultural products; rotating and changing agricultural crops; allowing land used for agricultural activities to lie fallow in which it is plowed and tilled but left unseeded; allowing land used for agricultural activities to lie dormant as a result of adverse agricultural market conditions; allowing land used for agricultural activities to lie dormant because the land is enrolled in a local, state, or federal conservation program, or the land is subject to a conservation easement; conducting agricultural operations; maintaining, repairing, and replacing agricultural equipment; maintaining, repairing, and replacing agricultural facilities, provided that the replacement facility is no closer to the shoreline than the original facility; and maintaining agricultural lands under production or cultivation;
- ii. "Critical areas" means the following areas:
 - 1. Critical aquifer recharge areas;
 - 2. Geologic hazard areas;
 - 3. Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas;
 - 4. Flood and channel migration hazard areas and
 - 5. Wetlands.
- iii. "Critical aquifer recharge area" means an area with a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water, including areas where an aquifer that is a source of drinking water is vulnerable to contamination that would affect the potability of the water, or is susceptible to reduced recharge.
- iv. "Enhance" or "enhancement" means to improve the processes, structure, and functions existing, **as of July 22, 2011**, of ecosystems and habitats associated with critical areas.
- v. "Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas" are areas that serve a critical role in sustaining needed habitats and species for the functional integrity of the ecosystem, and which, if altered, may reduce the likelihood that the species will persist over the long term. These areas may include, but are not limited to, rare or vulnerable ecological systems, communities, and habitat or habitat elements including seasonal ranges, breeding habitat, winter range, and movement corridors; and areas with high relative population density or species richness. These also include locally important habitats and species.
- vi. "Floodplain, one hundred-year," "one hundred-year floodplain" or "flood hazard areas" means those lands which are subject to a one percent or greater chance of flooding in any year.
- vii. "Functions and values," or "functions" means the beneficial roles served by critical areas. For example, functions and values associated with wetlands include: water quality protection and enhancement, fish and wildlife habitat, food chain support, flood storage, conveyance and attenuation, groundwater

recharge and discharge, erosion control, wave attenuation, aesthetic value and recreation.

- viii. "Geologically hazardous areas" means areas that because of their susceptibility to erosion, sliding, earthquake, or other geological events, are not suited to the siting of commercial, residential, or industrial development consistent with public health or safety concerns.
- ix. "Protect" or "protecting" means to prevent the degradation of functions and values existing as of July 22, 2011.
- x. "Wetland" or "wetlands" means areas that are inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas. Wetlands do not include those artificial wetlands intentionally created from nonwetland sites, including, but not limited to, irrigation and drainage ditches, grass-lined swales, canals, detention facilities, wastewater treatment facilities, farm ponds, and landscape amenities, or those wetlands created after July 1, 1990, that were unintentionally created as a result of the construction of a road, street, or highway. Wetlands may include those artificial wetlands intentionally created from nonwetland areas created to mitigate conversion of wetlands.

2. Thurston County Overview

- a. [Shoreline Inventory and Characterization Report](#)
- b. [Basin Evaluation Report](#)
- c. [Thurston County Comprehensive Plan](#)
- d. [Thurston County Species of Concern/HCP](#)
- e. [Thurston County Farmland Inventory](#)
- f. [Existing Development regulations/county-wide planning policies](#)
- g. [VSP Maps](#)
 - i. Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas-ag
 - ii. Floodplains
 - iii. Gopher/Prairie Soils
 - iv. Open Space
 - v. Water Quality
 - vi. Wetlands

3. Study area: Focus on Chehalis River Basin

- a. Overview of Lower and Upper Chehalis Watersheds/WRIA 22 and 23
 - i. Geography and Hydrology:
 - 1. Travels approximately 125 miles north-northwest and discharges through the Grays Harbor Estuary into the Pacific Ocean
 - 2. Encompasses 2,520 square miles and drains 2,660 square miles
 - a. 12% in Thurston County
 - 3. Contains 180 lakes, ponds, and reservoirs that provide water for wildlife, fish habitat, and agricultural activities
 - 4. Groundwater aquifers provide water to local farms/residences

5. Surface water flows also provide water resources and are primarily supported by rainfall precipitation
- ii. Land Uses
 1. Upper Chehalis Basin is 77% forestland
 2. Lower Chehalis Basin is 91% forestland
 - a. Most are private and government-owned property
 3. Westside of the Chehalis River is primarily agriculture, which is approximately 257 square miles, or 9.7% of the basin area
 - a. Primarily crop production and pasture
 4. Urban/industrial is 3% (Eastside of the river-Centralia/Chehalis)
- iii. Watershed management plans related to critical areas and agriculture
 1. Main focus of basin-wide strategy (Chehalis Basin Partnership) is on improving salmon runs and reducing flood damage
 - a. Wildlife habitat areas
 - i. 31 salmonid stocks in the basin
 1. 8 of which are known to be depressed
 - b. Flood and channel migration hazards
 1. Ag activities (cropland and pasture) are primarily on the edges of the floodplains
 2. Record floods in 2007 and 2009

Sources of Information

1. [Chehalis Basin Watershed Plan \(2004\)](#)
 2. [Chehalis Basin Level 1 Assessment \(2000\)](#)
 3. [Flood Authority: Chehalis Basin Background](#)
 4. [Flood Protection and Ecosystem Services in the Chehalis River Basin \(2010\)](#)
4. Existing information and resource condition
- a. Upper and Lower Chehalis/WRIA 23 and 22
 - i. Water quality data and plans
 1. [Ecology-Chehalis River TMDLs](#)
 2. [EPA-Watershed Summary Report](#)
 3. [USGS Groundwater/surface water interactions](#)
 4. [State of the river report](#)
 5. [Scatter Creek Septic System Management](#)
 - ii. Watershed management data and plans
 1. [Chehalis Basin Watershed Plan \(2004\)](#)
 - iii. Farmland protection data and plans
 1. [Thurston County Farmland Inventory](#)
 2. [Working Lands Strategic Plan](#)
 - iv. Species recovery data and plans
 1. [Ecology-Chehalis basin salmon habitat limiting factors](#)
 2. [The Chehalis Basin salmon habitat restoration and preservation work plan for WRIA 22 and 23](#)