

Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Project
Workgroup Meeting #12 Draft Summary
January 20, 2015 4:00-6:00pm
Farm Bureau
975 NE Carpenter Rd, Lacey, WA 98516

In attendance: Kathleen Whalen, Karen Parkhurst, Glen Connelly, James Myers, John Stuhlmiller, Josh Guintoli, Rick Nelson, Bruce Morgan, Jim Goche, Charissa Waters, Christina Sanders, Mike Gaffney, Erin Ewald, Laurie Pyne, Eric Johnson.

Communicated inability to attend: Cynthia Wilson, Theresa Nation, Jon McAninch.

Discussion Summary

Josh Guintoli with the Washington Conservation Commission discussed his work on farmland data collection and dissemination, making it useful, understandable, and easier to track information. From a statewide perspective they are looking at what types of data can support the VSP effort. Tasked UW researchers to use WA parcel database layer, a frequently updated data source of all parcel level information in WA. Also have WSDA crop plan geodatabase. Limitation is that it is based on cropland only. This data is informing the *Results WA* effort around farmland preservation. Cropland data is in 7 mile range (excludes rangeland) rather than the overall 14 mile range for all Ag land. For the WSDA efforts, every 2-4 years the whole state is considered for comparison purposes. Used Thurston and Chelan zoning designations and applied WSDA cropland data, which is a measure of Ag activity to see where is Ag activity happening in the different zoning designation. The results that they got back at the beginning of the year were limited in that they can say how much activity is happening in one section of land but the data isn't clear on the zoning. Another data layer is the national Ag statistics crop land data, which could give a higher resolution and they are working on it currently. Key point is that there is opportunity here and it could be useful for the VSP as well as local Conservation Districts.

Charissa Waters reported on Critical Area functions and how agricultural activities impact those as well as potential best management practices to address those impacts of Ag activities on Critical Areas (CAs).

Brainstorming session on Critical Area functions and agricultural activities. Mike Gaffney brought up the relationship between critical area functions and agricultural activities and how that can open an opportunity for this group to identify criteria and metrics to measure a change in that dynamic.

Discussion on the baseline for measurement and trade-offs between protecting CAs and preserving farmland. Many layers of complexity. Baseline for VSP is when the law became effective, July 2011. Anything lawfully taking place before that is an acceptable activity. Our mandate is to protect the levels of activity and CA functions that were in place as of that date. Need to review data to understand the status of Ag and CAs as of 2011. The existing information and current conditions part of the report that Charissa is working on is gathering this baseline information and best available science for the protection of critical areas. Mike discussed the distinction in application of the statute between baseline for impact measurement purposes and legal status or compliance with applicable statutes at the parcel level as of July 2011 (two different categories). The baseline is a measure of the net impact as of July, 2011 (better than which we need to do). At the aggregate level: What's the net relationship between

agricultural activity and critical area functions. Have to be wary of conflicts at parcel level, but at the watershed level we're looking at net impact.

Karen Parkhurst brought up some questions regarding whether we have data to show where we are now. Is that documented in some way for this baseline, what was true in that moment? Has the CAO been working? Has farmland preservation been working? CAs are better documented than the farmer's side of the information. Karen suggested doing a survey of farmers (agriculturalists) and Ag activities to understand what the baseline is for them, how regulations have affected them. What's keeping Ag from booming? Need to define the problems and the baseline to be able to show improvements. Discussion on how to document and describe what the problem is and what factors have contributed to it.

Mike Gaffney further discussed the need for a baseline and what measurements/metrics can be used against that baseline (i.e. acreage in Ag production and critical area functions). Mike summarized three projects/areas of inquiry that came from this discussion:

- Define a baseline for ag activity to be measured against
 - Come up with specific areas that are measurable (criteria)
- Establish a baseline for CA functions that we can measure against (and metrics/criteria)
- Discussion about process. Identify opportunities for this program to benefit both (ID regulatory burdens that can be lessened, funding opportunities, resources for farmers to enhance activities).
 - What new data do we need from farmers to help inform ways that we can improve the relationship between Ag activities and CAs?
 - A survey of Ag activity would be great for that. TRPC could be a convener of that to engage farmers (see what is needed for a viable farm). They would facilitate discussion, others would need to help with outreach and analysis of results
 - County has been working on trying to collect farmland data and get that baseline. It's important to get farmers perspective (survey and brainstorm with farmers). Need to get stakeholder engagement and buy-in from the Ag community
 - Can also use USDA census info from farmers, every year surveys

Discussion about how to do the survey and that when this info is solicited it needs to be done with a purpose, clear that it is for VSP, let them know why we are doing it and for what purposes it will be used. This is also a great opportunity for education and outreach on the VSP (kicks off implementation). Emphasis was placed on the need for a 3rd party that is user friendly ("neutral party") could be a combination of TRPC and TCD (have limited resources, joint venture). Different strategies were discussed (top-down and bottom-up). Nisqually sub-area plan used as an example. They chose bottom-up and it seemed successful. Let the people/stakeholders define the process and fill-in the blanks. Make it clear and simple, ask a few things that we want to learn about and get their perspective. What kinds of issues do they think that we need to look at and address? Need to engage as many stakeholders in this process as we can. Have to make it worth it for them to come to the meeting. Have to be careful how we do it and how often. It was suggested that we have a little more work to do before we begin to think about the public side. Need to come up with some questions and facilitate it to keep it on track.

Karen discussed the draft table of contents and how it helps to document where we came from, where we're going and how do we know if it's successful. Karen asked if there are areas where we can start

assigning some hunks of this to meet our deadline. Things that would be easy to put together to start building that plan, especially if we need to start reporting on this. See tasks below.

- Tasks assigned (preliminary agenda for next time):
 - County establish baseline for CA functions and criteria/metrics for measurement (Charissa)
 - Ag activities baseline and criteria/metrics. Jim can be contact, Kathleen and Karen (and farm bureau) will work on collecting data
 - Outreach, gather info from farmers about Ag activities and baselines/metrics. How to do that/organize that process, mechanisms for the survey and activities or focus groups. Christina and Mike will take a stab at that and share it via email. The survey will also help to gather contact info and educate people on VSP
 - Report on legislation (John)
 - Discussion of current regulations related to ag activities and CAs (including fees) (Cindy)
 - NRCS new conservation planning program (Jim)
 - Each of these groups will report back at the next meeting