

**Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Project
Workgroup Meeting #13 Draft Summary
March 2, 2015 3:00-5:00pm
Farm Bureau
975 NE Carpenter Rd, Lacey, WA 98516**

In attendance: Kathleen Whalen, Karen Parkhurst, Glen Connelly, James Myers, Liz Myers, John Stuhlmiller, Bruce Morgan, Jim Goche, Charissa Waters, Christina Sanders, Mike Gaffney, Laurie Pyne, Eric Johnson, Cindy Wilson, Jon McAninch, Miles Micheletti, Patrick Dunn, Theresa Nation

Communicated inability to attend: Rick Nelson.

Discussion Summary

Charissa Waters presented a baseline conditions report via PowerPoint. The PowerPoint was distributed to the list serve via email and posted to the County VSP website. Charissa discussed main issues, plans for dealing with these issues and the status of implementation of plans in the Chehalis Basin. Miles, a new intern with the County also passed out documents with additional information on agricultural activities impacts, BMP tables and the group discussed potential metrics for use by VSP. Although covering all critical areas and critical area functions, Charisa's discussion focused on water quality; in part because of the amount of data available.

- Group feedback and input:
 - ID subbasin areas where progress has been made, what's the status in specific areas?
 - ID data gaps for baselines and metrics
 - Difficult to identify the source/cause of issues and improvements to conditions
 - Can't assume impacts or improvements are from ag activities
 - Need to know what's responsible/causal relationship
 - EPA has reports on impacts of Ag BMPs (there are causal relationship studies)
 - Change wording of BMP to stewardship practices (or conservation practices)
 - How do we narrow baselines to benchmarks & define metrics for them?
 - Need flexibility in plans to be able to adaptively manage

The group briefly discussed the importance of carefully considering what terminology to use in VSP documents and plans to promote a sense of collaboration and reduce resistance that might be brought about by use of these terms that are politically charged or historically negative. The group also discussed using the information associated with the VSP impacts and BMP tables as baseline data in plan development. Attendees discussed and committed to using the best data available so that there were not incorrect assumptions made regarding actual causes for impacts (e.g. contamination) as compared to assumed or expected causes. Further discussion involved the need to identify data gaps, and develop benchmarks at the watershed level and also a monitoring process that is specific to individual locations and not done at the basin-wide level. The CD, as a technical assistance provider will help the landowners who want to opt into the program identify potential opportunities for them to focus areas for improvement without expecting the landowner to take responsibility for critical area problems. The conversation also included some discussion on the expectation that some kinds of impacts happen and recover over very long periods of time and that implementation of a changed practice in some cases may not show noticeable improvement in the short run, in which case it may be that the changed

practice itself might be the metric. It was suggested again that the group become more familiar with what agencies are already collecting what data that could be used by VSP and/or whether it might be possible for them to collect additional data at their already designated collection points. Charissa and Miles, with the County, are currently researching what is already being measured and by what agencies and if we can use these metrics and data for VSP monitoring

Members also discussed how the group goes about understanding who is interested in participating in VSP, who has farm plans, who is aware of VSP, who will want to engage, etc. The group was reminded that micro and urban farmers should also be included as engaging in ag activities.

Karen Parkhurst, Jim Goche and Kathleen Whalen talked to the group about a stakeholder meeting they held in late February. The meeting was attended by a diverse group of members of mostly the agricultural community. Attendees shared their stories regarding regulating experiences and spent a substantial amount of the two-hour meeting sharing concerns on maintaining a vibrant agricultural community, what it means to maintain and enhance the long-term viability of agriculture, the importance of water (especially its availability), the need for education, technical assistance, infrastructure, grants and other forms of funding and tax and regulatory reform.

- What do they need for long-term viability?
 - Criteria/potential metrics included:
 - Economy/markets (return on investment)
 - Land and water availability
 - Technical assistance and communication/education (point person at the county)
 - Funding (grants/loans)
 - Infrastructure
 - Regulatory reform/flexibility (site-specific)
 - Regulations need to allow for a diversity of activities (flexibility)
 - Clarity of regulations: a clearinghouse for info all in one place

The working group spent some time discussing incentives and disincentives for farmers to participate in changed activities and/or participation in the VSP. A disincentive discussed was the high cost of different kinds of permits – an example used was permitting for septic systems. Some of the incentives discussed included the reduced cost that might be associated with completing a farm plan and the possibility of offering some much needed education to farmers, especially to new farmers on how to be successful, as an incentive for those who opt in to VSP. (The need for education was brought up in the stakeholder meeting mentioned above.)

A point was reiterated (by Jim Myers) that we are developing a better overall process for the protection of critical areas and agricultural operations (we need to be careful not to get caught in the details or try to reinvent the wheel). He requested Christina forward an email that he had sent to the group Oct. 22, 2014.

John Stuhlmiller provided a legislative update. VSP funding is in process and has support from many entities – no money in hand yet. If VSP is not funded there will be no support for the program after June 30, 2015. A couple of counties have indicated that they will self-fund, if needed.

Additional Notes:

John Stuhlmiller suggested that the group take a look at Clark County's CAO.

Jon McAninch provided a flash drive containing photos before, during & after his farm plan development that will be shared with the group. Because of the size of the files they will likely be shared via the County VSP website.