

Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Project
Workgroup Meeting #16 Draft Summary
May 28, 2015 4:00-6:00pm
Farm Bureau
975 NE Carpenter Rd, Lacey, WA 98516

In Attendance: Kathleen Whalen, Theresa Nation, Glen Connelly, Alex Callender, James Myers, Jon McAninch, Patrick Dunn, Derek Rockett, Bruce Morgan, Rick Nelson, John Stuhlmiller, Evan Sheffels, Jim Goche, Charissa Waters, Miles Micheletti, Mike Gaffney, Jeff Swotek, Christina Sanders.

Discussion Summary:

Charissa Waters and Kathleen Whalen presented the updated version of the *Monitoring Plan Draft*, which they have been working on with assistance from Jeff Swotek to incorporate agricultural benchmarks and measures (metrics). The documents: VSP Monitoring Plan and Monitoring Activities and Responsible Parties were distributed to the group.

There was a discussion focusing on the potential for an agricultural liaison position with the County who would work on activities associated with the VSP program and assist in streamlining the permitting process by working closely with the ag community and with the conservation district. It has not been determined how the position would be funded. Several in attendance expressed opinions on where such a position should be located – with the county so that there would be quick & easy access to information and data or outside of the county offices in order to be viewed more as an independent assistant to the ag community as opposed to being viewed as an employee of the county. Similar considerations were discussed with regard to source of funding for such a position.

Jon McAninch cautioned that agritourism is not currently set up to benefit most farmers and shouldn't be included in the examples of programs to help improve the economic viability. The group discussed the VSP goal to reduce conversion and that if land is not making money for farmers they need to be able to convert. Bruce Morgan suggested that that there should be mention of mitigation to compensate for loss of Ag land to restoration efforts such as removal of dykes.

The group discussed the goal to maintain and improve economic viability of agriculture and that there are a multitude of factors involved in economic viability that are beyond the scope of the VSP. It was discussed that the VSP can't guarantee economic viability or profitability but that it can provide support to agricultural operators and create an environment to encourage agricultural activities through providing more opportunities to improve agricultural viability such as marketing and diversification.

Based on discussion of the documents presented at the meeting and comments indicating a desire to include components from the Chelan County checklist, Charissa is working to incorporate appropriate parts of that checklist into an updated Stewardship Plan document for Thurston VSP, which will be forwarded to the group for comparison and feedback. Jeff Swotek suggested that the National Resources Inventory be used to assist with watershed level monitoring and for tracking changes in land cover over time (i.e. degree of urbanization or impervious surfaces).

There was also discussion on the best way to capture net return/profitability for the farmer and how that might be measured. E.g. are there the same # or more of farmers? farms? acres? – involved in agricultural activities. In general, does an increase of acres in Ag production = an increase of viability?

The subcommittees working on plan development will continue to work on more clearly defining how these goals and benchmarks could most accurately and practically be measured.

Next meeting:

Since we are working with limited time to complete the plan it was decided during this meeting that the next meeting will be held on Thursday, June 11th at the Thurston Farm Bureau from 4-6 p.m.

We will continue to discuss and refine the work plan drafts at the next meeting. Please email Mike Gaffney at mjgaffney@wsu.edu with any items you would like to see added to the agenda.