

**Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Workgroup Meeting #19 Summary
Version #2**

**March 18, 2016 3:00 – 5:00 PM
Washington State Farm Bureau offices**

In attendance: Brad Murphy, Kevin O’Sullivan, Jim Goche, Evan Sheffels, John Stuhlmiller, James Myers, Jon McAninch, Bruce Morgan, Brian Merryman, Ed Lewis, Toby Jewett, Kathleen Whalen, Karen Parkhurst, Derek Rockett, Alex Callender, Cindy Wilson, Bill Eller, Maya Buhler, Patrick Dunn. ,

Welcome and introductions:

New facilitator Neil Aaland introduced himself to the VSP Work Group. Workgroup members asked him to focus on keeping the discussions on track. Neil asked the group for permission to record the meetings, noting this is only to help prepare meeting notes and the recording is deleted after notes are prepared. Nobody objected to this.

Review of ground rules

Since it has been nearly nine months since the last meeting, Neil reviewed the ground rules that the VSP work group had previously developed, as a reminder of how members agreed the work group would function. He noted that, in general, we would operate on a consensus basis, but refer to the ground rules if voting is desired or needed.

Where the work group left off in June 2015

The work group last met in June 2015. Charissa Waters reviewed the document “VSP Work Group Actions Summary, as of June 2015” [see document for details]. The current drafts of various work products are available online (<http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/planning/vsp/voluntary-stewardship-draft-documents.html>). She also referred to a flowchart on the voluntary stewardship program, which provides an overview of goals, tactical objectives, and benchmarks and metrics.

What has happened with the work plan since last June?

John Stuhlmiller and Evan Sheffels, both with the Washington State Farm Bureau, have continued to work on re-drafting the work plan. Since there are some new participants at this meeting, John provided some background on VSP. After the legislature created the program in 2012, 28 counties opted in to the program. Two pilots were funded, Thurston and Chelan counties. In 2015, funding was provided for the remaining counties to begin work. The legislation provides that a VSP technical panel, housed at the Conservation Commission, reviews and recommends approval (or not) of a plan. Four state agencies make up the technical panel – Ecology, WDFW, Agriculture, and the Conservation Commission.

Evan then described the work since then. The budget is included in the state’s operating budget. This is a biennial budget; after June 30, 2015 funding stopped until the state could re-fund the contract. This took over six months. The farm bureau wanted to keep moving so they made revisions to the draft work plan and met in August 2015 with interested people to discuss their edits. They heard concerns from the technical panel about having to address 28 different plans. The Chelan pilot process provided a proposed re-grouping of required elements in the plan, which was helpful. Now that funding is available again, he’s looking forward to moving ahead on the Thurston plan. He reminded the group that there are two primary goals: protecting critical areas, and maintaining and enhancing the viability of agriculture.

Evan said the meeting in August was mostly a discussion of the re-organizing and re-grouping of the June work plan draft. Charissa is reviewing that version and will send it around to the group. In response to a question, there is a new deadline for submittal of the Thurston work group that takes into account the gap in funding. Those months will not count in setting the deadline for submittal. Neil said the new schedule will be sent to the group along with information for the next meeting. Bill Eller noted there is a difference between the contract deadline and the statutory deadline.

Neil noted that Chelan County has asked the statewide technical panel for an informal review of their plan. This meeting is happening in mid-April. Neil will bring that information back to the Thurston work group. John thinks this same informal review will be needed for the Thurston work plan. John mentioned the members of the technical panel: Ecology is Tom Clingman, Agriculture is Kelly McLain, Conservation Commission is Brian Cochrane, and WDFW is Amy Windrope.

Next steps

Charissa referred to the next steps listed on the back of the actions summary document (see that document for the list of next steps). Jim Goche asked Charissa about the County's need for a comprehensive agricultural economic impact study to create the metrics and benchmarks which the law require its VSP Work Plan to have and if the County was communicating with the Port on this. Jim noted that a group of local agricultural stakeholders ("South Sound Friends of Food & Farming", hereafter "Friends") that includes several VSP Stakeholders had met with the EDC several times since January in an attempt to learn more about what work it was contracting with the Port to do but as of last Friday, was informed that no contract had yet been signed. EDC staff did however advise the stakeholders that its work will be limited to two things: gather a list of agricultural organizations; and develop a decision tree for port commissioners on what decisions would be most helpful for agriculture. Charissa said the economic piece is under the agricultural viability goal in the monitoring plan with benchmarks and metrics.

Jim reported the "Friends" group has suggested that an economic impact study of "agricultural activities" in Thurston County should begin with a set of working definition(s) beginning with what "agriculture" and what-an "agricultural economy" are. Jim also mentioned Dr. Riley Moore, who is a professor of economics at St. Martins University and who has worked with the Port on other projects has volunteered to help with this project. Since it appears that the EDC's project will fall considerably short of a comprehensive agricultural economic impact study needed to created metrics and benchmarks for the VSP Work Plan, Jim suggested that the VSP Work Group create a subcommittee to work with local agricultural interests, local educational institutions, the Port and the EDC to scope such a study and then discuss options for making it happen. Others think the information Jim mentioned is important and asked that the "Friends" group be invited to attend the next meeting and report on its meetings with the EDC. Jim suggested that such a study should be approach dynamically as a living document and will grow as we learn more about our local agricultural economy. In response to a question, Neil explained how the Chelan plan addresses this. A subset of agricultural producers got together and wrote a section that discusses agriculture in Chelan County. The difficulty for Thurston is the producers are smaller, and it's harder to describe.

The group was interested in continuing work on the plan, and plug in more detailed agricultural viability information as it becomes available. Jim thinks it is an important component on next step item 1 (current conditions report for all watersheds). John Stuhlmler thinks we can use national agricultural statistics as starting place, which are currently in the baseline conditions report (Appendix G) of the draft

work plan. Charissa noted we can have the EDC come and discuss this information; Jim suggested inviting the port as well so that the Port could better acquaint itself with the VSP pilot project and the needs of the County's needs as the Stakeholders develop a VSP Work Plan. Karen thinks the economic development part may need to be developed as we go and we just need to get started.

A detailed conversation on economic development will be scheduled at a future meeting.

Evan has looked up the new relevant dates for the Thurston VSP work plan:

- January 20, 2014: funding was made available to Thurston County
- January 10, 2017: previous due date
 - Add 7 months due to lack of funding
- May 1, 2017: VSP Work Group deadline for completing its work
- August 10, 2017: new finish date for approval of work plan

Neil will work with the commission to confirm these dates and provide to the work group.

Charissa asked about need for subcommittees. Previously there were several subcommittees, including an agricultural subcommittee and a monitoring plan subcommittee. She is wondering if those subcommittees should be started up again. She asked for interested people to get back to her by the next meeting. Evan volunteered for the subcommittees; others will get back to her. Charissa said it would likely be a meeting every other week for the subcommittees.

John noted there is a lack of environmental members on this work group. Charissa and Cindy think we have reached out enough and have continued to include them in work group communications. Neil noted that the work group needs to document how environmental organizations were reached out to, and include that in the plan. Additional specific outreach can be made as we move toward plan completion. It may be useful for the county to make an additional effort at outreach at this point, including going and meeting with them to review the current draft.

Neil summarized key next steps

1. Neil will work with Charissa to frame up the economic issues for the work group
2. Neil and Charissa will write up a schedule of meetings and topics
3. The environmental organizations and tribes will be contacted to let them know about current status and ask again about participating
4. A revised timeline will be produced
5. Charissa will complete her review of latest iteration of plan and e-mail it out
6. Invite the Port/EDC to attend the next VSP meeting
7. Invite the "Friends" group to attend the next VSP meeting

Neil asked about regular meeting dates; the group agreed to establish the third Thursday of each month from 4 to 6. Neil will include this in an e-mail to the group. Charissa suggested, on an interim basis, that for the next two months the work group will meet on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays to try and make progress. The work group agreed.

The meeting adjourned approximately 4:30 pm.

