

Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Workgroup Meeting #22 Summary
May 5, 2016 4:00 – 6:00 PM
Washington State Farm Bureau offices

In attendance: Jim Goche, Evan Sheffels, John Stuhlmiller, Kathleen Whalen, James Myers, Rick Nelson, Stephen Bramwell, Bruce Morgan, Brian Merryman, Karen Parkhurst, Erin Ewald, Nick Cockrell, Kevin O’Sullivan, Maya Buhler, Charissa Waters, Brad Murphy, Neil Aaland.

Welcome and Introductions: Facilitator Neil Aaland opened the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves; he then reviewed the agenda.

Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) Training Video

The 16-minute long training video on the OPMA was shown. This is the video produced by the Attorney General’s office to satisfy the training requirement for decision-making boards.

Report from new subcommittee on agriculture economic viability

Evan summarized the results of the subcommittee meeting that met yesterday (May 4). They discussed five elements of viability (pulled from sources including the Growth Management Act and Skagitonians for Farmland):

1. An adequate land base
2. Adequate water rights and water resources
3. Reasonable regulatory standards (predictable, know where things stand)
4. Infrastructure – do you have roads, bridges, railroads to get goods to market; if not, what can a VSP workplan do to help? Do you have soft infrastructure – e.g. lenders, seed dealers
5. Community and technical support, including funding for conservation districts

Additional comments from other subcommittee members:

- We might want to survey people on how we’re doing; perhaps work through existing organizations such as the farm bureau
- Need to add aquaculture as part of the viability discussion since aquaculture is present in Thurston County
 - Should take that question back to Taylor Seafood and discuss how to address viability for aquaculture
- Subcommittee discussed what data is needed, and decided to start with what we have and address in the work plan how to additional needed data

Review Stewardship Plan checklist; ask for volunteer for “beta test”

Charissa walked people through the checklist, which was adapted from one developed for the Chelan VSP effort. Neil noted that the checklist idea stems from section 36.70A.750 of the statute, which provides that producers implementing an individual stewardship plan are considered to be “...working toward the protection and enhancement of critical areas.” When filling out the checklist, it is envisioned the technical provider (conservation district) would be there to help. The idea is to first have a lot of outreach, then the CD will take start by working on the “low hanging fruit”. There should also be discussion in the checklist about why someone would want to participate. Consider having a 1 page executive summary as part of the checklist.

Additional comments included:

- Producers are probably already doing these kinds of things
- Think about another way to ask “do you have critical areas” – something like “has the county identified any critical areas on the property?”
 - For VSP maps, be sure to note that “these maps aren’t to be used for regulatory purposes”
- Also include a statement that the county is not disclosing information from owners
- Should consider producing a video that explains it; step 1 might be scary
- Consider asking the statewide advisory committee to address the issue of confidentiality

Bruce Morgan agreed to have his farm serve as a “beta test” for the checklist.

Round 3: Thurston VSP Work Plan Draft with Ag Caucus Edits (review monitoring and measurable benchmarks)

Charissa continued leading people through the table 9 handout on participation goals. There was some discussion about setting benchmarks for participation; ranging from 10 per watershed to not stating any numbers. Neil mentioned Chelan’s approach, where no numbers are specified but instead it looks at an increase in acres over 10 years. There was general comfort with that benchmark idea. Charissa asked for feedback on target 4 (“Promote producer participation and progress toward meeting the protection and enhancement benchmarks of this work plan with a proactive conservation program delivery process...”); there was some uncertainty on how to measure that target, and a suggestion to delete the last clause.

The work group looked at some of the subsequent indicators, and tweaked the language for several of them. They recommended eliminating tracking by percentage, and suggested tracking actual technical assistance visits. It was asked if there is some way to track by the size/acreage.

Neil summarized next steps

1. The new subcommittee on agricultural economic viability will continue to meet
2. The May 19th meeting is cancelled and we’ll revert to a once per month meeting
3. Neil will send a Doodle poll for the June meeting since Charissa cannot attend on June 16
4. Neil and Charissa will work on a schedule for the remainder of the process, so we can have an estimate of what it is going to take to reach the endpoint of developing the work plan and submitting it for approval

The meeting adjourned approximately 6:00 pm.