

**Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Workgroup Meeting #24 Summary
July 21, 2016 4:00 – 6:00 PM
Washington State Farm Bureau offices**

In attendance:

Stephen Bramwell

Nick Cockrell

Jim Goche, Friendly Grove Farms

Jon McAninch

Bruce Morgan

Jim Myers

Theresa Nation, WDFW

Rick Nelson

Doug Rushton, Thurston CD

John Stuhlmiller, WSFB

Jerilynn Walley, SPSSEG

Staff: 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. He then asked for discussion on two additional administrative items:

1. Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) considerations: Neil offered a summary of discussion about this subject: VSP Stakeholders have expressed surprise and on-going concerns about the Washington State Conservation Commission's apparent decision several months ago that VSP Work Groups are subject to some or all of the State's Open Public Meeting Act's requirements. Stakeholders have requested (through Neil) that the Commission provide a written explanation of its decision and the reasoning behind it; also that the Commission seek legal guidance from the Attorney General and obtain an AGO that Thurston County and the other 27 VSP counties could rely on. To date, the Commission has not responded to these requests.

Thurston County's VSP Stakeholders have put nearly two year's work into this Pilot Project which will soon produce a draft Work Plan and they want to make sure that the process used meets the requirements of law, will pass muster when reviewed at the state level, and will survive any legal challenge that may be filed to it. During this time, Stakeholders have acted in good faith in diligently considering the laws that govern the VSP process and Thurston County has publicized VSP meetings which are open to the public. However, the Commission's recent oral opinion about OPMA has now created confusion which Stakeholders want to have resolved.

Specific questions which Stakeholders have asked include 1) how does OPMA apply (if at all) to the Thurston County VSP Work Group, 2) is the Work Group a local or state agency, and 3) who should the Work Group consult for legal advice on the matter? In response to this discussion, Brad Murphy, Thurston County Resource Stewardship Department, said that he would present these questions to the Thurston County Prosecutor's office and request a legal opinion. John Stuhlmiller said he would also raise these questions at the Statewide Advisory Committee at its meeting on August 1 and request clarification.

2. August meeting change: Neil mentioned he would be gone and we'd need to change the August meeting date. He noted that he had heard some frustration about changing the dates. After discussion, the group decided to cancel the August meeting, which would allow more time for

subcommittee work. The next meeting will be on the regular meeting date of Thursday, September 15th.

Update on agricultural viability

Jim Myers summarized the meeting with Riley Moore. Riley is interested in helping collect data, and would like to reach out using students to help collect data. Timeliness is a challenge. The tentative proposal is to look at September for getting a framework put together. Riley and Jim Goche will develop an outline. There was some discussion about the need to have an agricultural economist involved. Charissa has had contact with an agricultural economist with L&I who also has a background in agriculture. She suggested it was important to focus on the relationship between agriculture and critical areas.

In summary, Jim and Riley are working to develop the outline. They can engage with Stephen Bramwell, WSU Cooperative Extension, to access WSU people, to engage with an agricultural economist. Stephen said he'd like to talk with someone from the workgroup to better understand the VSP process.

Review revised benchmarks from section 2

Charissa started by reviewing the table on page 21, and reviewed the acreage in the critical area/agriculture overlap. She noted the disclaimer language on page 20: "The data below serves as a general indicator and is meant to be confirmed by the technical assistance provider on-site to verify the presence of Critical Areas in areas of agricultural activities. This data may change between reporting periods to factors outside the scope of VSP." Workgroup members generally liked this language.

Charissa will clarify the reference to "oak grasses". The workgroup was interested in including information on the future potential use of land for agriculture. She then referenced the table titled "Metrics and Indicators for Effects on Critical Areas". Comments and questions included:

- Consider using case studies to help explain the benchmarks
- The on the farm checklist will help set the benchmarks; need to be careful and avoid creating a situation where benchmarks inappropriately drive information and have unintended consequences such as setting a requirement for new practices
 - If the checklist shows things are okay, that becomes the stewardship plan
- People were comfortable with the over-arching benchmark in CA B-1

There was some general discussion about how we present this information to the public and to producers. Bruce said we need to review the checklist, have some more ground trothing on it. John suggested an "elevator speech" aimed at the lay person needs to be developed. There is a lot of interest in going back to the checklist, and having that as one of the topics for the next meeting.

The workgroup suggested the agenda topics for the next meeting in September are the checklist; agricultural viability; and start going through the whole plan. The next meeting will be 3 hours instead of 2.

Next steps (Neil)

1. No full workgroup meeting in August; subcommittees may continue to meet
2. Jim will work with Riley Moore to flesh out the report, and include Stephen Bramwell
3. September meeting will be 3 hours.

The meeting adjourned approximately 6:00 pm.

The next meeting will be on Thursday, September 15.