

**Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Workgroup Meeting #26 Summary
October 20, 2016 3:00 – 6:00 PM
Washington State Farm Bureau offices**

In attendance:

Pat Dunn	Theresa Nation, WDFW
Jim Goche, Friendly Grove Farms	Rick Nelson, TCFB/Grange
Jon McAninch	Evan Sheffels, WSFB
Zach Meyer	John Stuhlmiller, WSFB
Bruce Morgan	Kathleen Whalen, TCD
Jim Myers	

Staff: Maya Buhler, Charissa Waters, Neil Aaland

Welcome and Introductions: Facilitator Neil Aaland opened the meeting and reviewed the agenda. He reminded the workgroup that the November meeting was moved to November 8, and asked the group if the December meeting could also be moved a week earlier – from Dec. 15 to Dec. 8. The workgroup approved that request. Neil will send out a reminder e-mail.

Overview

Charissa reviewed the detailed agenda included in her powerpoint presentation. She reminded the workgroup that Thurston County prioritized all four of its watersheds. The timeline has mid-January as a time for informal review by the statewide Technical Panel (TP). March 1 is the target for formal submission to the Conservation Commission. The workgroup suggested that the monitoring discussion happen in December, in order to have that piece ready for the informal TP review.

Jim Goche thinks it might be useful to see how other counties are organized, whether they have formed similar workgroups. Neil thinks all other counties that have started have similar workgroups; they may have formed them differently (some appointed, some included all people interested in attending). Pat Dunn asked for clarification around the approval process, and wondered about the role of the county. Neil and Charissa explained that the county does not have a formal approval role, and that was part of how VSP was created. The intent was to have the Conservation Commission assume the risk of lawsuits by being the approval authority. Neil noted that in Chelan County they have had an informal briefing of the commissioners, just so they would know what was being considered by the VSP workgroup. Thurston might want to do that as well, once the election is over and we know who the commissioners will be.

Additional comments and observations:

- Pat noted that programs of federal agencies might be resources for implementing VSP
- Jon McAninch said we have been improving our environmental situation; the biggest problem is when people don't think enough has been done
- A question was asked about development regulations being relied upon; Neil mentioned the example of floodplain regulations needing to stay in place to qualify for the availability of FEMA flood insurance
- The work group should re-visit appendix H (voluntary incentive programs and regulatory backstop)

- Jon suggested adding an appendix on funding needed to implement the workplan; the workgroup thought that would be useful
- Neil will ask Lisa Grueter about using sharepoint downloads to circulate information
- Staff will identify which appendices are in final form

Stewardship Plan Checklist

Charissa started out this section by handing out a “voluntary survey”. This is intended to track agricultural viability in Thurston County, to measure the “ag economy”. Pat wondered if this is an opportunity to ask about voluntary enhancements for critical areas. Charissa said that is what the development plan checklist is for. Rick said it is important to ask about regulations and their impact on farming.

Additional comments and observations on the survey:

- Have a separate question regarding the open space tax program, forestry designation – these should not be described as “financial assistance programs”
- Expand the categories in item 1 – Bruce is willing to work with Charissa on that
- This should be sent out to a wide audience
- Add introduction that explains why this is being done – explain VSP
- Add a question regarding critical areas
 - Maybe add a question – are you interested in conservation practices?
- Consider having the survey online to protect anonymity
- Charissa will circulate the survey – would be great to have comments back to her by Oct. 28

Stewardship Plan checklist

Charissa explained the purpose, which is to meet the statutory requirement for an individual plan. It is intended to document what is being done to protect critical areas and enhance agriculture. Jim suggests including the concept that explains why VSP is important and why farmers should care about it. Other comments and observations:

- In the first paragraph, explain what it is and what it isn’t; Jim Myers thought something along the lines of “this is the opportunity to take control on your own property”
- Discussion about whether this is the individual stewardship plan; this, along with additional information from the CD, would be the plan
- Could a farm participate in VSP if they don’t have a critical area?
 - John Stuhlmiller thinks they can, but it wouldn’t be an individual stewardship plan under VSP (they can use the available assistance, though)
- Shift the section on “approved technical service provider” (page 6) to the top, so landowners are clear they will have help on this
- What constitutes an “approved provider”? This needs clarification
 - Charissa suggested “NRCS approved provider”

Next steps (Neil)

1. Charissa will circulate the survey
2. Checklist will be revised and reviewed by subcommittee
3. Next meeting will be 3 hours; we will continue reviewing the entire draft plan.

The meeting adjourned approximately 6:00 pm. The next meeting will be on Thursday, November 10.