

**Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Workgroup Meeting #27 Summary
November 10, 2016 3:00 – 6:00 PM
Washington State Farm Bureau offices**

In attendance:

Stephen Bramwell

Pat Dunn

Jim Goche, Friendly Grove Farms

Jon McAninch

Zach Meyer

Bruce Morgan

Jim Myers

Rick Nelson, TCFB/Grange

Evan Sheffels, WSFB

John Stuhlmiller, WSFB

Kathleen Whalen, TCD

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 December meeting was moved a week earlier – from Dec. 15 to Dec. 8. The workgroup asked that meeting date moves be minimized in the future. Neil noted that there are not many meetings after December; we're nearly done preparing a draft work plan.

Bruce Morgan raised the issue of the Work Group's status and expressed concern about the lack of clarification by the State Conservation Commission on this point. This is a reoccurring concern by the Work Group. Jim Goche agreed with these concerns and suggested that a request for a formal response be addressed to the Commission as well as a request for an AG's opinion on the matter.

The workgroup discussed process steps and voting membership. Charissa reminded us that we have ground rules; they are addressed in the plan. Jim Myers said a flowchart that shows the approval process would be helpful. This would include how the workgroup will function after the plan is approved and there won't be a facilitator any more. Neil noted that the Yakima workgroup has appointed a co-chair, with the idea he will take over once the plan is complete.

The workgroup decided to have a further discussion in January, where we will talk about the process that will be used by the workgroup to approve the plan.

Public Comment: No comment was offered by members of the public.

Continue review of the draft work plan

Charissa started reviewing the benchmarks and metrics. A question was asked about the definition of adaptive management; it means we learn as we go and change accordingly. She then began with section 2 on page 19, and reviewed the statutory requirements. There was discussion about the acreages shown in the table. The county estimated the acreages based on available information. This is okay if benchmarks don't require specific acres. A question: is an agricultural area eligible if it does not have a critical area? John Stuhlmiller thought it would be difficult to segregate farms with critical areas from farms without.

We briefly reviewed ag viability. It was noted that the Ag Viability Subcommittee is holding a work session for local farmers and ag-related businesses on Dec. 8. Karen Parkhurst is taking the lead on the logistics. The goals for the meeting:

- Define what the Thurston County agricultural economy is and current shortcomings of current ag economic data, need for more local numbers, and ideas on how to gather this information
- Develop an initial list of the “social values” that support local farming/food production—so we have community input to base the second half of our “value” analysis on. The social values supplement the commercial or market values and explain why consumers are willing, for example, to buy locally produced chicken at \$5.00/lb. when they could buy it from Costco for \$2.00.
- Expand the SWOT analysis by gathering input on strengths, opportunities and weaknesses.

We then moved to table 3 – critical areas. Charissa was asked how often mapping is done; she said some pieces are updated on an ongoing basis, for example when WDFW provides new information. The county updates geodata every two years. She added that onsite verification is important.

The idea of comparing to the 2011 baseline was discussed. One members was thinking if a farmer does not participate in VSP, they would be subject to the ag CAO. Pat was concerned about this, since the county was sued for the 2011 CAO. John mentioned the assumption is farms can co-exist with critical areas. On balance, are critical areas the same as in 2011.

The group decided to table this issue and move on; it’s an important topic and probably need to discuss with the Conservation Commission.

Charissa suggested an amendment to CA goal 1, B-1: strike “through mapping” and substitute assessment. The group agreed. Pat suggested making a parallel table with conservation area goals. Charissa mentioned CA M-a, p. 26 – the assessment would be redone for each reporting period.

We then moved on to geologic hazard areas. Pat noted that there are no measures for some objectives. There was discussion around that; the plans do not necessarily require measures for every objective, which would be costly. John thinks that the measures are of NRCS practices. Geologic hazard areas are a different critical area; function and value are different than for wetlands, habitat.

Next up was wetlands. A question was raised about using Ecology’s wetland rating system. Charissa will do more research on that and consult with the technical review team for their recommendation to bring to the work group at the next meeting.

Next: flood and frequently flooded areas. Evan wondered if we want to point to the checklist (for NRCS practices); the group agreed with that. Charissa will verify the issue of retaining enough regulatory authority to comply with flood insurance requirements.

Critical aquifer recharge areas: a change was made regarding infiltration.

Participation and Stewardship Action was reviewed. We need a way to explain this easily. We’ll need to do an “executive summary” type of explanation. We’ll need to demonstrate to the technical panel how we met this.

The workgroup then looked at the 11”x17” matrix, the example of monitoring and adaptive management. John thinks the acreage piece would be challenging. Could consider a 3-year trend line

(trend of decline over three years). This would have to be done for all 5 critical areas – all must be “good”. We discussed what happens with a declining trend; we need to see how much of a decline is attributable to agriculture. That point was added to the matrix – the need to assess the issue and determine appropriate action.

The workgroup discussed what needs to happen with the technical panel. We need to demonstrate why the workgroup believes the VSP work plan is ready to go. Then, explain how the work plan complies with sections a-l (from the statute).

Next steps (Neil)

1. Workgroup to review revised benchmarks and metrics
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 Friday, December 9 from 3 to 6.