

**Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Program  
Workgroup Meeting #28 Summary  
January 19, 2017: 3:00 – 6:00 PM  
Washington State Farm Bureau offices**

In attendance:

Stephen Bramwell, WSU  
Robin Buckingham, TCD  
Pat Dunn, CNLM  
Jim Goche, Friendly Grove Farms  
Jon McAninch, TCFB  
Brian Merryman, TCFB  
Sarah Moorehead, TCD  
Jim Myers, Nisqually  
Theresa Nation, WDFW  
Rick Nelson, TCFB/Grange  
Karen Parkhurst, TRPC  
John Stuhlmiller, WSFB

Staff: Maya Buhler, Charissa Waters, Neil Aaland

Welcome and Introductions: Facilitator Neil Aaland opened the meeting and reviewed the agenda.

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

Schedule:

Neil reviewed the proposed schedule, printed on the agenda, that gets us to a March 1 submittal of a work plan to the Conservation Commission. The workgroup agreed to a meeting on February 9, and on Wednesday, February 22 if needed. Meetings will be three hours, from 3 pm to 6 pm.

In order to save time and avoid the need for two meetings in February, the Work Group created a drafting subcommittee that would review and agree on Work Plan language, with recommendations for final approval by the Work Group. WG members who volunteered (or were volunteered) for the Subcommittee were Jim Myers, Bruce Morgan, Evan Sheffels, Pat Dunn, Jim Goche, Rick Nelson and John McAninch.

Continue review of the draft work plan

Charissa reviewed the “required elements checklist” that serves as a checklist for completion. The first two items have been reviewed; she turned to the third one, “develop goals for participation.”. She noted that NRCS is doing approximately 12 plans per year. That reflects a baseline participation rate. The group discussed goals for agricultural participation. Sara Moorehead from the Conservation District suggested that they should increase capacity and increase plans, setting a rate per year. John thought we should not have a specific rate as an objective, but have this in the plan elsewhere as information. Jim Goche thought it was already in there, a statement is included about “contingent on funding”.

It was suggested that with the stewardship checklist, we might consider doing another test on a farm. Charissa noted that a test run was done with an anonymous farmer outside of the VSP Work Group in December. The Thurston Conservation District was present at this test run, and suggestions have been

taken into consideration for the checklist. After some discussion, the group decided to instead do an exercise at the next meeting. Everybody should think about how the checklist pertains to your property; come back at the next meeting and walk through it as a group. Neil will send out the checklist.

Karen thinks we need to clearly identify the goals that are mandatory. She would like to see a clear discussion of “how we fail out” of VSP. She suggested a 1 or 2 paragraph description of this, upfront. This might fit in section 1.4.3, “Work Plan Approval Tests”, where the conditions for approving a workplan are addressed. One member asked about “failing out” for agricultural viability; Neil explained that under the law, the work plan can only fail out for not meeting goals to protect critical areas. John said we do not want to fail out; he thinks we also need to mention the adaptive management side of this, that we’ll first look to modifying the work plan.

The group discussed the use of the 2014 wetlands rating manual to assess function and values of wetlands. If wetlands exist in 2011 and are unchanged at the time of the first report/assessment, but this manual is different than existed in 2011, does that change the baseline of 2011? Charissa will look into that and report back.

#### Balance between critical areas protection and agricultural viability

Neil introduced this topic. Rick Nelson sent Neil an email back in November about the balance between critical areas protection and agricultural viability. He expressed concern about this, and thought there might not be enough attention paid to agricultural viability. Neil said he would put it on an agenda for the whole workgroup to discuss. Workgroup members noted that the VSP legislation requires that the Work Plan balance critical area and agriculture issues. Jim Myers and Jim Goche mentioned that they raised this point at the Informal Submission Conference with the Technical Panel on Jan. 4 and the Technical Panel members agreed.

Rick also expressed concern about the term “social value”, and is not sure what that adds. Members of the Ag Subcommittee responded to Rick by explaining why the two track approach to “value” was necessary for creating a meaningful way to define what the county’s agricultural economy was and creating benchmarks for the VSP Work Plan. This also allows the Work Plan to be inclusionary of all agricultural producers and ag businesses in the county rather than focusing on a few entities. Subcommittee members asked Rick to circulate an explanation of his concerns and any alternative language that he might suggest ASAP after the meeting so the Subcommittee could consider it. John noted that the ultimate test is the VSP work plan – is it making things better?

#### Coordination with other VSP workgroups

Jim Goche noted that after repeated requests for clarification by the Thurston VSP Work Group members over the past 6 months, the Conservation Commission has finally committed its position about the “public agency” nature of a VSP county work group to writing. Speaking for the Commission, Ron Schultz stated in a Jan. 13 email that the Commission’s position is that “we have determined the work group is exercising actual decision making authority for the county commissioners by developing a VSP work plan” and that county work groups are “are a governing body acting on behalf of the public agency, the Thurston County Commissioners”.

Jim reiterated concerns that have been raised by him and other members over the past year regarding what this means for Thurston County, the Work Group, and individual Work Group members. Jim, Pat Dunn, and other members discussed concerns regarding a clear definition for Work Group membership, governance, and decision-making in anticipation of submitting a final draft VSP Work Plan to the state.

The Work Group also discussed the importance of networking with the other VSP counties around the state to ask questions and share information. A related idea that should be considered is having adjacent counties work together and operate regionally on VSP. A major benefit would be consistency among watersheds that cross county lines. The workgroup should have discussion on this in the future.

#### Technical Panel presentation

Neil mentioned that the informal presentation to the Technical Panel was on January 4. Charissa led the presentation and was assisted by Jim Myers and Jim Goche who also offered comments and responded to questions. The Technical Panel members seemed to like Thurston's approach to its Work Plan and importantly confirmed that their view, like that of the Thurston Work Group members, was that developing a VSP work plan was a dynamic process since it involved new approaches that would require a certain amount of trial and error to develop something that worked. WSDA's Kelly McLaine compared the Work Plan development process to flying in an airplane while the passengers are still building it. The Technical Panel advised Thurston County that in developing its Work Plan, it need not submit a completely developed and tested plan but rather should document questions that have come up, identify areas of uncertainty and then explain the reasons behind the approaches that were being suggested to protect critical areas and support/enhance agriculture.

#### Next steps

1. Stewardship plan checklist will be mailed out for all members to review; at next meeting we will discuss how it applies to a piece of property.
2. Staff will mail out the work plan to the Drafting Subcommittee to provide a detailed review prior to the next meeting. The Subcommittee is responsible for a preliminary approval of the final Work Plan draft and recommending its adoption by the Work Group.
3. For next iteration, Charissa will show changes in ~~strikeout~~/underline track changes format.
4. If he is willing, Rick Nelson was asked to submit an explanation of his concerns and any suggested changes to the Ag Viability Subcommittee for its review by Feb. 3.

The meeting adjourned at 6 pm.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 9, from 3 to 6 pm. February 22 has been reserved for a second meeting if necessary before forwarding the work plan to the Conservation Commission for submittal to the Technical Panel in March.