

**Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Workgroup Meeting #29 Summary
February 9, 2017
Washington State Farm Bureau offices**

In attendance:

Robin Buckingham, TCD
Jim Goche, Friendly Grove Farms
Jon McAninch, TCFB
Bruce Morgan, TCFB/UPPL
Jim Myers , Nisqually
Theresa Nation, WDFW
Rick Nelson, TCFB/Grange
Karen Parkhurst, TRPC
Evan Sheffels, WSFB
John Stuhlmiller, WSFB
Kathleen Whalen, TCCD

Staff: Maya Buhler, Charissa Waters, Neil Aaland, Brad Murphy

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

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

Stewardship Plan checklist

The assignment from last meeting was that people should fill out the checklist for their own property, to get a sense of how it worked. A copy of the checklist was e-mailed after the meeting. Jon McAninch and John Stuhlmiller filled it out. Charissa began going through the checklist. Members had several discussion points about the introductory portions. For example, the item “What is VSP”, John Stuhlmiller thinks this should be the elevator speech. The first sentence should include a point about giving “farmers the opportunity to manage their land in their own way”, since VSP offers farmers the opportunity to be in control of their land and tailor stewardship plans to their individual operations. Evan thinks the checklist could be the beginning of the VSP process.

John Stuhlmiller suggested adding a section “why should I participate in VSP”. First, include what voluntary collaboration means in this context. Second, it’s a collaborative approach. Third, VSP focuses on results than regulations. Fourth, this allows farmers and ranchers to manage their property in a way that meets their specific needs. His main point is we need the “why” before we get to the checklist.

Confidentiality was discussed, and noted it should be up front since some are concerned. There was some discussion about ways to preserve confidentiality. It was decided that John Stuhlmiller and Kathleen Whalen will discuss how to address this topic. Jon pointed out that we will still need to know which watershed a property is in, so we can track what is happening. Bruce Morgan asked about the relationship to farms plans; does a VSP work plan negate a farm plan? Brad and Robin suggested a VSP work plan would be a subset of a farm plan, since it only addresses the portion of the property where agriculture intersects critical areas.

John noted there is a good graphic from the Whitman County plan, and he will see about getting permission to use it in the Thurston plan.

John said he had difficulty with item 2, “identify conservation practices to meet objectives”. One suggestion was asking a question instead. He wondered if it made more sense to delete it, thinking that the Technical Service Provider (TSP) will check on this item. Further discussion points included:

- Consider having some choices to check, instead of an “essay question”
- Could have another step of the form that the TSP would use with these essay type questions
- Jim Myers wonders about taking the ones with “lines” and add “to be filled out with the TSP”, and put those items in one place
- Add a question about “conservation practices started after July 2011” to the section on practices, so this can help document practices after the baseline year/month

Work Plan Sections

The discussion started with benchmarks. It was noted that the Technical Panel encouraged the work plan to separate protection benchmarks from enhancement benchmarks. It was also noted that verbs should be added to each benchmark for ease of reading. At this point, the review process was put on hold and John Stuhlmiller suggested referring this back to the drafting subcommittee because substantial organizational changes are being made that make reviewing the current draft in this meeting fruitless. He and Evan have been working on a revised work plan draft, and he will be able to circulate this by tomorrow (Friday). Maya noted that the technical committee is meeting on the 15th, and they need to be able to provide input. [Note: a review process was developed; see later in the notes].

Organizational Issues

There were four different topics to discuss under this item. First was the process for approving the workplan. Neil wanted this on the agenda so we can all be clear about the path to complete the work plan and submit it to the Conservation Commission. Included in the mail-out was the original ground rules. Discussion occurred around voting members; voting members either approve by consensus, or in the case of more than two dissenting from a request for consensus approval, then a vote. Charissa and Maya reviewed past lists of attendees and came up with a list of who was eligible to vote. There are approximately 12 members eligible to vote. This list will be clarified and handed out at the next meeting on March 22. Neil noted that the ground rules do not discuss how voting works – whether it would be a simple majority or some other majority. He suggested it be the majority of voting members present at that meeting. Jim Goche asked how we submit this plan properly, since the work group is a governing body? The work group decided that once they had a work plan that they were comfortable with, it would be a motion to recommend submitting it for approval by the Conservation Commission. After reviewing the statutory language, the motion would be that we recommend submitting it to the Conservation Commission for their review and approve the work plan.

The issue of attendance was discussed. Jim Goche suggested that “approved absences” would be those approved by the work group. At this point, unexcused absences are those that have not emailed or contacted the facilitator or Charissa to let them know they can’t make it previous to a meeting.

Neil mentioned that the county legal counsel had suggested that the ground rules be re-adopted, to confirm their use. Rick moved to re-adopt the ground rules, Bruce Morgan seconded. In keeping with approving by consensus, Neil asked if there was any voting member wanting to register their disagreement. Nobody did so, and thus the ground rules were re-adopted by consensus.

Communication

Neil noted that Jim Goche had asked him to place a discussion of communication on the agenda, and asked him to address. Jim said he has engaged with staff and facilitator about this, and appreciates the back and forth discussion. He mentioned his concern that the Conservation Commission has not adopted by rule their criteria for approving VSP work plans. They have criteria which are still in process. Jim asked what we would submit to the state for approval. He suggested a cover page, easy summary, and a checklist showing what was done to meet the statutory criteria.. It was noted that the Technical Panel will want to see the appendices to see our work, and they will also want to see the full work plan, including the appendices and supporting documents that include elements which are required in statute for a work plan (e.g. baseline conditions reports for each watershed).

The work group decided an additional meeting will be held on March 3 to review and approve the appendices. Evan asked Neil to check with Bill Eller about changing the due date currently listed on their website, since that has been updated by e-mail to Neil.

Presentation to Board of County Commissioners

This is occurring on March 22 at 9 am, for 30 minutes. We cannot present a lot of detail with that time constraint. Several work group members noted they have had off-line discussions with individual commissioners so they know what is going on.

Next steps

1. Charissa will work with Kathleen and John Stuhlmiller on confidentiality.
2. John will get permission to use the Whitman graphic.
3. The February 22 meeting will be used to approve the work plan; an additional meeting on March 3 is scheduled to approve the appendices.
4. Neil will follow up with a detailed e-mail summarizing the review process for the work plan.

The meeting adjourned at 6 pm.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 22, from 3 to 6 pm. March 3 has been reserved as a meeting to approve the appendices.