

Voluntary Stewardship Program

Meeting Minutes

October 12, 2016

Open @ 5:30 PM

Present: Meagan Bailey
Kim Lyonnais
Don Brigham
Don Howard
Janet Howard
Terry Bruegman
Marty Hall
Justin Pearson
Bill Warren
Bryan Martin
Eric Thorn
Jim Bob

Next meeting: 12/14/2016 @ 5:30 PM—Delany Building

-
- **Meeting Minutes**
 - Discussion on agenda
 - a. Brigham: Introduction; door prize awarded to Eric Thorn for answering trivia; approval of July minutes; concerns?--NO.
 - Presentation
 - a. Updates from Kelly/Evan: send apologies for not being able to make it; busy with covering 29 counties.
 - b. In the middle of August, a couple of you were in this subcommittee for mapping; summary sent out via email. Main thing of it, what mapping do we need to do? What do we use as a measuring stick? What are the widgets that we want to measure? We had a lot of discussion at this subcommittee about that. This is what we came up with: the idea that we don't want to set a target that we cannot reach. We need to be able to have a degree of control over it. Initially, we thought the meeting was to discuss mapping, but it became apparent that we need to determine what widgets are important PRIOR to mapping. We did cover some of the critical areas, and there are some maps already being done. Don quickly ran through the existent mapping we could use.
 - a. CRITICAL AREAS: map at the state levels for potable water. Maps the travel time of contamination to potable water. State department of health has plotted these. In a broader picture, there are aquifers that extend past county lines (i.e.:

Walla Walla county and Columbia county). This mapping already exists; we don't need to recreate them.

- b. FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AREAS: Shaded areas are some sort of priority habitat for fish and wildlife.
- c. WETLANDS: National wetlands inventory, and now at the state level. Intersection of wetlands and crops. Very detailed and interesting to look at. Patit Creek has some wetlands intersecting with mostly pasture.
- d. FREQUENTLY FLOODED AREAS: We should have mapping after shorelines passes through the Department of Ecology.
- e. GEOLOGICALLY HAZARDOUS: Some seismic zones, there is a fault in this area; rings of hazard as far as property damages. Helps with emergency management. Geologically hazard areas and intersection with farmland is generally minimal—these are usually areas where you don't want to farm.
 1. The agricultural lands, looking as WSDA crop mapping, can look to evaluate the indicators that they have.

- Any questions on the mapping or anything? This is what we shared with the mapping subcommittee and discussed what we may need.
- Martin: Did you happen to bring the handout from the subcommittee? It has all of the websites for the mapping.
- Brigham: that was in the summary I sent out. We can incorporate it into the minutes.
- Martin: essentially everything is out there; we just have to decide what we want to do with it.
- Brigham: I believe that is an accurate summation—yes.
- Brigham: Agricultural viability in Columbia County. Refresh what we did on wording and what we changed. Again, the dual goals are to protect and enhance critical areas while promoting agricultural viability. The work group is tasked with developing a work plan that will be submitted to the state that represents the dual goals we have. How do we define success? What widgets are we going to measure?
 - a. Protecting Critical Areas: It must be acknowledged that VSP could determine to measure/monitor numerous environmental factors in an attempt to ascertain if VSP is being successful in protecting critical areas. Examples could be the amount of riparian vegetative cover, river water quality or temperature, number of salmonids, ETC.
 - a. Brigham: It could be that many other factors affect the habitat. We can set this as a goal, but something out of our control could come in and affect this.
- Enhancing Agricultural Viability: It must be acknowledged that VSP could determine to measure/monitor numerous factors in an attempt to ascertain if VSP is being successful in enhancing agricultural viability. Examples could be number of farmers, agricultural income, acres of grain harvest, etc.

- a. Brigham: Revenues could go up or down, depending on farm bill, etc., totally out of our control. Should these be the widgets we are seeking to measure? I don't think so...we should be able to control them.
- The Problem: Therefore, the challenge is to identify factors that not only satisfy the twin goals of protecting critical areas and enhancing agricultural viability, but are factors that are under the control of VSP and its participants; factors that are not part of the 'big picture', and subject to fluctuations beyond the control of VSP.
 - a. Hall: By identifying a widget, are we admitting a liability?
 - b. Brigham: That is what we would be held to.
- The Premise: There exist a number of tasks or programs that inherently are beneficial to protecting critical areas. For example, the upland watering of livestock or the planting of riparian vegetation are by their very nature known to have a positive influence on the protection of critical areas. Furthermore, these tasks or programs are under the direct control of VSP participants. Additionally, there exist a number of tasks or programs that inherently are beneficial to enhancing agricultural viability, for example, sponsoring workshops on succession-planning and promoting sales of locally-grown ag products. Again, these tasks or programs are under the direct control of VSP participants.
 - a. Brigham: If there are things that are inherently good, as in they are meant to protect critical areas—if we keep doing those, and keep the same ones, if we do more good, we should be protecting them. Maybe that is too simplistic, but that was one of our premises. If we do more good, then we should be furthering the goals of VSP. These are things that we have direct control over. We don't have to set the bar high, we just need to do better.
- Hall: There has been a lot of this already done, what if we said that was our goal, "promote the availability of funding..." Promoting is something we could do.
- Jim Bob: I don't think we should do that. We are setting precedence that we don't want these cows on this stream. I don't see how that is always beneficial. That whole thing is fenced off. What is along the creek? --hemlock. There is nothing good in there. You can either under graze it or under graze creek. I don't want to set the precedence that we don't want these cows near this creek.
- Bruegman: Hemlock is a problem—doesn't matter if it's on the creek or anywhere else. Historically, in the 19 years, hemlock is a low priority.
- Jim Bob: There is not desirable forage along the river there. We have a mono-species; the wildlife doesn't eat that [hemlock]. Where do these trees help the stream? If the soil isn't healthy, how can that help the stream?
- Brigham: Other thoughts? I like the idea of saying 'promoting'. We just say we promote it. We are already ahead, we have done improvements since 2011. We don't have to raise the bar too much more to be okay.

- Bruegman: Don't you think though that the program really isn't looking for a neutral plan? Regulatory entities and environmental groups...If we do nothing, if we stay status quo, we lose.
- Brigham: Without VSP, we have the critical areas ordinance, which is what we would deter to without VSP. That is neutral—it does nothing. If you do nothing, it is neutral. I don't believe that neutral is a bad thing in my opinion.
- Terry: Any program that is functional or helps a land manager maintain is OK—it is that regulatory component. One of my biggest fears...we say we want to do all of these things, but we don't know if the agencies will accept what we decide as enough.
- Brigham: FYI: there are two pilot projects, neither one has officially submitted their plan. The task force has not seen anything, we have no guidance. Even when it's approved by that group, we could have challenges.
- Bruegman: if this group was really married to this VSP group, if we worked together, I don't know what the magic bar is that tells us that we did a good job. Are we tracking widgets that mean something to the landowner? This could add more frustration to the process.
- Brigham: That is why I go back to neutral—critical areas aren't really doing much. Counties say ag activities are exempt, now it's the other way.
- Jim Bob: My fear in that is that if some guys do it, they will come back and ask us to do the same. You have to look at the whole management plan. If you rotate, they are only there a little bit and they are gone. They still can't touch the creek in some spots.
- Hall: Maybe that could be a goal. What you are saying is that they may come back independent of VSP. Maybe a widget could be a grazing timeline.
- Brigham: That sounds like the common sense approach, I like that idea.
- Bruegman: Riparian grazing is an approved B&B practice. I can take you around the county and I can show you that 19/20 guys with cows in the creek are not applying B&B practices. Inherent task of livestock operator applying constant management. When you have producers that are multi-vested, it is difficult. Big management is possible.
- Brigham: Where I was going is to take a real simple approach where we can monitor with direct control. I don't know if we can predict down the line what the state will want, but it is important to think about that.
- Martin: Can education be one of our widgets? That is a benchmark we can control.
- Brigham: Definitely. Mailers, workshops, or flyers. All we say is that we are doing continuing education.
- Martin: There has to be measurable able benchmark where we can document and show improvements.
- Brigham: Yes, just number of workshops or numbers of mailers. They don't want so many measurable benchmarks on ag viability. Ready to go on? All of this and more is on that handout that Meagan gave you.

- The Conclusion: Thus, if we continue tasks or programs such as those above examples, or better yet, increase participation in those tasks or programs, we should be furthering the cause of protecting critical areas and enhancing ag viability. If a VSP participant chooses to plant 500 feet of riparian vegetation or the local ag community sponsors a relevant ag seminar, these tasks are furthering the aims of VSP. Therefore, we can and should measure/monitor those tasks or programs to determine the success of VSP. This assures that VSP is accountable for tasks or programs over which it has a degree of control. And equally important, it removes from consideration the need to measure/monitor situations or conditions that are beyond VSP's control.
 - a. Brigham: If we continue these tasks/programs, then we are doing the cause we sought out to do—this might be too simplistic. I finished this topic paper this weekend, and I did send it to Kelly and Evan, I am anxious to see what their reaction is, they are seeing it from a different perspective. This has to fit you all.
- Pearson: with all of these programs that are expiring...is that something that will hurt us? Considering it was in a contract for 15 years, the riparian buffer has been built up now we have no control or sense of what will happen after that. What do we say when those acres go down? Will this hurt us?
- Brigham: I think we really need to watch that. We don't measure the whole thing if it is going to hurt us. Maybe we need to stay away from that.
- Pearson: New contracts that are going to be enrolled; there are differences in the new/old contracts and acreage is going down. It is still a deficit.
- Brigham: There are two different things we could measure: one would be acreage and one would be number of people who enrolled, and both of them could be going down then. We shouldn't touch that, we don't want a potential negative. Is there a replacement program for that?
- Bruegman: Landowner decision to not enroll.
- Jim Bob: In his opinion that's a good thing. In his opinion, that's a good thing.
- Martin: If acres are coming out of CREP, the acres are reduced, can we offset that by improved function of the remaining acres?
- Bruegman: the thing about the CREP is that it's long... (unable to hear)
- Pearson: starting next year there are less contracts that are up for renewal. This year was 50, next year is 27. It has been slowing down progressively.
- Bruegman: A big impact is...(unable to hear)
- Pearson: I think the issue was is that they mapped the river for CREP. So now there is no value for river value. Now they are mapping the acreage around it.
- Martin: This could potentially be one of our widgets. I keep going back to function. If some of these CREP acres are coming out, is there some way we can improve the function of that resource. Such as, different types of planting around the perimeter, more...
- Hall: Or create some biodiversity within that area

- Martin: Evaluate the function...that could be a widget
- Brigham: Does this ever happen? If it comes out of this program it immediately gets plowed under and turned to crops?
- Bruegman: Historically the lands were grazed. If they were utilizing, it was for grazing.
- Brigham: If we used that as a measurement, it could bite us on the butt
- Pearson: I don't see that hurting. It would be a small deficit, but I don't see it hurting overall.
- Martin: Especially if we offset that with a higher functioning system of some kind.
- Brigham: The function is the most important. Something has to be created to protect the function of it.
- Thorn: We need to remember that there are a lot of activities that take place that are individual programs that go on without federal knowledge and without payment. There are many more acres of those than there are in these federal programs.
- Brigham: Like private and good stewardship. Is that something we can look at or quantify?
- Thorn: It sounds like ag lands aren't really a part of this program. From your description of those maps, Ag land has been eliminated. All ag land in Columbia County is highly erodible.
- Brigham: It doesn't meet the definition. It has to be for potable water, everything charges an aquifer. That's the way they look at that. Again, just to clarify, we are only concerned with the overlap of critical areas and ag practices. If you are grazing within a frequently flooded area, that's the intersection we are talking about.
- Martin: Our critical recharge areas seem to be around the city well heads.
- Brigham: They could be around private ones, too. The scale of the map doesn't show them.
- Don Howard: While you were working on this, what did you come up with water quality? That is the number one thing. We are doing all these things; it boils down to water quality (the critical areas). I don't think there has been much water quality done. There has been sediment, talking about cattle...
- Brigham: There has been some done for salmon recovery
- Brigham: I don't want to use water quality...we don't have control over it enough
- Don Howard: That is important. We should know more. It would be nice to know some of these things. I have thought about doing my own sampling.
- Brigham: Is what you are doing affecting that? I think it's upstream landowners.
- Don Howard: I want to know...
- Warren: We have to take samples out of the water for irrigation and drinking waters. We just have to keep this information on file to help track down sources of the problems.
- Brigham: We can look into that, Don. I haven't really looked.
- Jim Bob: It may be good to know. Then we don't have an agency coming in. We could have a standard to go by.
- Hall: That could be a widget—water monitoring.
- Don Howard: It may be bad for some people...

- Bruegman: We have discussed with them numerous times, do it at different breaks in the river, and you get multiple samples but without a source factor. Where is the problem at?
- Warren: It changes too. Take the samples at different times and everything changes.
- Don Howard: Originally, we were talking about the Tucannon. They wanted to take a water sample and come on our property and take a sample. The water is already warming up in July.
- Warren: they wanted accurate readings, not the best reading. What they are looking for is 6-7 years of records.
- Brigham: As I mentioned, the state DOE and DOA will be doing it out of their budget. We can use their monitoring for our purpose if we chose. It wouldn't have to be an addition.
- Brigham: In the July meeting, we went through a list of statements. We have revised these as necessary.

- a. Revised from July meeting to read as follows:

Activity A-1. - Ensure that landowners have the rights and are allowed to place agricultural land into conservation easements, land trusts and similar holdings.

Activity A-2. – Encourage and promote the continued operation of viable agricultural land (where appropriate) even when land is placed into conservation easements, land trusts and similar holdings.

- a. Brigham: The numbers do not indicate priority—just to format

- b. Was approved at July as is:

Activity B. - Promote Comprehensive Plan Policies and zoning regulations that support agricultural operators to keep land in farming and diminish its conversion to non-agricultural uses. Evaluate allowances for agricultural accessory uses or second homes for agricultural operators; for example, consider where the County code can be made more flexible or accommodating.

- a. Brigham: This was approved how it was...just move through that.

- c. Revised from July meeting to read as follows:

Activity C. – Support County regulations that set appropriate densities and site planning for rural residential or urban residential uses that abut designated agricultural lands to minimize interface, protect necessary agricultural practices, and reduce pressure for agricultural conversion.

- a. Don Howard: The density here, the planning department has addressed that at some point?

- b. *Lynnais: We have addressed it.*

- c. Brigham: This is already in place.

d. Lyonnais: When I read it, I see that we are melting it into the ordinance that already exists. We have this in place—we got it covered.

d. Revised from July meeting to read as follows:

Activity D. - Promote local education on the value of ag lands, on the Right to Farm and on necessary ag practices, especially among residents whose homes abut designated ag lands, to minimize conflicts among neighbors.

a. Brigham: just so you see the relevance, these are all in reference to ag viability. We don't need to have measurable benchmarks—we just have to promote or encourage this sort of stuff.

e. These two were both accepted at our July meeting as is:

Activity E. – Establish an Agricultural Viability Committee to promote awareness of the value of agriculture to the local economy and cultural lifestyle of the County.

Activity F. – Promote recognition of local ag products through field signage, farmers markets and marketing efforts.

a. Brigham: These were both OK last meeting.

f. Revised from July meeting to read as follows:

Activity G. – Ensure that capital investments and county/state transportation plans and telecommunication systems provide strong support for agricultural infrastructure.

a. Brigham: We added the telecommunications aspect, which is obviously important.

g. Revised from July meeting to read as follows:

Activity H. – Promote awareness with the public, with local and state officials and other decision-makers that the sale of private, productive ag land to state agencies diminishes the viability of ag in the region. (Also impacts property tax revenue)

a. Brigham: Here we are just talking about promoting awareness.

h. This was accepted at our July meeting as is:

Activity J. – Promote awareness with the public, with local and state officials and other decision-makers to ensure that hunting and wildlife management coexists with land in ag production in order to maintain the viability of ag in the region.

a. Brigham: This was okay as it is.

i. This was accepted at our July meeting as is:

Activity K. – Maintain or increase participation and conservation practices to enhance agricultural activities. Promote economical and effective water, soil, pest and nutrient management that maximizes production quality.

a. Brigham: This one was okay.

j. This was accepted at our July meeting as is:

Activity L. – Promote County policies and regulations that don't inhibit agricultural operations and that maintain and improve the long - term viability of agriculture. Review relevant codes to determine alternative strategies. Evaluate fees applied to agricultural activities and identify ones that should be eliminated or modified.

a. Brigham: This one was okay. No one really knew what fees we were really talking about.

- Brigham: that to me forms a good framework for the objectives that we want to go after. I do have a couple other ones that we didn't do previously.

Activity 1 - Priority funding made available by federal, state, and local sources to support VSP participation by agricultural operators. Applications for conservation practices could score higher for VSP participants

a. Bruegman: I don't know how you will organize the state process. Might be able to at the local level. I don't know that federal programs will be influenced.

- Brigham: This is from Thurston County; they think they can influence anything. Does it hurt to have it in there?

Activity 2 - Provide information to agricultural operators about available tax incentives, financial assistance programs, and other information related to agriculture (i.e. an online clearinghouse for resources and info). Seek new tax incentives by the state legislature that recognize VSP participation.

a. Brigham: To me, activity 3 is redundant.

b. Brigham: Again, this is from Thurston County.

c. Bruegman: Doesn't the Farm Bureau of a liaison?

d. Brigham: I thought that is what Evan did

Activity 8 - Evaluate ways to streamline the application and permitting process for Ag operators.

a. Bruegman: I guess I am not sure what the permitting process is

b. Brigham: Again, I think that is a Thurston County.

- c. Bruegman: I think it's a critical statement, I just didn't understand. One thing that helped me, if you had a magic list of the county ordinances that we keep referring to...we ought to have this information.
- d. Brigham: Ag activities are excluded under Shorelines, and subdivisions.
- e. Lyonnsais: The ordinances are online. We are reproducing and updating right now.
- f. Brigham: Number 5 and 11 are what we need to talk about

Incentive 5: Ensure carbon taxes and cap and trade systems for greenhouse gas emissions do not apply to agricultural activities like tree fruits that are a permaculture.

- a. Warren: Thinking about the life cycle of an orchard, after the lifespan, the trees are removed and the soil is tilled. All that sequestered carbon is released. Is that really allowable?
- b. Brigham: I think they borrowed that from the forest industry. Orchards are short term, 15-20 years is a generation. I don't know that they could really meet the permaculture definition. What I hear is that the consensus is to not include this incentive-5.

Incentive11: Explore a “farmbudsman” program where farmers and ranchers can obtain objective and comprehensive advice on federal, state, and local laws that affect agricultural activities, e.g. water rights.

- c. Brigham: What about incentive-11?
- d. Hall: Explore works better than create.

- Brigham: We will revise this block and send it out. Let's see if it's saying what you want it to say. We will explore Don Howard's request as well. What Kim and I were talking about is maybe, for numerous reasons, we might go every other month. The test cases haven't even been aired—we could do a lot of work and they could tell us it isn't needed. **Next meeting 12/14/2016 @ 5:30PM, Delany Building**

MEETING AJOURNED

Mapping Links:

Maps of Wellhead protection zones available through state Dept. of Health

- <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/eh/maps/SWAP/index.html>

Maps available from state Dept of Fish & Wildlife

- <http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/>

Maps specific to Columbia County are available through the state Dept. of Agriculture

- <http://arcg.is/23yRw6e>

Some mapping and info available from Department of Natural Resources

- <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/geologyportal>
- <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/programs-and-services/geology/geologic-hazards/geologic-hazard-maps>

Maps specific to Columbia County are available through the state Dept. of Agriculture

- <http://arcg.is/23yRw6e>
- <http://agr.wa.gov/PestFert/natresources/AgLandUse.aspx>