

## **Columbia County VSP meeting February 8, 2017**

In attendance: Roland Schirman, Tom Schirm, Norm Passmore, Terry Bruegman, Justin Pearson, Don and Janet Howard, Eric Thorn, Scott Magi, Jim Bob Bloomfield, Greg Abramson and Don Brigham.

Minutes of previous meeting were approved as submitted.  
There were no concerns, issues or questions raised.

❖ Concerning the **Outreach & Communications (O&C) plan:**

Don: Following up on issues raised at meeting two weeks ago. **O&C** is an important process for the program. Don and Meagan produced a draft plan. The goal is to ensure all interested parties are aware of VSP.

Terry: Landowners need to be in the loop. Could use Assessors' parcel data to generate list of affected owners.

Roland: Would like to start with weed tax mailing.

Terry: Does forestry count as ag operation?

Don: No, but we would like to include them, as they could contribute to overall health of watersheds.

Eric: DNR may also have a list that could be added.

Don: Do we need a motion to adopt Outreach plan?

Roland: No, let's just keep it as a living document.

Don: We won't go into detail of objectives, just brief overview.

Don Howard: Where are five bullet points from our earlier meeting?

Don: Yes, we need to pull them out, and keep them in the forefront of meetings.

Terry: Add "landowners" to Outreach Objectives.

Don Howard: "Landowner" would include the smaller parcels along rivers that aren't farmers or producers, etc. Around Last Resort store on Tucannon, for example.

Don: Should we retain last bullet point? (It's from Grant Co.)

Roland: Edit last bullet-point: (Ensure on-going interaction between ag producers and govt. agencies.)

Don: Early outreach efforts have been noted.

CC: Can we add a number or a website to encourage active participation of all growers/producers/landowners/operators.

There was some debate over terminology to cover all types of landowners.

CC: Should we have flyers/brochures in various ag. related agency offices.

CC: Do we have a definition of what is going to be involved in the stewardship plan?

CC: Do we have a plan for beta testing?

Don: It's too soon. Revised language will be sent out prior to next meeting.

❖ **Measurable benchmarks process**

Don: This is our main topic for tonight. This is a result of information from Moses Lake meeting which several of us attended.

Goals: "Protection" goals are a must in VSP. "Enhancement" goals are not required. Protection applies to Benchmark functions and values compared to July, 2011.

Measurable benchmarks directly measure critical areas functions and values through use of on-going monitoring data (see slide). It's important that there are measurable improvements to benchmarks when the five-year deadline comes up.

Terry: Does F&W map existing habitats, or desired habitats?

Tom S: We map all types of habitats.

Terry: how do they map it? What's desirable, or what's there?

Tom S: What is there. Other counties are looking at the existing as a protection level, with incentives to increase them.

Don: Protection benchmarks of functions and values that are similar to the baseline of July 2011 - and enhancement goes above that, where values and functions are improved compared to 2011.

Norm: What happens if county drops below benchmarks?

Don: Four things can happen: VSP could be thrown out, and we would revert to current system. There are other, less drastic measures that could be taken.

Terry: If someone challenges VSP, any lawsuits are against the state Conservation Commission, not the county.

Tom S: Another hammer is ag would be subject to GMA.

Don: Presented a discussion of the benchmarks process flowchart.

Roland: Can the county have a two-tiered tax rate? One for stewardship plan, one for those without.

Norm and Eric: Yes.

Terry: We would need to see how we would advise landowners on best way forward.

Don: It might be better to look at state-funded credits, rather than county-funded tax breaks.

Don: We are getting credit for improvements since 2011. Setting benchmarks using SMART guidelines. These are: Specific (what specifically do you want to do?) – Measurable (How will you know when you've reached it?) – Attainable (Is it in your power to accomplish it?) – Realistic (Can you realistically achieve it?) – Timely (When exactly do you want to accomplish it?)

Terry: Keep components simple.

Don: Effectiveness monitoring: determines if the protection action is effective at meeting the benchmarks or measuring implementation through time. Effectiveness versus implementation: VSP requires watershed work groups to show the effect of voluntary actions within the watershed. This effectiveness begins with monitoring implementation. Examples of benchmarks include: Maintain acres of riparian vegetation at 2011 levels along all streams and rivers or maintain acres of shrub steppe habitat adjacent to agriculture at 2011 levels.

Implementation monitoring tracks if stewardship plan elements (ecological and social) are successfully completed. There are at least two ways to fail: The monitoring plan was incapable of measuring benchmarks or the voluntary actions were not accomplished per the stewardship plans. Put simply "Did we do what we said we would do and could we tell?"

Adaptive management was presented briefly. The concept is that we set benchmarks (a specific environmental conditions desired from VSP); have performance metrics (what will be measured to know if adaptive management objectives are

achieved); the monitoring method (how the performance metric will be measured); the adaptive management action threshold (how the project result that, if achieved, must be addressed with an action); the adaptive management action (the action that will be taken if the threshold is reached); and who monitor the process.

Next meeting: March 8, 2017 (Roland will not be here) Norm will chair.  
Adjourned at 7:04 PM.