

Appendix D: Existing and Related Plans, Programs and Regulations

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The Growth Management Act (GMA) was passed by the Washington State legislature in 1990 to help the state manage the growth of development and activities that have the potential to affect sensitive environments and species, including critical areas. The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) is part of the GMA, but was also written to work with other existing programs, plans and applicable rules and regulations. This appendix sets forth an overview of the existing resources used in the Columbia County VSP Work Plan and describes how they relate to other applicable rules and regulations. This is referred to as the regulatory environment on the balancing graphic.

Existing Conservation Programs

As described in the Columbia County VSP Work Plan, the VSP provides a voluntary framework for critical areas protection and enhancement actions carried out by agricultural producers while maintaining and improving agricultural viability. Other similar programs are available to agricultural producers that are designed to incentivize protection and enhancement of critical areas through conservation practices. The availability of these programs is variable, as they are heavily influenced by federal and state program funding, the regulatory environment, industry standards and the agricultural market. Many of these programs have been in place since the 2011 baseline date and have contributed to conservation practices being implemented in Columbia County.

There are a variety of voluntary incentive programs for agricultural producers provided by federal, state and local entities. The VSP was written to be compatible with existing conservation programs to achieve protection and enhancement of critical areas. Table 1 includes a summary of federal programs and Table 2 includes a summary of state and local programs available. This is intended to provide a general representation, but is not intended to be an all-inclusive list.

Federal Conservation Programs

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help agricultural producers make and maintain conservation improvements on their land. NRCS also offers conservation easement programs and partnerships to leverage existing conservation efforts on farm lands.

❖ **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**

Voluntary program providing financial and technical assistance for agricultural producers to plan and implement conservation practices improving soil, water, plant, animal, air, and related natural resources

❖ **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**

Voluntary program providing technical assistance for agricultural and forest landowners to develop plans for conservation, management, and enhancement activities.

❖ **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**

Provides conservation partners with financial and technical assistance through agricultural land easements to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands

❖ **Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)**

Voluntary program providing financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers for implementing agricultural water-enhancement activities

❖ **Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)**

Voluntary program for wildlife habitat conservation and enhancement on agricultural land, non-industrial private forest land, and Native American land

❖ **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**

Provides conservation partners with financial assistance to support high-impact conservation projects.

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

FSA oversees several voluntary, conservation-related programs that work to address several agriculture-related conservation measures.

❖ **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**

Voluntary reserve program to conserve environmentally sensitive land through agricultural protections and plant species to improve environmental health.

❖ **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)**

Similar to the CRP, this voluntary program targets high-priority conservation issues. The contract period is typically 10 to 15 years.

State and Local Conservation Programs

Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC)

WSCC works with conservation districts (CDs) to provide voluntary, incentive-based programs for implementation of conservation practices. WSCC supports the CDs through financial and technical assistance; administrative and operational oversight; program coordination; and promotion of CDs activities and services.

❖ **Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) Program**

Voluntary and locally led program for landowners seeking to resolve land-use and natural resource issues through local coalitions and consensus building

❖ **Irrigation Efficiencies Grant Program (IEGP)**

Provides financial incentives to landowners willing to install irrigation systems that save water.

❖ **Natural Resource Investments (non-shellfish) Grants**

Grant program for landowners to complete natural resource enhancement. Projects necessary to improve water quality in non-shellfish growing areas.

❖ **Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP)**

The OFP identifies and addresses farmland loss through agriculture conservation easement programs, providing technical assistance, developing farm transition programs, and providing data and analysis on trends.

❖ **Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)**

WDFW provides financial assistance for habitat projects that restore and/or preserve fish and wildlife habitat through funding opportunities such as the ALEA Volunteer Cooperative Grant Program

❖ **Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA)**

Grant program for qualifying landowners who undertake projects that benefit Washington state's fish and wildlife resources.

❖ **Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office**

The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office provides funding to protect aquatic lands and for projects aimed at achieving overall salmon recovery, including habitat projects and other activities that result in sustainable and measurable benefits for salmon and other fish species. Funding is provided through programs such as ALEA and the Salmon Recovery Funding Board Grant Program.

❖ **Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA)**

Local and state agencies and Native American Tribes can apply for grants to fund aquatic habitat-enhancement projects.

❖ **Salmon Recovery Funding Board Salmon Recovery Grants**

Grant program for eligible parties seeking to improve important habitat conditions or watershed processes to benefit salmon and bull trout.

❖ **Farmland Preservation Grants**

Grant program for local agencies and non-profits to buy development rights on farmlands to ensure the lands remain available for farming in the future.

❖ **Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology)**

Ecology provides funding for water-quality improvement and protection projects, including programs such as the Water Quality Financial Assistance program and voluntary partnership programs such as the Farmed Smart Partnership.

❖ **Water Quality Financial Assistance Program**

Grant and loan program for high-priority projects to protect and improve the health of Washington State waters.

❖ **Farmed Smart Partnership**

Regional voluntary program overseen by the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association, in coordination with Ecology, that certifies agricultural producers for environmentally friendly and sustainable dryland agriculture practices.

❖ **Columbia Conservation District (CCD)**

CCD provides technical, financial, and educational resources to meet the needs of local land users for conservation of soil, water, and related resources.

❖ **Cost-share Program**

Program for projects within WCD boundaries that implement best management practices for improving water quality.

❖ **Water Quality Program**

Program providing technical assistance for livestock and non-livestock issues relating to water quality.

❖ **Riparian and Wildlife Habitat Program**

Program offering education, technical, and financial assistance for improving, enhancing, and restoring habitat.

❖ **Conservation Agriculture and Farmed Smart**

Program offered through the Conservation Agricultural Department at CCD offering a variety of grant options to help landowners and producers.

❖ **Washington State University (WSU) Extension**

The WSU Extension program connects agricultural and natural resource takeholders and industries, as well as the public, to extend research-based information and conduct locally relevant applied research in the fields of agriculture and natural resource sciences.

❖ **Agriculture and Natural Resources Program**

Program providing technical assistance, research, and education to producers.

Related Plans and Programs

As required by RCW 36.70A.720(1)(a), the VSP Work Plan must incorporate applicable water quality, watershed management, farmland protection, and species recovery data and plans. Below is a summary of the planning documents and programs that were referenced for the VSP Work Plan and appendices. This includes watershed management and wildlife management programs prepared specific to Columbia County.

❖ **Water Resource Inventory Areas**

The County includes portions of three major watersheds, which are known as Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs). Most of the County is in the Middle Snake WRIA (WRIA 35). The western portion of the County is in the Walla Walla WRIA (WRIA 32), and a relatively small area in the northwestern portion of the County is in the Lower Snake WRIA (WRIA 33). Watershed planning under RCW 90.82 has previously been undertaken which focuses on issues relating to water quality, water quantity and habitat.

The purpose of watershed planning under the Washington Watershed Management Act (WMA) is to provide a method to help achieve a balance among competing water resource demands. Water demands for commercial, industrial, residential and agricultural activities (e.g. out of stream uses) have to be balanced with Tribal Cultural and instream fish habitat needs. Demands such as irrigated agriculture provide a significant economic base for the Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA). Critical habitat for fish species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) as well as a diversity of non-listed fish and wildlife are also dependent upon water resources. The WRIA's surface water resources also offer recreational opportunities and natural beauty for residents and visitors.

A summary of WRIA goals includes:

- Protect existing water rights, private property rights and tribal treaty rights
- Emphasize voluntary and incentive-based management solutions
- Maintain and enhance the regional economy and provide future economic opportunities associated with the watershed hydrology, including but not limited to potable water, agriculture, industry, recreation and tourism
- Establish and maintain ongoing education and public involvement program
- Establish a detailed funding plan for implementation, including: projects, programs, long-term monitoring and evaluation of watershed plan implementation
- Ensure fairness in distributing costs and burdens of water resource management actions
- Obtain local, state and federal agencies (regulatory and management) and tribal buy-in and cooperation for recommended management strategies
- Provide long-term reliable and predictable water supplies for human uses
- Identify minimum and target stream flows, and manage stream flows to enhance habitat conditions for salmonids, with emphasis on steelhead, Chinook and bull trout
- Protect surface and ground water quality needed for public drinking water supplies, agriculture, recreation, fish and other uses
- Improve certainty, timeliness and efficiency in water right decisions
- Improve scientific basis for understanding baseline conditions
- Identify and implement water conservation and efficiency strategies
- Maintain productive riparian habitat and enhance degraded habitat for salmonids in all life stages

❖ **Salmon Recovery Plans**

There exist a number of salmon recovery plans dating back to 2004. In 2011, the Snake River Salmon Recovery Board put forth the Snake River Salmon Recovery Plan for SE Washington. This plan provides strategies for restoring salmon populations in the Snake River Basin. The plan represents a coordinated effort with other planning processes to provide recovery strategies and general actions to restore habitat and fish passage within the basin.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA Fisheries), in 2015, put forth the Proposed ESA Recovery Plan for Snake River Fall Chinook Salmon. This plan provides recovery goals and strategies, including site-specific actions for restoring fall

Chinook salmon populations in the Snake River basin. This includes strategies to improve habitat and water quality critical to the recovery of the species.

A similar plan was also put forth in 2015 for the Snake River Sockeye Salmon by NOAA Fisheries.

In 2016, NOAA Fisheries put for the Proposed ESA Recovery Plan for Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon and Snake River Steelhead. The goals and strategies are similar to the plans for the other species.

❖ **Columbia County Shoreline Master Program (SMP)**

The SMP sets forth shoreline goals and policies for management and protection of shorelines of the state located within the County. Existing agricultural activities are exempt from the SMP.

❖ **Priority Habitats and Species List (PHS)**

The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife manages the PHS list to track and document state-listed habitats and species located throughout the state.

Federal, State and Local Regulations that Apply to Agriculture

The VSP is provided as an alternative to protecting critical areas used for agricultural activities through development regulations under the Growth Management Act. Despite its voluntary nature, it is still the intent of the VSP to improve, and not limit, “compliance with other laws designed to protect water quality and fish habitat,” per Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 36.70A.700 and 36.70A.702. Per RCW 36.70A.720, the development regulations used to achieve the goals and measurable benchmarks for protection of critical areas must be incorporated into the VSP Work Plan. Because no regulations are enforced via the VSP, regulatory enforcement in the County provides a “regulatory backstop.” For example, the Washington State Department of Ecology will continue to regulate wetland conversions on agricultural lands through the local Water Pollution Control Act.

Continued compliance with these regulations provides additional assurance the functions and values of critical areas are protected. As illustrated in the figure below, the VSP is intended to balance critical areas protection and agricultural viability at the County level through voluntary actions by agricultural producers. VSP is not a replacement for compliance with other laws and regulations, but participation in the program can often help agricultural producers comply with these requirements.



Other Programs

The following list includes international organizations that offer a variety of voluntary conservation and certification programs to agricultural producers:

- **GLOBALG.A.P.:** GLOBALG.A.P. is an international non-profit organization that provides a voluntary GLOBALG.A.P. certification for eligible crops and livestock that meet or exceed 16 standards for safe and environmentally sound agricultural practices.
- **Safe Quality Food Institute (SQFI):** SQFI offers certifications recognized by the Global Food Safety Initiative for best agricultural and livestock practices.
- **PrimusLabs:** PrimusLabs, located in North and South America, is a food safety company that provides a Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) auditing program that certifies agricultural producers who comply with standard operating procedures for food safety.
- **Farmed Smart:** The Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association oversees the Farmed Smart Program, which is designed to certify producers who use sustainable practices. The program defines conservation standards and provides educational tools to producers regarding the environmental benefits of direct seeding.