



Chapter Six: Implementation

6.1 Framework for Implementation

Work Plan implementation is expected to continue largely through established programs and organizations. As noted previously, many agricultural-based programs, activities, and efforts are already in place to protect and, in many cases, enhance critical areas and agricultural viability.

Significant progress has been made to these ends in recent years. This Work Plan has been designed to fit within this existing framework, with supplemental efforts identified to meet state VSP requirements, including documenting critical areas baseline conditions, establishing goals and measurable benchmarks, identifying stewardship activities, and establishing monitoring and adaptive management measures to track Work Plan performance in protecting critical areas and maintaining agricultural viability. The tracking timeframe for this Work Plan is the first 10 years of implementation.

Per RCW 36.70A.705, the Work Group is responsible for developing the Work Plan and overseeing its implementation. Work Plan implementation responsibilities include: agricultural producer participation and outreach; technical

assistance; program performance tracking and reporting; and adaptive management.

Columbia County will be responsible for designating a VSP Coordinator through a new hire or contractor to best to serve this role. The VSP coordinator will collect participation data from existing conservation program leads and entities (identified in Section 6.4) and coordinate reporting, monitoring, and adaptive management procedures with the Work Group. The VSP Coordinator will rely on existing agencies, the conservation district, and local organizations to provide the technical assistance to producers. The anticipated implementation budget for this Work Plan is summarized in Table 6-1, under the assumption that State funding for VSP is continued at a level of \$250,000 each biennium for the County.

Table 6-1 Implementation Budget

Task	Activities	Who	Biennium Budgets
Education, Outreach, and Technical Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct outreach and develop education materials • Assist producers in developing stewardship plans • Facilitate Self-Assessment Checklist reporting • Identify cost-share to leverage other conservation project funding 	VSP Coordinator with help from technical assistance providers	\$165,000
Monitoring, Reporting, and Adaptive Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual monitoring and tracking • Develop adaptive management as needed • Prepare 2-year status reports • Prepare 5-year progress reports 	VSP Coordinator with help from technical assistance providers or contract services	\$70,000
Work Group Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend quarterly meetings • Coordinate report and adaptive management review and approvals 	VSP Coordinator with help from technical assistance providers	\$15,000
Total State Budget			\$250,000

Notes:

1. Assumes State funding for VSP is continued at a level of \$250,000 each biennium for the County.
2. Costs will be less in non-reporting years to support annual monitoring and tracking efforts. The majority of budget item will support costs during the 2-year and 5-year reporting years: 2021, 2026, and 2031.

Ultimately, agricultural producers play the most integral role in VSP implementation. Success of the VSP relies on these producers to voluntarily implement conservation actions that help meet Work Plan goals and benchmarks for critical areas protection and agricultural viability.

6.2 Agricultural Producers Participation, and Technical Assistance and Outreach

Many producers are already implementing stewardship strategies and practices that are protecting or enhancing critical areas and supporting agricultural viability throughout the County, as described in Section 4. Two participation objectives have been established for Columbia County VSP implementation:

1. Better identify and document the existing measures that have been put in place since 2011 through private-sector activity and outside of government programs.
2. Increase the level of participation among agricultural producers in implementing stewardship strategies and practices.

Regarding the first objective, it is expected the measures summarized in Section 4 represent only a portion of the total measures implemented during this period. Outreach to individual landowners, as well as to private industry groups, is planned in Years 0 to 2 to better document existing practices and identify future practices that might be implemented outside of government programs. Additional outreach and coordination with the private sector, resulting from the initial outreach activities, is expected to continue through the remaining 8 years of the initial 10-year performance tracking period.

The second participation objective is focused on increasing the number of stewardship strategies and practices implemented by agricultural producers, helping to meet protection and, where possible, enhancement performance goals outlined in Section 5. Achieving this objective includes offering technical assistance to producers with the development of individual stewardship plans, and making them aware of available private- and public-sector financial incentives and programs.

This technical assistance would also include helping to estimate the expected benefits that can be realized from implementing the measures identified in individual stewardship plans, including agriculture viability benefits at the farm level.

Results from these conservation efforts will be documented, along with documenting any lands converted from stewardship strategies and practices

back to more conventional farming, so the overall net effect on protecting (and where applicable, enhancing) critical areas is characterized. VSP success depends on producer participation. **According to guidance from the WSCC, statutory provisions on the confidentiality and disclosure of a farm plan also apply to a VSP “individual stewardship plan” that a conservation district helps a producer develop (unless the producer expressly permits disclosure). The WSCC believes the individual stewardship plan meets the definition of farm plan in the statutes. The Commission’s position is that it believes that similar to farm plans developed by conservation districts, individual stewardship plans are confidential and exempt from disclosure, unless permission is granted by the landowner or operator. Further, additional confidentiality requirements are invoked if the landowner’s farm plan is a requirement under federal law. The Statewide Advisory Committee concurs with the position of the Commission that similar to farm plans developed by conservation districts, individual stewardship plans are confidential and exempt from disclosure, unless permission is granted by the landowner or operator, provided they are provided by or created in conjunction with a conservation district.**

VSP technical assistance providers can provide more detail on applicable confidentiality and disclosure provisions for particular types of agricultural operations and conservation programs.

6.2.1 Organization Leads

The VSP Coordinator will rely on local organization leads to continue to provide technical assistance to providers:

- The Columbia Conservation District will continue to implement public-sector program participation efforts within their respective boundaries, supported by other agencies, such as Washington State Department of Agriculture, WDFW, and Ecology, NRCS and FSA, others with their respective programs, and support from the private sector.
- Local entities including the Columbia County Cattlemen’s Association, Columbia County Farm Bureau, and Columbia County Association of Wheat Growers will continue to provide technical assistance to producers.

6.2.2 Technical Assistance and Outreach

Technical assistance occurs in a variety of ways, including developing individual stewardship plans, providing advice on use of specific practices, range management plans, and sharing information at forums, meetings, and other venues where stewardship strategies and practices are highlighted for environmental and economic benefits. The VSP Coordinator will work with local organization leads to prepare biennial work plans that incorporate public-sector activities to be implemented to achieve VSP outreach and technical assistance

objectives, and also identify plans for working with the private sector to capture information about practices put in place through their efforts. See Table 6-3 and Appendix D for additional detail on public-sector plans, programs, and agency partners that support the goals of this Work Plan.

Table 6-2 identifies potential VSP outreach strategies, opportunities and forums. Table 6-3 includes a list of technical assistance providers and public-sector conservation programs that are currently available. Private-sector programs are available through existing agri-businesses and associations serving the County, such as the Columbia County Cattlemen’s Association, the Columbia County Farm Bureau, and the Columbia County Association of Wheat Growers. Appendix D contains more detail for each program and links to the programs’ webpages.

Table 6-2 VSP Outreach Opportunities

Venue	Description
Tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation District-led annual tours • Legislative and partner agencies outreach tours • Private sector industry • Washington State University Extension
Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation District monthly board meetings (public meetings) • Conservation District annual meetings • Annual Southeast Washington Conservation District meetings • Local government • Private sector industry-led meetings • Washington State University Extension
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation District and private sector industry websites, newsletters, and social media sites • Columbia County website • Washington State Conservation Commission news and announcement webpage • Articles, announcements, and advertisements with local newspapers • E-mail distribution lists • Farm Service Agency newsletter • Washington State University Extension newsletter • News releases
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational booths and displays at fairs and agricultural conventions • Individual outreach consistent with Conservation District policies • Private-sector industry marketing efforts • Washington State University Extension

**Table 6-3
Public Sector Conservation Programs Summary**

Lead	Description	Technical Assistance	Financial Assistance	Partnership Agreements	Contractor Easement Agreements
Natural Resources Conservation Services	Provides technical and financial assistance to help agricultural producers make and maintain conservation improvements on their land and offers conservation easement programs and partnerships to leverage existing conservation efforts on farm lands.	•	•	•	•
Farm Service Agency	Oversees several voluntary, incentive-based conservation-related programs that work to address several agriculture-related conservation measures, including programs such as Conservation Reserve Program and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program		•		•
Washington State Conservation Commission	Works with Conservation Districts to provide voluntary, incentive-based programs for implementation of conservation practices; supports the Conservation Districts through financial and technical assistance; administrative and operational oversight; program coordination; and promotion of Conservation District activities and services.		•	•	
Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife	Provides financial assistance for habitat projects that restore and/or preserve fish and wildlife habitat through funding opportunities such as the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account Volunteer Cooperative Grant Program.		•		
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 Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account and Salmon Recovery Funding Board Grant Program.		•		

Lead	Description	Technical Assistance	Financial Assistance	Partnership Agreements	Contractor Easement Agreements
Washington State Department of 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.		•	•	
Washington State University Extension	Provides agricultural producers with technical assistance, research, and education services. Leads the Water Erosion Prediction Project, which is a hydrological characterization model to predict runoff and erosion that may be useful in identifying effective stewardship strategies and targeted locations in the County.	•			
Columbia Conservation District	Works through voluntary, incentive-based programs to assist landowners and agricultural operators with the conservation of natural resources throughout the Conservation District, including cost-share and watershed-based partnership programs such as the Regional Conservation Partnership Program	•	•	•	

6.3 Monitoring, Reporting, and Adaptive Management

Monitoring performance, reporting progress on Work Plan goals and benchmarks, and implementing adaptive management measures when necessary are part of this Work Plan. Tracking program performance and reporting includes the following tasks:

- **2-year status reports.** Conducting a program evaluation and providing a written report on the status of the Work Plan, including accomplishments to the County and to the WSCC within 60 days (by the end of September) after the end of each biennium. Based on a January 2016 receipt of

funding date, 2-year reports are due by end of September in 2018, 2020, 2022, 2024, and 2026.

- **5-year performance reports.** Developing and providing to the WSCC 5-year progress reports on Work Plan performance in meeting goals and benchmarks. Based on a January 2016 start date, 5-year progress reports would be due in early 2021 and 2026.

The 2-year status and 5-year performance reports would be developed by the VSP Coordinator under the direction of the Work Group. Draft reports would be prepared and presented to the Work Group for review and comment. Comments would be addressed and edits made to the reports, and then approved by the Work Group, after they are satisfied the reports are accurate and complete. Reports would be distributed to the County, WSCC, and others by the VSP Coordinator on behalf of the Work Group. The general timing for reporting will be as follows:

- Monitoring will focus on the measurable benchmarks described in Section 5 and will include periodic evaluations every 2 years.
- The Work Group must report no later than 5 years after receipt of funding on whether the protection and enhancement goals are being met or identify an adaptive management plan to meet VSP goals and benchmarks.
- The Work Group must report not later than 10 years after receipt of funding, and every 5 years thereafter, whether it has met the protection and enhancement goals and benchmarks of the Work Plan.

Work plans often need to adapt to changing conditions and observations of results that aren't consistent with established goals. Adaptive management is the process for "continually improving management policies and practices by learning from the outcomes of the operational programs" (Nyberg 1999). If the Work Group determines goals have not been met, they must propose and submit an Adaptive Management Plan to achieve the goals and benchmarks. The adaptive management process is outlined in Section 5. Monitoring indicators will inform the long-term viability of the Adaptive Management Plans, based on goals for protecting critical area functions. Monitoring will focus on the measurable benchmarks and goals also described in Section 5.

6.4 Regulatory Backstop

The VSP is provided as an alternative to protecting critical areas used for agricultural activities through development regulations under the GMA. 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 RCW 36.70A.700 and 36.70A.702. Existing federal rules and

regulations continue to apply to agricultural activities that have the potential to affect the environment, including the federal Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and Endangered Species Act. State and local environmental regulations may also apply to agricultural activities with the potential to affect the environment (see Appendix D).