

Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)

A collaborative process that helps Washington communities ensure healthy landscapes and strong farms today and for the future.



What are critical areas?

Washington's Growth Management Act covers five critical areas that counties must identify and protect:

1. Wetlands
2. Frequently flooded areas
3. Critical aquifer recharge areas
4. Geologically hazardous areas
5. Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas (emphasis on anadromous fish)

Background: Managing growth in Washington

- ▶ Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA) requires counties to develop plans for managing population growth and development.
- ▶ GMA requirements include that counties must:
 - » Identify and protect critical areas (see left), including those on agricultural lands.
 - » Preserve farmland and prevent urban growth from crowding out agriculture.
- ▶ Prior to 2011, the main tool for counties to protect critical areas on agricultural land was regulation.
- ▶ Regulation threatened farm viability and led to legal battles.

What makes VSP different?

- ▶ VSP (created in 2011) gives counties the option to protect critical areas and farmland by implementing plans that rely on incentives — rather than regulations — to encourage farm-friendly conservation practices.
- ▶ Each county develops and carries out local plans that identify where critical areas and agricultural activities intersect, set benchmarks to protect critical areas and farmland, and outline the incentive-based strategies that will be used to hit those benchmarks.
- ▶ Agricultural landowners are offered incentives to develop and implement stewardship plans for their property that will help achieve benchmarks.



What does VSP mean for you?

If you own farmland in a VSP county, the program can be a big help for your operation:

- ▶ VSP is voluntary and non-regulatory. You can choose whether to do a stewardship plan for your farm.
- ▶ Stewardship plans are site-specific and identify conservation practices that you can install on your property that protect critical areas and keep your agricultural operation economically viable... so it works for you!
- ▶ The program seeks to focus available resources, funding, and incentives to help you complete the practices outlined in your stewardship plan, such as constructing livestock fencing or improving pastures and paddocks.

How it works - Three phases of VSP

1: Develop work plan*

- ▶ Local stakeholders form a VSP workgroup and develop a work plan.
- ▶ Work plan is sent to the State Conservation Commission for approval.
- ▶ Workgroup begins outreach to agricultural landowners about the program.

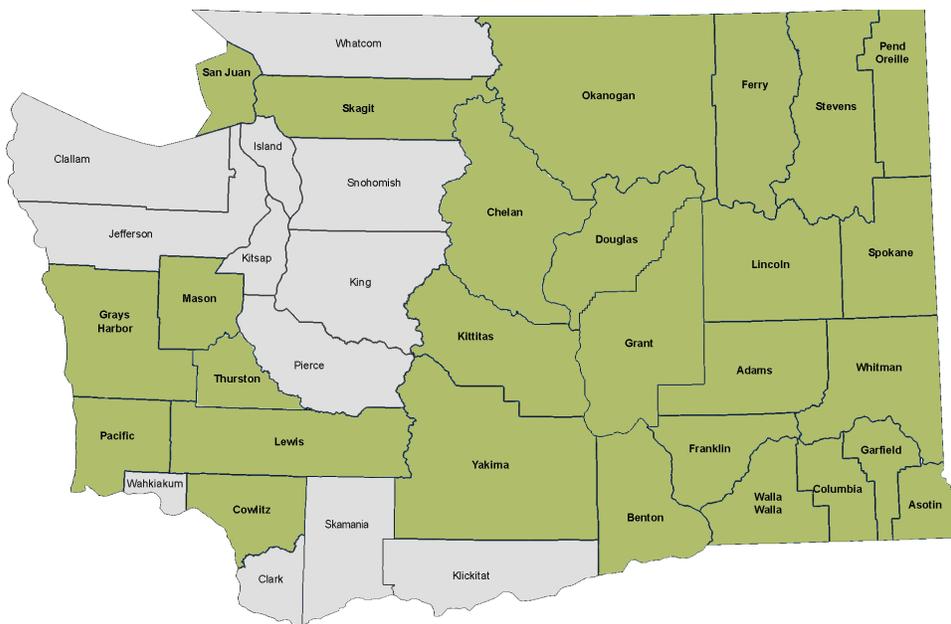
2: Implement stewardship plans

- ▶ Local conservation technicians conduct outreach in priority areas and create stewardship plans for agricultural landowners who choose to participate.
- ▶ Stewardship plans identify conservation practices that meet agricultural and critical area goals.
- ▶ Existing voluntary, incentive-based programs are used to help landowners implement stewardship plans.

3: Monitor results

- ▶ Workgroup provides status reports to the State Conservation Commission every two years.
- ▶ Workgroup monitors and reports on progress every five years — must show progress toward benchmarks and goals.
- ▶ If progress isn't achieved, new incentives may be created, or the county may need to revert to a regulatory approach.

*As of 2019, all 27 counties participating in VSP have completed Phase 1 and have state-approved work plans.



27 counties are participating in the Voluntary Stewardship Program.

Partners supporting VSP:



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