

October 2017 VSP Newsletter

This is the monthly installment of a Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) informational newsletter. Please sign up to receive the newsletter [here](#). Feedback is welcome - please direct it to [Bill Eller](#).

VSP BILLING: Billing, reimbursement and vouchering procedures for VSP expenses have been updated. All requests for payment should be emailed to sccgrants@scc.wa.gov. Also, there is a specific A-19 form that needs to be sent in for VSP reimbursements, it can be found on our website at this link: <http://scc.wa.gov/vsp-counties-workgroups/>. For other details of the changes, please see the updated Billing FAQ [here](#) on the [VSP County and work group web page](#). If you have any questions, please contact [Karla Heintz](#) at the Commission.

YAKIMA AND WALLA WALLA COUNTY VSP WORK PLANS SUBMITTED TO THE COMMISSION: Yakima and Walla Walla County submitted their VSP work plans to the Commission on last month. The work plans can be accessed from the Commission's VSP web page [here](#). The VSP Technical Panel is in the process of reviewing those work plans for approval. For Technical Panel meeting details, please see the Technical Panel web page [here](#).

SUBMITTAL OF VSP WORK PLANS TO THE COMMISSION: The Commission has set up a schedule for the formal submittal of VSP work plans. Two plans can be reviewing in any given month. Plans must be formally submitted no later than the first of the month in which the review meeting is set for that plan. Counties wishing to formally submit work plans must contact [Bill Eller](#) at the Commission before submitting their work plans so that the plan can be assigned a meeting. [Bill Eller](#) can be reached at 509-385-7512 or by email at beller@scc.wa.gov.

Action by Work Group on Work Plan: remember, the action the VSP work group needs to take in sending the work plan to the Commission is that the work group should move to submit the work plan to the Commission and VSP Technical Panel, not "approve" the work plan.

Technical Panel Review Process: The Technical Panel typically has at least two meetings during the review process. The first meeting is the first time the Technical Panel has an opportunity to discuss the work plan amongst themselves as they can only talk about the plans amongst themselves during an open public meeting. They also make oral comments on the work plan during that initial meeting. After that initial meeting, the Technical Panel members work to craft written agency comments that are compiled by the Commission and supplied back to the work group that submitted the plan. Then, at the next Technical Panel meeting on the work plan, the Technical Panel considers the work plan in light of the written comments the members made. Sometimes more than two meetings are needed to complete the review process.

VSP REGIONAL MEETINGS - *TRANSITIONING FROM PLANNING TO IMPLEMENTATION*: Six work plans have been approved by the Commission, and two more are in the review process. Many of you will soon be submitting your work plans and, after approval, transitioning to implementation. The Commission will hold two regional VSP meetings - one in Lacey and one in Spokane. The agenda for the meetings will be the same at each - transitioning from VSP planning to implementation - what you need to know. The meetings will be during the first two weeks of December. More information will be available through this newsletter once the dates are chosen.

AMENDMENT TO VSP STATUTE: During the last legislative session and as part of the operating budget bill ([SSB 5883, §961](#)), the legislature amended RCW 36.70A.725 (2) to change the time period in which the Technical Panel conducts a review of a work plan formally submitted to the Conservation Commission. The Technical Panel now has ninety days (instead of forty-five) to review the work plan and report to the Commission whether or not at the end of ten years after receipt of funding, the work plan, in conjunction with other existing plans and regulations, will protect critical areas while maintaining and enhancing the viability of agriculture in the watershed.

UPCOMING MEETINGS OF THE VSP TECHNICAL PANEL: The VSP Technical Panel has revised its meeting schedule. The most complete and up-to-date meeting schedule can always be found on the Technical Panel web page [here](#). All meetings will be held at the Farm Bureau building, 975 Carpenter Rd NE #101, Lacey, WA 98516, unless otherwise noted. A summary of the revised meeting schedule is below. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining each webinar for which you register.

Friday, October 27, 2017, 9:00 am - 3:00 pm - Agenda TBD. To register for this webinar, use this link:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/4529005327184417281>

Friday, November 17, 2017, 9:00 am - 3:00 pm - Agenda TBD. To register for this webinar, use this link:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/1120032197427752449>

Friday, December 8, 2017, 8:00 am - 3:00 pm - Agenda TBD. To register for this webinar, use this link:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7936390763523426819>

Friday, December 15, 2017, 8:00 am - 3:00 pm - Agenda TBD. To register for this webinar, use this link:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/1230273632647930115>

VSP TECHNICAL PANEL CHANGE IN MEMBERS: Please welcome two new members to the VSP Technical Panel, both representing the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) - Matt Muller and Stacey Polkowske. Matt is the Land Use Change Outreach Coordinator for WDFW and Stacey is the Division Manager for the Ecosystem Service Division of the Habitat Program. Both will be filling the shoes for the foreseeable future for Amy Windrope who has

left the Technical Panel for a new position in WDFW as the Regional Director for WDFW's Region 4 - North Puget Sound. The Technical Panel agency member list has been updated and is available [here](#).

STATE AGENCY INVOLVEMENT WITH VSP: We addressed this in the May and October 2016 VSP Newsletters, but we are still getting questions, especially now that some counties are transitioning to work plan implementation, so we are re-publishing an updated version of this topic. Various state agencies (in particular the Department of Commerce (DOC), Department of Ecology (ECY), Department of Agriculture (WSDA), Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and Conservation Commission (WSCC)) are involved in VSP in a variety of ways. The WSCC's VSP web page describes each agency's level of involvement in VSP, how its programs interact with VSP, and staff contacts for VSP.

Specifically, each state agency listed above (except for Commerce) has a seat on the VSP Technical Panel (TP). Each agency has agreed to provide the necessary staff to participate in the TP. The TP reviews the VSP work plans of the 27 counties who have opted-in to the VSP. The TP will assess whether the plan, in conjunction with other plans and regulations, will protect critical areas while maintaining and enhancing the viability of agriculture in the watershed.

Each agency has agreed that agency staff will participate in the local VSP workgroups at the agency's discretion. Agency staff will also be responsible for responding to requests for data and information from the local workgroup. Further information on agency involvement is set out below. None of the agencies listed (DOC, ECY, WSDA, WDFW, WSCC) serve as voting members of local VSP work groups.

ECOLOGY INVOLVEMENT IN VSP: The Department of Ecology is interested in helping VSP Watershed Groups achieve clean water, and protect and enhance critical areas. At this time, Ecology has limited capacity to engage with the multiple VSP work plans being developed this biennium. While we are not able to participate actively in VSP technical committees or routinely attend meetings, we can provide the following support:

- The most current information on wetlands, aquatic habitat, frequently flooded areas, groundwater protection, and water quality that we recommend be included as you develop the VSP work plan.
- GIS data layers useful for wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, and frequently flooded areas.
- Response to technical questions and review of draft VSP sections on wetlands, frequently flooded areas, aquifer recharge areas and clean water requirements.
- Information on existing technical resources that may be helpful as you develop your plans (such as TMDLs, groundwater and surface water studies, and information on known water quality impairments)

The Department of Ecology has also designated Heather M. Kosaka, from the Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program, Central Regional Office, as Ecology's Voluntary Stewardship Program Coordinator. She can be reached at hkos461@ECY.WA.GOV or 509-454-3619.

WSDA INVOLVEMENT IN VSP: The Department of Agriculture is interested in helping VSP Watershed Groups promote and enhance the viability of agriculture while protecting and enhancing natural resources. We are devoted to assisting as much as possible at the local

level with the development of work plans as well as assessments of available and relevant data sets. WSDA will:

- Participate in as many work plan meetings as possible (either in person or on the phone)
- Provide every county with an ArcGIS online map that includes wetland, stream, and agricultural land use data (this can be used as a starting point for your assessment or in conjunction with other data sources).
- Respond to technical questions and review draft work plan sections on agricultural viability and enhancement, monitoring and assessment benchmarks, etc.
- Provide information on existing technical resources that may be helpful as you develop your plans (such as WSDA-led groundwater and surface water studies, agricultural research on BMP's, and ag water quality impairments)

Our email address for inquiries is: kmclain@agr.wa.gov. Kelly McLain, our senior Natural Resource Scientist and land use policy lead is the point of contact for VSP engagement. Please contact her for access to maps, datasets, and participation on your workgroups.

WDF&W INVOLVEMENT IN VSP: Conserving WA's fish and wildlife through VSP begins with the important role that agriculture is already playing in providing habitat. The WDFW is interested in helping agricultural producers understand how best to achieve conservation while maintaining agricultural viability. We plan on being active throughout the state as technical experts for conservation of fish and wildlife:

- Providing a technical expert to watershed groups that can identify where and how Priority Habitat and Species overlap with agricultural activities and what activities might be impactful. We plan on attending as many technical meetings as possible. At the community's request we may serve as nonvoting workgroup members or as members of the workgroup's technical committee
- Providing useful GIS layers for Priority Habitat and Species
- Technical review of VSP drafts on fish and wildlife
- Help with understanding elements of successful monitoring including baseline conditions, benchmarks and goals. In addition, we can provide expertise on adaptive management to ensure long term success of local plans.

NRCS INVOLVEMENT IN VSP: Many of you are wondering how the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) participates in Washington State's VSP. NRCS has a legacy of providing excellent customer service and supporting their natural resource partners. However, due to limited staff availability and some limitations on federal participation in county governmental matters, NRCS personnel can comment and provide input on the following related to VSP:

- Information on NRCS conservation practices and associated standards
- Application of NRCS conservation practices on private agricultural, range, forested land
- NRCS conservation and voluntary incentive programs
- Input and guidance on development of watershed level conservation plans as they relate to conservation on private agriculture, range, or forest land
- Discuss ecosystem stewardship as it relates to voluntary conservation
- Information on NRCS's planning initiatives and pilots such as the Voluntary Natural Resources Conservation Plan or Resource Stewardship Pilot

NRCS personnel will not be able to:

- Serve in an official capacity on any VSP committee or work group
- Vote on any resolutions or participate in any polls that may be before the County Commissioners with regard to VSP
- Provide an opinion on the County's designation of critical areas
- Comment on determination of best available science
- Review or comment on non-NRCS best management practices that may be under consideration
- Review or comment on regulations pertinent to agriculture/forestry or use of natural resources

For more information on the extent of NRCS involvement in VSP, please contact Larry Johnson, NRCS point of contact for VSP. Larry can be reached at (509) 323-2955 or Larry.A.Johnson@wa.usda.gov.

VSP IMPLEMENTATION POST WORK PLAN APPROVAL: Now that some counties have approved VSP work plans, those counties are moving into the implementation of the VSP. What does that look like? It depends.

First, there is a continuing obligation under the VSP statute for the county to maintain a relationship with the VSP work group as the entity that is involved in implementation and reporting on progress made under the work plan. Nothing in the statute relieves the county of its continuing obligations under RCW 36.70A.715 (1) through (4) to

- (1)(a) Acknowledge the receipt of funds; and
- (1)(b) Designate a watershed group and an entity to administer funds for each watershed for which funding has been provided.
- (2) A county must confer with tribes and interested stakeholders before designating or establishing a watershed group.
- (3) The watershed group must include broad representation of key watershed stakeholders and, at a minimum, representatives of agricultural and environmental groups and tribes that agree to participate. The county should encourage existing lead entities, watershed planning units, or other integrating organizations to serve as the watershed group.
- (4) The county may designate itself, a tribe, or another entity to coordinate the local watershed group.

Similarly, there is nothing in the statute that relieves the county of the obligation to establish a work group that creates a work plan "to protect critical areas while maintaining the viability of agriculture in the watershed." The obligation to create a work plan that meets the goals of the VSP statute (RCW 36.70A.700-760) is a continuing one, requiring at various times for the work group to adaptively manage the work plan and report to the Commission. See RCW 36.70A.720 (2) (b) (i) - (iv), (c) (i) - (iv); RCW 36.70A.730.

In order to meet these obligations, the county must continue to support the work of the work group during implementation and reporting periods.

In addition to these county-specific obligations, for those counties with approved work plans, there are the deliverables in the County's VSP approved work plan that the work group identified as needed to achieve the goals and benchmarks of the work plan. Those could include outreach, education, and technical assistance to landowners, cooperators, and producers; monitoring, and adaptive management actions. These deliverables may have multiple parties responsible for these items, or there could be one entity responsible (in many cases, that one entity is the local conservation district). All of those deliverables would also need to be part of implementation.

Continued county administrative and financial support for the work group and the work plan's technical service provider is crucial for successful implementation of the work plan.

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