

April 2021 VSP Newsletter

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QUARTERLY REPORT DUE

APRIL 10, 2021: The [VSP quarterly report](#) (for January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021) is due April 10, 2021. Please use the link above to submit your county report.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND VSP MEETINGS: Due to the ongoing pandemic, and to continue protecting the health and safety of our staff, volunteers, and the public, VSP meetings will be conducted via online web meeting and teleconference. All members of the public are welcome. If you would like to join us online, please follow the links included in the meeting agendas (or below) to receive additional information on how to participate. Meeting agendas can be found on the [VSP Technical Panel web page](#) or the [VSP Statewide Advisory Committee web page](#).

THE VSP TECHNICAL PANEL MEETS ON APRIL 8, 2021, AT 8:00 AM: As part of the five year report review and

evaluation process, the next public meeting at which the Technical Panel can meet and discuss reports is set for April 8, 2021, at 8:00 am.

The Asotin, Grant, and San Juan county reports are on the agenda. Counties will be given the opportunity to seek clarity and feedback from the TP regarding their comments during the public meeting, however, the presentation of new or additional data of information will not be available.

The link to attend the online meeting is here: Meetings of the VSP Tech Panel & Statewide Advisory Committee
Thu, Apr 8, 2021 8:00 AM - 11:00 AM (PDT)

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone.
<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/554911853>

You can also dial in using your phone.
United States: [+1 \(224\) 501-3412](tel:+12245013412)

Access Code: 554-911-853

The agenda and other materials will be posted on the Commission VSP web page.

THE VSP STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETS ON APRIL 8, 2021, AT 10:30 AM: The VSP Statewide Advisory Committee will meet

immediately after the VSP Technical Panel to discuss their recommendations on the Kittitas, Mason, and Garfield county five year reports at 10:30 am, April 8, 2021.

The link to join that online meeting is here: Meetings of the VSP Tech Panel & Statewide Advisory Committee
Thu, Apr 8, 2021 8:00 AM - 11:00 AM (PDT)

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone.
<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/554911853>

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Access Code: 554-911-853

The agenda and other materials will be posted on the Commission VSP web page.

JOINT TECHNICAL PANEL AND STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING: The next joint meeting of the Statewide Advisory Committee and Technical Panel will be Thursday, April 22, 2021, at 8:30 a.m. The link to join is below. Remember to use the meeting ID and the passcode:

Topic: Joint VSP TP & SAC meeting
Time: Apr 22, 2021 08:30 AM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85843101525?pwd=aWxtRUE3WjhseCs2SUZuK1g0d3NHdz09>

Meeting ID: 858 4310 1525

Passcode: 070655

One tap mobile

+12532158782,,85843101525#,,,,*070655# US (Tacoma)

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+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 858 4310 1525

Passcode: 070655

Find your local number:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kkJeXPFTW>

The agenda and other materials will be posted on the Commission VSP web page.

SCC-COUNTY CONTRACT FOR FY21-23 AND BUDGET WEBINAR: The Commission will host a webinar for those involved in VSP implementation, primarily county, conservation district, technical service providers, and consultants. The webinar will

- Review the new FY 21-23 contract between the VSP counties and the Commission,
- Provide an example template that a VSP sub-contractor or technical service provider might use when contracting with a VSP county for implementation, and
- Summarize the VSP budget for FY 21-23, including timelines, vouchering, deliverables, responsible parties, and other items.

The webinar will be Wednesday, May 26, 2021, from 9:00 am – 10:30 am.

Topic: VSP Budget and County Contract webinar

Time: May 26, 2021 09:00 AM Pacific

Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88491455904?pwd=NUJCTU1SWnhMV3pVT0FKWVhLT0NSZz09>

Meeting ID: 884 9145 5904

Passcode: 503506

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+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington
DC)
+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)
+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)
Meeting ID: 884 9145 5904
Passcode: 503506
Find your local number:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88491455904>

Please remember to use the meeting ID
and passcode.

NRCS WEBINARS RELATED TO VSP:
The NRCS has links to recorded
webinars on topics relating to critical
area functions and values, conservation
practice mapping and monitoring,
effectiveness monitoring, and the effects
of climate change on agricultural
activities and critical areas.
Content is primarily from NRCS's
Conservation Outcomes Webinar Series
(website with additional resources [here](#))
and USGS's National Climate
Adaptation Science Center (website with
additional resources [here](#)). Some of the
links to the webinars are set out below:

*A Framework for Evaluating the
Vulnerability of Multiple Wildlife Species
to Climate Change at Regional Scales*
[https://www.usgs.gov/centers/climate-
adaptation-science-
centers/science/webinar-a-
framework-evaluating-](https://www.usgs.gov/centers/climate-adaptation-science-centers/science/webinar-a-framework-evaluating-)

[vulnerability?qt-
science_center_objects=0#qt-
science_center_objects](https://www.usgs.gov/centers/climate-adaptation-science-centers/science/upcoming-webinar-response-big-sagebrush-plant?qt-science_center_objects=0#qt-science_center_objects)

*Response of Big Sagebrush Plant
Communities to Climate Change,
Grazing, and Cheat Grass Throughout
the 21st Century*
[https://www.usgs.gov/centers/climate-
adaptation-science-
centers/science/upcoming-webinar-
response-big-sagebrush-plant?qt-
science_center_objects=0#qt-
science_center_objects](https://www.usgs.gov/centers/climate-adaptation-science-centers/science/upcoming-webinar-response-big-sagebrush-plant?qt-science_center_objects=0#qt-science_center_objects)

*Sagebrush Ecosystems in a Changing
Climate: Key Opportunities for Adaptive
Management*
[https://www.usgs.gov/centers/climate-
adaptation-science-
centers/science/webinar-sagebrush-
ecosystems-a-changing-climate?qt-
science_center_objects=0#qt-
science_center_objects](https://www.usgs.gov/centers/climate-adaptation-science-centers/science/webinar-sagebrush-ecosystems-a-changing-climate?qt-science_center_objects=0#qt-science_center_objects)

*Benefits of Using Satellite Imagery for
Making Better Crop Management
Decisions*
[http://www.conservationwebinars.net
/webinars/benefits-of-using-satellite-
imagery-for-making-better-crop-
management-decisions](http://www.conservationwebinars.net/webinars/benefits-of-using-satellite-imagery-for-making-better-crop-management-decisions)

*Quantifying Conservation Effects on
Multiple Wetland Ecosystem Services:
Understanding Tradeoffs is the Name of
the Game*
[https://nrccs.adobeconnect.com/ a757
707842/pam5ik3nzgqf](https://nrccs.adobeconnect.com/a757707842/pam5ik3nzgqf)

Measuring and Understanding the Effects of Conservation within Watersheds

<https://nracs.adobeconnect.com/a757707842/pim1ndo2nxnj>

Links to these webinars can also be found on the Commission's [VSP implementation page](#) under the implementation tab. Thanks Levi Keesecker for supplying the links!

DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY SEEKS COMMENT ON CARA GUIDANCE:

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) has revised the [Critical Aquifer Recharge Area Guidance](#). They are inviting public review and comment **from March 10 to May 7, 2021** (see how to comment below). [This guidance](#) helps local governments and residents understand what is required to protect groundwater resources under the Growth Management Act (GMA). Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas are considered Critical Areas because it protects groundwater that supplies local drinking water. Our guidance helps local governments plan and follow the state water quality standards.

The current guidance is from 2005 and needed revision to reflect current laws, rules, and practices. Ecology made revisions to:

- Reflect GMA laws and rules about Critical Areas amended since 2005

- Reflect outcomes of many cases that have been decided by the Growth Management Hearings Board and Superior Court since 2005
- Update resource links and references to websites and publications
- Maintain consistency with the Washington Department of Commerce Critical Areas Handbook, accessible from their [Critical Areas webpage](#).

Ecology wishes to thank the many people who have already been involved in working to update the guidance. They started with a request for what they should update in the guidance and have their response to those comments in [Appendix G of the new draft](#).

They will accept written comments on the guidance, from **March 10, 2021 until 11:59 p.m. on May 7, 2021**.

Please have comments reference specific report text whenever possible.

You can submit comments:

- Online via [the eComments form](#) (preferred)
- Or by mail (postmarked by May 7, 2021):
Laurie Morgan
Water Quality Program
Washington State Department of Ecology
PO Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

Ecology will hold an online informational workshop. During the workshop, they will discuss the draft report and answer questions.

Workshop Webinar: April 15, 2021

9:30 a.m.

[Register for the webinar](#)

Tips for attending the event

While not required, they recommend that you register in advance using the registration link. This helps make sure you have any needed software updates taken care of early so you may participate on time.

Here are some other things you may find helpful:

- We recommend you use the Google Chrome browser when signing in.
- Plan to join us 15 minutes or so before the event begins, around 9:15 a.m.

After the close of the comment period, Ecology will consider and respond to comments, and include the final response to comments as an appendix to the report. For questions, please contact:

Laurie Morgan

email: laurie.morgan@ecy.wa.gov

Phone: (360) 407-6483 (leave a message and she will call back – she is working from home during the pandemic)

For more information, please see the Ecology [CARA webpage](#)

COMMENTS AND POINTERS ON THE VSP FIVE YEAR REPORT TEMPLATE AND PROCESS:

Is COVID-19 Affecting VSP Implementation in Your County?

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected many aspects of our lives, and continues to make meeting in-person very difficult. No doubt it has also impacted the ability of the county, county work group, and technical service providers to implement VSP, including conducting site visits, holding work group meetings, or meeting with landowners. If this is the case in your county, please make sure you document any impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had or continues to have in your five year report.

There are many opportunities for you to include how COVID-19 has impacted VSP implementation in your county, including data gathering, monitoring, or outreach efforts. The Technical Panel is charged with reviewing and evaluating progress toward work plan goals and benchmarks, so they need to know of any factors that influence progress toward those goals.

REMAINING FIVE YEAR REPORT DUE DATES:

COUNTY	5 YEAR REPORT DUE
Lewis	4.18.21
Spokane	4.22.21
Adams	5.23.21

PROCESS AFTER THE FIVE YEAR REPORT HAS BEEN SUBMITTED:

The VSP statute says that the VSP Technical Panel reviews and evaluates five year reports submitted by county work groups.

The statute further says that after review, the Commission executive director must decide if she agrees, or not, with the assertion of the work group in the report that they are meeting (or not) the goals and benchmarks of their work plan. If she agrees that they are, then the county and work group keeps implementing VSP. If she does not agree that they are, then she consults with the VSP Statewide Advisory Committee and the county work group to see if improvements can be accomplished within six months. If so, then the county and county work group continues implementing VSP. If not, then the county and county work group fail out of VSP.

The Commission's [Guide](#) to the five year reporting process sets out in more detail the process described above. Generally, the steps look like this:

- After the report has been submitted to the Commission, the Commission makes the report available to the Technical Panel for their review and evaluation. Technical Panel members have 45 days to complete their review and make comments.

- Once Technical Panel member comments are available, the Commission will make them available by email to the person who submitted the report on behalf of the county work group.
- A public meeting is held where the Technical Panel meets to discuss each members' review and evaluation, and the SAC plays a role in making a recommendation to the Commission executive director. The public meeting schedule for each report review is available on the Commission's [VSP implementation web page](#) and directly [here](#).
- After the public meeting, Commission staff have 30 days to gather together the Technical Panel comments and Statewide Advisory Committee recommendation and provide that to the Commission executive director for her consideration. The executive director has 30 more days in which to make a decision. Her decision will be communicated to each county by email and by letter.

If you have any questions on where your report is in this process, please contact Bill Eller at beller@scc.wa.gov or by phone at 509-385-7512.

THOUGHTS ON HOW TO IMPROVE THE COMMISSION'S FIVE YEAR REPORT TEMPLATE AND PROCESS:

We welcome any comments any have to improve the five year report process and template. Comments should be send or emailed to Bill Eller at beller@scc.wa.gov or mailed to the Commission at PO Box 47721 Olympia, WA 98504-7721.

VSP VOUCHERING: Remember, the Commission's agency policy requires monthly reimbursement requests for all VSP contracts (as well as any other contracts). However, we have noticed some counties are sending in reimbursement requests quarterly.

Monthly reimbursement requests allow entities to stay on top of expenses and contract end dates. So, please remember to voucher monthly for VSP expenses as stated in your VSP contract.

VSP FUNDS USED FOR PROJECT COST-SHARE: After receiving funding from the Legislature for the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP), the Commission makes funds available to each of the 27 participating counties.

After a county VSP work plan has been approved by the VSP Technical Panel, VSP funds plans may be used for implementation. Each county is free to choose how to allocate those funds, but regardless of how the funds are allocated, must continue to meet all the

requirements of the VSP (RCW Chapter 36.70A), and must also meet the goals and objectives of their own VSP work plan.

The Commission urges counties contemplating creating a VSP cost-share program to review all of the obligations in RCW Chapter 36.70A and to review Policy Advisory [03-18 Roles and Responsibilities during VSP implementation – Amended](#), and 05-18 [VSP Implementation Reporting – 2 year and 5 Year Reports](#) for a summary of some of those obligations before making its decision. Some of those obligations include:

- Maintaining a regularly-meeting VSP work group which oversees work plan implementation
- Conducting periodic evaluations of the county work plan
- Instituting adaptive management
- Providing a detailed, written report every 2 and 5 years of implementation efforts and success
- Meet contract obligations with the Commission and others responsible for VSP implementation
- Conducting outreach and education to meet work plan goals
- Providing technical assistance, or contracting with an entity to so provide, to VSP participants

- Meet the goals and objectives of the county work plan
- Staffing needs, including salary, equipment and other items required to perform their job

The Commission urges counties to create an implementation budget and project management protocols in order to meet the statutory requirements.

The Commission also urges counties who might want to use VSP funds for cost-share projects to partner with an entity (such as your local conservation district) that already has the training, knowledge and experience with administering a cost-share program using the Commission's cost-share policies and procedures.

Finally, the Commission urges counties to review the [Commission's cost-share policies and procedures](#), specifically the [Grant and Contract Procedure Manual](#) and [Cost Share Process](#) before making a decision to offer VSP funds for cost-share.

If VSP funding will be spent on cost-share projects with landowners, there are a few requirements:

- The county work group will need to approve any cost share program used in the implementation of VSP.
- [Washington State Conservation Commission](#)

[cost-share policies](#) would need to be abided by, regardless of who is administering the cost-share program (conservation district or some another implementing entity (such as the county)). Since WSCC funds are being used as the basis for the cost-share funding, WSCC policies apply.

- If a conservation district is implementing the VSP cost-share program on behalf of a county work group, and if the county work group has not set a rate of reimbursement, or if the county work group wants to use the conservation district rate, then the conservation district rate of reimbursement is used.
- If a county is implementing the VSP cost-share program without the assistance of a conservation district, the county must pass a rate of reimbursement resolution ([see the Grant and Contract Procedure Manual](#)).
- If the entity administering the cost-share program and otherwise involved in contracting with landowners for project implementation using VSP funds has not already been trained in the Conservation Commission cost-share policies and procedures, that entity must be so trained before funds can be used from the Commission.

Please contact the Commission staff below to schedule a training.

- VSP projects that are funded using any Commission funds will need to be reported in the five year report under RCW 36.70A.720 (2) (b) (i) and (c) (i).

Anyone implementing VSP and seeking to use VSP funds for cost-share must consult with Commission staff before funds are available. The staff person at the Commission responsible for VSP cost-share is Karla Heinitz. Please contact her by email at kheinitz@scc.wa.gov or by phone at 360-407-6212.

FOUR MONTHS UNTIL 2-YEAR STATUS REPORT IS DUE: Each county in the VSP has recurring reporting requirements under the VSP statute. Among those are the 2-Year Status Report and the 5 Year Review and Evaluation Reports. These reporting requirements are set out in detail in the [Commission's Policy Advisory 05-18](#).

Both reports, when submitted, should abide by the guidance given in [Policy Advisory 05-18](#) and otherwise meet the reporting, adaptive management, and monitoring requirements in the VSP statute.

Currently, most counties are in the middle of submitting their 5 Year Review and Evaluation Reports. However, in

just four more months (no later than August 30, 2021), the 2-Year Status Report is due.

2-Year Status Report

The VSP statute says that in implementing the work plan, the watershed group must “*provide a written report of the status of plans and accomplishments to the county and to the Commission.*” See [RCW 36.70A.720 \(1\) \(i\)](#).

The 2-year status report provides the County and VSP work group with a forum for updating the public on the VSP implementation progress made during each biennium. The 2-year status report should provide a snapshot of what’s been done during each 2-year period and should answer the questions:

- “How far along are we with our planned implementation?” (“*status of plans*”) and
- “What have we done?” (“*accomplishments*”).

The 2-year status report is not reviewed and evaluated by the Commission, the VSP Technical Panel, or the VSP Statewide Advisory Committee. There is no statutory authority in the VSP statute for the Commission, Technical Panel, or Statewide Advisory Committee to review and evaluate the 2-year status report. None have any statutory authority to review or evaluated the 2-year status report. Monitoring results are not required to be reported in the 2 year

status report unless a county wants to share those as part of demonstration of progress and results of the VSP.

This 2-year report is due to the county and to the Commission “*within sixty days after the end of each biennium....*” See RCW 36.70A.720 (1) (j). Therefore, no later than August 30 at the end of each biennia, a 2-year report is due. All VSP counties have the same deadline for submitting 2-year status report. The end of the current state biennia is June 30, 2021, so sixty days after that is the deadline, on August 30, 2021.

The 2-year status report should be sent as a PDF by email to Commission staff member Bill Eller at beller@scc.wa.gov, and should be cc'd to Commission staff member Alicia McClendon at AMcClendon@scc.wa.gov.

Upon receipt by the Commission, a confirmation email will be sent back to the sender to confirm receipt. The 2-year status report will be posted on the [Commission's VSP web page](#). The 2-year status report should also be sent to the county, as that is required by statute.

2-year Status Report Summary -

- Due at the end of every biennium, no later than August 30
- Reports on the status of plans and accomplishments

- Is not reviewed by the Commission, Technical Panel or Statewide Advisory Committee
- No requirement to include details on monitoring, cost-share projects, or adaptive management
- Cannot trigger statutory provisions leading to a county failing out of VSP
- Commission guidance complete in [Policy Advisory 05-18](#)

SUBSCRIBE TO THE VSP

NEWSLETTER: New subscribers should access this link and choose the subscription for the “*Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)*” under the *Programs and Policy* tab:

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WASCC/subscriber/new>.

If you have any questions on how to sign up, please contact Bill Eller (beller@scc.wa.gov) or Laura Johnson (LJohnson@scc.wa.gov) at the Commission.

Bill Eller | beller@scc.wa.gov | 509-385-7512 | Washington State Conservation Commission