

May 2021 VSP Newsletter

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2 YEAR STATUS REPORTS DUE AUGUST 30, 2021: ***The two-year status report required in [RCW 36.70A.720 \(1\) \(j\)](#) is due on August 30, 2021.*** Some of you have already begun preparing this report, even though the due date is after the end of this fiscal year. That is a best practice and we encourage such planning and forethought.

All work groups, county staff, conservation district staff, and other staff responsible for VSP implementation should review [Policy Advisory 05-18](#) to ensure they understand the two-year report and deadline.

In our VSP outreach efforts, the Commission is aware of some confusion over the difference between the two-

year status report and the five-year review and evaluation report.

Each county in the VSP has recurring reporting requirements. These reporting requirements are set out in detail in [Policy Advisory 05-18](#).

Two-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.*”

The two-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. These status reports should provide a snapshot of what’s been done during each two-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 two-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 two-year status report.

Monitoring results are not required to be reported in the two year status report unless a county wants to share those as part of demonstration of progress and results of the VSP.

This two-year report is due to the county and to the Commission “*within sixty days after the end of each biennium...*” In other words, no later than August 30 at the end of each biennium, a two-year report is due. All VSP counties have the same deadline for submitting the two-year status report.

Summary of Differences	
Two-year Status Report	Five-year Review and Evaluation Report
Due at the end of every biennium	Due every five years from the date a county initially received VSP funds
Reports on the status of “plans and accomplishments”	Reports on whether or not the county work group believes its VSP work plan is meeting its goals and benchmarks
Is not reviewed by the Commission, Technical Panel or Statewide Advisory Committee	Is reviewed and evaluated by the Commission, Technical Panel, and Statewide Advisory Committee
No requirement to include details on monitoring, cost-share projects, or adaptive management	Must include details on monitoring, cost-share projects, and adaptive management (if an adaptive management plan is required)
Cannot trigger statutory provisions leading to a county failing out of VSP	May trigger statutory provisions leading to a county failing out of VSP

The two-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 two-year status report will be posted on the [Commission's VSP County Directory web page](#). The two-year status report should also be sent to the county, as that is required by statute.

Past 2-YR status reports are available for each county on the Commission's VSP web page on the [VSP County Directory](#). Under each county name in the directory is a link called "Reports". Click on that link to access any report the Commission has on file for that county.

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 MAY 13, 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 May 13, 2021, at 8:00 am.

Cowlitz, Pacific, Okanogan, and Benton 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: **Topic: VSP 5YR Review Tech Panel & SAC meeting**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83818799530?pwd=MVBNMEpra1NLQ0Z0dis0a3d1c01lUT09>

Meeting ID: 838 1879 9530

Passcode: 157425

One tap mobile

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<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83818799530?pwd=MVBnMEpra1NLQ0Z0dis0a3d1c01IUT09>

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

THE VSP STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETS ON MAY 13, 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, May 13, 2021.

The link to join that online meeting is here: **Topic: VSP 5YR Review Tech Panel & SAC meeting**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83818799530?pwd=MVBnMEpra1NLQ0Z0dis0a3d1c01IUT09>

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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 Friday, May 28, 2021 at 8:00 a.m. The link to join is below. Remember to use the meeting ID and the passcode:

Topic: Bill Eller is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Joint VSP TP & SAC meeting
Time: May 28, 2021 08:00 AM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89388965060?pwd=WEE3Z3JIRzI5aCs0VzhVTnNrQTVhZz09>

Meeting ID: 893 8896 5060

Passcode: 086137

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DC)

Meeting ID: 893 8896 5060

Passcode: 086137

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

VSP BUDGET AND END OF FISCAL YEAR ON JUNE 30, 2021: The Legislature funded the VSP for FY 21-23 at slightly less than last biennia, at \$8,450,000. The budget includes funds for implementation for each county, administration of VSP through the Commission and other agencies, and supported funding for WDFW's [HRCD](#). The budget still needs to be signed by the Governor to be official. Commission staff will be developing the budget allocation for the 2021-23 biennium. More details will follow.

Please remember that none of the funding available this current biennia (FY 19-21) can carry over into the

upcoming biennia. The current biennia ends on June 30, 2021, and all funds available this current biennia must be spent by that time.

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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+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 884 9145 5904

Passcode: 503506

Find your local number:

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

Please remember to use the meeting ID and passcode.

CHANGES COMING TO THE COMMISSION'S FIVE YEAR REPORT TEMPLATE AND PROCESS:

Though some counties have not yet submitted their 5YR VSP reports, others who've already submitted their first want to start working on their next 5YR report. Most are not due until the year 2026, but two (Thurston and Chelan) are due sooner - in 2024.

The Commission is working on a number of options, improvements, and changes to the template and database, as well as the 5YR reporting process as a whole. We expect to hold an in-person meeting later this late summer or early fall, a webinar, or a combination in-person/webinar to debut some of those proposals, and to seek input on all of them at that meeting and others to come.

Changes we are already working on:

Eliminating redundant and "not applicable" entries. One change we are already working on is changing the template format so that the number of records will be more manageable. Part of this effort will be to eliminate redundant, unnecessary and "not applicable" entries. The original version of the template and database were designed to capture as much information as possible related to the goals, benchmarks, critical areas, watersheds, and monitoring as possible. Sometimes, that created redundant entries, or entries that were tracked as "not applicable."

Rather than eliminate those immediately, we wanted the counties to be able to clearly show to the VSP Technical Panel members that the data wasn't missing, but rather, just wasn't applicable or was redundant. This led to instances where there seemed to be

many repetitive, or “not applicable” entries being made on behalf of the county. We believe we can eliminate some or all of those redundancies and are actively working to make that fix.

Providing a “summary” table of accomplishments. Another change that has been proposed both by the counties and the Technical Panel is the ability of the database to display the data entered in a summary-table type format. If the Technical Panel wanted to see more of the information behind the summary table, that option will be available to them.

This option was contemplated in the original design of the template and database, however we were not confident that the data necessary to populate the table would be detailed enough to provide the necessary information for the Technical Panel and the Commission executive director, so it didn’t make the version that was released.

The change will allow counties that provide enough detailed data to populate a summary table that will provide a summary of the data both the Technical Panel and executive director need in their review and evaluation.

Technical Panel comments directly in the database. Another change always contemplated in the 5YR reporting process was to allow the Technical

Panel members the ability to make their review and evaluation comments directly in the database. Right now, the Technical Panel must review the template pdf and use a separate form to make their comments. This change would make the process simpler and decrease the time between submittal of the report and when comments are available.

This feature of the database was anticipated to be added since the inception of the database, but due to time-factor and prioritization issues, wasn’t included in the initial roll-out of the template and database. The Commission is actively working with a database consultant to get this change made to the database before the end of the current fiscal year. This change should not in any way affect that data that counties have already entered in this first round of 5YR reporting.

5YR Report Check-in Schedule: The Commission also proposes a scheduled check-in with the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee for each VSP county, based on their next 5YR report deadline.

The concept is that each county would have a dedicated time to meet with the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee on an on-going basis. The purpose of this meeting is to reinforce the communications, *focused primarily on issues related to the next 5YR report,*

between the state agencies on the Technical Panel, counties, county work groups, and technical service providers and the stakeholders represented on the Statewide Advisory Committee.

These meetings wouldn't replace the interactions between all of those entities at the local county watershed work group level, but to complement it. Some state agencies (WDFW is a good example) use regional staff to engage at the local level, and this scheduled communication wouldn't replace or supplant that, but is intended to broaden the ability of the entities to coordinate communication with the county watershed work group.

The Commission proposes adding each county to agenda for the monthly joint meetings of the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee. Each county would have a dedicated monthly meeting at which they are free, or not, to bring whatever issues they want to bring to the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee for comment. Issues might include monitoring, data collection, 5YR report data entry, outreach and education, etc.

We want to stress, though, that the time set aside on each agenda dedicated for each county wouldn't be the only time that the county work group could come and communicate with the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee, but each county would

receive priority for the timeslot they are assigned. Other counties would be able to be on the agenda, but their timeslot availability would be subordinate to the dedicated timeslot of the assigned county.

The proposed schedule would begin in 2022 and run through up to the final due date for the now 10YR report in 2025. It would look like this:

County	10YR due date	2022 Pre-10YR meeting	2023 Pre-10YR meeting	2024 Pre-10YR meeting	2025 Pre-10YR meeting
Chelan*	7.20.24				
Thurston*	7.20.24	Jan-22	Jan-23	Jan-24	Kittitas only Jan 2025
Kittitas	11.17.25				
Mason	11.24.25				
Garfield	11.30.25	Feb-22	Feb-23	Feb-24	Feb-25
Asotin	12.14.25				
Grant	12.14.25				
San Juan	12.21.25	Mar-22	Mar-23	Mar-24	Mar-25
Cowlitz	12.22.25				
Pacific	12.22.25				
Okanogan	12.28.25	Apr-22	Apr-23	Apr-24	Apr-25
Benton	1.12.26				
Skagit	1.19.26				
Whitman	1.19.26	May-22	May-23	May-24	May-25
Columbia	1.20.26				
Yakima	1.21.26				
Douglas	1.22.26	Jun-22	Jun-23	Jun-24	Jun-25
Pend Oreille	2.2.26				
Franklin	2.24.26				
Walla Walla	3.7.26	Jul-22	Jul-23	Jul-24	Jul-25
Stevens	3.10.26				
Ferry	3.14.26				
Grays Harbor	3.21.26	Aug-22	Aug-23	Aug-24	Aug-25
Lincoln	3.21.26				
Lewis	4.18.26				
Spokane	4.22.26	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24	Sep-25
Adams	5.23.26				

Again, we stress, that this proposed schedule would not replace communications that are on-going between any VSP entities at the local or state level, but to provide a dedicated “check-in” opportunity for any county that wants to make use of it.

Counties and county watershed work groups are always free to contact the Commission's VSP Coordinator at any time to see if there is room on the monthly joint VSP meetings for the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee. Subject to availability, any county can come and present any issue they want at that joint meeting, and are encouraged to do so. Contact Bill Eller at beller@scc.wa.gov or by phone at 509-385-7512 if you have questions or want to get on any meeting agenda.

Other proposed changes:

Cloud-based database access. One of the most significant changes that will be proposed is one that the Commission has contemplated since the creation of the 5YR report process, template and database, and that is to remove the template and database to a cloud-based system which would allow users to directly access the database and input data without the necessity of transferring the template (which is a cumbersome process) between the Commission and the county. So, rather than the process we use now whereby Commission staff send the template to the county's authorized user and that user filling out the template and uploading it into our system, the user would simply access the database directly using their own login credentials.

This proposed change is not yet implemented, nor will it be this fiscal

year, and it will be part of the proposals to be contemplated in the improvements to be discussed later this year.

For that reason, it may be prudent for those wanting to start working their second 5YR report to hold-off until this change (and perhaps others that will be suggested) are made to the template and database, as there is a possibility that data entered before these changes are made could be lost or not able to be transferred when (and if) this transition is made. We anticipate that if such a transition is made, that it won't occur until late in 2021 or in early 2022 at the soonest.

Allowing for the uploading or attaching of documents directly into the database.

Another option that was originally proposed, but not adopted in the final version of the template and database, was the ability of a county to upload supporting documents directly into the database through the template.

This option was discarded for the same reason described above for the summary table and after the review and evaluation of the two pilot county five year reports (Thurston and Chelan) – that allowing counties to upload documents directly to the database bypasses the requirement to provide enough data on the critical areas, watersheds, goals and benchmarks for the Technical Panel and executive director to review and evaluate the

report. The Commission is examining the cost/benefit of this proposed change for the next five year report.

Agricultural viability in the 5YR report.

The 5YR report process set out in the VSP statute does not include a review of agricultural viability goals and benchmarks. As a result, the Commission's template and database do not ask for that information in the 5YR report. The Commission is aware of the importance of agricultural viability in VSP and the state as a whole, and wholeheartedly supports maintaining the viability of agriculture in each VSP county and across Washington State.

Nevertheless, we've heard from numerous counties that they would like the option to describe and showcase their efforts related to agricultural viability in the 5YR reporting process. The Commission's position has been that the best forum for highlighting agricultural viability successes is the two year status report. However, due to the calls for an option to describe agricultural viability in the 5YR report template and database, the Commission will examine the cost/benefit of adding such a section to the template and collecting that information for the database.

The Commission continues to actively solicit comments, suggestions, and ideas on how to improve the 5YR

reporting process, template and database.

If you have any comments to make to improve the five year report process and template, please direct those to Bill Eller at beller@scc.wa.gov or mailed to the Commission at PO Box 47721 Olympia, WA 98504-7721.

When we have a date-certain for the in-person meeting, webinar or combination on the 5YR report process, template and database changes, we will make that date available here in the newsletter and on our webpage.

COMMISSION UPDATES POLICY ADVISORY #04-19 *CAO'S IN THE VSP*: The Commission, working over many months with the VSP Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee, has updated its policy advisory related to critical area ordinances. The purpose of this advisory is to provide guidance for counties who have opted into the VSP on how VSP relates to updates to their Critical Area Ordinance (CAO). This policy advisory is primarily directed at counties and county planning staff for their use, but other VSP stakeholders may find the information useful for VSP implementation. For more details, please review the policy advisory on the Commission's VSP web page. A direct link is [here](#).

COMMISSION CREATES A NEW POLICY ADVISORY #06-21 *THE VSP AND "NEW" AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES*: The Commission, working over many months with the VSP Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee, has updated its policy advisory related to VSP and "new" agricultural activities. The purpose of this advisory is to clarify the application of the VSP to "new" agricultural activities. This policy advisory is primarily directed at counties and county planning staff for their use, but other VSP stakeholders may find the information useful for VSP implementation. For more details, please review the policy advisory on the Commission's VSP web page. A direct link is [here](#).

VSP VOUCHERING: Counties and those that work with counties on VSP are in danger of missing out on reimbursement for VSP implementation expenses incurred. Monthly reimbursement requests for all county VSP contracts (as well as any other contracts) is required. If no expenses have been incurred during a month, a voucher should still be done showing a zero expenses incurred. So, please **remember to voucher monthly** for VSP expenses. Questions about vouchering? Please contact [Karla Heinitz](#) at the Commission.

WATERSHED WORK GROUP MEETINGS: **Question:** *How often*

should a watershed work group meet during VSP implementation? **Answer:** As often as it takes to successfully implement the county VSP work plan and meet the other obligations under the VSP Statute, RCW 36.70A.700-760.

[Policy Advisory 03-18](#) identifies the roles of each of the entities responsible for VSP implementation, and further explains that the watershed work group should meet "regularly". Regularly gives each county watershed work group flexibility on how often to meet. When there isn't business to conduct, the work groups shouldn't meet. However, a county watershed work group shouldn't go six months between meetings. This is because there is a lot of business for a work group to conduct related to implementation of the county VSP work plan and meeting the obligations under the statute, and six months without a meeting to monitor progress and take adaptive management actions might lead to failure of the work plan.

The watershed work group has an important oversight role to play during implementation. [Policy Advisory 03-18](#) explains, in summary fashion, that the watershed work group has many different duties during implementation, including

- Overseeing implementation;
- Providing leadership on VSP in the local county;
- Meeting regularly;

- Participating in outreach efforts, fosters and builds partnerships with other natural resource entities;
- Providing direction and oversight to the VSP technical service provider on compliance with VSP goals and objectives;
- Establishing a succession plan for the work group, i.e. what will you do when work group members leave, how will you maintain your commitment to a diverse work group;
- Working with the VSP County Commissioners, County Staff and Fiscal Staff Responsible for the County – Commission VSP contract, and VSP Technical Service Providers to establish a budget for VSP implementation that outlines tasks, amount allocated for outreach, monitoring, technical provision, and any other task or deliverable needed;
- Every 2 years, periodically evaluating (programmatic, economic, and resource) and reporting on the VSP;
- Adaptively managing implementation if not meeting the established goals and benchmarks in the work plan; and
- Every 5 years, reporting to the Commission and the County on whether the work plan’s protection and enhancement

goals and benchmarks have been met.

County watershed group members should read the county’s VSP work plan, understand its terms and requirements; receive training in the background and history of VSP, as well as how the work group functions as an entity of the county. Watershed work group meetings are open public meetings under the [Open Public Meetings Act, RCW Chapter 42.30](#), so all volunteer members of the watershed work group will need to be familiar with the OPMA and should undergo the [attorney general’s OPMA training](#). Remember, [OPMA refresher training is required every four years](#).

REMAINING FIVE YEAR REPORT DUE DATES:

COUNTY	5 YEAR REPORT DUE
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.

APPLICATION PERIOD OPEN FOR NRCS CONSERVATION INNOVATION

GRANTS ON-FARM TRIALS: The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service is **seeking proposals through June 21** for Conservation Innovation Grants On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials. Through the program, NRCS and partners collaborate to implement on-the-ground conservation activities and then evaluate their impact.

This program harnesses the expertise, resources and capacity of partner organizations nationwide to help NRCS boost natural resource conservation on private lands and support climate smart agriculture.

A critical element of each On-Farm Trials project is the project evaluation. Partners must propose robust scientific approaches for their projects, resulting in data and analyses of the environmental, financial and, to the extent possible, social impacts of the trials.

NRCS will invest up to \$25 million on On-Farm Trials in 2021. This total includes up to \$10 million for the Soil Health Demonstration Trials (SHD) priority. The Soil Health Demonstration Trial (SHD) component of On-Farm Trials focuses exclusively on implementation of conservation practices and systems that improve soil health.

NRCS is seeking proposals that address at least one of the following four On-Farm Trial priorities:

- Climate-smart agricultural solutions
- Soil health demonstration trial
- Irrigation water management
- Management technologies and strategies

This is a GREAT opportunity for Conservation Districts and VSP technical service providers to work with their local farmers and partners to demonstrate new or emerging conservation practices or methods. We encourage you to review the proposal request today:

[Find more information on the NRCS-CIG grant process HERE](#)

VSP EQUIPMENT REQUEST ON-LINE FORM: The Commission has created an on-line form for counties and technical service providers who contract with counties to implement VSP to use when purchasing equipment valued at over \$1,000 with VSP funds. The form can be found [here](#).

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