

Monitoring in the Voluntary Stewardship Program



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2021



Agenda

Objective: What is different about monitoring in the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)?

- Fundamental principals / important ideas
- VSP and its relationship to GMA
- Monitoring



Fundamental principals / important ideas

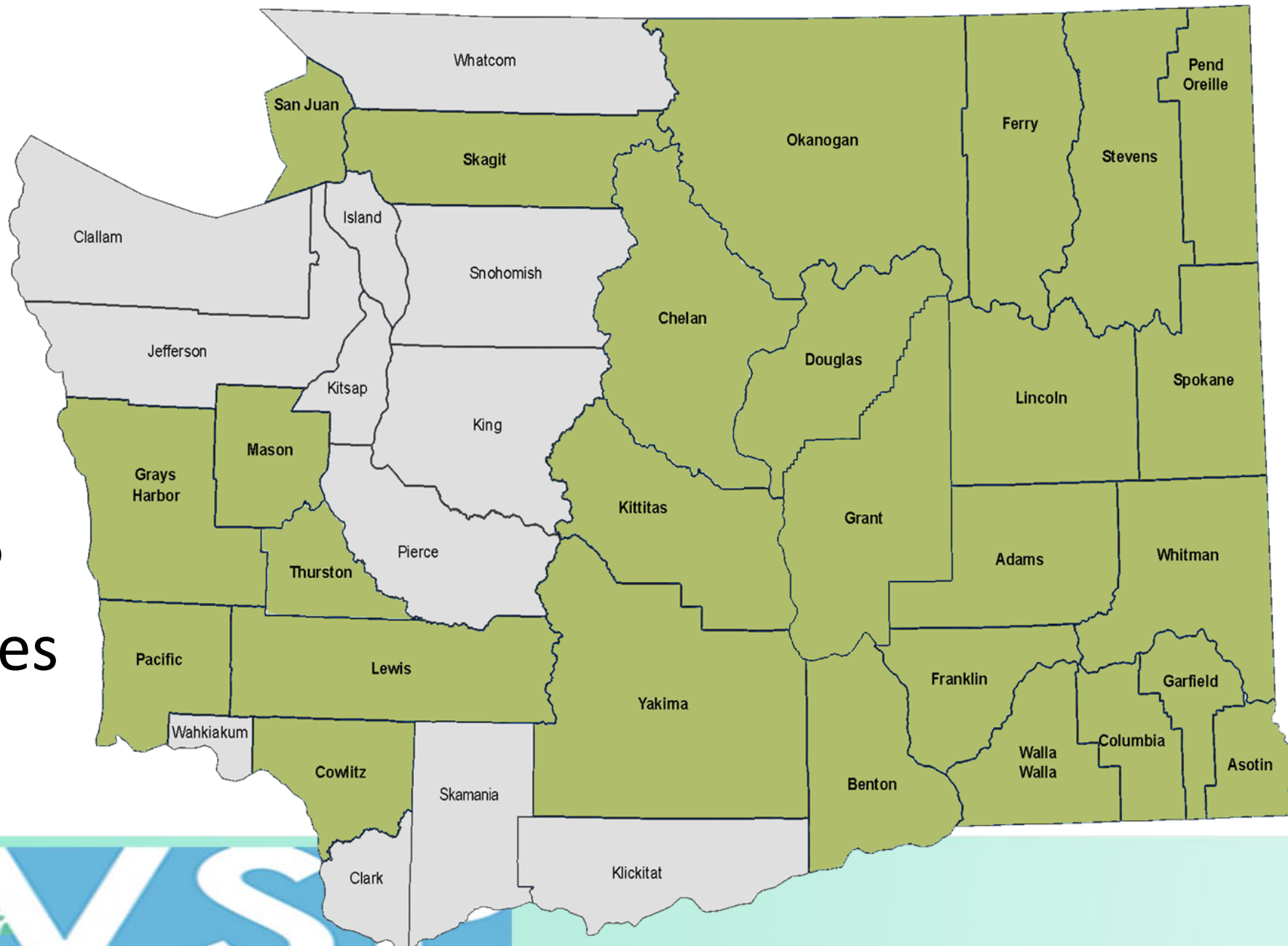


Fundamental principals

- Alternative to GMA regulation for counties to meet GMA requirement to
 - protect critical areas and
 - maintain agricultural viability
- Local control: local program implementation is the responsibility of the county
 - County watershed work group (WG) → Technical Service Provider (TSP)
 - 3 years of planning, then implementation with check-ins at 2YRs and 5YRs
 - Monitoring of the work plan informs the WG and their adaptive management of the work plan (WP)
 - 27 approved WPs



27 VSP Counties



Fundamental principals

- WPs were designed to identify
 - Critical areas and agricultural activities
 - Economic viability of agriculture
 - An outreach plan for landowner participation
 - Who will provide landowner assistance through the VSP
 - Measurable programmatic and implementation goals and benchmarks



Work Plan Elements: RCW 36.70A.720(1)(a-l)

- c) Develop goals for participation by agricultural operators necessary to meet the protection and enhancement benchmarks of the work plan;
- e) Create measurable benchmarks that, within 10 years after receipt of funding, are designed to result in the protection and enhancement of critical areas functions and values through voluntary, incentive-based measures;
- i) Establish baseline monitoring for:
 - i. Participation and implementation of the voluntary stewardship plans and projects;
 - ii. Stewardship activities; and
 - iii. The effects on critical areas and agriculture relevant to the protection and enhancement benchmarks developed for the watershed;



Work Plan Elements: RCW 36.70A.720(1)(a-l)

- j) Conduct periodic evaluations, institute adaptive management, and provide a written report of the status of plans and accomplishments to the county and the Commission within 60 days after the end of each biennium;
- k) Assist state agencies in their monitoring programs...



VSP Work Plan Goals

- **Programmatic** Goals – Those measuring progress on implementation of the work plan (include landowner participation and stewardship plan implementation)
- **Natural Resource** Goals – Are the identified critical areas being protected; is enhancement occurring on available funds
- **Economic Resource** Goals – Is the viability of agriculture being protected and enhanced
- *Each county work group must ensure the work plan goals and the statutory goals are being met*



Fundamental principals

- VSP is voluntary – for the county to opt-in, and for the landowner to participate
- For an opt-in county, protection of critical areas from agricultural activities is done through the VSP work plan not the county's critical area ordinance (CAO)
 - The WG must account for any loss of protection resulting from withdrawals when establishing goals and benchmarks for protection in the WP



What is the relationship between the VSP
and the GMA?



VSP compared to GMA

- “Traditional GMA” uses a regulatory approach – required buffers on each parcel with critical areas
- VSP uses a voluntary approach – landowners use stewardship plans and voluntary programs
- Voluntary programs have provisions for standards and practices for best management practices



VSP works at the Watershed Scale

Key distinction between “traditional GMA” approach to protection of critical areas, and VSP approach:

- “Traditional GMA” approach – must be able to demonstrate protection of critical areas at the parcel scale. Demonstration typically done through regulatory buffers combined with enforcement program. Efforts to use landowner plans have been questioned because of challenges related to being able to demonstrate protections are met.
- VSP approach – relies on evaluation at a **watershed scale**. Demonstrate progress on work plan goals every 5 years. *Focus is on critical area function rather than per parcel.*



VSP Requires Reporting

Reporting: another key distinction between “traditional GMA” approach to protection of critical areas, and the VSP approach:

- VSP approach – Requires reporting to the Commission on progress for achieving the goals of protection of critical areas, with protection and enhancement of viability of agriculture.
- State agency (Commission) evaluation of progress and may disagree with watershed group.
- WG, and thus the county, may be kicked out of VSP if not achieving or adaptively management to get to goals.



Overview:

Vs.



Parcel	Protection scale	Watershed
One-size/negotiated	Actions	Site specific
Presumptive	Effectiveness model	Demonstrative
Regulatory	Participation model	Voluntary
Not required	Monitoring	Required

Monitoring



Monitoring in VSP

- Monitoring is a statutory requirement in VSP
 - To demonstrate that the counties are meeting their goals and benchmarks
 - Each county is free under VSP to choose the monitoring type, plan, processes and procedures that best fit their local county VSP work plan, provided the monitoring is scientifically valid
- Broadly, VSP monitoring can be used to address at least four VSP-related themes:
 1. Stakeholder participation
 2. Implementation
 3. Effectiveness
 4. Agricultural viability



Monitoring in VSP

- While each of the four types of monitoring (Stakeholder participation, Implementation, Effectiveness and Agricultural viability) are important for VSP success, ultimately the deciding factor for whether a county can continue participating in VSP is whether critical area functions and values are protected at the watershed scale, as measured against the baseline date of July 22, 2011.



Stakeholder Participation in VSP

- Assesses the level of engagement of agricultural producers with respect to the goals and benchmarks of the county's VSP work plan.
 - Example: tracking the proportion of producers participating in VSP within a county and/or watershed using producer surveys or Individual Stewardship Plans (ISPs).



Implementation Monitoring

- Tracks implementation of conservation practices (i.e., BMPs) across the landscape within a county and/or watershed, with an emphasis on whether BMPs were installed to proper specifications, when and where BMPs have been implemented, and whether BMPs are being maintained over time.
 - Example: field-verification of cover cropping or animal exclusion fencing to ensure practices are to appropriate specifications and accurately reported.



Effectiveness Monitoring

- Effectiveness Monitoring – determines the effect of the implemented practices on critical area functions and values.
 - Example: tracking stream turbidity over time in relation to erosion-related conservation practices in a watershed (e.g., no-till or conservation-tillage BMPs vs. conventional tillage); is the sum of BMPs in an area affecting critical areas in the way we expected?



Agricultural Viability Monitoring

- Explores bridges and barriers to agricultural producers' livelihoods.
 - Example: analyzing patterns of land-use conversion from agricultural to non-agricultural activities.



Monitoring and the 5YR Review & Evaluation Report

- Every five years each county must assert in a report that it is meeting its county-wide work plan goals and benchmarks in order to continue to participate in VSP.
- Information from the suite of monitoring approaches outlined above will need to be integrated into the decisions and activities of each county's watershed work group.
- In this way, data collected via the various monitoring approaches inform each county's work group and adaptive management efforts.



Purpose of the 5 Year Review & Evaluation Report

- The 5-year report goes beyond providing a summary of what's been done. It is a self-evaluation of how well the actions are working towards meeting the goals and benchmarks of the plan, and if the plan is adequately showing protection or enhancement of critical area functions and values as indicated by monitoring.
- The 5-year report should answer the questions:
 - “Is our plan doing what we said it would do?” (meeting goals and benchmarks);
 - “Is our plan protecting and enhancing critical area functions and values?” and
 - “How do we know?” (What evidence do we have to support our answers to the first two questions?).



10YR Report Due Dates

	Chelan & Thurston – July 20, 2024
Kittitas – November 17, 2025 Mason – November 24, 2025 Garfield – November 30, 2025	
	Asotin & Grant – December 14, 2025 San Juan – December 20, 2025 Cowlitz & Pacific – December 22, 2025 Okanogan – December 28, 2025
Benton – January 12, 2026 Skagit & Whitman – January 19, 2026 Columbia – January 20, 2026 Yakima – January 21, 2026 Douglas – January 22, 2026	
	Pend Oreille – February 2, 2026 Franklin – February 24, 2026
Walla Walla – March 7, 2026 Stevens – March 10, 2026 Ferry – March 14, 2026 Grays Harbor & Lincoln – March 21, 2026	
	Lewis – April 18, 2026 Spokane – April 22, 2026
Adams – May 23, 2026	

VSP Implementation between 5 Year Reports

5YR
report
due
2021

VSP implementation - includes preparation of next report, meaning

- Conversations, collaboration, & assistance with & from state agencies (Technical Panel members & others) & federal & local agencies
- Monitoring & data gathering
- Adaptive management
- WG strategic direction after reports from TSPs
- Writing & preparing the next report

10YR
report
due
2026



Thank you! Questions?

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