



Kittitas County Conservation District

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Voluntary Stewardship Program

Watershed Group Meeting

Armory Hall at Kittitas County Event Center, 901 E 7th Ave, Ellensburg
1:00 PM Wednesday, February 22, 2017

Meeting Minutes

Attendees: *Anna Lael, Jim Huckabay, Harold Crose, Marie Lotz, Mark Moore, Justin Bezold, Mitch Long, Jill Scheffer, Brian Cortese, Kevin Eslinger, Mark Charlton, Jennifer Nelson, Doc Hansen, Kat Satnik, Jack Clerf, Dale Rusho, John Marvin, Jim Miller, Sherry Swanson, Bambi Miller, Mark Crowley, Arden Thomas, Rose Shriner, Bill Eller, Jeff Brunson, Karen Poulsen*

- I. **Welcome** – Jim Huckabay, VSP Facilitator, welcomed the attendees to the meeting of the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Watershed Group.
 - a. Jim reviewed the agenda
 - b. Introductions were completed
- II. **Membership, Participation Agreements and Roles**
 - a. VSP Membership
 - i. Anna reviewed the Watershed Group membership and said that it has not changed. The Kittitas Conservation Coalition remains on the membership list; they are interested in VSP but do not have anyone to send at this time. Anna also informed the Group that Lila Hanson was unavailable for today's meeting.
 - ii. Zach Meyer with the Department of Ecology has taken another job within Ecology and will no longer be on the technical advisory committee.
 - iii. Anna also mentioned that the open public meeting act webinar link is on the KCCD's VSP website and to please review if you haven't done so yet.
 - b. Review of Past Meeting Minutes
 - i. The Group reviewed the 10/12/16 meeting minutes. Anna noted that decisions the group makes at the meetings are highlighted in the minutes. Minutes were accepted as presented.
 - c. VSP Operating Procedures
 - i. Anna included a handout of the Watershed Group's Ground Rules for reference. No changes were suggested.

d. Outreach Update

- i. The KCCD VSP website continues to be updated with information. Anna attended and presented information to the Kittitas Timothy Grower's at their annual meeting last week. KCCD's first electronic newsletter was also sent out on February 9th.

III. Update on the Status of Watershed Plans and Planning efforts across the State

- a. The meeting's power point presentation listed links to other Counties' plan presentation or informal review. All the links are on the Conservation Commission Website.
- b. Anna has received feedback to take our time and don't rush the planning process. There are several Counties working to submit their plan this June, prior to the end of the State Biennium.

IV. VSP Tools and Data

- a. The KCCD contracted with Grant County Conservation District to obtain NRCS data and information on NRCS funded practices installed in Kittitas County since July 2011. Harold Crose, who worked for NRCS for more than 30 years, 13 of those years in Kittitas Valley, now works for Grant County Conservation District and is their VSP lead; he still has his NRCS credentials and is able to pull data on NRCS funded practices installed for Counties. He is currently helping 10 Counties with their VSP process. Marie Lotz was introduced as the District Manager with the Grant County Conservation District.
- b. Harold began his presentation with background on Grant County agriculture and the VSP process they have taken. Grant County plans to submit their plan this June; they feel they have a solid plan and are ready to implement their plan. Harold stressed the importance of having a plan that can be implemented. The VSP process is "voluntary" until no one volunteers. Grant County used 2015 ag census mapping, the NRCS Rapid Watershed Assessment and generated NRCS practice code data implemented in Grant County since 2011 as the foundation for their plan. They are also creating a "Critical Area Checklist" for use on farm site visits during the implementation process. Grant County has conducted 20 meetings, reaching an estimated 700 producers.
Bambi Miller asked what the general response has been to VSP in Grant County. Harold stated their first response is one of caution, but quickly changes to relief. Doc asked if the Conservation District's assessments of critical areas is approved by their County Planning official. Harold said yes and it is State approved.
- c. Harold began reviewing the data he put together on Kittitas County. He began reviewing the Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE) spreadsheet. CPPE is a national tool used to generate NRCS practices to treat resource concerns on

farm. Harold stressed that the tool is technically accurate and uses the best available science.

Next Harold reviewed the NRCS practice codes implemented in Kittitas County since July 2011. This list captures practices installed using NRCS funds. Harold called this list, “our good deeds” and give us our baseline information for our plan.

Karen Poulsen asked how we account for practices implemented not through government programs. Harold shared that only 10% of the farmers in Grant County use government programs and that the Conservation District will work with producers to capture their work.

Jack Clerf asked how practices on your own farm can be documented. Harold said that if a Technical Service Provider (TSP) can stamp that the resource concerns are being treated, then you are ok. Your farm plan, through a TSP, protects producers from critical area regulation.

Kevin Eslinger asked if the watershed plan should document irrigation district work. Harold stated that irrigation districts are exempt in the law, but still thinks it is important to capture the work that is being done by districts.

Mark Charlton asked Harold how he thought Kittitas was doing in regards to addressing resource concerns. Harold said Kittitas is the poster child of what should be done in the State.

Another member asked when establishing goals in the watershed plan, what’s enough? Harold stressed the importance of making realistic, achievable goals.

Brian Cortese asked who completes the voluntary assessments. Harold stated, at this point, it will depend on State funding for implementation of VSP.

Kevin asked what if funding isn’t approved. The County will still be responsible to protect Critical Areas.

Arden asked how Grant County prioritized their work plan. Harold shared through their identified agricultural communities and resource concern.

Jen asked if there is a clear link between NRCS practices and protection of critical areas. Harold said that you pick out the practices from the list generated in the “conservation practices physical effects” sheet that best protect the critical area. Harold also stressed to the group that the job of watershed plan is to monitor practices on the ground not monitoring water quality, etc.

BREAK

Questions for Harold continued after the break.

Jeff Brunson asked about State and Federal lands. Harold stated that those lands are exempt from VSP. If the lands are leased by an individual and used for ag, then they can be counted as working agricultural lands.

Kat asked if a conservation group completes work on State and Federal lands can that count. Harold said no, it needs to be an individual.

John Marvin asked what other Eastern WA counties Harold is working with.

Harold stated 10 other counties which will present a consistent state approach that is he believes is technically correct.

V. Outline of Work Plan

- a. Anna reviewed a draft list of non NRCS funded conservation practices. The list was generated from KCCD projects implemented since July 2011. YTAHP projects need to be added to this list. And we also need to capture the work from other project partners.

- b. Anna reviewed the draft work plan outline.

Mitch asked if it makes sense to break Kittitas into communities similar to how Grant County did. He commented that it seems like it would be good for community buy in. Doc liked the idea of organizing the plan by watershed. Anna said that she plans to have two more meetings before irrigation season with the goal of running the Rapid Watershed Assessment (RWA) and to pick an example farm and run through a farm plan.

The group directed Anna to try running the RWA for all irrigated lands.

Jack commented that he is in favor of using the Grant County approach. Jim Huckabay said that the State review committee has “bought” into the Grant County plan approach.

Mark Moore asked if this approach allows the ability to add in and customize practices specific to their County. Harold stated that their process does allow Counties to customize practices.

VI. Monitoring

- a. Anna mentioned the WDFW presentation on the Commission website and the example of monitoring riparian area. Do you measure the amount of vegetation overtime or measure the “fenceness” of the fence - is it still keeping cattle out after 10 years?

VII. Ag Viability Toolkit

- a. Anna discussed the WSDA presentation which is posted on the Commission website. Anna asked if the ag representatives were interested in working with

Evan Sheffels on the SWOT analysis. The consensus was to wait until fall to do work through that as Evan is busy during the Legislative session.

VIII. Implementation Funding

- a. Anna reviewed the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program funding that was received for the Yakima Integrated Plan - Toppenish to Teanaway project. The funding fits with implementation of VSP and is a 5 year, \$7.5 million funding source. Anna informed the group that the goal is for the first sign up to occur in October 2017.

IX. Participants Forum

- a. The group discussed the need to capture other partners' projects implemented since 2011. Sherry will send out what information would be helpful and work on generating a partners list of implemented practices. Jim Huckabay suggested including all projects, then as a group we can work through which ones to include.
- b. The group discussed and scheduled the next two meeting times, March 14th from 1 to 4 PM and the 29th from 1 to 4 PM, both at the Armory.
- c. Anna mentioned a possible mid-summer meeting, late July, with a possible field visit.

X. Action Register

- a. Sherry to work with partners on generating a list of their practices implemented since July 2011.
- b. KCCD to run RWA on test area.

XI. Adjourn

- a. The meeting adjourned at 3:45 PM.