

Columbia County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Work Group Meeting Minutes

June 24th, 2019, 111 South 1st Street, Dayton, Washington 99328

I. Call to Order

Roland Schirman called the meeting to order the 2nd quarter meeting of the Columbia County VSP Work Group at 6 p.m.

II. Attendance

Roland Schirman, Terry Bruegman, Don Howard, Janet Howard, Tom Schirm, Marty Hall, Ryan Rundell, Valerie Turner, Meagan Bailey and Don Brigham.

III. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the April 25th meeting were approved as presented.

IV. Updates from State VSP

Meagan presented a budget update. The County will receive \$240,000 for the 2019-2021 biennium. She said that we anticipate utilizing nearly all of the previous grant with projects such as the cost-share for yellowstar spraying, Mapseed consultants and staff time.

Question: has the Work Group developed a VSP budget for the upcoming biennium grant. Answer: Not yet, that will be worked on soon and sent out to the Work Group for their reaction and input.

V. Implementation Progress

Weed Board Yellowstar Thistle Spray Program: Meagan stated that the program was a great success. It allowed for nearly doubling the land acreage in the County that was sprayed compared with previous years before VSP. All participants in the County program – 31 total – completed the Individual Stewardship Plans (ISPs). Terry said that the weed program was effective in reaching landowners and was viewed as highly successful. He asked if the Work Group could commit to budgeting \$41,000 per year for the cost-share portion of the program? He also asked if we should establish a set cost-share percentage amount. These items will be considered in the budget process and discussed at a future meeting.

There was discussion on the wording used in our surveys and reports, particularly pertaining to practices such as weed-spraying: should we be listing the acreage which is impacted or the acreage treated? It was noted that the important point is to illustrate the difference between acreage before VSP (2011) and the present; the improvements in stewardship practices. We need to show consistency between what we said we would measure for our benchmarks and what we are now measuring.

VSP cost-share practices There followed some discussion on what standards our VSP practices need to comply with. There are state conservation standards and NRCS standards. Will those be required to be complied with? Brigham will investigate and report back to the Work Group. It was noted that while developing the VSP Work Plan, we allowed for self-reporting of VSP practices – thus the onus is on the landowner/producer to implement practices which further the stewardship objectives. However, if the Work Group is allocating funds for practices, perhaps we need or will be required to have minimum standards. It was noted that on the handout from the state web site it states that Washington State Conservation Commission cost-share policies will need to be abided by.

The question was raised regarding future local cost-share programs/projects: are those projects going to be funded on a first-come first-served basis? Or will some priority or ranking process be established?

Mapseed The web site developed by Mapseed was presented in its beta version. Meagan walked the Work Group through a hypothetical landowner's survey approach on the site. It appears quite user friendly. The reporting-out feature at the end will be useful for our reports required by the State. There was a question about the willingness of survey respondents to provide info such as their email and phone. It was decided that we need to insert clarification as to why we need such info and that such info will not be provided to the public. There was a question regarding the range of acreage reported in the survey – will this provide us with the necessary info for comparing to VSP benchmarks and the required reports?

Public record requests There were some concerns about individuals/attorneys doing public record requests. Meagan and Ryan assured the Work Group that the County has in place a solid procedure for dealing with such requests. It was noted that most, if not all, of the info which a producer may provide on a survey is easily available through existing public sources. Marty pointed out that producers should take pride in participating in the stewardship practices which we are undertaking.

VI. On-going Items

VSP Projects Roland asked for examples of projects/practices that Columbia County VSP may wish to pursue to further our stewardship goals. Tom suggested encouraging upland shrub plantings to enhance bird habitat. He also suggested using a seed mixture for CRP land that has more diversity, is not a monoculture, such as what is specified currently. Another suggestion was the planting of pollinator strips.

Project examples from Garfield County's brochure were put forward as potential. Terry said he felt the majority of the list is applicable to Columbia County. These include precision ag, nutrient/pest management, grazing management, alternative water developments, buffers, riparian plantings and streambank protection. Terry said that we should not consider cost-share funding for direct seed practices where the

producer currently is implementing said practice, but only for conversion of land to direct seeding.

New outreach methods It was suggested that we could produce a VSP brochure similar to Garfield County's and distribute it around the community at locations which would ensure good visibility. We should also plan to have a booth at the fair in September to promote Columbia County VSP. Meagan will consider time and staff constraints in determining the feasibility and inform the Work Group if a booth will be at the Fair this year.

VSP member succession planning Roland attempted to diplomatically pass the gavel to a new president, however, the Work Group over-ruled his attempt. Valerie said she would be happy to join the Work Group, however, the meeting dates need to coincide with her schedule of other responsibilities. We can solicit other new members through those who have responded to the ISP surveys.

VII. Comments and concerns

Due to the desire to hold the length of the meeting to an hour and a half, this area was skipped over.

VIII. Next Meeting

The third quarter meeting of the VSP Work Group is set for September 3rd, 2019 at 6:00 at the Delaney Building, 111 South 3rd Street, Dayton.

IX. Adjournment

Roland adjourned this productive and friendly meeting at 6:33 p.m.