

Columbia County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Work Group Meeting Minutes
June 16, 2022 ~ CD Boardroom/Zoom

I. Call to Order

Work Group Chair Rick Turner called to order the regular meeting of the Columbia County VSP Work Group at 8:33 a.m. on June 16, 2022.

II. Attendance

In-person Attendance: Rick Turner, Joy Eckhoff, Roland Schirman, Marty Hall (BOCC), Val Turner (Conservation District Staff), Dena Martin (County Planning Staff)

Zoom Attendance: Aneesha Dieu (Conservation District Staff), Brian Cochrane (VSP Tech Panel)

III. County/CCD Updates

- Martin provided a budget update through April, 2022.
- Martin, Turner and Dieu spoke briefly about the VSP Supplementary Budget Update webinar. The main takeaways are that funding is competitive and eligible projects must address salmon habitat needs/impacts and be completed by June 30, 2023. Cochrane noted that the supplementary budget is funded through the capital side, intended for projects. It is a one-time infusion with a short time frame. Dieu asked if there was any way to bypass the standard \$50,000 project cap. Cochrane said the Commission is currently having that discussion, as these may not all be single-owner projects. Dieu is hopeful that we may be able to submit for projects that are already approved.
- Martin and Dieu updated on the June 1 visit from VSP tech panel support staff members: Levi Keesecker, Sean Williams, Leslie Michel and Chelsey Brenner, as well as Tom Schirm (WDFW). The team toured the County and several VSP projects and said they found the visit to be very beneficial in better understanding Columbia County and its efforts in VSP. Cochrane clarified that the intent of the visit was not to audit, but rather to offer support. He said the visit helped provide a better understanding of what we are trying to accomplish and how, as well as the challenges we are experiencing.
- Dieu provided an update on current VSP cost share projects:
 - Peyton spring development VSP 2019-05 is completed and Dieu is preparing the final cost-share billing
 - Phinney pasture restoration VSP 2019-08 is going well. He had to do some additional spraying and will plant grass in the fall.
 - Archer pump site restoration VSP 2021-02 went over budget. Will address under discussion/action items.
 - Hutchens nutrient management VSP 2020-02 project will probably apply to VSP again for future applications. Dieu is currently getting nutrient estimates.
 - Touchette VSP 2019-03 has ordered the trees for a fall planting for the reforestation project. He will do weed control throughout the summer. Dieu expects a good return with all of the recent rains.

- Dieu plans to present additional project applications, but is still working on the final application materials. One may qualify for the new VSP supplementary budget funding.

IV. Discussion/Action Items

- **Archer Project VSP 2021-02 cost increase and potential budget amendment**
 - Dieu reported that, due to increased materials costs, the Archer project came in at a higher cost than anticipated. The project was approved in July of 2021 with NRI covering \$15,000 and VSP covering 50% of the unfunded \$4,800 of the project, for a total VSP cost share of \$2,400. Final costs came in at \$29,341.48 for a total project cost increase of \$9,541.48.
 - Dieu requested VSP pay 50% of the unfunded \$14,341.48 for a total VSP cost share of \$7,170.74, an increase of \$4,770.74 over what was previously approved.
 - Following discussion, the work group agreed that the cost increase was not the fault of the applicant and cost-share spending to date is approximately 50% of what was budgeted at halfway through the biennium.
 - *Eckhoff moved to approve amending the VSP cost-share amount for VSP 2021-02 from \$2,400 to \$7,170.74. Schirman seconded. All in favor.*
- **Potential livestock fencing project**
 - Dieu let the work group know about a potential livestock fencing project just north of the Bishop/Truesdale Streambank Stabilization Project. Property owner Columbia Straw is looking at ways to supplement its income with the demise of Columbia Pulp and plans to raise livestock. The river has moved and new fence needs built to keep the cattle from the river. Dieu will bring estimates and photos to the next meeting.
 - Schirman asked if the project will be considered a relocation/improvement of the fence or a new fence. Dieu responded that the old fence is not salvageable and will be in a new location, requiring cultural resources.
 - Turner wanted to make sure that there are no restrictions in funding a private business as opposed to a producer. Dieu explained that the only distinction is between private and public funds, and a business is considered private land.
- **Approve or cancel Mapseed hosting**
 - The annual Mapseed hosting bill is due at a cost of \$800.00
 - The work group agreed that the site has not been utilized and is not worth the expense.
 - *Schirman moved to cancel the Mapseed hosting. Eckhoff seconded. All approved.*
- **Discuss future focus in light of the May 12 Statewide Meeting information and WDFW/Tech Panel support staff visit**

- During the May 12 meeting with the Statewide Technical Panel and the Statewide Advisory Panel the work group became aware that VSP is intended more to monitor the work implemented through other funding sources (rather than implement its own projects) in order to show that voluntary stewardship is effective at protecting critical areas at the watershed scale.
- Dieu suggested we consider amending the 2021-23 VSP budget by moving some of the Technical Assistance/Cost-share funds to Monitoring in order to help support the technical focus of VSP.
- Dieu shared an idea for a web-based monitoring platform that could pull in monitoring data from regulatory agencies and environmental agencies. such as WDFW, DOH, DOE, CTUIR, the Conservation District, etc. By bringing the data together in one place, and adding projects by site, layers could be used to monitor changes in critical areas over time. This would be a one-stop shop for monitoring and project efforts and would paint the picture of what is going on in the county, and would also show where there are holes in monitoring efforts. This would prevent a duplication of monitoring efforts.
- Another benefit is that there is no \$50,000 project cap for monitoring like there is for cost share.
- Dieu is working with Reed Camp on the project and estimates a cost of \$80,000 for the project, though there could be additional expenses such as a need for new LIDAR in a specific area.
- Martin asked Cochrane if he felt the project was a good fit for VSP funds. Cochrane said it was a good start and he appreciates Camp's abilities but said the monitoring will need to show the beneficial effect of the implementation and that those dots need to be connected.
- Dieu explained that overlaying river projects with data on water temperatures and water quality should show a historical improvement in critical area functions, corresponding with projects implemented.
- Cochrane said he liked the approach and concept but was concerned if the relationship does not show as expected. He suggested piloting where we have the best chance of showing a relationship and scaling down until we have a proof-of-concept and then scaling countywide.
- First steps include:
 - Adaptively managing the work plan to change the focus to the monitoring side of things
 - Getting a more accurate project cost estimate
 - Determining if we should scale to the Tucannon and what the budget for just that area would be
 - Work group approval in amending the budget to allow for the project
 - Dieu coordinating with partners to gather data
- Cochrane said that we need to show, at a watershed scale, that we are protecting critical areas at a watershed scale.
- Eckhoff asked about the difference between monitoring to show that individual projects are working as opposed to showing that the entire watershed is benefitting from the practices.

- Cochrane explained that we need to show that the practices being implemented by some landowners is enough to compensate for the “drag” created by those landowners who are not utilizing BMPs and that the watershed is still benefitting, overall.

V. Comments, concerns, items not listed on the agenda

- Turner shared information about a producer that is using satellites to build fences. The process uses computer software to set laser lines which can be moved daily, if desired, which has many benefits. Turner suggested this could be a good VSP project and the producer can then take the virtual fence with them wherever they go.
- Cochrane said WSCC has been funding virtual fences in places where fire has destroyed cattle fencing.
- Schirman questioned whether it would be helpful for VSP to purchase a drone for producer use. Turner said they had learned that insurance is an issue in that the drone is only covered while on the ground.

VI. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, July 19 at the Conservation District boardroom and via Zoom.

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:02 a.m.