

Adams County VSP Work Group Meeting Notes

Tuesday, April 11, 2017

11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Attendees:

Work Group Members	Other Attendees
Jake Wollman Jr. – Landowner	Tim Unruh – Adams County Building and Planning
Grant Miller – Landowner	Evan Sheffels – Farm Bureau
Lynn Olson – Landowner	Ben Floyd – Anchor QEA
Dave Leatherman – Landowner	John Small – Anchor QEA
Cara Hulce – Adams Conservation District	Nora Schlenker – Anchor QEA
Marie Lotz – Grant County Conservation District	
Matt Harris – Washington State Potato Commission	
Craig Simpson – East Columbia Basin Irrigation District	

Follow-up from Last Work Group Meeting

It was noted that the language surrounding the reduction of chemical input costs is unrealistic, and the focus should be on reducing the amount of chemical and other production inputs and not the cost. Additionally, comments received before the meeting were discussed. The first comment expressed concern that increases in agricultural practices would result in a decrease in critical areas functions and values. The Work Group felt this was not completely accurate and it possibly needs to be qualified. This will be further discussed during the review period. The second comment was regarding the inclusion of common game species within the description of fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas. Game species will be identified for the County, and areas/acres of habitat summarized in the Work Plan and Technical Appendices. However, the Work Group made a preliminary decision that protection goals should not be focused on these game species, as these species and their associated habitats may not meet the state definition of fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas. These game species can be a focus for enhancement goals and associated conservation practices. Additional follow up on this topic with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is desirable. It was also clarified that the benchmarks will address all the conservation practices implemented in the County, because even if they do not directly intersect with critical areas, they still provide a benefit to critical areas functions and values.

Work Plan Content Review

Goals and Benchmarks: It was explained Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE) are used to weight the numbers of acres affected by implemented or planned conservation practices to identify a relative benefit to critical areas functions and values. These scores are then used to determine the number of acres that should be included in each benchmark. Protection benchmarks will maintain the level of conservation practices existing in 2011, and enhancement will be considered anything above that level. It was discussed goals should be tied back to the critical areas instead of individual functions.

For example, the goals should be centered around wetland functions instead of hydrology functions. Additionally, it was noted pest management does affect habitat.

Discussion also occurred regarding indicators. It was explained that the Technical Panel will allow benchmarks to be measured by conservation practices, but there also needs to be a method of back-checking to verify practices are achieving the desired results. However, it was discussed that it needs to be clearly stated that indicators are not used to determine if benchmarks are being met; instead, they are a tool for assessing general performance and adaptive management. Additionally, it was suggested that a small random sample of projects implemented will be selected each year (approximately 10% of projects implemented) to verify the benefits predicted are being realized. This validation will be completed by visual observation by the technical provider. The Work Group was supportive of this idea. It was discussed tracking flows should be qualified in the hydrology indicators due to the number of outside factors as part of Columbia Basin Project operations affecting flow.

Quantitative Goals and Benchmarks

It was discussed the protection benchmarks were set to equal the estimated practices expected to be discontinued based on rates established in consultation with the Work Group. Additionally, the importance of incentivizing participation in VSP was discussed, as producers may not otherwise want to track and report on their practices. It was suggested education should be highlighted as part of outreach efforts in the Work Plan.

Next Steps

Send additional comments to Nora at nschlenker@anchorqa.com. The next Work Group meeting is scheduled for Tuesday May 9, 2017, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Adams County Building.