

Adams County VSP Work Group Meeting Notes

Tuesday, December 13, 2016

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

Attendees:

Work Group Members	Other Attendees
Jake Wollman Jr. – Landowner	Eric Pentico – WDFW
Lynn Olsen – Landowner	Camas Uebelacker – Landowner
Rex Harder – Landowner	Loren Wiltse – Adams County
Dave Leatherman – Landowner	Ben Floyd – Anchor QEA
Matt Harris – Potato Commission	Vivian Erickson – Anchor QEA
Cara Hulce – Adams Conservation District	Nora Schlenker – Anchor QEA

Welcome and Introductions

Ben Floyd recognized Matt Harris from the Potato Commission, who was attending in person. There was one additional new attendee, Camas Uebelacker, who may be interested in joining the Work Group in the future.

The Work Group supported moving forward with the proposed two-volume approach to the Work Plan.

Agricultural Viability

Under the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP), critical areas must be protected without impacting agricultural viability. Therefore, maintaining agricultural viability will be one of the main goals of the Work Plan. It was discussed that although agricultural viability is a major goal within VSP the Work Plan, it is not required by state law to set specific goals and benchmarks for tracking agricultural viability. The program could emphasize conservation practices that have agricultural viability and critical areas protection benefits. Agricultural viability is proposed in the Work Plan from two main perspectives, regional and farm. Under VSP, there needs to be a county-wide balance between critical areas protections and agricultural viability.

Conservation Practices

It was discussed that conservation practices could be used for tracking critical areas protections in Adams County. Monitoring, such as water quality monitoring, could be used as an indicator to evaluate how well the practices are protecting critical areas. A list of conservation practices that could potentially be implemented in Adams County was presented to the Work Group, and feedback on this list was requested. Conservation practices implemented since 2011 would count toward protection and enhancement of critical areas. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) practices implemented between 2011 and 2016 were presented. The list of practices shared represents only a subset of the total number of practices being implemented in the County, because many practices are implemented outside of government programs. The Work Group discussed the importance of trying to account for

these practices. Some suggestions included using a web survey, conducting an annual survey of agri-business service providers, or adding VSP to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) survey. Work Group members also suggested speaking to irrigation districts to look at water usage and efficiency. Additionally, educational and training programs could be used for outreach, as well as tracking how many producers are learning new methods.

Virtual Tour

Rex Harder described his farming practices and the conservation practices he implemented on his property. It was discussed, that in the future, VSP could take credit for these practices.

Goals and Benchmarks Overview

Ben Floyd introduced the requirements for goals and benchmarks under VSP. The Work Plan must include goals and benchmarks for the protection and enhancement of critical areas. However, to meet the requirements of VSP, the County only has to meet protection benchmarks; anything beyond that would count toward the enhancement benchmarks. It was discussed that the Work Plan goals and benchmarks would focus on the critical areas functions and values (i.e., water quality, hydrology, soil health, and habitat). Additionally, benchmarks would focus on implementation of conservation practices. The recent Washington State Supreme Court decision on rural water supply (Hirst Decision) could also affect VSP and was discussed by the Work Group.

Outreach

The following were suggested as potential outreach opportunities:

- Farm Bureau meetings
- Educational opportunities through the following:
 - Washington State University
 - Conservation districts
 - NRCS
- Agricultural shows
- A brochure, outlining an overview of VSP, to be handed out at meetings
- Article in Othello and other newspapers
- Washington Cattle Breeders communications
- Conservation District Annual Meeting, to be held January 24, 2017
- Adams Conservation District quarterly newsletter
- Adams Conservation District website

Implementation

The entity that would implement the VSP was discussed, and it was suggested the conservation districts lead implementation. Cara Hulse from Adams County Conservation District felt the District would be open to this idea. Additionally, it was suggested a tool be created for farmers that outlined all the

practices they could get credit for under VSP. This could be a VSP checklist or self-assessment and be patterned after other checklists developed by the VSP pilot counties, but tailored to Adams County.

Next Steps

The next Work Group meeting is scheduled for Tuesday January 10, 2017, from 11:00 to 1:00 at Adams County Building.