

Adams County VSP Work Group Meeting Notes

Tuesday, February 14, 2017

11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Attendees:

| Work Group Members | Other Attendees |
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| Jake Wollman Jr. – Landowner | Eric Pentico – WDFW |
| Rex Harder – Landowner | Grant Miller – Landowner |
| Cara Hulce – Adams Conservation District | Craig Simpson – East Columbia Basin Irrigation District |
| | Kevin Lindsey – EA Associates |
| | Loren Wiltse – Adams County |
| | Ben Floyd – Anchor QEA |
| | John Small – Anchor QEA |
| | Nora Schlenker – Anchor QEA |

Welcome and Follow-up from Last Meeting

Ben Floyd acknowledged there was not a sufficient number of Work Group members for a quorum. However, no specific decisions were scheduled to be made at this meeting; so, it was decided the meeting would proceed. As follow-up to the last Work Group Meeting, additional feedback was requested on the previously distributed table of conservation practices applicable to Adams County (County). This information will be included as part of a toolkit in the Technical Appendices of the Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Plan (Work Plan).

Work Plan Overview

Introduction Section: Requested adding, “Why is it important to participate in VSP?” to the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Work Plan.

Regional Setting Section: Discussed how water quality is an important critical area function provided by wetlands, riparian habitat and other vegetated critical areas and how it will be addressed in the Work Plan in this context. Also, water storage actions will be included, promoting the capture of spring runoff in the floodplain and other storage to meet water needs later in the growing season.

Baseline and Existing Conditions: It was discussed that although areas with water and wind erosion potential are not designated critical areas in the County, they will be included to give a complete picture of the County. Additionally, reducing wind erosion will have a secondary benefit of improving air quality in the County. Reducing both types of erosion also contributes to maintaining agricultural viability.

Kevin Lindsey from EA presented information on Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARA) in the County. Irrigated agriculture in the panhandle region is mainly surface-water-delivered, and irrigated agriculture in the north water comes from deep wells. EA’s analysis identified 56 public water supply wells in the

County. It was also noted there are many other wells that are locally managed but not defined by the State as wells with associated CARAs. The County Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) defines CARAs as those public water supply wells with recharge areas exposed to the ground surface, and thus potentially more susceptible to surface contamination sources. Based on these criteria, wells that draw water from shallow alluvial aquifers were used to determine wells with CARAs in the County. Although not defined in the CAO, estimating a 10-year time of travel around wells for shallow alluvial aquifers, known as wellhead protection areas, gives a good idea of where practices may affect these shallower aquifers. The other wells in the County are associated with deep aquifers and are less likely to be impacted by agriculture, because recharge occurs outside of the County and typically to the east. However, the areas around wells associated with deep aquifers still have the potential to affect groundwater and are considered to have a potential CARA intersection with agricultural practices.

Protection and Enhancement Strategies: Make sure practices that are applicable to irrigated lands are represented in this section.

Goals and Measurable Benchmarks: Discussed the difference between protection and enhancement goals and benchmarks. Attendees noted that the Work Plan needs to be clear, that under VSP, only protection benchmarks need to be met, and any additional enhancement is above the requirement for a successful VSP, recognizing the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) has some specific procedures related to enhancement goals and benchmarks.

Additionally, it was discussed that benchmarks include the direct and indirect benefits of conservation practices. This means, regardless of the presence of critical areas on an individual farm, producers can participate in VSP and protect and enhance critical areas functions and values. For example, reducing wind and water erosion on dryland farms indirectly improves water quality through reduced siltation and improves agricultural viability through improving the perception of agriculture. This also has a secondary benefit of improving air quality.

Indicators and adaptive management were introduced as a way to determine if reaching VSP benchmarks is having the desired effect on the landscape. These indicators include existing data-collection programs such as water quality monitoring conducted by East Columbia Basin Irrigation District and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, flow data, Priority Habitat and Species data, and other potential information sources. Analysis of these indicators informs the adaptive management plan, which may be used if the desired result is not occurring.

Implementation: Discussed that implementation will use analysis units as defined by watershed boundaries; however, technical assistance and tracking will occur within the respective Conservation District (CD) boundaries. Adams County CD will lead the VSP reporting, and Adams and Grant counties' Conservations Districts (CDs) will provide technical assistance and track the implementation of conservation practices within their respective districts. Tracking of practices outside government-funded programs was discussed. Attendees suggested the CDs go through existing organizations to find out what people are doing on their properties. Many producers are already required to report to several organizations (e.g., Wheat Growers Association and Cattlemen's Association). Therefore, getting buy-in

from these organizations will be important, because they can help in tracking practices implemented in the future. It was discussed that once the draft Work Plan is finalized, a meeting with these organizations should be hosted to receive feedback and get buy-in; this will likely happen in the fall of 2017.

Next Steps

The next Work Group meeting is scheduled for Tuesday March 14, 2017, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Adams County Building.