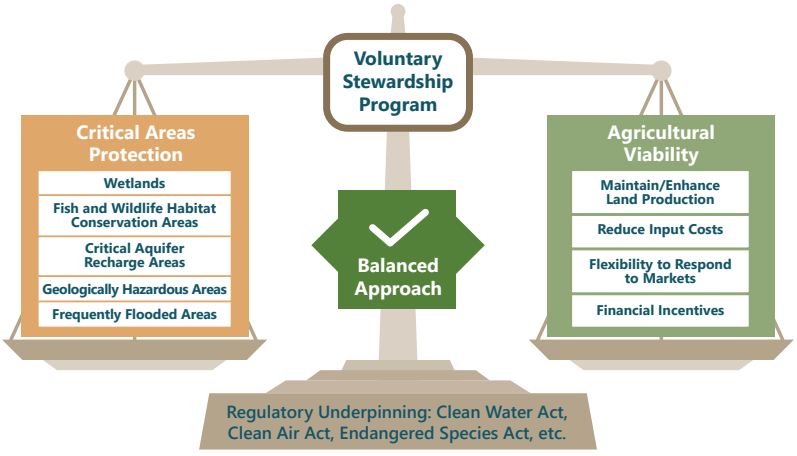
# Adams County - Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)
# Overview and Checklist

**VSP is a non-regulatory, incentive-based approach to protecting critical areas on agricultural lands, while maintaining agriculture viability.** VSP allows farmers and ranchers to protect critical areas through voluntary stewardship strategies while maintaining and enhancing agricultural viability.

VSP is allowed under a recent change in the Growth Management Act and provides an alternative to traditional approaches to critical areas protection, such as protection buffers. VSP is intended to balance critical areas protection and agricultural viability at the County level through voluntary actions by agricultural producers, as illustrated in Figure 1. VSP is not a replacement for compliance with other laws and regulations, but participation in the program can often help agricultural producers comply with these requirements.

**Failure** to meet protection and associated participation goals in the County will trigger the **traditional regulatory approach** to critical area protection under the County's Critical Areas Ordinance process.

**Figure 1**
**Balanced Approach of Critical Areas Protection and Agricultural Viability**




## Critical Areas

### Wetlands

Areas inundated by surface water or groundwater for at least part of the growing season and which support vegetation adapted for life in saturated soil conditions.

### Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

Lands and waters that provide habitat to support fish and wildlife species throughout their life stages.

### Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

Areas that have a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for drinking water, including aquifers vulnerable to contamination.

### Geologically Hazardous Areas

Areas susceptible to erosion, sliding, and other geological events. In Adams County, geologic hazards related to agricultural activities are primarily associated with erosion.

### Frequently Flooded Areas

Includes floodplains and floodways, and often includes the low-lying areas adjacent to rivers and lakes that are prone to inundation during heavy rains and snowmelt.

## How will critical areas be protected if VSP fails in my County?

Failure of the VSP Work Plan will trigger a regulatory approach to critical areas protection under the Growth Management Act, which includes mandated regulation on critical areas, such as buffers and setbacks. Additionally, regulation of critical areas on agricultural lands through the Growth Management Act does not take agricultural viability into account and does not encourage outreach or technical assistance for agricultural operators. Therefore, agricultural operators are encouraged to participate in the program to ensure VSP succeeds.

## What does participation look like?

VSP participation includes tracking conservation practices that protect and enhance critical areas functions and values at a farm and ranch level through the Self-Assessment Checklist. There are many ways that agricultural producers can get involved, either through existing Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or other publicly-funded programs, or through self-funded improvements. Participation in the VSP is voluntary, meaning that agricultural landowners and operators (commercial and noncommercial) are not required to participate. However, many producers already implement conservation practices that protect and enhance critical areas through government- or self- funded practices. These practices can be recorded anonymously as part of the VSP to ensure success of the Work Plan. Voluntary participation, anonymity, and privacy are all key principles that will be maintained during the reporting process. Agricultural producers who choose to participate are free to withdraw at any time without penalty (RCW 36.70A.760).

## Is there funding to support VSP?

The VSP received statewide funding for the 2017 – 2019 biennium. However, future funding is contingent on additional appropriations by the state. Other funding sources, such as local conservation district funding, federal funding through farm bills or other programs, and private funding, can also be used to support VSP protection and enhancement goals.

## How do I get involved in VSP?

To participate in VSP, complete the attached VSP checklist and share your checklist findings with the VSP Coordinator. Additionally, to increase involvement in VSP consider reaching out to your commodity group representative and share ideas on new practices. If you have any questions or would like more information on how to get involved contact the VSP Coordinator.

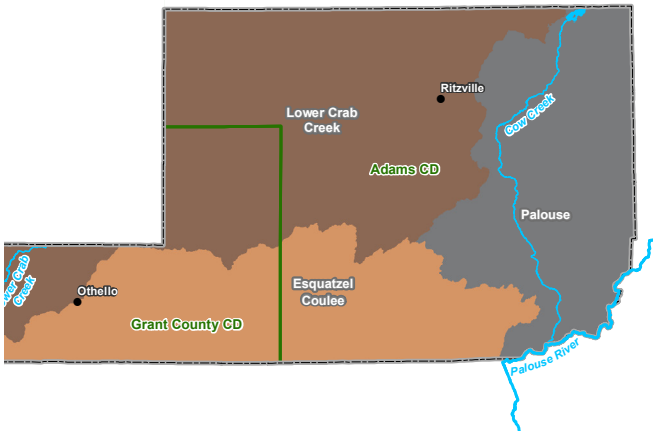
## General Location (Voluntary Information)

If you are inclined to share, what area is your farm or ranch located within?

- ☐ Lower Crab Creek
- ☐ Palouse River
- ☐ Esquatzel Coulee

What Conservation District is your farm located within?

- ☐ Adams Conservation District
- ☐ Grant County Conservation District




## Land Management and Agricultural Viability:

What types of land management or agricultural viability concerns do you have on your property?

- ☐ Soil composition (organic matter)
- ☐ Soil loss (erosion)
- ☐ Moisture management
- ☐ Weed management
- ☐ Pollinator/beneficial organism management
- ☐ Yield/fertility
- ☐ Reduce inputs (e.g., crop pretection tools and/or nutrients)
- ☐ Other(s) - please list: _____
  _____

### Erosion

Residue- and till-management strategies are applied by producers in the County to reduce erosion caused by tillage and to manage soil moisture content.

### Grazing

Managing grazing to improve plant communities helps to reduce run-off, increases water infiltration, restores degraded habitat, and maintains healthy plant communities.

## What conservation practices are being implemented on your farm or ranch?

| Conservation Practices Examples[1] | I do this | I'm interested in this | Does not apply | Not interested | Average units/year (acres/feet/other) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Residue and Tillage Management** | | | | | |
| Mulch Till | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Reduced Till | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| No Till/Direct Seed | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Other(s): _____ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| **Pest and Nutrient Management** | | | | | |
| Pest Management | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Nutrient Management | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Other(s): _____ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| **Water and Filtration Management** | | | | | |
| Grassed Waterways | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Sprinkler Systems | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Irrigation Water Management | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Other(s): _____ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| **Range Management** | | | | | |
| Prescribed Grazing | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Range Planting | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Stock Watering Facilities/Wells | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Other(s): _____ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ _____ *(unit)* |
| **Soil Management** | | | | | |
| Conservation Crop Rotation | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Cover Crop | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Mulch | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Other(s): _____ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| **Habitat Management** | | | | | |
| Conservation Cover | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Herbaceous Weed Control | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Tree/Shrub Establishment | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Hedgerow | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ acres |
| Fencing | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ feet |
| Other(s): _____ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | _____ ____ *(unit)* |

[1] There are a variety of implementation methods that are acceptable within each type of conservation. For example, under reduced till, varied methods can be used that result in different amounts of residue left on the soil. Under VSP, a goal is to document and take credit for all conservation practices that provide benefits to critical areas functions and values.

**For more information about VSP please visit**
http://www.co.adams.wa.us/departments/building_and_planning/volunteer_stewardship_program.php
Or contact the Adams County Planning Director,
Tim Unruh (509) 488-9441

ADAMS County WASHINGTON