



Kittitas County Conservation District

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Voluntary Stewardship Program

Watershed Group Meeting

KCCD Conference Room, 2211 W Dolarway Road, Ellensburg, and Virtually through Zoom

10:00 AM Friday, December 8, 2023

Meeting Minutes

In-Person Attendees: *Anna Lael, Ryan Stingley, Brent Dixon, Jennifer Nelson, Mark Moore, Jeff Burnham, and Bradley Gasawski*

Zoom Meeting Attendees: *Jack Clerf, Kat Satnik, Kevin Eslinger, Mark Charlton, and Elizabeth Torrey*

I. Welcome

Anna welcomed the attendees to the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Watershed Group Meeting and introductions were completed.

II. Review Meeting Minutes

July 21, 2023, minutes were reviewed and there were no comments or concerns.

III. Watershed Group Membership

Anna reported no changes, the dryland representative remains vacant. Rineharts were suggested as potential dryland producers.

IV. WSCC Contract VSP for Fiscal Years 2024 – 2025 (July 2023 to June 2025):

- a. Kittitas County Contract:** *The County's current budget is \$240,000 plus an amendment for \$47,000 for monitoring plan purposes. There may also be a project funding amended into the agreement by the Conservation Commission.*
- b. Kittitas County – KCCD Interlocal Agreement:** *Anna requested and received approval from the Watershed group for the amendment to the interlocal agreement with Kittitas County.*

V. Financial Assistance: Cost Share Opportunities

Anna shared and reviewed each funding source available to producers.

a. Natural Resource Conservation Service

- i. NRCS held its sign-up for EQIP and EQIP WaterSMART – There were 30 applications received by the October deadline.*
- ii. KCCD's Middle Columbia Steelhead Partnership RCPP second signup closed on November 17th had 5 applications.*
- iii. KCCD was awarded another RCPP – Upper Yakima River Water Supply and Fish Habitat Improvement – The total project funding is \$17 million. On-farm sign-ups will begin in fall 2024.*

b. Conservation Commission

- i. Natural Resource Investments (Small Projects) – *awarded 1 applicant this fall. There may be another signup in early 2024 to ensure the funds are spent.*
- ii. Irrigation efficiencies Program – *The guidelines for this program have been published making the program more feasible locally. There is a 2 projects per year limit.*
- iii. Riparian Grant Funding – *The guidelines are out for review for this \$25 million pot of funding.*
- iv. Sustainable Farms & Fields – *The program applications will not be open again until after the Commission determines how much additional funding there may be available.*
- v. Washington Shrub Steppe Restoration Initiative (WSSRI) – *There is funding here for fencing options related to wildfire specifically and virtual fence demonstrations.*

c. VSP Capital funding potential projects

- i. Cooke Creek RM 4.25 – Fish screen and passage: *This project was approved by the Watershed Group at the July 2023 meeting and submitted to the Conservation Commission. The project was approved by the Conservation Commission, but with the request that the Irrigation Efficiencies Program (IEP) eligible components be funded through that program. The application to IEP is still being reviewed by WSCC staff.*

d. VSP Contract Funding Assistance

- i. Virtual Fencing – Wildhorse CRM – *The rancher associated with this project is seeking funding for the collars for the cattle. The towers and other infrastructure are funded by WDFW. The cost is \$15,000 per year for the collars and Anna has also applied for funding through the Washington Shrub Steppe Restoration Initiative (WSSRI). If that application isn't successful or timely, Anna is requesting approval from the Watershed Group to utilize VSP funds.*
- ii. Planting Projects Maintenance – *At the July meeting, the Watershed Group approved the use of VSP funding for upland and riparian planting projects. Anna is requesting approval to use VSP funding for stewardship of all current riparian projects regardless of the original project funding source.*

The Watershed Group approved both requests.

VI. Monitoring

- a. Monitoring Plan Requirement (Due July 1, 2024) - *Anna reported that the KCCD is working to develop the plan and will be hiring a consultant to help complete it*

by the July deadline. KCCD will have an outline for the Watershed Group by the next meeting.

VII. Two-Year Report (Turned in August 30, 2023)

- a. *Anna submitted the two-year report before the August 30, 2023, deadline. See the link for a copy.*
https://www.kccd.net/files/uqd/b7e4d5_4e1d673919534c9aaf0d0895358fc12f.pdf

VIII. SCC Riparian Grant Program Guidelines

- a. *Anna reviewed the guidelines with the group. The deadline to submit comments is January 2nd. The Conservation Commission will act on the guidelines at their January 18 meeting. The list of best management practices was reviewed as was the tiered incentives. The tiered incentives are complicated. Brent is working to try to calculate local examples for review.*

IX. Round Table:

- a. *KCCD - Anna reported that the new RCPP project agreement needs to be completed by May 2024. She also reported that a \$10 million Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) has been awarded to KCCD. These funds deal with fuel breaks along evacuation routes and potential control lines. This project starts at about the same time as the RCPP project.*
- b. *WDFW – Jen Nelson reported that WDFW is hiring a few new folks. A biologist II position out of Ellensburg and a regional land planner are being advertised now. They hired a new regional engineer (out of the Yakima Office).*
- c. *KRD – Kevin report KRD has awarded construction contracts on the south branch and north branch canals.*
- d. *Kittitas County Water Purveyors – Kat thanked KCCD for the equipment purchases.*
- e. *Kittitas County Farm Bureau- Mark Charlton asked Jeff Burnham (WDFW) about the elk issue on the east end of the valley and WDFW’s response. Mark has talked with Mike Livingston about developing water sources and inventorying feed sources. Jeff wasn’t aware of the conversations but is interested in helping.*

X. Action Register

- a. *Anna will send out the next meeting date.*
- b. *Brent will run through a couple of different scenarios on the Riparian Grant program tiered incentives and send it out to the group.*

XI. Adjourn 11:20 AM