 **Voluntary Stewardship Program**

**Watershed Group Meeting**

**Armory, Kittitas Valley Event Center, 901 E 7th Ave, Ellensburg**

**10:00 AM Friday, November 6, 2020.**

**Meeting Minutes**

**In-Person Attendees:** *Anna Lael, Brent Dixon, Terry Clarke, Mark Charlton, Jack Clerf, Lila Hanson, Karen Poulsen, Bambi Miller, Mark Moore, and Jennifer Nelson.*

**Zoom Meeting (Mtg ID: 965 3987 0355) Attendees:** *Mitch Long, Justin Bezold, Bill Eller, Kevin Haydon, John Marvin, Kevin Eslinger, Jim Miller, Urban Eberhart, Mark Crowley, Levi Keesecker, Elizabeth Torrey and Leslie Michel.*

1. **Welcome –** Anna welcomed the attendees to the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Watershed Group Meeting.
   1. Introductions and a review of the meeting agenda were completed.
   2. Review of the Jan. 17th, 2020 meeting minutes was completed and there were no comments.
2. **Review Watershed Group Membership**
   1. *Term lengths:* Past agreement was that current members would serve through successful submission of the 5-year progress report.
   2. *Membership:* Discussed recruitment of new members including adding agricultural producers not currently represented (e.g. fruit grower or someone who is involved with fruit growers, someone of Hispanic background, etc.).
3. **Outreach Activities and Materials**
   1. *On-line Mapping and Survey:* Anna is going back to developer for them to change how the data is displayed. Have the data entry go county wide instead of putting a point at the location to perhaps encourage more producers to participate.
   2. *Outreach Plan Status*: KCCD published a mailed a newsletter to landowners (all rural routes in County), Anna will attend the local work group meeting; hay growers, Saddle Mountain, KCCD/Farm Bureau, etc. if they occur this winter.
   3. Anna reviewed the cover crop project that was implemented with technical assistance from Marlon Winger (NRCS) who spoke at the Soil Health Workshop back in February.
4. **Technical Assistance**
   1. *Inventories for landowners:*Anna and Brent reviewed what information is in the inventory’s packets.
   2. *Drone Technology:*Brent went over the current drone services available with KCCD.
5. **Financial Assistance:** Anna shared and reviewed each funding source available to producers.
   1. Current Individual Producer Opportunities
      1. Integrated Plan Water Conservation Fund
         1. Trust Water component is included in sprinkler conversion projects.
      2. Conservation Commission
         1. Natural Resource Investment Funds - Limited to $50,000/Landowner
         2. Irrigation Efficiencies Program
      3. RCPP – 2021 Applications for EQIP are accepted by KCCD through November 20,2020
      4. RCPP (CSP) – 2021 Applications accepted will be accepted as soon as NRCS allows KCCD to advertise the sign-up.
      5. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Classic EQIP
         1. CART is the new NRCS ranking tool
         2. 2020 ranking resulted in 9 pre-approved projects, 8 of which became contracts. KCCD assisted with Cultural Resources surveys and reports for these projects.
         3. Classic EQIP applications accepted by NRCS through November 20, 2020
   2. Program Updates
      1. Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
         1. Yakima Basin Integrated Plan – Toppenish to Teanaway
            1. Anna reported that the Annual report has been completed and submitted.
         2. New round of RCPP applications are due November 30, 2020
            1. KCCD is working on a proposal with partners including the Yakama Nation ($7 million), who is the lead and will be submitting the proposal. The Kittitas County portion is $3.3 million for land management activities (~EQIP and CSP) including irrigation efficiencies and habitat projects.
      2. Fish Barrier Removal Board
         1. Cooke Creek-Construction complete 2020
         2. Coleman-Olmstead Creek- Construction to begin 11/9/2020
         3. Parke Creek and Caribou Creek - Construction planned for 2021
      3. Yakima Tributary Access & Habitat Program
         1. Matching funds for FBRB & SRFB projects
      4. Salmon Recovery Funding Board
         1. Yakima Fish Passage Targeted Investment Projects (Naneum and Coleman Creeks)
         2. The Ranch on Swauk Creek
         3. Tjossem Ditch -- Improving Salmonid Survival
         4. Upper Yakima River Cottonwood Assessment
      5. Ecology
         1. Yakima River Mile 160 Riparian Restoration- Riparian planting on 8 acres
      6. NACD Urban Agriculture Conservation Initiative
         1. Thorp School District’s “Farm to School” Initiative Proposal
   3. VSP Funding Assistance
      1. Habitat Improvement Projects
         1. KCCD is proposing providing financial assistance to producers willing to implement planting projects. This assistance would not be cost share but rather purchase of materials (plants, weed mats, etc.) and crew time to assist with the installation. Although it is not cost share, a landowner agreement is still required. The purpose for proposing this is to provide a greater incentive for landowners to adopt these habitat practices. This would especially be offered to producers signing up for EQIP or CSP, so it would be matching those contract funds. Anna reported that the funds are available in the grant. The Watershed Group approved the use of VSP grant funds for this purpose.
6. **Reporting Requirements**
   1. Anna reviewed the Workplan Goals and Benchmarks, along with the indicators for each of the key functions for the goals (water quality, hydrology, soil function and habitat). (See meeting [PowerPoint](https://d5e16bdc-feb8-46ed-8244-b8ccbddd5ace.filesusr.com/ugd/b7e4d5_9fd13f085dfc44fba86327489f08d4ed.pdf) for data and maps presented)
   2. Anna also reviewed the Outreach and Participation goals and accomplishments.
7. Brent and Anna reviewed the timeline of the 5-year report template provided by the Conservation Commission and the issues with data entry. The report is set up so that goals are entered, along with each benchmark and then the template forces them to be assigned to every critical area and every watershed. So then “Goal: 1 - Protect wetland functions on lands used for agricultural activities, benchmark: 1 - Water Management - Protect 533 acres of irrigation systems” is assigned to all five critical areas in each of the two watersheds. We rolled up all data at the County level to avoid targeting individual producers so we aren’t reporting in separate watersheds. And our goals are based around the five critical areas so assigning each goal and benchmark to each of the five critical areas when they are already set to specifically address just one, results in lots of n/a’s and a lot of repetition. So far, the report is 170 pages long and is not yet complete. In addition, there is no place to report on maintaining agricultural viability. Anna reported that she has talked with Commission staff and with Farm Bureau staff at the state level and understands that there were no metrics that could be uniformly reported on in all counties. Also, the statute specifically does not call out any reporting for ag viability. She believes that inclusion of even a short narrative response to the status of ag viability would be helpful. Anna suggested that the report submission be accompanied by a letter detailing the issues with the reporting template and the lack of acknowledgement of ag viability.
8. Anna polled the group on the question of whether the “watershed group asserts that the work plans protection and enhancement goals and benchmarks have been met”. The Watershed Group unanimously agreed that the County is meeting the goals and benchmarks. They also agreed that the suggested letter to the Conservation Commission be drafted and sent with the report.
9. **Action Register**
   1. *The KCCD will complete and submit the 5-year report with the data presented and Anna will draft a letter to the Conservation Commission as described and send it out for review.*
   2. *The next meeting will be set based on the response to the 5-year report.*
10. **Adjourn (11:26 AM)**