August 2025

Kittitas County Voluntary Stewardship Program

Biennial Report: 2023 to 2025

Prepared for

Kittitas County Board of Commissioners

Washington State Conservation Commission

Prepared by

Kittitas County Conservation District

Kittitas County VSP Watershed Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Kittitas County Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Biennial Report for July 2023 through June 2025 has been prepared in compliance with the two-year reporting procedures for VSP implementation pursuant to the Revised Code of Washington Chapter 36.70A. As part of the implementation phase, the Kittitas County Conservation District (KCCD) documented implementation of **111** conservation practices that benefit critical areas and help to maintain the viability of agriculture; conducted outreach including presenting VSP at three meetings; maintaining a webpage and a story map explaining VSP to both inform and recruit producers to participate; and facilitated six meetings of the Watershed Group.

KCCD has ongoing and future outreach efforts planned to include periodic Work Group meetings and outreach efforts, providing technical assistance, continuing to develop the monitoring and reporting framework, and identifying adaptive management needs. Through the implementation of conservation practices and active monitoring, KCCD is on track to meet or exceed goals and benchmarks outlined in the approved Work Plan, indicating successful implementation of VSP.

ABBREVIATIONS

CDS	Community Development Services (Kittitas County)
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
KCCD	Kittitas County Conservation District
KCWP	Kittitas County Water Purveyors
KRD	Kittitas Reclamation District
NRCS	USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services
PIT	Passive Integrated Transponder
RCPP	Regional Conservation Partnership Program
RCW	Revised Code of Washington
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
VSP	Voluntary Stewardship Program
Watershed Group	Kittitas County VSP Watershed Group
Work Plan	Kittitas County VSP Work Plan
WSCC	Washington State Conservation Commission
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
YBIP	Yakima River Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan
YN	Yakama Nation
YTAHP	Yakima Tributary Access and Habitat Program

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1 Introduction

The Biennial Report provides the status and accomplishments of the Kittitas County Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Work Plan (Work Plan; Anchor QEA 2018) implementation process for 2023 to 2025 biennium which spans July 2023 to June 2025. This report was developed by the Kittitas County Conservation District (KCCD) and the Kittitas County VSP Watershed Group as an evaluation of the effectiveness and accomplishments of the County's Work Plan in meeting the purpose and intent of VSP pursuant to the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 36.70A.700(2).

The information provided in this report documents work that has been completed and highlights progress made during VSP implementation over the last 2 years. Ongoing and planned implementation efforts were previously documented and reported in the 5-year status report, submitted to the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) in November 2020 (5 years from VSP funding award) and in the required biennial reports. The contents of this report include the following:

- Summary of actions and accomplishments by the KCCD and the Work Group in meeting the VSP goals for the 2023-2025 biennium.
- Report on the progress towards meeting the goals identified in the Work Plan as measured by the Work Plan metrics.
- Description of how adaptive management procedures have been instituted.
- Report on the status of Work Plan implementation, including progress toward meeting the modified protection and enhancement benchmarks identified in the Work Plan.

1.1 Requirements

The purpose of this report is to fulfill state requirements pursuant to RCW 36.70A.720 (1)(j), which states that as a part of Work Plan implementation, the Work Group must "*conduct periodic evaluations, institute adaptive management, and provide a written report of the status of plans and accomplishments to the county and to the commission within sixty days after the end of each biennium.*" Consistent with WSCC Policy Advisory #05-18 (WSCC 2018), this report includes a summary of how Work Plan implementation is making progress toward meeting the purpose and intent of VSP per RCW 36.70A.700(2).

Table 1 provides a brief summary of the status and progress towards meeting the intent of VSP, consistent with WSCC Policy Advisory #05-18. Section 2 of this report provides a more detailed description of these efforts.

Table 1 *Summary of progress toward meeting the intent of the Voluntary Stewardship Program.*

No.	VSP Intent	Kittitas County VSP Biennial Report 2023 to 2025
1	The protection and enhancement of critical areas within the area where agricultural activities are conducted	• **Section 2.1** describes outreach to landowners by KCCD to encourage participation in VSP to promote critical areas protection and agricultural viability. • **Section 2.2** describes conservation practices that have been implemented in the biennium. • **Table 3** summarizes conservation practices implemented in the 2023-2025 biennium.
2	The maintenance and improvement of the long-term viability of agriculture	• **Section 2.3** describes how implementation efforts positively impact agricultural viability within Kittitas County.
3	Reducing the conversion of farmland to other uses	• **Table 3** describes conservation practices that have been implemented since Work Plan approval that have had a beneficial effect on agricultural viability. • **Table 5** summarizes outreach efforts by KCCD and participation by landowners to implement conservation practices that benefit agricultural viability.
4	The maximization of the use of voluntary incentive programs to encourage good riparian and ecosystem stewardship as an alternative to historic approaches used to protect critical areas	• **Section 2.2** summarizes projects implemented by landowners since Work Plan approval. • **Section 3** Highlights program success that directly demonstrate the maximization of the use of voluntary incentive programs to protect and enhance critical areas.
5	The leveraging of existing resources by relying upon existing work and plans in counties and local watersheds, as well as existing state and federal programs to the maximum extent practicable to achieve program goals	• **Section 2.3** summarizes voluntary incentive programs that provide funding to implement stewardship practices. • **Work Plan Appendix D: Existing and Related Plans, Programs, and Regulations** describes available resources, plans, and programs being used or available to support VSP implementation.

6	Ongoing efforts to encourage and foster a spirit of cooperation and partnership among county, tribal, environmental, and agricultural interests to better assure the program success	• **Section 2.1** summarizes the methods that KCCD is applying for outreach to interested parties and landowners, including public meeting presentations and regular outreach to encourage partnerships in the community.
7	Ongoing efforts to improve compliance with other laws designed to protect water quality and fish habitat	• **Section 2.2** summarizes projects implemented by landowners since Work Plan was assembled. • **Section 2.3** describes technical assistance efforts by KCCD and other partners including applying for and acquiring permits in compliance with laws designed to protect water quality and fish habitat laws.
8	A description of efforts showing how relying upon voluntary stewardship practices as the primary method of protecting critical areas does not require the cessation of agricultural activities.	• **Table 3** demonstrates that Kittitas County continues to meet or exceed goals and benchmarks outlined in the approved Work Plan, indicating successful implementation of VSP. This will be further supported and verified through continued monitoring and implementation efforts captured in the 5-year status report. • **Section 2.3** describes how participating in VSP allows landowners to protect and enhance critical area functions while also promoting agricultural viability.

2 Summary of Actions and Accomplishments

This section includes a summary of activities KCCD has implemented in the 2023-2025 biennium. This includes outreach, conservation practices, monitoring, and adaptive management. This section also provides a summary of reporting efforts, a status report on agricultural viability in Kittitas County as it relates to VSP implementation.

2.1 Outreach

2.1.1 Completed Outreach Activities

KCCD is responsible for managing and facilitating the VSP through its implementation. Continued public outreach and education is integral to the success of this process. As described therein, KCCD is committed to reaching out annually to at least 10% of the approximately 300 producers that operate lands with critical area intersects. The 23-25 biennium continued to be impacted by the global pandemic and the shift away from in-person meetings, however individual contacts remain strong. KCCD was able to complete the following outreach to producers in this reporting period:

- The VSP Coordinator provided presentations including VSP at fall 2023 meeting of the Kittitas County Cattlemen (12 attendees), and the 2024 and 2025 KCCD annual meetings.
- A self-assessment checklist and VSP informational handouts were available at the KCCD office, CDS, WSU Extension offices, and were provided at various events.
- Kittitas County VSP webpages hosted on KCCD website were maintained. Page analytics indicated 135 unique visitors to the page during this biennium.
- KCCD staff provided direct outreach to and subsequent technical assistance to 28 producers working to manage/enhance natural resources on their property.

Some of these outreach activities are more impactful than others. In general, the in-person workshops and grower meetings allow for potential interaction between the presenter and the audience. Questions can be asked and answered, and the side conversations occur in breaks or at the end of the presentations/meetings. The impact of the presentation can be felt in those

interactions. The passive outreach activities are harder to judge as the contacts are impersonal and only as interactive as the medium allows. The website, story map, on-line map and survey, and the social media posts are documented along with the visits and even time spent, but without any direct interaction, it's difficult to know the impact.

2.1.2 Planned Outreach Activities

VSP success relies on producer participation and the implementation of conservation practices where critical areas are present. Ongoing and future outreach and implementation efforts are anticipated to include continuing periodic VSP Work Group meetings and outreach efforts, providing technical assistance, continuing to develop the monitoring and reporting framework, and identifying adaptive management needs. Outreach activities planned for the next biennium are summarized in **Table 2**.

Table 2. *Planned outreach activities*

Type	Ongoing and Planned Activities
Maintain Email List	Email list for the Watershed Group and interested parties is maintained by the VSP Coordinator.
Update Website (and Social Media)	The VSP informational and Watershed Group pages on KCCD's website will continue to be updated and maintained and links to VSP material shared on Facebook.
Newsletter	The annual KCCD newsletter will contain at least the equivalent of a full-page article about VSP, as well as providing information about programs that provide assistance with conservation practice implementation supporting the VSP work plan.
VSP Self-Assessment Checklist	The Self-Assessment checklist will continue to be available at various offices, grower meetings and other events. The on-line map and survey will also be promoted as a way to learn about critical areas and self-report conservation practices.
Educational Videos	No educational videos have yet been created
Tours and Workshops	A tour of projects (in-person or virtual) and landowner workshops are planned for fall 2025 and 2026. A focus on riparian restoration is likely along with a continuation of the soil health topic.
KCCD Meetings	KCCD will include VSP in all grower meetings, workshops and annual meetings of the KCCD.
County Fair	VSP will continue to be included in the KCCD display at the Kittitas County Fair
Association Meetings	VSP Coordinator will continue to reach out to the various associations and businesses to offer presentations.

Watershed Group Member Outreach	Watershed Group members are encouraged to continue to include VSP in their organization's annual meetings and invitations extended to the VSP Coordinator to provide presentations.
Newspapers	Occasional articles may be submitted to the Ellensburg Daily Record and the Northern Kittitas County Tribune.

2.2 Conservation Practice Implementation

This report documents implementation of conservation practices identified by and/or reported to the KCCD in the 2023-2025 biennium, as well as the conservation practices implemented in the previous biennia and the practices reported in Section 4.2 of the Work Plan (July 22, 2011 through 2016).

From July 2023 through June 2025, approximately 111 conservation practices have been implemented in partnership with federal, state and local programs that are available to landowners and producers. **Table 3** summarizes the types of conservation practices implemented in the 2023-2025 biennium as well as the previous biennia and the previously reported practices (2011-2016), and identifies protection and enhancement performance objectives for 2025, consistent with Table 5-7 in the Work Plan (Anchor QEA 2018) as updated in 2023.

Projects implemented in the biennium have realized benefits including improving water use efficiency, reducing irrigation induced erosion, opening previously blocked habitat for listed fish species, improving instream and upland habitat conditions, and improving grazing conditions. The projects included varying levels of protections for all five critical areas (wetlands, habitat conservation areas, critical aquifer recharge areas, geologically hazardous areas, and frequently flooded areas). The level of protection and the specific critical area is dependent on the individual project details.

In addition to the above reported practices, two projects were completed that resulted in benefits to instream flow via Trust Water Rights. One was an on-farm project that involved irrigation system improvement practices (converting from rill or flood irrigation to sprinkler irrigation systems). It resulted in 129 acre-feet dedicated to the Trust Water Rights program for 15 years in a tributary to the Yakima River. The second was acquisition of winter stockwater on Manastash Creek. KCCD worked with Trout Unlimited to contact, develop, and negotiate with willing winter stockwater right holders (Manastash Water Ditch Association). An application for transfer of water rights for 7.08 cubic feet per second was accepted by Ecology in December 2023. Both projects were funded through the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan funding provided through their Water Use Subcommittee and administered by the Department of Ecology.

	Type	Practice Name	2025 Protection Objectives	2025 Enhancement Objectives	2011-2019 Reported Data	19-21 Biennial Implementation	22-23 Biennial Implementation	24-25 Biennial Implementation	Total Implementation to Date (2011 to June 2025)
Indirect Intersects	**Water Management**	Irrigation Water Management	**2,459 Acres**	**27,489 acres**	15,705 acres	6,879 acres	2,174 acres	2,902 acres	**27,242 acres**
		Sprinkler System	**299 Acres**	**9,406 acres**	5,063 acres	1,536 acres	1,451 acres	961 acres	**9,011 acres**
		Irrigation Pipeline	**12,413 ft**	**416,100 ft**	200,671 ft	30,178 ft	49,400 ft	57,725 ft	**337,974 ft**
	Nutrient Management	Nutrient Management	**2,060 acres**	**19,864 acres**	12,851 acres	6,066 acres	648 acres	0 acres	**19,565 acres**
	Pest Management	Pest Management	**775 acres**	**7,538 acres**	5,217 acres	1,906 acres	0 acres	0 acres	**7,123 acres**
	Soil Management	Cover Crop	**1424 acres**	**17,550 acres**	10,183 acres	115 acres	207 acres	132.5 acres	**17,673 acres**
		No-Till/Reduced Till							
		Polyacrylamide				2,777 acres	1,170 acres	3089 acres	
	Range Management	Range Planting Prescribed Grazing	**450 acres**	**4,227acres**	3,590 acres	589 acres	52 acres	0 acres	**4,231 acres**
		Stockwater Facility	**3 facilities**	**55 facilities**	39 facilities	3 facilities	9 Facilities	0 Facilities	**51 facilities**
Direct Intersects	**Habitat Management**	Riparian Forest Buffer Tree/Shrub Establishment Wetland Restoration	**59 acres**	**875 acres**	496 acres	7.9 acres	6 acres	3.4 acres	**872 acres**
		Upland Wildlife Habitat Management/Restoration of Rare & Declining Habitat			353 acres	5.7 acres	0 acres	0 acres	
	Stream Enhancement	Streambank Protection Channel Bed Stabilization	**293 ft**	**5,448 ft**	4,008 ft	743 ft	350 ft	310 ft	**5,411 ft**
		Aquatic Species Passage And Fish Screen	**2 project**	**51 projects**	26 projects	12 projects	5 Projects	8 Projects	**51 projects**

Table 3 *Summary of Implemented Practices and 2025[1] Performance and Enhancement Objectives.*

[1] 2025 Objectives were modified by the Kittitas County Watershed Group in February 2023.

2.3 Agricultural Viability

Maintaining and enhancing agricultural viability is a multi-faceted effort. It includes providing both technical and financial assistance to landowners and producers to implement conservation practices, as well as continuing efforts to explore new technologies and opportunities to address challenges and limiting factors for local producers. The following sections describe additional efforts to maintain and enhance agricultural viability.

2.3.1 Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is provided to landowners and producers on request and at no cost. Utilizing VSP grant funding, specific technical assistance was provided for a variety of projects and issues. Support was provided for habitat plantings with assistance ranging from implementation of a previously completed planting plan to visiting new producers and initiating planting plans for both riparian and upland (shrub steppe) sites. Four landowners were assisted with planning, and two previous planting were assistance through maintenance activities in this reporting period. KCCD staff also assisted 8 applicants for the VSP cost share funds offered in Spring 2025 for soil health (cover crops) and drought resiliency

Figure 1. *Drone images of irrigated fields with irrigation water management and nutrient management issues.*

Technical assistance was also offered in discussions with Kittitas County and Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife regarding the Wilson/Naneum split. Drone work was planned and completed by County staff at this site. KCCD staff also consulted with the City of Ellensburg and Ecology about wetland impacts of a City project on the Vantage Hwy that would affect agricultural producers upstream.

KCCD staff utilize the drone equipment to assist landowners with irrigation water management and with nutrient management. Eight producers were assisted through a total of 18 flights in this reporting period See **Figure 1** for examples of the assistance provided. KCCD staff also worked with Kittitas Reclamation District staff to conduct three drone flights at the Taneum Creek Managed Aquifer Recharge Site, which is part of the Field Assessment of High-Priority Managed Aquifer

Recharge Sites in the Upper Yakima led by Jacobs[2]. This study has implications for groundwater storage options using water conveyed by irrigation districts.

In addition to the VSP funded technical assistance, the conservation practices that are installed with funding through USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the KCCD grant programs include technical assistance to ensure that suitable conservation practices are selected and that the practices are implemented to USDA NRCS standards or to the project design completed by a license professional engineer. That technical assistance includes engineering and design work for fish screen, fish passage and habitat projects, as well as irrigation system upgrades. It also includes archeological surveys and reports to meet cultural and historic resource consultation requirements, and assistance securing permits (e.g. US Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit, WDFW's Hydraulic Permit Application (HPA), Endangered Species Act, etc.). Ensuring compliance with federal, state and local permits assists the landowners in meeting regulatory requirements. This level of technical assistance is essential to the implementation of priority practices to meet the goals and benchmarks of the VSP Work Plan.

2.3.2 Financial Assistance

During this reporting period the implementation of conservation practices was achieved with financial assistance through federal, state, and local programs. The implemented conservation practices were funded through Farm Bill programs of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and grants through the Washington State Conservation Commission, Department of Ecology, Salmon Recovery Funding Board, Bonneville Power Administration, Kittitas County and KCCD. **Table 4** summarizes the 23-25 biennium payments to producers and funds used to construct projects on private lands. This includes only those funds used to implement conservation practices identified in the Kittitas County VSP Workplan, not all funds provided to producers through these sources.

Funding through the Salmon Recovery Funding Board and Yakima Tributary Access and Habitat Program is targeted to fish habitat improvement, a positive impact on the Fish & Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas. Some funding sources though allow KCCD to determine or at least provide input into the selection of individual producer applications for funding. This is true with the Conservation Commission funding and with the Farm Bill program funds through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) along with state and local contribution funds. KCCD, in partnership with the Yakama Nation, closed out the first RCPP project, "Yakima Integrated Plan – Toppenish to Teanaway RCPP Project" in the last biennium and now have two additional projects. Both projects

[2]Jacobs, "Field Assessment of High-Priority Managed Aquifer Recharge Sites in the Upper Yakima: Taneum Creek MAR Site Pilot Test Report, Jacobs, 2024, https://map.gis.cwu.edu/ybip-groundwater-research/documents/KRD_MAR-Eval_PilotTestRpt.pdf

address critical needs to improve access to and quality of stream habitat, protect fish from entrainment in irrigations systems, and increase quality of and quantity of the water supply. The first is the Middle Columbia River Steelhead Partnership (2023-2027), which like the first RCPP project, is led by the Yakama Nation. That project involved three sign-ups for producers focused on irrigation efficiencies, fish screen/fish passage and habitat work. The second is the Upper Yakima River Water Supply and Fish Habitat Improvements RCPP Project (2024-2029), for which KCCD is the lead partner. Producer applications have been ranked using the following criteria that provide additional points for projects that:

- Convert from surface irrigation to sprinkler irrigation
- Include irrigation water management
- Have tailwater flowing directly into a river, stream, side channel or canal
- Establish or an enhance a minimum 20 foot average width buffer on at least 70% of the stream or river in a planning unit
- Install a fish screen
- Remove a fish passage barrier
- Place water in the Trust Water Rights Program for at least 10 years

These ranking criteria provide both incentive to producers to implement more conservation practices in order to improve their chances of funding while also prioritizing the funding to be used in a way that provides the greatest impact to the natural resource concerns. In all cases of funding for on-the-ground implementation, KCCD consistently seeks to incorporate ranking criteria that align with the VSP Work Plan for Kittitas County.

Figure 2 *RCPP sign-up flyer distributed at local vendors, irrigation districts and online.*

Through a Washington State Conservation Commission grant contribution to the Middle Columbia Steelhead RCPP project, KCCD has or will provide reimbursement to producers who entered into RCPP contracts for their associated electrical power services costs for their sprinkler conversions. The NRCS programs specifically exclude this expense as a national policy. In this County, power expenses (installation as well as ongoing) are a limiting factor for producers, so this cost share effort is essential to implementing water conservation practices. The cost share is provided as 50% reimbursement of costs with a maximum of $25,000 per producer.

Yakima Basin Integrated Plan (YBIP) funding through a Department of Ecology grant was also a contribution to the RCPP project and was focused on the conversion of surface irrigation to sprinkler irrigation in Kittitas County. This funding was secured through an application to the YBIP Water Use Subcommittee by KCCD. The projects developed all had a Trust Water component. The second grant

(the contribution to the Middle Columbia Steelhead Partnership) was completed through two projects that converted 221 acres to sprinkler irrigation and placed 129 acre-feet in the Trust Water program for 10 years.

Table 4. *Financial assistance to farmers and ranchers in Kittitas is essential to the implementation of conservation practices that protect and enhance critical areas in Kittitas County.*

Agency/Program	Payments to Producers[3]	Construction on Private Lands[4]	Total
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – EQIP[5]	$1,228,982		$1,228,982
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – RCPP[6]	$1,604,162		$1,604,162
Washington State Conservation Commission	$614,418	$366,683	$981,101
Department of Ecology	$805,762		$805,762
BPA – (Yakima Tributary Access & Habitat Program)		$113,711	$113,711
Salmon Recovery Funding Board	136,373	$561,807	$698,180
Local Funds (KCCD and Kittitas County Public Works)	$3,501	5,229.23	$8,730
		Total	**$5,440,628**

VSP grant funds were utilized in this biennium to assist producers working to implement tree and shrub plantings to benefit fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, but to a much lesser degree than the past biennium. This is primarily due to funding availability through the SCC's Salmon Restoration and then Riparian Grant Programs that fulfilled that need in Kittitas County. VSP grant funds were utilized to address drought conditions through irrigation water management (soil moisture monitoring), sprinkler system upgrades including re-nozzling and adding gated pipe systems. Approximately $38,000 was distributed to 8 producers in the spring of 2025. In the midst of a third consecutive drought year, priority was placed on practices to mitigate drought impacts.

[3] These payments are made through an agreement between either USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service or the Kittitas County Conservation District and individual producers.

[4] Construction on private lands includes projects implemented through publics works (competitively bid) projects by the Kittitas County Conservation District. Typically, this includes large fish screen, fish passage or habitat planting projects.

[5] USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits. https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/eqip/

[6] USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is the Middle Columbia Steelhead Partnership (#2326) and the Upper Yakima River Water Supply and Fish Habitat Improvements Project (#3149).

In fiscal years 2024 and 2025, KCCD secured and utilized $446,000 including Salmon Restoration and Riparian Grant funding from the SCC. All of these funds were implemented in partnership with the Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group. Mid-Columbia conducted a new planting at Yakima River mile 150. This was a 2.6 acre planting along 1200 feet of river bank. Mid-Columbia also did a small 0.4 acre planting on a side channel at Yakima River mile 160. They also maintained recent past projects at Yakima River Mile 160 (13 acres), Sorenson Creek (3.9 acres) and Wilson Creek (5.3 acres). In addition to the on-the-ground work, Mid-Columbia also designed riparian and instream enhancement projects on Jack Creek and Indian Creek and worked on an overall project development effort for future riparian projects.

Figure 3. *Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group completed the Yakima River mile 150 project, a 2.6 acres planting along the Yakima River.*

KCCD continues to seek financial assistance sources for agricultural producers in Kittitas County. Applications to the Salmon Recovery Funding and the Fish Barrier Removal Board continue for fish passage and fish screen projects. KCCD successfully submitted two farmland easement projects to the Conservation Commissions' solicitation in 2022 and 2024. The first project, a 600-acre agricultural operation in the Swauk area, is expected to close in late 2025 or early 2026. The 2024 application has yet to be awarded. KCCD is coordinating informational meetings for additional producers interested in easement projects.

In addition to the producer focused funding that has been secured, the two on-going RCPP projects include assistance for "water management entities" through public works type projects. The Middle Columbia Steelhead Partnership will provide funding for construction of the Cascade Irrigation District at Coleman Creek intersection. This involves installing a new irrigation diversion structure for Cascade that is fitted with both fish screens and fish passage (a fishway or fish ladder) and installing an inverted siphon to pass the canal under Coleman Creek so the streambed may be restored and passable. The Upper Yakima River Water Supply and Fish Habitat Improvements includes $10 million in financial assistance anticipated to be used for water use efficiency projects (lining, piping, pump upgrades, etc.) for Cascade Irrigation District and West Side Irrigating Company. Improving drought resiliency for these water purveyors is a critical component of agricultural viability in the Kittitas Valley.

2.4 Monitoring

2.4.1 Monitoring Plan

A monitoring plan was developed collaboratively with Kittitas County Conservation District (KCCD), the Kittitas County Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Watershed Group (Watershed Group), input from SCC VSP staff, and with the guidance of the *Watershed Monitoring Project Development Guide for the Voluntary Stewardship Program in Washington* (SCC Monitoring Guidelines; SCC 2023). The plan built on the Monitoring, Reporting, & Adaptive Management section of the Kittitas County (County) *Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Plan* (Work Plan; County 2018) that was approved by the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) on April 27, 2018.

2.4.2 Conservation Practice Implementation

All conservation practices implemented and inventoried for this report were part of a landowner agreement with either USDA NRCS or KCCD. The practices were planned to meet NRCS specifications or were designed by a licensed professional engineer. Implementation was monitored by KCCD staff or NRCS staff and then certified by the staff or engineer that implementation met the design. By contract, the participating producers are required to maintain their practices for the practice design life designated by NRCS. KCCD involved projects also require producers to certify their practice for the first five years. This is typically done with a letter attestation at the end of each year.

Figure 4. *KCCD staff verify installations of conservation practices, as NRCS staff do with their projects. This includes measuring and verifying structure dimensions (top) and verifying materials and construction methods (pipe sizes, nozzle types, pump types). This information is used to certify and pay for conservation practices.*

2.4.3 *Streamflow*

The KCCD continues to monitor stream flow in Manastash Creek as part of the Manastash Creek Restoration Project. In the summer of 2019, a stream gauge was installed with the help of USGS to provide continuous flow monitoring above the irrigation diversions. This data collection is essential to operation of the irrigation diversions, but also valuable as work continues to acquire instream flow from willing sellers in Manastash Creek. The work to acquire winter stock water to benefit Mid-Columbia summer steelhead in Manastash Creek succeeded in early 2024 when payment was made to the Manastash Water Ditch Association for 7 cubic feet per second of stock water. KCCD also conducts streamflow measurements as needed for project implementation in other tributaries to the Yakima River.

2.4.4 *Fish Presence in Tributaries*

KCCD, through VSP funding, continues to participate in the monitoring of tributaries of the Yakima River for fish presence. VSP funds were utilized in the past biennia to purchase passive integrated transponder (PIT) arrays to be installed by the Yakama Nation and monitored through a cooperative effort by USFWS, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife at the confluence of Wilson Creek and Cherry Creek. Installation occurred and the site was operational in early 2023, however continuing issues with power have hampered its use in 2024/2025. PIT arrays are already maintained in Manastash Creek, Taneum Creek, Teanaway River, Big Creek, Little Creek, Tucker Creek, and Tillman Creek (see **Figure 5** for full map). The data collected is being used as an indicator of the impacts of various project implementation along with efforts by the Kittitas Reclamation District to supplement flows in these tributaries.

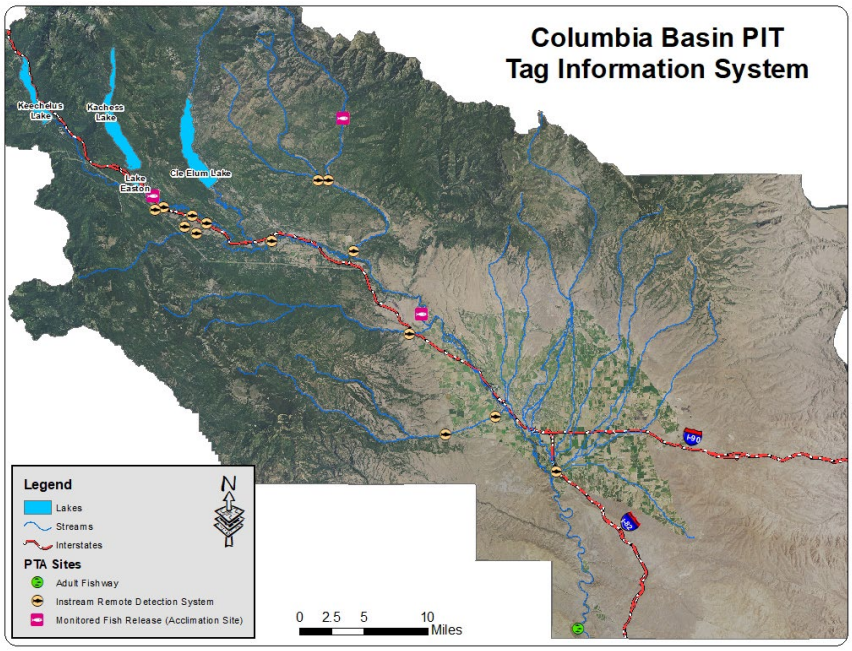

Figure 5. *Map of PIT Tag interrogation sites in Kittitas County. Data is available at https://www.ptagis.org/.*

In addition to this overall monitoring of the Yakima River and tributaries, KCCD also works with WDFW to document fish presence at project sites as construction is occurring. See **Figure 6**.

Figure 6. *WDFW staff lead the fish rescue at construction projects Right: WDFW staff inventory captured fish species at the Coleman Creek 4.5 project. Left: Capturing fish using a backpack electrofisher and nets at the Coleman 2.0 project site.*

2.4.5 Water Quality

Long term water quality monitoring in the upper Yakima continues to be conducted by the Kittitas County Water Purveyors (KCWP) who sample streams and canals for turbidity. See **Figure 7** for a map of their monitoring locations.

The KCWP data indicates a downward trend for turbidity at the Wilson Creek at Canyon Road site, a compliance point for the Upper Yakima River Basin Suspended Sediment, Turbidity, and Organochlorine Pesticide Total Maximum Daily Load (see **Figure 8**). This is consistent with the Ecology monitoring report conclusions.

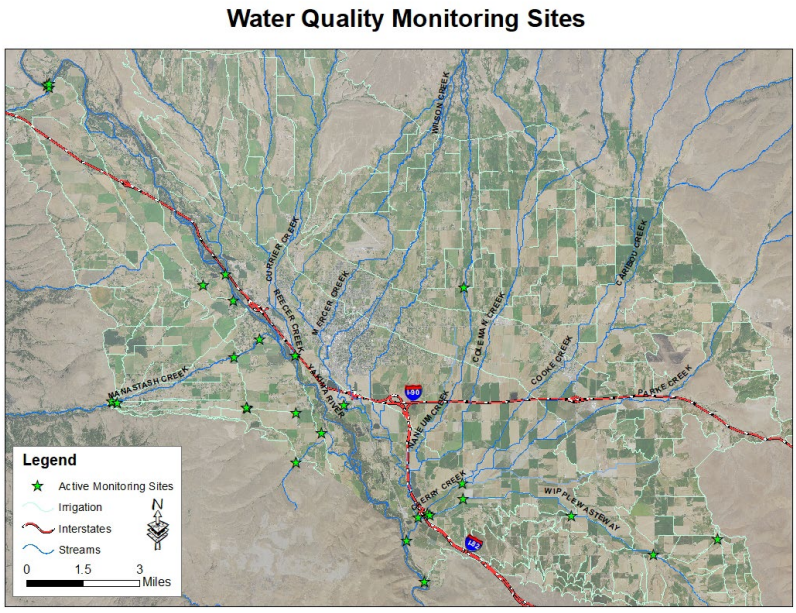

Figure 7. *Map of the Kittitas County Water Purveyors water quality monitoring sites.*

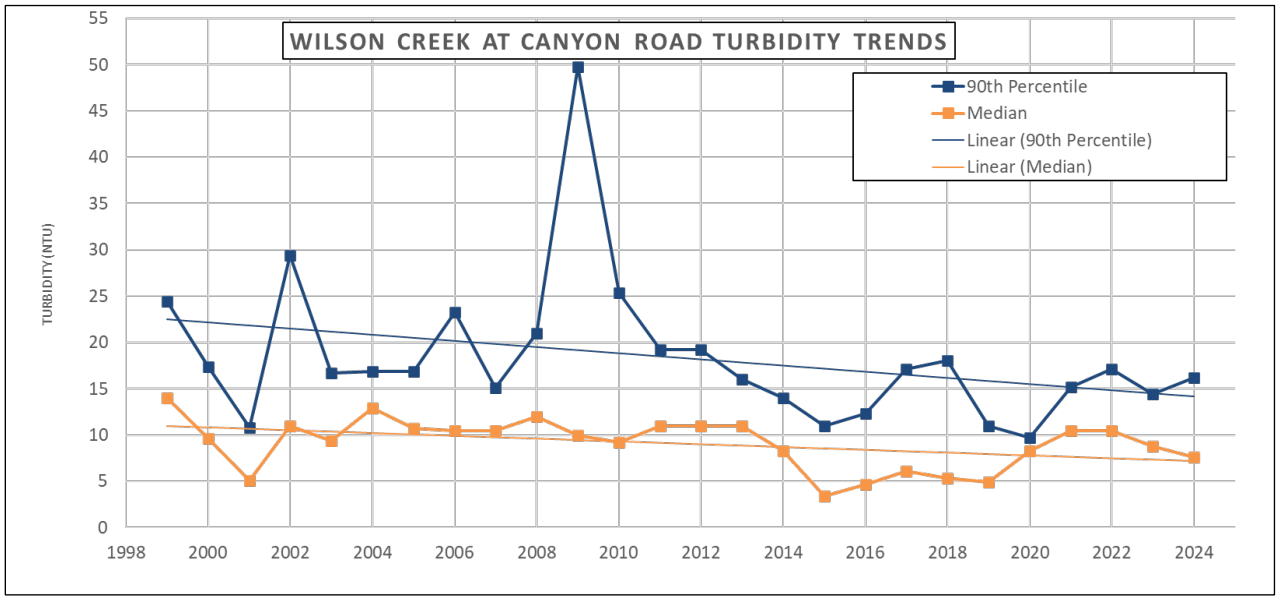

Figure 8 *Wilson Creek at Canyon Road is a compliance point for the Upper Yakima River Basin Suspended Sediment, Turbidity, and Organochlorine Pesticide Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). The Kittitas County Water Purveyors have sampled this location continuously for more than two decades and their data shows a downward trend for turbidity. The watershed above this compliance point contains approximately two thirds of the cropland in the Kittitas Valley.*

In addition to the TMDL compliance points, the KCWP also samples at several locations on various tributaries, establishing background location and comparing the sites (see **Figure 9**). This information is helpful in targeting financial assistance to producers, particularly the irrigation upgrades to sprinkler systems that reduce return flow (and associated sediment and nutrients) to streams and waterways.

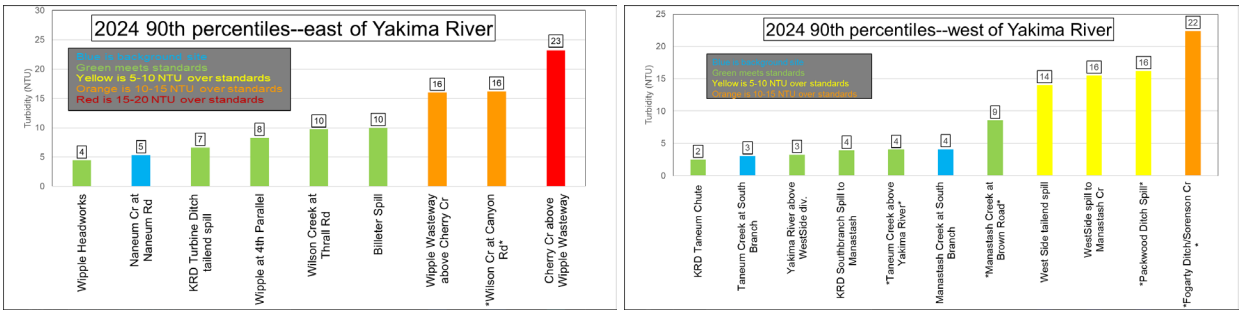

Figure 9. *KCWP samples at various locations on tributaries to monitor turbidity levels. The charts above contain 2024 data for cropland east of the Yakima River (Naneum) and west of the Yakima River (Manastash). The TMDL set the compliance at 5 NTU over background for tributaries. Note the blue for the background sites and then a color scale for the other locations including green for sites meeting the standard (less than 5NTU over background), yellow for 5-10 NTU over background, orange for 10-15 NTU over background, and red for more than 15 NTU over backround..*

Utilizing VSP funds, KCCD procured two turbidity loggers and KCWP deployed them on Cherry Creek and Wipple Wasteway where each cross Moe Road. This further indicates the source areas for the turbidity in Wilson Creek (the TMDL compliance point). Data clearly indicates that Cherry Creek experiences higher and more sustained elevated turbidity events.

2.4.6 Producer Participation

The VSP Coordinator at KCCD is committed to monitoring public participation and stewardship practices every 2 and 5 years. Results of efforts by KCCD to monitor producer participation are summarized in **Table 5**, consistent with the Work Plan.

Table 5 *Producer Participation Monitoring*

Participation Goal: Promote producer participation in voluntary stewardship of agricultural lands and critical areas to meet the protection and enhancement benchmarks and protect critical areas functions and values at a County-wide watershed level.		
Objectives/Benchmarks	**Performance Metric/ Monitoring Method**	**Biennial Status**
Sufficient active participation by commercial and non-commercial agricultural operators (farmers and ranchers) over 10 years that achieves the protection of critical area functions and values at a County-wide watershed level.	• Number of acres reported in key stewardship practices or number of key stewardship practices • Sufficient producer participation necessary to meet protection and enhancement benchmarks	KCCD has been tracking and reporting conservation practices as summarized in **Table 3**. Producer participation is on track to meet benchmarks. In particular, the RCPP sign-ups have regularly seen as many as one third of the annual applications from new/beginning farmers and producers who've not previously had NRCS contracts.
Passive participation by commercial and noncommercial agricultural operators in VSP stewardship practices is maintained or increased over 10 years on agricultural land.	• Mapping and aerial photo evaluation and/or rapid watershed assessment of practices in place • Random sampling of farmers and ranchers in the field by technical assistance providers with willing landowners	KCCD is developing a methodology for tracking passive participation and impacts to critical areas via GIS to document passive participation and also to assist in targeted landowner outreach.
Technical assistance and outreach are provided to agricultural producers to encourage stewardship practices and VSP participation.	• Number of outreach and education events • Number of event attendees	KCCD provided 3 presentations in this reporting period with total attendance of 77[7] and outreach materials presented at each.

[7] The presentations were given at events often attended by many of the same producers. The estimate of different individual producers reached by these presentations is 30 to 40.

2.5 Adaptive Management

Adaptive management is applied on an ongoing basis as needed. In 2023, the Kittitas County Watershed Group reviewed the status of the goals and benchmarks. Many of the 2025 protection and enhancement objectives had already been met or were expected to be met and exceeded prior to the 2025 reporting date. All protection benchmarks have been achieved as have most, but not all enhancement benchmarks. Goals and benchmarks will be evaluated again in the next biennium.

2.6 Reporting

The VSP statute sets two main reporting requirements during the implementation of an approved VSP work plan: a two-year status report at the end of each biennia, and a five-year review and evaluation report. This document is the two-year status report and thus provides a summary of accomplishments in the 2023-2025 biennium. The 5-year performance review for Kittitas County was submitted in November 2020 and the 10-year performance review is due in 2025.

Figure 10. *The Technical Panel support staff visited Kittitas County project sites in May 2025 reviewing practices including sprinklers, riparian plantings, fish screen, and fish passage.*

The Technical Panel members and their support staff have provided helpful feedback and guidance. Annual opportunities to present to the Technical Panel and State Advisory Committee each April have been great opportunities to share progress and ask questions. A site visit occurred in May 2025 (**Figure 10**) with all four agencies represented.

2.7 Fostering Partnerships

The continuing development of robust partnerships between the Watershed Group members, including the agricultural, tribal, environmental, and county interests was demonstrated in this reporting period. Outreach opportunities have been set up through and promoted by Watershed Group members for their organizations.

Watershed Group meetings have included presentations from both members of the Watershed Group entities and the Technical Committee to share information about monitoring activities. This has included Yakama Nation Fisheries and National Marine Fisheries presenting information about mid-Columbia Steelhead monitoring (PIT tag arrays) and over population status. The Kittitas County Water Purveyors and Department of Ecology presented water quality monitoring data and the status

of the TMDLs in the Upper Yakima watershed. VSP funds were utilized to purchase supplies and equipment in this reporting period to support both of these monitoring efforts.

On-the-ground projects have been and are being developed with input and assistance (both technical and financial) from Technical Committee members and Watershed Group members. For example, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service RCPP funded projects, the "Yakima Integrated Plan Toppenish to Teanaway" and the "Middle Columbia Steelhead Partnership" are led by the Yakama Nation as the contracting partner with NRCS and involve a large group of partners including the KCCD and members of the Kittitas County Watershed Group and Technical Committee.

KCCD is also forming strong relationships with water management entities to further drought resiliency and water conservation efforts, as well as maintain agricultural viability. Cascade Irrigation District, West Side Irrigating Company and Ellensburg Water Company are smaller entities with limited capacity to develop projects and seek funding. Providing technical and financial assistance is imperative to maintaining operations in challenging times.

Overall, the VSP program has been promoted within the community by individual members of the Watershed Group and the Technical Committee members. This level of involvement by all partners is crucial to continuing success of VSP in Kittitas County. Communication between the Watershed Group members and the Technical Committee members will be maintained through regular meetings of the Group, updating the website and sharing the successes of VSP with the community.

3 Voluntary Stewardship Program Successes

Many projects have been successfully constructed or implemented in the County since the VSP Workplan was approved in 2018. A few project highlights from this reporting period are described below.

3.1 Sprinkler Conversion Projects

KCCD continues to implement projects that address water quality and inefficient use of irrigation water through various funding sources. This includes the Middle Columbia Steelhead Partnership Project (2326) with lead partner the Yakama Nation and the Upper Yakima River Water Supply and Fish Habitat Improvements Project (3149) led by KCCD. Both are funded through the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Services' (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) with contributions from several state agencies (e.g. Ecology and the Washington State Conservation Commission). RCPP is a voluntary conservation program that provides producers with technical and financial assistance to invest in solutions that conserve natural resources for the future while also improving agricultural operations. Applications are accepted annually and then ranked to determine funding. For the RCPP funds, screening and ranking criteria were established by the KCCD. The ranking criteria provide additional points for projects that address the major resource concerns of this RCPP including insufficient water, water quality and fish & wildlife habitat. These resource

concerns directly impact critical areas including primarily fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas and frequently flooded areas.

Producer sign-ups for this RCPP project 2326 were conducted in 2023 and 2024. To date, 6 contracts have been or are in the process of being implemented on 545 acres. Of the 6 producers, one had no previous EQIP contracts and one was a beginning farmer (less than 10 years of farm management). Three of the projects were primarily constructed during this reporting period. Various delays with design, funding, and landowner issues with the remaining projects have slowed their construction.

In addition to the RCPP funds, there is also funding available through Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and Department of Ecology grants. The SCC grants, Natural Resource Investment and RCPP Contribution, funded three sprinkler conversions in this reporting period. The Ecology grant (Yakima Basin Integrated Plan Water Use Subcommittee) funded one sprinkler conversion in this reporting period.

3.2 Safe Fish Passage

The Yakima Tributary Access & Habitat Program (YTAHP) is a long-standing program to work on unscreened irrigation diversions, fish passage barriers and instream and riparian habitat improvements. In this reporting period, two projects were completed addressing a total of three fish passage barriers and three fish screens.

On Coleman Creek, two irrigation diversion structures were addressed. The lowest barrier on Coleman Creek was a decommissioned structure and so was removed and the streambed restored so that year-round fish passage is provided (**Figure 11**).

Figure 11. *Before (left) and after (right) photos of the fish passage barrier in Coleman Creek. Correction of the barrier ensures year-round passage into 2.5 miles of habitat.*

The second project on Coleman Creek was an existing diversion that was removed and replaced with a new channel spanning structure with a fish screen and an instream rock ramp to accommodate fish passage (**Figure 12**).

Figure 12. *Fish screen (two silver panels on left side) installation on Coleman Creek to provide safe diversion of water for agricultural purposes and year-round fish passage.*

The lowermost barrier on Naneum Creek was removed as well. It is part of a project to consolidate two channel spanning concrete diversion structures to a single pump station with a fish screen. The pump station and fish screen were installed, but the second diversion structure that is planned for removal is delayed by design issues. All three projects were funded by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board and YTAHP.

The third fish screen installation was on Cherry Creek and was installed in early 2024. That project was funded by RCPP and Ecology.

Figure 13. *Fish screens installed on Cherry Creek for a pump diversion system. These are River screens, that do well in tributaries in the Kittitas Valley.*

3.3 Grazing Management and Wildlife Friendly Fence

A new source of funding for range management and habitat projects has emerged in the Washington Shrub Steppe Restoration Initiative (WSSRI). WSRRI was established in 2021 to restore and protect shrubsteppe in the Columbia Plateau of Eastern Washington amid the threat of wildland fires. The WSRRI program utilizes operating funds for fire recovery and shrubsteppe restoration, as well as capital funding for wildlife-friendly fencing in prioritized areas. In Kittitas County, two

projects were funded in this biennium, one for virtual fencing (**Figure 14**) and another for wildlife friendly fencing (**Figure 15**). Virtual fence is a system consisting of radio collars worn by grazing animals and a method to trigger a warning and correction that controls the movement of the animals for grazing management without physical fencing. Collars are equipped with GPS that communicate with strategically placed solar repeater towers. The collars are leased by a company that specializes in virtual fence installations. Wildlife friendly fence specifications retrofit existing fence to consist of a top smooth wire set at 42 inches from the ground, a bottom smooth wire set at 18 inches above the ground, and two strands of smooth or barbed wire in between.

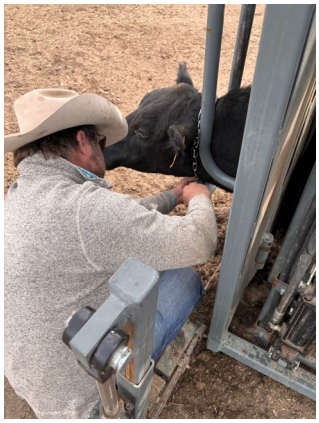

Figure 14 *GPS collars were fitted on cattle grazing the Wild Horse CRM area in eastern Kittitas County.*

Figure 15. *Big Horn Sheep, Elk and mule deer graze in the Scammon Landing area of Kittitas County. Here 8,000 feet of fence (left) were retrofitted to be wildlife friendly.*

4 References

Anchor QEA, 2018. Kittitas County Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Plan. Prepared for the Kittitas County Conservation District and the Washington State Conservation Commission. May 2018. Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/cec2f9_432221a2747249bda5c995da605ad23b.pdf

WSCC (Washington State Conservation Commission), 2018. Policy Advisory #05-18: Approved VSP Work Plan Implementation Reporting Requirements & Procedure. Revised July 2020. Available at: https://www.scc.wa.gov/vsp/statewide-advisory-committee-roles-responsibilities.

Appendix A
Outreach Materials

- KCCD Website Pages for VSP and the VSP Watershed Group

Website for VSP (https://www.kccd.net/voluntary-stewardship-program)

KITTITAS COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Voluntary Stewardship Program

Washington State's Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) was created in 2011 to provide an alternative approach for counties to address Growth Management requirements for agricultural activities.

How it Works

The Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) administers funding for counties to implement the program. Counties then designate a work group to develop a watershed-scale plan that will:

- Identify critical resource concerns.
- Identify agricultural activities in the critical areas.
- Create a plan for targeted outreach to assist landowners in developing farm plans that address agricultural impacts to critical areas on their property.
- Identify and maintain economically viable agriculture while protecting and restoring critical areas

In October 2015, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) worked with the Kittitas County Conservation District to enlist our assistance with facilitation of the Watershed Group. We entered into an interlocal agreement with the County in November. The BOCC passed Resolution 2016-001 in January 2016 designating the Kittitas County Conservation District as the lead entity for the Voluntary Stewardship Program.

What are Critical Areas?

There are five critical areas identified in Washington's GMA:

- Wetlands
- Frequently flooded areas
- Critical aquifer recharge areas
- Geologically hazardous areas
- Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas

Learn about critical areas on your property - Click here to visit the Kittitas County VSP On-Line Map & Survey

Background

1990 – Washington Legislature passes Growth Management Act (GMA), which requires state and local governments to manage growth by identifying and protecting critical areas, designating urban growth areas, and preparing and implementing plans and regulations. While well-intentioned, implementation of GMA requirements meets with years of conflict and lawsuits.

2007 – In response to GMA conflicts, Washington Legislature charges the Ruckelshaus Center—a collaborative, problem-solving center—to examine the conflict between protecting agricultural land and protecting critical areas under GMA.

2010-11 – Based on recommendations of the Ruckelshaus Center, the

Kittitas County VSP Watershed Group webpage

Click here for meeting notices, meeting minutes, materials, maps, data, etc.

Next Meeting:

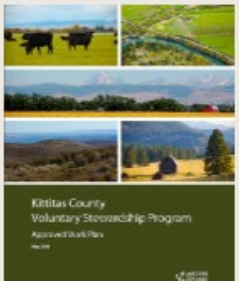
The next meeting is scheduled for August 22, 2025 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM at KCCD Conference Room (2211 W Dolarway Road, Ellensburg). Find the agenda here with virtual meeting participation instructions.

Biennial Report Issued:

KCCD, on behalf of the Kittitas County VSP Watershed Group, issued the Biennial Report for Kittitas County. Click the link below to learn about the progress made in our County.

Final Kittitas County VSP Work Plan

The Kittitas County VSP Work Plan was submitted to the Washington State Conservation Commission on March 1, 2018. The Work Plan was presented to the State Technical Panel on March 30, 2018. It was approved by unanimous vote of the Technical Panel on April 27, 2018. The final Work Plan is available here:



Website for Watershed Group (https://www.kccd.net/kittitas-county-watershed-group)

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Kittitas County VSP Watershed Group

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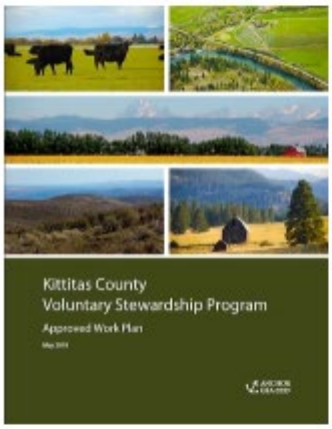

Watershed Group Membership List

(Updated July, 2022)

VSP Watershed Group Members are requested to review the Open Public Meetings Act training video produced by the Attorney General's office. Click here to view the video. Please let KCCD know when you have completed this training.

What are Critical Areas?

There are five critical areas identified in Washington's GMA:

- Wetlands
- Frequently Flooded Areas
- Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas
- Geologically Hazardous Areas
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

In Kittitas County, information about critical areas can be found on the County's website by clicking here.

Learn about critical areas on your property - Click here to visit the Kittitas County VSP On-Line Map & Survey

Meeting Documents

The next meeting of the Watershed Group will occur in on **August 22, 2025** from **10:00 AM to 1:00 PM** in the KCCD Conference Room (2211 W Dolarway Road, Ellensburg). The meeting will also be on the Zoom platform. See agenda below for details.
Agendas, minutes and other meeting materials are available below.

August 22, 2025
Agenda
Meeting Slide Deck

March 14, 2025
Agenda
Kittitas County Voluntary Stewardship Program Monitoring Plan
Minutes

March 22, 2024
Agenda
Meeting Slide Deck
Minutes

December 8, 2023
Agenda
Meeting Slide Deck
Minutes

July 21, 2023
Agenda
Meeting Slide Deck
Draft Minutes

February 17, 2023
Agenda
Meeting Slide Deck and Info
KCWP 2022 Water Quality Data Presentation
Minutes

January 13, 2023
Agenda
Meeting Slide Deck and Info
Carbon Farming - Lynn Brewer
Minutes

July 22, 2022
Agenda

Full Page Advertisement in the Daily Record's Ag Journal (Published Quarterly)

Participate in the Kittitas County

Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)

KITTITAS COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

VSP is a non-regulatory, incentive-based approach to protecting critical areas on agricultural lands, while maintaining agricultural viability.

Critical Protection Areas:
- Wetlands
- Frequently Flooded Areas
- Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas
- Geologically Hazardous Areas
- Fish and Wildlife habitat conservation areas

How to Get Involved:
- Share Stewardship practices implemented on your land with the VSP Coordinator
- Evaluate additional conservation opportunities on your land
- Implement stewardship practices that fit your operation

VSP Coordinator: Anna Lael – 509-925-3352 ext. 7, anna.lael@kccd.net

Working together, farmers and ranchers can demonstrate that current land stewardship provides both protection and enhancement of critical areas without the need for additional regulatory controls. Contact KCCD for information about available technical and financial assistance (funding) for stewardship practice implementation.

Kittitas County Conservation District

Regular Board Meetings
2nd Thursday Every Month
(7AM Apr-Oct; 1PM Nov-March)
Board of Supervisors:
- Mark Moore • Lynn Brown • Jeff Brunson
- Bill Boyum • Matt Eslinger

To Learn More about KCCD and our Programs, Visit Us In-Person or Online www.kccd.net
Anna Lael – District Manager
2211 W Dolarway Road Suite 4, Ellensburg, WA 98926
509-925-3352 Ext 7

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KCCD Booth at Kittitas County Fair (Labor Day Weekend)