



Kittitas County Conservation District

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Voluntary Stewardship Program

Watershed Group Meeting

Armory Hall at Kittitas County Event Center, 901 E 7th Ave, Ellensburg

1:00 PM Tuesday, March 14, 2017

Meeting Minutes

Attendees: *Anna Lael, Jim Huckabay, Paul Jewel, Justin Bezold, Mitch Long, Jill Scheffer, Brian Cortese, Kevin Eslinger, Mark Charlton, Jennifer Nelson, Doc Hansen, Kat Satnik, Tip Hudson, Dale Rusho, John Marvin, Sherry Swanson, Bambi Miller, Mark Crowley, Arden Thomas, Rose Shriner, Jeff Brunson, Karen Poulsen, Matt Cox, Ryan Roberts, Chelsea Benner*

- I. **Welcome** – Jim Huckabay, VSP Facilitator, welcomed the attendees to the meeting of the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Watershed Group.
 - a. Introductions were completed
 - b. Anna reviewed the meeting objectives
 - c. Jim reviewed the agenda and reminded the Group about their ground rules.
- II. **Membership, Participation Agreements and Roles**
 - a. VSP Membership
 - i. Anna reviewed the Watershed Group membership and said that it has not changed. Anna also informed the Group that Lila Hanson, Jack Clerf and Mark Moore were not able to attend today's meeting.
 - ii. The Department of Ecology has posted the job opening for the VSP position that was held by Zach Meyer.
 - b. Review of Past Meeting Minutes
 - i. The Group reviewed the 2/22/17 meeting minutes. Minutes were accepted as presented.
 - c. Outreach Update
 - i. The KCCD VSP website continues to be updated with information.
- III. **Update on the Status of Watershed Plans and Planning efforts across the State**
 - a. Thurston County has submitted their plan to the State. Anna provided a Dropbox link to the Thurston Plan for those that would like to review it.
- IV. **VSP Tools and Data**

- a. Anna began reviewing the Rapid Watershed Assessment (RWA) tool and reminded the Group that at the last meeting they directed her to run the RWA for all irrigated agriculture in the County. Based on the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) crop data, there are 85,000 acres of irrigated crop land for Kittitas County.

Anna reviewed the RWA current conditions and made sure to differentiate between the RWA baseline and VSP baseline conditions. In reference to baseline conditions under VSP, it is the condition of the critical areas as of July 2011 which must not be further degraded. In the context of the RWA tool, baseline is the average or typical operation and the type of practices implemented on them. On “Tab 1 – Variables” of the RWA, the acres must be categorized as Baseline, Progressive and Resource Management Systems (RMS). In working through this, Anna defined operations as baseline if they included primarily rill irrigation; progressive if they had installed some conservation practices including sprinklers, fish screens, fencing, etc.; and RMS if management practices (irrigation water management, prescribed grazing, etc.) and habitat practices (riparian buffers, stream or wetland restoration, etc.) have been fully implemented along with those at the progressive condition. Then this tab also requires that the projected change be determined, so an estimation of the number of acres in the baseline and progressive conditions that will be maintained and the number of acres that will move up to the next category must be made.

Doc asked how the current conditions were determined. Anna used the 2015 WSDA crop data which includes irrigation methods for each field.

On “Tab 2 – Select Concerns-Practices”, the resource concerns and practices are selected from long lists. Only four resource concerns can be selected so for this exercise Anna chose:

- Water Quantity - Inefficient Water Use on Irrigated Land
- Water Quantity - Insufficient Flows in Watercourses
- Water Quality - Excessive Suspended Sediment and Turbidity in Surface Water
- Fish and Wildlife - T&E Fish/Wildlife Species: Listed or Proposed under ESA

The five critical areas are also resource concern choices, but Anna did not select them. She selected concerns that she felt would address the critical areas while being more specific about the agricultural practices in critical areas.

In addition to limiting resources concerns to four, the NRCS practices are limited to 30, which seems like a lot, but is quickly reached when considering the different areas and categories of conditions (baseline, progressive and RMS).

Anna reported that Trust Water has already been added to the list of practices, since that is an important local practice.

“Tab 3 – Practice Effects” allows the opportunity to rate the specific practices from -5 to +5 as to their impacts on the identified resource concerns. This is where local conditions and priorities and the understanding of the impact of the practices on the resource concerns can be addressed.

Tab 4 – Treatment levels then asks that the practice list be assigned to the categories of baseline, progressive and RMS.

Anna reviewed the rest of the RWA tabs with the summary of the assessment and cost to implement on the last two tabs. Anna stated that it was challenging to run the RWA for the whole county and recommends running the RWA with different geographical areas within the county.

Karen asked if the cost sheet of the RWA would be made available. Anna said that it would be made available to the Group and must be reviewed to be sure it's locally accurate.

Anna reviewed the proposed areas which are as follows:

- Badger Pocket
- Below Cascade Canal
- Above Cascade Canal
- Taneum/Manastash
- Swauk/Teaway
- Big Creek to Peoh Point
- Yakima Canyon
- Columbia River

See the meeting's Power Point ([click here](#)) for the acreages, including the percentage of sprinkler irrigated areas and the general crop patterns of the area. The reasoning behind this division was to be able to use the RWA tool on smaller areas that are more similar in resource concerns and practices. Anna gave the example that the Badger Pocket area is probably not a high priority for fish. Jen Nelson pointed out that an adult steelhead has been documented in Badger Creek. Anna stated that may not be where steelhead presence should be a priority.

Jill asked what splitting into the different areas achieves. She was unclear which scenario gives you more information. Anna said that there may not be a huge difference but splitting into small geographical areas gives more information and helps with prioritization of addressing resource concerns and recommending practices.

Kevin asked if might be easier for the end user to read if it is broken into smaller areas. Anna said yes it likely would as landowners could find their area and

maybe make a better determination as to how this impacts them and what may be expected.

Mark Charlton asked if it would fit better with potential funding sources. Anna said it probably would.

Kevin asked how to put all the resource concerns together for the plan. Anna said that they could be combined into one summary spreadsheet.

Arden asked if the benchmarks would be different for each area. Anna said that the RWA would produce individual goals and benchmarks, but that the VSP requirement is for goals and benchmarks at the watershed scale. So, the end product would be watershed wide.

Kat stated that she likes how the areas are broke out and thinks it will be good for documenting where progress is made and perhaps where assistance for particular practices could be focused.

Kevin had the concern that communities would be singled out if broken out.

Anna said that the end result would be benchmarks watershed wide but it would help inform outreach and technical assistance like Kat mentioned.

Brian had concerns about whether benchmarks would be associated with water sources. Anna suggested that there wouldn't be different practices, but a different level of assistance and funding associated with different water sources.

Mark Charlton commented that we are looking for where enhancements are possible with the goal of producers participating and implementing practices.

Jen asked about non-irrigated lands. Anna said that non-irrigated lands would be assessed as their own area in addition to the other areas. Jen thought lumping all non-irrigated seemed acceptable. Kat thought that not all non-irrigated areas are going to have the same resource concerns.

Mark Charlton liked starting with the individual areas but then making the ultimate goals and benchmarks watershed wide.

Jen wants to clarify how sprinklers benefit all critical areas, and she stated the need to connect the dots between the practices and their benefits. Anna stated that this can be done when completing the practice effects tab of the RWA.

Arden inquired about how this RWA affects the role the individual person has assessing a farm. Anna commented that it would be good to take a typical farm and create a general farm plan scenario.

Jim Huckabay asked the Group if they are ok with running the 8 geographical irrigated areas and the non-irrigated area. Doc stated that it will be important for KCCD and the County to coordinate these identified areas regarding the County's subareas in the Comprehensive Plan.

Kevin asked if we need to look/assess by subwatershed. Anna said that it seemed better to identify areas by where their irrigation water comes from, eg. Cascade,

KRD, etc. Mark Crowley said that there are similar cropping styles across the watersheds, rather than from top to bottom.

Arden inquired about choosing Cascade Canal as boundary. Anna said that I-90 was considered, as was the Vantage Highway, it seemed that the canal was a better boundary as most operations seem to identify by where their irrigation water comes from.

Anna asked the group if we might want to combine some of the areas. Mitch asked if we could combine Yakima and the Columbia area. Anna had concerns that there might be different fish species for those two areas and they are in two different watersheds.

Kevin inquired about Peoh Point vs. Teanaway/Swauk. Anna stated that Peoh is KRD water and Teanaway/Swauk are private creek and river diversions. That was the reasoning, but Anna stated it may be better to combine all of it into one area.

Anna again reviewed the list of practices for our County for baseline, progressive and RMS levels. Jill asked if conservation easements were a practice. Anna said we would look into adding.

Mitch asked what metrics are being used and to make sure standards are similar, calling out in our reports if different funding sources have different standards. For example, stream buffers may differ between funders.

V. Participants Forum

- a. The group moved into the participant's forum. Karen verified if we were using the RWA and if we can add resource concerns. The answer was yes to both. The RWA can be customized as we determine is appropriate.

10 Minute Break

The participant's forum continued after the break. Anna asked the group if everyone was comfortable running the RWA with the geographical areas discussed. There was no opposition from the group. Anna asked the group if we should have another full Watershed Group meeting at the end of March or wait until July when we would have RWA results for review. Or have a technical meeting in the coming weeks.

Mitch was ok with a July meeting with time to review the assessment results prior to the meeting. Anna said that she could send out assessment results in email updates. Mitch thought it was best to review results in person.

Kevin suggested taking just two areas and running through the RWA.

Jim Huckabay said that Anna will need the involvement of the Technical Committee and stressed if anyone has questions to reach out and ask.

Brian asked if there is a push to get people to enroll in VSP. Anna said no, not until the watershed plan is approved. Brian then asked if it would be good to show interest and Anna said that it would be helpful to document interest in the watershed plan.

Mark Charlton mentioned that we should be careful not to make unfunded mandates. Paul Jewel said there is currently money to write the plan and then money, if approved in the next State budget, to implement the plan.

Implementation of the plan is dependent on funding.

Anna mentioned that we must be careful in selection of practices for enhancements to ensure we are selecting practices that both are acceptable to producers and positively impact critical areas. Jen suggested keeping the March 29th meeting from 1-4 for a Technical Committee meeting. The group agreed and Anna stated that the meeting would be for the Technical Committee, but all members of the Watershed Group would be welcome to attend.

Tip said we need to make sure and acknowledge all the good conditions currently and not base success on “pounds of flesh” extracted from producers.

Anna said that the RWA can both document good existing conditions while identifying enhancements. Kevin also agreed that we need to make sure the County is credited for all the good work that has been done. Kat asked how we pick up the farms that are already doing good. Anna stated that we can describe the existing work in each area’s narrative. Anna said that the technical service provider does the assessment of the farm and can sign off that the farm is addressing and taking care of any resource concerns so that would document good conditions as well.

VI. Action Register

- a. KCCD to run RWA on geographic areas.
- b. Technical committee meeting March 29 at 1:00 - 4:00 pm
- c. July Watershed Group meeting to be determined.

VII. Adjourn

- a. The meeting adjourned at 2:58 PM.