

**Yakima County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Meeting Notes - Workgroup Meeting #4
June 23, 2016 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM
North Yakima Conservation District Office**

In attendance:

Eric Bartrand
Donna Broers
Laurie Crowe
Stuart Crane
Lynn Deitrick
Steve George
Byron Gumz
Ranie Haas

Mark Herke
Celisa Hopkins
Steven Jones
John Marvin
Eric Olson
Arden Thomas
Michael Tobin

Project Staff: Neil Aaland, Lisa Grueter

Welcome and introductions:

Facilitator Neil Aaland opened the meeting and asked attendees in the room to introduce themselves. Neil reviewed the agenda, and noted that later in the meeting he would like a sense of whether we are trying to move too quickly, or if the pace is right. He also noted that at the next meeting we will need to view a video on the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA). This is required under state law for “decision-making bodies”, and the Conservation Commission believes VSP workgroups fall under that definition.

Updates

a. Review latest mapping

Lisa Grueter opened this discussion. A link to updated maps was sent to the work group several days ago. She reviewed the updated maps, and discussed some statistics. For rangeland, they had only included federal and state lands. They were able to get information on private lands from the assessor and filled that in. This information will go into the online map set.

In response to a question, she explained how they are mapping rangeland. Information was obtained from the county assessor on who is being taxed as “agriculture”. After that, she met with Mike Tobin and reviewed this information. They noted that a lot of land west of Yakima is being used for agriculture; one question is whether USFS still issues grazing permits. Meeting attendees confirmed that such permits do exist in that area. Additional questions/comments:

- 18% of the county is privately owned; the remainder is state, federal, and tribal lands
- Would non-tribally owned lands on the reservation be subject to VSP?
[Need to research this]
- For rangeland overlapping with critical habitat areas, need to check whether soil profiles have been permanently changed

- Mike noted there is a large comprehensive set of data; this data provides a good foundation upon which to base our work
- b. Update on related plans
Lisa noted that additional work is being done to update this information. The statute says to start with existing information; this review helps to know what kind of issues those related plans identified.
- c. Technical Service Providers
Neil noted that the statute requires the workgroup to identify technical service providers that will help with work plan implementation. This does not need to be formally done yet, but he wanted to flag this item for some initial thoughts. Some workgroups just identify the local Conservation District, others are identifying multiple entities. Suggestions from workgroup members:
- Yakima Nation could provide some assistance
 - WDFW can help, especially with restoration activities
 - Conservation Districts are central as technical service providers
 - Washington Water Trust can work with landowners on water rights
 - Do irrigation districts have a role?
 - Mike noted the “Board of Joint Control” has conservation practices to minimize turbidity; they don’t provide that service but refer instead to CD’s; they also have a fish biologist on staff
 - Consider asking the US Bureau of Reclamation

Mike Tobin noted there are different categories of providers, and wonders about agriculture-related tribal services. There is a specific NRCS tribal office, but need to check on this. Laurie Crowe said their CD office covers the Yakama Reservation.

Discuss Outreach Strategy

Neil reviewed a handout he prepared, which is a draft of an outline for a strategy. He noted there are three phases: early phase, where the emphasis is on getting the word out that the VSP effort is underway; middle phase, where a draft plan is available and feedback on the proposals is being sought; and the implementation phase, where outreach is needed to enroll and assist participants.

Questions and comments included:

- Are flood plans part of this effort? [Those are being included in our research on existing plans]
- Some crop types aren’t yet included, such as cereal grains
- We need buy-in even from groups we’ll never work with; need to create a message for people saying what the plan is or is not, being mindful of how we help commodity groups
- Need to identify and reach out to other stakeholders
- Mike Tobin is going to work with farmers who have critical areas
- Lisa said we can put together a FAQ sheet to help distribute

- Steve George said a short status report done periodically would be helpful for him to be able to send out to his members

Continue discussion: sectors of agricultural economy in Yakima County

At the last meeting, Frank Hendrix presented some information on cattle production. We'd like to get information on the additional agricultural sectors. Lisa is able to work with a small subcommittee to develop a description; this approach has worked well in other counties. The workgroup thought that Lisa could start by working with Frank Hendrix and Frank Lyall to prepare a draft for further review.

Comments and questions:

- Be mindful that we need to focus on agriculture that exists with Critical Areas
- Start with the biggest dollar producers
- This information is probably already written, since the county comprehensive plan has been revised, and also check salmon recovery plans
- There should be a description of critical areas as well
- Steve George sent Neil a contact from the Yakima Basin habitat committee; check with him to see if any useful information, and try to avoid overlapping work
- Important to keep track of money sources
- Eric Olson noted that for upland wildlife habitat conservation areas, need more information on condition of ground (to help determine what is a new impact)

Next steps

- Workgroup members think the speed we are going is appropriate; Mike Tobin said the faster the better, would like to be done as soon as is reasonable
- Neil will send a poll to set a new date for the next meeting (see below for results)
- The OPMA video will be shown at the next meeting after adjournment; those who have not seen it can stay and watch, or view it at home at this link:
<http://www.atg.wa.gov/OpenGovernmentTraining.aspx>
- Lisa will work with Frank Hendrix and Frank Lyall to prepare a draft summary of agriculture in Yakima County

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:00 pm.

Next meeting: Friday, August 5 from 10 to noon at the North Yakima Conservation District.