**Yakima County Voluntary Stewardship Program**
**Meeting Notes - Workgroup Meeting #6**
**August 25, 2016 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM**
**North Yakima Conservation District Office**

In attendance:

Justin Bader
Talia Barquin
Betsy Bloomfield
Donna Broers
Laurie Crowe
Stuart Crane
Bill Eller
Jack Field
Steve George
Byron Gumz
Frank Hendrix
Eric Olson
Evan Sheffels
Arden Thomas
Gail Thornton
Michael Tobin
Kerry Turley

Project Staff: Neil Aaland, Lisa Grueter, Sarah Sandstrom

Welcome and introductions:
Facilitator Neil Aaland opened the meeting and asked attendees in the room to introduce themselves. Neil reviewed the agenda.

Agricultural Viability
Lisa Grueter opened this discussion. This will become a chapter in the work plan. Changes were made to an earlier draft in response to comments at the last meeting. They have added food processing and exports to the discussion, as well as income data. It would be good to add more on the conservation practices being implemented and agricultural viability.

Comments and questions from the work group:

- John Marvin's e-mail raised some interesting questions about sage grouse; recent big fire on the training center burned a lot of habitat, which is connected to farmers' efforts to enhance habitat. Habitat they're trying to protect has burned
- Fire on the training center is a huge issue; farmers shouldn't have to deal with this [consultant team will follow up on this]
- We need to address this point as part of the VSP work plan – "resilient landscapes"
- A representative from the training center should be invited to the work group meeting if possible to talk about management practices
- Key to this issue is that the training center no longer has grazing on their land
- Grazing can be a tool to help maintain habitat – keep down invasives
- When humans are involved on the land, the land has to be managed more
    - Shrub-steppe is in danger of being lost
    - There is a push to remove sheep and associated grazing from USFS lands; what happens on public lands can affect ag viability on private lands

- Neil is asked to bring this topic up at an upcoming monthly VSP coordinator conference call

Neil asked for input on the question from the agenda – what additional programs are producers participating in?

- NRCS programs
- In Yakima County there are a number of niche programs
- Talia Bergman (Sustainability Coordinator for Yakima Hop Chief) introduced herself; she said the "environmental badges" are helpful in marketing
- Ecology is re-writing the Dairy CAFO Permit that expired in 2011.

*Critical Area Functions, Issues, and Potential VSP Goals*

Neil explained that this topic shifts the conversation away from presentations and starts trying to foster discussion among the work group on work plan issues. A template was provided to the group to serve as a way to begin the dialogue – titled "Framework: Critical Areas, Agricultural Practices, and Potential VSP Goals". Neil wants to see if this works to foster discussion, and suggested going line by line to capture comments on critical areas goals and agricultural viability goals. The work group agreed to try this; Lisa and Sarah served as recorders and captured the dialogue on flip charts.

The flip chart comments have been typed up and are attached to these meeting notes. After this topic was completed, Neil asked how this worked for workgroup members. Several comments were made that this was a good process, served to provide a basis for discussion. We will continue using this for the next meeting and generate potential goals.

A question was raised about the information sent by John Marvin in advance of today's meeting. People expressed an interest in having John on the agenda next time to discuss his views on the significance of the data.

**Next meeting: Thursday, September 22 from 1:00 to 3:00 at the North Yakima Conservation District.**

# YAKIMA COUNTY VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

## Wenas Creek Basin | Preliminary Agricultural Viability and Critical Area Protection Goals | August 2016

The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Work Plan must be designed to protect critical areas while maintaining the viability of agriculture in the watershed. The work plan must include goals and benchmarks for the protection and enhancement of critical areas. (RCW 36.70A.720 (1))

This chart provides a partial example of how critical areas and agricultural activities may be influenced by one another, potential relevant conservation practices, and placeholders for goals.

The VSP Work Group discussed the Wenas Creek Basin as a test case for walking through issues, practices, and goals. Results of the discussion are presented below the table.

**Table 1. Critical Area Functions, Agricultural Practices, and Potential VSP Goals**

| Function-General | Function-Specific | Agricultural Activities that may Intersect or Affect Critical Area Functions (Examples) | Common Conservation Practices (Examples) | Goal for Critical Area | Goal for Ag Viability |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Water Quantity** | Flow | Irrigation | Irrigation efficiencies | | |
| **Water Quality** | Sediment | Tilling, irrigation | Conservation tillage, irrigation and soil management | | |
| **Water Quality** | Nutrients | Application of fertilizers, disposal of livestock waste | Application and disposal of pesticides per federal requirements; storage ponds, waste transfer, etc. | | |
| **Water Quality** | Temperature | Crop or plant types and associated shading | Tree and shrub establishment | | |
| **Water Quality** | Pathogens | Bacteria from animal waste | See nutrients above | | |

## Table 2. VSP Work Group Discussion: Preliminary Goals and Conservation Practices

### Goal for Critical Area

**Flow – Water Quantity**

Goals:

- Increased flow
- During critical flow period
- At critical reaches

Tools:

- Conservation Commission Irrigation Efficiencies
- Variable pumps
  - Cost, but more efficient
  - Flexible
  - Better distribution
- Access water trust – don't lose water right
- Barrier removal
- Stream passage
- Kittitas emergency reallocation
- Rescue stranded fish
- Irrigation allocation in emergencies
- Emergency water wheeling
- Storage – can store more during peak flood
  - could enlarge storage, or
  - implement alternative management

Other benefits:

- Increased flow in Wenas Creek can help other downstream areas
- More stability to other species

*Note: Wenas Creek Data – how much flow, volume is needed? Is there a TMDL?*

**Sediment – Water Quality**

Context:

- TMDLs established in different tributaries
- Irrigation districts joined forces and have a water quality program
- While there may be zero runoff with an irrigation scenario – the channel is at risk of avulsion
- Channel migration results in sediment

Need proper riparian function

- Fencing, riparian, PAWS

Goal: Re-establish and manage riparian vegetation

There's some natural sedimentation – there's a "Goldilocks" level

### Goal for Agriculture Viability

**Flow – Water Quantity**

Maintain Water Rights

Compliance – reduced regulatory risk

Enhanced irrigation efficiency/distribution

Infrastructure flexibility/opportunity - wells, storage, pumps

Water trust – value instream

- Water marketing
- Key periods

More water availability

- Increased storage

Increased reliability/certainty (*junior water rights)

- Within and out of basin

**Sediment – Water Quality**

Maintain access to irrigation water/infrastructure

- Avoid avulsion

**Nutrients – Water Quality**

Off-channel watering

Precision agriculture

- Efficiencies

**Temperature – Water Quality**

Commodity buffer (CREP)

- Multiple benefits
- Rental

Storage (seasonal/floodplain)

- Irrigation availability

**Pathogens – Water Quality**

Identify source/address

- Pass it off if not associated with agriculture

| Goal for Critical Area | Goal for Agriculture Viability |
| --- | --- |
| Firewise – avoid sediment | |
| **Nutrients – Water Quality** | |
| Establish riparian areas | |
| Focus on performance standards rather than buffers – e.g. avoid nutrient inputs | |
| Berms, dikes, settling ponds could be solutions<br>o Berm is not effective in Wenas Creek for storm event<br>o Equation for distance, about 3 feet<br>o Keep livestock in field or pasture, not confined | |
| More forage; livestock management | |
| Off-channel watering sites | |
| Precision Agriculture | |
| **Temperature – Water Quality** | |
| Amount of proper stream shading<br>o Depends on stream width, flow, ponds, wood in stream<br>o Factors are interdependent | |
| Commodity “buffer” flexible area, like CREP, can manage it like crop - rental agreement | |
| Manage stream function | |
| Lump water quality and quantity | |
| Replace bank storage, feed base flow removed by diking, monetize flow – excess – California example | |
| **Pathogens – Water Quality** | |
| DNA where is it coming from– on Cowiche Creek mostly human from leaking septics or wild animals | |
| Comes back to flow, help with other dynamics<br>o What is source of pathogen? If not Agriculture – address it through other programs, identify and pass on to right authority | |