

**Yakima County Voluntary Stewardship Program  
Meeting Notes - Workgroup Meeting #11  
January 26, 2017 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM  
North Yakima Conservation District Office**

In attendance:

Eric Bartrand  
Donna Broers  
David Child  
Stuart Crane  
Lynn Deitrick  
Scott Downes  
Byron Gumz  
Ranie Haas  
Celisa Hopkins

Frank Lyall  
John Marvin  
Eric Olson  
Arden Thompson  
Gale Thornton  
Michael Tobin  
Kerry Turley

Guests: Mark Teske

Project Staff: Neil Aaland, Sarah Sandstrom, Lisa Grueter, Bryce Anderson

Welcome and introductions:

Facilitator Neil Aaland opened the meeting at 1:00 pm and asked attendees in the room to introduce themselves. The agenda was adjusted to allow Mark Teske, WDFW, to talk about shrub steppe work.

Public Comment: No members of the public were present to offer any public comment.

Outreach: This topic was first addressed at the December meeting. Neil wrote up the discussion from the last meeting and included it in the table for this mail-out. He asked the workgroup for additional outreach suggestions:

- Information for the websites of both Conservation Districts
- CD newsletters
- Tree fruit conventions
- General organizations of growers
- Check with Frank Hendrix, who likely has a list of producers
- Place article in “Good Fruit Grower” magazine
- Contact the local Salmon Recovery Board to provide information

The table will be updated; staff will discuss outreach with the county.

Shrub-Steppe Habitat

Mark Teske, WDFW, discussed WDFW’s efforts and showed a PowerPoint presentation titled “Key Threats and Conservation Efforts”. 60% of the original habitat has been lost; the primary loss is in deeper soil conditions that are suitable for agriculture. Sage grouse eat sagebrush, and their numbers are at a historic low. Key areas include Douglas County, the Yakima Training Center, and Swanson’s Lake Wildlife Area (they are brought in to this location). Animal species that use the habitat include grouse,

pygmy rabbit, hawks, and striped whip snake (which are probably the rarest snake using the habitat).

Mark discussed the Washington Connected Landscapes project, issued in December 2010 and produced by the Connectivity Working Group. The group then did some more focused work on the Columbia plateau, issued in February 2012. These efforts were followed by the 2014 Arid Lands Initiative. He then mentioned the State Wildlife Action Plan, part of a nationwide effort to conserve the nation's fish and wildlife and their natural habitat. Mark also mentioned the fire issue. He thinks that belongs in VSP work plans, since it is a critical areas protection issue. Sarah noted that the workgroup has previously raised questions about linkages across highways and through developments. Mark noted that developed areas may still support linkages for some species.

Comments and questions from workgroup members:

- Mike suggested WDFW needs to recognize what VSP is doing; the expense of having viable agriculture and critical area protection. WDFW should view farmers as partners
- Gale asked why the area around Yakima that is untouched not full of these species; one reason might be invasive land species, and would be good to see state lands improved
- Kerry thinks the fire issue is bigger than just the training center; how do we hold everybody accountable?

### Measurable Benchmarks

Sarah reviewed the changes from the last meeting. There was some discussion about using beaver colonies as measures of success. Some members were concerned that beaver populations were not driven by agricultural activities. Arden noted that biologists look at beavers as a way to support wetland and floodplain functions, and that these functions are already addressed through other benchmarks. John Marvin suggested that an increase in habitat elements suitable for beavers could be a measure. Eric Bartrand suggested that riparian buffers are key to providing beaver habitat.

Sarah asked if any of the benchmarks should be prioritized over others. The work group agreed that this would be useful. Mike and Eric suggested that managing riparian areas was a top priority. Mike suggested more general monitoring metrics for grazing practices. Gale asked about the metrics involving fencing, saying that measures of total fencing were not realistic to measure, but acknowledging that changes in the length of fencing were manageable. Eric Bartrand thinks the most basic metrics of success for both Riparian and Shrub-steppe critical area habitats is sustaining and improving vegetation quantity and quality. Those two metrics cover WDFW's needs in Yakima county. Arden thought flows should be a priority area.

Mike wonders how the technical service providers implement. He typically goes to several tried and true methods; what will he do first? Sarah suggested that we try to winnow down the measures, and lump together where it makes sense (for example, combining stream, wetland, and floodplain benchmarks). John Marvin noted that that

approach would be more consistent with the County's approach to regulating critical areas.

### Monitoring

Lisa reviewed the monitoring goals and benchmarks. The PowerPoint presentation showed how this monitoring will work. Following workplan adoption, if the benchmarks are not met, then the work group will have to dig in and figure out why and what to do – adaptive management. She reviewed the schedule of monitoring requirements, and how the monitoring will be carried out. Eric Bartrand thinks there is a need to winnow-down the on-farm actions that are most-often cited and rank them by priority of the outcomes. WDFW believes the most cost-effective way to protect CAO-critical areas is doing change detection analysis of vegetation quantity and quality.

The topic of stewardship plan checklists was introduced. The VSP statute includes a requirement for an Individual Stewardship Plan. The idea behind a checklist is to serve as a screening tool, and it also documents what is already being done by a producer. Bryce then explained where the example checklist came from. Mike suggested inserting another column in the checklist – “done before July 2011” [the baseline year] and “done after July 2011”.

Work group members generally like the idea of the checklist. Eric Bartrand suggested adding in the fire issues under land management. Mike wants to be inclusive of the different types of agricultural land. He also mentioned that each practice generally has a life span; they “wear out”.

The meeting ended at 3:15 p.m.

**Next meeting: Thursday, February 23 from 1:00 to 3:00 at the North Yakima Conservation District.**