

**Yakima County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Meeting Notes - Workgroup Meeting #13
March 23, 2017 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM
North Yakima Conservation District Office**

In attendance:

Eric Bartrand, WDFW

Betsy Bloomfield, CCC

Donna Broers, TU

Steve George, Dairy Federation

Byron Gumz, Yakima Co

Frank Hendrix, Ag Industries (phone)

Frank Lyall, YCFB

Eric Olson, Honey Bees

Brent Renfrow, WDFW

Gale Thornton, YCCA

Michael Tobin, NYCD

Kerry Turley, Yakima Audubon

Project Staff: Neil Aaland, Lisa Grueter, Sarah Sandstrom

Welcome and introductions:

Facilitator Neil Aaland opened the meeting at 1:00 pm and asked attendees in the room to introduce themselves.

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

Strategy for Completion

Neil explained that we have now covered and discussed all the primary topics in the workplan. We have four meetings remaining, including today's meeting. Feedback from the workgroup is needed to decide how we complete our work. Lisa Grueter noted that the consulting team has been revising the workplan based on discussion, and we need to bring those back as a next draft. Neil also explained that we are scheduled to submit a workplan by June 30, but under the statute we actually have another year. There can be strategic reasons for submitting by June 30th, or for waiting till later. Submitting by June 30th could mean quicker access to implementation funding; waiting for several months after could mean taking advantage of good things in another county VSP workplans. John Stuhlmiller, State Farm Bureau, has expressed concern about the crush of plans that may happen on June 30th.

Thoughts and ideas from the group:

- When the plan is finished, do we provide the list of accomplishments? [That is part of implementation of the plan.]
- What are the steps involved in completion? [Submit to Technical Panel; they may come back with issues for us to address. Not sure if new funding currently in state budgets can be used for implementation.]
 - Ongoing discussion of this should be on agendas for the remaining meetings
- How do we transition into plan implementation? [Mike thinks the CD will get a contract from the CD and start work with other Technical Service providers; he sees this as implementing the actions discussed in the workplan]

- Eric Bartrand said WDFW has pitched the Black Rock range lands as key habitat; Wenas doesn't have as much
- Lisa noted that once the workgroup has honed in on goals and benchmarks, we'll need to do some prioritization
- Mike would like to have some succession planning as part of this [Neil noted we will discuss this as part of a "governance" discussion; early on in this process the work group selected a co-chair, Frank Hendrix]

Participation Objectives and Stewardship Plan Checklist

Lisa reviewed the thinking behind having two checklists; one for the grower and a more detailed one for the TSP. She noted it is important that people know there is no right or wrong way to fill out the checklist.

Comments from the workgroup included:

- Steve George suggested, on the draft letter, changing "volunteerism" to "voluntary participation"
- Mike would craft the bullets for each specific watershed
- Consider adding an open-ended question at the beginning: "Do you know where your critical areas are, if any?"
- Some nervousness about state agencies, including WDFW, coming on the property
 - Neil noted they won't com unless invited later in this process
- Eric Bartrand noted that some discussions have already been started with property owners, it is less important to be sure the form includes everything
- The form needs to NOT scare people off

Funding for implementation was discussed. Lisa said that a budget was developed for the Chelan VSP workplan. We can bring that back to this group for discussion purposes. We can also bring back a "menu of monitoring". Mike asked Byron if the county anticipated funding any implementation activities; Byron was not aware of anything at this point.

Mike said the Resource Conservation & Development Council (RCD) could serve as the fiscal agent for the implementation phase. There is only one RCD in the state, based in Yakima, and they are used to serving in that role. Frank Hendrix is the current president of the RCD Board of Directors and would be willing to have the RCD serve in that role; others liked that idea.

We will have a discussion at a future meeting about financial issues.

Lisa referred to the "potential participants" table. There are over 17,000 ownerships across the four watersheds. One operator might be in multiple watersheds, so would be counted as multiple operations. In response to a question, Lisa said there are 40,000 taxpayers with 2-20 acres of irrigated pasture land. Gale thought that number was too high. Lisa will take another look at the data, working with Mike Tobin. Steve suggested

identifying the number of acres we want to work with. Lisa thinks we also want to capture both active and passive participation in VSP.

Critical Area/Agricultural Viability Goals and Benchmarks

Sarah Sandstrom led this topic. This was cut a bit short last meeting, so we'll start where we ended (page 6). Under upland habitat, the item on "policy level support for rural fire districts" was moved into agricultural viability. "Controlling cheat grass" was left in the benchmarks. Discussion on this item:

- Controlling cheat grass will be very difficult, may depend on management of state lands
- The threat to the critical area is something we don't have control over; can we include something beyond that?
- Neil noted the difficulty he had in connecting with the Training Center (federal)
 - Leave that reference in there and find the right person
- Lisa suggested we move this to page 8
- Mike pointed out there are unique dynamics in the Moxee area; 3 federal entities have fire and environmental responsibilities (training center, BLM, Hanford). He suggested not naming the "training center"; idea is to coordinate those with fire responsibilities
- Betsy agrees this should continue to be highlighted

Sarah introduced a suggestion from Eric Bartrand that the initial priority for shrub steppe habitat is the Black Rock Area. Eric Bartrand explained that this area has an intact area of shrub steppe with high diversity, and a connecting corridor. Fire makes it hard to maintain. The VSP workplan could help support efforts to address the fire problem. Brent thinks the VSP workgroup could help urge DNR to be a first responder. Betsy said there may be resource agencies involved, and what is needed is for the agencies to be coordinated.

Frank Lyall had a couple of concerns. First, it feels like we're switching focus on work plan development. Second, ranchers cycle their land through different uses, which may be a factor. Mike Tobin thought having this under "activities" in Ag viability is a good section, this needs to be there. Betsy pointed out that it's not a perfect measure, but an appropriate action.

Sarah referred to the handout from Eric Bartrand on "using remote sensing." This is something that could be useful. It would cost about \$5,000. Frank Lyall was concerned about remote sending, thinks this may border on regulation. He didn't think it should be done without agreement from growers. The group asked questions about how shrub-steppe would be classified after a fire. Betsy noted that it should still be classified as shrub steppe, and that 25% cover is ideal. Sarah asked the group – if we don't use the landcover change analysis, how should we monitor the change in shrub steppe related to agricultural lands?

The group was asked to consider this question, for more discussion in upcoming meetings.

The meeting ended at 3:10 p.m.

Next meeting: Thursday, April 27 from 1:00 to 3:00 at the North Yakima Conservation District.