

**Yakima County Voluntary Stewardship Program  
Meeting Notes - Workgroup Meeting #15  
May 25, 2017 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM  
North Yakima Conservation District Office**

In attendance:

Eric Bartrand, WDFW  
Betsy Bloomfield, CCC  
David Child  
Stuart Crane, Yakama Tribe  
Laurie Crow, SYCD  
Lynn Dietrich, Yakima County  
Bill Eller, WSCC  
Steve George, Dairy Federation  
Byron Gumz, Yakima Co

Frank Hendrix, Ag Industries  
Frank Lyall, YCFB  
John Marvin, Yakama Tribe  
Eric Olson, Honey Bees  
Gail Thornton, YCCA  
Mike 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. He reminded that everyone agreed to meet until 4:00.

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

Administrative items

*Potential public meeting dates:* After discussion, the workgroup decided to hold a public meeting on June 22, in the evening.

*BOCC check-in meeting:* A work session to brief the county commissioners has been set for Tuesday, May 30<sup>th</sup>. Neil and Lisa will be there. Workgroup members attending are Frank Hendrix, Eric Bartrand, Steve George Mike Tobin, Eric Olson, and Stuart Crane.

*Conservation Commission/Tech Panel update:* Neil explained that our previously scheduled time for informal review has been moved due to the WSCC receiving several plans to review and approve. We have a tentative date set for July 28, which could change if the SCC receives any more plans for formal review.

Draft Workplan Review:

Frank Lyall asked about the change in the agenda, from having WDFW present to having a general conversation about airphoto imagery and shrub/steppe. For the imagery, Neil explained that the WDFW proposal is only one idea, so we wanted to re-focus the conversation on a general discussion. For shrub/steppe, we want the ideas to come up from the workgroup, rather than having WDFW present their approach.

Lisa started reviewing the adaptive management matrix in appendix G. A question was asked about the definition, whether it is defined. It is not included in the VSP statute. Lisa and Sarah explained what adaptive management is. Some workgroup members

did not think the workplan should include a definition. Betsy pointed out the work plan separates what is regulatory from our benchmarks. Frank Lyall thinks the focus should be on improvement of farming and agricultural priorities. Frank Hendrix thinks BMPs can be inserted; Gail agreed. Steve wondered if putting a practice in place fulfills the monitoring requirement; Neil suggested that there needs to be a way of seeing if the practice is successful in protecting critical areas. Mike suggested looking at some examples.

Steve asked about the action threshold in the matrix, why it references “due to ag activities”. That reference will be deleted. First, we need to note the change, and then figure out why it happened, whether it’s due to agriculture.

There was discussion about using aerial imagery to monitor and determine changes. There was discussion about what sampling areas by aerial photography meant, and the example of Chelan County was discussed. John Marvin indicated that imagery is a broader term than aerial photos; there is LIDAR and infrared imagery too. Frank Lyall is concerned that this is invasion of privacy. Mike Tobin provided an example of using aerial imagery for floodplain mapping. Byron Gumz noted that when there is a flood event, drones are used to help determine the height of water. Reviewing the Chelan County language Gail Thornton liked the sideboards in the language.

Neil suggested taking a ten-minute break. Following the break, he suggested taking a poll on whether aerial imagery should be included as a monitoring method. The poll was 9 to 1 in favor of having that as an option. Neil suggested that a small group have a conference call to develop a proposal for aerial monitoring, and this would be brought back to the June meeting. Those who volunteered for the small group conference call included: Frank Lyall, Frank Hendrix, Steve George, John Marvin, and Arden Thomas.

In the matrix, an action threshold of 10% change was suggested for several benchmarks. After discussion, the workgroup thought 10% made sense. For Row 4, page 3, Frank Lyall suggested a threshold of 5% (category of reduction of conservation practices addressing water quality and nutrient management). Steve noted there is a new Ecology dairy permit. The lower county will have a huge amount of track regarding that. Betsy thought that would provide useful information and should be reflected in this matrix.

Row 5 relates to fish passage barriers. NYCD has surveyed these barriers. The benchmark was changed to “no increase” in barriers.

Row 6 relates to wetlands. Mike Tobin suggested 5% and 5% for the two adaptive management thresholds, as once you lose wetlands it’s hard to get those functions back. The workgroup asked if we can use adjacent landowners to enhance wetlands; the consultant team will look into that.

Row 7 relates to biodiversity, specifically within shrub steppe habitat. Why is the suggestion to use deep soils as a benchmark? That’s because deep soils will grow

bigger sagebrush, which then helps the animals using it. Frank Lyall said that ranchers have the prerogative to convert the shrub steppe habitat. Lisa noted that under any of the critical areas, there can be a loss, but that needs to balance somewhere else. Eric Olson said he has a big objection to maintaining that habitat. Steve asked what timeframe we would be looking at; the longer timeframe is better. Lisa wonders if the areas of shrub steppe habitat can be improved; she thinks a 5-year time frame would make sense.

Betsy noted that with fires, the number of acres of shrub steppe habitat could change. Kerry Turley said the need to protect shrub steppe is an issue of the species using shrub steppe. Arden made the point there is likely to be some conversion of the land, the issue is what action can landowners take to protect that natural value? What action can agencies take?

Frank Hendrix wonders what fits the definition of critical area and shrub steppe? We might not need to have this as a critical area; intersection with agriculture may not be a critical area.

Eric Bartrand said that the issue of connectivity is important, and connectivity is at a premium.

At this point in the meeting, the consulting team brought out various maps showing shrub steppe habitat, how it intersected with agriculture, and other maps. The work group stood from their seats and talked with each other, and the consulting team, about the location and intersection of shrub steppe with agriculture.

Several members were interested in talking more about shrub-steppe. Neil planned to poll members by email.

At this point, we reached the end of time for this discussion.

The meeting ended at 4:00 p.m.

**Next meetings:**

- **Thursday, June 15 from 10:00am to 1:00pm at the North Yakima Conservation District (NYCD) – purpose is a focused discussion on shrub/steppe habitat**
- **Thursday, June 22 from 1:00pm to 4:00pm at NYCD: regular workgroup meeting**
- **Thursday, June 22 from 5:30 to 7:00 at NYCD: public open house**
- **Thursday, June 29 from 1 to 4pm at NYCD: tentative workgroup meeting if needed (we'll decide on June 22)**