

Minutes

Yakima County Voluntary Stewardship Program

Tuesday December 17, 2019

1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

USDA Ag Service Center

1606 Perry Street, Yakima WA 98902

1. Welcome, Introductions, review Agenda.
Frank Hendrix, current Work Group Chairman called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm. All participants and Work Group members introduced themselves. An agenda item 7; Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) and potential legislation was added as an item of interest for the VSP-WG.
2. Discuss future meetings and processes with Work Group, affirmed by Work Group.
Michael Tobin (NYCD – technical service provider to the Work Group) explained the relationship in regard to the current contract(s) with Yakima County that NYCD and SYCD have. The Work Group will need to rely on the NYCD and SYCD to provide basic administration assistance (agenda, notifications, minutes, etc....) at this time. The Work Group has set the following dates as their quarterly regular meetings for the next year; March 31, 2020, June 30, 2020, September 29, 2020 and December 29, 2020.
3. Update Work Group on Service Provider contracts with BERK.
Both NYCD and SYCD have entered into contract with BERK Consulting for needs related to completing the 5-Year and 2-Year Reports. The cost will be a total of \$62,000 that will be split equally and expensed under the current contract with Yakima County. Bill Eller, WSCC discussed future development of a “template” to be used by all VSP Work Groups.
4. Share Yakima County Letter to Washington State Conservation Commission and response Letter to Yakima County (handouts).
Frank Hendrix gave a brief background to the issues, timelines, meetings conducted etc. Brief discussion by several Work Group members. Bill Eller, WSCC commented that several Counties are still expressing concerns and that the WSCC is having on-going discussions with the Washington Department of Commerce. Ongoing education with Yakima County Departments may need to be a priority for the Work Group and/or NYCD and SYCD.
5. Update Work Group on examples of Wenas data gathered.
Mike Tobin presented and discussed several items related to data collected within the Wenas watershed and how it complements VSP processes and the Program. The data was collected to identify stream barriers and screening needs throughout the Wenas Watershed. These needs relate directly to Critical Area improvement as well as agricultural viability. Data from VSP monitoring equipment – Fish Arrays was also discussed.

6. Discussion by Work Group Members of activities know that contribute to VSP Goals / Purpose. **Mike proposed this agenda item as part of on-going discussions and responsibility of the Work Group Members. The idea is that there are many activities we all know about that contribute to the goals of VSP and that bringing them to the Work Groups attention and/or the NYCD and SYCD they can be “captured as VSP related actions”. This is important because VSP alone will never have the funding to do all that is necessary to achieve Critical Area Protection and Enhancement nor the level of Agricultural Viability. By example Scott Downes of the WDFW updated the Work Group on work with landowners in the Black Rock area along Highway 24 and 241 to reduce the risk of fire and fuels loading to protect rangeland and habitat within the shrub steppe area.**

7. Open Space Legislation Discussion
Several Members of the Work Group shared communications and discussions within other forums related to the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) proposed legislation. The legislation would apply a minimum income requirement on agricultural parcels over 20 acres. The concern is that most agricultural parcels in Eastern Washington and perhaps all of Washington that do not enjoy irrigation will fail to meet the proposed income threshold. The result of this will force conversion to development or County tax default by agricultural producers. The result is a direct threat to Agricultural Viability and increases the overall threat to the functions of Critical Areas. This issue should be a great concern to all Work Group Members and who they represent. Individuals were encouraged to look into the issue and express their Groups opinion to WACO directly.

8. Good of the Order
Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to ALL!