

Dear Washington State VSP Work Groups:

The Yakima County Work Group is facing a conflict of interest and competing goals in regard to other State Agencies and their programs. All VSP work Groups conduct their activities and work plans with the purpose of attaining the goals embedded in the statement below.

*It is the intent of chapter 360, Laws of 2011 to: (a) Promote plans to protect and enhance critical areas within the area where agricultural activities are conducted, while maintaining and improving the long-term viability of agriculture in the state of Washington and reducing the conversion of farmland to other uses ...”*

The issue Yakima County VSP Work Group faces is the permitting of solar farms under the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC). The EFSEC was established to “provide a “one-stop” siting process for major energy facilities in the State of Washington. EFSEC coordinates all evaluation and licensing steps for siting certain energy facilities in Washington. EFSEC specifies the conditions of construction and operation. If approved, a Site Certification Agreement is issued in lieu of any other individual state or local agency permits. EFSEC also manages an environmental and safety oversight program of facility and site operations.”

Our concern is the conflict where “siting” of these large (thousands of acre facilities) are being placed on and proposed in areas where agricultural activities are currently being conducted and critical habitat of which many species of concern or threatened depend upon. The work of the EFSEC does not coincide with the States’ VSP law as stated above. By example the Goose Prairie Solar Site will convert agricultural land to an industrial use and will impact migratory and forage areas of many shrub steppe species.

In addition, the EFSEC can and does implement mitigation elements within their permitting. Many times, the mitigation is to overcome the loss of “habitat”. When this is done the acquired land for mitigation is always “agricultural land” that is then converted to public land. This in effect doubles the amount of conversion and again is in conflict with the law governing VSP.

The Yakima County VSP Work Group points out this conflict today in the hopes of creating awareness. If your VSP Work Group faces similar issues please communicate it with us. We hope that this facilitates a discussion where the conflict can be addressed and corrected so all parties are successful.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please send correspondence to the Yakima County Work Group technical service provider at North Yakima Conservation District, 1606 Perry Street Suite C, Yakima WA 98902.

Yakima County Work Group Chair  
Mr. Gail Thornton