



Voluntary Stewardship Program

Work Group Meeting, Tuesday, December 12, 2023

Attendees: Ben Floyd, Elsa Bowen, Delaini Disher, Tom Harding, Craig Madsen, Michael Atamian, Jo Gilchrist, Melissa MacKelvie, Keith Nelson, and Rex Harder attended in-person, Adam Hill, Sean Williams, Ron Mielke and Val Vissia attended online.

The meeting started at 1:12pm with introductions from each attendee. Ben provided an overview of the agenda and introduced the presentation that Melissa had prepared.

Recent VSP Coordinator Activities

Delaini gave an update on recent outreach activities, including the use of the VSP mapping tool to find landowner addresses in the Hawk Creek watershed, who received a mailer directing recipients to the LCCD VSP web page. She made a feedback form available on the website where users can enter and submit information about their property, focusing on reporting present critical areas, BMPs that have been or are being applied, and landowner comments/interest in future projects, BMP implementation, and concerns. Using this same selection method, the tool can be used to find potential future monitoring and/or project sites. Delaini has also been meeting with other VSP coordinators from neighboring counties and attended a workgroup meeting with other VSP personnel that will continue meeting every other month to share monitoring and outreach progress. She also gave an update on monitoring equipment and strategies, which will continue to be developed before monitoring sites are re-installed in the spring.

Sean shared that WDFW might have additional wildlife habitat data to update the mapping tool. Adam said there should be no problem updating our VSP map with that data. Rex asked if this data would be available to mobile users, and Melissa said she can help find out and Elsa noted that Washington Shrub Steppe Restoration Initiative (WSRRI) data should be made publicly available toward the end of January.

Elsa shared that LCCD was interested in purchasing an "OWL" system and the required accessories to make hybrid meetings easier. Tom made a motion to approve this purchase and Rex seconded. Elsa also mentioned a DNR sims table training that she and Delaini attended, and that there is some potential program overlap that could make this a useful tool for VSP.

WDFW Presentation on Shrub Steppe

Melissa shared a presentation focused on shrub steppe, starting with her position background and current role covering Spokane and Whitman counties for WDFW. She discussed the importance of the shrub steppe habitat in Lincoln County, and the threats to it, which include fire, erosion, and development. She mentioned the priority species habitat (PHS) program, which is WDFW's method of relaying fish and wildlife information to the public and is used to update land use plans and regulations. She then shared an

example of the PHS map of Lincoln County.

Melissa then discussed the WSRRI program (which was started initially as a response to the 2020 wildfires in Lincoln, Douglas, and Okanogan counties, but was then expanded to other Washington counties with shrub steppe habitat). WSRRI is a WDFW, DNR and WSCC joint program with the goal of restoring habitat by rebuilding fences, contributing cultural resource reviews, incentivizing grazing, native planting, and mapping. Melissa also shared examples of the WSRRI maps that will soon be made publicly available. These are created by a company called TerraAdapt and use adapted information to track and reflect land cover changes; some figures are already even available that are public domain. Ben brought up that there were some similarities between these mapping programs and a GIS analysis done for VSP to track and change data and conservation practices from 2011-2021, and how it might be beneficial to bring these resources together to provide more up-to-date data. Elsa confirmed that the WSRRI work group has already brought this idea up to Levi and that there is an effort to combine these resources.

Melissa mentioned Mike Finch's cheatgrass control trials and Ben asked the group if they had interest in learning more about these trials. The group agreed, and Melissa mentioned that she will coordinate with Mike to set up a future presentation or workshop. Melissa also mentioned that there was some interest in grazing on Swanson Lakes ground for cheatgrass management, but this would have to be approved by both WDFW and WSCC. To conclude her presentation, Melissa mentioned that VSP's ability to access private land data that WDFW doesn't have access to offers good opportunities for information sharing and to encourage practices that are being implemented on public land to private landowners. She also shared some links to helpful resources, including the WDFW's grazing guidance and maintenance tool.

Following the presentation, the group had some general discussion about the maps, and a few additional questions were brought up that Melissa said would be relayed to WDFW staff to be answered in some more detail in the future. Mike A. mentioned the national Sage Grouse Initiative could be an opportunity for help with developing grazing management plans. Melissa, Ben and Delaini decided that they would meet in the near future to discuss potentially monitoring shrub steppe, range ground, and other landscapes.

Next Steps

Ben discussed upcoming items for the next meeting, which we anticipate being a landowner-based shrub steppe workshop. Ron mentioned that the best time for this to take place would be before March, so that WDFW staff and farmers in the work group can more easily attend. More outreach and monitoring strategy updates will also be shared at the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:57pm and the **next meeting will be virtual-only and is scheduled for February 20, 2024 at 1 pm.**