



August 2019
Lincoln County Voluntary Stewardship Program

Biennial Report: 2017–2019

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| Work Group Review Draft: | 5/21/2019 |
| Approved for Submittal: | 6/18/2019 |
| WSCC Review Draft: | 8/16/2019 |

August 2019
Lincoln County Voluntary Stewardship Program

Biennial Report: 2017–2019

Prepared for
Lincoln County and the Washington State
Conservation Commission

Prepared by
Lincoln County Conservation District and
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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------------|---|
| BLM | United States Bureau of Land Management |
| County | Lincoln County |
| CPPE | Conservation Practice Physical Effect |
| Ecology | Washington State Department of Ecology |
| FY | fiscal year |
| ISP | Individual Stewardship Plan |
| LCCD | Lincoln County Conservation District |
| NRCS | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| RCPP | Regional Conservation Partnership Program |
| RCW | Revised Code of Washington |
| USFWS | United States Fish and Wildlife Service |
| VSP | Voluntary Stewardship Program |
| Work Group | Lincoln County Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Group |
| Work Plan | <i>Lincoln County Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Plan</i> |
| WSCC | Washington State Conservation Commission |

1 Introduction

This Biennial Report (report) for fiscal years (FYs) 2017–2019 is intended to document the status and accomplishments of the *Lincoln County Voluntary Stewardship Program Approved Work Plan* (Work Plan; Anchor QEA 2018), which was approved by the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) in May 2018¹. This report only documents implementation efforts that have occurred since May 2018 following Work Plan approval and through June 30, 2019 (end of FYs 2017–2019). This report also documents ongoing and planned implementation efforts which will be further reported in future reports to the WSCC.

The Lincoln County Conservation District (LCCD), under direction of the Lincoln County Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Group (Work Group), developed this report to provide a periodic review of the effectiveness and accomplishments of Lincoln County's (County's) Work Plan in meeting the purpose and intent of the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP; Revised Code of Washington [RCW] 36.70A.700[2]).

This report includes the following:

- A summary of actions and accomplishments made by the Work Group in meeting the VSP goals **since Work Plan approval in May 2018 through June 30, 2019**
- A report on the progress toward meeting the goals identified in the Work Plan as measured in accordance with the Work Plan
- A description of how adaptive management needs are being identified and instituted
- A report of the status of Work Plan implementation including progress toward meeting the protection and enhancement benchmarks

1.1 Requirements

This report fulfills the state requirements outlined under RCW 36.70A.720 (1)(j), which states that as a part of Work Plan implementation, the Work Group must “conduct periodic evaluations, institute adaptive management, and provide a written report of the status of plans and accomplishments to the county and to the commission within sixty days after the end of each biennium.” The first report for FYs 2017–2019 is due no later than August 30, 2019 (WSCC 2018).

Per the VSP Policy Advisory No. 05-18 issued by the WSCC, the report should include a summary of how Work Plan implementation is making progress toward meeting the purpose and intent of the

¹ The *Lincoln County VSP Work Plan* was approved by the Washington State Conservation Commission on April 30, 2018. The approved version of the Work Plan was issued in May 2018.

VSP (RCW 36.70A.700[2]). As of June 30, 2019, VSP Policy Advisory No. 05-18 is the only guidance provided by the WSCC on the requirements of the report.

Table 1 provides the location in this report where information on the status and progress toward meeting the intent of the VSP can be found. The numbers in the left column correspond with the elements found in VSP Policy Advisory No. 05-18.

Table 1
Summary of Progress Toward Meeting VSP Intent

| No. | VSP Intent | Lincoln County VSP Biennial Report (FYs 2017–2019) |
|-----|--|---|
| 1 | The protection and enhancement of critical areas within the area where agricultural activities are conducted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.1 describes outreach to landowners by the LCCD that has encouraged participation in stewardship strategies and practices to protect critical areas and promote agricultural viability. • Section 2.2 describes conservation strategies and practices that have been implemented since Work Plan approval. • Table 4 summarizes conservation strategies and practices implemented since Work Plan approval. |
| 2 | The maintenance and improvement of the long-term viability of agriculture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Table 4 summarizes the agricultural viability benefits from conservation strategies and practices that have been implemented since Work Plan approval. • Section 2.6 describes how implementation efforts have improved agricultural viability. |
| 3 | Reducing the conversion of farmland to other uses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Table 4 describes conservation strategies and practices that have been implemented since Work Plan approval that have a beneficial effect on agricultural viability. • Table 5 summarizes outreach efforts from the LCCD and participation by landowners to implement conservation strategies and practices that benefit agricultural viability. |
| 4 | The maximization of the use of voluntary incentive programs to encourage good riparian and ecosystem stewardship as an alternative to historical approaches used to protect critical areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.2 summarizes projects implemented by landowners since the approval of the Work Plan, which include funding from five different voluntary incentive programs benefiting ecosystem stewardship. |
| 5 | The leveraging of existing resources by relying upon existing work and plans in counties and local watersheds, as well as existing state and federal programs to the maximum extent practicable to achieve program goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.2 summarizes voluntary incentive programs that provide funding to benefit ecosystem stewardship. • Work Plan Appendix D: Existing and Related Plans, Programs, and Regulations describes available resources, plans, and programs being utilized or available to support VSP implementation. No additional resources have been added since the approval of the Work Plan. |

| No. | VSP Intent | Lincoln County VSP Biennial Report (FYs 2017–2019) |
|-----|--|---|
| 6 | Ongoing efforts to encourage and foster a spirit of cooperation and partnership among county, tribal, environmental, and agricultural interests to better assure the program success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.1 summarizes the methods the LCCD is using to reach out to interested parties and landowners, including public meetings and regular website updates to encourage partnerships in the community. |
| 7 | Ongoing efforts to improve compliance with other laws designed to protect water quality and fish habitat | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.3 describes monitoring efforts from the LCCD that include the use of data that is also used to determine compliance with existing water quality and fish habitat laws. New, publicly available information collected by the LCCD during monitoring will be made available to the appropriate agencies as applicable to assist with their monitoring programs. • Section 2.2 summarizes projects implemented by landowners since the approval of the Work Plan. Direct seed cost-share projects with Ecology help comply with water quality programs by helping reduce agricultural runoff. |
| 8 | A description of efforts showing how relying upon voluntary stewardship practices as the primary method of protecting critical areas does not require the cessation of agricultural activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Table 4 demonstrates that based on efforts since Work Plan approval, Lincoln County is on track to meet goals and benchmarks, indicating successful implementation of the VSP. This will be further supported and verified through continued monitoring and implementation efforts that will be captured in the 5-year report. • Section 2.6 describes how participating in the VSP allows landowners to protect and enhance critical area functions while also increasing agricultural viability. |

2 Summary of Actions and Accomplishments

This section includes a summary of activities the County, LCCD, and others have implemented or completed that support Work Plan implementation and monitoring since May 2018 when the County's Work Plan was formally approved by the State of Washington.

2.1 Outreach

2.1.1 Completed Outreach Activities

Lincoln County has delegated responsibility to the LCCD for managing and facilitating the VSP process. Continued public outreach and education is integral to implementing the Work Plan. Each year, the LCCD has committed to reaching out to 10% of the producers who operate the approximately 900 farms in the County. Outreach completed during development of the Work Plan is summarized in Appendix F of the Work Plan.

Since May 2018, the LCCD has conducted VSP outreach through presentation or distribution of VSP outreach materials (Appendix A) at six meetings held by regional groups and organizations representing agricultural interests, such as the Lincoln County Wheat Growers Association and the Lincoln County Noxious Weed Seminar. Over 250 producers were reached at these meetings, as summarized in Table 2. The primary materials provided at public meetings included the one-page VSP flyer and the more comprehensive VSP Overview and Checklist (Appendix A).

At the November 13, 2018 Lincoln County Noxious Weed Seminar and the January 7, 2019 Reardan Lions Club meeting, outreach included presentations given by the LCCD providing an overview of the VSP and the Work Plan, with time for questions from the attendees. The meeting on January 7, 2019, also included a roundtable discussion with the VSP Coordinator and attendees. Discussion topics centered around the effectiveness of current marketing materials and provided real-time feedback on the VSP Overview and Checklist. Attendees provided feedback on outreach methods and noted that concise and straightforward marketing was preferred and agreed that the VSP Overview and Checklist is a useful, self-explanatory tool.

Table 2
Public Outreach Meetings Since May 2018

| No. | Date | Meeting | Location | Participants | Notes |
|-----|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--|
| 1 | October 30, 2018 | Lincoln County Farm Bureau | Reardan, WA | 20 | VSP flyers and VSP Overview and Checklist were distributed. |
| 2 | November 6, 2018 | Lincoln County Wheat Growers | Davenport, WA | 12 | VSP flyers and VSP Overview and Checklist were distributed. |
| 3 | November 13, 2018 | Lincoln County Noxious Weed Seminar | Davenport, WA | 40+ | Presentation on the VSP and all VSP materials were distributed. |
| 4 | January 7, 2019 | Reardan Lions Club | Reardan, WA | 15 | Presentation on the VSP with a roundtable discussion. VSP Overview and Checklist were distributed. |
| 5 | February 19, 2019 | HighLine Grain Growers Meeting | Odessa, WA | 120 | VSP flyers and VSP Overview and Checklist were distributed. |
| 6 | February 21, 2019 | HighLine Grain Growers Meeting | Davenport, WA | 75 | VSP flyers and VSP Overview and Checklist were distributed. |

2.1.2 Ongoing and Future Outreach Efforts

VSP success relies on producer participation to implement conservation actions. The implementation budget for each biennium provided to the County includes funding for Education, Outreach, and Technical Assistance with activities that include stewardship plan development, reporting, and educational materials (see Table 6-1 in the Work Plan). Ongoing and future outreach and implementation efforts include maintaining regular Work Group meetings, conducting outreach, providing technical assistance, continuing to develop the monitoring and reporting framework, and identifying adaptive management needs.

Ongoing and future outreach efforts are summarized as follows:

- **Work Group Meetings:** The VSP Work Group has met several times between the approval of the Work Plan (May 2018) and June 2019 to focus on implementation and ongoing outreach activities. Meeting agendas and minutes are available on the LCCD VSP website.²
- **Email Updates:** The VSP Coordinator has provided periodic email updates to Work Group members and these emails will continue, with information updates sent out quarterly, at a minimum.

² <https://www.lincolncd.com/voluntary-stewardship-program>

- Ongoing Individual Stewardship Plan Development:** In the 2019–2021 biennium the VSP Coordinator will be working with each of the Work Group members and others to develop Individual Stewardship Plans (ISPs), which can also act as models for other potentially interested landowners.
- GIS Outreach, Monitoring, and Reporting:** To support ongoing outreach, implementation, and future monitoring and reporting requirements, the LCCD hired a GIS Specialist/Natural Resource Planner. The GIS Specialist/Planner is developing a targeted outreach plan to landowners using critical area mapping and historical imagery. These maps will be used to identify landowners within critical areas who can be contacted for site visits. Since May 9, 2019, 800 VSP flyers were mailed to producers with follow-up outreach in person or by phone planned as an ongoing effort. The LCCD will also use GIS to map implemented practices and host data collected as a part of tracking and monitoring efforts. See Figure 1 for the Phased VSP Outreach and ISP Development Flow Chart.

Table 3 provides an update on the planned public communication and outreach activities that were described in Table 4 of the *Lincoln County Voluntary Stewardship Program Outreach Plan* (Appendix E of the Work Plan).

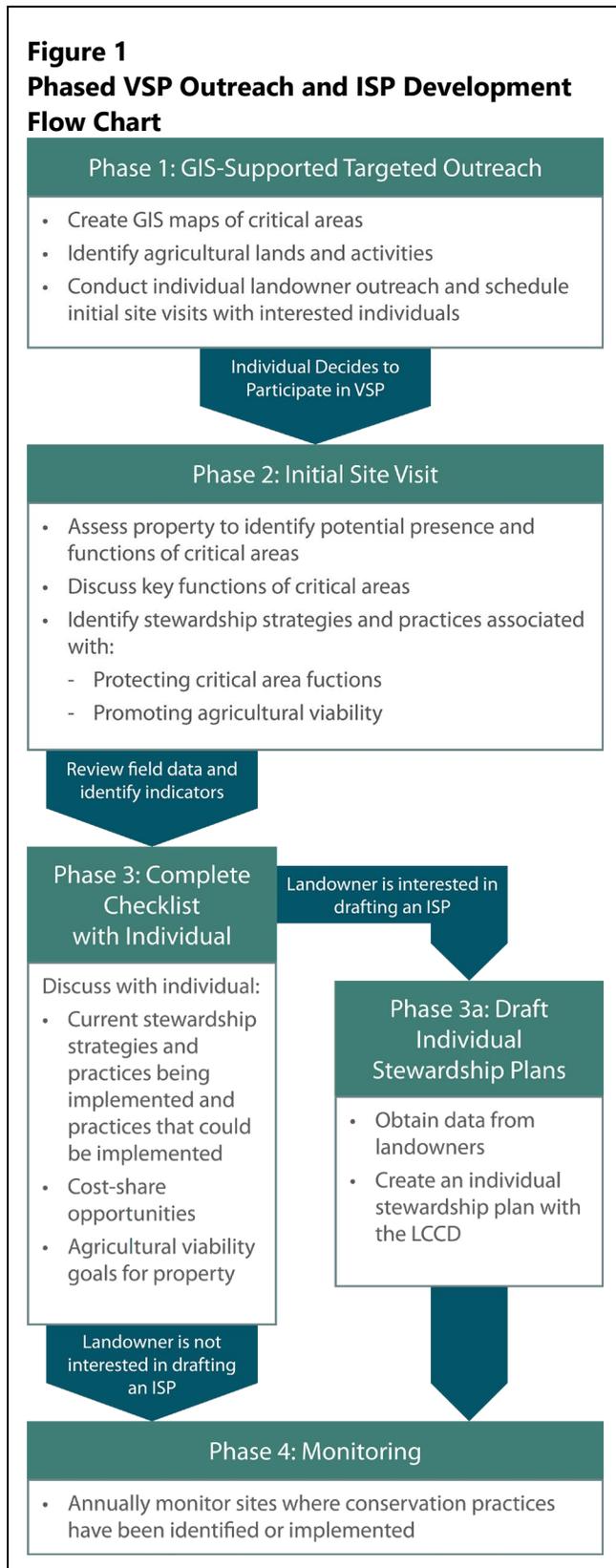


Table 3
Status of Public Communication and Outreach Activities

| Type | Completed and Ongoing Activities |
|---|--|
| Maintain and Update Email List | LCCD maintains an email list containing all interested subscribers from the LCCD website. Anyone may subscribe to the email list from the LCCD website: https://www.lincolncd.com/voluntary-stewardship-program . |
| Update Website and Media | LCCD created a webpage specifically for the VSP and has continually updated the site. All meeting notices and materials as well as documents will continue to be provided on the LCCD VSP webpage. LCCD also posts announcement and updates on social media, including Facebook. The website, with links to social media, can be found at: https://www.lincolncd.com/voluntary-stewardship-program . |
| News and Success Stories Publications | LCCD publishes news and success stories on their website. Information about the VSP has been and will continue to be included. |
| VSP Checklist | The VSP Overview and Checklist was included as Appendix E of the Work Plan. This checklist will help facilitate participation in the VSP and track ongoing conservation strategies and practices. The VSP Checklist may potentially be converted to an online, fillable document in the future. |
| Notifications, Handouts, and Landowner Maps | With GIS support, LCCD will be conducting outreach to agricultural landowners who may have acreage that intersects with critical areas. LCCD has developed educational handouts outlining common best management practices that protect and/or enhance critical areas. Landowners who request additional information from the LCCD will receive these handouts along with site-specific maps outlining critical areas on their lands based on County maps. An informational flyer encouraging participation was developed and sent to landowners to introduce technical assistance opportunities (Appendix A). |
| Individual Stewardship Plans | LCCD will work with producers to help them prepare stewardship plans for their farms, and support them in implementing these plans. See Figure 1 for the Phased VSP Outreach and ISP Development Flow Chart. |
| Reporting on Stewardship Strategies and Practices | LCCD will work with NRCS and the Farm Service Agency to annually collect information related to ongoing and new practices implemented on individual farms. Additionally, LCCD will also work with individual producers to annually collect information on self-funded practices implemented, with associated metrics, to use in developing biennial and 5-year reports and performance reviews. Information will be collected during the GIS-supported landowner outreach. |
| Educational Opportunities | Educational materials focused on particular critical area issues and agricultural practices are available to producers at their convenience. These can be used at booths at fairs, public meetings, or farmers' markets. LCCD's additional educational offerings are described on the LCCD website: https://www.lincolncd.com/ |
| Tours | LCCD-led annual tours are opportunities to share information with producers, partners, and the public. Tours may include on-farm testing, demonstrations, and field trials. |

2.2 Conservation Practices

The report documents implementation of stewardship strategies and practices that have been facilitated or led by the LCCD since May 2018. Section 4.2 of the Work Plan documents conservation

practices that were implemented since the establishment of the VSP on July 22, 2011 to 2016, which established appropriate goals and benchmarks for ongoing implementation of the program.

Since May 2018, the LCCD has supported producers with implementation of 40 stewardship projects in partnership with several existing state and local programs. Funding sources for implementation of these stewardship projects has been provided through cost shares from seven different programs:

- **Voluntary Stewardship Program:** VSP funding is allocated to each participating county for implementation to meet the goals and objectives of their work plan.
- **Lincoln County Conservation District:** LCCD allocates resources with the goal of meeting the needs of local landowners to conserve soil, water, and other natural resources.
- **Washington State Department of Ecology:** The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) provides funding for water-quality improvement and protection projects through various grant programs and partnerships with local conservation districts.
- **Washington State Conservation Commission:** The WSCC supports conservation districts through financial and technical assistance and has grant programs for landowners to complete natural resources enhancement projects.
- **Palouse Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program:** The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is dedicated to improving water quality, soil health, and habitat through voluntary incentive funding, and covers a portion of the southeast part of the County.
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:** The Channeled Scablands Cooperative Weed Management funded through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) provides funding for technical and financial assistance to landowners to control invasive species and restore rangelands for the benefit of the greater sage grouse habitat.
- **U.S. Bureau of Land Management:** The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) provides funding to protect the sage grouse habitat area by creating roadside fuel breaks to prevent the spread of wildfires in these areas.

Table 4 summarizes the types of strategies and practices implemented since approval of the Work Plan and identifies associated key conservation strategies and practices, consistent with Work Plan Tables 5-6 and 5-7. See Appendix B for full descriptions of each project.

Projects implemented in this biennium had agricultural viability benefits that included producing habitat for beneficial species, protecting against erosion, promoting land fertility, and protecting herd health. The projects included protections for all five critical areas (wetlands, habitat conservation areas, critical aquifer recharge areas, geologically hazardous areas, and frequently flooded areas).

Based on the number and type of projects that have already been completed, it appears Lincoln County is on track to meet protection and enhancement benchmarks described in the

Work Plan by the 5-year reporting period in 2021. A more comprehensive list of implemented stewardship strategies and practices through other publicly-funded sources such as NRCS, and privately-funded projects will be reported on in the 5-year status report.

The LCCD is working to field verify 10% of implemented conservation practice through annual monitoring and visual recognition. The GIS mapping, ISPs, and other outreach practices are incorporating the 10% verification process. Figure 1 shows the phasing the LCCD intends to use to approach field verification and ISP development with interested landowners, which would include outreach, site visits, and monitoring. The LCCD currently conducts field verification following installment of all practices and projects that are facilitated by the LCCD. The purpose of field verification is to confirm that practices have been installed consistent with best management standards and specifications.

2.2.1 Individual Stewardship Plans

The LCCD will continue with outreach efforts and work with agricultural producers to provide technical assistance and develop ISPs highlighting a variety of stewardship strategies and practices.

Table 4
Examples of Projects Implemented Since Work Plan Approval (May 2018)

| Key Stewardship Strategies | | | Projects | | | 2021 Protection Performance Objectives ¹ |
|---------------------------------------|--|----------|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|---|
| Type | Key Conservation Practice | NRCS No. | Number of Projects | Funding Source | Approximate Units | |
| Residue and Tillage Management | Direct Seed Tillage | 329 | 8 | Ecology | 800 acres | 7,107 acres |
| Pest Management | Precision Pest Control/ Herbaceous Weed Treatment | 595/315 | 19 | USFWS | 4,259 acres | 611 acres |
| Nutrient Management | | | 0 | | | 459 feet |
| Water Management | Diversion Project | 362 | 1 | WSCC | 255 feet | 384 acres |
| | Drainage Cleanout | 607 | 1 | WSCC | 4,350 feet | |
| Livestock Management | Spring Development | 574 | 1 | VSP | 1 watering facility | 1 watering facility 532 acres |
| | Livestock Watering Facility | 614 | 1 | LCCD | 1 watering facility | |
| Soil Management | | | 0 | | | 159 acres 25 feet |
| Habitat Management | Tree Planting | 612 | 1 | RCPP | 32 acres | 984 acres 519 feet |
| | Power Fence Installation | 382 | 1 | RCPP | 1,135 feet | |
| | Riparian and Upland Planting | 342 | 1 | LCCD | 26 acres | |
| | Living Snow Fence | 422 | 1 | LCCD | 1,600 feet | |
| | Drainageway Maintenance | 342 | 1 | LCCD | 6,590 feet | |
| | Fuel Break | 383 | 3 | BLM | 47,520 feet | |
| Other | Off-Site Mitigation Work ² | Other | 1 | LCCD | 0.5 acre | N/A |

Notes:

1. Units for performance objectives are based on the examples of key conservation practices identified in the Work Plan. Practices such as fencing or field borders are captured in feet while practices such as prescribed grazing or direct seed are captured in acres. See Work Plan Table 5-6 for the list of key strategy and practice examples.
2. This project is related to mitigation for a road project; which included riparian plantings occurring on private agricultural lands.

2.3 Monitoring

The LCCD is committed to monitoring performance, reporting progress, and implementing adaptive management measures as discussed in Section 6.3 of the Work Plan. Monitoring focuses on measurable benchmarks and indicators described in Section 5 of the Work Plan that are to be informally evaluated every 2 years to support the 5-year performance review. In preparation for data monitoring and indicator analysis for the 5-year report, LCCD hired a GIS specialist to develop a VSP mapping system to help support an outreach, monitoring, and reporting program. The VSP Coordinator is also committed to monitoring public participation in stewardship strategies and practices every 2 and 5 years. Results of efforts by the LCCD to monitor producer participation are summarized in Table 5, consistent with Table 5-9 in the Work Plan.

**Table 5
Producer Participation Monitoring**

| Participation Goal: Promote producer participation in voluntary stewardship of agricultural lands and critical areas to meet the protection and/or enhancement benchmarks and protect critical area functions and values at a County-wide watershed level. | | |
|---|--|---|
| Objectives/Benchmarks | Performance Metric/ Monitoring Method | Biennial Status |
| Sufficient active participation by commercial and non-commercial agricultural operators (farmers and ranchers) over 10 years that achieves the protection of critical area functions and values at a County-wide watershed level ¹ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of acres reported in key stewardship practices • Number of VSP self-assessment checklists submitted • Sufficient producer participation necessary to meet protection and enhancement benchmarks | The LCCD has been tracking and reporting key stewardship strategies and practices since Work Plan approval, summarized in Table 4. Producer participation has been on track to meet protection and enhancement benchmarks at the 5-year reporting period. |
| Passive participation by commercial and non-commercial agricultural operators in VSP stewardship practices is maintained or increased over 10 years on agricultural land ² | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping and aerial photo evaluation and/or rapid watershed assessment of practices in place • Random sampling of farmers and ranchers in the field by technical assistance providers with willing landowners | The LCCD has hired GIS support to develop methodology for GIS tracking of critical areas and to assist in targeted landowner outreach. Figure 1 demonstrates the process for site visits and technical assistance in 2019. |
| Technical assistance and outreach are provided to agricultural producers to encourage stewardship practices and VSP participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of outreach and education events • Number of event attendees | The LCCD has participated in six public meetings reaching over 250 attendees since approval of the Work Plan in April 2018. VSP outreach materials were presented at these events. |

Notes:

1. Active participation includes stewardship activities reported either through publicly funded programs or self-reported through the VSP self-assessment checklist in coordination with the VSP Coordinator or technical assistance provider.
2. Passive participation includes un-reported stewardship activities.

A list of monitoring indicators included for each critical area function in Table 5-8 of the Work Plan are used to inform whether protection of baseline conditions is being achieved during the 5-year reporting period. Indicators will also be used to identify trends and focus efforts on high-priority areas. Some indicators being used to support conservation practice monitoring, such as surface and groundwater tracking through Ecology and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife habitat assessments, are also designed to support other environmental compliance laws including water quality standards and fish habitat protection.

2.4 Adaptive Management

No adaptive management needs have been identified at this time. Lincoln County is in the implementation and monitoring stage of the VSP and currently appears to be on track to meet protection and enhancement benchmarks by the 5-year reporting period. Adaptive management would be triggered if the 5-year performance review suggests the VSP may not be protective of critical area functions that existed in 2011. Adaptive management will be applied on an ongoing basis as needed and is not restricted to actions included in biennial or 5-year reports. See Section 5.4 of the Work Plan for discussion on the adaptive management process and thresholds that are to be met by the 5-year performance review.

2.5 Reporting

The report is intended to be a summary of accomplishments and plans of commitments in the Work Plan since approval of the plan in May 2018. The 5-year performance review will provide a more robust report that specifically documents how the County has met protection and enhancement goals and benchmarks from the Work Plan. The 5-year report will include an analysis of monitoring indicators and an adaptive management plan if the benchmarks are not being met.

As of June 2019, the WSCC is working on the approval of regulations setting out the 2- and 5-year reporting content in more detail in the Washington Administrative Code for review by the State Advisory Committee, with approval as soon as practicable (WSCC 2019).

2.6 Agricultural Viability

Conservation activities being implemented also sustain agricultural viability, as summarized in Table 5. Many of the cost-share projects planned or completed in this biennium allowed producers to provide ecosystem services while protecting herd health, promoting yield, and protecting against the risk of erosion. Continued participation in the VSP by landowners and upcoming site visits are expected to result in even more conservation strategies and practices implemented with benefits to agricultural viability through cost-sharing and technical assistance from LCCD. Participation by the County in the VSP allows producers to protect critical areas without discontinuing agricultural activities or converting agricultural land to other uses.

Recent agricultural viability concerns identified by the Work Group include the following:

- Increased foreign ownership of productive farmlands could result in reduced income in the local economy or the conversion of agricultural lands to other uses (NPR 2019)
- Increased consolidation of ownership could result in reduced income to the local economy
- Toxicity studies indicate that glyphosate (one of the most widely used agricultural pesticides worldwide, also known as Roundup) may result in transgenerational inheritance of pathologies (Sorensen 2019). If this chemical, which is used for fallowing and weed control, were restricted in usage or banned all together, it would result in producers needing to rely on other, more expensive methods of treatment to achieve the desired effects for their operations. These actions could further reduce margins on dryland crops that are already experiencing thinner margins in recent years.
- Inaccurate, conflicting, or inconsistent messaging coming to consumers from various information sources about farming practices and their impact on the environment is affecting economic viability of agriculture. Agricultural producers continue to improve land stewardship practices and apply sustainable farming practices. Producers and those they work with to move products to market need to improve messaging and provide more consistent messaging about how farmers are good stewards of the land and use sustainable practices.
- Sustained low market prices for wheat in recent years are a threat to agricultural viability. Some farms are having to defer land lease payments or extend loan payment periods, and are at risk of going out of business or may need to sell multigeneration family farms, to maintain economic position.

2.7 Spirit of Cooperation

Since approval of the Work Plan, six different agencies have partnered with landowners in Lincoln County to implement projects that benefit critical areas and agricultural viability. Additionally, the LCCD has collaborated, partnered, and contracted with Grant and Pend Oreille counties on VSP efforts, such GIS monitoring platforms, outreach, and presentations. The LCCD has been updating the website and social media accounts to keep community members informed on different programs and activities that are part of the VSP. Additional information updates will be provided. Implemented projects have included critical area plantings that benefit wildlife habitat on privately owned land without direct intersects with agricultural activities, bridging agricultural and environmental interests.



LCCD staff working on wetland reserve plantings voluntarily implemented by private agricultural producers

3 Voluntary Stewardship Program Successes

Since May 2018, the LCCD has worked with landowners to coordinate implementation of stewardship strategies and practices that not only protect and enhance critical areas functions and values, but also support the viability of agriculture for individual agricultural producers. Highlights of some of these successes are shown below.

| | |
|--|--|
|  | <p>Direct Seed Projects</p> <p>Example benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduces erosion• Improves water storage and filtration• Limits soil compaction• Promotes natural groundwater filtration functions• Protects soil health• Promotes yield and fertility• Reduces invasive and nuisance species |
|  | <p>Grassed Waterway Project</p> <p>Example benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduces erosion• Improves water storage and filtration• Reduces inputs from runoff• Protects soil health• Reduces invasive and nuisance species• Enhances habitat for native plant and animal species |



Stock Watering Projects

Example benefits:

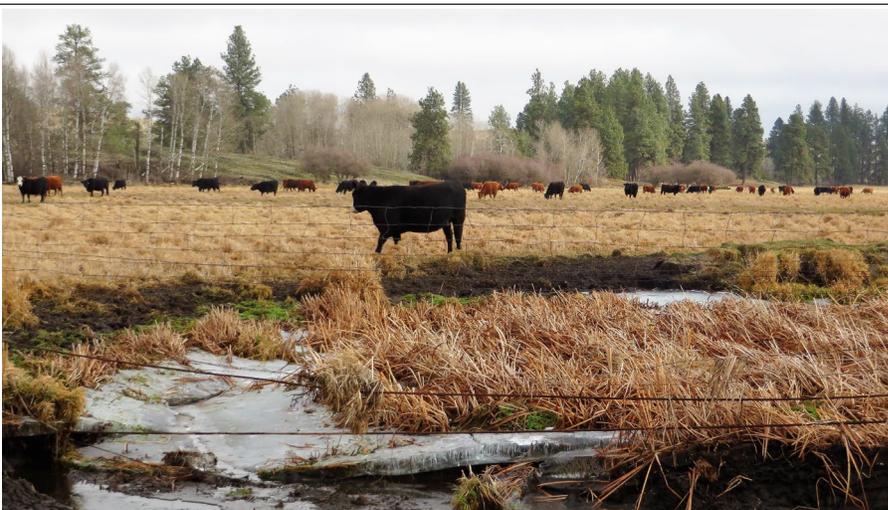
- Reduces erosion
- Improves water storage and filtration
- Limits trampling of habitat
- Prevents unintentional conversion of shrub-steppe habitat
- Limits shoreline degradation
- Limits soil compaction
- Protects soil health
- Reduces invasive and nuisance species



Wetland Reserve Plantings

Example benefits:

- Protects wetlands and buffers
- Reduces inputs from runoff
- Restores/creates habitat structures
- Reduces erosion
- Reduces invasive and nuisance species



Exclusion Fencing of Waterway

Example benefits:

- Limits shoreline degradation
- Limits trampling of habitat
- Protect against erosion risk
- Reduces invasive and nuisance species
- Improves water quality

4 References

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Appendix A

Outreach Materials

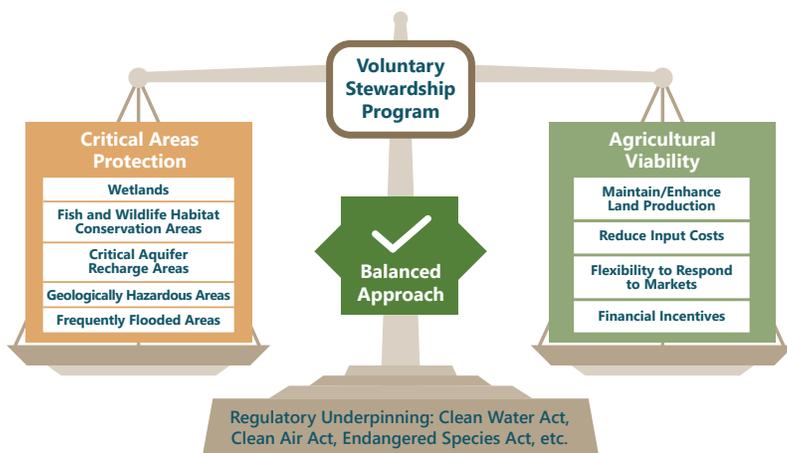
- VSP Overview and Checklist
- VSP Flyer
- Introductory Flyer

Lincoln County - Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Overview and Checklist

VSP is a non-regulatory, incentive-based approach to protecting critical areas on agricultural lands, while maintaining agriculture viability. VSP allows farmers and ranchers to continue agricultural practices without regulation under Lincoln County's Critical Areas Ordinance by promoting voluntary stewardship strategies and practices by producers that protect critical areas and maintain and enhance agricultural viability.

VSP is allowed under a recent change in the Growth Management Act and provides an alternative to traditional approaches to critical areas protection, such as protection buffers. VSP is intended to balance critical areas protection and agricultural viability at the County level through voluntary actions by agricultural producers, as illustrated in Figure 1. VSP is not a replacement for compliance with other laws and regulations, but participation in the program can often help agricultural producers comply with these requirements.

Figure 1
Balanced Approach of Critical Areas Protection and Agricultural Viability



Critical Areas



Wetlands

Areas inundated by surface water or groundwater for at least part of the growing season and which support vegetation adapted for life in saturated soil conditions.



Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

Lands and waters that provide habitat to support fish and wildlife species throughout their life stages.



Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

Areas that have a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for drinking water, including aquifers vulnerable to contamination.



Geologically Hazardous Areas

Areas susceptible to erosion, sliding, and other geological events. In Lincoln County, geologic hazards related to agricultural activities are primarily associated with erosion.



Frequently Flooded Areas

Includes floodplains and floodways, and often includes the low-lying areas adjacent to rivers and lakes that are prone to inundation during heavy rains and snowmelt.

How will critical areas be protected if VSP fails in my County?

Failure of the VSP Work Plan will trigger a regulatory approach to critical areas protection under the Growth Management Act, which includes mandated regulation on critical areas, such as buffers and setbacks. Additionally, regulation of critical areas on agricultural lands through the Growth Management Act does not take agricultural viability into account and does not encourage outreach or technical assistance for agricultural operators. Therefore, agricultural operators are encouraged to participate in the program to ensure VSP succeeds.

What does participation look like?

VSP participation includes tracking conservation practices that protect and enhance critical areas functions and values at a farm and ranch level through the Self-assessment Checklist. There are many ways that agricultural producers can get involved, either through existing Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or other publicly-funded programs, or through self-funded improvements. Participation in the VSP is voluntary, meaning that agricultural landowners and operators (commercial and noncommercial) are not required to participate. However, many producers already implement conservation practices that protect and enhance critical areas through government- or self-funded practices. These practices can be recorded anonymously as part of the VSP to ensure success of the Work Plan. Voluntary participation, anonymity, and privacy are all key principles that will be maintained during the reporting process. Agricultural producers who choose to participate are free to withdraw at any time without penalty (RCW 36.70A.760).

Is there funding to support VSP?

The VSP received statewide funding for the 2017 – 2019 biennium. However, future funding is contingent on additional appropriations by the state. Other funding sources, such as local conservation district funding, federal funding through farm bills or other programs, and private funding, can also be used to support VSP protection and enhancement goals.

How do I get involved in VSP?

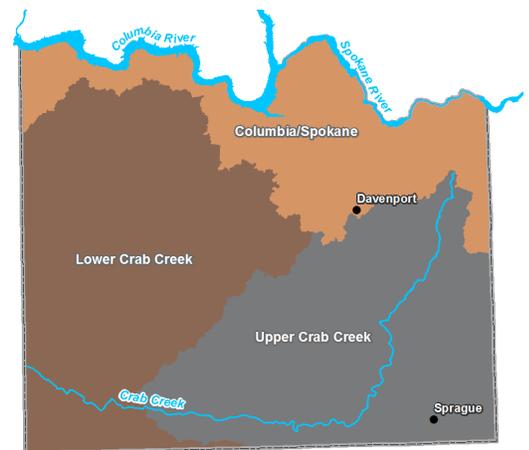
To participate in VSP, complete the attached VSP checklist and share your checklist findings with the VSP Coordinator. Additionally, to increase involvement in VSP consider reaching out to your commodity group representative and share ideas on new practices. If you have any questions or would like more information on how to get involved contact the VSP Coordinator at the Lincoln County Conservation District.



General Location (Voluntary Information)

If you are inclined to share, what area is your farm or ranch located within?

- Columbia/Spokane
- Lower Crab Creek
- Upper Crab Creek



Land Management and Agricultural Viability:

What types of land management or agricultural viability concerns do you have on your property?

- Soil composition (organic matter)
- Soil loss (erosion)
- Moisture management
- Weed management
- Pollinator/beneficial organism management
- Yield/fertility
- Reduce inputs (e.g., pesticides or fertilizers)
- Other(s) - please list:

Erosion



Rill-induced erosion is a major concern in the County. Residue- and till-management strategies are common practices applied by producers in the County to reduce erosion and manage soil moisture content.

Stock Watering Facility



Stock watering facilities provide drinking water for livestock that is away from sensitive habitats and areas. These facilities divert livestock traffic from streams, thus increasing riparian vegetation cover and reducing streambank erosion.

What conservation practices are being implemented on your farm or ranch?

| Example Conservation Practices | I do this | I'm interested in this | Does not apply | Not interested | Average units/year (acres/feet/other) |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Residue and Tillage Management | | | | | |
| Mulch Till | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reduced Till | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| No Till/Direct Seed | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Other(s): _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Chemical and Nutrient Management | | | | | |
| Integrated Pest Management | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Nutrient Management | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Other(s): _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Water and Filtration Management | | | | | |
| Irrigation Water Management | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Grassed Waterways/Filter Strips | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Residue Retention (dryland) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Instream Water Storage | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Other(s): _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Range Management | | | | | |
| Prescribed Grazing | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Range Planting | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Stock Watering Facilities/Wells | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Other(s): _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Soil Management | | | | | |
| Cover Crop | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Conservation Crop Rotation | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Mulch | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Low Disturbance Subsoil | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Eco Tillage | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Other(s): _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Habitat Management | | | | | |
| Conservation Cover | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Critical Area Planting | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Tree/Shrub Establishment | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Hedgerow | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Range Planting | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Fencing | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Other(s): _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |



For more information about VSP please visit
<http://www.lincolncd.com/voluntary-stewardship-program>
 Or email: lincolnvsp@conserveva.net

What is the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)?

The Lincoln County Voluntary Stewardship Program will keep most agricultural activities exempt from the County's Critical Areas Ordinance, as long as voluntary goals are met. Stewardship practices implemented since 2011 are being used to demonstrate the success of the program.

The five critical areas in Lincoln County include: wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, frequently flooded areas, critical aquifer recharge areas, and geologically hazardous areas.

What Does VSP Participation Look Like?

Many farmers and ranchers in Lincoln County are already conducting stewardship practices that promote agriculture and protect critical areas. VSP has a lot of flexibility for producers. Agricultural producers can be as involved in VSP as they want to be, whether it is simply sharing information on existing practices or implementing new ones. Producers do not have to be part of a federal program to be involved in VSP.

Examples of VSP stewardship practices

Direct seed/No till

Crop rotations

Pest and nutrient management

Cover crops

Prescribed grazing

Stewardship practices may be part of a cost-share program or self-funded



Crop Rotations



Stock Watering Facilities



Direct Seed

Help keep critical areas protection voluntary.

Working together, farmers and ranchers can demonstrate that current land stewardship provides protection without the need for additional regulatory controls.

How Do I Get Involved in VSP?

- ▶ Share stewardship practices implemented on your land with the VSP Coordinator.
- ▶ Evaluate additional conservation opportunities on your land.
- ▶ Share your VSP experience with others.

For more information and to participate in VSP, visit:

www.lincolncd.com/voluntary-stewardship-program

Or email: lincolnvsp@conserveva.net

Privacy note: A VSP "individual stewardship plan" developed with conservation district support is kept confidential.



DAVENPORT, WA 99122-0046
PO BOX 46, 1310 MORGAN STREET
Lincoln County
Conservation District 

**FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT VSP
WILL IMPACT HOW YOU
FARM AND RANCH
IN THE FUTURE**

WORKING TOGETHER YOU HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY
TO DEMONSTRATE GOOD STEWARDSHIP AND AVOID
ADDITIONAL REGULATION

We need your help to keep the protection of critical areas voluntary.

What is VSP?

VSP is a non-regulatory, incentive-based approach to protecting critical areas on agricultural lands, while maintain agriculture viability.

VSP is allowed under a recent change in the Growth Management Act and provides an alternative to traditional approaches to critical areas protection, such as protection buffers. VSP is intended to balance critical areas protection and agricultural viability at the County level through voluntary actions by agricultural producers.

Working together, farmers and ranchers can avoid additional regulatory controls by simply sharing information on new or existing practices that protect critical areas.

Examples of Stewardship Practices



Crop Rotations



Stock Watering Facilities



Direct Seed

How Do I Get Involved in VSP?

Lincoln County Conservation District is pleased to announce our new GIS-Natural Resource Planner

Tim Robinson

Tim was raised in Lincoln County and is ready to help do his part to make it possible for future generations to experience the traditions that make Lincoln County an example of what good stewardship practices can do.

Tim can help you:

-  Inventory practices already implemented on your land
-  Provide technical assistance for possible future projects
-  GIS mapping of your land
-  Develop individual stewardship plans



For more information and to participate in VSP contact Tim Robinson:

trobinson@wadistrict.net (509) 725-4181 ext.119

Appendix B

Descriptions of Implemented Stewardship Strategies and Practices (facilitated by the LCCD)

Descriptions of Implemented Stewardship Strategies and Practices (facilitated by the LCCD)

VSP-Funded Cost Share Projects

1. **Spring Development Project (WRIA 43):** \$20,000 max. Cost share 50% with landowner.

This project upgraded an existing spring development and livestock watering trough and developed a second adjacent spring and watering trough about 380 feet away from the first one. Livestock have been getting water out of the partially developed trough located within the saturated overflow area of the spring. Vertical 4-foot-diameter, 4-foot-tall galvanized steel culverts with a surrounding shell of gravel were installed just downhill of each spring to collect and filter the groundwater. Groundwater will be piped downhill to an adjacent 6-foot-diameter metal water trough that is located on drier ground. Overflow water will be piped downhill and returned to an adjacent stream channel that is lined by trees and shrubs. The immediate saturated soil area around each spring was fenced in for livestock exclusion.

Before photos:



Additional Conservation Projects:

2. **DOE-funded direct seed tillage cost share projects (locations vary):** Cost share 50% with landowner for implementing practice on between 40 and 200 acres. Currently eight Lincoln County landowners are funded for \$33,600 maximum for 3 years. More landowners will be funded as budget allows.
3. **WSCC-funded projects:**
 - a. **Diversion project (WRIA 43):** Cost share 50% with landowner up to \$20,000. Seasonal runoff from nearby hills is flowing away from an intermittent pond and flooding the

landowner's barns, shop, arena, and second residence. The project established a waterway with a diversion on the lower-sloped side of the channel to divert the surface water away from the landowner's property and protect the range-ground from the damages of upland runoff. After the channel was constructed, the edges were reseeded with grass seed to stabilize the channel sides.

- b. **Drainage Cleanout project (WRIA 43):** Cost share 50% with landowner up to \$20,000. This project cleaned out a drainageway channel to restore the proper functioning of this waterway area without adversely affecting the alfalfa planting on both sides of the central channel. This channel was clogged with cattails in most locations, which led to the breaching of runoff water out of the waterway area and into the adjacent crop field. Small gullies were eroded into the cropland soil due to this overflow. The cattails were removed and were replaced with smaller native grasses, sedges, and rushes that will reduce clogging and prevent water from overflowing onto the owner's cropland.

4. RCPP-funded projects:

- a. **Tree planting project (WRIA 34):** Cost share 50% with landowner up to \$1,000 to plant caragana, chokecherry, Ponderosa pine, serviceberry, and woods rose trees and shrubs on the unfarmable hillsides on this cropland. Landowner and laborer scalped the planting area with hoe to remove grass sod and hand planted trees and shrubs with shovels.
- b. **Power fence installation project (WRIA 34):** Cost share 50% with landowner up to \$20,000. The project established 1,135 feet of electric fence line to exclude cattle from a wetland area.

5. LCCD-funded projects:

- a. **Riparian and upland planting:** Partnering with NRCS, LCCD staff planted 5,500 trees along a creek to prevent erosion and create a wildlife habitat.
- b. **Living snow fence project:** The establishment of Austrian pine trees along 1,600 feet of a highway road to block seasonal snowdrifts.
- c. **Off-site mitigation work:** The establishment of about 0.5 acre of wetland in an alternative area to replace wetland area lost by a road construction project.
- d. **Livestock watering facility project:** Cost share 50% with landowner up to \$20,000 to install a trough for livestock.
- e. **Drainageway maintenance:** Cost share 50% with landowner up to \$20,000. The reshaping and installation of plants along an estimated 6,590 feet or 1.25 miles of intermittent stream.