



Voluntary Stewardship Program

VSP 101 Kick-off Meetings Summary

Introduction

The Lincoln County Conservation District has partnered with Lincoln County and the Washington State Conservation Commission to create a Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) for County agricultural activities. The Voluntary Stewardship Program is a new approach approved and funded by the state legislature to protect critical areas on agricultural lands within the state of Washington. Lincoln County is one of 27 counties across the state that opted to participate in the VSP process. Instead of enacting further critical areas regulation on agricultural lands, VSP would allow Lincoln County to work closely with landowners and stakeholders to develop voluntary, site-specific stewardship plans. VSP is an optional, incentive-based approach to protecting critical areas while promoting agriculture. Lincoln County has requested that Lincoln County Conservation district serve as the facilitator for VSP in the county. Lincoln County Conservation District hosted three public information meetings in Odessa, Wilbur and Davenport on March 22, 2016 to provide general information to the public. Along with VSP Facilitator Ben Floyd, with Anchor QEA and Bill Eller, VSP Coordinator for the Washington State Conservation Commission.

The meeting purposes were to:

- Introduce and give an overview of the Voluntary Stewardship Program requirements and work plan elements to producers, landowners, stakeholders and the general public
- Receive input, concerns and have open dialogue on what the VSP development process is and the effect it will/can have on promoting agricultural lands while protecting critical areas in Lincoln County
- Provide the opportunity for county residents to apply for the County VSP Work Group and
- Share next steps and timeline in the VSP development process

Outreach and Attendance

Notices for the three public meetings were featured in various newspapers distributed throughout the county, and on social media. Additionally, emails were sent to interested parties. A meeting notice was also posted to the Lincoln County Conservation District's website: <http://www.lincolncd.com> and included in the District's monthly newsletter.

Fourteen individuals attended the Odessa meeting, 11 attended the Wilbur meeting and 19 attended the Davenport meeting.

Summary of Public Comments

Public comments received during the meetings are summarized below.

Comments received at the Odessa Meeting:

- Lincoln County did not opt-in to the Growth Management Act (GMA) but it does leave the County still responsible for addressing other land use regulatory requirements.
- Watershed work has already been done and those involved with this past work would like to see that work brought forward into the VSP process, and avoid recreating the wheel. Important to have the VSP work group acknowledge the Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) Watershed.
- There have been issues and conflicts between the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) and Lincoln County in the past. There are concerns about how VSP could be used by Ecology or other agencies to enforce their agendas.
- VSP will open up opportunities to work with Ecology and present the counties' VSP plan.
- Farmers can sign off or not to participate as this is truly a Voluntary Stewardship Plan.

Comments received at the Wilbur Meeting:

- Will there be incentive money for projects and implementation of programs in the future?
- Can producers with agricultural leases on DNR participate in the VSP program and/or would it apply to them? Bill Eller with the Washington State Conservation Commission will follow up on this question and provide an answer back to the Conservation District.
- Where can maps be found of the Shoreline Master Program developed for Lincoln County? These maps can be found on the Lincoln county website. LCCD will add links on their website to the Lincoln County website..
- It was brought up that Lincoln County is unique with its different amounts of rainfall, and pasture, wheat, and timber. Ben Floyd with Anchor QEA added that that is the beauty of VSP– being able to write the program to fit Lincoln County specifically.
- What will the process for submitting to the technical panel look like? This process is still being developed. Chelan County is set to present their VSP work plan in April.

Comments received at the Davenport Meeting:

- There was concern that VSP seems to be very fluid and, with that in mind, will Lincoln County be able to use information from Chelan County? Chelan and Thurston counties are the two pilot counties and Lincoln County will be able to use lessons learned and draft work products from these pilots..
- Who is the Technical Review panel? The Technical Panel consists of: Amy Windrope, WDFW, Brian Cochrane, WSCC, Kelly McLain, WSDA and Tom Clingman, ECY
- Will a lessee have to check with an owner to participate and to write a VSP plan as an agricultural operator? Bell Eller will follow up on this question. Will contracts with NRCS change (CSP, etc..) because of VSP or remain the same? Contracts will remain the same.
- 'Watershed' seemed to be an inappropriate term to include in the name of the VSP Work Group and Ben Floyd referenced that that term will be removed from future publications and that the term VSP Work Group will be used instead.

Next Steps

The Lincoln County Conservation District will prepare a meetings summary. Application deadline to be appointed to the VSP Workgroup is April 8th, 2016. Applications can be obtained from the Lincoln County Conservation District. The first Lincoln County Work Group Meeting will be held April 19, 2016 at 6:00PM, Lincoln County Public Works Building, Davenport, WA. This and all future meetings are open to the public. Meeting presentations and other materials will be made available on the Conservation District website.