



## Voluntary Stewardship Program

Work Group Meeting, Tuesday, February 23, 2021

Attendees: Ben Floyd, Elsa Bowen, Mark Stedman, Connor Nikkola, Jason Kunz, Leslie Michel, Pete Wyborney, Levi Keesecker, Val Vissia, Rex Harder, Jon Small, Josh Sherwood, Braidy Haden, Craig Madsen, Jeff Schibel, Ron Mielke and Nikole Stout. This meeting was web/call-in only.

Meeting started at 2:30 p.m. with Ben Floyd providing a brief overview of the agenda items. VAP success with Connor Nikkola, 5-Year Report overview and vote on submission and next steps

Connor Nikkola, LCCD's Natural Resource Planner opened the meeting with an update, including pictures of VSP cost share projects and other examples of VSP successes in Lincoln County.

- Post fire reforestation tree planting following the 2016 Hart Rd fire. 15,000 trees were planted. Will be following up this spring on viability.
- 5000+ trees and shrubs were planted along Crab Creek. This is an ongoing Conservation Easement, Wetland Reserve Program partnering with NRCS. Since 2018 there have been approximately 18,000 trees and shrubs planted. This will program will conclude in 2024.
- Sediment Dam Removal. This project was funded with VSP cost-share funding removing and restructuring old sediment dams that no longer were working and were actually rerouting and eroding the fields.
- Large waterway cleanout of 1000 ft. Reseeding has been done and plantings to follow this Spring.
- Exclusion fencing project. This project was funded with VSP Cost-share funding. This project is part 2. A watering facility that had already be completed. This completes the project.
- Watering facility that was placed between to adjacent pastures to alternate with cattle and to prevent use of a nearby waterway.

No questions were asked by attendees.

Ben Floyd introduced Nikole Stout who has been the lead planner compiling data for the 5-year report. Ben then reviewed the presentation slides.

- 5-yr Report Intent, which is due March 21, 2021. Five-year performance reports are meant to provide a written report on whether the Work Plan has met protection and enhancement goals and benchmarks and Intended to fulfill the state requirements outline under the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 36.70A.720(2)(b)(i) and (c)(i)
- 5-Year Report Submittal Procedure. The five-year report will now be submitted using an online database created by WSCC  
Once the report is ready for submittal, the submitter will transmit the report directly to WSCC

- Critical Area Function Goals & Benchmarks. **Goal** -Protect or enhance the functions of: Wetlands, FWHCA, FFA, CARA, GHA. **Benchmarks**- No net loss of acres managed under stewardship practices; no net loss of feet or units managed for protection. Enrolled enhancement units (e.g., acres and feet) are sufficient to offset identified agricultural degradation and maintain baseline conditions.
- Stewardship Practice Monitoring Methods. 2011 – 2021 NRCS and CD-led programs reported data (conservation acres monitoring) Sample verification (randomly selected sample of 10% of reported projects). Ag stewardship is protecting critical areas. Sample verification shows critical areas stable and improving. The County is protecting functions and value.
- Performance Metric Tracking. All key conservation practice protections and enhancement objectives have been exceeded. Residue & Tillage Management, Pest Management, Nutrient Management, Water Management, Livestock Management, Soil Management, Habitat Management and Off-Site Mitigation work.
- Participation Goals & Benchmarks.
  - Goal:** Promote producer participation in voluntary stewardship of agricultural lands and critical areas to meet the protection and/or enhancement benchmarks and protect critical areas functions and values at a County-wide watershed level.
  - Participation:**
    - Sufficient **active participation** by operators over 10 years that achieves the protection of critical area functions
    - Passive participation** by operators in stewardship practices is maintained or increased over 10 years on agricultural
    - Technical assistance** and outreach provided to producers to encourage stewardship practices and VSP participation
- Participation Tracking. 5 VSP Checklists, technical assistance to over 15 landowners, 6 outreach events reaching over 282 community members, attendance at several webinars in 2020, several assessments and evaluations of practices have been performed over the last few months (project successes)
- Critical Area Function Monitoring. Indicators help the County assess if the VSP is meeting the protection standard for critical areas function within agricultural areas. Indicator data is used to assess any loss or gain in the baseline condition for critical areas function. Indicator data alone is not indicative of VSP success or failure

- Habitat Indicators. Change detection analyzed through GIS and aerial imagery:  
Pending. Mapping vegetation changes between 2011 and 2019 in wetlands and riparian buffers intersecting agricultural land use. Anchor QEA will provide an accuracy assessment after the preliminary analysis.  
Priority Habitats and Species: A decrease in areas of endangered species. Four sites have been removed from the PHS maps. American White Pelicans are now listed 'Threatened' and not 'Endangered.'
- Water Quality and Hydrology Indicators. Department of Ecology 303(d) Water Quality:  
Two segments of Crab Creek have been listed as polluted since 2011. These sites are near rangeland and irrigated land and listed for pH or bacteria.  
While it is not conclusive that agricultural activity is contributing to water quality issues, there is opportunity for further outreach in this area.  
USGS Flow Gauge Tracking:  
There are 3 active gauges in Lincoln County (Coal Creek, Crab Creek, and Wilson Creek). Monthly low flows at these gauges have either increased or remained similar.  
Department of Health Groundwater Quality: Pending
- Adaptive Management. Lincoln County **met or exceeded** 2021 benchmarks.
- No adaptive management is required as part of the 5-year report.

That concluded the presentation. Ben then opened it up for questions and discussion.

Leslie Michael suggested that a supplemental document could be included to give a snapshot to the Technical Committee to make it very clear whether or not Goals and Benchmarks have been achieved. Several districts have done that to summarize their 5-year report. Val asked if it is as simple as the Benchmark Table that was included in the pre-meeting email would suffice and Leslie clarified that yes, that would work. Ben asked how to submit this type of supplemental document with the 5-yr report and Leslie recommended sending it directly to Bill Eller, and that other CD's materials can be view at the WSCC website listed under counties on the VSP pages.

Levi encouraged the group to use available data for monitoring along with continuing to use BMPs. There are some areas with bacteria etc. that are located in areas that can be useful as VSP in Lincoln County moves forward. Ben remarked that follow-up will be done with producer upstream from the monitoring areas.

Jon pointed out that the Work Group was more inclined to review stewardship over indicator monitoring as the Work Plan indicates. As time goes on, the Work Group will be looking at BMPs/projects to improve data gaps.

Ben then asked if the Work Group was ready for approval the 5-Year report and ready for submittal. Jon asked if we needed to send out an email once we have all pending data in for approval. So, "Are you ok just getting an email for approval without an additional meeting?" All updated will also be approved by LCCD and Anchor QEA. Mark Stedman moved that we approve the 5-year report now at this meeting and that the email update will serve as the final approval to submit. Ron Mielke seconded. Motion approved.

Next Steps:

Emails will be sent out as soon as pending data is available.

The meeting ended at 3:30 PM