



## GRANT COUNTY VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

### VSP Workgroup Meeting Minutes

January 23, 2017 – 1:00-3:00 PM

Washington State Potato Commission, 108 S Interlake Road, Moses Lake, WA 98837

#### Attendance:

Aaron Golladay (Producer Warden/Farm Bureau), Mike Schlueter (Columbia Basin Walleye Club), Matt Harris (Washington State Potato Commission), Eric Pentico (Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife), Andy McGuire (Adams/Grant WSU Extension), Glenn Burkholder (Warden Producer), John Preston (Warden Producer), Chris Edwards (Hartline Producer), Bill Eller (WA State Conservation Commission-VSP Coordinator), Harold Crose (Grant County Conservation District-Coordinator), Marie Lotz (Grant County Conservation District-Recorder), Ben Floyd (Anchor QEA-Consultant), John Small (Anchor QEA-Consultant)

#### Attendace per Webex:

Jerry Dormaier (Hartline Producer), Dan Dormaier (Hartline Producer), Denver Dorsing, Zach Meyer (Department of Ecology-VSP Coordinator), Vivian Erickson (Anchor QEA-Consultant), Nora Schlenker (Anchor QEA-Consultant),

#### Welcome and Introductions and Meeting Purpose:

Harold called the meeting to order at 1:01 PM. Introductions were made around the room and via telephone. The minutes were presented and emailed from the December 5, 2016 Work Group meeting. Aaron Golladay moved to approve the minutes as sent. Glenn Burkholder seconded. **Motion Carried.**

The draft Work Plan was sent out a few days before this Work Group meeting for review. Ben stated this meeting will be about Work Plan structure, baseline and existing conditions, protection and enhancement strategies, and goals and measureable benchmarks.

#### Work Plan Objectives and Work Plan Overview:

Vivian went over the Work Plan structure volume 1. She stated “we are focusing on a viewer friendly layout” to introduce VSP and address frequently asked questions. Vivian asked other to view the frequently asked questions to see if there is a missing question you may want to add. Regional settings is about the make-up of the county and how the Columbia Basin Project has an influence; The interface of agricultural activities with wetlands and fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas. Volume I also includes a section on agriculture viability and the interviews conducted with local producers on what agricultural viability means to them.

The next section is protection and enhancement strategies. Two parts to this section – 1) examples of conservation practices that are typically applied on agricultural lands and how they protect and in many cases enhance critical areas functions and values in balance with advancing agriculture viability 2) illustrating the importance of accounting for the ammount of conservation practice application that has been implemented through conservation programs and how this data will be used to set goals and benchmarks. Chapter 5 is the goals and objectives of the work plan and a discussion how to develop benchmarks to measure the progress in meeting the goals and the final chapter is implementation. Vivian stated they are working on a self assessment checklist producers can use to see if and how VSP could apply to them.

Ben stated that volume 2 is the supporting documentation that will be used to provide valuable information for planners that will be implementing the VSP plan. Ben stated that volume 2 will be the technical appendices for the implementers showing the strategy, participation benchmark tracking and indicators and adaptive management. For the Technical Panel and government agencies it will have a more detailed baseline condition summary, protection and enhancement strategies, and conservation practice benefits. This volume will also have maps and data. The Work Group will approve both volumes.



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Ben stated the key element in the Work Plan is voluntary approach while protecting critical areas and maintaining agriculture viability. They broke it down to “regional perspective” and “farm perspective.” Regional perspective is the ability of a region to sustain agricultural economy and production over time. Farm perspective is the ability of a farm to meet financial obligations and to make a profit.

### **Volume I – Work Plan Content Review:**

John S. discussed protection and enhancement strategies showing practice examples such as irrigation water management, nutrient management, integrated pest management, cover crop, residue and tillage management, and stock water. He showed each practice agriculture type (irrigated, dryland, rangeland), the description of the practice, if they effect one of the critical areas function mentioned above and the agriculture viability. Harold stated to add cover crop under “irrigated.” Andy stated under residue and tillage management to add “irrigated.” John S. went over the conservation practice, the acres affected, the number of projects and the agriculture activity (irrigated, dryland, range) that was pulled from the Rapid Watershed Assessment. Andy asked if this is just NRCS funding? Vivian answered that it is only NRCS data/acres. John S. said using NRCS data allows us to use information that is recorded for all the key practices applied since 2011.

John S. went over goals and measureable benchmarks. Ben stated they addressed workgroup feedback from the last meeting on water quality not only affected by agriculture. They redirected it to participation on practices that effect critical areas function and values. Ben also stated the group wanted to make sure credit is being taken on conservation practices from 2011 and how to accumulate all the data from the private sector and Resource agencies.

Harold stated that the Grant County Conservation District has made several presentations at grower group annual meetings throughout Grant County. A key message to producers and ag support organizations is how important it is to tell the whole story of precision agriculture and that farming practices in many cases are conservation practices and are protecting critical areas. Harold stated only 10% of producers participate in government sponsored conservation programs, that does not in any way mean that there is not a great deal of conservation work being done by producers through there own initiative or other sources of tech support. The feedback has been positive with some producers stating they are willing to support VSP and tell their stories.

Harold showed the Quincy Community Rapid Watershed Assessment (RWA). Out of the 176,404 acres, 149,943 acres is what we do not have data on (practices being applied). We have 24,697 acres that has data since 2011, or what is being called “baseline condition.” For the recidivism component of the plan, out of the 24,697 acres about 24,450 will stay the same, and will be a focus of our implementation strategy. Out of the 24,697, 247 acres may do enhancement practices. Within the RWA it projects a goal, out of the 149,943 acres, 4,745 acres is what is being plan to treat in the future, or the goal for this community. Within the RWA is the CPPE rating system-5 to +5 with zero being the baseline condition. Harold also stated the RWA is a tool to use when doing a VSP plan for a producer.

John S. Discussion on recidivism rates – basically – how many previously implemented conservation practices are not maintained or are abandoned. This can happen for a number of reasons – change in ownership – contract with government programs expires or not renewed – Harold stated that 50% of land in the CBP can change hands in lease agreements each year – can result in changes in stewardship levels. Ben stated they are trying to track and account for those practices that may be dropped and try to figure out what the percentage of recidivism would be. Harold stated it also depends on the type of practice, such as wildlife practices, which at the time they put in the practice they received funding but over time they have not been maintained often due to costs and time and/or the contract ended. Harold stated that certain programs such as CRP and any others that have a time limit, we need to address. Aaron stated as the government changes programs we should look at it at a yearly basis. Harold stated if something is coming out, what is happening as a result of it coming out, is it degrading, this





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may be the monitoring piece of the plan. Aaron stated if a farm has an overall positive number under the CPPE, then we should report and take credit for VSP as an enhancement. We need to continue to emphasize that until a professional conservation planner completes a resource inventory on a farm we will not know for sure if practices are in place to address critical areas if found on the farm. It would be appropriate to conclude that we will not know until that time. When a plan is done, and there are issues, alternatives will be developed and discussed with the producer. Ben stated if that producer has been doing it the same over the years and voluntarily does the recommendations, it would be an enhancement. Aaron stated that when does enhancement become the new baseline and understand that the baseline is 2011. Ben stated unless the legislatures change the rules of baseline, it will remain the same. Harold tied it all together, the new norm – for the most part modern farming practices are conservation practices - good for the producer and critical area protection. Agriculture needs to tell that story – VSP can help in that effort. Aaron stated that Evan Sheffels stated that Grant County draft plan is the best with Whitman County not far behind which is being done by Anchor also. John S. stated we need to have a future meeting to go over the recidivism rate.

John S. went over surface water quality goals as an example. It is to maintain or improve surface water quality through conservation practices that reduce sediment, nutrients, heat, and other parameters. Harold asked why the term “heat” is being used. Aaron stated on the east side of the mountain water temperature for salmon issues is used, they use ¾ mile tree high along streams to control the temperature, but in Grant County sagebrush is what is native to the area and trees will not grow. John S. stated that every eastside watershed plan uses heat but using the word temperature would make more sense for Grant County area. Harold stated we need to be upfront about not using temperature as a measure in the plan, when the source of decrease in temperature can not be related to just agriculture, there are many other factors that contribute to this. Aaron stated DOE will require temperature to be in the plan. Eric stated we are not measuring temperature but only recording practices being applied, so a decrease or increase in temperature should not affect VSP, nor will anyone notice. Ben stated they are proposing to look at data through DOE as indicators, not that we are going to measure our performance against it, performance is the measures that get implemented and tracked on the ground. He further said they hope to see a trend that the measures are suppose to be affecting water quality, they hope the indicator data backs it up and supports it but won’t try to measure an increase or decrease in water temperature in this case, based upon these measures by setting a number and we also can’t control. It is more a function of the Columbia Basin Project and irrigation districts operate spills and how a farmer operates rill irrigation/sprinkler practices being used that comes off the property. Harold stated our focus is the water quality component that we have control over. John S. went over the goal and benchmark along with recidivism rate on the key practices implemented that contribute to surface water quality reduction of inputs including sediment, nutrients, heat, and other parameters. He showed a slide of surface water quality goal tracking. They take the CPPE scores multiply by the acres into production and see the progress we are making and add the recidivism rate and show the cumulative practice score is well over 20,000, zero is the protection goal anything above is an enhancement. Matt asked if there is any measure capturing surface water quality coming into the system, all we are saying we are leaving it better than the way we received it. Harold stated that is a good point, it varies throughout the system. Ben stated there are multiple points, like water quality there are multiple measuring locations throughout the waterbodies. They will summarize where and what the trends have been over the years and if we affect those trends. Matt asked is that water coming in or is that water we are utilizing, such as at Banks Lake what is the quality. Ben stated that the Bureau of Reclamation has a monitoring network that they maintain that shows water quality in the whole system, and areas throughout the system, they will summarize how to track this information and add to volume 2. Ben stated we only want to be responsible for what the current condition is in the system. Aaron asked how many man-made waterways are in Grant County? Ben stated Rock Ford Creek, Crab Creek, Lind Coulee and Wilson might be natural. John S. thinks in Grant County it is important not to track water quality independent of hydrology and habitat function. He went on to say that while the water in the project is warmer and has nutrients but it has gone through miles of streams, wetlands, and crops grown along the way. Ben stated Craig Simpson will be reviewing this information and stated that the Bureau has been keeping track of the water temperatures. Harold stated that he believes that the conversion from rill to sprinkler has improved over time, and return flow and tail water has





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changed. Ben stated that Dave Sullivan has stated there is really good quality water at Grand Coulee and there is good water quality that is still excellent at the discharge into the Columbia River.

John S. went over their adaptive management figure. It walks through 2017 Work Plan that will - establish 2011 baseline - develop goals - establish benchmarks, indicators, and implementation. Then Subsequent Years on - implement work plan – monitor benchmarks and indicators – evaluate benchmarks and indicators – adjust work plan as needed. Aaron asked if we have to establish goals for each of our communities or as Grant County as a whole. John S. state the county as a whole. Harold stated by looking at communitites we can specify practices being applied and direct programs and technical assistance to those resource concerns but the overall goal is the county and the implementation phase will be by community. Aaron stated he would be concerned about setting a goal by community if, as an example, the government funding will not help one community to help implement practices then those practices may not be used and then we fail. Harold stated the goal takes in many factors, such as administration, funding, etc, and the current goals are set by future NRCS contracts and this does not include what the private sector is doing without funding. John S. stated they might add another – market conditions and funding. Ben stated we only have to show protection and we show enhancements this will help balance it.

### **Roundtable Discussions:**

Ben asked group to review and provide comments on the plan – We need to place a hight priority on writing a plan that is easily understood and implementable. John S. stated that the baseline and existing conditions in Chapter 4 – protection and enhancement strategies are still being developed.

Make all comments and feedback to Marie Lotz by February 17<sup>th</sup>. The Plan and Comment Sheet will be on the Grant County Conservation Distirct website at [columbiabasinnds.org](http://columbiabasinnds.org).

Bill stated that counties will not be able to move funds forward so use the money. The Conservation Commission is in the process of requesting the next cycle of funding from the state, which the legislatures understand that the next two fiscal years do not match the timeline in the VSP statute. He also said if they chose not to fund 17-19 then the Conservation Commission will have to determine if Counties are adequately funded, then everyone will have to chose from the 4 options in the statue and VSP will cease due to lack of funding. Ben asked if there is an opportunity like Grant County Conservation District who is almost done with the development of the plan to request more funding if some other counties return funds. Bill said he will find out if this would be possible.

Andy stated the cover crop is under estimated and he may have a 2012 figure for all the of irrigated Columbia Basin not just Grant County. Harold stated that each community was broken down by crop type and what the next crop would be and based on that information we could revisit the cover crops. Glenn asked where the crop data was obtained. Harold stated from Department of Agriculture. Glenn stated he does not report his crop information to them so there is missing data. Harold stated that by using their information, it is the best data out there and we know that it is not 100% of the information in Grant County. Harold said that cover crops can be difficult to track – and there is sketchy reporting criteria – Department of Ag is looking in to it.

Harold stated that the Grant County Conservation District has had their first meeting with the Direct Seed Association about starting the process for irrigated agriculture Farmed Smart for Washington State and starting to get data. VSP and irrigated Farmed Smart will be a package deal along with safe harbor and anyone who would like to be involved. Ben asked if the current draft plan has enough information on Farmed Smart. Harold stated he will take a look at it and to make sure you have it in the Whitman County plan also. Matt asked if Farmed Smart is about tillage practices. Harold stated it is about animal, plants, soil, water, air, all the factors into conservation planning. Matt asked with it going through the Direct Seed Association, does it have to do with Direct Seed in irrigated agriculture. Harold stated it does not, we are working with them on their template and the agencies they worked with to get this approved Aaron stated he sees VSP and Farmed Smart working together to gather the





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information needed for VSP and a safe harbor certification through Farmed Smart. Harold stated the nice part is this is all voluntary.

Harold wanted the group to know that Anchor did an outstanding job on creating the VSP Plan for Grant County. Ben let the group know that Grant County Conservation District staff has been great to work and give direction and it is a team effort. Aaron stated that Evan Sheffels statement to him was he wishes that the Grant County plan was the first to be presented to the State Technical Panel. John S. stated Anchor is going back to the finish their presentation to the Technical Panel about recidivism rates and tracking and will bring back to the group their feedback. Harold stated he would like to be first. Aaron asked if this plan is approved can other counties use it. Ben stated yes they can. Eric said he goes back to physical character effects and have a more clear picture this meeting and wondering how the CPPE is verified and is correct. Harold stated to go to the NRCS site and see how they came up with this rating system that was developed nationally.

### **Next Steps:**

The next Work Group meeting will be held February 27, 2017, 1:00-3:00 PM at the Washington State Potato Commission. The meeting adjourned at 3:02 PM.

The next meeting will be February 27, 2017 and March 27, 2017 to review and correct the draft plan

