

## **Pend Oreille County Voluntary Stewardship Program**

### **Working Group Meeting Summary**

**April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

On Thursday April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016 the Pend Oreille County Community Development Department hosted the third in a series of monthly meetings in support of the County's Voluntary Stewardship Program. The following is a brief summary of the meeting.

#### **Participants:**

Charlotte Yergens, land owner, Cusick Town Clerk  
Sharon Sorby, Selkirk Conservation Alliance and County Weed Board  
Tom Eagle, Ag Producer/Land Owner  
Larry Cordes Ag Producer/Land Owner  
Sandy Dotts, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)  
Tim Lasier, Selkirk Conservation Alliance  
Michelle Masuen, Pend Oreille Conservation District  
Mark Simpson, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)  
George Stuvenga, Ag producer/Land Owner  
Gregg Dohrn, County Planning Consultant  
Mike Lithgow, Community Development Director  
Andy Huddleston, Assistant Planner  
Cesar Stoddard, County Planner/GIS Technician  
Terri Ann Hedtke, administrative assistant

#### **Meeting Summary**

Gregg Dohrn, County Planning Consultant began the meeting and called for introductions. The purpose of these meetings is to explore the feasibility of establishing a Voluntary Stewardship Program in Pend Oreille County. The agenda will include additional maps and water quality data compiled by the Tribe, the PUD and other agencies. Also additional conservation programs available to farmers in the area.

The next meeting of the VSP Work Group is scheduled for May 26<sup>th</sup>. In order to accommodate the summer haying season, subsequent meetings would resume the fourth week in August.

Briefly stated, Pend Oreille County is charged under state law to protect agricultural lands and agricultural activities, as well as environmentally sensitive areas, which include wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, priority habitats, steep slopes/unstable lands and frequently flooded areas. Some people perceive these two goals as in possible conflict. The state legislature adopted the Voluntary

Stewardship Program to address these goals with local input. It is the goal of this legislation to consult with the environmental community, agricultural community and the tribes to create a voluntary strategy and a local plan to satisfy the Conservation Service, Department of Commerce, the Department of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife. An acceptable local plan would have the added benefit of exempting agricultural activities from compliance with the Washington State Growth Management Act. Whether or not this is desirable is still a question to be answered through this information gathering phase. All Eastern Washington counties are progressing through a similar process, with Thurston and Chelan Counties taking the lead. Many Western Washington counties are also in the process, with some counties choosing not to participate in the Voluntary Stewardship Program.

Following this in-depth re-cap of the Voluntary Stewardship Program, for the benefit of those audience members not previously in attendance, Cesar Stoddard presented two maps to help answer questions re: the location of environmentally sensitive areas and their condition as well as agricultural sites and the challenges they currently face. The two new maps were titled 'Selected habitat areas' and '303d—impaired waterbodies.' Impaired waters, or polluted waters are to be 'brought back to a fishable, clean water source.' The data set, from the Department of Ecology, is from 2012. The Department of Ecology is in the process of updating this information. The maps identified the three Water Resource Inventory Area's (WRIA's) 62, 57 & 55. Cesar explained the 'data gathering' aspect of this stage of the process. Bull Trout, Cutthroat and Riparian areas were identified. [These maps will be available through the Voluntary Stewardship Program web site] Further clarification on the process of gathering the agricultural parcels with input from the Assessor's Office data. The goal is for no net loss of ecological function. The riparian areas are defined per WDFW maps. Sandy Dotts may have an updated map. Questions on this presentation:

What was the methodology and base level for determining 303d list?

Could mining activities be linked to water quality?

Is there any source information for fecal coliform?

What constitutes 'turbidity?'

What impact do forest practices have on water quality and riparian vegetation?

Could weather statistics be compiled and correlated into the data?

How does the operation of the dam figure into water quality?

What percentage, if any, of agricultural activities impact water quality?

Gregg Dohrn pointed out this is a mapping exercise, the information may or may not be helpful. It will be important going forward to draw the right conclusions and be careful of 'connecting the dots.'

The County website [www.pendoreilleco.org](http://www.pendoreilleco.org) see the Community Development pages, look for Voluntary Stewardship Program.

The Tribe and PUD have performed data collection. The Tribe is testing less frequently as there is little change. The Tribe notes both historic and current forest practices contribute to an increase in water temperature and a decrease in dissolved oxygen. Mike shared a handout, available on line.

The simplest way to identify agricultural operations is by use of the Assessor's taxing data base. This method is not perfect and many smaller operations and those choosing not to participate in the open space or farming programs will not be captured. Additionally, as the Assessor's Office 'cleans up' their data, parcels are being culled that no longer qualify. The Department of Agriculture census can be utilized. Again, not a perfect or accurate method. Roughly 280 farms have been identified. Hay and cattle are the main agricultural products produced by farms in Pend Oreille County.

Andy Huddleston next discussed programs available to sustain and promote agriculture. The Conservation District channels some programs/funding from Department of Ecology, Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) and also partners with the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS). To develop a good plan, Andy suggested a round table discussion, identifying what works, what doesn't work and why. Perhaps there are little known programs that simply need more exposure. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) pass-through 319 monies, as an example. WSCC and NRCS offer matching funds. The required monitoring of Farm Stewardship Plans in Wetland Reserve Programs (WRP) was mentioned. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) checks for compliance as required by law. A facet of the Voluntary Stewardship Program is monitoring of Farm Stewardship plans and the data already collected could prove useful. Wetland Reserve Easement Programs (WREP's) offer a compatible use agreement component to allow for grazing and haying. As of 2014, WREP's are either 30 year or permanent. A new plan allows grazing rights with a reduction in payment. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a point system. Currently no Pend Oreille farms are in CRP. Further discussion related to the point system functionality and further requirements for qualifying. Budgeting vs policy. Could any of the programs offer more attractive incentives? Currently how many successful Conservation easements are there? At present five agriculture producers are either in WRP or have applied for WRP.

The next meeting will be May 26<sup>th</sup>.