

Pend Oreille County Voluntary Stewardship Program

Working Group Meeting Summary

May 26th, 2016

On Thursday May 26th, 2016 the Pend Oreille County Community Development Department hosted the fourth 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:

Travis Hanson, Ag Producer/Land Owner

Larry Cordes, Ag Producer/Land Owner

Steve Wilson, Ag Producer/Land Owner

George Stuvenga, Ag Producer/Land Owner

David Marcell, Pend Oreille Conservation District

Tim Laysen, Selkirk Conservation Alliance

Ron Meyer, Ag Producer/Land Owner

Michelle Masuen, Pend Oreille Conservation District

Sharon Sorby, Selkirk Conservation Alliance and County Weed Board

Bill Eller, WA State Conservation Commission (WACC) /Voluntary Stewardship Program coordinator

Gregg Dohrn, County Planning Consultant

Mike Lithgow, Community Development Director

Cesar Stoddard, County Planner/GIS Technician

Terri Ann Hedtke, administrative assistant

Meeting Summary:

Bill Eller presented a Power Point Presentation, which highlighted some of the events which led to the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP). The purpose of VSP being to protect and enhance the environment while maintaining and improving agricultural opportunities. It was further noted many counties exempted agriculture from the Critical Areas Ordinance. Critical Areas are defined by Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 36.70-A and Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 365-190 as:

Wetlands

Aquifers

Fish and wildlife habitat

Frequently flooded areas

Areas of geological hazard

Agricultural activities are also defined through RCW 90.58.065 (2)(a). Currently 27 of Washington State's 39 counties are participating in the VSP. The Working Groups formed to develop and monitor Voluntary Stewardship plans represent a broad spectrum of stakeholders including tribal representation, local agricultural producers, land owners, and conservation groups. The technical panel includes Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Department of Agriculture, Department of Ecology and WSCC. Mr. Eller further identified programs currently in use:

CREP Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

EQIP Environmental Quality Incentive Program

CSP Conservation Stewardship Program

ACEP Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

and spoke to the importance leveraging existing resources to save money and time, creating co-operatives and partnerships to improve compliance and the use of voluntary practices as a primary method. Planning with VSP & the Growth Management Act (GMA) demonstrate a willingness to protect.

Director Lithgow spoke to the available programs, with a view to what is and is not currently working, i.e. Grassland Reserves.

Consultant Dohrn stated the goal is to reduce thereby creating a clear and simple explanation.

Chelan County's VSP was discussed, Director Lithgow noted Sections 7 & 8 seem crucial. Cost is a concern as well as to measure 'something' meaningful. It is possible the dams and timber harvest have more of an impact than haying.

Technician Stoddard presented maps.

Member comments addressed:

Laws which force farmers out of business

Hay fields are minimally tilled, every 10 – 15 years

One rule fits most doesn't fit for Pend Oreille County

4-5 thousand agricultural acres have been lost

Pend Oreille County once boasted 50 dairy farms, none exist currently

If land is under production, noxious weeds are addressed

Primary and secondary farmers; to make a viable living 500 acres with cattle, 800 acres without

The next meeting of the Working Group will be the fourth Thursday in August, to accommodate haying season. A field trip was proposed with Kaltran to provide bus service.

The meeting adjourned at 6:50pm.

