

**Pend Oreille County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Meeting # 1 – January 27th, 2016**

In attendance: Tim Layser (Conservation – Selkirk Conservation Alliance), John Kroch (agriculture), Charlotte Yergans (agriculture), George Stuvenga (agriculture), John Galley (agriculture), Mark Simpson (NRCS), Steve Wilson, Sharon Sorby (Weed Board), Ron Meyer, Amanda Parrish (Conservation – Lands Council), Karen Skoog (County Commissioner), Mike Lithgow (Community Development Director), Gregg Dohrn (Facilitator), Cesar Stoddard (Community Development Staff)

- Introductions
- Dohrn poses the questions to the group as to whether we can both protect Ag and Critical Areas. That is essentially what the State has asked us to do with VSP.
- The group's mission is to come up with a work plan by June 30th, 2017
- Q from Galley (Ag): Didn't the County opt out of this process?
 - A: No the County opted into the VSP in 2012. The confusion most likely stemmed from the county's recent consideration of the option offered by the state for a few counties to plan under Growth Management to a lesser degree than full Growth Management. No matter the level of Growth Management, all counties must update their critical areas ordinances.
- Q from Dohrn (Facilitator) to the group: What is stopping the Ag operators from doing what they need to do?
 - General consensus: There is not a lot stopping farmers from doing what they need to do right now. However, there seems to be great concern about future regulation.
- Q from Charlotte (Ag): What is the definition of critical areas?
 - A: Geologically hazardous areas, frequently flooded areas, wildlife habitats, wetlands, aquifer recharge areas. For our purposes, while we have an obligation to protect all critical areas, our main focus will be primarily on wetlands, waterbodies, and habitat.
 - Dohrn (Facilitator) also defines Ag lands. It is based on Assessor's land classification and compares it to Thurston County's which has a much more comprehensive definition.
- Q from Simpson (NRCS): What is our definition of protection?
 - A: Our obligation is to set benchmarks and protect critical areas as they are, while encouraging enhancement (but enhancement is not required)
- Q from Charlotte (Ag): What are the benchmarks?
 - A: It is up to the group to decide what the bench marks are. Typically water quality is used.
- Statement from Galley (Ag) where he expresses that in Pend Oreille County we are improving what little agriculture that we have. He expressed worry about what the state has coming down the pike (as far as regulation) could threaten the viability of agriculture.
 - Simpson (NRCS) counters that VSP could be a way to avoid the kind of legislation that is more common in Western Washington.
- Q from Charlotte (Ag): What will our baseline conditions be based on?
 - A: Best available science, must be basis for our conditions, cannot just make it up
 - A: We will try not create cost and burden for the County. We will try to use integrate monitoring that is already taking place.
- POC staff explain the map at the front of the room that shows the location of Ag lands as well as WRIA boundaries. There is a tabular breakdown of acreage of farmland by WRIA (62,55,57)
- There was some group comments and discussion on how process similar to the VSP seem to come up somewhat frequently and state projects like these seem cyclical. The sentiment was

expressed that some of the work group members have even been on groups trying to accomplish similar tasks as the VSP. Questions arose about what happened to the work that went into a 1990 committee focused on water quality (staff members believe that they were referring to a sub-committee relating to GMA and comprehensive plans) and the watershed planning done for the WRIA (watershed resource inventory area) of Pend Oreille County.

- Dohrn (Facilitator) responds: We will build upon past efforts and if we find that we don't need it (VSP), then we don't have to do it. However we can use all the data and work from past and current efforts to assist us with this process.
- Q from Simpson (NRCS): Has anyone identified which critical areas are at risk?
 - A: Not that the staff was aware of. Identifying which critical areas are at risk will be part of our process of creating a work plan.
 - We must have a way to objectively measure which critical areas at risk because there will be difference of opinion.
- Group discussion on the Department of Ecology's involvement
 - Question and discussion on whether DOE will honor the County's plan
 - A: DOE must still enforce clean water standards and other legislation, their involvement in this process is at the state level. Theoretically they should.
 - Experiences and stories of personal and interactions with the DOE were told by some members of the group (mostly negative)
 - Staff explained that Ecology will sit on the SCC's technical committee which is responsible for approving the work plans.
 - Group member brought up example of DOE taking action against a farmer in Pomeroy and in Spokane County (POC staff said they do some research to find information)
- Group discussion on why the state is focusing on agriculture being the culprit of pollution in Washington state
 - Discussion on different possible sources of pollution. Wildlife given as an example.
- Q from Simpson (NRCS): Could you give an outline of what we plan to accomplish?
Answers are the following:
 - What critical areas do we need to protect
 - What farms do we need to maintain
 - How are we going to determine if we are protecting and maintaining critical areas and farmland
 - Answer how VSP is a better option than continuing with a traditional regulatory GMA approach.
- Statement from group that monitoring will cost the county significant amount of money.
 - Moving forward we will attempt to utilize groups already collecting data from other agencies and departments.
- Request for maps of agriculture and critical areas intersection as well as maps that visualize past WRIA and SMP information.
- Group comments on how they would like to see this remain a positive process and that emphasis of this project is voluntary. Must respect farmers management practices even if different than your own
- Group discusses scenarios where the State Technical Committee denies the Work Plan
 - The Work Group can accept the requested changes or discontinue with VSP or come up with their own revisions and submit it again.
- Q from Dohrn (Facilitator): What are the issues affecting farmers in Pend Oreille County today?
Answers from the group are the following:

- Increased wildlife – Elk, deer, cougars, wolves, and beavers.
- Uncertain regulatory future – Ag operators worry about increased legislation and selling land becomes an enticing option
- Bonneville Power Administration and Kalispel Tribe buying prime farmland for conservation.
- Cultural resource areas
- Lack of interest from younger generations to continue farming.
- Lack of marketing and adaptation to current trends in agriculture and food
- Allotment on Forest Service land changing
- Absentee land owners
- Possible climate change policy.
- Perception vs reality.
- Parrish (Lands Council) gives statement of what she hopes to see come from this process. The hope is that VSP will allow for more flexibility and less strict rigidity to allow for more practical applications for conservation projects.
 - Conservation projects have strict application of rules that can't always be followed.
Example if a grantor of funds calls for 50 ft buffer on both sides of stream but perhaps land owner only has 30 ft on border side of his property.
- Scheduling, logistics, and expectations for next meeting.