



SKAGIT COUNTY
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
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**Skagit Voluntary Stewardship Program
Watershed Advisory Group**
March 10th, 2025, 8:00-10:00 am

Meeting Notes

Watershed Group Members in attendance: Emmett Wild, Jeff McGowan, Brian Lipscomb, Shannon Rupert, Maggie Taylor

Other attendees:

Skagit County: Taylor Scott, Jenn Johnson, Emily Derenne
Skagit Conservation District (SCD): Ryan Gelwicks

Summary of the outcome:

Decisions made or postponed:

- Agenda: Brian Lipscomb moved to approve the minutes; Jeff McGowan seconded. Agenda was unanimously approved.
- Minutes: Maggie Taylor moved to approve the minutes; Jeff McGowan gave a second. Minutes were unanimously approved.
- The group approved the allocation of \$43,350 to Skagit Conservation District for the Peachy Keen Heavy Use Area Project.
- The group approved the allocation of \$3,750 to Skagit Conservation District for the Higgins Slough Riparian Enhancement Project.
- The group approved the allocation of \$5,500 to Skagit Conservation District for a Blanken Cost Increase.

Outreach & Education

- Taylor shared the updated flyer and asked the group to provide feedback
 - Jeff asked if VSP is reducing farmland conversion. Jeff suggests this is more about CAO. Taylor stated that this is in the Work Plan and sees it as VSP is helping farmers keep farming by funding voluntary projects and that's the point of VSP.
 - Brian asked about how SCL impacts farmland conversion
 - Shannon Rupert – Maybe we just remove the farmland conversion part to be clearer for the flyer.
 - Jeff – Looks like the biennium funded the projects... he has provided some written comments.
- Taylor will share flyer via email link to Canva and PDF for printing, please provide comments by March 24th.

Monitoring Plan & Reporting

- Taylor reported doing her background reading for the 2-year report. She shared general questions we should be answering in these reports. Taylor is attending tech panel meetings monthly to learn more. There is no standard on how the 2-year report should look and does not need approval from WSCC. The 5-year report which is due in January 2026 is more robust and does need approval from the Tech Panel.

- Taylor will request feedback on the 2-year report from WSCC staff and Tech Panel
- Taylor will share previous 2-year reports via email with WAG members.
- The first draft of the 2-year report will be ready for the May meeting to have a final review at the July meeting and ready to submit by August 30, 2025.
- Tech panel visit is scheduled for June 24th, 2025.

Criteria Evaluation

- Taylor ranked two previous projects to see how our scoring criteria could work. Frisbee Riparian Enhancement and Blanken Waste Transfer were both put through the scoring process. Taylor is interested in cleaning up the criteria and making some questions clearer and will have a final draft by next meeting for review.
- Water Quality Improvement could come from an NRCS spreadsheet where BMPs are given a number 0-5 according to their benefit to water quality.
 - o Maggie suggested included links that could pull numbers directly
- Some members feel this would be a great way for proponents to see if their project would be a good fit for VSP and would like them to fill it out prior to applying
 - o Emmett stated that funding does not include time to fill out this scoring sheet so their staff time to complete would be “volunteer”.
- Brian says he would like some additional questions and details.
- The original intent of the criteria would be to give sponsors an idea if their project would be funded.
 - o Emmett requests to have the NO-GO removed and all projects go to WAG.

VSP workflow clarification: All VSP projects must be approved by the Work Group, or they will not receive funding from WSCC.

Projects Updates & Budget Review

Dorsey –Weed Control Spring 2025
 Benson – Seeding and possible herbicide control in Spring 2025
 Maxwell – Complete by April 1st
 Lewis – Weed Control Spring 2025
 Minkler – Completed
 Shea – Complete by April 1st
 Blanken Waste Transfer– Project canceled
 Blanken Calf Slap – Requesting more funds, not started
 Frisbee – Weed Control Spring 2025
 Stewart – Weed Control Spring 2025
 SRM – Weed Control Spring 2025
 Iaccino – Weed Control Spring 2025
 Auriemma – Completed
 Fitzgerald – Completed
 Curry – Completed
 Franklin – Completed
 Maykut – Awaiting Permits
 Clear Valley – Complete by April 1st
 Steere Hedgerow: Awaiting WSCC Contract

Projects requesting funding:

Boone Manure Lagoon Decommission (Skagit Conservation District)– Requesting \$50,000 for a 1.1-million-gallon manure lagoon decommissioning. Sits near Hill Ditch and Carpenter Creek. The farmer has moved to East side. Transitioning from cattle to crops. Working with NRCS to get designs and permitting. They are planning to complete by June 2025. Includes soil sampling, excavator rental. Site will be graded with grass seed planted. Jeff asked that SCD consider trees and Emmett said he's open to that but can't do that with this funding.

Discussion:

- Shannon – is there a code for the owner to clean up their own problem?
- Emmett – Many of these existing before ownership and considered an asset. Want to close ones not in use.
- Shannon – but if it is valuable why are we decommissioning it? Also wants to know why the farmer isn't responsible for this. Her experience comes from a place where the farmer had to manage this. Feels strongly we are paying to correct a past discretion. She feels strongly it's a good project but wants people to be responsible for their actions and feels a little uneasy about VSP paying for what she feels should be addressed by the landowner.
- Emmett – With no livestock and no intent that means no maintenance and an opportunity for failure. Farmer is trying to be proactive and do the right thing. There is no requirement for them to decommission. Farmer is voluntarily offering to correctly manage the lagoon and close it down.
- Jeff wants to know what funding is left. We can't answer that now.
- Brian asked about age of the lagoon – sometime in the 1980s. Also mentioned that the landowner should contribute something.
- Emmett – they will not contribute, so the project will be dead without VSP funding.
- Ryan – A bonus to using state funding ensures that the project will have to meet specific requirements for construction.
- Jeff – Perhaps some goodwill could come that includes planting along the ditch/Carpenter Creek.
- Maggie – Question about returning funds to the state? Does that change the vote?
- Brian – No. I like returning funds.

*Clarification – This does not include labor. This only includes material costs.

VOTING

Jeff and Maggie – Yes

Brian and Shannon – No

Emmett – Conflicted – no vote.

*Status quo goes forward – no vote holds.

Peachy Keen Heavy Use Area (Skagit Conservation District): Heavy Use Area. Micro-dairy originally but they are expanding their cattle herd so can no longer confine the cattle appropriately. Funds a 3700 sq foot heavy use area. This will get them to what they need but not provide additional space for her to take on new cattle, which they plan to cap at 20 cattle.

Group Discussion:

- Brian- 6" seems thick, how does she manage the manure now?
 - o Ryan- this is NRCS practice standard, built to sustain a tractor for scraping. They currently export their manure off site
- Shannon- Was always told 1 acre per animal? Is the density of animals at this site appropriate?
 - o Emmett- This dairy is currently regulated and is required to have a WA Dairy Plan
- Shannon- How much runoff do they have? Brought up the benefit vs personal responsibility
- Shannon- Asked if there are other programs for people who want to do this?
- Shannon- Asked if this project is part of their livelihood, should they be getting gains?

- Taylor to follow up next meeting to reach an understanding about what voluntary stewardship is
- Emmett- Reiterated the importance of HUA as the CD does not recommend any animals to over winter on pasture

VOTING

Brian, Jeff, Maggie- Yes

Shannon- Abstain

Emmett- Conflicted, no vote

Higgins Slough - Port project in partnership on Viva Farms. Port is matching the project 50%. Maintenance of past project.

Group Discussion:

- Brian – Likes the port match
- Shannon – me too.

VOTING

Unanimous Yes from voting members

Emmett – Conflicted – no vote.

Blanken Waste Transfer (Skagit Conservation District) - Lagoon cannot move forward due to missed timeline. Returning the \$15k. Calf slab (70' x 60') needs \$21k. So total new ask would be \$6k ish. SCD has match funding for the project. Both projects were previously approved by WAG.

Discussion:

Jeff – Was calf slab already funded?

Emmett – Yes. Returning lagoon and asking for additional funding for calf slab but both were previously approved.

Shannon – Ok. This happens. Costs just keep going up.

VOTING

Unanimous Yes from voting members

Emmett – Conflicted – no vote

Open Discussion

Jeff wanted to talk about perception of returning funds. Brian and Shannon think it looks good to return funds. Jeff thinks it looks bad.

Shannon – Wants a better budget break-down for the manure storage. Provide his in-kind for match.

Emmett – this is a projection. NRCS is designing the lagoon. Engineering is being done in-kind. No TA request either. SCD can document their time as cost share.

Taylor will schedule a special meeting to review the Boone Manure Lagoon once we have more information on cost breakdown.

Group adjourned at 10:05am

Action Items:

- Taylor will send minutes and updated documents for the group's review.
- Taylor will continue to work with Tech Panel to schedule June 24th visit.