



# SKAGIT COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-5625  
(360) 416-1400

## **Skagit Voluntary Stewardship Program Watershed Advisory Group**

*April 2nd, 2025, 8:00-10:00 am*

### **Meeting Notes**

**Watershed Group Members in attendance:** Emmett Wild, Terry Sapp, Brian Lipscomb, Mikala Staples-Hughes, Maggie Taylor, Bill Dewey

### **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; Terry Sapp seconded. Agenda was unanimously approved.
- Minutes: Brian Lipscomb moved to approve the minutes; Mikala gave a second. Minutes were unanimously approved. Terry and Bill abstained.
- The group approved the allocation of \$3,300 to Skagit Conservation District for the Hite Herbaceous Weed Control Project
- The group approved the allocation of \$6,600 to Skagit Conservation District for the Kennedy Heavy Use Area Project.
- The group approved the allocation of \$13,200 to Skagit Conservation District for the Muller Waste Management Project
- The group approved the allocation of \$13,200 to Skagit Conservation District for the Small Waste Management Project
- The group approved the cost increase of \$12,000 to Natural Resource Stewardship Program for the Clear Valley Project

### **Budget**

- Jenn shared most up to date budget
  - All funds are currently allocated, but the budget shows that some large sums will be returned and unused, the VSP team would like to reallocate those funds to new projects
    - Taylor and team are working to return funds.
    - Taylor and team are working with WSCC staff to complete returned funds.

### **New Projects**

- Taylor has run projects through the ranking scoresheet, the workgroup will give final approval and rank in priority if needed.

*Projects requesting funding:*

Hite Herbaceous Weed Control (Skagit Conservation District)– Requesting \$3,300 for a mechanical weed control, fence removal, and landowner funded planting. Site is located on Ag-NRL in the Samish along colony creek, but area of planting is near road running along a waterway that leads into Colony. Project scored 26 on current ranking scoresheet.

Discussion:

- Do we think they will replant?
  - Yes
- But not removed invasives?
  - Elderly and need assistance
- How is hobby farm determined?
  - Will look up code to confirm
  - If it is not their commercial income, but if it is work on the side
  - Ties to ag viability ranking criteria
  - Terry – language is loose and needs to be corrected. Using ‘hobby farm’ term loosely tends to build a history/record. Can be dangerous.
  - Good point – will work on using more appropriate terms.

Emmett – delegate further inspection of this and move on.

- What to do with land afterward?
  - Will remove fence because it is a barrier to county maintaining ditch.
- Ditch the property boundary?
  - Most likely, and along the ROW
- Bill: Support project but not use of herbicides
  - SCD confirmed plan is to use only mechanical treatment
- Another project similar that was approved for a larger amount.
- SCD secured a 25% match

#### VOTING

Unanimous Yes from voting members

Emmett – Conflicted – no vote.

Kennedy Heavy Use Area (Skagit Conservation District): Heavy Use Area. Reinforce livestock area along wiseman creek. \$4,500 with landowner match. This is a very muddy area and landowners are struggling with it, they do their own mitigation along the north barrier with other plantings. Need help with gravel costs to complete HUA. This project scored a 27 on the ranking scoresheet.

Group Discussion:

- Next to a wetland, priority area, good outreach opportunity, little maintenance potential
- SCD secured 25% match

#### VOTING

Unanimous Yes from voting members

Emmett- Conflicted, no vote

Clear Valley Cost Increase (Natural Resource Stewardship Program) – Increasing plant density and more site prep was needed, asking for \$12,000.

Group Discussion:

- Already gave \$92,000

- Passed and reviewed at previous meetings

## VOTING

Unanimous Yes from voting members

Muller & Small (Skagit Conservation District) – Waste Management for two neighboring landowners with horses, zoned urban reserve residential but in the Nookachamps priority area. Projects scored 30 points on the ranking scoresheet.

### Discussion:

- How much manure per horse/day?
  - o 50 lbs/day
- Scored 30 since water quality is high ranking, it is also located in the TMDL area.
- Terry – appreciate scoring but concerned spending \$13,200 on 3 horses, would like to comment on overall value.
- Bill – appreciate the LiDAR image.
- Unnamed creek flowing into Nookachamps (maybe Gribble Creek)
- Maggie – what is the fish species? In watershed or adjacent to property?
  - o Does seem like it is a long way from the water body and that 3 horses are contributing to the Nookachamps.
  - o Discussion on water flowing and our SC SCMP sampling sites.
- Do they have a farm plan?
  - o Not currently, but this project will hopefully get them interested in doing a plan.
  - o Emmett: hard in the context of VSP since it takes a bit of staff time that couldn't be funded through VSP.
  - o When PIC started, they tried to require a farm plan but since the CD is smaller it became a bottle neck because there wasn't capacity to get them all done.
  - o WAG has also indicated a preference for riparian plantings, but if we don't need a farm plan for that then the nexus is more tenuous.
  - o Terry: concern is pollution to water ways?
    - Yes, manure storage is reducing sediment runoff
    - How many other kinds of sources of livestock might be part of the issue?
      - Probably many, but good to show their neighbor is another party interested in doing a similar project for 4 horses.
  - o SCD also secured a 25% match
  - o Terry: does this area have other sources of pollution?
    - Yes, lots of work on Gribble Creek, TMDL area, Nookachamps priority area.
    - Emmett: have worked with many landowners in the past, and new ones coming forward for work. Historically lower engagement from landowners so these projects good to get VSP and County work more visible.
    - Reconnected with CD through an outreach event.
    - Ryan: word of mouth spreads fast – out at Muller and within 2 days Small had reached out after conversation with neighbor

## VOTING

Unanimous Yes from voting members

Emmett – Conflicted – no vote

Cameron Hedgerow (Skagit Conservation District) – Hedgerow along wetland near Skiyou Slough. \$3,300 for a pollinator hedgerow planting and wind break for healthier pastures. Scored 27 points in the ranking scoresheet.

Discussion:

- Terry: lives along Skiyou Slough, trying to orient
- Plant a hedgerow to encourage pollinators? Is that our job?
  - Taylor: in 5-year report DFW asked us to think about other species to consider beyond fish that we should be considering.
  - Terry: This is not wetland and would be willing to walk the property since he lives there.
  - Emmett: said quite a bit of wetland on NW side of property.
    - DFW maps indicate that this is a wetland
  - Fish points since it is close to Skiyou Slough, VSP adjacent and priority area, shovel ready, maintenance, and outreach opportunities.
- Person has offered to host a farm tour to highlight BMPs with past projects with SCD – 4 major livestock management past projects. Horses and misc. animals.
- Terry – his farm is in the picture, hard to swallow spending money on this kind of activity for species unnamed in water courses that aren't very close. Oppose project.
- Emmett – trying to understand what specifically as it relates to policy and scoring doesn't fit well?
  - Production type?
    - Recreational
    - But it is ag viability?
- This ranking criteria meant to help guide sponsors, so good to hear us talking through it – just a way to start discussion and hit on key discussion points. Really appreciate the feedback and definitely areas to clarify.
- Emmett: should we be helping horse farmers comment, or comments on hobby farm designation – may be contradicting ourselves. Need to look at projects to help people be the best farmers they can be.
- Emily: the hope of the ranking form was to make it more uniform so it doesn't matter who is in the room, but a project is ranked evenly meeting to meeting.
- Mikala: a component of ag viability? It is challenging to consider horses as agriculture – doesn't compute in her mind. Shannon actually opposed the last project on horses.
  - Emily: clarifying question – should those projects then go under CA protection, or how would they fit into the ranking sheet.
  - Taylor: sounds like we may want to separate those two (ag = food vs non-ag = horses).
  - Emmett: would like further clarification, not sure we will clarify it all today.
  - Maggie: interesting discussion, and know horses can have a huge WQ implications so see benefits in supporting manure management BMPs. Also seeing horses in areas where they can't properly steward the land and maybe shouldn't have horses. Question – are WQ benefits larger than supporting these areas that shouldn't have horses? Just acknowledge they'll have the animals regardless and so it is just trying to help with BMPs.

- Bill seconds this comment
- Emily: this proposed project is about pollinators not the horses. Does the WAG support the planting project for pollinators.
- Brian: but where do the fish fall in?
  - Jenn: Should update ranking sheet to make sure fish points are much more adjacent to property.
- Terry: Past example of person indicating in Samish the greatest harm to WQ is dogs.

#### VOTING

No motion to approve

Does not pass

#### **Open Discussion**

Lost quorum at 9:03am

Emily: Would it be helpful to send projects ahead of time and have members rank, and then come together and average.

Jenn: the process will have to be much more structured.

Bill: I think it is fair to have further discussion, still trying to dial it in and make changes. Don't freak out yet.

Terry: well said Bill

Bill moves to adjourn at 9:08am (but no quorum)