

Voluntary Stewardship Program

Watershed Advisory Group Meeting

Nov 13, 2023

Meeting Notes

General

- Watershed Advisory Group on MS Teams

Went over where some of the documents are kept. Of note: Work plan, 2 and 5 year reports, meeting presentations, meeting agendas.

- Meeting frequency (monitoring subcommittee?)

For now we will meet every 2 months unless there are no new topics or projects, in which case we would cancel. May need to meet more frequently if project decisions are needed.

Second Monday of the month was suggested as a date that could work to coordinate with the WA State Conservation Commission (SCC) project review process

VSP-Funded Projects

- Capital funds update

Noted that all projects reviewed in September were shown at base cost, not including technical assistance. When SCC awards funds, they add 25% to each project. In addition, the SCC charges \$30,000 for overhead and sets aside \$50,000 for cultural review. Cultural review money can be later used for projects if it is not needed. Approximately \$515,000 of \$1m remains in capital funding for new projects.

- Update on WAG and state approved projects

All projects approved by WAG were also approved by SCC, except Shea which was not entered into the database for SCC review. We expect it will be awarded funding.

- Proposed Project

Blanken manure management– details were discussed and concerns raised about the cost, and whether it was relevant to a critical area. It is a good project for ag viability, especially since it is a costly project difficult for a small farmer to afford. This farmer does have a farm plan. Also, it could benefit downstream agricultural operations such as shellfish or fresh fruit / veggies. However, it is in a relatively well protected area with regard to surface water, whereas manure leaching to groundwater is a concern. We also discussed whether this project could use matching funds from shellfish or other since it doesn't have a strong fit with the main Skagit VSP purpose (Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation). One of the benefits of this project is that it constitutes part that commercial agricultural operators are getting involved in VSP.

Note: An error was made in the presentation about the \$75,000. \$75,000 includes \$60,000 for implementation and \$25,000 for technical assistance.

Monitoring Plan Development

- Summary of current monitoring

We discussed current monitoring methodology and pointed out that the monitoring section of the work plan is short and that our new monitoring plan will be much more thorough. Several existing monitoring programs that we can leverage are shown on the meeting slides. We also can use the riparian restoration data collected by the Skagit Watershed Council / SRSC monitoring. There was mention of Benthic Index of Biotic Integrity.

Need to

- Work through questions

We spent little time working through monitoring questions on the slides.

Outreach opportunities

- Call for suggestions

Workshop with WSU?

Reminder that the Skagit Ag Summit is coming up February 9th

Need to find 1 participant with strong connections – (potentially Colony Creek - pollution, flooding, drainage?)

Open Discussion / Questions

Input from Swinomish Tribe – frustration with metrics, lack of participation in VSP, better communication is desired. Priority watersheds would be those with TMDL plans: Nookachamps, Hansen, Thomas, Carpenter creeks.

- Tentative – CREP explanation / discussion

CREP was not discussed

Adjourn