SKAGIT COUNTY
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

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

Skagit Voluntary Stewardship Program
Watershed Advisory Group
Sept. 16, 2024, 8:00-10:00 am

Meeting Notes

Watershed Group Members in attendance: Terry Sapp, Jeff McGowan, Bill Dewey, Shannon Rupert, Emmett Wild, Maggie Taylor

Other attendees:
Skagit County: Jenn Johnson, Rebecca Rising, Karen DuBose, Emily Derenne
Swinomish Indian Tribal Community: Galen Priest
Skagit Conservation District: Ryan Gelwicks

Summary of the outcome:
The original agenda topics were discussed as intended. From the discussion on projects, the topic of how to clarify our group's criteria for ranking projects for both project proponents and Watershed Group decision making was discussed. This topic overlapped somewhat with the operating procedures discussion.

Decisions made or post-poned:
- The group decided not to approve the Ghidossi windbreak project
- The group determine the amount of additional funding to approve for Clear Valley will occur at the November meeting. Also at the November meeting, the group will decide whether to approve the operating procedures as edited by county staff between now and then. Minor edits are expected.

Notes on agenda topics

- Review July notes (5-10 min)
  - Members asked the minutes be sent out following each meeting as well as the week before the next meeting for more detailed review for quick edits/approval at the beginning of each meeting.

- General VSP Update (15-30 min)

  Project progress:
  - Project implementers provided updates on the progress of funded projects. Not all projects were covered. Projects being implemented by Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group are somewhat impacted by Nate White's departure from his position. However, Emily provided some information about those projects as well as the NRSP topics. The SCD provided updates on some of their current projects as well.

  Monitoring plan progress
  - The monitoring plan has been turned into the WA State Conservation Commission (SCC) and the consultant was asked to provide additional edits, expected within the week. Rebecca will send the resultant draft to the Watershed Group (and the VSP Technical Panel) and others interested after the consultant has concluded their work.

- Review cost increase for Clear Valley, and new project – Ghidossi windbreak (not on original agenda)
  The bids for the Clear Valley project are expected to be higher than the $80,000 (+$20,000 technical assistance) that the Watershed Group approved for this project because the reed canary grass at the site is more pervasive and dominant than expected, and will require control in order for the planting to be successful. We had understood that we were subject to $100,000 limit, however, according to SCC guidelines, this limit does not apply to "District Implemented"

projects; only to "Cost Share" projects. The Clear Valley project could likely use any remaining VSP funds as they are returned.
The group discussed the Ghidossi windbreak proposed by the Skagit Conservation District (SCD). Concerns were raised about the project not addressing protection of the nearby waterway or wetland area, and not being effective at mitigating pesticide drift. It was noted that the project could be evaluated as pertaining to a geologically hazardous area (as opposed to a fish and wildlife habitat conservation area) since the windbreak could serve to reduce wind erosion. Upon voting, one member voted in favor, and four opposed.

The group discussed the lack of clarity about how to make decisions as we move forward into a time when funds are being returned. One option would be to have all funds go towards the Clear Valley project. However, this would not allow room for funding smaller projects that the group would approve. It was asked that county staff provide resources such as examples from other groups, and the criteria used in the Conservation Practice Data System, a database for VSP and other funding sources run by the SCC to the group for review.

The group also touched on the point that VSP funds have not been the chosen funding source for SCD projects because the process takes longer than other funding sources for them, and because of lack of clarity in acceptable practices, costs, and other guidelines. This is partially a side effect of VSP being run within the county instead of the conservation district, as it is done with all other counties (except Chelan and Skagit). This requires an additional level of oversight. SCD also has a funding source that provides financial incentives to producers for riparian plantings.

To address the concerns about lack of clarity mentioned above, the Watershed Group plans to create their own criteria for use in future years when Skagit must compete for VSP funding, and needs to be proactive about prioritizing projects for funding.

- Review operating procedures (30 min)
  Approximately 20 minutes were dedicated to discussing the operating procedures. Members did not express any concerns regarding the several questions posed, but in general agreed that the procedures were in keeping with expectations for an advisory group (much of the content was modified from the Ag Advisory Board and Conservation Futures Advisory Board operating procedures).

  It made sense to the group to set the membership limit at 9 or 11 members instead of 10 to avoid tie votes. In order to meet quorum for upcoming meetings, it was recommended that the VSP Coordinator request RSVP so that business can be conducted, and decisions can be made at meetings.

- Open Discussion / Questions (0-20 minutes)
  No time remained for additional discussion.

- Adjourn
  The group adjourned at 10:03am

Action Items:

- Rebecca and Emily will provide examples of criteria that the Watershed Group can use to evaluate projects more consistently

- Rebecca will provide the most recent draft of the monitoring plan to the Watershed Group for review by those who are interested.

- Rebecca will request RSVP for future meetings to ensure there is a quorum to conduct business.

- Watershed Group members will avoid having an email exchange amongst a majority of members, because this could be considered a meeting not open to the public. Rebecca will often send emails as bcc, and members are encouraged to reply, just not as a “reply all” or to a majority of the group.