



# SKAGIT COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

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## Skagit Voluntary Stewardship Program Watershed Advisory Group

January 27, 2025, 8:00-10:00 am

### Meeting Notes

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

### **Other attendees:**

Skagit County: 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: Jeff McGowan noted a correction to his name. With that change, Jeff McGowan moved to approve the minutes, Emmett Wild gave a second. Minutes were unanimously approved.
- The group approved the allocation of \$725 to the new SCD Steere project on hedgerow plantings.

### **Notes on agenda topics**

- **OPMA rules**
  - Jenn Johnson led the committee through an Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) training which is required for all committee members (must renew every 4 years). The said training can be found here: [OPMA Revised.pptx](#)
  - Group Discussion throughout the training
    - Terry mentioned the need reasonable rules of conduct for outside parties who attend such meetings as more disruptions seem to be occurring during OPMA meetings. These have recently drawn local attention and are becoming more common around the county these days. Jenn noted that OPMA supports closing a meeting if it gets out of hand.
    - Terry asked about Robert's rules or policies and procedures that might be required by OPMA. Jenn noted that OPMA does not clearly call out any specific procedures which must be followed beyond having and posting an agenda 24 hours in advance of the meeting and making all minutes available to the public. VSP Watershed Group did adopt new policies and procedures in 2024 that follows a similar Robert's Rules fashion.
    - Terry asked if meetings were recorded and what that entailed for OPMA. Jenn explained that VSP meetings are not recorded, just handwritten minutes are taken. Emmett noted that when a meeting is recorded it becomes much more work since that must then be preserved and on record and that can be difficult as technologies progress, and some methods become outdated.

- Jenn clarified the use of emails. OPMA restrict the use of group communication via email as it can constitute a meeting that was not made publicly available. IT is recommended that all email communication include members a bcc so that any responses only go to the staff to bring up at the next public meeting. Terry noted that is also why any subcommittees that meet to discuss committee work must never be larger than the quorum. Due to these restrictions, it was also noted that we must be careful of what is discussed outside meetings.
- Updates
  - Outreach & education
    - Jenn shared the most recent outreach flyer with the group. Comments included:
      - Make clearer the wording at the beginning around projects. It needs to be clear that anyone who is interested in doing restoration/conservation work can be a part of VSP, not just those who have done grant funding.
      - Clarify near the QR code that landowners have the option to either mail in the paper form provided or go to website with QR code to complete the same survey online.
      - Jeff noted that when reporting, there will be needed communication and explanation about the validity of the survey results. Emmett added the note that weed maintenance might not be up to standards. Jenn recommended adding a link to NRCS standards so individuals can read more about what each BMP entails, but not too make it too complicated (Jenn will follow up with Emmett).
      - It was noted that N/A should be added as an option next to primary agricultural product.
      - Brian brought up that a standard in the County is that there is a set income needed to qualify as a agricultural producers (approximately \$4000 minimum – need to confirm number). Group decided this will not need to be met for this survey effort.
      - Jeff asked about reporting private culvert projects such as those in partnership with SFEG but not VSP. Jenn noted those should be reported in the Riparian database which VSP will use for its 2 and 5-year reporting.
  - Monitoring plan
    - Jenn explained that we submitted our most recent draft to the sate at the end of December. Next steps will to be for the new Coordinator and Jenn to meet with the technical panel members to receive feedback. This will be shared with the group at an upcoming meeting.
    - Brian asked if it would be possible to do some site visit with the WAG in coordination with group. Jenn said she would reach out to WSCC to get something planned for the summer.
  - Hiring
    - A new VSP Coordinator has been hired to begin February 10<sup>th</sup>, Taylor Scott who currently works for the SCD.
    - The grouped thanked Jenn for stepping in while the hiring process was underway.
- Criteria
  - Jeff recommended for “fish species present”: recommended to add 4 pts category for coho & chum.
  - Bill proposed to add “adjacent to shellfish growing area or located in a marine recovery area (MRA)” to water quality improvement.

- Shannon recommended changing the category term of “connectivity” since that can mean other things in the science world. Maggie recommended “adjacency” or Jenn put forth “proximity”.
- Jeff brought up the weighting around “Protection status”. Seems high compared to its importance to achieving VSP goals. Recommended to lower the weighting.
- Jenn will look for and share the WSCC white paper mentioned under “Agricultural Viability”.
- In reference to “shovel readiness”, the group clarified that this would be based on the start date of when the landowner signs their agreement.
- Terry requested an appendix with all the acronyms explained. Jenn will include that on the next version.
- Emily recommended that the group run some of the past projects through to see how they would have scored. Then run some new projects through for scoring. This was welcomed by the group and will be part of the next meeting.
- Jeff asked to define the “tiers” under “funding priority”. Jenn noted that these align to the SWC tiers but will confirm.
- Emmett requested that we add links to all the referenced material (i.e., tiers, NRCS, zooming, etc.)
- The group discussed the bottom section on a project score. Emmett requested we not include this as it limits potential funding opportunities when projects are rejected (mentioning the wind break example which was not funded). Others asked if everything still comes to the group, which was confirmed. It was clarified that this table is just to give sponsors an idea whether or not a project will score well in alignment to the VSP goals and objectives when it comes to limited project funding. Recommended change from “no go” to “re-eval”.
- Emmett also noted that most of the scoring elements look at where the project is in landscape and less on merit – saying some areas more important than work. Jenn confirmed that VSP and WSCC does try to identify areas of importance, but to make sure there is proper weighting throughout the scoring sheet.
- Shannon clarified that the reason for this scoring tool was because there was frustration on projects being brought and not supported by the group. That this tool does not negate the promise of the projects, just a structure to the process. She explained her understanding that this was a guide for sponsors who asked for something to help them bring the best projects forward to the group, but it doesn’t take away from the merit of the project or how it fits into the bigger picture.
  - Jenn confirmed and clarified that this tool is really for the sponsors who were bringing projects forward with no guidance on what the group wanted. To better see how well the projects aligned with VSP before they spent the time to compile and bring them forward.
  - Sentiment was that the group doesn’t want to be locked in a box as a committee if it’s all determined by the rubric, but it is really helpful for the sponsor. The Board is still important to ranking and making decisions, this is just a guide.
- Terry brought forward the idea of giving the Watershed Group a bit more latitude by adding something in the “other factors” category. He provided the teaching example of giving students a narrative with thorough explanation rather than a report card – reveals a lot more than standardized scoring does. The group requested the addition of a “Special Considerations” section with a narrative component to the rubric since not every consideration fit in a box.
  - Shannon gave example of project (barn re-piped) that was brought forth and WAG discussion said it didn’t fit well, so this rubric would have helped. As we

start using this and ask sponsor to use – everyone will be more focused and less frustrated.

- Jeff added that the small project brought forward today would fall under these special considerations category.
  - Terry also noted potential points for owner paying for part of it as a special consideration.
- Projects Updates & Budget Review
- Dorsey – moving along
  - Benson – fenced complete, planting done soon. A little money left o spray organic or just return funds. Waterers installed – replaced one float and moved other to the slough. Should work in summer and pull in winter.
  - Maxwell – fully planted, LWD installed, fenced replaced. Return some funds. Blackberry SFEG work in the spring. Might table for next year.
  - Lewis – fencing and planting now, completed mowing and treating.
  - Minkler – SLT mostly completed and on-track
  - Shea – all done except replanting in Feb
  - Blanken – redesign on slab on track for spring.
  - Frisbee – might come back with more blackberry needs for additional funding. Landowners mow and some in CREP which they do maintenance for but needs more manual work. Blackberries best use of funds and labor?
  - Stewart – one more round of weed maintenance
  - SRM – one more round of weed maintenance and another round of planting.
  - Iaccino – mixed funding, work going great. Some planting upkeep with rain and freezes, fix plantings and blackberries look good.
  - Auriemma – spot spraying knotweed now, VSP work completed.
  - Fitzgerald – done. New pics show great work completed.
  - Curry – done.
  - Franklin – muddy mess, fencing complete and planting next week. New landowner has been good.
  - Maykut – on track, permitting with County. Design ready.
  - Clear Valley – plans approved, site prep on all 17 acres. Adding \$6000 to complete final work.
- Bill gave a thanks for all the hard work to get these projects done. He recommended considering a presentation during a legislative work session. Often dinged too much for lack of great work being done, VSP needs to brag more.
- Emmett with the SCD brought forward a new project:
- Steere in Edison - proposed hedgerow planting along drainage ditch. 160 feet of 2 rows, 50 shrubs required. Ask = \$725.00. Not active agriculture. Fish presence unknown.
    - Discussion: Not much agriculture, but not much money. Interesting to run through spreadsheet.
      - Some WQ points
      - 25-foot buffer.
      - Bil moved to approve the project, Brian provided a second – no further discussion – project was unanimously approved.
    - Group stated it was helpful see a quick review of the form.

Group adjourned at 10:05am

#### **Action Items:**

- Jenn will send minutes and updated documents for the group's review.
- Jenn will work with IS on the sound issues or find another room to try for the next meeting.

- Jenn will reach out to the technical panel about a summer site visit with the WAG on past and recent projects.
- Jenn will look for and share the WSCC white paper noted under Ag Viability on the criteria sheet.
- Jenn will add acronyms to the criteria sheet.
- The coordinator will run some past projects through the ranking sheet in preparation for the next group meeting.