



Skagit Voluntary Stewardship Program

Watershed Advisory Group Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Monday, November 10, 2025
8:00-10:00 am

Welcome

Attendance: Shannon Rupert, Mikala Staples Hughes, Maggie Taylor, Terry Sapp, Bill Dewey, Brian Lipscomb, Emmett Wild, Jeff McGowan, Jenn Johnson, Emily Derenne, Taylor Scott

Agenda & Meeting Minutes

September Meeting Minutes

- Motion to approve as presented: Terry
- Second: Brian
 - Discussion: None
 - Yea: 7
 - Nay: 0
 - Abstain: 0
- Motion passed

November Agenda

- Motion to approve as presented: Brian
- Second: Bill
 - Discussion: None
 - Yea: 7
 - Nay: 0
 - Abstain: 0
- Motion passed

General VSP

New Membership Updates: Next Steps

- We need to fill two vacancies. We have received three applications and will give it until the end of the week. At the next meeting the Work Group will review the applicants and make a recommendation to the BoCC for final approval.
- Taylor summarized that the applicants are community members, they do not represent any organizations, but two have relevant natural resource background experience.

Funding Update

23-25 Capital Updates

- None of the Skagit VSP projects submitted to the WSCC were funded. Round three was closed on Dec 15th. 93 projects were submitted totaling \$80 million dollars. Of these, seven

projects were selected from two counties for \$610,000. These are predominately Grant County irrigation systems.

- Work Group: How do irrigation systems fit into the concept of VSP?
- Taylor: VSP concepts will vary by County, so these east side counties tend to have more interest in irrigation vs our riparian enhancement
- Emmett noted that 92 of the 93 projects got a score of 0 for tribal partnership. It doesn't feel like a good use of scoring criteria and that it's not actually leading to involvement or engagement or change. And he'd like to see that it be more effective for Skagit projects like AG viability or something else like that.
 - Jenn: Received an email from Mike on what tribal support meant.

“Tribal partnership is any project that has been developed with, sanctioned by, or identified as an important specific project or sub-basin to a Tribal partner. This may include Tribal participation in your work group and the project approval process via that route, or it may include documentation from the Tribal partner that a specific project has their explicit support in the form of a document or study they have authored, OR as you suggest, a letter from the Tribe supporting the project itself. There is a place to attach supporting documentation in CPDS under the Documents tab. If you DO attach something in the Documents tab to support your project, please reference that somewhere in your responses to either the “clustering” or “ancillary benefits” questions to make sure our review team sees the document/file.”

- Emmett: Many times, projects have support from tribal employees, but then it makes it way up to politics and things change - so who has the delegated authority to say we approve and what does approval mean or participation?
 - Taylor and Jenn will continue to work with Mike on this.
- The Butler Creek riparian enhancement and stream crossing was allocated the 40k set aside and will start in the spring.

5-year (10-year) Report

Taylor went through the entire report as follows and welcomed comments during the meeting or for the WG to review online and provide edits there. The sections were reviewed as follows;

Regulatory Backstops

- This section helps provide a background understanding of how we are using VSP. Skagit VSP uses regulatory backstops for four of the 5 critical areas
 - No comments or discussion

Major agriculture industries and major natural resource concerns

- This section will provide a general overview of Skagit's agriculture
 - Shannon- I'm still a little disappointed at the lack of place-based specificity. And the fact that we're still discussing the upper Skagit as just an undeveloped no man's land. It concerns me. I don't think it's fair.
 - Taylor and Jenn asked Shannon to provide more upper Skagit context to include.

Goals and Benchmarks

- Wetlands

No net loss of wetlands since 2011. The goal and benchmark was met.

- The WG discussed the need to better track wetlands.
- The wetland layer from ecology has not been updated since 2016
- There is no full-proof way to track gains

- Geologically Hazardous Areas

All building permits in GHA zones are compliant. The goal and benchmark was met

- There might be a better way to track this metric

- Frequently Flood Areas

No unresolved issues in ongoing agriculture. The goal and benchmark was met

- The Work Plan says we need to use Community Assisted Visits (CAV's) from Ecology, which is no longer being used by Skagit Planning Department, unresolved code cases were pulled instead.
 - The cases were reviewed and the WG requested a follow up on the land disturbance cases.

- Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

No degradation in Group A water systems since 2011. The goal and benchmark was met

- Although there were some violations or exceedances, these were not due to agricultural practices.
 - Maggie requested to define what a group B system is for the report.
 - Maggie commented that the list of analytes seems larger than traditional agricultural markers because we want to remain open in the idea of “could this exceedance possibly be caused by agriculture.”

- Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

No degradation since 2011. The goal and benchmark was met.

Taylor requested enhancement information from the Skagit Watershed Council in June. There has been no forward movement on this request and have not been given an answer. Plan to move forward without this data. Need to show no net loss so will use NRSP, VSP and any other projects from aeriels. DFW ran a high-resolution change detection for Skagit VSP. This showed all the loss near our streams on Ag-NRL and RRc-NRL. This was then narrowed down to tree canopy loss caused by humans. There is loss in all VSP watersheds.

- Bill: Skagit is under a microscope from a riparian standpoint, and that's going to dramatically change the appearance of the program. If you can include those numbers in the success of the program.
- Equivalency in loss: 40 year old trees have a much bigger impact than 3 year old saplings. Need a way to further classify the loss to measure function and values.

- Skagit Watershed Council counts replanting, underplanting and planting separately in their reports and that will be include in ours
- Critical Area Monitoring
 - Using Skagit County Monitoring Program, Department of Health Samish Bay closures, and WSDA pesticide monitoring
 - Maggie: Local ecology water master should be able to provide a list of water use violations or unpermitted water use that they've been able to detect and that could potentially be a good metric.
- Agriculture Viability
 - Pulled information from Work Plan and gave updates on each and relevant programs
 - No discussion
- Education and Outreach
 - List of outreach events and how we work with other agencies
 - Bill: Are you including the Skagit County newsletter?
 - Work Group requested to be signed up for this
- The report is due January 19th, and needs work group approval before submitting. The Work Group requested if there are any changes, they should be made aware by email.
 - Motion to approve as presented: Shannon
 - Second: Bill
 - Discussion: None
 - Yea: 7
 - Nay: 0
 - Abstain: 0
 - Motion passed

General Discussion

- Emmett: One request that as we're talking about gathering data from different sources and sharing that out, whether in this report or promotional materials. A request that we credit the project sponsors and the people who are facilitating those projects. The VSP mailer that went out this fall or winter, and I got a number of calls from landowners about it that. Were really confused because they had worked with the conservation district and the conservation district wasn't named and it looked like the county was taking credit for all those through VSP. So just like to make sure that we're giving credit where credit's due for those contributions.
- Taylor: This was the outreach mailer requesting folks to share their stewardship. There was a postcard and a one page flyer.
 - Taylor read outreach mailer to Work Group;

“Skagit County’s Voluntary Stewardship Program tracks and supports what producers like you are doing to protect our land. Your voluntary stewardship means less regulations for you and other farmers. The work you do on your property to improve soil health and protect water quality makes a big difference, even if you’re not part of a formal program. ---- The success of VSP relies on the participation from our Skagit agricultural community!

Please take our survey using the QR code below to tell us about how you protect land, soil, and water.”

“VSP FUNDED—10 livestock BMPs, 60 acres of native plantings, 56 acres of invasive weed control, 22 feet of instream salmon habitat, 3,500 feet of livestock fencing”

- Emmett: QR codes not accessible for all age groups and demographics, so maybe have a QR code and like a link that people could type in or something.
- Taylor: There is a link included as well.

Adjourn

Next Work Group meeting March 10th, 2026.