

Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Plan

Appendix O – VSP Work Plan Methodology

Table of Contents

1	VSP Overview and History.....	2
2	Development of the Work Plan	2
2.1	Voluntary Stewardship Plan Workgroup	4
2.1.1	Workgroup Decisions	6
2.1.2	Subcommittee Roles	7
2.2	Mapping Methodology	8
2.3	Stewardship Plan Checklist	9

1 VSP Overview and History

In 2006, voters considered and subsequently rejected Initiative 933- a measure focused on regulatory takings of private property due to development regulations. Although the measure failed, the following year the state legislature continued the public discourse related to these tensions.

In 2007, the state legislature adopted Substitute Senate Bill 5248 which:

- Required the Ruckelshaus Center (a non-profit think tank based in Seattle and managed jointly by Washington State University and the University of Washington) to look into the conflicts between critical areas regulations and agricultural uses. The Ruckelshaus Center was tasked to conduct a fact finding mission, bring together stakeholders for discussion of the issues, and develop a recommendation to the state legislature.
- Enacted a moratorium on new critical areas regulations on agricultural uses defined in the bill between May 1, 2007 and June 30, 2010. In 2010, the moratorium was extended until June 30, 2011 so the work could be completed.

The hard work undertaken by the parties brought together by the Ruckelshaus Center concluded in early 2011 with an agreement submitted to the state legislature in the form of HB 1886. The 2011 state legislature subsequently enacted Engrossed Substitute House Bill (ESHB) 1886. This bill amended the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A) and added new VSP options (RCW [36.70A.700](#) to 760) for protecting critical areas in relation to agricultural activities. VSP allows participating counties to either:

- Use a voluntary stewardship program in conjunction with stakeholders in lieu of enacting further critical areas regulations relating to agricultural uses. At the state level, the voluntary stewardship program is to be administered by the Washington Conservation Commission.
- Continue under existing law and update critical areas regulations for agricultural uses by July 22, 2013.
- Limit the voluntary stewardship program to certain watersheds in the county, and update the critical areas regulations for other watersheds.

The Thurston Board of County Commissioners, who at the time were Cathy Wolfe (chair), Karen Valenzuela (vice-chair), and Sandra Romero (commissioner), opted in to the Voluntary Stewardship Program on January 12, 2012, designating all five watersheds in the county as “participating watersheds,” and nominating all five watersheds for consideration as “priority watersheds” pursuant to RCW 36.70A.210. The current Board at time of plan submittal is Bud Blake (chair), John Hutchings (vice-chair), and Gary Edwards (commissioner).

2 Development of the Work Plan

The development of the Voluntary Stewardship Program has been a two-year process for Thurston County. The ordinance opting-in to the Voluntary Stewardship Program was adopted in January 2012, and the County received initial funding to begin work plan development on January 14, 2014. The County conducted outreach in the beginning of 2014 to develop a workgroup. Outreach included resource agencies, tribes, and agricultural stakeholders interested in participating in the workgroup. See Appendix N for more details on those contacted to initiate and maintain the workgroup.

The first meeting of the workgroup was held on May 28th, 2014. The workgroup met at least once a month, and often twice a month in the first year to build trust and communication among members. In these meetings, work plan products were developed and reviewed. Review of documents was also done via e-mail.

Funding ended on June 30th, 2015 and at the time the workgroup had developed a draft work plan. On January 14, 2016 the contract was extended (with a plan due date extension to reflect the unfunded 6-and-a-half month gap) for the workgroup to finish developing the work plan and submit for approval. An invitation to reconvene the workgroup was sent out to old members as well as new members that shared an interest. Meetings resumed on March 18, 2016 with Workgroup reaching consensus on edits proposed to the draft work plan, which primarily incorporated interim work product from a Thurston VSP agricultural subcommittee that continued to work despite the lapse in state funding. Between March 18, 2016 and February 22, 2017, the workgroup met monthly, and sometimes twice a month to continue drafting a work plan. When the larger workgroup moved from bi-monthly meetings to monthly meetings, several subcommittees began meeting, on the work group’s behalf and at its direction, to work on specific sections of the plan for the Workgroup to consider.

Submission of the work plan to the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) is planned for March 8, 2017. If more time is needed to complete technical cleanup edits and submit a recommended drafts of the plan and all attached appendices, submission can occur as late as March 13 in order to give the technical panel 45 days for review and recommendation to the SCC director, which must be completed no later than April 26, 2017. If the plan is not approved prior to that date, which reflects the statutory deadline of 2 years and 9 months from the receipt of initial funding, the plan will be referred to the State Advisory Panel for review and recommended resolution to the SCC director. The plan must be approved by July 25, 2017, which reflects the final statutory deadline of 3 years from the receipt of funding for the director of the SCC to approve a work plan.

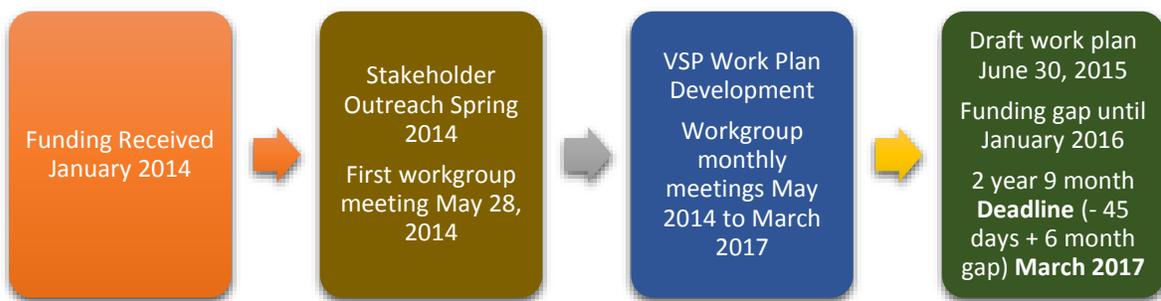


Figure 1: Timeline of the Voluntary Stewardship Program

After the plan is submitted for review, it is anticipated that the workgroup will continue to meet to discuss implementation techniques and outreach efforts. These meetings will initially continue on a monthly basis until outreach picks up, and then meetings will shift to a quarterly basis (or as needed).

The development of the Voluntary Stewardship Plan was an iterative process and involved many on-going efforts by a variety of different parties. Thurston County staff drafted many of the work plan documents and appendices internally, and then brought documents to the workgroup for discussion. Plan documents saw several iterations of back and forth between Thurston County staff and the workgroup before a final document was complete.

2.1 Voluntary Stewardship Plan Workgroup

The County decision to meet and develop the plan with a workgroup allowed for greater stakeholder input and responsibility. Involving the community and diverse stakeholders in the development of the work plan has created greater ownership of the VSP.

Initial outreach to the workgroup was extensive and involved many agencies, affected tribes and agricultural and community stakeholders. Some agencies, environmental groups and tribes (Nisqually Tribe, Chehalis Tribe) participated initially but then did not attend workgroup meetings due to time constraints and staffing. Many individuals participated in the workgroup on and off throughout the 2.5 year development of the plan (e.g. Taylor Shellfish, South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group, agricultural stakeholders). For a more detailed list, see Appendix N.

Voting members include environmental groups and agricultural stakeholders in the workgroup that participate regularly, excluding any regulatory agencies that are involved in approval of the work plan. Regulatory agencies decided to maintain an active role in workgroup meetings and drafting of the plan, but serve primarily as non-voting technical experts. At the second meeting on June 11, 2014, ground rules were developed and agreed to by consensus by attending members and a facilitator. Because the County established the Workgroup as an entity and table where diverse interests and stakeholders could collaborate (as opposed to a fixed and exclusive list of named individuals) the Workgroup's ground rules employ active stakeholder participation (determined by consistent attendance as opposed to invitation) as the primary factor for eligibility as a "voting member" combined with a preference for consensus agreement. Because of time constraints during the meeting, ground rules were finalized by e-mail. The VSP workgroup ground rules are as follows:

1. **Decision-making** - All members are expected to participate in all phases of discussions and decisions. Active voting members will endeavor in good faith to reach decisions by consensus on issues. Consensus shall consist of all voting members present, less the support of no more than two voting stakeholder members actively participating, to approve a decision. Those disagreeing may submit a position statement for inclusion in the records of the workgroup. Active participation for purposes of voting shall be defined as consistent attendance – not more than one unexcused absence in the previous three scheduled meetings.
2. **Respect for Interests** - The Thurston Voluntary Stewardship Workgroup members represent a full range of interests related to protecting critical areas and sustainable agriculture in Thurston County. Every idea has merit; all the members recognize the legitimacy of the interests and concerns of the other members and expect that their interests will also be respected.
3. **Suspend Assumptions, Listen Carefully, Speak to Educate** - The members commit to suspending assumptions about each other's interests, to listen carefully to each other, to recognize each person's concerns, to ask questions for clarification, and to make statements that attempt to educate or explain.

4. **Creativity** - The members commit to search for opportunities, options, and alternatives. The creativity of the group often finds the best solution.
5. **Open Dialogue** - The members agree that they have a responsibility to discuss the issues and plan development, and to use open and candid communication with each other. The purpose of the frank discussion is to bring issues out in the open, provide greater understanding of member's perspectives, share insights, reduce hostilities, and build trust.
6. **Working with Media and Public** - No individual member will speak on behalf of the Workgroup without the consent of the group. Press releases may be issued from time to time based on decisions of the group. Individual members are, however, encouraged to discuss the Workgroup activities and the Thurston VSP project with others, so long as they do not claim to represent the Workgroup.
7. **Advisory Process, Open Meetings** - All committee meetings will be open to the public. Observers are welcome to attend the committee meetings. The Workgroup will occasionally schedule special meetings to provide information to the public and to solicit public comment and feedback. Summaries of each meeting and important decision will be posted on the Workgroup website.
8. **Freedom to Disagree** - The members agree to disagree. The point of our interaction together is to foster open discussion of ideas. We need to respect each other's right to disagree so this can happen.
9. **Speaking** - One person will speak at a time, and Facilitators will make every effort to assure that everyone will have an opportunity to speak. The facilitator will recognize each speaker.
10. **Attendance** - Attendance is critical to the success of this planning process. Each member will take the responsibility to get the information they missed due to an absence. Non-(poor) attendance leaves an interest without a representative. Members may waive the opportunity to participate in decisions due to lack of attendance.
11. **Vulnerability Acknowledged** - When people are candid with each other it can make them vulnerable. Members agree that what is said during the committee meetings is to bring all the issues "to the table." The information will not be used against the individual at a later time.
12. **Responsibility to meet needs** - Each member will take the responsibility for getting their needs met, for getting the needs of those they represent met, and for getting the needs of the other members met.
13. **Responsible statements** - Committee members are responsible for the statements that they make to the other committee members as well as to the public regarding the work of the committee.
14. **Start on time** - Committee members agree to start the meetings on time and end them on time.
15. **Humor & Miscellaneous** - We agree that humor is appreciated and welcome. We commit to having fun and encouraging it in others. Unless there's an emergency responding to pagers, cell phones, telephone messages, etc. will wait until the members are on a break, or the meeting is over.

With the exception of the 6-and-a-half month gap in funding, the workgroup met once or twice a month (for two to three hours per meeting) for two years. Meetings occurred on the following dates:

- May 28, 2014
- June 11, 2014
- July 2, 2014
- July 24, 2014
- August 5, 2014
- August 26, 2014

- September 17, 2014
- October 1, 2014
- October 21, 2014
- November 13, 2014
- December 8, 2014
- January 20, 2015
- March 2, 2015
- March 31, 2015
- May 12, 2015
- May 28, 2015
- June 11, 2015
- June 23, 2015
- March 18, 2016
- April 7, 2016
- April 21, 2016
- May 5, 2016
- June 13, 2016
- July 21, 2016
- September 15, 2016
- October 20, 2016
- November 10, 2016
- January 19, 2017
- February 9, 2017
- February 22, 2017
- March 3, 2017
- March 8, 2017

To maintain active participation and balanced representation in the workgroup, outreach was ongoing. Environmental groups, tribes, and other agencies not regularly attending the workgroup meetings were maintained on an e-mail list to update on work plan drafts. Additional outreach to environmental groups and tribes was periodically done again in order to see if staff had availability to attend workgroup meetings and solicit more participation if needed.

A key component to the development of the work plan was the role of subcommittees. Two subcommittees – an Agricultural Subcommittee and a Technical Subcommittee – worked on specific areas of the work plan.

2.1.1 Workgroup Decisions

Consensus is the favored option for decision-making in the group and consists of all voting members present, less the support of no more than two voting stakeholder members actively participating (TC VSP Workgroup, June 11, 2014). In the event that consensus is not reached, a vote will occur and may include a minority opinion. Voting members must have no unexcused absences for the previous 3 meetings to vote. The average attendance for VSP workgroup meetings in Thurston County was 18 persons per meeting, based on the meeting notes. Thirty meetings totaled to 65 hours for plan development. Based on average persons per meetings, 1,170 hours of time were donated to the workgroup meetings.

In 2014 after the kick-off of the VSP in Thurston County, consensus agreements of the Workgroup included establishing a mission statement, membership rules, scheduling, ground rules, decision-making and voting. Additionally, portions of the work plan were tasked out – e.g. the County took on the “Existing Information and Resource Condition” section. The workgroup also agreed by consensus that NRCS practices and standards would be used and that the Thurston Conservation District would serve as the primary technical assistance provider.

In 2015 the Workgroup reached consensus on the two major goals of VSP (protect and voluntarily enhance critical areas and maintain and improve agricultural viability). Additionally, the group agreed that recording and measuring economic data and activity for agriculture is important for VSP and tracking Agricultural Viability. The consensus was to elevate headings to “Goal”, “Objective” and “Measures” (TC VSP Workgroup, June 11, 2015) and to use wording and a preferred method of NRCS standards and practices in order to be able to qualify for NRCS funding (TC VSP Workgroup, June 11, 2015). Work plan draft sections, including the Stewardship Plan Checklist, were vetted at Continuing Legal Education (CLE) presentations and other events, including local Farm Bureau meetings, after the June 11, 2015 meeting.

In 2016, the workgroup continued to develop sections of the work plan. After the 6-and-one-half month unfunded interim period without meetings, at the March 18, 2016 meeting, it was noted that it would be helpful to have more environmental members as active participants at the workgroup meetings. Thurston County staff indicated that they continued to reach out to them and kept them involved in communications. At this meeting it was agreed by consensus that the County would follow up with environmental organizations and tribes on the status of VSP and re-invite them to participate in the workgroup. In 2016 after further development of the Individual Stewardship Plan, the workgroup reached consensus that a beta-test of the Stewardship Plan Checklist (Appendix D) was needed; two on-site run-throughs of the Checklist were conducted with two different farmers, NRCS, Thurston County, and Thurston Conservation District. Further developing and refining the benchmarks and metrics was a primary focus of the workgroup in 2016, which were reviewed and revised several times both by the workgroup and by the technical subcommittee to address technical concerns and seek agreement on language consistent with requirements of the VSP.

At the February 22, 2017 meeting, the workgroup discussed the need to have a Chair and vice-Chair to maintain the workgroup, be responsible for meeting structures, and periodically convening the Workgroup after the work plan is approved. Jim Myers was nominated as Chair, and Jon McAninch as vice-Chair, and the Workgroup agreed by consensus. The Workgroup also reached consensus to recommend the work plan for submittal to the SCC on March 3, 2017 and subsequently recommended the work plan appendices for submittal to the SCC on March 8, 2017 (with submittal of the work plan and appendices no later than March 13 if more time was needed). The full Work Plan and appendices were formally submitted on March 9, 2017.

Any adaptive management recommendations made by the Workgroup in regards to the work plan will be included in this section with date, and subsequently reflected in the larger work plan.

2.1.2 Subcommittee Roles

Subcommittees played an essential role in the process of drafting work plan documents. Subcommittees are generally composed of active workgroup members and representatives from resource agencies. Over the two-year development phase of the Thurston VSP work plan, four subcommittees took on different tasks.

The Plan Drafting Subcommittee was named at the October 1, 2014 meeting and chaired by Jim Goche'. This subcommittee began by drafting work plan documents, including the monitoring plan. This group was primarily made up of agricultural representatives of the Workgroup.

The Agricultural Viability Subcommittee initially started in 2015 on monitoring and outreach. This subcommittee was composed of agricultural Workgroup members, Thurston County staff, WSU Extension, Thurston Regional Planning Council and the Thurston Conservation District. Early in 2015, an Agricultural Roundtable was held to gather farming members in the Thurston Community and discuss needs for agriculture. In 2016, this subcommittee developed a definition of "agricultural viability" as it relates to Thurston County, and identified five specific elements that are necessary to maintain it. The products of this subcommittee have informed several pieces of the final work plan, and are captured comprehensively in Appendix M – Agricultural Viability in Thurston County. Additionally, this subcommittee developed a survey that collects data to measure Agricultural Viability and identifies areas of need in the county. The Agricultural Viability Subcommittee has also been the driver behind

identifying the need to develop reliable economic data about local agriculture, and initiated conversations with Dr. Riley Moore of St. Martin’s University to help develop a plan for collecting data. This plan is in draft form and attempts to capture both the community or social value and monetary value of the agricultural economy. Work will continue on the economic data collection plan after the submittal of the work plan. In 2017, the subcommittee held a second Agricultural Roundtable to discuss the draft agricultural viability definition and elements, community values of agriculture, and the agricultural economy in Thurston County.

The Technical Subcommittee kicked off in the beginning of 2015 and continued through 2017 up to submittal of the work plan. This subcommittee focused on the baseline data, goals, benchmarks, objectives, and metrics in the work plan, as well as adaptive management and monitoring. Members from Ecology, Center for Natural Lands Management, Thurston County Water Resources, South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group, Thurston Conservation District, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service composed the technical subcommittee. Much of the discussion surrounded the feasibility of monitoring metrics, baseline data and data gaps, and the capability of the technical assistance provider to measure the proposed site-level metrics.

A final subcommittee was formed in 2017 as the Digital Subcommittee. This Subcommittee was determined by the workgroup to only include voting members (i.e. no resource agencies). Their main responsibility was to review the work plan in full for textual accuracy. Digital Subcommittee and Technical Subcommittee members met as a “blended subcommittee” to collaboratively resolve any outstanding issues in the Work Plan and appendices before bringing to the full Workgroup. Any unresolved issues were brought before the Workgroup for discussion.

2.2 Mapping Methodology

Mapping for the Voluntary Stewardship Program was done by intern Miles Micheletti. Miles worked both with Thurston County and with the Thurston Conservation District, and was able to compose an agricultural activities layer with data from both agencies. Information used from the Thurston Conservation District composed a relatively small amount of the final agricultural activities layer.

The Agricultural Activities layer uses data from: National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Cropscape data (2011); USGS GAP land cover data (2011); National Land Cover Database (2011); windshield surveys and mailing lists from the Thurston Conservation District; Thurston County parcel data (2011); and approved tidal shellfish areas (2016). In order to identify estimated agricultural activities in Thurston County: Agriculture was selected from the GAP and NLCD data layers; parcels were identified and added based on the information from the Thurston Conservation District; any parcel with the word “farm” as an attribute was identified and confirmed with aerial imagery from Thurston County parcel data; approved tidal shellfish zones were added based on feedback by the Workgroup.

Critical Areas maps were made from readily accessible data layers from Thurston County Geodata¹. The Geologic Hazard Areas (GHA) layer was created by combining data from the USDA Soil Conservation Service (erosion soils), Department of Ecology Coastal Zone Atlas (unstable coast areas), USGS (Lahars, landslides, landforms, and seismogenic features), Washington DNR (active mine sites), and Thurston

¹ More information on Thurston County Geodata available at: <http://www.geodata.org/>

County Geodata (slopes). The GHA data layer is not a complete representation of the Critical Areas Ordinance GHA rule, and so is more suitable for screening than analysis. The Frequently Flooded Areas used FEMA (2011) data of the 100-year floodplain and 500-year floodplain. Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas were composed of several layers: gopher soils, prairie soils, priority species habitat data, Washington natural heritage program data, and oak stands and grasslands layers. Wetlands and Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas are both readily available layers from Thurston County GeoData.

To avoid unnecessary friction over map accuracy as to the intersection between county designated critical areas and agricultural activities, the Workgroup requested and the County agreed that a disclaimer language cover sheet will be included with VSP-related maps.

In repeating these layers in the future, some are expected to be updated regularly (e.g. NLCD should have an updated edition released in 2017) whereas others may not. Some layers have slightly changed since 2011 (e.g., FEMA flood zones, gopher and prairie soils) and will be accounted for in monitoring.

2.3 Stewardship Plan Checklist

The Stewardship Plan Checklist was developed beginning in 2015. Development of the Checklist involved discussions and presentations from the Thurston Conservation District and the Natural Resource Conservation Services to the workgroup. Subcommittees also worked on the Checklist, and Thurston County staff did background research on checklist forms used in farm plans by other counties.

In addition to several discussions with the workgroup, development of the checklist involved two on-the-ground test runs. The first test run was with an active workgroup member. Thurston County, NRCS, and the Thurston Conservation District came out with the checklist and surveyed the property, and discussed conservation practices that could be implemented (many of which the farmer already was implementing). A second test run was conducted with an anonymous farmer that had not been actively participating in the VSP workgroup and had no prior knowledge of the VSP Stewardship Plan. The Thurston Conservation District and Thurston County staff visited the farmer's property. The farmer had already filled out the checklist, as it is intended to be conducted, and suggestions and feedback were given on its ease of use.