

**AGRICULTURE OPERATOR
STEWARDSHIP PLAN CHECKLIST**



PROMOTING AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY AND PROTECTING CRITICAL AREAS

For: _____

Land Owner

Address

Date



WHAT IS THE VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM?

The VSP offers farmers the opportunity to manage their land in their own way and provides options to create stewardship plans tailored to their individual operation, as opposed to being subject to “one-size-fits-all” county regulations for environmentally critical areas. The VSP is a voluntary, incentive-based approach to protect and voluntarily enhance critical areas while maintaining and improving the long-term viability of agriculture.¹ This program is an alternative to the traditional county critical areas regulations on agricultural activities. Stewardship activities are intended to support the goals and objectives listed in the Thurston County VSP Work Plan.

The Voluntary Stewardship Program is **non-regulatory** and allows farmers more flexibility than prescriptive county critical area regulations of the past, however it is not a replacement for state and federal regulations. This program is also not a “one-size-fits-all” method and allows tailoring to each specific farm.

WHY SHOULD I PARTICIPATE?

1. Focuses on results rather than prescriptive regulations
2. Flexible – allows farmers and ranchers to manage in a way that meets their specific needs
3. Participating is crucial to the success of the VSP and a lack of participation could result in failure of VSP, resulting in a return to a more stringent regulatory approach
4. Voluntary means of maintaining and improving the long-term viability of agriculture while ensuring the protection of critical areas
5. Collaborative approach to management of agricultural activities and environmental concerns

HOW CAN PARTICIPATION IMPROVE AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY?

Some of the benefits to agriculture from this program include:

1. A reduction in regulatory risk and uncertainty through the presumption that agricultural operators implementing a Stewardship Plan are working towards the protection and enhancement of critical areas;
2. Improved operational efficiencies, higher yields, and increased production;
3. Enhancing the image of agriculture to the larger community as good stewards of natural resources;
4. Incentives for landowners to implement conservation practices.

WHAT ARE CRITICAL AREAS? WHAT DOES PROTECTION MEAN?

Critical areas include:

- 1) Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas;
- 2) Wetlands,
- 3) Frequently flooded areas,
- 4) Geologic hazard areas (including steep slopes), and
- 5) Critical aquifer recharge areas used for potable water.

“Protect” means to prevent the degradation of critical area conditions existing as of the July 22, 2011 “baseline” – the date VSP was established. (RCW 36.70A.030 and 36.70A.703)

¹ Completing an Individual Stewardship Plan will help the Agricultural Community of Thurston County meet the goals and objectives of the VSP under the Growth Management Act (GMA) ([RCW 36.70A.750](#)). Once the Individual Stewardship Plan is verified by a technical assistance provider and implemented, operators are presumed to be working towards the protection or enhancement of critical areas.

WHAT IS A STEWARDSHIP PLAN?

The following checklist initiates an Individual Stewardship Plan (ISP). This is a site-specific plan for individual agricultural operations that identifies agricultural activities and conservation practice options based on Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation planning procedures. The ISP documents conservation practices to promote agricultural business viability while protecting and voluntarily enhancing critical areas.

STEP 1: General Location Information

1. What basin is your agricultural property located within?
 - Chehalis (1)
 - Deschutes (2)
 - Nisqually (3)
 - Puget Sound/Kennedy-Goldsborough (4)

For online maps and to look up your parcel you can go to <http://www.geodata.org/>



3. Identify your current participation in voluntary programs that address environmental quality and agricultural viability:
 - NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
 - NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs (ACEP)
 - NRCS Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)
 - NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - NRCS Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)
 - Thurston County Open Space Tax Program
 - Existing farm plan through the conservation district or NRCS

Other: _____

- Do your best with Steps 1 and 2 and the technical assistance provider will help you with the rest.
- An approved technical assistance provider (e.g. Thurston Conservation District) will perform a site visit in Step 3 to verify the actual extent and location of critical areas on your property and help you develop an action plan for implementing conservation practices and maintaining or improving the long-term viability of your agricultural operations. This will be done through the use of online mapping tools and visual identification.

STEP 2. IDENTIFY CONSERVATION PRACTICES TO MEET OBJECTIVES

Use the examples in the tables below to begin identifying conservation practices that you are already doing or that you are interested in discussing with your technical assistance provider to meet objectives of the VSP.² These examples are only a few of the commonly used conservation practices that might be implemented in a Stewardship Plan.

Please indicate which conservation practices you are already doing (either before or after the July 22, 2011 baseline) or that you would like to implement, or N/A if it is not applicable to your operation.

COMMON CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Several common conservation practices are listed below. For more information, criteria, and other practices please use the link in the footnote below to view the conservation practice standard in the Field Office Technical Guides.

ACCESS CONTROL

| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Definition. The temporary or permanent exclusion of animals, people, vehicles, and/or equipment from an area.

Purpose. In coordination with the schedule of practices, measures and activities specified in the conservation plan, this practice is applied to support one or more of the following purposes:

- Control intensity of use by animals, people and equipment
- Increase wildlife species health and diversity
- Improve habitat for fish and aquatic species
- Reduce potential contamination and pathogen transport
- Reduce compaction of soils



CONSERVATION COVER

| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Definition. Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover.

Purpose. This practice is applied to support one or more of the following purposes:

² The VSP Stewardship Plans utilize the Conservation Practice standards of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The VSP statutory definitions for protection and enhancement and baseline date of July 22, 2011 are utilized for VSP’s watershed accounting purposes. More information on specific conservation practices and Field Office Technical Guides (FOTGs) for Thurston County can be found at <https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/treemenuFS.aspx> by clicking Washington → Thurston County → Section IV → Washington Conservation Practices.

- Reduce sheet, rill, and wind erosion and filter sedimentation
- Improve ground and surface water quality by reducing sediment
- Increase uptake of nutrients
- Increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Reduce emissions of particulate matter (PM) and PM precursors, and greenhouse gases
- Enhance wildlife, pollinator and beneficial organism habitat
- Reduce non-native invasive species and increase wildlife food, cover and biodiversity
- Improve soil health

COVER CROP

| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Definition. Grasses, legumes, and leafy ground cover planted for seasonal vegetative cover.

Purpose. This practice is applied to support one or more of the following purposes:

- Reduce runoff and erosion from wind and water
- Maintain or increase soil health and organic matter content
- Maintain or improve water quality
- Utilize surplus soil nutrients
- Suppress excessive weed pressures and break pest cycles
- Improve soil moisture use efficiency
- Enhance pollinator and wildlife habitat, food and cover
- Minimize soil compaction



FENCING

| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Definition. A constructed barrier to animals or people.

Purpose. This practice is applied to support one or more of the following purposes:

- Control intensity of use by animals and people, and/or equipment
- Improve water quality by reducing runoff and erosion of sediment
- Reduce compaction and improve riparian and stream conditions
- Protect and/or improve fish and wildlife habitats

IRRIGATION WATER MANAGEMENT

| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Definition. The process of determining and controlling the volume, frequency, and application rate of irrigation water.

Purpose. This practice is applied to support one or more of the following purposes:

- Improve irrigation water use efficiency
- Minimize irrigation induced soil erosion
- Minimize runoff to protect or improve surface and groundwater quality
- Increase water availability for other instream and out-of-stream uses
- Manage salts in the crop root zone
- Manage air, soil, or plant micro-climate
- Reduce energy use



INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT

| | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Definition. A site-specific combination of pest prevention, pest avoidance, pest monitoring, and pest suppression strategies.

Purpose. This practice is applied to support one or more of the following purposes:

- Prevent, minimize or mitigate water quality risks of pesticides leaving the site
- Reduce risks to ground and surface water quality from leaching and runoff
- Prevent, minimize or mitigate off-site pesticide drift and vaporization risks to soil, water, air, plants, animals and humans
- Prevent, minimize or mitigate on-site pesticide risks to pollinators and other beneficial non-target species through direct contact
- Prevent, minimize or mitigate cultural, mechanical and biological pest suppression risks to soil, water, air, plants, animals and humans



NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT

| | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Definition. Managing the amount (rate), source, placement (method of application), and timing of plant nutrients and soil amendments.

Purpose. This practice is applied to support one or more of the following purposes:

- Budget, time, supply, and conserve nutrient applications for plant production
- Minimize agricultural nonpoint source pollution of surface and groundwater resources
- Utilize manure or organic by-products properly as a plant nutrient source
- Protect or improve water quality for fish and wildlife habitat
- Protect or improve air quality by reducing odors, nitrogen emissions (ammonia, oxides of nitrogen), and the formation of atmospheric particulates
- To maintain or improve the physical, chemical, and biological condition of soil

PRESCRIBED GRAZING

| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Definition. Managing the harvest of vegetation with grazing and/or browsing animals.

Purpose. This practice may be applied as a part of conservation management system to achieve one or more of the following:

- Improve or maintain desired species composition and vigor of plant communities
- Improve or maintain quantity and quality of forage for grazing and browsing animals’ health and productivity
- Reduce erosion rate of soils, sediments and nutrients to protect or improve stream and/or wetland conditions
- Improve or maintain surface and/or subsurface water quality and quantity
- Improve or maintain riparian and watershed function
- Maintain or improve soil condition
- Improve or maintain the quantity and quality of habitat, food and/or cover available for wildlife
- Manage fine fuel loads to achieve desired conditions



RIPARIAN FOREST BUFFER

| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Definition. An area predominantly of suitable trees and/or shrubs planted along a stream, river, lake or other water body.

Purpose. This practice is applied to support one or more of the following purposes:

- Create shade to lower or maintain water temperatures to improve habitat for aquatic organisms
- Increase retention of flood waters
- Create or improve riparian habitat, cover and refuge for wildlife
- Provide a source of detritus and large woody debris to improve fish habitat

- Increase filtration and reduce amounts of sediment, organic material, nutrients and pesticides in surface runoff
- Reduce nutrients and other chemicals in shallow ground water flow
- Reduce pesticide drift entering the water body
- Restore riparian plant communities and soil stability
- Increase carbon storage in plant biomass and soils

TILLAGE AND CROP RESIDUE MANAGEMENT

| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Definition. Tillage and crop residue management is a means of limiting soil disturbance to manage the amount, orientation and distribution of crop and plant residue on the soil surface year-round.

Purpose. This practice is applied to support one or more of the following purposes:

- Reduce erosion and runoff of sediment, organic material, nutrients and pesticides to surface waters
- Reduce flow of nutrients and chemicals to shallow ground waters
- Increase retention of snow and flood waters
- Improve soil health, organic content, porosity and stability
- Increase carbon storage in plant biomass and soils
- Provide food and escape cover for wildlife
- Improve water use efficiency
- Reduce energy use



WATERING FACILITY

| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Definition. A watering facility is a means of providing drinking water to livestock or wildlife.

Purpose. This practice is applied to support one or more of the following purposes:

- Supply daily water requirements
- Improve animal distribution and health
- Provide a water source that is an alternative to a sensitive resource



- Reduce soil compaction and nutrient distribution to improve riparian conditions
- Improve or maintain surface and/or subsurface water quality and quantity

WETLAND RESTORATION

| I DO THIS – IMPLEMENTED | | I’M INTERESTED IN THIS | N/A |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On or before July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> After July 22, 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Definition. The return of a wetland and its functions to a close approximation of its original condition as it existed prior to disturbance on a former or degraded wetland site.

Purpose. This practice is applied to support one or more of the following purposes:

- Restore wetland function, value, habitat, diversity and/or capacity
- Restore conditions conducive to hydric soil maintenance
- Improve wetland hydrology
- Restore native wetland vegetation (including the removal of undesired species, and/or seeding or planting of desired species)
- Improve surface and ground water quality
- Improve habitat and cover quality for migratory birds and waterfowl
- Improve habitat and cover quality for wildlife, fish and aquatic species



STEP 3: ACTION PLAN

Once you have done your best to answer the questions and complete Steps 1 and 2, please contact an approved VSP technical assistance provider for more information on funding to establish conservation practices, to learn about next steps, and to develop an action plan. Providers must be certified by the NRCS in order to be considered approved Technical Assistance Providers.

The Thurston Conservation District is the lead provider for the Voluntary Stewardship Program, but you may contact any other NRCS certified Technical Service Provider.

Lead Technical Assistance Provider:

Thurston Conservation District <http://www.thurstoncd.com/>

Supporting Technical Assistance Providers:

USDA Technical Service Provider Locator: <https://techreg.sc.egov.usda.gov/CustLocateTSP.aspx>
WSU Extension <http://ext100.wsu.edu/thurston/agriculture/>

***Disclaimer:** Every operation is unique and requires a site-specific assessment of: 1) whether there is a need to implement conservation practices, and 2) whether conservation practices are in fact appropriate to a site. Not all the information needed to implement these measures is contained in this checklist. Please see technical assistance providers for more guidance as well as funding opportunities.*

