



## Okanogan County VSP Meeting Minutes

A regular session of the Okanogan County VSP Workgroup was held on November 3, 2016 at 6:30 p.m. in the Natural Resource Conference Room, 123 5th Avenue North, Okanogan, Washington.

**OKANOGAN COUNTY STAFF:** Director Perry Huston, Natural Resources Planner Angela Hubbard, Planner 1 Pam Wyllson

**VOULUNTARY STEWARDSHIP MEMBERS:** Bill Tackman, Les Kinney, Megan Kernan, Jerry Barnes, Dick Ewing.

**OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Amy Martin

**Approval of Agenda:** Mr. Barnes moved to approve the agenda as written, Mr. Tackman seconded the motion, Mr. Ewing proposed adding Grant information and Time line for information the group does not have. Mr. Barnes moved to approve the modified agenda Mr. Tackman seconded. All were in favor of changes to the agenda.

**Approval of Minutes:** Mr. Tackman moved to approve, Mr. Barnes seconded, Minutes approved.

**AG Sustainability Review:** Mr. Huston gave an overview of his BOCC discussion where he updated the County Commissioners on where the VSP group is at. There was discussion on how the critical area ordinance protects the critical areas except in AG lands which are now protected under VSP. How do we protect the critical areas and still sustain AG at the intersections and not the whole County?

**Review Map Intersections:** Ms. Hubbard gave a brief overview showing where wetlands, Flood, slopes over 30% and severe CMZ and Ag intersect. The map represented both current use Ag and Conservation District information. Everyone referred to the chart handout showing total Ag land and percentages of that land in each of the critical areas discussed.

**Ag Viability (Sustainability):** Discussion of ways Agricultural land owners can assess their property. Possibly use categorizing wetland as a tool. Mr. Ewing suggested that an option could be to have a conservation representative come out to assess the property and come up with a management plan. Mr. Tackman suggested a toolbox a type of checklist that can be done independently. Mr. Barnes stated that many templates already exist. Mr. Ewing stated the Conservation District has many documents that can be utilized. There was discussion on where different types of Ag occur. Mr. Ewing stated orchards over 2000 feet in elevation would not survive. Mr. Tackman stated 1400 feet to 1500 feet in elevation

is typically for orchards. Mr. Kenny stated most orchards are along the river. Mr. Barns stated the Assessor's office has acres for different Ag activities.

The discussion continued on where to focus on Ag sustainability. Should they concentrate on the sliver where Ag and critical areas intersect or the county as a whole? The specific purpose statement was referred to RCW 36.70A.700 – 36.70A.760 protect critical areas while protecting viability of AG for the state of Washington. How does balancing the intersection impact the whole viability of AG in the county and the state of Washington? Mr. Ewing stated trade agreements also affect the sustainability of AG. Mr. Tackman stated water quality and quantity are very important to sustainability. If water quality goes down the drain then the land is worthless.

Profitability is key to keeping Ag viable which relates to development pressure. An example is converting farmland to other uses. Mr. Kenny pointed out that someone who bought a farm 50 years ago might want to sell. There are already regulations in place making it hard to sell their AG land at a decent price. Such as open space ag has to stay in ag or pay seven years back taxes. Flexibility is needed to stay in ag. A farm is worth about \$300 an acre but a developer will pay \$2,000 an acre. The question was asked if there is an up and coming generation that is going to farm.

Ms. Kernan stated that they should look at the viability of Ag for the county as a whole. Protecting critical areas against viability of Ag is not helpful. Mr. Ewing suggested to keep both ideas on the table, Mr. Tackman suggested looking at specifics and how they impact overall sustainability.

Mr. Huston stated keeping land available for production you would need to minimize buffer zones. Onerous regulations are burdensome and we should avoid complexity. Make sure farmers have flexibility to deal with changing markets. We have to consider water quality. Ms. Kernan stated water temperature would be a significant challenge. Mr. Tackman stated fires and mudslides contribute to the degradation of water quality. Any work done in critical areas could potentially impact mud slides.

Mr. Ewing stated they should get ideas to fit in the draft and fill in the blanks. Define what we do know and what we would want a consultant to do. Concentrate on getting the information from the conservation district on work they have done.

**Next Step:** Mr. Ewing offered to meet with Mr. Huston to fill in some of the blanks for the work plan. Get a Bibliography put together, examples of RFQ vs RFP, and Bullet point summary for next meeting.

**Adjourn:** Ms Kernan moved to adjourn, Mr. Tackman seconded.

| Pam Wyllson  
Planner 1