

VOLUNTEER STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM WORK PLAN

For Okanogan County

Draft 1 November 13, 2016

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Okanogan County nearly 58% of the land is owned by federal and state agencies. An additional 20% of the County is within the boundaries of The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and therefore outside of the direct planning and permitting authority of the County, with the exception of deeded fee lands. Of the remaining land mass, it is estimated that another 10% is not suitable for substantial development due to topography, access, potable water, critical area features and other limiting factors. The remaining land mass (about 10% of the County) provides the privately owned land to provide for residential, industrial, and commercial needs both in and out of the incorporated cities and towns. This land, together with publicly owned lands, supports the agricultural, natural resource and recreation- based activities that are central to the local economy and the environmental values and benefits important to the residents and property owners of the County. Tribal lands, under the management of The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation also provide a significant contribution to the County economy and environment.

1.1 Vision statement:

1.2 Purpose and goals:

Purpose of the VSP plan:

(1) The purpose of chapter 360, Laws of 2011 is to establish the voluntary stewardship program as recommended in the report submitted by the William D. Ruckelshaus Center to the legislature as required by chapter 353, Laws of 2007 and chapter 203, Laws of 2010.

(2) It is the intent of chapter 360, Laws of 2011 to:

(a) Promote plans to protect and enhance critical areas within the area where agricultural activities are conducted, while maintaining and improving the long-term viability of agriculture in the state of Washington and reducing the conversion of farmland to other uses;

(b) Focus and maximize voluntary incentive programs to encourage good riparian and ecosystem stewardship as an alternative to historic approaches used to protect critical areas;

- (c) Rely upon RCW [36.70A.060](#) for the protection of critical areas for those counties that do not choose to participate in this program;
- (d) Leverage existing resources by relying upon existing work and plans in counties and local watersheds, as well as existing state and federal programs to the maximum extent practicable to achieve program goals;
- (e) Encourage and foster a spirit of cooperation and partnership among county, tribal, environmental, and agricultural interests to better assure the program success;
- (f) Improve compliance with other laws designed to protect water quality and fish habitat; and
- (g) Rely upon voluntary stewardship practices as the primary method of protecting critical areas and not require the cessation of agricultural activities.

1.3 Historical overview:

The Voluntary Stewardship Program is an incentive based approach to protecting critical areas while promoting the viability of agriculture. The program uses a watershed based collaborative stewardship planning process and relies on incentive based practices for protecting critical areas, promoting viable agriculture, and encouraging cooperation among diverse stakeholders.

In 2007 the State Legislature tasked the William D. Ruckelshaus Center with facilitating a common ground solution that would ensure productive agriculture in our state, protect critical areas, and resolve long standing controversies related to the Growth Management Act. Following a three-year collaborative process involving state and local governments, tribes, the agricultural community and environmental interest, the Ruckelshaus Center presented the framework for the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP), which uses incentive based programs to support both critical areas and viable agriculture. The Legislature created VSP within the State Conservation Commission in 2011 (RCW 36.70A.705).

Okanogan County opted into the Voluntary Stewardship Program and reached out to stakeholder to form the VSP work group. The work group is tasked with developing a Work Plan to provide goals, measurable benchmarks and incentives, leveraging existing information from watershed plans and other programs to protect critical areas and promote agriculture.

1.4 Definitions:

The definitions in this section apply to RCW [36.70A.700](#) through [36.70A.760](#) and RCW [36.70A.130](#) and [36.70A.280](#) unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

- 1 (1) "*Agricultural activities*" means all agricultural uses and practices as defined in
2 RCW [90.58.065](#).
- 3 (2) "*Commission*" means the state conservation commission as defined in RCW
4 [89.08.030](#).
- 5 (3) "*Director*" means the executive director of the state conservation commission.
- 6 (4) "Enhance" or "enhancement" means to improve the processes, structure, and
7 functions existing, as of July 22, 2011, of ecosystems and habitats associated with
8 critical areas.
- 9 (5) "*Participating watershed*" means a watershed identified by a county under RCW
10 [36.70A.710](#)(1) to participate in the program.
- 11 (6) "*Priority watershed*" means a geographic area nominated by the county and
12 designated by the commission.
- 13 (7) "*Program*" means the voluntary stewardship program established in RCW
14 [36.70A.705](#).
- 15 (8) "*Protect*" or "*protecting*" means to prevent the degradation of functions and
16 values existing as of July 22, 2011.
- 17 (9) "*Receipt of funding*" means the date a county takes legislative action accepting
18 any funds as required in RCW [36.70A.715](#)(1) to implement the program.
- 19 (10) "*Statewide advisory committee*" means the statewide advisory committee
20 created in RCW [36.70A.745](#).
- 21 (11) "*Technical panel*" means the directors or director designees of the following
22 agencies: The department of fish and wildlife; the department of agriculture; the
23 department of ecology; and the commission.
- 24 (12) "*Watershed*" means a water resource inventory area, salmon recovery
25 planning area, or a subbasin as determined by a county.
- 26 (13) "*Watershed group*" means an entity designated by a county under the
27 provisions of RCW [36.70A.715](#).
- 28 (14) "*Work plan*" means a watershed work plan developed under the provisions of
29 RCW [36.70A.720](#).

34 1.5 Project Details

35 1.5.1 Work Group Structure

36 The watershed work group was established by invitation from the
37 County. The workgroup was composed of various stakeholders
38 including representation from the tribes, environmental group,
39 WRIA planning units and agricultural groups.

1 The Work Group consists of the following committee members;

- 2 • Okanogan County Farm Bureau
- 3 • Okanogan County Cattlemen Association
- 4 • Okanogan County Horticultural Association
- 5 • Environmental Group
- 6 • Watershed Planning Units
- 7 • At large Commissioner District 1
- 8 • At large Commissioner District 2
- 9 • At large Commissioner District 3
- 10 • At large member
- 11 • Colville Confederated Tribe (invited)
- 12 • Yakama Indian Nation (invited)

13
14 1.5.2 Work Group Duties

15 The VSP legislation at RCW 36.70A.720 specifically outlines the duties of
16 the Work Group and requirements of this VSP Watershed Work Plan
17 (Plan). These are:

- 18
- 19
- 20 (a) Review and incorporate applicable water quality, watershed
- 21 management, farmland protection, and species recovery data and plans;
- 22 (b) Seek input from tribes, agencies, and stakeholders;
- 23 (c) Develop goals for participation by agricultural operators conducting
- 24 commercial and noncommercial agricultural activities in the watershed
- 25 necessary to meet the protection and enhancement benchmarks of the
- 26 work plan;
- 27 (d) Ensure outreach and technical assistance is provided to agricultural
- 28 operators in the watershed;
- 29 (e) Create measurable benchmarks that, within ten years after the receipt
- 30 of funding, are designed to result in (i) the protection of critical area
- 31 functions and values and (ii) the enhancement of critical area functions
- 32 and values through the voluntary, incentive-based measures;
- 33 (f) Designate the entity or entities that will provide technical assistance;
- 34 (g) Work with the entity providing technical assistance to ensure that
- 35 individual stewardship plans contribute to the goals and benchmarks for
- 36 protection;
- 37 (h) Incorporate into the work plan any existing developmental regulations
- 38 relied upon to achieve the goals and benchmarks for protection;
- 39 (i) Establish baseline monitoring for: (i) Participation activities and
- 40 implementation of the voluntary stewardship plans and projects; (ii)
- 41 stewardship activities; and (iii) the effects on critical areas and agriculture
- 42 relevant to the protection and enhancement benchmarks developed for
- 43 the watershed;

- (j) Conduct periodic evaluations, institute adaptive management, and provide a written report of the status of plans and accomplishments to the county and to the commission within sixty days after the end of each biennium;
- (k) Assist state agencies in their monitoring programs; and
- (l) Satisfy any other reporting requirements of the program.

1.5.3 Elements of the Work Plan

The VSP Work Group is responsible for presenting the Work Plan to the Director of the Washington State Conservation Commission. The Technical panel comprised of the Departments of Fish and Wildlife, Ecology and Agriculture are to review and approve the proposed plan.

For approval, the proposed Work Plan must meet three core tests:

- Protection of critical areas
- Maintenance and enhancement of agricultural viability
- Voluntary enhancement of critical areas through promotion of incentive-based measures.

How to meet the Protect Critical Areas test:

How to meet maintain and Enhance Agricultural Viability test:

How to create and meet Protection and Enhancement benchmarks:

2.0 BASELINE CONDITIONS

The effective date of the VSP legislation is July 22, 2011. This is the statutory date for identifying the applicable baseline for county requirements related to protecting a particular critical area, and for maintaining and enhancing agricultural viability. This baseline also delineates the assessment line between critical area protection and voluntary enhancement that may be promoted where needed, through incentive-based measures, to improve critical area functions and values above the July 22, 2011 protection baseline. (RCW 36.70A.703)

This is also the date from which the County will measure progress in implementing the Work Plan measurable benchmarks. VSP programmatic assessments should occur at the watershed scale (not farm by farm or ranch by ranch), as all VSP participation by agricultural operators is voluntary. "Program shall be designed to protect and enhance critical areas on lands used for agricultural activities through voluntary actions by agricultural operators." (RCW 36.70A.705(1))

VSP law calls for:

- ...goals and benchmarks for the protection and enhancement of critical areas (RCW 36.70A.720 (1))

- 1 • Create measurable benchmarks that, within ten years after the receipt of funding,
2 are designed to result in (i) the protection of critical area functions and values
3 and (ii) the enhancement of critical area functions and values through voluntary,
4 incentive-based measures; RCW 36.70A.720 (2) (e)
- 5 • Establish baseline monitoring for: (i) Participation activities and implementation of
6 the voluntary stewardship plans and projects; (ii) stewardship activities; and (iii)
7 the effects on critical areas and agriculture relevant to the protection and
8 enhancement benchmarks developed for the watershed (RCW 36.70A.720 (2)(i))

9
10 The baseline status of critical areas and their intersection with agricultural activities are
11 identified below. Goals and measurable benchmarks relating to those critical areas,
12 participation, and stewardship activities:

13
14 **2.1 Need data of Restoration and Conservation Actions since 2011 relating to
15 Habitat from WDFW and Ecology. Include the following:**

- 16 • Land acquisitions and Conservation Easements
- 17 • Irrigation and Streamflow Enhancements
- 18 • Shoreline enhancements
- 19 • Riparian enhancements
- 20 • Flood plain and side channel restorations
- 21 •

22 **2.2 Need NRCS Conservation Practices Implemented since 2011**

23
24 **2.3 Critical Areas intersection with Agricultural Activities**

- 25 • Identify Acreage per critical area
- 26 • Identify baseline Acreage and Current Status of Designated Agricultural
27 lands
 - 28 ○ Farmland Protection Program 2011 Baseline: % in open space, %
29 in long term Ag.
- 30 •

31 **2.4 Identify specific Ag land ownership for lands intersecting critical areas**

32
33 **2.5 Need identification of specific Critical areas of concern from NRCS,
34 Conservation Commission, WDFW and Ecology associated with Ag activities..**

35
36
37 **3.0 GOALS AND MEASURABLE BENCHMARKS**

38
39 The benchmarks and measurements presented here are designed to meet the overall
40 Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) goals to 1) protect and voluntarily enhance
41 critical area functions and values, and 2) maintain and improve the long-term viability of
42 agriculture and reduce the conversion of farmland to other uses.

43 The benchmarks include metrics that serve as criteria for monitoring the impacts and
44 progress made towards the goals from the implementation of the VSP. Benchmarks
45 represent steps in the desired direction measured over time and metrics are the tools

1 for measurement. After implementation of the VSP Work Plan, metrics will be reviewed
2 on an annual or biannual basis and benchmarks will be reviewed every 5 years after
3 receipt of funding.

4
5 Agriculture viability on lands associated with critical areas is directly related to many
6 factors affecting agriculture viability in general. These include:

- 7 • Land availability
- 8 • Flexibility of land use to allow crop changes and uses such as grazing
- 9 • Water availability, means of getting water for more water intensive crops
- 10 • Water quality such as freedom from contamination or erosion from natural events
- 11 • Not losing Ag lands to development
- 12 • Regulations which raise cost or restrict flexibility of land use
- 13 • Regulations of land classifications that make sale of Ag land to future farm
14 difficult and make it more advantageous to sell land for development.

15
16 **3.1 Determine Agricultural Viability Goals, Objectives and Measurement**
17 **benchmarks**

18
19 **3.2 Determine Critical Areas Goals, Benchmarks and Measurements**

20
21 **3.3 Agriculture and Critical Area Intersections**

22
23 **3.3.1 Determine Agriculture and Geologic Hazard Areas Intersection Objective and**
24 **Measurements**

25
26 **3.3.2 Determine Agriculture and Fish and Wildlife Habitat Areas Intersection**
27 **Objectives and Measurements**

28
29 **3.3.3 Determine Agriculture and Wetland Intersection Objectives and**
30 **Measurements**

31
32 **3.3.4 Determine Agriculture and Frequently Flooded Areas and Aquifer Recharge**
33 **Areas Intersection Objectives and Measurements**

34
35 **3.3.5 Determine Agriculture and Geological Hazard Areas Intersection Objectives**
36 **and Measurements.**

37
38 **3.4 Determine Participation and Stewardship Goals, Benchmarks and**
39 **Measurements.**

40
41 **3.5 Suggested activities to maintain and enhance Agricultural viability**

42
43 Essentially we need a publication list of all best management and Conservation practices from
44 NRCS and CC and the Washington Ag extension services.

45
46 **4.0 VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PLANS**

1
2 **4.1 Resources for Voluntary Stewardship plan development**

- 3 • Develop a worksheet or analytical format a landowner can use to analyze
4 his operations in regard to the critical area on his property

5 **4.2 What is a Voluntary Stewardship Plan?**

- 6 • Develop a Plan format that allows a landowner to identify existing
7 practices that he already is employing that have preserved and protected
8 his critical area
9 • Include provisions for additional practices the land owner is committed to
10 apply to land management around the critical area.
11 • Provide for benchmarks the landowner will maintain or attain through his
12 VSP.

13 Under the VSP, a Stewardship Plan is a site-specific plan for individual agricultural
14 operations. Stewardship Plans are intended to provide guidance to agricultural
15 producers to undertake voluntary conservation planning for common agricultural
16 activities and to protect and voluntarily enhance critical areas. A checklist shall be
17 provided to give the individual an opportunity to understand the potential impacts of their
18 agricultural activities and adopt conservation practices that can improve the productivity
19 of their agricultural operations while also protecting critical areas
20

21 The goal of the voluntary Stewardship Plan process is to protect certain critical areas
22 and their associated buffers from the potential impacts of agricultural activities while
23 also maintaining and improving agricultural operations. The plan includes basic
24 information about the agricultural activities on the farm and a standard checklist with
25 examples of NRCS conservation practices designed to protect critical areas and
26 improve agricultural operations. Once the checklist is approved by the technical
27 assistance provider and an action plan is developed for implementation, the
28 Stewardship Plan meets the requirements of the VSP under the GMA. As per RCW
29 36.70A.750:

30
31 “Agricultural operators implementing an individual stewardship plan consistent with a
32 work plan are presumed to be working toward the protection and enhancement of
33 critical areas.
34

35 “If the watershed group determines that additional or different practices are needed
36 to achieve the work plan's goals and benchmarks, the agricultural operator may not be
37 required to implement those practices but may choose to implement the revised
38 practices on a voluntary basis and is eligible for funding to revise the practices.”
39

40 After implementation of the VSP Work Plan the Work Group must periodically evaluate,
41 adapt if needed, and report on the status of plans and accomplishments to the county
42 and the conservation commission every two years (RCW 36.70A.720 (1)(j)).
43

44 **4.3 Develop an approach to gain participation in the VSP.**
45

1 **5.0 MONITORING, REPORTING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT**

2
3 The VSP Work Group is responsible for ongoing monitoring, reporting, and adaptive
4 management of the Work Plan implementation. RCW 36.70A.720 describes the
5 schedule and actions the Work Group must follow during implementation of the plan.
6

7 (i) Not later than five years after the receipt of funding for a participating watershed,
8 the watershed group must report to the director and the county on whether it has met
9 the work plan's protection and enhancement goals and benchmarks.
10

11 (ii) If the watershed group determines the protection goals and benchmarks have
12 been met, and the director concurs under RCW 36.70A.730, the watershed group shall
13 continue to implement the work plan.
14

15 (iii) If the watershed group determines the protection goals and benchmarks have not
16 been met, it must propose and submit to the director an adaptive management plan to
17 achieve the goals and benchmarks that were not met. If the director does not approve
18 the adaptive management plan under RCW 36.70A.730, the watershed is subject to
19 RCW 36.70A.735.
20

21 (iv) If the watershed group determines the enhancement goals and benchmarks have
22 not been met, the watershed group must determine what additional voluntary actions
23 are needed to meet the benchmarks, identify the funding necessary to implement these
24 actions, and implement these actions when funding is provided. (RCW 36.70A.720)
25 The statute further requires reporting, evaluation and, if necessary, adaptive
26 management at “ten years after the receipt of funding... and every five years thereafter”.
27

28 The majority of the monitoring will be conducted by the primary technical assistance
29 provider (Thurston Conservation District) through tracking the participation in
30 Stewardship Plans and implementation of conservation practices. The watershed level
31 monitoring activities will primarily be conducted by Thurston County (potentially an
32 agricultural liaison, pending funding) in collaboration with other organizations that collect
33 specific data in the watershed.
34

35 VSP programmatic assessments should occur at the watershed scale (not parcel by
36 parcel or on an individual site level), as all VSP participation by agricultural operators is
37 voluntary. General information from parcel level monitoring such as acreage and
38 numbers, including the number of Stewardship Plans and conservation practices
39 implemented can be reported in conjunction with watershed level monitoring data.
40

41 **6.0 PLAN APPROVAL PROCESS**

42
43 The Conservation Commission Director must approve the Work Plan within 3 years of
44 funding⁷ or the county must comply with the non-VSP (regulatory) critical area
45 protection requirements of RCW 36.70A.735.

1 The Work Group submits the VSP Work Plan to the Conservation Commission Director,
2 who gives it to the Technical Panel for review. RCW 36.70A.720(2)(a). The Technical
3 Panel has 45 days to make a recommendation. If the Technical Panel says the Work
4 Plan doesn't pass the statutory Work Plan Approval test, the Work Group must modify
5 and resubmit the Work Plan.
6 If the Conservation Commission Director does not approve the Work Plan within 2 years
7 and 9 months of the county's receipt of funding, the Director must submit the Work Plan
8 to the Statewide Advisory Committee for resolution. The Statewide Advisory Committee
9 has final say. If the Statewide Advisory Committee recommends Work Plan approval,
10 the Conservation Commission Director must approve it.

11
12 **Develop Work Plan Preparation, Approval and Monitoring Timeline**

13
14 **7.0 APPENDICIES**

15
16 **Identify Appendices content and supporting documents for the VSP Plan**

17
18
19

