

**Whitman County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Agriculture Conservation Measures Subcommittee
7/28 conference call**

Conference Call Notes

Attendees:

- Subcommittee: Jon Jones, John Pearson, Alan Thomson, Kim Weerts
- Others: Evan Scheffels, Brad Johnson, Dan Harwood
- AQ: Ben Floyd, John Small, Vivian Erickson

Ag Activity:

- Include conservation practices associated with irrigated croplands, but qualify that there is limited irrigated lands in County.
- Dryland rotations:
 - Rotations are typically based on precipitation profiles as follows:
 - 2-yr: less than 14" (winter wheat/summer fallow)
 - 3-yr: 14" to 18"
 - Annual: 18" and greater
 - Increased productivity curve is shifting further west with more advanced ag practices
 - South of Endicott in western profile is typically 2-yr rotations, with higher intensity as you move north – consistent with precipitation profile. Group concurred that ag activity follows precipitation profiles as mapped on draft precipitation map.

Conservation Practices Table

- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) measures
 - Consider flagging Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) measures that are also included in the RCPP (caveat – balance with making sure the table isn't too busy and unreadable)
 - Include NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) practices that are also eligible under the RCPP grant
 - Reference RCPP and FOTG website
- Conservation Practices
 - Group discuss the pros and cons of including a more comprehensive versus a more narrowed list of conservation measures in the work plan
 - Pros: provide as many options to landowners for implementing conservation practices
 - Cons:
 - concerned with landowners perception/interpretation that some conservation practices would be required, regardless of the fact that actions under VSP are all voluntary
 - concerned that adding new conservation practices will require official revision to Work Plan, especially as new and more advanced conservation practices are identified in coming years.

- Example conservation practice – Cover crops:
 - Cover Crops and other practices can enhance soil health (microbiology, plant matter, biomass, moisture management)
 - Example cover crops include: peas (typ. For 2-yr rotations), legumes (in areas with less than 18" precipitation), brassicas, and radishes.
 - Cover cropping can enhance yield by 10% to 15% in the following wheat rotation.
- Additional Range-related practices:
 - Rotational Grazing
 - Water Storage/Troughs
 - Water Gaps
 - Managed Grazing (managed riparian grazing)
 - Others covered in table sent out with call materials

VSP Implementation

- How do we capture undocumented voluntary conservation practices conducted by landowners?
- What actions qualify under VSP?
- Clarify that conservation practices qualifying under VSP do not necessarily need captured in the Work Plan conservation measures table.
- Consider including conservation practices table as appendix and focus more on developing a checklist.
- Keep work plan broader/simpler to encourage more participation
- Farmers need ability to take land out of CRP without penalty
- Keep protection standards simple:
 - Maintain 2011 functions/value baseline
 - Encourage voluntary actions in problem areas and avoid degradation of baseline conditions

Next steps

- Sept 1 – next Work Group meeting
 - Work through an example subbasin to see how implementation of VSP could work
 - Include scenarios of lands being taken out of CRP, and additional VSP measures being implemented
 - Identify HUC level goals and how they compare to County-level/watershed benchmarks/goals under VSP
- CDs can help provide RCPP practices to AQ
- AQ will follow-up with CDs prior to Sept. 1 meeting to discuss baseline conditions for Sept. 1 example run-through