

**WHITMAN COUNTY
VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM
Meeting
November 3, 2016
Commissioner's Chambers**

MEMBERS:

Alan Thomson	Art Swannack
Jeff Pittmann (absent)	Joan Folwell
Jon Jones	Kim Weerts
Nancy Belsby	David Lange (Absent)
David Swannack (Absent)	John Pearson
Larry Cochran	Tracy Eriksen (Phone)

Phone: Vivian Erickson, Anchor QEA; John Stuhlmiller, VSP member; John Small, Anchor QEA.

Audience: Ben Floyd, Anchor QEA; Nora Schlenker, Anchor QEA; Brian Bell, Whitman Conservation District; Bradley Johnson, Palouse Conservation District; Elinor Huber, Clerk.

3:05 p.m. – Ben Floyd – Today we will re-cap from prior work group meeting. The main thing we will be focusing on is what your work plan is starting to look like. We've been building the front pieces of the work plan but we are also going to share what we think will go into the section, the measures, goals and benchmarks, implementation and get your feedback on those parts of the plan so that when we finish those sections as we work through December, you provide us input on every section of the plan.

If we have time, we are going to talk about outreach strategies at the end of the meeting. Then the next step will be our next meeting in January; you are taking December off. Any questions on the agenda?

At the last meeting we went through the conservation measures and made sure we didn't limit the conservation measures, make sure that we didn't push for just NRCS or conservation districts or bring up programs that we know. We just kept it as a tool box that people can just take all or part of the pieces of those tools and implement in the work plan.

We also talked about doing a 2-volume work plan that the front part is a piece that is going to be shared so if you have a neighbor who asks about the VSP you have a 25-page document that describes everything about it. How it began and what it means for you.

Then Volume 2 will have all the details, Technical Appendices, everything that is maybe more for this group, for the technical review panel for those organizations that are going to lead the implementation and track how this program is implemented over time, including baseline conditions, critical areas functions, and ag viability, protection and enhancement strategies and goals benchmarks, and measurement tables. It is detail that not everyone will want to get into.

Then we said that we need to talk more about benchmarks, protection enhancement, there were some questions about that. It is voluntary but this is required. So what is required? We are going to go back and talk a little bit more about it. We don't have a white paper, Kim, but we have some slides that we think more clearly describe what the requirements are and the differences. If after this discussion you still feel that you'd like to have something we are going to have a write-up that is included in the report.

Anything from the last meeting you want to bring up?

Jon Jones – I think it might help Kim a little bit. We had discussion at the last meeting about the toolbox and the things we should and shouldn't include, and the toolbox is just a series of tools and we have a plan before we use those tools. Just by taking one tool out or one FOTG part doesn't mean that somebody is going to comply with what we are doing here. So the toolbox, what we select on that almost comes out to the plan and then we go to the tools.

Ben Floyd – I think that is right and you want to make it as comprehensive as possible which is what I think you have said, as well. But what I also heard is, let's not try to push people into one direction or other. I think we had agreement around the workgroup about our approach on that.

Jon Jones – I think we did. When I left the meeting I felt a little uneasy about it. Treat it like a toolbox, not the whole automobile.

Ben Floyd – It did remind me of another thing. Joan gave us some additional programs to make sure we included a lot of different things. You may have pointed out one but we noticed another one on there that we didn't have included on the list.

Joan Folwell – I included Fish & Wildlife and then I sent one to you.

Art Swannack – Then we also were going to add that this wasn't a complete list of all possible.

Ben Floyd – Right, it is an example toolbox, and it is not the toolbox which I think we have captured. Okay, so the conceptual overview of the work plan, volume 1, chapter 1. At the introduction we are thinking very short, 1-2 pages, probably some pictures in there, too. Discuss the main goals and purpose of the VSP relationship to the Growth Management Act, voluntary versus regulatory.

Summarize the work plan elements so we are saying here is what is required and here is what we developed to meet the requirements.

Roles and responsibilities, and this is roles and responsibilities both during development of the work plan and implementation. Implementation will be just introduced and then there is a whole implementation section that will have more details about roles and responsibilities.

Then we are thinking that we have a pretty good handle about what this program entails, but for some who are reading this for the first time will read the first page and they might have a question about this and this, etc. This was Vivian's idea to put a few frequently asked questions up front. So, after we get through how does the VSP affect you as a landowner, is this something you are required to participate in? So, when people see this right up front, we start to get them thinking about questions and we have a few responses. So we will come up with the first shot at what those questions are and we are thinking like maybe four or five questions.

Vivian Erickson – Yes, and we were thinking of including topics of describing the importance of the voluntary landowner participation and the success of VSP and how technical assistance could be provided to those who are interested in participating and maybe outlining the differences between VSP approach versus the traditional GMA approach with the critical areas regulations.

Ben Floyd – Okay, thank you. So that is Chapter 1. We are also going to include in Chapter 1 something like this that shows growth management act, voluntary stewardship program, other rules and regulations still apply and maybe we would add to this something that shows building permits, any other structural permits, traditional critical areas protection. Something that shows that this is a different pathway from the traditional regulatory approach.

Art Swannack – I think you need to emphasize what would happen if you didn't have VSP. That is the reason why we are doing this. Have that right up front and this is what happens if you are subject to critical areas ordinances. This is the regulation, this is what you have to work with.

Ben Floyd – That is a great suggestion. Any questions on the first two pages? We actually have most of this already written, but we don't have what you just talked about, Art. That is exactly the kind of input we are looking for.

Okay, Regional Setting. We are thinking about some maps, show existing ag land, show precipitation, because this kind of sets up where measures are appropriate and where they are not on the precipitation and just a very general overview of drainage areas and how we have broken up the County into different geographic areas.

Joan Folwell – In reading the notes from the technical advisory committee, who have been listening to reports from what is being done in Grant County and Skagit County, are you equating those watersheds to the subunits that these other counties are also establishing and they may be establishing their subunits under different qualifications, like what is grown, community areas, not just by watershed? But we are taking the watershed out.

Ben Floyd – We are proposing a hybrid approach. So, for critical areas functions in determining what are the functions and values for the wetlands and streams that are in the County, we are organizing that information by drainage areas. The Palouse Main stem is quite a bit different from Union Flat Creek in terms of riparian areas adjacent habitat, land use right down in the valley, there is quite a bit of difference in terms of what the intersects there are with ag (inaudible).

So, for critical areas functions and values documentation we are using this watershed drainage approach, the hydrological unit where we have actually taken the County and broken it up into 16 sub watersheds. That is kind of hard to see but there is these blue lines. Those are the 16 hydrologic units so for functions we are doing based on that. We are thinking for organizing, for implementation, that we would propose maybe a more geographic based, not watershed based approach but it could be, for example, boundaries of the conservation district if you decide that is who you want to have lead. Or it could be just maybe by communities that work together.

We are actually hoping to get input from you later on in this meeting about implementation and how you want it organized. Someone has to implement this program. It is not going to be you, you are going to oversee it. You are going to set up the program, you are going to check in on the progress but someone else is going to be working with the landowners. It may be multiple but someone has to take ownership of this program to just see that it is implemented and to identify progress and summarize results and benefits. Alan and Art are probably not going to volunteer to be in that role. Their responsibility under VSP is to set this process up and then participate and do nothing more. If they got into the implementation part of this, they would essentially end up owning it, too. So for those reasons they may not want to do that.

Nancy Belsby – What is the 16 sub-watersheds and (HUC 10), what is that?

Ben Floyd – It's the level of hydrologic unit detail. So, we are using HUC 10, which is 16 drainages. If it is like HUC 8 it may break up to only 5 watersheds. It rolled them up together for them.

John Small – I believe that is the three major watersheds at the next level out which is 8. It's just how many digits are in the code, it is a little bit of a (inaudible) term but it is the way USGS classifies all their watershed delineations.

Ben Floyd – So, just think about it at the level of detail. This is a little higher level of detail than at a different, at Hydrologic Unit Code. We are going to talk about different crops that are produced, how much dry land, range land, irrigated; just context. People need to know that Whitman County is quite a bit different than, for example, Grant County. So the conservations measures, what is in your toolbox, here something may be the same but how they get applied could be quite a bit different because there is so much dry land and range land.

We are also going in Chapter 2 to introduce the critical areas that exist in the County. You've got fish & wildlife habitat conservation area, there is a riparian area. You have a wetland, you have geologic hazards. There is an example of erosion. It may not be the best example but you have critical aquifer recharge areas that are impacted by irrigation, by water withdrawal, by infiltration and then frequently flooded areas.

Kim Weerts – Are you going to have a definition section that is going to tell people what all these acronyms are because I caution using those constantly.

John Jones – That is going to be the longest part of the document.

Ben Floyd – Yes, we will have the Table of Contents, we'll have acronyms and abbreviations that will be in Volume 1 and also references.

Chapter 3, so now we have laid out the settings. This talks about baseline and existing conditions and this is again, not going to be a really long section but we are going to talk about how do critical areas exist in the ag setting in Whitman County?

Nora Schlenker – We split it up into three different ways to look at it. The first we are looking at what are these streams that intersect with agriculture? For the first column total stream miles, that is the total number of stream miles in the County. Then known streams and unknown streams. From the very first we had a bunch of streams that are the kind that had topographic loads that may or may not have actual streams there that are covered in those unknown streams. Known streams are about 2,000 and about 3,500 for unknown streams.

Art Swannack – Wouldn't that be better to say unknown water sources or, most of those aren't streams.

Nora Schlenker – We can change that.

Jon Jones – You are talking about unnamed streams or unknown streams?

Nora Schlenker – Unknown, whether or not they are there. They would probably be unnamed.

Ben Floyd – Remember the map we looked at?

Art Swannack – The one that has all the capillaries instead of the veins and arteries?

Larry Cochran – It is easier to put them all on there and force us to take them off than it would to actually (inaudible).

Jon Jones – You're talking about DNR?

Larry Cochran – No, DOE.

Jon Jones – DOE doesn't make them.

Ben Floyd – It was DNR. I just wanted to make sure that wasn't directed as a consulting team.

Nora Schlenker – So, this is saying that of those streams, 93% of the known streams are found in ag land, 58% are in dry land and 34% are in range land, and not many are in irrigated mostly due to the facts there isn't a lot of irrigated land. Then riparian areas the amount of stream miles most of which are found in range lands.

This table is set up but we are talking about critical areas acres. The left column shows how many of each critical area there are and what percentage is found in ag land. This is showing for most critical areas a majority of the acreages are found in ag land; with the exception of critical aquifer recharge areas only about 54% are found in ag lands and not a lot in irrigated.

This is just a summary of the last table. All critical areas are mainly found in ag areas. Priority habitat and species areas which is how we estimate the Fish & Wildlife conservation areas and then water erosion has the largest intersect with agriculture. The majority of the streams are the dry topographical lows which may or may not exist. But overall only a small portion found in irrigated lands.

This is looking at what proportion of ag has critical areas on it. So this is saying for the biggest percentage is water erosion potential moderate, 69% of ag areas have moderate water erosion potential, and for most of these the percentage of critical areas on ag lands is pretty low.

Overall the intersect of ag critical areas is pretty small. A majority of the intersects with the Fish & Wildlife Habitat Conservation areas in water erosion potential. So although 90% of PHS lands occur on ag land only 40% of the ag land have those same areas on them.

Ben Floyd – PHS is Priority Habitat and Species. We are getting bad at that.

Nora Schlenker – Then there is one caveat to this is that your irrigated lands are in Whitman County most of them have the priority habitat and species on them which is opposite from all the other intersections.

Kim Weerts – Have you ever thought about putting the findings first and then the graphs so that someone who is looking at it can look at this and understand it and they can skip the other stuff. A lot of people aren't going to care about this.

Ben Floyd – A good suggestion.

Nora Schlenker – Or definitely thinking these tables wouldn't be directly put in the work plan. We are thinking we have to put them up by critical area or ag type and look at them in smaller chunks instead of all at once. If you have any other suggestions, please let us know.

Art Swannack – You just said as I interpreted this, 47% of the ag lands in the County have this priority habitat species. But is that actually a requirement of VSP? We are not talking critical areas, you are talking a whole field covered by mule deer habitat. That is not a critical area.

Ben Floyd – This does not necessarily reflect Fish & Wildlife habitat conservation areas in the County.

Art Swannack – So I am looking at it from the commissioner viewpoint, the bureaucrat viewpoint. It looks like you put this into a plan and say this, all of a sudden you give Fish & Wildlife a lever in here towards activity on private ground. I'm not sure that is where this VSP plan was intended to go.

Ben Floyd – It is not intended to go that way. You are definitely right. Fish & Wildlife, that's where we get the data from so they already have the information.

Art Swannack – They can designate whatever they want to designate.

Ben Floyd - They can characterize.

Art Swannack – But does this tie to what a critical area is which in general is some type of a stream course or a geologic hazard or the other thing?

Ben Floyd - Stream course or it could be a unique like cliffs and bluffs. Migratory song birds.

Art Swannack – I understand that but I don't like that number and what we talked about in this last bit, it encompasses the entire county. When you talk a million out of 1.3 million acres, that doesn't make sense to me when you're talking critical area alternatives through VSP. I think we need to rethink that.

Ben Floyd – I think that is a great point. So John Small, you might want to jump in on this, but my thought is that the mule deer habitat which is like almost all the county or white tail, that is shown, my point is that is in the PHS database but not all that area that is shown is Fish & Wildlife Habitat Conservation area. So we have to true up the definitions of the mapping.

Larry Cochran – You put those figures in there but you have to put the caveat in there that they are not subject to the critical area ordinance or VSP.

Ben Floyd – Or, we just filter out some of the stuff and make it more specific.

John Small – Correct me if I am wrong, but we are looking at the critical areas for WC specifically references state priority habitat (inaudible) subject to the state priority species, which is what this data layer represents. That is not to say that protecting mule deer habitat isn't pretty consistent with normal ag practices. That is the way the county code is written.

Alan Thomson – John is right. When we have a building application, essentially a short plat, it triggers something like this. We notify Fish & Wildlife and ask if there is anything on there, we reference the PHS system. That is what we are after and they will give us a mapping back and it does have mule deer all over the place. But I'm not going to stop a building just because there is mule deer there. There are other priority species that may interfere with the building. That is how we do this. We go to the PHS data base and then they get the information in this area, this section where you want to build, this is what species is there. If something comes up as endangered or threatened or listed, then I have to notify Fish & Wildlife and figure out a plan to avoid impacting them. But mule deer does not cause me to do that.

Art Swannack – You're talking about when someone is doing something under a critical area ordinance like building not farming.

Alan Thomson – Yes, so that is not going to prevent someone from farming just because there are mule deer there. That is ridiculous. We are not going to flag that and say that you can't farm that field because there are mule deer there. But if there is some critical species other than a mule deer then, yes, that may flag that and that is what the PHS data tells us. There is a bald eagle there but that will probably be in a tree probably farmed already so probably nothing is going to happen. What if there is a salamander there or something? I don't think there is any difference between someone who wants to put a building up and farming. We just have to identify if there is any critical habitat species there and then we need to deal with it.

Art Swannack – There is a difference there, I think. Because the farming is existing the building is something new and under this plan existing is the baseline. So when we are putting this in here, we need to be looking at as this is how we operate now. Here are the options if you want to improve things but this is how we operate now under VSP. It is not doing something new.

Alan Thomson – Okay, but if the PHS database comes up with a hit and we know it is being farmed and that hit is impacting negatively that species, are we going to ignore it?

Art Swannack – Under this, you would because this is a baseline situation.

Ben Floyd – It may or may not.

Art Swannack – Unless it is in the ESA list and it has certain critical habitat and all that and that is a whole another process that is separate from VSP.

Ben Floyd – It is but the major species at compliance but you might have a bluff habitat with some state sensitive species and maybe their nesting season is happening the same time you are doing calving or whatever. I was also thinking about dry land with respect that maybe you have a bunch of tractor and truck activity right around that. So the State would say that if you could keep it quiet for 60 days until they hatch that would protect those species from that impact.

Art Swannack – That isn't a regulatory effect on a baseline; that is a choice as an enhancement. The baseline says the guy farmed but you farmed in 2011 so you are farming in 2011, you have these species around and whatever and you are putting around like you are in 2011. If you would like to do something that has less impact that helps this species along, you can add that as an enhancement to what you do. But as a baseline it is what you were doing in 2011.

Alan Thomson – Think about a wetland. So, farming could impact wetlands. 2011 onward, 2011 before. You farm right up to the very edge of the Palouse River, potential impacts. That is exactly what we are talking about with this. We are going to review that and come up with a plan so if there is erosion going into the Palouse River, for instance, that has been going on before 2011 or after 2011, doesn't matter, we are trying to prevent that from happening. So, yes, in one sense we are using that as a baseline in 2011 but if there is a negative effect, I don't think we are ignoring that.

Art Swannack – If they have been farming up through 2011 doing that, the goal is to get somebody to enhance the area by saying they choose to plant 30 feet of grass and they don't farm next to the edge or whatever. But it's not regulatory.

Alan Thomson – No, it's not regulatory but that is exactly what we are focused on, so just go to the example of a critical such as a wildlife habitat. We've got the same logic so it could have been impacted before 2011 but the baseline says that farming has happened here and therefore we need to enhance that area. So what we are talking about fencing off wetlands or preventing cattle or sheep or whatever going in there for whatever period of time. We need to apply that same logic to habitat area if we discover one with a critical species in there. We've got to help that not be impacted.

Larry Cochran – If is in an identified critical area that's fine, but if it is just out in the middle of nowhere, I don't see why it should apply. How it could apply.

Alan Thomson – Critical area is a critical area whether it is designated or not, if it exists.

Ben Floyd – So, the question is has it been there before the baseline? Has there been an impact that was already there if you haven't changed your practices?

John Pearson – If it was farmed in 2011 and you discover a species there, then obviously that species is surviving under farming. So, we just keep farming.

Nora Schlenker – I think that is what it is saying, too. You know, 47% of the PHS of ag has PHS on it and obviously deer are doing fine.

John Pearson – Deer are doing just fine and like the garbanzo they like the cover and the white tail deer are doing fine, too.

Nora Schlenker – I think it is also like, so on that 47% of ag land you have the potential to do enhancement. If you know there is deer there you can enhance if you decide to but the protection is keep doing what you are doing on those 47%.

Larry Cochran – A hunter asked me, "Oh by the way, you don't have any deer in the back of the north fork of the Palouse River but you do have a cougar back here."

Joan Folwell – So, according to what I've read, the goal of VSP is not to go below those standards, the benchmarks the 2011 conditions but included in that goal is to try to make conditions better. The enhancement part and even though we don't have the money for that now that is an expected conclusion to this program.

Ben Floyd – Yes, and we will get to that. In fact, we are jumping into the goals so let's keep moving. So are there any comments from those on the phone?

Tracy Eriksen – I'm fine with it here.

John Stuhlmiller – I just want to be sure we remember that the 2011 baseline, the assumption is everything that is happening as of 2011 is consistent with protection. Then you have the VSP that says that we'd like to do better so this is how we will do better so you develop those pieces. But the other thing is how do you make ag better, how do you maintain and enhance the viability of ag? Those are supposed to be compatible so we look at those standards, not just how do you make the critical area better?

So keep that in mind that we are counter balancing that so it is skewed in favor of ag and critical areas. Your plan is going to be this overlay that your plan will protect critical areas and maintain and enhance the viability of ag and through some voluntary measures you can put some extra positive touches on the word, "enhance." So it is just a little difference than you look around for what is wrong and try to fix it. Right?

Ben Floyd – Yes, and there are some head nodding around the table.

Joan Folwell – So, with the 2011 baseline, is it assumed at that point that the conditions for ag viability, that is our baseline there, too? Is it ag viable at that point?

Ben Floyd – It is not, I don't think that is set in stone. Yes, it is viable in 2011 and that is the baseline. For us we are making an assumption that 2011 is a good ag viability baseline as well. But we also, ag viability is a little bit more vague and we will probably have more specific goals for the conservation measures and then maybe have more of a qualitative discussion around ag viability. We'll get to that because we have some thoughts and we want your input on that today.

Alan Thomson – The question is are the critical areas viable at that point in time, too. One of the reasons we are looking at this is ag is exempt under the Critical Area Ordinance in Whitman County. Other negative impacts have (inaudible) to critical areas because of ag.

Ben Floyd – So the baseline are the functions whether they are impaired wetlands, awesome wetlands, drained wetlands, whatever existed in 2011, that is the function we have to protect. So, if someone tilled and drained a wetland and they did that 30 years ago and it is still that way today, that is the baseline. There is no function there, there is a wetland. If there is a wetland that is severely degraded as long as it stays severely degraded and doesn't get completely removed, that's the baseline. If there's a wetland that is in great shape, that's the baseline.

So, you have this range of function in value for all the different critical areas, based on what is in existence in 2011. That is why we are capturing everything or describing everything by these drainage areas because different watersheds have different rainfall, different riparian conditions, and different number of wetlands. So categorizing that in these different drainages allows us to better describe, like, this sub-drainage is in really good shape. It has lots of riparian habitat, wetlands that are along the river. This drainage over here, doesn't have very many critical areas. It is mostly upland habitat and a very few intermittent streams.

We want to know what those functions are between those two and everything else in the County. So someone doesn't come in and say that your baseline is doing downhill. It has been documented and you are looking over here but this has less function over here and that is why our goal is only to protect this much. Someone could look at the protection goals and think they are different. They are different then we roll them up to the county-wide and there will be some commonality. That is why we are trying to break it down into the level so that we can account for the natural variation that exists across the County. Twenty inches of rainfall versus nine; the habitat is quite a bit different.

Alan Thomson – So in the case of instream activity, aquatic habitat and aquatic life, we do have a problem right now with TMDL's, water temperature, water quality. Is part of that the reason why we have a problem with that right now, is part of that agriculture? So are we saying that whatever the conditions in 2011 which may be part of the reason why we have problem in the first place, we are just going to maintain that problem?

Ben Floyd – So, the TMDL and the compliance effort that Ecology will go through to meet Clean Water Act requirements that is a regulatory process.

Alan Thomson – So, that is not VSP?

Ben Floyd – It may require more. There are measures in the VSP that will likely happen in the VSP work plan that will improve water quality. If you have someone that has a lot of erosion and they change the practices and reduce or eliminate erosion. That will effect water quality. It is also going to affect ag liability; now they have soil that stays on the property that was running off at one point. So there can be indirect effects. Water quality is kind of a tricky one because it has a regulatory component to it, clean water act and it's got VSP indirect effects from all these measure that could improve water quality.

Jon Jones – TMDL's are voluntary also. All of TMDL is a way to meet the state clean water standards. The plan is laid out pretty similar to what we are doing. We still have the clean water act in the RCW's, or Ecology still has the clean water act and the RCW's to follow outside of the TMDL.

Ben Floyd – I would expect that Ecology hopes that through VSP there is a lot of participation and that measures help to improve water quality under rivers and streams. But for the baseline all we have to do is keep it, make it no worse than in 2011, even if there are some areas that have high temperature or high sediment loads all of that.

Kim Weerts – DOE is creating their own plan with their own BMP at this point so that will be a separate entity from VSP.

Ben Floyd – Quality assurance program plan?

Larry Cochran – They have to go back and determine the BMP from water quality for EPA of which Ecology has hired a firm to develop the plan to come up with the plan to do this plan.

John Pearson – And the reasoning is seed money which is only 3 million a year.

Ben Floyd – So we should go back and find out more about that. We still have to describe the intersection with the regulatory.

Larry Cochran – When Alan talks about temperature for the TMDL’s that is going to be the issue because I think in these streams they never met the temperature requirement that they require nor will we ever be able to meet it. If you go back into time and it says this stream has never met this requirement and you can document it which we probably can’t, you could, (inaudible).

John Stuhlmiller – That is right on because the goal to the water quality standards is to meet specific criteria there established generally statewide, and somebody mentioned some of the water bodies in WC may never have met those temperature criteria even historically. I know that the temperature that 16 degrees Celsius is used throughout the state in a variety of watersheds based on (inaudible). That is probably ridiculous to a lot of mentality.

Under VSP we would be looking at protecting the existing temperatures. Of that the mean annual temperature is 20 degrees Celsius, completely unsuitable for cold water fishery. That is fine, that is what we are trying to maintain. We are not trying to go to some arbitrary standard that is more of a statewide approach under this program. It doesn’t eliminate the Clean Water Act but it is not part of this effort.

Nancy Belsby – The Palouse is home to warm water species of fish and this is what is in that instream flow. I made up a copy for anybody who wants it. It lists the fish that are warm water and describes them and then it lists all the introduced species. It is very important. Last year I made the comment to the gentlemen in Olympia who are in charge of all the water quality species, and I was told that EPA says the water temperature for the State of Washington and the only way you can change it is you have to go through Ecology to go the EPA, which is why I sent this list to Ecology in Olympia because they say (inaudible) the normal standard for the state. But that is under normal conditions.

Ben Floyd – Right, that is what John was saying like it is a statewide standard and it may or may not be applicable to the Palouse. We will pull pieces of that information into Volume I and then details about that function, habitat, etc., will be in the technical appendix.

John Jones – Once the TMDL plan is fully implemented and it still does not meet the standards for the Clean Water Act, then that becomes the standard. If the standard is trying to get 18 degrees and everyone agrees to plant enough shrubs, trees, whatever over the stream and it still doesn’t meet that 18 degree standard, then whatever the water temperature is that becomes the new standard. The same with any of the pollutants, you know fecal chloroform, if you follow the plan and it meets the standards and then the standards are changed.

Alan Thomson - That wouldn’t be our responsibility because we are looking at the baseline of 2011.

John Jones – Right, it is not our job here.

Art Swannack – The only probably with that plan is that if you have any failure in that system while you are trying to figure out if you have it perfect, it qualifies not done yet.

John Jones – The temperature they get on the TMDL’s you get 50 years to meet that standard but in the meantime the modelers figure out if there could be the available shade that it could be, they do it while modeling.

Art Swannack – It depends on what they put for assumptions and if the model is valid or not.

John Jones – It does, it does depend,

Brian Bell – Where does the data come for the baseline besides the stream?

Ben Floyd – There are multiple data sources. Watershed plan, do we have a slide for that?

Nora Schlenker – We have the slide outlining the plan that we pulled into the report but are you talking about the actual data that was used to make these maps?

Brian Bell – No, how are you going to tell the farmer to decrease the quality of his field?

Ben Floyd – We have aerial imagery from 2011 that we used the facts based on. Not that we are looking at that level of detail but we have the imagery and it is in the public domain so someone could go back and look at that. So, we use a variety of plans, data sources, imagery, to characterize what happened in 2011.

Brian Bell – So it hasn't been crunched?

Ben Floyd – Yes, we have it crunched we just don't have a report, the technical appendix hasn't been developed. We are working trying to get this work plan nailed down and the supporting details we are holding off on putting a report together that goes along with that, series of maps, data tables, etc., that will go in the technical appendix as the underpinning for it.

Nora Schlenker – This is the summary of what we talked about in the October slides. Most critical areas are located in ag lands, however only a small portion of ag lands intersect with critical areas. Protecting as of 2011, we used critical areas on ag lands as crucial to protecting those functions and values. I noticed an error in my last bullet, *“Conservation practices only need to be implemented on a small portion of ag lands to **enhance** those functions and values.”*

Then we look a little bit at the agriculture in Whitman County so this is the baseline for ag viability. This is from 2012, so it was approximately \$370 million dollars in market value of ag products. Ninety-five percent of those were crops and 5% was livestock. Approximately 1,100 farms and a majority are smaller producers, less than \$100,000 in sales. Wheat is the top crop by acres and grains were the top commodity followed by cattle and calves.

Art Swannack – Is that livestock number right?

John Pearson – I'm curious about 40% of farms having, so 60% have sales less than \$100,000.

Nora Schlenker – I'm not sure exactly what their criteria was for farms but I can look back. This was from a summary documentation. The census of agriculture.

Larry Cochran – Usually, the census from farmers are defined are having \$100,000 or more in sales.

Nora Schlenker – We can break this down farther.

Ben Floyd – We will have more detail like the top ten crops, but this was just to give you a flavor to give you an idea of what is going to go in this part of the plan. You'll get a chance to review it in detail. We can look into this. Maybe there is a different cut off.

Ben Floyd – I have a farm; it is in Benton County, 5 acres. It is an acre of pasture. But I used to have cows on it. I filled out the survey just like anybody else does, right?

Art Swannack – That is the other part of it.

Ben Floyd – So maybe we ought to go to two or three sources.

Art Swannack – There are a bunch of people who don't fill out surveys. They just don't trust the government so they will not put their data into it.

Ben Floyd – So, that is good to know.

Art Swannack – Or they will give you the wrong data. There is somebody over here, I don't remember who it is. He plants 5,000 acres of soybeans every year. So, some people will give the data some people will make up the data and some underestimate the data.

Kim Weerts- Ask the farmer how many acres they have and they will say, "enough." You ask a cattleman and many cows they have and they say, "None of your business."

Alan Thomson – The number that come into my office and I ask them how many acres they have, and they just say a lot.

Ben Floyd – So, we will summarize this information as best as we can around 2011 and you can let us know in terms of ag viability how that does or doesn't relate as we think about maintaining ag viability. Okay, Protection and Enhancement.

Nora Schlenker – We looked up the NRCS practices that were applied in the last 5 years and came up with a list to give an idea of this enhancement. We got this data from Grant County Conservation District.

Ben Floyd – Former NRCS employee, you're looking at data, don't tell anybody about this stuff, John Stuhlmiller. This is data that most counties don't have but Grant, Whitman, Lincoln, Adams, and Franklin are all going to have this data which is NRCS practices implemented since 2011, by county, by type. We may be able to define this more. We get to take credit for things you are already doing, right? We set a goal for protection and enhancement and we have measures that have been implemented.

Art Swannack – Are these ones that somebody has signed up with the conservation district to do something where it says EQIP, WHIP, etc.

Ben Floyd – Yes, or NRCS.

Larry Cochran – So there is a lot more out there.

Ben Floyd – This is program driven.

Nora Schlenker – Another question later is how do we create a system where we can know what you are doing that are part of these programs?

Ben Floyd – How can we create a system that we publicize the benefits that are happening from measures in the County, not specific of one person but if this is happening, what else is happening? Lets characterize that and try to quantify it best we can or describe it. We want to capture all the things that are going on and show the trend. This is your county; we got it from a former NRCS employee who still has his credentials and was able to pull up the data and give it to us for Whitman and he worked on the other counties for us.

Nory Schlenker – This is an overview of, talking about potential measure that can be put in place.

Alan Thomson - I remember trying to get some data out of the NRCS and they basically told me that it is something they can't give out.

Ben Floyd – You can get it; you have to go through stream of information act request. They publish this stuff but you can't get the names. We are just asking for summary information.

John Pearson – I had someone come in the office the other day and he showed me (inaudible) and it was amazing how much stuff is on the website.

Ben Floyd – They have a ton of data.

John Pearson – I was going to say, there have been a lot more than 5 pumping facilities in WC in the last five years.

Ben Floyd – Through your programs?

John Pearson – No.

Ben Floyd – So we should have another column that says, Programs, and Landowner funded and help us come up with a conservative estimate. If you know it is probably more like 20, let's put down 10 and set a goal.

Brad Johnson – I believe this is only out of the NRCS data base, which wouldn't have any of the district projects. So, you have to do a NRCS column and district column, private landowner column, I don't know.

John Pearson – This is pretty impressive (inaudible) based on 2011 if you actually put on the things that have been done since 2011.

Ben Floyd – Yes, that could be done. We set our goal for 10 years and here is our protection goal. Then you add the enhancement which is 50% of this, done. Put a bow on it, slap each other on the back, have a BBQ and call it a program. Is that how it is going to work, John Stuhlmiller?

John Stuhlmiller – That is exactly what you are supposed to do.

Vivian Erickson – He means have the BBQ.

Larry Cochran – When it is all said and done, that’s exactly where we are going to be. Put everything in the documents and we are going to say 50% of it is down and we’ve only got 40% to go.

Ben Floyd – I do think it makes sense from a strategic standpoint. We want to under-promise and then expect we will be over-deliver. So we may have a modest goal, or a set of modest goals and then something we know we can easily achieve. There is protection and enhancement and then we hope that we just flow past that.

Jon Jones – I think we have been around this before, but who is going to track the enhancements?

Ben Floyd – We will get to that in implementation. Maybe we will get to that, if anyone is looking for a job, this will pay a lot of money, it’s going to be very popular with people, everyone will want to talk to you, what more could you want?

Nora Schlenker – This is showing the conservation stewardship program acres, reiterating that a lot is going on now in the last 5 years to take credit for. These are showing the type of (inaudible) that we will have in the work plan surrounding these types of measures saying a short description of the measure itself managing the amount, source and application of nutrients. Then outlining what ag viability and critical area functions protections it has which will feed in to the benchmarks and goals. Then showing how much has happened in the last 5 years. We have another example as well, direct seeding, leaving crop residue and doing tillage only on a narrow strip. I’m sure you all know that. Then the ag viability and critical areas benefit that comes from this type of practice.

Ben Floyd – Does that make sense how we are tracking that through? I look at this and I see the picture. We have a practice, it’s going to provide these ag viability benefits potentially and also provide these protections and probably some enhancements. Now, turning these into goals shows you the logic from measure and how it categorized under the protection benefits for viability and critical areas.

Art Swannack – What are you defining as prescribed grazing? There are a lot of definitions between use of pasture which is just leave them in the same spot all year long versus daily shifting of animals behind an electric fence like John tried to sell us back in 1980 something.

Larry Cochran - We got ours split up into 3 and it is pretty good until about the middle of summer and then you just open all the gates and they can go where they want to go.

Art Swannack – In our sheep operation we move probably weekly during the spring but then it is based on how it grows through the year. What I’m saying, if we are going to put this in there we should say, this covers this to that.

Ben Floyd – Yes, and this is based on the field office technical guide description of managed grazing. Nora has already put together a summary of all those measures in your example tool box. All the measures that and what they consist of. There are variations. Someone may do some work under this program and then they change it down the road.

Art Swannack – Depends on the rain and the weather and how you manage and sometimes you have a field that needs cleaned off and that one will look bad but it has a bunch of old growth that is impeding new growth.

John Pearson – These 12,614 acres are probably under a CSP program?

Nora Schlenker – They are under the umbrella from the first table that we didn't break it out.

Nancy Belsby – Some of those projects that Ecology had, were they all from riparian areas? He can do flash grazing; is that prescribed grazing?

John Pearson – I think everything is, I don't think we should describe it.

Ben Floyd – We have a general description of what it includes.

John Pearson – It changes.

Art Swannack – I wouldn't say to write it only as if, I would say write it broad. It can be a lot of prescribed grazing yet it still does this function of improving the habitat.

John Pearson – I like the way this (inaudible) is included which means, it is pretty bold.

Ben Floyd – Okay, this is our latest figure; it is a work in progress. What it shows is you have your VSP program, you have critical areas protection on one side, ag viability. So, John Stuhlmiller, this is the point that you made earlier. We have to think about both. It is a balance and then you have the regulatory underpinning, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Endangered Species Act, and other laws and regulations that we are not changing or those go on in separate arenas. This is what we are trying to get to. We have spent 90% of our time talking about the measure on the left. We've spent hardly any time talking about ag viability. I want to spend some time talking about ag viability.

These are some things that we came up with. We are going to work first off of the left column. Then the right column. But I want to ask you first are there other things in ag viability that we should be considering? What is ag viability? I don't know but this is our attempt to try and get some ideas into a definition into components of what ag viability includes. We've got reducing input costs. Can we protect critical areas using measures that also help reduce input costs? Energy, chemicals, labor. Can we take credit for technological advances that reduce input costs that also help protect critical areas? So just keep churning through these.

Maintain and enhance land production capacity. Soil health, water systems and moisture management. We combined everything. Water in there to keep it on one page. Nutrient management, so things we can do to protect critical areas but also enhance or maintain land production capacity. We don't want to protect critical areas in a way that cuts John's or Nancy's useable ground by 20%; that is not this. That is critical areas, ag viabilities all of a sudden tipped up.

Flexibility to respond to market conditions. Again, I will go back to the example that John Pearson shared which is, I got ground that is in CRP or historically CRP and I may want to farm that again, can I do that? The answer is yes and you can decide how much you want to participate in this program. But changing land in production, individual schedule for implementing conservations practices. That goes back to the point that you said, Art, which was people are going to be hanging on here maybe for the next few years with the low prices. So don't expect them to open up their wallet and do a bunch of new expensive ideas or new risky ideas that may or may not return something in the short run because of economic conditions.

Art Swannack –That’s why I said cash. That is the area where you have to put in, your cash flow is what it amounts to.

Larry Cochran – The word I want in there is “technology.” Technology has brought ag a long ways, whether it is a new wheat varieties, GPS systems, chemicals, all sorts of things.

Jon Jones - I’m on the same page, Larry. With chemicals, fertilizer, seed, those inputs can all be reduced through technology. GPS, more accurate drills, more accurate fertilizer placement, better nutrient management, those are all. Technology has something to do with energy, labor too. Not only a more efficient use of fuel and power but less use of it. One time over the field instead of ten.

Ben Floyd – I think that is another premise of the VSP idea is that technology improves practices. There is already that trajectory going on so let’s just capture it, put it in some goals and publicize it.

Larry Cochran – In the old days, hydraulics is probably the best technology that came along.

Jon Jones – But that was before 2011. I think that is another thing, we should advertise this as a good thing for farmers for ag and make a big splash about it. It is a proactive approach to say we are doing some good things.

Ben Floyd – I think as we talked about it the last meeting that is why volume one is like 25 pages, lots of pictures and maybe some is too detailed even yet. You’ll tell us if we have the right details. But it is almost more of a publicity document. It is going to serve bad, also be able to be used for neighbors who want to know what is going on. Is this going to screw me over or is it something that can help me? Here check it out.

Joan Folwell – I think that the showing of the practices and then drawing the line to ag viability, protection and then to critical area function, protection the light bulb went off in my head to see that by using these practices you are going to affect the viability of your operation.

Ben Floyd – Great comments. Incentives, so payment for measures, tax breaks. The bottom line is also the incentive.

Nancy Belsby – Ben, I don’t know about WC but in Adams County the last several years there has been a lot of wealth within solar panels where there is no electricity. Somehow we need to recognize that.

Ben Floyd – That comes under maintain, enhance land production capacity, water systems and moisture management. So like Rex Harder and all those systems he has put in along Sprague Lake, which are both in Lincoln and Adams County. So, he has all those solar system, like 16, cow creek drainage. But yes, you are right. I think we have those in here.

If you have pictures of practices, we don’t have to say it is your land but we want to try and highlight as much of these as we can through pictures. So, Conservations Districts, landowners, County, if you see something cool take a picture and make sure we have permission to use it. We would like to have a whole bank of pictures that we can use to draw upon for this plan.

Okay, Incentives, farm land conversion. You have a certain amount of farm land each year that gets converted to urban development. It may not be a big deal, sounds like it is primarily around Pullman in

WC, and does 200 acres of wheat land getting converted into subdivisions every 5-10 years, is that a big deal from a ag viability standpoint? I don't know, it is a category that we wanted to capture. That probably will not affect the fertilizer suppliers, and all of the ag infrastructure that serves your farm but it is something we wanted to capture.

Larry Cochran – The last statistics I saw said we are losing a billion acres a year to land development in the US. But with the factor of technology, we are still increasing the production even though we are losing farmland.

Art Swannack – My question is does that belong in VSP?

Ben Floyd – I don't know, is it an ag viability?

Art Swannack – From an objective point of view, you have 1.3 million acres of farm ground in WC, how much ground around Pullman are you going to lose? One percent is 13,000 acres, 10% is 130,000 acres. If it is critical areas that are converted then it goes under the CAO regular. I'm just trying to figure out the intersect of that with ag viability.

Ben Floyd – It is less land that is in production.

Alan Thomson – It does answer the question and the answer is it is no big deal; it is informative in that sense.

Ben Floyd – We looked at it and saw the issue.

Larry Cochran – My new neighbors at the log home next to where I was seeding the other day, the lady was working next to the fence. She would never turn and look at me. I was right next to the fence and she would never turn and look at me.

Art Swannack – I don't think it is an issue if you start talking about scattered conversion all over the County that impacts farm operation.

Ben Floyd - Is that happening?

Alan Thomson – No it is not; we can't plant houses all over the county like that.

Larry Cochran – No yet, because what I have is the world urban city development next to me, Redtail Ridge, Colfax. The fence line for me is still rural WC. The right to farm legislation might come in the process some of these days.

Ben Floyd – So in 20 years are you going to sell it off to subdivide, too.

John Pearson – Is it more or less in the country?

Alan Thomson – Take the areas around Pullman out of the picture and there is not much going on. The percentage of it compared to ag land is very minimal. There is more activity around Pullman.

Joan Folwell – I have to say, the little bit of activity has already caused conflict between the farmers adjacent to those projects.

Jon Jones – It never goes the other way. We never convert urban area back to farming.

Art Swannack – I just watch other areas of the country go through this, before I got involved in this job. You look at Des Moines, Iowa, high value corn ground and it still got converted. Because the value of the city and people next to it, what they were willing to pay to do it was way higher than what the farmer could do.

Larry Cochran – That is what ag viability is to me, is when ag land is worth more to develop than it is to produce food, we have a problem.

Art Swannack – I have friends in Utah that have ground and if you sell it is probably \$50-60,000 an acre but it has open space taxation so it is protected as long as they want to keep farming it. But it is a choice of the landowner and there is a certain amount of private property rights which we need to recognize and respect.

Jon Jones – Money really talks.

Art Swannack – Okay, Schweitzer in Pullman or WSU you have already covered farmland but Pullman and bunch of people seem happy about it. The development on Bishop Boulevard was when I was at college, I saw that road go in. Yes, that was all farm ground but the population growth in Pullman and the demand for Pullman to put houses caused that push.

Larry Cochran – Better to have it in one spot than all over.

Art Swannack – The retired people in Lamont who were farmers that move out and get upset because the airplane is spraying the wheat field above them; let alone someone that comes in from outside. That type of interaction scattered all over is causing problems.

Alan Thomson – That is what growth management is about with GMA. We are not a fully planning GMA county but much of Washington is and you have these growth boundaries and to some extent it is working. You don't get the sprawl in the ag land and in WC it used to be real about things. There is an area around Pullman that is going to be developed regardless of who is in charge of it. Ultimately, Pullman is going to expand and that farmland is gone.

Larry Cochran – Hopefully, they go towards Moscow and fill in the corridor.

Art Swannack – Pullman has a 50-year plan for their city limits in addition to that corridor.

Alan Thomson – That is the area that is going to get developed and John is right in the cross-hairs there.

Larry Cochran – This is probably, but the part that says the County has determined there is enough water before you can give out permits for wells?

Alan Thomson – No, we are not subject to that right now. That is full planning GMA counties, the Hirst decision, and so right now in this moment in time, and stay tuned because it may change; it does not apply to us.

Art Swannack – Because WC is a partial planning Growth Management Act County, meaning the critical areas and the shorelines. We aren't full growth management to designate every area specifically what it is going to and not let anything else happen. Spokane County has run into that issue with the trans loader facility that they were trying put in and the County is saying it is outside their growth area so they can't do it.

Ben Floyd – So, let me bring this back to a question. Is conversion of ag land to urban development and ag viability consideration, something that you want to address even if we say it may not be that big of an impact?

John Pearson – We can recognize it.

Jon Jones – It should be there.

Larry Cochran – On the west side they are putting out these easements for farmland but it is a small chunk and then you have urban going around it and now you have a little piece of land that is landlocked but it isn't big enough to do anything with.

Ben Floyd – No surprises regulatory environment. This even goes down to county permitting of cleaning out drainage ditches, right?

Art Swannack – The county permitting is depending on the wildlife department permitting.

Ben Floyd – If you want to have WFW on ways things could work better in the regulatory environment from an ag viability standpoint; this is your chance to put a message out there. Just think about that. We can be clear about what we think would work better.

Art Swannack – Ideally, we would have an integrated seamless program that somebody could go into and understand what was going on and reach the expectation that was getting done what they need to get done in a reasonable time frame.

Ben Floyd – But then you wouldn't need consultants like us.

Art Swannack – There is that advantage, too.

Jon Jones – I think on the frustrations with Ecology is no one has ever brought a play to them. To say, we don't like what you are doing but it doesn't come the other way. People feel the push one way. I think since I don't work there anymore, I think if we made a plan that was good, as a group and presented it to Ecology they might buy off on it. It is something that we would buy off on. Just a thought. When I worked there no one ever brought in a different plan that they want to do this, or that but not a specific plan that makes sense.

Ben Floyd – So, something to think about.

Alan Thomson – On the County permitting the ditching, actually I'm going to make the pitch that it enhances ag viability because you have fields that are flooded. That is the reason for the ditching in the first place which takes out land from production. We've got a simple easy permitting process that involves having an engineer, but we allow it with a floodplain development permit if it is in the floodplain. It is very common in WC. It hasn't been regulated in the past but now it is. It does enhance ag activity.

Art Swannack – You can put tile drainage in that but there is no way we are doing that, (inaudible)

Alan Thomson – But then we are talking about farmed wetlands or prior converted crop lands. Those are exempt from our regulations because they were put in for a reason to drain areas which were a critical area in the past and no longer considered critical areas under the Critical Area Ordinance or the VSP.

Ben Floyd – Could you put together a write-up for us? If you have a picture to go with it? That would be helpful for us to incorporate.

Joan Folwell – The Washington State Conservation Commission has put out a draft for agricultural viability. Have you seen this?

Ben Floyd – I don't know if I have seen that.

Joan Folwell – I got it from a note from the technical panel and they referred to it so I picked it up. It had a list of 5 areas that any VSP plan could consider. It talks about the land base but other things like infrastructure and services.

Ben Floyd – This came from Thurston County. I haven't seen that version of it but I've seen the earlier document.

Joan Folwell – The list that you had is more applied to the farmer and what the farmer does. This includes things like education training and session planning for farmers that are about to retire to keep the land in production. Seminars and how they can produce new farmers into farmers and provide programs to do that. I don't know whether we want to do that.

Infrastructure and services in order for ag to remain viable the infrastructure that supports it must be in place; utilities, irrigation, market access and transportation systems must remain. Equipment and supplies need to be available to the local ag producer. Support for best farm management practices, education training and succession planning, which is what I just described.

The average age of the ag operator is nearly 60 years old. Estate succession planning for that generation is imperative to furthering ag operations in the state. When new and younger ag operators do get involved in the ag they must be educated in farm operations, labor apprenticeship, methods for growers and seasonal labor to help train the next generation of farmers; the sustaining of healthy state and community college systems to promote innovative technology.

It goes on to itemize a couple of other things but I think you can get the general idea. Then the last thing is the welcoming business environment, property taxes, zoning ordinances, nutrient management, regulations, air quality regulations should be an active with viable ag (inaudible).

Ben Floyd – Okay, so that is some additional information to what we have up here. Are some of those ideas something you want to include?

Nancy Belsby – That is Thurston County. It is more urban and has a lot of different issues than what we are dealing with in WC.

Ben Floyd – Yes, I think there are other people who helped develop this.

Art Swannack – Actually, the air quality is kind of a DOE versus ag in that way.

Kim Weerts – I think all of those things listed spark more ideas and it is like the practices. Why not have more in there because it creates creative thinking.

Larry Cochran- There are probably things in the future that we haven't even thought of yet.

Brad Johnson – It just goes along with what everyone said. The biggest thing that we were missing up before Joan read off the list was information and education or just outreach. How do we continue to do outreach in the next 10 years when the new technology comes along to get that out? Whether the technology accepts it now or down the line depends on each individual producer.

Ben Floyd – As John mentioned, this is more focused on the grower and producer and that is more focused on the surrounding support structure.

Kim Weerts – Still like viability from a different vantage point.

Brad Johnson – I would like to have everyone write a short paragraph what they think ag viability is and what are some of the important things that go on within the community of WC that they partake in that showcases (inaudible).

Ben Floyd – Do you want to accept that as a challenge? We have to talk about goals and benchmarks. This is also another key piece. It will measure whether or not this program works. In the RCW the work plan must include goals and benchmarks for protection and enhancement of critical areas. Measurable benchmarks that within 10 years are designed to protect and enhance through voluntary incentive-based measures.

When you say voluntary incentive-based measures the non-required part of this, we are talking about the enhancement goal. Because it is a voluntary stewardship program and we have voluntary incentive-based measures, it gets a little confusing. Maybe there is a way we can think about how we further distinguish that. You have to protect critical areas in this program. If you don't protect critical areas in this program it goes to regulatory.

If you enhance you can do that just through good practices that you choose to implement but that is not the measurement of whether the program stays or goes. That is basically the distinction. We know about July 2011, so the work plan has to protect both protection and enhancement goals. We have funding for protection, we are hoping to get funding on top of that for enhancement.

Art Swannack – We don't have funding for protection; we have funding to create a plan. I don't believe we have funding yet for protection.

John Stuhlmiller – The only thing we have funding for so far is the planning process.

Ben Floyd – We will take out those two statements. Even though all we are required to do is protect, there is some benefit from spending time thinking about enhancement, because if we just focus on protection there may be some areas that we slide back a little bit and if we had a little enhancement on top of that it could account for a blip or two.

Alan Thomson – When you say protect critical areas we really are protecting the 2011 baseline. I think that needs to be articulated because protect wetlands means something different.

Ben Floyd –Yes that is correct. So protect the 2011 baseline. So, enhancement benchmarks can document ecological lift making things better. If we have a practice and it is degrading we can stop the degradation and it increases function and makes it better. Also, it can buffer against unforeseen events like a fire. It helps access county-wide protection of critical areas functions and values.

So this is a graphic that John Small and Vivian put together. In the middle you have basically the critical area functions and values to fall into. Water quality, soil health, hydrology and habitat. Then each of the different types of critical areas wetlands, FWLF, habitat conservation area, which is FWCA, critical aquifer recharge areas, frequently flooded areas, all can impact water quality and soil health can be impacted by the three on the left and the right and habitat hydrology. It is just a way to see functions and values how they line up with the critical areas.

Art Swannack – I am trying to remember what each of those mean and they need to be written out for someone who doesn't know.

Kim Weerts – Maybe at the top of the page.

Ben Floyd – Yes, this is great. Someone that doesn't know what is going on should be able to understand it.

Brad Johnson – The glossary is great but sometimes you have to write them out.

Ben Floyd – Each section will almost stand alone. Stream habitat, protection benchmark is to keep it as it is, 2011. A bunch of these projects are next to farmland and we need to take credit for those restoration projects even if they are not specific measures that are happening. They are improving quality habitat and stream function and it happened since 2011, let's capture the benefit and include it.

So, protection benchmark, this shows that over time even protection may actually enhance because you have land that hasn't been farmed for 15 years or so and so you are now adding trees and shrubs and not just grass. I'm not saying it will stay forever. You have the flexibility to do what you want with that property, but in the meantime it is increasing in function. So we want to take credit for that.

So, we have to come up with measurable benchmarks. So, we can measure participation, here are all the measures. Here are how many were implemented. How many acres, practices and then describe the benefits to the critical areas baseline from those measures.

Option 2 is we take existing monitoring programs, ecology data sets, data that is collected, stream monitoring, temperature gauges, WFW priority habitat species, and updated data set. We can use that

to see if things are protected or are they getting better over time through these data sources. Or we can do a hybrid of the two.

Larry Cochran – So, my district has the Option 2 already on the north fork of the Palouse River. We've got about 5-10 years of monitoring data that shows improvement.

Ben Floyd – Is that county-wide? Do we have those systems county-wide?

Larry Cochran – I don't know about county-wide.

Art Swannack – I think you need to use Option 2 to keep Ecology and other guys off your back.

Ben Floyd – What I am hearing, does anybody think we shouldn't have measures as tracked and something that we have goals related to participation measures, acreage of certain types of practices that we project out?

Jon Jones – I think we need to have some goals, a good way to measure progress. We don't want to make it so specific we tie our hands.

Ben Floyd – So we don't want to say like 30,000 additional acres in prescribed grazing or 50,000 additional acres in government programs. We might say increased acreage at a percentage over 2011.

Kim Weerts – Maybe a percentage but not a high percentage.

Nora Schlenker – Could we tie it back to the function. Say, X acres of conservation practices that benefit (inaudible).

John Pearson – The way you look at it is the way you are doing it now. So, look within NRCS standards and recommendations is to improve soil health, reduce erosion. The way they have done it over the years has changed, and the way we will do it is going to change.

Ben Floyd – Whatever we come up with is flexibility and new technology.

Kim Weerts – So it is, the goal is the benchmark, not the way you get there.

Jon Jones – Not the practice.

Ben Floyd – The goal will have a broad statement of direction. The benchmark will be here is how we are going to measure it. But it is not going to be farm by farm, acre by acre, and practice by practice.

Kim Weerts – The benchmark is increased water quality. The practices to get there are your choice. You can't use those as a benchmark.

Ben Floyd – You could use the practices as a benchmark, but have a modest goal and something that already accounts for what you have already done. Then you track those measures or implementation of that.

John Pearson – I think we can agree today that agriculture is moving that direction anyway. So why don't we call the practices the latest conservation practices and leave it at that. If we say we have to do this or that that tunnels us. Soil health, I'm getting a little concerned about. What is soil health? We all think we know what it is but if we start putting it on paper that this is soil health and it is earthworms, which I believe it is, then I put earthworms in here and all of a sudden every farmer in the county is going to say that I don't need an earthworm to grow a crop of wheat; and he is right.

Jon Jones – But that is just an indicator of soil health. It is not soil health.

John Pearson – There isn't a producer anywhere that doesn't agree that soil health is important but how we get there, where we are going is debatable.

Nancy Belsby – When we were doing the instream water quality, we talked about swizzles which is different sources of (inaudible) but it has to do with the water quality and WRIA 34 is included. This document came from the (inaudible) but it describes the source (inaudible). I don't know where it fits in with what you are talking about.

Ben Floyd – So, this has to be specific enough that we can measure whether we are meaning it or not. Someone outside could look and ask how you are meeting it. I can't tell you are meeting it. I'm going to challenge it and say you can't demonstrate you are meeting VSP so you really can't demonstrate that you are protecting. So you are going to go back into regulation. They could potentially enforce that.

Kim Weerts – I disagree if you use Option 3 which is a hybrid of Option 1 and 2. You absolutely can do it because you are recording on the conservations practices that are being implemented in existing programs. But I also think in Option 1 it should be an existing program as well as producer funded. I think if we go to people like the Farm Bureau and the WC Cattlemen's Association they can certainly help to locate and help record those practices that are being done that are not funded.

Ben Floyd – Okay, so use the agricultural organizations to help capture privately funded improvements.

Joan Folwell – What about people participation and (inaudible) to apply that benchmark to certain, how many people are enrolled in the VSP program and within that how many people are performing this practice, etc. There is going to have to be some accounting of who is involved in the program.

Kim Weerts – That is good because you may not be in a program but you may be involved in VSP and you may be involved in a program and involved in VSP and it is another way to get a number. If the voluntary stewardship participants are increasing over time then that is an indicator too.

Joan Folwell – We haven't talked about the mechanism of how the program is going to be handled. Certainly you have to know whether people are accepting this or not.

Ben Floyd – There has to be some kind of performance measurement that happens throughout the process.

John Pearson – This came up in the very first meeting, is who is going to administer this and how are they going to do that. We still haven't answered that. I think that is an idea. How are we going to do it? I also think that the RCW, we don't have any choice. If we claim as a producer that we are not participating and I don't think,

Ben Floyd – I would say as long as you are demonstrating even if we only have 20%, if the County, whoever ends up leaving this thing demonstrates that there is an increase, it doesn't matter how it is increased.

John Pearson – What is it say decreasing, what if we hit the 5% and (inaudible) I don't think the state will accept that. I don't think there is a choice here in the big picture.

Ben Floyd – We should have some participation targets. We may want to do it more by acreage, so that you've demonstrate. You could have more producers and less acreage it has to have some numbers component to it for Option 1, part of that Option 1 piece of it in tracking it.

John Pearson – My gut tells me that the only way this is going to be long term, sustainable, this VSP program, is if it is bought it by the producers. If the producers decide not to buy in then it is not going to work. So we have to write something that the producers are willing to buy into it.

Jon Jones – Whoever takes the lead is going to be responsible for tracking this stuff. You can see the records going somewhere else and it could turn into a mess. Documenting performance. That is going to be the job of the lead or whoever does that.

Kim Weerts – A lot of the producers are not forthcoming, so it comes back to the producers have to buy into and they have to trust whoever is doing it.

Jon Jones – I think there has got to be one CD who has a lead or if we had one CD in the County. They should have one person dedicated to VSP. It shouldn't be one person do a little of this and a little of that. That should be their job. We could do that the way we used to do the burn permit program. The four CD's every year, one would take the lead on tracking the acres and reporting to Ecology at that time. I don't know who they would report to for VSP.

John Pearson – There has to be a producer board, which is the work group and it has to be a flexible group. I don't think I want to do this for 30 years.

Ben Floyd – Yes, it can be a flexible group. You don't also have to meet monthly; you can meet once a year.

John Pearson – So that district has to answer (inaudible)

Kim Weerts – I'm going to caution putting it in the conservation district hands. Because a lot of producers don't trust the conservations districts. We sat at PSF and a producer came in and we talked about a couple of the conservation districts and he said he wouldn't deal with them. So there can be a lack of trust.

Joan Folwell – (Inaudible, background noise from the phone.)

Ben Floyd – We were going through those options here and trying to form recommendations. We came up with the Hybrid approach. So, let's put this here and see what the differences are.

Joan Folwell – Just exactly what the consensus is from the CDs viewpoint or this work group or the BOCC as to what the CD's were going to do.

Brad Johnson – We said exactly what you did. We said a hybrid with more emphasis on Option 1 because there won't be a lot of money from monitoring. My recommendation was to monitor one watershed because if you try to monitor every project that goes on the ground, one, you don't have enough people to do it and two, you'll never get the money.

Jon Jones – I think that is perfect,

Brad Johnson - Then that watershed has to be consistent. It has to be a big one that has stuff on the east, middle and the west and those projects, if they are successful there you can assume they are successful in other areas. But there is going to be flood, fire, and failures but that is where you learn from.

Joan Folwell – So, everybody at this point assuming that the CD's are going to be the implementers?

Ben Floyd – No, I don't think that is, that is why we have at least 3 options.

Kim Weerts – If there is a good buy in from producers, there may be producers who are monitoring who would share their information also. They might not be in that watershed but it adds another layer to the success.

Ben Floyd – So, these folks that are not comfortable with the CD's are they comfortable with any government agency?

Kim Weerts – I don't know. All I'm doing is saying I don't think that the CD's should be the go to. We need to look at different options and I don't know what those options are.

John Pearson – The one that may not be comfortable with the CD's may be comfortable with over here, but the one who,

Jon Jones – But we will be putting all the information together.

John Pearson – So I think we may need to have a board or something. That bears the question, who is paying the bill?

Ben Floyd – There has to be some money being requested, hopefully, at an annual basis from the legislature. About \$100,000 per county to implementation. Or to leverage other money to meet our goals.

John Stuhlmiller – That is correct. Those dollars would be commissioned. The statewide advisory committee and technical panel talked about the same at that \$125,000 range. You are jumping into the thick of VSP right now with the goals and benchmarks and looking to the other plans ahead of you, Thurston and Chelan, these things are helpful. You don't have to bite the whole thing at once. Don't jump at who is going to do what now. I would encourage you to think more about what is reasonable to have as goals as you go through piece by piece for each of that critical areas. Build the system first and then think forward what you need to fund it, etc.

Ben Floyd – We are taking off the month of December. We will write the plan based on what we've heard today we will give you some initial goals and benchmarks to look over. The first three or four sections of Volume 1 may just get refined based on your comments. The last section where we are still working with

these ideas, you may want something different. That is okay. We will put it all together so you can see what this thing looks like.

That is what we will be talking about at our next meeting on January 5th. Would you mind if we started at 2:00 p.m. on the 5th because we always go a little long? So, let's go ahead and say on February 2nd, so we will go 3 hours each. So, both will start at 2:00 p.m. and go until 5:00 p.m. We will have some snacks, too. We will meet here in the BOCC chambers.

Thanks to everyone on the phone. We will continue to look at the goals and benchmarks and try to pull some of that together before the next meeting. We will be sending that out before our next meeting. You will have a little time to look that over and then come with your ideas.

Thanks, Nora, John, Vivian, Tracy, John.

5:30 pm. – Adjourned.