

**WHITMAN COUNTY
VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM
Meeting
April 6, 2017**

MEMBERS:

**Alan Thomson
Jon Jones
Nancy Belsby
David Swannack
Larry Cochran
Tracy Eriksen (Absent)**

**Joan Folwell
Kim Weerts
David Lange
Art Swannack
John Pearson
Jeff Pittmann**

Phone: Vivian Erickson, Anchor QEA; John Small, Anchor QEA.

Audience: Brian Bell, Whitman CD, Ben Floyd, Anchor QEA, Elinor Huber, Clerk.

2:06 p.m. – Ben Floyd opened the meeting. We are going to share a couple of different things that have transpired since our last meeting. We will talk about the tech panel discussion, John and Vivian will be leading that discussion. Then we will give an overview of the work plan Volume 1 and 2 structure. We gave you the work plan and you said that it was too long and no one will take the time to read it. You weren't the only ones who told us that. So we have a proposed updated approach for you today.

We will walk through the overview and checklist. Everybody should have received the checklist. We didn't print off copies of that. If you would like a hard copy of anything we sent to you electronically, just reply back to Vivian and let us know. We will talk about protection and enhancement benchmark values so we have covered this framework multiple times. The conservation practices, physical effects tool. Today we will present to you actual numbers for what we are proposing for protection benchmarks as well as enhancement benchmarks. There is a handout that you can take with you that summarizes the things that we will go through in the PowerPoint.

Then we want to spend a little time at the end of the meeting talking about something that we need to do a better job of; clearly identifying participation goals. So we will go through what the RCW says about participation goals and a few ideas we have related to that. We will conclude with next steps. We are still targeting trying to have this submitted and approved by the work group by the end of May, the first part of June, right after our June meeting. Are there any questions?

Art Swannack – I did read some of the links that Vivian sent out and I sent a response back to you and Mark and Alan. Everything I saw for measurements regarding critical areas, there was not measurements regarding viability of agriculture. That is equal in this plan as I understand it under the way the law was written.

Larry Cochran – Did we ever answer the viability question?

Art Swannack – I don't know that we answered it but I am looking at the links and with the technical panel and others, none of them addressed that issue.

Ben Floyd – Ag viability is tricky. It is in the eyes of the beholder. There are some things that we can identify related to ag viability but why don't we just add that to the agenda as a discussion item. Let's talk about this after participation goals. It says you have to have participation goals. Not a quota, but goals. Are there any other items to add to the agenda today?

Let's go into updates since the last group meeting, technical Panel discussions.

John Small – The feedback we got regarding how long our volume had become and how in depth it was, is that we presented this new version that is facing the producers. It is intended to be pretty accessible, easy to understand not getting into quite the depth that we had initially. The other thing since we last met is that Thurston had their formal review by the VSP tech panel in Olympia. There was some clear difficulty in finding all the parts of their work plan and how they fit together because it has become a series of separate documents.

So what we want to do is pull everything back together and take what was our original Volume 1 and add more detail to it and stop there. It will be a few appendices that have some of the summary tables and other information and maps that just don't fit in the document. Everything that the tech panel will need for their review that the implementation team will need to make VSP successful in WC will be in Volume 2.

At the front of that will be a summary that will be useful for those who want to get more information about VSP, really understand it better and are still more likely to be members of the public than are producers. Just want to have a better understanding of why they should participate in VSP. If they are already convinced, they may just look at Volume 1, fill out the checklist and be done.

Volume 2 will be a robust document and it will be aimed at folks involved in the implementation of the VSP and approval of the VSP. It will be organized to show that how this plan is intended to be implemented and how this plan meets all the requirements of the RCW.

Ben Floyd – This is a proposal based upon what we have heard from the tech panel, the feedback that we have seen given to Thurston County informally. Chelan County also just submitted and they are going to have a workshop next week with the tech panel. So we should start getting more feedback about what they like and don't like out of the work plans. Just based upon what we have already heard and what you suggested we do. This is our revised approach for the work plan.

We are going to have this overview plus the checklist that we mailed you. That is what we are calling Volume 1. It will be 14-15 pages and pictures, something that people can go through and

do a self-assessment and also if they wanted more information about how to participate in VSP, they can call the Cattlemen's Association, CD's, or McGregor's, etc. They can take it from there and work with the producer to identify practices they are already doing or additional opportunities they could do, get that information captured in the check list, get it back to our VSP coordinators, yet to be named, and that is what Volume 1 is looking like.

It was Tracy, who is not here, at the last meeting, he said that we needed it to be 10 pages and we didn't get the 10 pages but we are less than 20. Then the executive summary is going to take the detailed plan and it will pull out highlights and we will walk through what that will look like. But it is basically you're going to have a section that still has the FAQ.

So some of Volume 1 will also go into the executive summary but there will be more information on goals, conservation, stewardship practices that are included with more detail about conditions in the County. Again, it will be in that 25-page range. Then in Volume 2 it will have everything. All the detail, more of a report format, so that version that we showed you, will end up being in Volume 1 in the executive summary. We decided since the audience for Volume 2 will be the tech panel and the implementers we were thinking a report format would work for that.

Joan Folwell – I am wondering exactly what you mean by implementation? Is that where there are suggestions for practices regarding critical areas?

Ben Floyd – In Volume 2 that is the implementers. We are thinking the VSP coordinator, whoever the County selects to do that job. The associations, the conservations districts, anybody else that will be responsible for working with individual producers and landowners for collecting summary information on practices that are implemented and then feeding that into the structure that set up the practices of where they are implemented, how many acres, etc., that are affected. Those implementers that will be on the ground working with the individual landowners and rolling that information up to report, we have to do a 2-year and a 5-year report on the work plan.

Joan Folwell – My question is what exactly do you mean by implementation there? The data gathering process or how to implement practices regarding the preservation and increase of critical area?

Art Swannack – All of it, because this is the implementation of the plan which means tracking, actual practices and the whole thing. We write this plan then it has to be active and put out into the field and be done.

Joan Folwell – I understand the benchmarks and the goal setting and all that kind of stuff. Is that what you are terming implementation?

Ben Floyd – We are tracking that. How are we doing against those goals? That happens individually with the producer and practices and how those get summarized and communicated back to a central place and rolled up with all the other practices throughout the County. So,

implementation is everything about the plan but I think about it in terms of the VSP coordinator and everybody that will be working to feed information to that coordinator.

Art Swannack – It is more than that. It is more than the information to the coordinator, it is the actual out in the field actions. Then the coordinator gets all the stuff that is coming together.

Joan Folwell – Right now we are waiting to make sure there is funding for the next phase which is the implementation phase.

Art Swannack – The House and Senate has 7.2 million in each budget for implementation.

Joan Folwell – So we are pretty much assured of those funds. I just wanted clarification on what implementation meant in this document.

Ben Floyd – The same thing. It is how the plan is going to be implemented once you approve it.

Kim Weerts – So the draft work plan is what now?

Ben Floyd – That is going to get folded back into Volume 2. A lot of that, some of the schematics and pictures and things will be, the graphics and pictures will be heavy in the executive summary and in Volume 1. We will still have some of that information in Volume 2 and the pictures and graphics and stuff but more of the text and all of the detail, everything that the tech panel or implementer is going to need for implementing the plan will be included in Volume 2.

Vivian Erickson – The first draft of the work plan that we sent out, the report version, we are going to build on that framework so that will stay pretty consistent. But what we are now doing is we kept referring back to the technical appendices that we are going to build separately and what we heard from the tech panel in their review of Thurston County is they felt the review was a piecemeal and it was hard to see that consistency.

So, we wrote a work plan that has a good framework. So, we are going to bolster what we have already developed and bring more of that detailed content that we need to support that work plan into that document and then look at that prettier version that we developed and pull some of the summary-type information out of Volume 2, and create that 20-25 page executive summary of the work plan.

Ben Floyd – So, we are going to take that work plan, pieces of it are going into Volume 1, pieces are going to go into Volume 2 and then we are going to take some of those technical appendices that we originally identified as appendices and we actually built and we are going to put them into that volume. So, we will expand that work plan and make it a more complete Volume 2. It will have some appendices, but it will have more of the body.

So, rather than just have a summary, we have a performance, we have a protection benchmark and enhancement benchmark and here is how we put it together, we will have a methodology.

We took the CPPE, we scored all these conservation practices. Here is a table that shows how we do it so there will be more detail in that overall work plan, Volume 2 and more summary stuff will be in the Volume 1 and executive summary.

Kim Weerts – The executive summary is for who? For producers and others who want more detail? So, it will be part of this?

Ben Floyd – Yes, pieces of that will still be in there and all of the content will be here. So, that executive summary we came up with that is based upon your feedback, we thought there was more we could take out of this and make it an executive summary. We hope people will care enough to read that part of it.

Kim Weerts – That was my original question. I saw Volume 1 and Volume 2 and I didn't see a reference to an executive summary in Volume 2 in what I read in the shortened version. I wanted to make sure that there was some kind of reference so that someone could, they don't have to go into any office or contact anyone. They can just have a link to it.

Ben Floyd – But I think your point is well taken. We need to make sure the executive summary also has this. So, each of these should discuss the overall framework. Here is Volume 1, here is the executive summary of Volume 2 and if you want all the detail there it is. These are the audiences we are targeting, recognize that everything is going to be available. It will be out on a website and available for people to get as much detail as they want.

So, let's walk through the overview. So, Volume 1, this doesn't have all of Volume 1 because attached to this will be the checklist. It has a brief summary of what the stewardship program is about, the five critical areas, how it is a balanced approach. Then why we developed a work plan and what its purpose is and then a quick overview of Volume 2. And it shows you that if you want to see Volume 2 you will get more information about regional setting, baseline conditions, protection and enhancement strategies, goals and benchmarks and implementation.

Then you go into work plan implementation. So, it talks about how producers can participate in VSP, examples and strategies, and practices, crop rotations, reduced till, no till, direct seed, etc. That there was a checklist available that there is opportunity for potential funding based upon what is happening at a given time and available funding sources. Then we go into FAQ. These questions are right out of your work plan except we trimmed them down and did some consolidation. What is the VSP, what are critical areas, are there critical areas on my land or how might I affect critical areas? It gives you a quick overview of the critical areas with the pictures.

Then what are the critical area functions and values, what is meant by baseline conditions, what does it mean to protect and enhance critical areas? What does it mean to maintain ag viability? Is there funding? How can I get involved? The checklist goes on the back of this.

Is this the right level of detail? Is there stuff that we are missing in here that a producer who wants a short version of this? Is there something we should have included in the work plan or something that is too much and take it out? You don't have to decide all this right now.

Art Swannack – I don't really like your ag viability sentence on page 5. You get to the part where the RCW and then you say, "*Activities or methods that protect critical areas must also be neutral to or beneficial to the viability of farm operations through reducing input costs or reducing soil erosion.*" I think you should strike out "~~through reducing input costs or reducing soil erosion.~~"

Ben Floyd – Okay, we are going to strike that out.

Kim Weerts – I haven't read this one but I jumped through this one, the checklist. My question is for both of them. In the checklist, and I start there first, there is a lot of stewardship practices. I think strategies is only mentioned once or twice. I haven't read Volume 1 yet, but my big concern is that to me VSP is first and foremost stewardship strategy. The practices come out of your strategy and the goals that each producer wants to achieve. I think we need to have just a little blurb that summarizes that.

You have to have a strategy before you can put the practices to good use. Otherwise, you are just encouraging people to go into another program, or a program. You take somebody like (inaudible) who is extremely successful, has never been in a program and looks at his place and how he does things very (inaudible) and very historically. I don't see any of that in here.

Ben Floyd – I think that is a great observation. Do any of you feel the same way? Not specific to that, but maybe you haven't seen it in a document but the overall idea that Kim suggested is about we need to talk strategy for your land, objectives for your property and then how practices could fit into that strategy. Is that something that you see to further emphasize and define what we mean when we talk about strategy?

Jon Jones – Are you talking about site specific, is what you are saying?

Kim Weerts – I think what VSP wants to do is to encourage the producer to sit there and think about his land before he just starts putting a bunch of different practices on there. Because it starts with thinking about your land and if you think you are fine and maybe you feel like you don't have to do anything, but if there are other areas that you want to improve upon and change, it starts with a strategy and then goes to a practice or a program with a practice, etc.

Jon Jones – Maybe they start a practice that doesn't really fit their place so let's do another one, so it does fit?

Kim Weerts – When we emphasize practices we go back to the same old mindset of every other agency that offers programs. If you go into CRP here are the rules and you are in it for this long. Whereas this I think, what we are supposed to be doing is encouraging people to look at their

land in a different way, a more whole way instead of just, here is what I want to do with this pasture, etc.

Larry Cochran – That’s why we are not pinpointing any exact practices. There is a whole slug of whatever excuse you want.

Kim Weerts – Exactly, but I’d like to use, when we use practices in here, I like to use stewardship strategies and practices or stewardship strategies, and I’d rather always see strategies and practices rather than just stewardship practices. I think it causes people to go back and think about this.

Joan Folwell – You just want an introduction using the term strategies as a preface to any practices. A holistic approach.

Kim Weerts – Yes, and then whenever we put stewardship practices in here it should always say stewardship strategies and practices. If you don’t have a strategy why are you looking at a practice?

Jon Jones – Adaptive management is the term that bureaucrats use.

Kim Weerts – We choose to use stewardship strategies.

Ben Floyd – I like also some of the things that Kim said about think about your land what is working and what is not working and other opportunities to change or improve? Are there recurring problems that you are dealing with? I think it would be helpful to think that when we say “strategies,” let’s put some definition around it. Do you want to see some definition around what we mean when we say “strategies?”

Art Swannack – I’d say leave it alone. Let them come up with their own strategy, it doesn’t have to be defined by us.

Ben Floyd – Okay, strategies and practices.

Larry Cochran – I like the word, “stewardship,” too.

Kim Weerts – Stewardship, strategies and practices. We already decided, can’t remember which meeting it was, that it was after John Stuhlmiller talked and said basically that you will not have any BMP’s in this. This is not, this is about, and then we came up with stewardship strategy.

Ben Floyd – I think it was our February meeting.

Alan Thomson – Is CRP an agricultural activity?

Ben Floyd – CRP is on ag land and I believe it is. It is a conservation, stewardship strategy.

Art Swannack – It is a paid for practice by the government on your land taking it temporarily out of crop production.

Alan Thomson – I raise that question because of the definition of agricultural viability and that last sentence on page 5 that advises me that agricultural activity after July 22, 2011, could be discontinued.

Larry Cochran – Not the way I read it.

Alan Thomson – It says, *“Further, the VSP will not require an agricultural producer to discontinue agricultural activities that legally existed before July 22, 2011.”* So what happens to ag activity that came into being after that date? The implication there is it could be discontinued. That’s why I asked about CRP because if lands are in CRP, and come out of CRP after this date, are they affected by this?

David Swannack – CRP is a type of farming. It’s like, at this time I do not raise peas. Say I start raising peas next year, to me it is the same. We are talking the same changes. One is for ten years but the other is now.

David Lange – VSP is a voluntary program. It says, *“...VSP will not require,”* so I think you can scratch that whole sentence. Three words later it says it is required.

Alan Thomson – You couldn’t tell someone to stop farming? It would have to be voluntary. What possible ag activities that happened after July 22, 2011, that wouldn’t be covered here? I don’t know. I’m just asking the question.

Larry Cochran – To me, it is talking about what you were doing before 2011 and if you are still doing those, you’ll still be able to do those, is how I look at it.

Alan Thomson – But what about after that date? Is there any new ag activity that comes in?

Art Swannack – The problem with this thing is that it doesn’t cover all of what is in that section of the RCW. The actual RCW, the title is Construction, but it says this: *“Nothing in RCW 36.70A.702 to 36.70A.760 may be construed to; 1.) interfere with or supplant the ability of any ag operator to work cooperatively with a conservation district or participate in state or federal conservation programs; 2.) require an ag operator to discontinue an ag activity that legally existed before July 22, 2011; 3.) prohibit the voluntary sale or leasing of land for conservation purposes (which would be the CRP,) either NP or as an easement, for grant counties or state agencies of additional authority to regulate critical areas or land use for ag activity; 5.) limit the authority of state agency, local government or landowner to carry out obligations under any other federal, state or local law.”*

So, the problem is that this thing covers, like we are talking about CRP, Section 3 of it would cover what you were, it can’t be construed to prohibit you from voluntary sale or leasing land for conservation practices, which is what CRP is really does. It leases your land for that type of work.

Alan Thomson – The CRP is protected. That was my main concern. Then I don't know what kind of plan would be brand new coming into ag production after 2011.

Art Swannack – An example that comes to my mind that would be probably prohibited is, prior to 2011 you can burn certain things and after 2011 there could be a regulatory affect that says you can't do this. This plan doesn't deal with that. I'm saying it legally existed prior to this. This plan doesn't prohibit what existed up to this point but something else has the regulatory authority over anything that way.

Joan Folwell – How about saying something like, "Will not require an (audible) discontinue anything unless it impacts critical areas negatively."

Ben Floyd – We are not requiring that because we are looking at the County aggregate. It is not an individual basis.

Kim Weerts – The first sentence of that paragraph, "*To receive approval, the Work Plan must protect critical areas...*" What work plan?

Ben Floyd – This work plan. Volume 1 Executive Summary and Volume 2.

Kim Weerts – This paragraph to me does not make sense when you put it with the heading. The producers do not care if there is a work plan that is approved or not approved. If this is going out then the work plan has been approved, hasn't it?

Ben Floyd – Right. So what I'm hearing is maybe let us try to rewrite that whole paragraph and put in more about ag viability. Maybe we put in more about the producer ag viability. Ag viability means this program helps you to reduce input costs, get more out of what you are already doing.

Art Swannack – It doesn't increase your costs of operation.

Kim Weerts – This isn't really talking about the ag viability. It is telling you that you can do this if it reduces input costs or reduces soil erosion. That is not really the definition of ag viability.

Ben Floyd – Right, we missed the mark on that one.

Larry Cochran – Can we say that this plan will not affect any of our right to farm ordinance?

Alan Thomson – It shouldn't. The word "discontinue," I'm with David Lange, I don't think that word should be in there.

Ben Floyd – We will rewrite this and refocus it around farmer producer, what does it mean for ag viability? It is something that affects the bottom line. Lower costs, higher yields, or neutral and I'm still able to do it. Any one of those three things I think is what we are talking about here. I'm getting consensus around that. We will trim it down and take out some of this stuff.

Alan Thomson – So, Larry, to answer your question, I think this should not affect the right to farm.

Larry Cochran- It is all voluntary. But it should be mentioned in here that the right to farm ordinance still supersedes VSP.

Ben Floyd – I don't know if it supersedes. They go together maybe?

Art Swannack – This is non-regulatory which means the County cannot, is not going to have regulatory ability on ag.

Alan Thomson – We are not going to ask anybody to discontinue farming operations. Some people may negatively impact a critical area, but as we know the entire drainage is included here. Not just one particular parcel or location.

Larry Cochran – The right to farm ordinance is part of our liability (inaudible).

Ben Floyd – So we could add in our discussion about ag viability, right to farm ordinance.

Art Swannack – I don't know that it is relevant to VSP in critical areas. In ag viability it is, but in terms of this program, VSP and critical area management, the right to farm ordinance doesn't say you can farm a wetland outside of what the current rules are. What are you saying that it does for you?

Larry Cochran – It protects against the housing development that I have before me now.

Art Swannack – But that is not VSP.

Larry Cochran – But part of that Red Tail Ridge can be critical areas. A lot of it is critical areas.

Alan Thomson – But that is inside the City of Colfax. They have their own critical area ordinances. They can't be destroying any wetlands or critical areas.

Larry Cochran – So, what I am hearing is about the viability piece of ag in this County because without that right to farm ordinance, right now more of that city limits, I don't know what my neighbors are going to do.

Art Swannack – I understand what you are saying there. I don't have a problem with the right to farm ordinance. I don't know that it is relevant to what we are doing with VSP verses critical area ordinance stuff. I think it is bigger than, that part of viability is outside of the viability they are talking about in here. This is viability related to regulations on critical areas versus VSP in farming.

That is my thought, is that you are looking at VSP and farming related to critical areas what VSP voluntarily allows you to do while protecting the critical area. But it doesn't talk about what right to farm does in terms of your neighbor being upset because you are baling hay at 3:00 a.m. in

the morning. That is a different argument, a different set of regulations outside of the Critical Area Ordinance in VSP. That is what I am thinking.

Ben Floyd – So, we do have a county regional setting for ag viability. In there we talk about good transportation system and we could mention the right to farm ordinance in there as one of those overarching infrastructure that supports ag economy.

Art Swannack – I have no problem with that.

Larry Swannack – Maybe it should be in Volume 2 instead of here.

Ben Floyd – We will beef up this ag viability so we can talk about both regional and individual producers in here.

Alan Thomson – That language in there about discontinued ag activity, that needs to be taken out because when I read that, how can we discontinue any ag viability?

Ben Floyd – We just took it out of the RCW. We will scrap that whole paragraph. By the way, we said the meeting will go only until 4:00, we are now back to 5:00 or 5:15 p.m.

John Small – I was going to summarize what this paragraph will say. Which is from the producers side that this program is voluntary focusing on no cost options or subsidized options, and it is equally looking at ways to increase yield and profitability under this resource protection.

Ben Floyd – I think we got the gist of it.

Jon Jones – There is nothing in here that prohibits someone who buys an acre of land with a house or subdivided. You are not really an ag producer but there is nothing prohibiting them from saying they want to be in the VSP program.

Ben Floyd – Anybody could have strategies and practices for their property.

Jon Jones – It just occurred to me that we are excluding some of those really small landowners.

Larry Cochran – Alan is just going to make sure they don't build on a critical area.

Alan Thomson – Jon, you are opening up a can of worms here. The reputation of ag is going to get on the table and we've had this discussion before.

Jon Jones – I see sometimes farms are sold, they sell the farmland but they exclude the house. Sometimes maybe the house is on a stream or next to a well. I think we don't want to exclude those people.

Alan Thomson – Well, we’ve got parcels of land out there that are 20 acres and they have been designated as commercial agriculture. There are no wetlands that I know about but what if something like that occurred and those parcels are created after 2011 maybe. You are opening up a can of worms.

Ben Floyd – We don’t specify the size of the farm. It is ag activities. From a practical standpoint landowners with a lot of land holdings, you want to go after those because you get more acreage, more area covered from the efficiency standpoint. But we also do want to have outreach to your hobby farms or small acreage farms that could potentially be impacting a stream or a critical area as well. Everybody can participate in VSP that wants to.

Alan Thomson – You really compensate on a lot of different types of ag activity now, community garden, half an acre can be considered. Marijuana is an ag activity. The Feds in WC considered it an ag activity.

Ben Floyd – We have a definition right here in the RCW 90.58.065. This is the definition right out of the RCW. It is the same definition that comes out of the Shoreline Management Act. It is all of these activities whether it happens on a large or small or an in-between farm.

Vivian Erickson – The VSP regulations refer to the SMP definition of ag activities.

Ben Floyd – Agricultural land, those specific land areas on which agricultural activities are conducted.

Kim Weerts – I’m not sure how it makes a difference as far as VSP is concerned because it is only county land and we don’t have to define it because why would we care how big or small it is. If a producer wants incentives to do projects on their property, they are going to go to agencies. The agencies are going to put their own individual programs to decide whether or not that person has enough land or what they are doing is appropriate and if they want to support that or not. So, what do we care, because we are looking at everything as voluntary and we want to put in as much as we can.

Alan Thomson – In the extreme circumstances, and these do occur, where you have a small parcel with a house on it, a residence, I really look at it as a residential parcel, but there is ag activity going on, they are growing a crop. That technically is an ag activity but it is on a residential parcel. There is a problem with that, because I am going to regulate that as a, if you are going to build something on a residential parcel and there is a critical area there, I treat that as regulatory property. There is ag activity happening on the parcel as well. You’ve got it split between the two. Ag activity and residence.

Kim Weerts – But the regulatory part, we don’t get into that at all, so how does that affect VSP?
On a small residential parcel with a critical area on it like a wetland, the wetland would be considered under the critical areas ordinance. If any buildings are to be constructed within 200 feet of a wetland a wetland report is needed. My point is that the wetland is already being

protected under the CAO. However, that still wouldn't prevent the landowner from benefitting from the VSP. (Added by Alan Thomson)

Ben Floyd – Let's say I own 5 acres of land that I don't have in cultivation. I have pasture, some just open space rangeland. But I want to plant them for habitat. So, I go and I put in a dryland seed mix, work with the CD, they let me use the tiller and I plant a bunch of dryland seed mix and now I have a habitat.

I don't have any critical areas on my land, but I just did a habitat enhancement project. Why wouldn't we get credit for that under VSP as a habitat planning on the 5-acre parcel? So I think it is really who gets technical assistance and if a small producer comes in or a large producer comes in and they want to do a practice. Have at it. Let's take credit for it.

Alan Thomson –So, they both are scenarios, as long as critical areas are being protected and ag viability is being protected, we don't have a problem.

Ben Floyd – I don't think so. You still regulate the activity structure. Let's go on to the checklist.

Joan Folwell – At the top of page 6 it mentioned GMA. Could you spell that out?

Ben Floyd – Vivian, do you want to walk us through the checklist?

Vivian Erickson – Sure, we have the voluntary stewardship checklist. We are thinking there might be opportunities to trim some language from it because we made the checklist before doing this Volume 1 document. So, we were thinking if we tuck this piece right into that document we can cut some of this introductory language. But when we first developed this we wanted this to be a comprehensive standalone checklist document.

We have some introductory information orienting the producer to what the voluntary program is, why participation is important, providing a context of what those critical areas are and what the key functions are for those critical areas. Then also highlighting what the key objectives are for the checklist, which is to identify the potential presence of critical areas on or (inaudible) farm, protecting critical areas by maintaining or improving existing stewardship practices.

Then here is a part of that strategy discussion we were talking about earlier and identifying opportunities to implement additional stewardship practices or strategies on your land and documenting what those strategies are.

Kim Weerts – That last paragraph that starts out with "Information collected by producers," I think we need to put in there that any information that is collected is confidential, there won't be names and addresses, etc., out in the public.

Art Swannack – Is that information confidential under state law?

Vivian Erickson – It is. I have to re-visit it. I read something about confidentially. It is not confidential to the work group. The work group can review that information, but to the general public it is.

John Stuhlmiller – The confidentially question is a question that has not been settled. My encouragement to you is in your plan grab a position which is that your information in the checklist is not disclosable. It is unclear in a lot of that program language that was woven into the State statute related to and is specific to a farm plan. It is not real broad so the Commission has left us a little bit up in the air in this question.

Bottom line is candidly unless you really grabbed at it and make your position and make somebody disprove it, the Commission's position is it is basically disclosable. So, either farmers keep it in their own hands and don't give it to the County or whoever that technical service provider is, or it is at risk. So, that is what we are doing in Thurston, is to say, "Buyer beware, anything that is given back to the County is at risk of disclosure, basically."

Art Swannack – That is why I asked because pretty much everything we have at the County is public information. So your recommendation is that we put in a statement that says we believe this is not open for disclosure to the general public?

John Stuhlmiller – Yes. I tried to get this done in Thurston but didn't get it done there. Basically, a little statement that says that the Whitman County VSP work group believes this is critical to the success of the program, that confidentially is critical to the success, and therefore we believe the information in the checklist is not disclosable other than in ranges, etc. I can give you more information on this but basically, that it is not disclosable because the program would collapse without that protection for farmer's information.

Jon Jones – It is a little like the FSA information farm plan that most farmers have. It is not disclosable. You have to go through the Freedom of Information Act.

Art Swannack - But that is federal law. Not state law and WA state law is much more liberal and what is disclosable and what the federal law is.

Larry Cochran – So, with the CD, the way to get around that is the plan is developed and given to the farmer and it is one of the (inaudible) and is not a subject of disclosure.

Alan Thomson – This is not a WC project. So, information, we can't disclose it.

Art Swannack – Except we are going to be in charge of who we select for the implementer and then as a County we have to give a report to the State of what has happened.

Ben Floyd – No, the work group gives the report.

Kim Weerts – My issue too, is with the tracking. So, if we are tracking what producers are doing, how are we doing that? Are we doing that by saying that John Pearson is doing this, etc.? So there are going to be names unless we give someone a number, or do we just have a tally sheet?

Ben Floyd – I think we have some information like in the checklist about what people are doing. We could maybe identify that this is in this drainage area with this many acres, and these are the ones directly next to critical areas, and these are ones that are indirectly next to critical area, and keep that confidential. There may be a data base or something like that. There is a data base within NRCS. I think we have said confidential, not anonymity, information will be kept confidential. We have that in other parts of the work plan, so I think we need to further emphasize.

Art Swannack – Might I suggest at the next meeting you gather your resources and find out exactly what the truth is on this issue?

Ben Floyd – I don't know that there is truth. I think there is intention and possible risk.

Art Swannack – We need that info so this group can look at language that actually does the best to protect the people involved.

David Lange – At the bottom of Page 6, it reads, *“These practices can be recorded anonymously as part of the VSP to ensure success of the Work Plan. Voluntary participation, anonymity, and privacy are all key principles that will be maintained during the reporting process.”* So, you have touched on that.

Ben Floyd – We have the information in here as a starting point. We can beef it up.

Kim Weerts – That is great if it is enforceable. That is my question. If it is not enforceable then we are telling people something that is not true.

Art Swannack – That is why I am asking you to gather that info and bring it to us. What is enforceable, protectable and what isn't.

John Stuhlmiller – There are two things. One is what Thurston did in its plan. We have a list of questions we'd like the commission to deal with and it is related. A memo to the Commission, Thurston VSP, and then Evan also did a nice piece for our purposes to show the two disclosure issues related to farm plans. So, I can work with you off line on that, Ben.

Ben Floyd – That would be great. We won't wait until the next meeting to distribute that but we will make sure it is on the agenda for discussion. Back to the checklist.

Vivian Erikson – Then we go into definitions for critical areas and then we have several pages dedicated to giving producers opportunity to think about what kind of practices are already being conducted on their land. We broke it down to categories to help the producer and the soil

management practices that are currently being implemented. We provide examples of what soil management practices could look like.

Kim Weerts – In particular, this is where I think it should say. “Stewardship Strategies and Practices,” as the heading, and then in that first paragraph where there are practices. Then also down below in each of the blocks, it says, “yes,” provides specific practice types. I think it would behoove us to give us space to provide their specific strategy because that explains a lot about what they are doing in particular in each of these categories. Or why they are not doing something. Or it can also be providing that person some thinking time and then realizing that they need different practices.

Ben Floyd – Since you guys have tractors that drive themselves and climate control, instead of looking on Craig’s List for deals you can just fill out the VSP checklist. In this we also talk about our critical areas nearby. We wanted to talk about direct impacts to critical areas versus indirect.

We have had discussions with some of our other clients this week and we are probably going to change this to whether critical areas are nearby. It’s whether you might have a direct effect on a critical area or an indirect effect.

A direct effect could be, I have a pathway down to that critical area. I’m right next to it. I have a drainage that could feed into a critical area or a stream or a wetland or whatever. It may not be just 100 feet, may be a steeper slope and you could be 500 feet away, but have an area that has erosion that could potentially affect it.

So we are going to try, if you think it is a good idea, we will try to do more discussion around direct effect versus indirect effect. If you don’t have, yes, I have an area where run off occurs but then it goes on to a loam hill fan and I farm below that and nothing ever reaches a water body. Then that is, from the erosion standpoint, that example that is probably not a direct effect to a critical area. Whereas those other examples are. So, rather than just having arbitrary 100 feet or whatever.

David Lange – I don’t like the verbiage that you used. You guys are living and breathing VSP and we are not and Joe Farmer is not. So, put it in practical terms, objectives in the VSP checklist. *“Identify the potential presence of critical areas on or down-gradient of your farm.”* Downstream.

Larry Cochran – With our County the way we are built with all our hills, everything we do will hit a critical area in our land.

Ben Floyd – That’s true.

David Lange – So then we go to water quality, hydrology, soil habitat, then I think we can wordsmith those and make them more applicable with what you are trying to say.

Ben Floyd – If you have some suggested language to share with us, do you think it makes a difference whether we show a direct or a real time effect or a 2-week delay? It probably doesn't make much difference if something is ultimately going to hit the stream or wetland in the County. Do you think this is a big deal to try and differentiate this or shall we just?

Art Swannack – I think you can get yourself in trouble if you have a two-part delay. Then you get into what might happen instead of what is happening. That is when you start running into regulatory problems of people coming in and saying that you have the potential to have fish in that stream.

It is the same thing, you have the potential to pollute this thing and then that becomes a slippery slope that isn't really an easy line for anybody that is participating in this program to understand or to report on. I'd be very careful going down the road. If you have this event that occurs within a limited time frame and we consider that an impact. Limited meaning a couple weeks, a month. I wouldn't be looking at stuff that could, might, may be happen. That just seems like a wreck waiting to happen for the producer.

Jon Jones – I think we should leave it as general as possible. Don't paint us in a corner.

Ben Floyd – Do you like that better than 100-feet or some kind of another arbitrary number? The 100-feet doesn't make sense either, particularly if you are doing something up here and it could run down there and this is 300-feet.

Kim Weerts – I'm not sure why we have critical area nearby at all. They are doing a strategy or a practice and this is all about critical area impact, why are we even asking?

Art Swannack – We are asking because it might get them out of having to mess with it.

Kim Weerts – How many producers are going to go in and find out if they have critical areas? They are either going to just do it or not.

Art Swannack – They won't be eligible for the program if they are not protecting critical areas. I wouldn't think the other programs would come into play.

John Stuhlmiller – So, something that came to us in Thurston, is who is going to fill this out? Actually, in Thurston we said that CD, the tech panel will actually work with farmers to fill this out. But any place there was a technical thing, for instance, you could talk like a practice, you know that mulching will stop soil movement so that is good for movement of soil and so on. So, you don't have to necessarily do the linkage right here with the producer answering it for themselves that there are critical areas nearby. You could get practices listed and then the tech provider could answer that question later, maybe?

John Pearson – So, is it erosion if it stays on your farm? We talk about the practice but maybe the result of the practice is the problem. We talk about mulching and last week I was sitting in

the DOE building and they showed a picture of erosion on a farm in WC. Come to find out the dirt and the runoff of this guy's hill stayed on his property down in the flat.

Ben Floyd - That was my example earlier. There was no dirty water that left the farm ground and went into a water body.

John Pearson – At some point but not when that picture was taken. So, there is always dirty water leaving the (inaudible) ground. So would you drink out of the tile line? So, don't be digging. Anyway, it just got me thinking about that picture and they said this is bad. It was a hillside and it was ditches on the hillside. Then come to find out that the water actually leaving his property and it was clear.

Larry Cochran – But you can't use that example because that producer is (inaudible).

John Pearson – You don't know who that producer was. We might recognize it but we don't know who the producer is. The water leaving the ground was clear because the dirt stayed up a quarter mile up the flat.

Alan Thomson – How does that effect the critical area? It doesn't so, therefore the VSP program is not (inaudible).

Jon Jones – That is Ecology's issue.

Art Swannack - That is an ag viability but that isn't a VSP issue.

Ben Floyd – Or compliance with the Clean Water Act.

Art Swannack – The water was clean going out of there, so the,

Ben Floyd – It may have been clean but also may have been,

Jon Jones – Clear water can carry a lot of nutrients.

Ben Floyd – Yes, good point and maybe that was the tail end and there was a blast that went off earlier.

John Pearson – We're not talking about drinking water.

Ben Floyd – No, we are talking about aquatic habitat and where that water goes.

Kim Weerts – It is up to the producer and if that soil stays on his land then it is his prerogative not to do things that he doesn't want to do.

John Pearson – In the Gazette last week they made a comment in one of the articles that the water backed up here in the city. Did I read that right? Some of the water that was going on the dike so they,

Art Swannack – It backed up to a drainage so they had to close the drainage pipes so it wouldn't fill up the other side of the dike.

John Pearson – So, then they started pumps and then some sewage backed up and they said we were lucky we had a permit from the DOE to discharge into the river.

Larry Cochran – So, we have this in place and somebody goes into Alan and wants to build something in my ag land. Are they going to have to fill out this checklist before,

Ben Floyd – No, if they are just building something, it is just a building permit process. He will do an assessment of whether there is an impact of a wetland or a stream or other type of habitat or precluded flooded area. He has his own checklist that he goes through.

Alan Thomson – That is regulatory as far as the Critical Area Ordinance is concerned. It is separate from VSP.

Ben Floyd – So, if there is not a nexus to a critical area, if you can't really make a connection and it comes down and it is just flat and you might get some recharge but that is water that will go through an infiltration process, if it makes it back to the stream. I would say it is not an issue if it stays on your ground. But if it goes off your ground and into a critical area, then obviously, you will have a nexus area. Not that anybody is going to go after people, except for Ecology regulatory-wise, but maybe there are some practices that can be done to improve that situation and reduce his erosion from the ag viability standpoint.

Kim Weerts – I think you have to address the objectives of the VSP checklist. The first one is to, *"Identify the potential presence of critical areas on or down-gradient of your farm."* That has to be addressed.

Ben Floyd – So, what would you change that to?

David Swannack – The idea of the checklist is to just get us going. We've got two different entities here. We've got the private farmer entity and the WC entity. They need to somehow be blended in keeping the privacy here. That's the problem with the critical area nearby within 100-feet. The question there makes a lot of sense, but I'm not going to tell you that I'm within 10-feet and I'll dump my sewage into my creek.

That's what I started laughing about earlier. But I can tell you that I am farming and maybe it is running in but I don't want you telling John this. How do we keep these things? The checklist has to be, I like the checklist for me to understand what I am doing, but I hate the checklist for turning it in.

Ben Floyd – Okay, you don't have to turn it in.

David Swannack – What good is it if we aren't able to somehow to get to the coordinator so he can write up his report to say we have improved over 2011?

Ben Floyd – We want people to report information but it doesn't necessarily have to be the filled out checklist. You could say here is my filled out checklist and here are the results. You could just put riparian enhancement, 20 acres, conservation tillage, 500 acres. You don't have to give the checklist.

The checklist is supposed to be a self-assessment a guideline and then start discussion with the coordinator who works under the work group, not reports to the County but reports to the work group and that coordinator can capture that information a way that is non-specific.

David Swannack – The next one is pretty much what John is touching on. I'm reading through this stuff and I'm scared of some of the verbiage, mainly I've heard through NRCS, FSA, and Ecology. I'm scared to death that some of this will come back to haunt us through those agencies. I've watched NRCS take my friend's writing of a program and destroy it these last two years and it hurt the farmers bad.

Ben Floyd – I think what we need is specific edits, so if there are things that you don't like in here, you can mark it up and re-write how you would say it, or if there are sections that are too vague, don't make sense, flag those for us. The more specific you can give us in terms of comments the more we can then refine and edit these to get them to where you are comfortable with.

Larry Cochran – I'm still trying to understand when we need this program because when the County gets sued by a group or can the Growth Management Board come after the County and say, the VSP or critical area,

Art Swannack – VSP is the alternative to us having to do a full critical area ordinance for agriculture.

Larry Cochran – If we put in place in terms of checklist, we,

Art Swannack – The checklist is kind of a blue herring, but it is a herring in the sense that really this needs to be done. Here is the self-assessment checklist. It is not meant to be used as a document you turn into the coordinator to help you set up stuff. It is meant as a, here is what I see on my farm. It is meant to use a conversation with your coordinator in the implementers towards getting something done.

Our measurements, as I remember, are going to be based on practices implemented which are going to be there under NRCS and federal programs. The state money for implementation is going to be to help fund the coordinator.

Larry Cochran – I'm not going to tell anybody unless I am forced to.

Art Swannack – What do you do if you go to put in buffer strips? You sign up for a program. You can put them in on your own. But I'm saying that most people will sign up for a program, they get whatever cost share they can get or put in CRP and get cost share on that. You do it through some federal agency maybe a state linkage to that federal agency, and there is money attached.

Larry Cochran – Unless there is money attached somewhere in here, I'm not going to tell them.

Art Swannack – But this is supposed to be the linkage between voluntarily solving problems and hooking into programs that have dollars associated with them to help you do it. If we don't successfully do VSP then you get to have the full Critical Area Ordinance that everybody else gets. And I get to have the full Critical Area Ordinance that everybody else gets. I've been through that process once because Alan made me do it, and it is not fun. It is really restrictive, and there will be fencing in those type of situations so we have to figure out how to make this work.

Ben Floyd – So, let me just say so the work plan gets approved by the work group. Then if the State approves it through the Conservation Commission, then if someone challenges us for not protecting critical areas on ag land the Conservation Commission is, we are doing everything we said we were going to do in our plan, the Conservation Commission defends us.

I think you should have as a goal of the group to figure out a way to get this information in an anonymous way so that you get credit for all the things that are happening. So if everybody takes the Larry approach, which is, "I ain't telling anybody nothing," then we don't know what is going on except through the government programs.

So that is not going to help us meet our goals, benchmarks. So, we have to have a certain level of trust and build a system that gives you comfort, Larry, that you could share your information. (Forgive me for picking on you.) But we have to have that information to the coordinator so they can roll up and show how we are doing. If no one shares anything, this will fail and then you will have a regulatory approach.

Art Swannack – I would try and go with some of the comments you had on the NRCS where they can actually do aerial surveys of cover. I think I would be trying for other methods to get data before we actually acknowledge that we failed.

Larry Cochran – Get the data, because I was talking to the director of ag the other day and he is pulling out his phone and said that we have this GIS layer, he would call up my field and tell me what crops I have planted.

Ben Floyd – We can too, we have that data. Your land may not be quite as private as you think.

Kim Weerts – I think that we are going to get there fairly easily because of all the people that are in the programs that information is there. If you look at the Cattlemen's, we have cattlemen who

are more than willing to take agencies and several of them took DOE on their property and showed them what they have already done. I think if there is a conversation between groups information can be gotten.

It doesn't have to have names on it but at the cattlemen's meeting or in an email survey we can get information on what cattlemen have done either within or without a program. Especially, if they think that DOE is watching them they are more than willing to tell you what they have done. DOE may not like it but we (inaudible) simply goes in to a number that we have to provide.

Larry Cochran – Someone will have to put the information together.

John Pearson – Is there an entity that has credibility that isn't subject to (inaudible).

Ben Floyd – I think this is all subject to (inaudible).

John Pearson – No, you can put the cattlemen's association can take all this information and not be subject to (inaudible).

Ben Floyd – As soon as they get it someone could go in there for it.

John Pearson – So the information is subject to (inaudible) not the organization.

Art Swannack – If you are participating and you don't have some type of specific exemption, just says this area will not be disclosed, I think you'd be subject because you are participating in this program under state law.

John Pearson – So the information is subject, not the entity. So we couldn't set up a private entity and say all the information, like Anchor QEA, so if they took the information would they be subject to (inaudible) it?

Ben Floyd – Yes, because as soon as we provide it to the VSP coordinator,

John Pearson – No, you are the VSP coordinator,

Ben Floyd – Well, even so, just because we are a private company doesn't mean that we don't have information that is discoverable and disclosable.

John Pearson – Are you subject to fully (inaudible)

Ben Floyd – Yes, like we are working on an EIS and someone sues on an EIS everything that we did, the emails, supporting documentation, everything is subject.

Art Swannack –There are two different types of disclosure here. One is freedom of information and the other is law suit. There is a lot of more stuff that is discoverable under a lawsuit than under the Freedom of Information.

Ben Floyd – I don't know if it is worth spending more time, we've probably spent enough time on this privacy thing. You have flagged it for us and we will do more homework, come back and share information on this.

Joan Folwell – Just in the checklist there is a request to mention all the projects that a person has done since 2011. Maybe there is a way at that point to assure a little confidence in the producers by just taking the measurements in acres, or whatever it is, not putting the name in it that you started the data base right then and there.

Ben Floyd – So, Vivian, can you scroll down, do we show the producer name?

Vivian Erickson – We don't.

Larry Cochran – As long as the data is on a county basis only and no names are mentioned.

Ben Floyd – It will just be the data. That is our intention so we don't have names in this checklist. It is just something for them to think about. Maybe what you are saying is have a form that accompanies this where they could summarize what they have done but no name and just where it is. I assume we will have to have some information or a drainage.

Kim Weerts – You could do it. That is what I was going after. It needs to be anonymous. I think a page where there is no name, if you want an identifying area, fine or not. But my concern was that you took the information without any kind of a person or entity to put it to. I don't want to do that but give proof that we are not just making things up. How do we give proof without giving out information? I think a sheet of paper where somebody wants to put down what they are doing is fine without any indicators.

Ben Floyd – These are some good thoughts, I'd like to close on this discussion.

John Pearson – When you fill out a PDC, you give all this information about all the details. How much money you have, and it goes on the internet but it is very hard to go find some of that information. If you took (inaudible) to go in and try to find it, so maybe there is a way to put the information in that is hard to get out.

Ben Floyd – I've done surveys where the surveys are anonymous and you can put in the information and it doesn't allow you to go back to that individual.

Jon Jones – Is this group going to give the coordinator leeway to break down the County into watersheds, sub watersheds, etc.? When we have a coordinator are they going to come to us for

guidance, how small the unit we want to track? It would be very helpful to track big units. Maybe there was a corner of the County that is not doing anything and another part that is doing a lot.

Ben Floyd – That is a good question.

Jon Jones – I've seen some of the watershed maps and you can make it really small.

Kim Weerts – Don't we have a watershed map in the draft? So why wouldn't we just use that?

Ben Floyd – Yes, and we would unless you said you wanted to leave the County wide. This is all good discussion. We are ending this discussion now. Any other comments on the checklist?

David Lange – So, back to the water quality, hydrology, soil and habitat. The water quality goes down filtration retention and you could have infiltration. What Joan thinks of water quality and what I think of water quality we could both head down separate paths that could be pretty broad. It gets so broad, can we just call it water quality and have the producer fill in the blank?

Then you go over to the one on the soil, *"...functions through the preservation of soil and the quality of the underground living ecosystem, which preserves plants, animals, and human life."*

Ben Floyd – Doesn't that make sense to you? It's not soil health. We tried to make it something to say what it wasn't.

David Lange – I'm just putting that in a producer's shoes and looking at this and

Ben Floyd – Are you just saying so soil, water quality and don't divide them?

David Lange – That is just a thought and then we can go, that is the thing about this program it is voluntary to make it your own.

Ben Floyd – It has to pass the State to demonstrate the, but that is not a bad thought. That is tech talk for the implement or the state tech panel but maybe we just have a very simple statement for this. Good suggestion. Any other comments on the checklist?

Alan Thomson – There is something that has been troubling me for the last half hour regarding ditching. I don't think you have covered it. But the question I have as far as the regulatory program is concerned, and that is pertinent because what I don't cover in the Critical Area Ordinance are farmed wetlands and a Prior Converted Cropland.

So when those two come up, and they come up frequently. When a landowner wants to ditch one of those I find out from the NRCS, is it designated as one of those things and if it is I tell the landowner that it is not covered under the Critical Area Ordinance so there could be a wetland in there. I think that is going to (inaudible) the VSP program now, so if there is a wetland there

then the Critical Area Ordinance doesn't cover it and I usually send them over to Ecology and Fish & Wildlife. I notify them and then they come on board. How do we cover this?

Ben Floyd – So if it is not a critical area by definition in the County code,

Alan Thomson – It could be a critical area but it is not covered under the Critical Area Ordinance.

Ben Floyd – That is kind of saying the same thing.

Alan Thomson - So we are allowing them to destroy a wetland.

Ben Floyd – Maybe a regulatory.

Larry Cochran – A farmed wetland is defined differently than a wetland.

Alan Thomson – Yes, farmed wetland and a prior converted crop land that is why they are exempt from the Critical Area Ordinance. But those still contain critical areas, some of them do.

Art Swannack – Some of them have ditches through them already because I farm one of them.

Alan Thomson – Yes, and you want to go in there and ditch that which is a legitimate thing to do but,

Ben Floyd – Was there a ditch and was it farmed in 2011?

Art Swannack – Yes.

Ben Floyd – So, no one is going to require you to discontinue something that you were doing in 2011 that is an ag activity. That is one initial thought.

David Lange – If that ditch is sediment in there,

Ben Floyd – You can maintain it, you can go in and maintain it. Was there a ditch system at some level and farming at some level in 2011 and you are continuing that. No one is requiring you to go and change that.

Alan Thomson – So we are not recognizing it as a critical area because it is a farmed area?

Art Swannack – If you were saying, is a person going to go out there and lay a ditch through the middle of a wetland,

Alan Thomson – No, I'm talking about existing drainages. There are existing drainages that are determined to be farmed wetlands and prior converted crop land by NRCS. That is what I go by. What does NRCS tell me? If it is a PCC and FW, hands off from the County.

Ben Floyd – Vivian, I think we need a call out box. Do we need to call it farmed wetlands?

Alan Thomson – That’s what they call it. Farmed wetlands and prior converted crop land. I don’t know what Ecology and F&W do. They probably implement their own programs but I tell them, it is in your court now if you have some sort of permit like an HPA.

Ben Floyd – That is regulatory.

Art Swannack – I had to go and clean that ditch out that goes through an area, but I had to have the NRCS come out and determine what the original depth was and then I couldn’t dig any deeper than the original depth. You are ineligible for the farm program if you violate that.

Ben Floyd – So, here is the opportunity if you want to convert that back to a wetland. Here is an enhancement program, then you can do that. If that kicks in with your overall strategy, then,

Art Swannack – It doesn’t bother me because it is in Spokane County. It is exactly across the line.

Ben Floyd – If there was one of those in WC, there is an opportunity there. If you have any other comments on the checklist or on this document after you review it, today is the 6th, do you want until a week from this Friday to give us comments? Okay, April 14, comments due back to Vivian on Volume 1 and the Checklist. Knowing that we have already captured the comments you provided us today.

Let’s jump back to the PowerPoint. We have 6 minutes to go through an hour and an half worth of material. Maybe just like 45 minutes for the material. Benchmarks. So, we have goals to protect critical area functions and ag viability. We have objectives, protect through stewardship strategies and practices. Then we have measureable benchmarks for how we are protecting and enhancing critical areas functions and values.

So, if you have a critical area, we already talked about direct and indirect. Let’s not go into that again. We have already talked about how for protection. All we are trying to do is maintain practices that were in place in 2011. So, we have certain strategies and practices that are implemented throughout the County and the amount of discontinuation of those practices.

So, let’s say we have a 6% discontinuation of practices county-wide. Which means that I was doing no-till and it isn’t working for me and I’m going back to more of a mulched till or a conventional tillage. I had a buffer strip, I need that land for production. All we are trying to do is offset those practices, those strategies and practices that were discontinued.

Vivian Erickson – We came up with initial measureable benchmarks based on the historic enrollment data that we have collected through what we have documented and reported, which are the NRCS acres. Those are the numbers we have discussed throughout this process.

So, this is the data we had to work with. We went ahead and averaged what that annual average enrollment is and practices that cover residue and tillage management, pest management and nutrient management.

We averaged over a 6-year period and looked at what the estimated yearly disenrollment rate might be for those practices in this group and gotten feedback and looked at what kind of practices would be, what kind of disenrollment and we are looking at a conservative higher range of disenrollment, which is still pretty low of 6% for these practices.

That is the yearly disenrollment average and for our protection benchmarks. We went ahead and covered that anticipated estimated yearly disenrollment in acres. Our 2021 benchmark is how many acres we anticipate being disenrolled in a certain strategy, times 10 years, which is from our 2011 benchmark.

For 2026 we are multiplying that number of disenrolled acres by 15 years. Something that we had talked about is this percentage of disenrollment can change through adaptive management, depending upon the level of reporting and monitoring that occurs, and as we can tell any changes that we are seeing in this estimated disenrollment rate. We have gone ahead and done the same for the livestock management, soil management and habitat management looking at the enrollment rate.

Ben Floyd – So, you understand the basis for this. We talked about percentages of discontinuation, and we agree upon zero, 3 and 6% as our percentages based on different practices. So, we just took the average of the practices that we know that were implemented since 2011 and we just assumed that that a percentage of those would be discontinued.

To account for that we basically took that discontinuation rate and multiplied it by the average usage to come up with the goals. So, for protection all we have to do is have enough practices to cover like for livestock management 903 acres through 2021, 1355 acres through 2026 and so on. The same practice for everything.

David Swannack - Okay, you have disenrollment. How do you take into account changes? Because I quit doing direct seeding, that doesn't mean that I've gone back to tilling the ground. It just means that now something new came out because this is three years later. I'm doing something new and I've found problems with what I was doing. So, yes, you have disenrollment but you're moving into something new or you are moving into something before. I guess I'm lost when I come to the disenrollment.

John Small – So this table is a pretty gross simplification and I think you're pointing out exactly the fog there. The way we look at this is all the possible conversions and mulch till, direct seed, whatever the next technology is that we don't know about, going back to older technologies are all possibilities and on any given piece of land you could have a lot of different changes.

We were just trying to get the idea that based on the data that we analyzed we are seeing a consistent trend toward more implementation of conservation practices that protect critical area functions and values. So the implementation will need the conversation we had about who that is going to be and how they are going to do that is really important.

Because as you point out, we need to know what all the changes are and we have simplified disenrollment as I'm no longer doing direct seed but I understand and I think the detailed plan identified that just because you are not doing something, it is not the end of the story. You are doing all the land and the Palouse is going to continue to be farmed for the most part.

It is not that you built the Walmart and it is not an ag production. More than likely you are just that you are using a different technique. The CPPE scores that are the backbone of how we measure ecological functions will need to be applied to whatever that next practice is. We have included tools to do that.

Ben Floyd – So, if you are doing one type of conservation practice or tillage and you switch to another in this, there would be no change. It would only be if you went back and cultivated it, then that would be a disenrollment that we would account for. Honestly, this number is a guess. It is something to say that we know there is some disenrollment that occurs and here is how we accounted for it. We are never going to try and crosscheck it and make sure that is a real number.

David Lange – This is just bureaucracy math.

Ben Floyd – This is bureaucracy math exactly. That is why I can see David sitting back there saying, "I'm going to eat a few more cookies because this is a waste of my time."

John Small – This is the simple version of bureaucracy math and I have a spread sheet with the full version that if you show it on the PowerPoint side, you can't even read the numbers.

Ben Floyd – But the tech panel wants to see this and we want you to know this is what we are going to be sharing with them. Your VSP coordinator will be able to sort through all this and share with you what is really relevant and not the bureaucratic math.

Here is another thing that says the numbers don't matter very much. Because if we know what we already have in the bank like 5,000 acres then you take away 1,355 and our enhancement is 3,700 acres. We just show we accounted for what we think was going to discontinue and look at all this other stuff we have done on top of that. Leave us alone. That is the simple story the safety zone.

So, we have these values for all these different practices and again, you have all of these in your handout with all these numbers. So, if you go back and review this and think about the numbers, the protection enhancement, we what to know if you find problems with this. So, Vivian, why don't you walk through the enhancement benchmarks?

Vivian Erickson – For enhancement, we have the same stewardship strategies. We are looking at the continuing enrollment. We have a disenrollment rate and we have a lot of acres that have already been enrolled since the 2011-2016 window. What we are looking at the historic enrollment that has occurred in that time and then we discount what we just discussed on the previous slide as our disenrolled acres or our protection benchmark. As Ben was just saying, everything above our protection benchmark we get credit for it as enhancement.

So, the next round of numbers are, you take the numbers that we have already enrolled since 2011, take away protection benchmarks and that is what we have for enhancement and we can make that our enhancement benchmark for 2026. Or, we can also discuss here the discussed portion. Do we want to talk about additional opportunities for stewardship practices we have already met?

We are on the right track, so if the work group would like to include additional enhancement benchmarks or goals, we could discuss additional opportunities based on known or anticipated funding, and in stewardship strategies and practices, or where you want desired funding to go in the future. And also taking into account some of those producer funded practices that are ongoing. Any questions before we move onto bureaucratic number table?

Ben Floyd – So, let me tell them the way I think. Enhancement is what we already got in the bank. So things that have been done since 2011-2016 during that time period. Plus, if we know the different CD's are going to implement certain kind of projects through this RCPP grant then we can forecast what those are.

I think we should put those in our enhancement goals, because those have money. If they have some producers that have been identified to participate then we should try and wrap that in there? The question is, do you want to try and estimate what David and others are doing on their own?

What are you doing? Do you want to put that in there or do you just want to have a number that shows a lot more of protection and then blow that out of the water when you get a bunch of people that are self-funding improvements added into it? Does that make sense? Some head nodding, some brow furrowing, etc.

Jon Jones – We are leaving a lot of discretion up to the coordinator on this. If someone comes in and says he has a hillside that he hasn't used much but planted sixteen trees on it. Is that an enhancement? Are we going to count the whole hundred acres and the sixteen trees?

Larry Cochran – Seems like the more generic we leave it the more wiggle room we have.

Ben Floyd – That is exactly right. So, do you want to go with what you have in the bank? Do you want to go with what you have in the bank plus projection sales or based upon money? Like others that are in the system but haven't paid it out? Or do you want to try and make it more aggressive and make it larger in credit anticipate, we are probably only capturing maybe 10% of

the practices and so we should try and make a higher enhancement goal. Do you have guidance for us on what you think the enhancement goal would look like?

Art Swannack – What does the tech panel say on this issue or are they saying anything on this issue?

Ben Floyd – I don't think the tech panel has given much guidance on enhancement? John, or Vivian do you know anything more than that?

John Small – They have talked about it but unless the other John has some insight I haven't heard a direction.

Ben Floyd – It has to be more of a protection, right?

Art Swannack – That is what I was trying to find out. Is there an expectation of an increase periodically over time that always (inaudible)

Ben Floyd – I think we get a justifiable goal and the basis for it. That is how we have been operating.

John Small - I think there is an argument to be made that we can look at the historic funding and use that as a gage for what might be appropriate.

John Stuhlmiller – Right now we are in the throes of finding out what the tech panel thinks about this issue. They sort of tagged Thurston. We will know more on the next tech panel meeting. One of the issues is this very issue related to protection and enhancement but it is also the proof of that.

You are going to benefit by Thurston going first because you are going to see how the tech panel and the statewide advisory committee settles out on that issue. But there is a built in expectation that there is an ever increasing effort for enhancement. The law does not require you to do so. It is just to make programs available, make the process available for enhancement but it doesn't require enhancement. You don't fail out for failure to enhance, only for protection.

Ben Floyd – Let's go through the numbers. This is based on historic enrollment right now. We are showing basically, take out the protection goal and whatever is left over is our enhancement goal. We've already met it because we have done 2016. That is one of the reasons so do we want to show more than that?

People go back and say you are just counting what you have in the bank. We are covering our discontinuation and we are showing more than that. We hope to meet this goal but we are going to under promise and then deliver is what our hope is. That is what the basis is. We could add in our RCPP projects. Brian, are you doing any specific projects through our RCPP with landowners?

Brian Bell – It was the CD of Palouse that has the,

Ben Floyd – We don't want to know who, okay. So those two CD's if they gave us a projection of things they know are going to happen, why wouldn't we want to include that in there? Maybe because we want to keep it under-promising and over-deliver and we will just pull all that stuff in. I'm seeing some head nodding around. Just base it on what is in the bank. Is that what I am hearing?

Art Swannack – I think you can also justify that somewhat, especially when you are on the other side of the State, with the chaos that is blocking the DC right now and the availability of programs. You are saying that we are going to go on the conservative, forward moving approach because we don't know how many programs and resources will be available to the producers to actively implement.

Kim Weerts – We want the plus one more tree and then we can deliver anything we want, the promise should be, yes, we will protect and plant one more tree.

Ben Floyd – Okay.

David Lange – When you have two less, one of the less minimalistic we promise, and then the coordinator would have a more complete list.

Ben Floyd – Like a formal and an informal?

David Lange – Then if you get called to the carpet you would have documentation.

Kim Weerts – Won't the coordinator have that anyway? This is going in now and what the coordinator has, that coordinator doesn't report for two more years, and so we have two years to gather that information and the coordinator gets it. This is just to appease the powers that be to get the plan approved. Nothing really to do with real numbers.

Ben Floyd – These are actually real numbers. I like that. Is there anyone that sees it differently?

Joan Folwell – Are we considering any strategic plans for implementation to be benefiting the critical areas regardless of where that application is made in relation to the critical areas?

Ben Floyd – So, does the project score higher because it is right next to a wetlands than five miles away from one?

Joan Folwell – I'm not talking about relative scoring, I'm just asking. You were talking about direct and indirect impacts, which sort of muddies the water. I am asking the question. You know, when John starts putting trees on the hillside, sure that is going to have a benefit but is it going to have a benefit particularly to a critical area? It probably does somewhere down the line.

Ben Floyd – Maybe because it is connectivity of habitat and now you have another,

Joan Folwell – That is what I am asking. If it is not a real apparent direct benefit, is it going be part of this enrollment every year?

Ben Floyd – Right now, we are saying, “yes.” Every practice has a benefit of some type of function whether it is directly or indirectly.

John small – It doesn’t necessarily have a benefit but we are looking at everything in the net benefit of the changes in those practices. For instance, pest management is not going to affect the hydrology. The pesticides you use, the way you apply them it is not going to affect hydrology in any way. But we are going to look at everything that is reported, get an understanding of what the physical effects of those ag practices are across the County. How much drill seeding is happening, how much other residue and tillage management is happening, and then total it all up using our bureaucratic calculator and score it relative to 2011.

Ben Floyd – The bureaucratic anonymous calculator.

John Small – As long as we are not counting John Pearson’s place over and over again. Then we can anonymize it. The trick is at some point we need to make sure we are counting all the plans once and none of the plans twice. The individual farm plans or other documents.

Ben Floyd – I don’t know, Joan, if we completely answered your question. We plan to, there are practices, they have certain affects, the more we know about where they happen, the more we can get specific about direct versus indirect effects.

David Lange – Just this spring, for an example, it is such a moving target. Our soil samples come back and we put on 85 pounds of fertilizer last fall, take a four-foot sample and we want to know where that fertilizer is. So the top foot has 10 pounds in it and the second foot has 10 pounds in it, the third foot has 15 pounds, and the fourth foot has 20 pounds. I don’t think any of us have ever seen our fertilizers move like that.

So then they are talking about a \$15 an acre product. It is a nitrogen stabilizer that you can put on. That is a huge expense but if you used it last fall, it is a huge result. So, we are not all just sitting here looking stupid, it is just that the variables change so much that this is alive and well.

Last fall it was falling numbers. The year before it was protein so there is such a broad spectrum of this that I think your bureaucracy math is right on. It is just an example of our wetlands being protected. We are sitting there thinking, “I am glad I didn’t put on 130 pounds of nitrogen.” I think the ag community is thinking the whole time as to how to improve the situation because it is money out of our pockets or it is money in our pockets.

John Pearson – After last week, and I saw the ditches, I’ve been driving around the Palouse and I came here 30 years ago and you could walk out and stand in ditches. I’ve been driving around

the last week and there are not two fields that look the same. Some are chiseled, I'm not a wheat farmer so I am talking to you wheat farmers, some are no tilled, or whatever. There is very little erosion in WC this year and it is a terrible year.

I talked to a wheat farmer in Franklin County and he said there is an FSA program down there to (inaudible) to the ditches and the wheat fields in, he said he couldn't wait, he rented a dozer and filled them in myself. WC wheat farms has been a little naughty boy, in my opinion, since I've been here.

Every time we talk erosion, they look at the WC wheat farmer and this deal at the DOE said they were going to talk about Eastern WA. They pick one field with a few ditches in it and they pick 5 cattlemen, I think and they had pictures of five cows in some mud. I thought what about Franklin and Spokane County? They pick on WC. Those were the only pictures they showed in all of Eastern Washington.

Ben Floyd – Asotin County was in a power creek.

John Pearson – So, they are targeting WC and I think the WC wheat farmers do a good job. I just want to get that out on the table. There is very little erosion out there. But we don't see it because we are just pounded on all the time about all the things we are doing wrong.

Larry Cochran – Yes, we are doing a good job but those few that are ruining it for everybody else.

John Pearson – We keep raising the bar in this County and right now, this County looks better than a lot of other counties.

Ben Floyd – We are trying to highlight a lot of the good things that are happening in the County and hopefully, through this process we are able to educate people better about what is going on. That water quality committee, I think needs more education, too.

Okay, producer participation goals. We have to have them. So, we have acres that represent participants for our protection and enhancement goals, but you also have to develop goals for participation by ag operators to meet the protection and enhancement benchmarks. So, we have to come up with some approximation to match our bureaucratic math with some other bureaucratic math about producer participation. John, I'll let you take it from here.

John Small – We have talked a lot about tracking participation and the questions on the next slide are about what information we will have and how will we extrapolate it. We are not expecting to know that, to have 100% of the producers enroll in VSP and tell us exactly what they are doing in every acre.

But we need to have sufficient participation when we report back to the Commission that it is a defensible number when we say we are protecting critical area function and values. We are not just saying we went to one farm and things look good there so it is okay.

If you go to the next slide, the questions we have are, what percentage of the County, how many do we have that are currently implementing new stewardship practices since 2011? How many of those are part of government programs so that they are tracked and how many are self-funded? Are there a number of producers that we would like to see start participating through 2026? That is getting at our participation goals.

How much participation do we think is reasonable to expect in the County? The other part of that question is how much of that will we know and be able to report back to the Commission? What percentage are currently reporting stewardship practices? That is something we can calculate. I don't think we have time today to provide that number but we know who is enrolled in government programs to the extent we know how many acres are in those programs.

We have a bit of difficulty if you have two practices that can be occurring on the same field. We don't know exactly when we go back to calculate how many acres of participation we have and divide by the number of acres in ag in the County. It gets more difficult to know exactly what percentage of the producers of the acreages are involved in stewardship activity.

The other question with VSP with hopefully, the increase in awareness around the county, is how many producers can we expect to start reporting the work that they are doing that isn't part of a government program? Government programs stuff is pretty easy and if we want to just rely on that, that's fine. If we want to try to capture and report on self-funded work then we need to have little more understanding of what our sample size is relative to the entire county.

Ben Floyd – So, I would suggest we don't spend a lot of time talking about this right now. But just know that you have to come up with some producer participation goal and this is really the last nut to crack in the work plan. We have acres but we really have to have how do we meet those acres for enhancement for protection? How many producers does that represent?

David Lange – How many producers are there in WC?

Ben Floyd – We have farms that is in the work plan. Farm numbers that may or may not be the same number of producers.

David Lange – Farm numbers is not the same number as producers. I think I have 13 farm numbers, something like that. We count the farmers or the farm numbers.

Ben Floyd – Good question, we don't know.

Larry Cochran – You can do it on an acreage basis or find out through NRCS or how many EQIP contracts or how many acres are in EQIP programs. Direct Seed Association might be a good resource to find out how many acres are direct seeded.

Jon Jones – Twelve hundred.

Kim Weerts – Aren't these the same kind of numbers that we talked about for disenrollment and enhancement? Why wouldn't we take what we have available in programs and add one more person to it and be done and then we can report anything that we get. Again, aren't these numbers just to appease?

Ben Floyd - These numbers are more like you have these goals, what is your goal for enrollment of producers to be able to meet those goals? It really comes down to how many people do we think are going to participate in VSP? If we are only showing 10% of the County participating in VSP, someone could come back and say that then you don't know what is happening in 90% of the County, and so you can't really say whether you are or are not really meeting these protection benchmarks. So if we could correlate producers to land coverage, yes, that would be a way to get that. We just don't have the date as a starting point, so we have been struggling with this one.

Jon Jones – When I worked at Whitman CD, we did a newsletter for Whitman and Pine Creek put together and we pulled 1,000 newsletters every month. That was a long time ago but I think the CD's would have a good idea about how many subscribers they have with their electronic letters. At that time we figured there were about 1,200 farmers in the County. I would guess the number is a third of that now.

David Swannack – They came up with a number at the last FSA meeting. Have they discussed the number of farmers since then?

Jon Jones – We've never talked about that. They could come up with the numbers.

David Swannack – Do we want farm numbers or do we want producers themselves?

Jon Jones – There will be a bunch of farm numbers, a lot more than producers.

Ben Floyd – I think we want producers like particularly then we could,

Kim Weerts – We are talking about a participation goal.

Ben Floyd – Yes, not a benchmark but something we are shooting for. Whatever we come up with our participation goal, we also have to have a basis for it. We could say we think 10% of the producers in the County are participating in government programs and reporting information.

We are going to try and increase the number of people participating in VSP or account for the people that are participating in VSP at 3% a year. So, we are going from 10-13-16 and just add that up so that the end of 10 years we've got another 30% reporting than we have today and so we think we will be at 40 or more percent.

Kim Weerts – All we have to do is maintain, so why wouldn't it be one more person and then we can strive to get a lot more people to be involved. If all we have to do is maintain why don't we set the bar low and blow everybody out of the water?

Larry Cochran – If you are talking about the government programs, 100% of it some programs you have to define which program you are talking about.

Ben Floyd – If it has a stewardship strategy or practice that has a relationship, if it is one of the practices in our tool box it is part of VSP.

Kim Weerts – We also have money now and it may not stay the same. I don't think we want to over-project. Why would you ever want to over-project or have a high goal when you can report anything you want?

Ben Floyd – I think you might want a higher participation number to show that we are going to have enough critical mass to protect the critical areas. If we are only showing a small number of participation and a lot of land that is not included in our participation goal, then how do you really know that you are protecting the critical areas?

Kim Weerts – Because in the first two years from now you will be able to prove it because you will have the numbers. You'll have the numbers of additional participants.

Ben Floyd – But the tech panel won't be able to see how we are going to meet our goals without some numbers.

Larry Cochran – We want a low number in the government programs and a high number in the self-funded programs.

Ben Floyd – Yes.

John Pearson – Would the operator, if we counted the operator on the farm programs, would that be the number that we want? We were just talking about a CRP ground that has four social security numbers and one is the operator.

Ben Floyd – We can get that from FSA? Who should we talk to?

David Lange – Patrick Lewis.

Ben Floyd – Vivian, we have already talked to Patrick, haven't we?

Vivian Erickson – Yes, and it has been tough to get some numbers but we might be able to get these numbers from him.

Ben Floyd – So, if we need some help, we might reach out. David Lange, you'll help? David is our interference blocker if we need it.

David Swannack – Kim is making some points. If you are in private industry, you want to have a high goal. You are going to set that goal a bit extra high like a stretch. But we are not, we are trying to meet a government goal which is scary. With the government goal you had better be careful where you go with it. You've got a point. If we don't show that we are moving, we are screwed. If we show that we can get to our goal, we are also screwed. So we want to keep it low.

Ben Floyd – That's two votes to keep it low and modest.

David Lange – We had an example of a gentleman in the ag industry retiring and we thought we would give him a little gift. We went together and we thought there are probably 120 of us, there were 40 of us. We were off that far. So I think the 1,200 number is probably high. The number of farmers, number of farms.

Jon Jones – There are a lot more farms than farm operators.

David Lange – So, there must be the 3-5 acres and according to the IRS are they actually farmers? Is that how they get their numbers?

John Pearson – It could be the average was \$200,000.

David Lange – The average acres is 1,027 acres. That is about as small as they get with 2,500 acres.

Jon Jones – It's bigger than 1,000. It has to be.

Ben Floyd – These are farm units. This has been helpful. So, we have some homework. We can try to come up with some baseline information and then some (inaudible) map that we will share with you.

Art Swannack – Dave is right on the carefulness of setting your goal in this program because if we don't meet the goal and we end up having to revamp and we still don't meet the goal, then we go to critical area ordinances. Reality is you are still going for the watershed success rate, not the individual little producer success rate. In the accumulative are we protecting the resources through participation and if most of the farm operations are with the 800 people running them that's who you really talk to. The little producer will be great especially the ones that are right beside a river with their livestock walking into it. If you can do these programs in those areas you have an added benefit and maybe you get a double count on it. When you are looking at a watershed basin that is trying to do this at accumulative or total picture, the guys controlling most of the land are the ones (inaudible).

Ben Floyd – So, maybe we can come up with an average operator operations size so that we can equate,

John Small – One thought for the work group, is that this goal is different than the protection enhancement goals and measurable benchmarks for protection of critical areas functions and values. This is really around, is the work group successful in getting the word out? If the work group is not successful in meeting this goal, the question is not do you go to a critical areas ordinance, the question is tell the Legislature how much money you need to get there.

They don't say they will give it to you, but that is the consequence of if we set the bar at 800 or 80% of operators that operate over 1,000 acres whatever metric we choose and at the end of 5 years we don't feel we are able to achieve that the consequences that the work group needs to identify how much more money they need to get to that level. It is a little bit less scary than maybe it sounds.

John Pearson – If that is WC it is 440 of those farms sell less than \$1,000.

Ben Floyd – That is full operators by farmer occupation 711 which is close to the 800. Did everyone hear what John Small said? He is saying there is a way if you want to try and use this to leverage more money out of the Legislature and we would get more participation if we had more incentive. Then your participation goal could be higher and we didn't need it because of all the funding. We have people who are doing self-funding but we could get more participation if we had more money. I don't know if this is what you want to propose but it was a good thought for consideration.

David Swannack – We are losing a number of farmers in our county and yet we are going to be basing this on the farmers and increasing the number of farmers participating. To me, we are in a neutral zone to do it off of acreage. I think farm numbers change constantly, so acreage isn't a bad idea.

Ben Floyd – Participation off of acreage and we would equate that to whatever, would you try and have numbers of like half the acreage in the County participating? The thing about acreage it gets really tricky. Nutrient management, pest management, do it on the same acreage, it counts as 1,000 acres each so it gets tricky trying to sort through the data. We can give our VSP coordinator a lot of flexibility but it not net acreage. What if we just keep it at percentages? If the number goes down of operators, our percentage will actually increase just because, (inaudible)

Larry Cochran – We want our numbers to say that we are doing a good job but we don't want them so high, so where is that number? I don't know where it is.

Ben Floyd – This has been good. We will do a recap with the notes. Here are the things we talked about, here is some additional information that we have been able to pull in in talking with FSA, and here are a few more options to consider. We will have it at the next meeting.

Vivian Erickson – Give us a little context, I was looking at some numbers. Based on the acreages we have mapped in the County under private ag land cover and the reported conservation acres we have, this is not including any sort acreages that are occurring in the same land, we are about at 10-14% of the ag acres, with conservation practices on them. That is government, NRCS and that is probably overlap in acreages even in those numbers.

Art Swannack – What percent of the farm ground is enrolled in the government programs?

Ben Floyd – We will go back and see if we can't get a better handle on the baseline. Ag viability, we have to address it.

Art Swannack – You stay in business and you send your kids to college and you're not in big debt. There you go.

Larry Cochran – You have to be able to make a profit and everybody's profit is different.

Ben Floyd – That is why I am saying if ag viability is I can keep these practices in place and I can still make my money and I can pay my bills and hope I make some profit one out of every three years based upon the price of wheat. I'm just saying it comes down to each individual and it is really difficult to try and get super specific in ag viability. The land stays in ag production.

Brian Bell – If the market is not there how is he going to stay in ag land?

Ben Floyd – This is in the context of critical areas. There are a lot of things that we talked about early on. A lot of things outside of the producers' control that we don't want to tie VSP ag viability to because we can't control those things.

Art Swannack – If you were to say in your goal, that all ground in the County is CRP and you have a certain goal? If you were to say that then every farmer that has ground in CRP is getting income but that doesn't mean the economy of the County is viable. He's not buying seed, fertilizer, etc., he is going to Arizona for the winter and the summer. The farms are in ag production. The land stays in ag production.

Joan Folwell – Early on the Conservation Commission defined it as the ability of the farm to meet financial obligations.

Art Swannack – When I hear that one it sounds like you are breaking even and you are not getting anywhere.

Joan Folwell – I don't disagree with you but I've got this paper that came out initially with VSP.

Ben Floyd – So, here is what we have for regionalized viability, stable and secure land base, instruction services, best farm practices, education training, welcoming business environment,

new expanding market opportunities, reliable marketing goods and services. The brown call out box at the regional level ag viability is to support the system that helps individual farms succeed.

Then we have at the farm level, maintain and enhance land production capacity, flexibility with the market conditions incentive, managed farm conversion, no surprises, protect property rights, account for environmental gradation.

Larry Cochran – There should be something in there about keeping our rural community.

Ben Floyd – Would that be in the regional? Stable secure ag land base, (inaudible) maintaining communities. Okay? Maintaining the business environment and support services. Maintaining and encouraging business environment and support services. So we are talking down under the welcoming business environment.

Joan Folwell – Actually that last box with business environment refers to property taxes, zoning ordinances, blah, blah, things like that that makes the business environment welcome.

Ben Floyd – Maybe it is a new category that has maintain rural communities. What I am hearing is that we have some definition about what this includes. I don't know how much more specific we can get.

Let's go to next steps. Comments, the May meeting we will give you the full meal deal the Volume 2, also the executive summary and we'll have another meeting in June and submit work plan after that.

Art Swannack – How many have kids in the show in Spokane? That is junior show in Spokane, May 4th. I don't know when they show. If they show in the morning I would be back here.

Ben Floyd – May 4th and June 1st are the next meetings. Are we still good with 2-5? Start at 4? Okay, we make up for starting early by leaving later. What about 4-7? Okay, May 4th, we will meet from 4-7 p.m. The June meeting time we will confirm later.

Adjourned - 5:01