

**FRANKLIN COUNTY VSP
WORKGROUP MEETING MINUTES**

December 8, 2016

**Franklin Conservation District
1724 E. Superior Street, Pasco WA 99301**

ATTENDED BY

Ramona Rommereim (FC NRAC), Dave Solem (SCBID), Brian Cochrane (FC Wheat Growers), Case VanderMeulen (Dairy), Comm. Rick Miller (Franklin County), Valerie Carlson (LCBAS), Mark Weiseler (FCD), Mike Ritter (WDFW), Mark Nielson (FCD), Heather Wendt (FCD), Zack Meyer (ECY), Josh Jensen (Anchor QEA), Betsy Severtsen (Anchor QEA), Ben Floyd (Anchor QEA).

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Ben Floyd welcomed the group and introductions were made.

FOLLOW-UP ACTION ITEMS FROM OCTOBER

Draft conservation practices table – posted on website.

ANCHOR QEA WILL POST MEETING MATERIALS ON THE DOCUMENTS PAGE AS WELL AS THE NEWS AND EVENTS PAGE (COMPLETE).

Habitat corridor data from Mike Ritter (WDFW) – Mike explained that the corridor maps show connectivity and can be used to inform habitat functions. The Workgroup has the option to use the maps to prioritize enhancement projects if the state provides funding.

Critical Area Maps – are being revised by Anchor QEA based on feedback from the Work Group.

INTRODUCTION TO GOALS AND MEASURABLE BENCHMARKS

The Voluntary Stewardship Program is designed to provide a balanced approach between critical area protection and agricultural viability. Critical area functions and values were discussed. We need to ask ourselves what function are we trying to protect - the conservation of fish and wildlife habitat areas may provide added benefits to water quality, hydrology, and soil health.

A list of the top 10 NRCS practices applied since 2011 were reviewed by the group. Specific best management practices (BMPs) were reviewed for their applicability to land use, connection to ag viability protection and how they provided protection to critical area functions. We are able to take credit now and into the future for BMPs that have occurred since July 22, 2011.

Agricultural viability has two perspectives, a regional and farm perspective. A regional perspective focuses on the region's ability to sustain an agricultural economy and production

over time. The farm perspective focuses on the farm's ability to meet financial obligations and to make a profit.

We need to think about future expansion of agriculture if the SCBID service area expands. Federal law does not allow for sod busting; cannot break-out new ground for production and be eligible for federal funding. How do we think about CRP, it was once all farmed? At year 5 and 10 we are required to be at least protecting the functions and values of critical areas at their July 22, 2011 level. The group discussed CRP ground and that this should not be considered critical area, but farm ground, therefore land moving in and out of CRP should not be an issue for VSP. Mike Ritter concurred.

The work plan includes both protection and enhancement benchmarks. Enhancement benchmarks look at whether or not the functions and values have improved since 2011. Enhancements are not required to be met through VSP. Protection benchmarks look at whether the functions and values are similar compared to July 22, 2011. Protection goals must be met through VSP. Benchmarks are evaluated on a countywide basis.

There are two types of benefits from the implementation on conservation practices, a direct benefit – fencing a riparian area, and an indirect benefit – water quality improvements in the surrounding watershed. Water quality monitoring is tough to use to quantify protection and enhancement. Surface water is measure in ranges and is based on standards set by the state instead of a no net increase. It may make more sense to track producer participation in programs and bmp's installed for goal setting.

Potential monitoring programs that we can look at for baseline data or trends include: Columbia Basin GWMA sampling data, SCBID water quality monitoring, Franklin County land use conversion data, LCBAS annual bird counts, WDFW Priority Habitat and Species updates.

The question was brought up about tracking losses of artificial wetlands due to increased irrigation efficiencies - Zack Meyer with ECY clarified that any lost wetland due to increased efficiencies would not need to be included in reporting as these changes do not require mitigation.

DISCUSS OUTREACH STRATEGY

The group discussed outreach opportunities. We could submit an article to local magazines, have a display at the Ag. Show, Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, Dairy Federation, etc. Members were asked to submit their ideas on the Coordination Outreach Table. Some initial ideas included seed grower's magazines, Basin City Journal, and other agricultural publications.

NEXT STEPS

January 26, 2017 – Next Meeting Date – at the FCD Office – 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Public Comment / Other:

ADJOURN

The meeting concluded at 4:10 pm