Draft Mason County Work Plan Goals, Benchmarks,   
Strategies, Conservation Practices, and Viability Actions

VSP Goals

The Mason County VSP Work Group will provide technical assistance to commercial and noncommercial farms to achieve the following three **GOALS**:

* **Ensure the viability of agriculture and reduce the conversion of farmland to other uses**
* **Prevent the degradation of critical area functions and values on agricultural lands at a watershed scale as they existed as of July 22, 2011**
* **Encourage the implementation of voluntary actions that enhance critical areas on agricultural lands**

The Work Group will accomplish these three goals with the assistance of the Mason County Conservation District and its program representatives.

VSP Benchmarks

**BENCHMARKS** will be used by the Work Group to evaluate the success of the program. Each benchmark has one or more **MEASURES** that will help in evaluating performance.

| **Benchmark** | **Measure** |
| --- | --- |
| * Preparation of Individual Stewardship Plans that identify ag viability actions and voluntary conservation practices for enhancing critical areas and ag viability | * Number of Individual Stewardship Plans completed |
| * Confidential technical assistance to agricultural operators | * Number of consultations |
| * Implementation of ag viability actions and voluntary conservation practices | * Aggregate number, type, and extent of viability actions and conservation practices implemented on watershed scale |
| * Implementation of conservation practices on ag lands accomplished outside Individual Stewardship Plans | * Aggregate number, type, and extent of conservation practices implemented on watershed scale |
| * Maintaining or enhancing the baseline level of agricultural viability and critical area function and value as of July 22, 2011 | * TBD |

The main tool for implementing the Mason County VSP will be the **INDIVIDUAL STEWARDSHIP PLAN**. This will be a simple checklist outlining voluntary actions that will guide a farm owner in how to increase overall viability and/or protect and enhance critical areas on the property. The Individual Stewardship Plan will be an efficient and practical method for sharing information with a farm owner to make informed choices about the future management of their operation. The plan will stay confidential by remaining in the hands of the farm owner.

If a farm owner voluntarily decides to enact some of the management choices detailed in the plan, the Conservation District can continue working with the farm owner through **CONFIDENTIAL CONSULTATIONS** to provide advice, resources, or connections to other resource providers who can help.

Confidential consultations are also a good way for those farm owners who choose not to do an Individual Stewardship Plan to still get answers on questions regarding viability and critical area issues on their property. This “partial step” eventually may build the trust necessary for developing an Individual Stewardship Plan or help a farm owner avoid bad decision that could impact a critical area. Consultations also will be a good avenue for the Work Group to learn about and inventory activities by non-VSP farms that protect or enhance critical areas.

The Conservation District will rely on **STRATEGIES**, **CONSERVATION PRACTICES**, and **VIABILITY ACTIONS** when preparing a Individual Stewardship Plan with the individual farm owner. Strategies are broad directions that the farm owner may need to consider when addressing issues related to ag viability or critical areas. Conservation practices and viability actions are specific action steps that implement the strategies. The following pages provide information on strategies with their associated conservation practices and viability actions. An “\*” denotes a conservation practice that not only enhances a critical are, but offers significant viability benefit to a farm owner.

**Strategies & Conservation Practices for Wetlands**

| **Strategies** | **Potential Conservation Practices** |
| --- | --- |
| * Avoiding wetland impacts | * Access control * Alley cropping\* * Filter strips * Fencing * Hedgerow planting * Grassed waterways * Nutrient management\* * Integrated pest management\* * Vegetative barrier * Watering facility\* |
| * Enhancing wetlands | * Critical area planting * Fish passage * Herbaceous weed treatment * Riparian forest buffer * Riparian herbaceous cover * Tree/shrub establishment * Wetland restoration\* * Wetland wildlife habitat management |
| * Retaining wetlands | * Conservation easements\* * Open Space enrollment\* * Wetland creation\* |

**Strategies & Conservation Practices for Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas**

| **Strategies** | **Potential Conservation Practices** |
| --- | --- |
| * Retaining/increasing agricultural acreage | * Agricultural land preservation\* |
| * Protecting groundwater drinking supplies | * Agricultural handling facility * Conservation crop rotation\* * Cover crop\* * Manure transfer\* * Nutrient management\* * Pest management\* * Prescribed grazing\* * Residue & tillage Waste treatment * Waste utilization |
| * Increasing groundwater supply | * Constructed wetland * Dam\* * Irrigation improvements\* * Water harvesting catchment\* * Water storage facility\* |

**Strategies & Conservation Practices for Frequently Flooded Areas**

| **Strategies** | **Potential Conservation Practices** |
| --- | --- |
| * Retaining/increasing agricultural acreage | * Agricultural land preservation\* |
| * Increasing water storage | * Dam\* * Mulch tillage\* * Ponds\* * Water harvesting catchment\* * Watering facility\* * Wetland creation, enhancement, or restoration |
| * Improving floodwater filtration | * Conservation crop rotation\* * Cover crop\* * Direct seed\* * Filter strips * Grassed waterways * Mulch tillage |
| * Reducing floodwater velocities | * Dam\* * Riparian forest buffer * Riparian herbaceous cover * Rock barrier\* * Stream habitat improvement & management\* * Tree & shrub establishment * Water spreading\* |
| * Protecting farm structures, crops, & livestock | * Livestock & equipment pads\* |

**Strategies & Conservation Practices for Geologically Hazardous Areas**

| **Strategies** | **Potential Conservation Practices** |
| --- | --- |
| * Retaining/increasing agricultural acreage for groundwater supply | * No net loss or gain of agricultural land\* |
| * Reducing bank erosion & channel migration | * Channel bed stabilization * Fencing * Heavy use area protection * Hedgerow planting * Riparian forest buffer * Riparian herbaceous cover * Stream habitat improvement & management * Streambank & shoreline protection * Watering facility\* |
| * Minimizing erosion & sedimentation | * Channel bed stabilization * Conservation cover * Conservation crop rotation\* * Contour buffer strips & farming\* * Cover crop\* * Direct seed\* * Filter strips * Grassed waterways * Mulching * Prescribed grazing * Water & sediment control basin\* |
| * Reducing landslide potential | * Range cover * Tree/shrub establishment |
| * Minimizing earthquake risk | * Sharing information on earthquake risk & building codes\* |

**Strategies & Conservation Practices for Fish & Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas (FWHCA)**

| **Strategies** | **Potential Conservation Practices** |
| --- | --- |
| * Avoiding disturbance to FWHCA | * Fencing * Integrated pest management * Nutrient management\* * Watering facility\* |
| * Enhancing habitat | * Access control\* * Alley cropping * Aquatic organism passage * Conservation cover * Critical area planting * Early successional habitat development/ management * Fencing * Field border * Filter strips * Fish passage * Grassed waterways * Hedgerow planting * Herbaceous weed treatment * Riparian forest buffer * Stream habitat improvement & management * Structures for wildlife * Tree/shrub establishment * Upland wildlife habitat * Wetland enhancement & restoration |
| * Reducing conflicts between agriculture & wildlife | * Wildlife fencing\* * Food plots\* * Nuisance wildlife management\* |
| * Retaining habitat | * Open Space enrollment\* * Conservation easements\* |