Watershed Work Group

Meeting Minutes

February 28, 2017

Opened: 6:05 pm – Adjourned: 8:15 pm

**Attendance**

Members: Michael Beyer, Tom Bloomfield, Larry Boltz, Allan Borden, Carmen Echeverria, Laurie Hagar, Michelle McCallum, Jeanne Rehwaldt, William Short, Myrn Stewart, and Gene Becker (guest)

Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife: Joshua Benton, Area Habitat Biologist

Washington State Conservation Commission: Bill Eller, VSP Coordinator

Washington State University Extension: Justin Smith, Mason County Director

Mason Conservation District Staff: John Bolender, Jennifer Holderman, Barbara Adkins\*

Facilitator: John Kliem, Creative Community Solutions, Inc.

**Agenda**

1. Overview of Critical Areas
2. Focus on Critical Areas: Wetlands
3. Best Management Practices
4. New Business

**Minutes**

**Overview of Critical Areas – Where Critical Areas and Agriculture Meet**

The VSP requires that the Work Plan contain an established baseline of critical area conditions as of July 2011 for monitoring purposes. Once determined, the goal thereafter would be the protection and voluntary enhancement of those critical areas where they interface with agricultural lands and activities. Mr. Kliem again provided a map of the agricultural lands documented to date within Mason County. This map, or mapping layer, will be utilized to determine the amount of land where agriculture interfaces with the five GMA established critical areas: wetlands, frequently flooded areas, geologically hazardous areas, aquifer recharge areas for potable water supply, and fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas. From that information, the process of establishing a baseline can begin for each critical area.

**Focus on Critical Areas: Wetlands**

Wetlands fall under a couple of somewhat complex definitions from both state and federal agencies. Most simply put, however, wetlands generally have three characteristics: (1) inundation or saturation of the soil by water, (2) the presence of wetland plants (hydrophytes), and (3) the presence of hydric soils. Mason County has a more than 10,000 acres of wetlands throughout, and more than 76% of all agriculture lands in the County potentially have wetlands on them. This is a fairly high percentage of possible critical area interface.

What are some of the Group’s concerns about wetlands on agricultural land?

* Roads, primarily new ones, causing stormwater runoff onto agricultural land and thus the creation of a “wetland” not previously existing, and without adequate recourse to deal with it.
* Property that is logged affects natural drainage patterns and the potential creation of wetland type areas on neighboring agricultural land.
* Does enhancement mean making the wetland larger than the original footprint, further impacting agricultural viability?
* What are the qualifications of the persons making wetland determinations (delineations)?
* How do you work around natural changes to the critical areas that have occurred since 2011?
* Do the critical areas have to stay in the same place?

Addressing these types of concerns, and others, involves considering not only the viability of the agricultural land, but also the function and value of the associated critical area. Looking at wetlands, their function is their role or job in the environment; their value is how they benefit the environment, including the agricultural activities they abut. Considering there is such a high percentage of agricultural land located on or near wetlands, there must be contributory factors to agricultural viability. Wetlands provide surface and subsurface water storage, nutrient cycling, shoreline stabilization, and habitat. It is important to note, however, that not all wetlands perform all functions. In fact, wetlands are categorized by their ability to perform these functions, and wetlands of lesser significance are subject to different, or lesser, conservation practices.

**Best Management Practices**

There are literally hundreds of recognized Best Management Practices (BMPs) or Conservation Practices to mitigate or prevent impacts to critical areas. The methodology behind BMPs is to find a balance between protecting the environment and maintaining, or increasing, agricultural production. These practices can be applied to “working” lands, where there is moderated interaction of agricultural activities in or near the wetlands, or to “retirement” lands where establishing buffers, for instance, completely remove activities from the area. The Conservation District utilizes a number of BMPs; a table of these was created and provided to Work Group members. Of approximately 30 practices, seven those are statistically the most commonly used. These include: fencing, heavy use protection areas, subsurface drain, composting facility, use exclusion (access control), filter strip, and waste storage facilities. All of these practices can, and have been, used to address impacts to wetlands.

Dan Larsen, a Resource Conservationist from USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) provided a slide show presentation of their programs. NRCS programs provide conservation planning assistance to address resource concerns though a nine step process. Resource Concerns can include soil erosion, soil quality, water quality degradation, degraded plant conditions, inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife, and livestock production limitation. Working with landowners to create specific conservation plans goes through a competitive annual application process based on ranking categories of Priority Resource Issues. The NRCS also provides a database of BMPs utilized in their conservation planning, including those the Conservation District provides to Mason County’s agricultural operators. These BMPs can be found on the NRCS website together with their practice standards and application processes.

**New Business**

There was some group discussion over future meeting dates, specifically picking a different day of the week to meet. Understanding that Tuesday evening meetings are not optimum for some of the Group members, consideration of other days ultimately proved to be equally as difficult for other members. The decision was to leave the meetings as they are for now, meeting the fourth Tuesday of each month until and unless there is a need for further discussion.

**Next Meeting Date**

The next meeting will be on **March 28, 2017 at 6:00 PM** in Conference Room A, Mason County Public Works, 100 West Public Works Drive in Shelton.

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**Barbara Adkins, AICP**

Special Programs Manager

Mason Conservation District

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