Watershed Work Group

Meeting Minutes

March 28, 2017

Opened: 6:00 pm – Adjourned: 8:00 pm

**Attendance**

Members: Michael Beyer, Larry Boltz, Allan Borden, Carmen Echeverria, Erin Ewald (phone), Laurie Hagar, Alann Krivor, Katie Ladner, Michelle McCallum, Jeanne Rehwaldt, William Short, Socorro Villeda, Seth Elsen (Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group), and Karen Roberts (guest)

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

Facilitator: John Kliem, Creative Community Solutions, Inc.

**Agenda**

1. Best Management Practices - Wetlands
2. Funding Programs for BMPs
3. Draft Wetland Goals, Objectives & Measures
4. New Business

**Minutes**

**Best Management Practices - Wetlands**

It is important to remember at each juncture of this process there are three primary goals of the VSP Work Plan: viability, protection, and enhancement. The Plan must ultimately maintain the ***viability*** of agricultural operations that interface with critical areas while also ***protecting*** and voluntarily ***enhancing*** them. Toward that goal, Best Management, or Conservation, Practices are utilized to sustain agricultural productivity and protect critical environmental functions.

The function of wetlands can vary, but generally they play a role in groundwater recharge & streamflow maintenance, natural water filtration, diversion & capture of flood water, shoreline stabilization, and for providing fish & wildlife habitat. However, not all wetlands are created equal; they do not perform all functions nor do they perform them all well. A professional evaluation can determine their level of function and place them into categories; and practices for protection or enhancement can be directly related to a wetland’s level of function. With or without a professional wetland evaluation or assessment, agricultural operators can obtain strategies for Best Management Practices (BMPs) from a variety of sources including the local Conservation District, the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), private companies, agricultural organizations and other Operators. The NRCS has hundreds of BMP designs aimed at providing a wide array of protection measures. Local Conservation Districts will have a shorter list of those BMPs most applicable to the area, and an even shorter list of those most often used. The Mason Conservation District has approximately 30 BMPs implemented in this region, with less than ten having the highest percentage of use in Mason County. A list of these was provided to the Group in a February meeting; examples of BMPs were also part of this meeting’s presentation. Some of these include:

* Filter Strips
* Fencing
* Riparian Forest Buffer
* Use Exclusion
* Channel bank vegetation
* Nutrient management

**Funding Programs for BMPs**

There are programs available to Operators that provide assistance in the design and implementation of BMPs. NRCS, the Washington State Farm Service Agency, the Mason Conservation District, and the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office all provide financial and technical assistance toward efforts that protect and enhance critical areas, including wetlands. Beyond that, Operators can seek assistance from community and philanthropic organizations, non-profits, public/private partnerships, or agricultural oriented corporations. Operators with the financial means to implement BMPs without assistance can also choose to implement practices on their own with or without agency guidance. Those utilizing financial assistance programs become contractually obligated to specific standards of practice; while those working outside of an agency bear the cost burden but they are also free from set standards. There is some concern, however, over how self-implemented, or DIY, practices will be measured, will they be viable, and will they be “count” when the Plan is evaluated by the State. The DIY approach is aimed at those who would prefer not to work with a government agency for various reasons, but who would still like to participate in the overall success of the Work Plan. At this point it is unclear as to what the State’s response will be to DIY participation, as well as how the Plan might effectively prescribe it. Ultimately, the theory is that any improvement is better than none for the overall benefit of the critical area.

Encouraging Operator participation in the use BMPs for the wetland enhancement can be simplified to a 5-prong approach:

1. Establish a VSP provider
2. Share BMP information through Farm Plans
3. Facilitate and expand existing programs
4. Create flexible funding sources
5. Provide info and assistance to DIYers

**Draft Wetland Goals, Objectives & Measures**

Implementing BMPs establishes a method of measuring the effectiveness of the Work Plan, and whether or not the objectives are being met. Wetland objectives should outline the milestones to be achieved under the Plan, and how progress toward those objectives will be measured in a realistic way. Creating lofty goals that are not reasonably attainable or measurable can set the Work Plan up for failure and eventually lead to the mandatory use of the County’s regulations. A draft list of potential objectives was provided to the group with their meeting materials. These were:

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| --- | --- |
| OBJECTIVE | MEASURE |
| Recruit and assist agricultural operators to prepare individual voluntary stewardship plans that identify potential conservation practices that will enhance wetlands | Number of stewardship plans completed |
| Assist agricultural operators in implementing voluntary conservation practices that enhance the functions and values of wetlands on their property. | Number, type, and extent of conservation practices implement |
| Provide confidential assistance to the agricultural operators about how to identify wetlands on their properties | Number of consultations |
| Prepare and distribute information to agricultural operators about available financial assistance programs for voluntary conservation practices that enhance wetlands | Literature prepared and distributed |
| Advise agricultural operators about enrolling in voluntary conservation easements or participate in acquisition programs for high functioning wetlands on their properties | Number of consultations |
| Promote a dual approach to voluntary conservation practices that enhance both wetlands and agricultural viability | Number, type, and extent of wetland enhancement projects that resulted in no net loss or an increase in agricultural viability |

**New Business**

No new business

**Next Meeting Date**

The next meeting will be on **April 25, 2017 at 6:00 PM** in Conference Room A, Mason County Public Works, 100 West Public Works Drive in Shelton.

\*MCD Staff/VSP Contact:

**Barbara Adkins, AICP**

Special Programs Manager

Mason Conservation District

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