

# November 2019 VSP Newsletter

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## UPCOMING JOINT MEETING OF THE VSP TECHNICAL PANEL AND STATEWIDE

ADVISORY COMMITTEE: The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee continue to update their meeting schedules. The most complete and up-to-date meeting schedule and meeting agendas can always be found on the [Technical Panel web page](#) and the [Statewide Advisory Committee web page](#). All meetings are held at the Farm Bureau building, 975 Carpenter Rd NE #101, Lacey, WA 98516, unless otherwise noted.

The next meeting is set for Wednesday, November 6, 2019, from 1 pm – 4 pm. The meeting is available by webinar and we encourage webinar attendance.

To register for the November 6<sup>th</sup> webinar meeting, please use the link below:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/203388062883820555>

After registering, you will receive a

confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

## COMMISSION SEEKING VSP NATURAL RESOURCE SCIENTIST:

The SCC is currently hiring for a new Natural Resource Scientist 2 (NRS2).

The position was created to assist the VSP with a technical review of required plans, development of technical resources to assist counties, and conduct spatial analyses of critical area functions.

The VSP is a first-of-its-kind alternative to the Washington Growth Management Act for protection of critical areas and relies on monitoring at the watershed-scale to determine if voluntary conservation practices on agricultural lands is protecting critical area functions and values or if adaptive management is appropriate.

The position anticipates a short-term need to review the first round of plans due for submission within the coming year, development of technical resources for monitoring a variety of

ecological indicators (soils, wildlife, wetlands, groundwater, streams), provide in-person assistance for county staff developing or analyzing monitoring data, and generate geographically broad analyses for critical area functions that span more than one county.

Moreover, the NRS2 will be asked to work with County or Conservation District staff to improve monitoring effectiveness if current methods aren't providing clear enough indications that voluntary conservation is protective of critical areas.

If you have any questions regarding this position, please contact the hiring manager, Brian Cochrane by email at [bcochrane@scc.wa.gov](mailto:bcochrane@scc.wa.gov) or by phone at (360) 407-7103.

For a full position description and to apply, please go to this [link](https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/washington/jobs/2603881/natural-resource-scientist-2-nrs2?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery):  
[https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/washington/jobs/2603881/natural-resource-scientist-2-nrs2?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/washington/jobs/2603881/natural-resource-scientist-2-nrs2?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

VSP TECHNICAL PANEL CHANGE IN MEMBERS: Please welcome a new member to the VSP Technical Panel, representing the Department of Ecology (ECY) – Rick Mraz. Rick is the Wetland Policy Lead for ECY and will be taking over for Lauren Driscoll. The [Technical Panel agency member list](#) has been updated. Rick can be reached at the

following address: Washington State Department of Ecology Headquarters, 300 Desmond Drive, Lacey, WA 98503-1274; Main Line: 360-407-6000; Office: 360-407-6924.

VSP INTRODUCTORY TRAINING FOR STATE AGENCY STAFF: The Conservation Commission hosted a training for state agency staff last month entitled an “*Introduction to the Voluntary Stewardship Program*.” The [webinar recording](#) is available on the [Commission’s web page](#).

REMINDER: COUNTIES, PLEASE SEND THE COMMISSION YOUR VSP BUDGET: New this biennia, the Commission requires each county to send its VSP implementation budget to the Commission. This requirement is part of the contract for VSP implementation between the Commission and each VSP county. Please send the budget electronically (a PDF or Excel spreadsheet is fine) to [Karla Heinitz](#).

The requirement is designed to ensure all requirements related to VSP implementation are accounted for during the performance of the contract with each county, and to ensure that the two year and five year reporting requirements will be met. The budget is due to Karla within 120 days of signing the contract.

Please send the budget to Karla by email at [kheinitz@scc.wa.gov](mailto:kheinitz@scc.wa.gov) or by phone at 360-407-6212.

#### COMMISSION OUTREACH ON VSP TO COUNTY COMMISSIONERS:

Commission staff will present the current status of VSP at the annual meeting of the [2019 County Leaders Conference](#) sponsored by the Washington State Association of Counties on November 20, 2019 in Spokane.

NEW COUNTY COMMISSIONERS, COUNTY OR STATE AGENCY STAFF, OR TECHNICAL SERVICE PROVIDER? Commission staff and VSP Technical Panel members are available to provide VSP training to new county commissioners, county planning staff, state agency staff, and VSP technical service providers.

We understand that the VSP has been around since 2011, and funded since 2015, and since that time there have been personnel changes throughout the VSP partnership. We want to make sure that all who play a role in making VSP a success receive a basic training on what VSP is, how it came to be, why it is important to the local community, and how it works to protect critical areas while maintaining agricultural viability.

We can also provide training to other interested parties, as needed. However, we will prioritize those that have a direct

role in VSP - county commissioners, county staff, state agency staff, and technical service providers. Please contact the Commission's [VSP coordinator Bill Eller](#) with training needs.

VSP FUNDS USED FOR PROJECT COST-SHARE: Each county is free to choose how to allocate VSP funds, but regardless of how the funds are allocated, each must continue to meet all the requirements of the VSP (RCW Chapter 36.70A), and must also meet the goals and objectives of their own VSP work plan.

The Commission urges counties contemplating creating a VSP cost-share program to review all of the obligations in RCW Chapter 36.70A and to review Policy Advisory [03-18 Roles and Responsibilities during VSP implementation – Amended](#), and [05-18 VSP Implementation Reporting – 2 year and 5 Year Reports](#) for a summary of some of those obligations before making its decision. Some of those obligations include:

- Maintaining a regularly-meeting VSP work group which oversees work plan implementation
- Conducting periodic evaluations of the county work plan
- Instituting adaptive management
- Providing a detailed, written report every 2 and 5 years of

implementation efforts and success

- Meet contract obligations with the Commission and others responsible for VSP implementation
- Conducting outreach and education to meet work plan goals
- Providing technical assistance, or contracting with an entity to so provide, to VSP participants
- Meet the goals and objectives of the county work plan
- Staffing needs, including salary, equipment and other items required to perform their job

The Commission urges counties to create an implementation budget and project management protocols in order to meet the statutory requirements. The Commission also urges counties who might want to use VSP funds for cost-share projects to partner with an entity (such as your local conservation district) that already has the training, knowledge and experience with administering a cost-share program using the Commission's cost-share policies and procedures. Finally, the Commission urges counties to review the [Commission's cost-share policies and procedures](#), specifically the [Grant and Procedure Manual](#) and [Cost Share Process](#) before making a decision to offer VSP funds for cost-share.

**If VSP funding will be spent on cost-share projects with landowners, there are a few requirements:**

- The county work group will need to approve any cost share program used in the implementation of VSP.
- [Washington State Conservation Commission cost-share policies](#) would need to be abided by, regardless of who is administering the cost-share program (conservation district or some another implementing entity (such as the county)). Since WSCC funds are being used as the basis for the cost-share funding, WSCC policies apply.
- If the entity administering the cost-share program and otherwise involved in contracting with landowners for project implementation using VSP funds has not already been trained in the Conservation Commission cost-share policies and procedures, that entity must be so trained before funds can be used from the Commission. Please contact the Commission staff below to schedule a training.
- VSP projects that are funded using any Commission funds will need to be reported in the five year report under RCW 36.70A.720 (2) (b) (i) and (c) (i).

**Anyone implementing VSP and seeking to use VSP funds for cost-share must consult with Commission staff before funds are available.** The staff person at the Commission responsible for VSP cost-share is Karla Heinitz. Please contact her by email at [kheinitz@scc.wa.gov](mailto:kheinitz@scc.wa.gov) or by phone at 360-407-6212.

**Question:** *How often should a watershed work group meet during VSP implementation?* **Answer:** As often as it takes to successfully implement the county VSP work plan and meet the other obligations under the VSP Statute, RCW 36.70A.700-760.

[Policy Advisory 03-18](#) identifies the roles of each of the entities responsible for VSP implementation, and further explains that the watershed work group should meet “regularly”. Regularly gives each county watershed work group flexibility on how often to meet. When there isn’t business to conduct, the work groups shouldn’t meet. However, a county watershed work group shouldn’t go six months between meetings. This is because there is a lot of business for a work group to conduct related to implementation of the county VSP work plan and meeting the obligations under the statute, and six months without a meeting to monitor progress and take adaptive management actions might lead to failure of the work plan.

The watershed work group has an important oversight role to play during implementation. [Policy Advisory 03-18](#) explains, in summary fashion, that the watershed work group has many different duties during implementation, including

- Overseeing implementation;
- Providing leadership on VSP in the local county;
- Meeting regularly;
- Participating in outreach efforts, fosters and builds partnerships with other natural resource entities;
- Providing direction and oversight to the VSP technical service provider on compliance with VSP goals and objectives;
- Establishing a succession plan for the work group, i.e. what will you do when work group members leave, how will you maintain your commitment to a diverse work group;
- Working with the VSP County Commissioners, County Staff and Fiscal Staff Responsible for the County – Commission VSP contract, and VSP Technical Service Providers to establish a budget for VSP implementation that outlines tasks, amount allocated for outreach, monitoring, technical provision, and any other task or deliverable needed;

- Every 2 years, periodically evaluating (programmatic, economic, and resource) and reporting on the VSP;
- Adaptively managing implementation if not meeting the established goals and benchmarks in the work plan; and
- Every 5 years, reporting to the Commission and the County on whether the work plan's protection and enhancement goals and benchmarks have been met.

County watershed group members should read the county's VSP work plan, understand its terms and requirements; receive training in the background and history of VSP, as well as how the work group functions as an entity of the county. Watershed work group meetings are open public meetings under the [Open Public Meetings Act, RCW Chapter 42.30](#), so all volunteer members of the watershed work group will need to be familiar with the OPMA and should undergo the [attorney general's OPMA training](#). Remember, [OPMA refresher training is required every four years](#).

For more detail on VSP watershed work groups during implementation, please see last year's [December 2017 VSP regional meeting presentation materials](#) on implementation and [our implementation page on the VSP web page](#). UPDATED INFORMATION FOR

THE COMMISSION'S VSP WEB PAGE? If your county has information related to VSP that needs to be updated on the [Commission's VSP web page](#), please contact [Bill Eller](#) so that information can be updated.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE VSP NEWSLETTER: New subscribers should access this link and choose the subscription for the "*Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)*" under the *Programs and Policy* tab:

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WASCC/subscriber/new>.

If you have any questions on how to sign up, please contact Bill Eller ([beller@scc.wa.gov](mailto:beller@scc.wa.gov)) or Laura Johnson ([LJohnson@scc.wa.gov](mailto:LJohnson@scc.wa.gov)) at the Commission.

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