

May 2020 VSP Newsletter

THE VSP [quarterly report](#) for January 1 through March 31 was due April 10, 2020. **We are still waiting for quarterly report from the following counties:**

- Cowlitz
- Yakima

If you are having trouble completing the quarterly report due to COVID-19 considerations, please contact [Bill Eller](#). Thank you!

MEETING OF THE STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Due to the increased concerns surrounding the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) virus, the State Conservation Commission (SCC) is taking pre-cautionary measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 by conducting its regularly scheduled VSP meeting via public online forum. If you require an alternate format for meeting materials or need help on how to attend this meeting, please contact Alicia McClendon at amcclendon@scs.wa.gov.

The next meeting of the Statewide Advisory Committee will be via teleconference and webinar on Wednesday, May 27, 2020, from 9:00 am – 11:00 am. Please register online by clicking on the link provided:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6177578998180907020>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

INPUT REQUESTED ON APPLICATION OF VSP AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES:

The Commission is working on updating its guidance in [PA #04-19](#) related to the practical application of the VSP definition of agricultural activities in local planning decision-making, and is seeking your input. If you are a county planner, county commissioner, or VSP technical service provider and have encountered instances where it has been difficult to apply the definition to proposed land use actions, please contact Bill Eller by phone (509-385-7512) or email (beller@scs.wa.gov). A

joint meeting of the VSP Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee will be held in mid-June to address these issue. The meeting location, time and details can be found on the [Technical Panel](#) and [Statewide Advisory Committee](#) web pages and in next month's VSP newsletter.

VSP 2-YEAR STATUS REPORTS VERSUS 5-YEAR REVIEW AND EVALUATION REPORTS: In our VSP outreach efforts, the Commission has become aware of some confusion over the difference between the 2-year status report and the 5-year review and evaluation report.

Each county in the VSP has recurring reporting requirements. These reporting requirements are set out in detail in the Commission's Policy Advisory 05-18.¹ A summary is below.

Both reports, when submitted, should abide by the guidance given in Policy Advisory 05-18 and otherwise meet the reporting, adaptive management, and monitoring requirements in the VSP statute.

2-Year Status Report

The first reporting requirement is the 2-year status report. The VSP statute says that in implementing the work plan, the watershed group must "*provide a*

written report of the status of plans and accomplishments to the county and to the Commission."²

The 2-year status report provides the County and VSP work group with a forum for updating the public on the VSP implementation progress made during each biennium. These status reports should provide a snapshot of what's been done during each 2-year period and should answer the questions:

- "How far along are we with our planned implementation?" (*"status of plans"*) and
- "What have we done?" (*"accomplishments"*).

The 2-year status report is not reviewed and evaluated by the Commission, the VSP Technical Panel, or the VSP Statewide Advisory Committee. There is no statutory authority in the VSP statute for the Commission, Technical Panel, or Statewide Advisory Committee to review and evaluate the 2-year status report. None have any statutory authority to review or evaluated the 2-year status report. Monitoring results are not required to be reported in the 2 year status report unless a county wants to share those as part of demonstration of progress and results of the VSP.

This 2-year report is due to the county and to the Commission "*within sixty*

¹ <https://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/VSP-SAC-Policy->

Advisory-05-18.June-2018.implementation-reporting.amended.pdf

² [RCW 36.70A.720 \(1\) \(i\)](#)

*days after the end of each biennium....*³ Therefore, no later than August 30 at the end of each biennia, a 2-year report is due. All VSP counties have the same deadline for submitting 2-year status report.

The 2-year status report should be sent as a PDF by email to Commission staff member Bill Eller at beller@scc.wa.gov, and should be cc'd to Commission staff member Alicia McClendon at AMcClendon@scc.wa.gov. Upon receipt by the Commission, a confirmation email will be sent back to the sender to confirm receipt. The 2-year status report will be posted on the Commission's VSP web page.⁴ The 2-year status report should also be sent to the county, as that is required by statute.

5-Year Review and Evaluation Report

The second reporting requirement is the 5-year report. During implementation of the work plan, *"the watershed group must report to the director and the county on whether it has met the work plan's protection and enhancement goals and benchmarks."*⁵

The 5-year review and evaluation report's purpose is different. It is reviewed and evaluated by the Commission, in conjunction with the Technical Panel and the Statewide

Advisory Committee.⁶ VSP county work groups use the 5-year review and evaluation report to assert that they are (or are not) meeting their VSP work plan goals and benchmarks.

The Commission, as part of its review, determines through an analysis of the 5-year review and evaluation report whether or not it concurs with the assertion of the work group. As a result, the 5-year review and evaluation report must include specific information related to the county work plan goals and benchmarks, as well as monitoring and adaptive management plans. There are statutory requirements related content for the 5-year review and evaluation report.⁷

The 5-year report goes beyond providing a summary of what's been done. It is a self-evaluation of how well the actions are working towards meeting the goals and benchmarks of the plan, and if the plan is adequately showing protection or enhancement of critical area functions and values as indicated by monitoring. The 5-year report should answer the questions:

- "Is our plan doing what we said it would do?" (meeting goals and benchmarks);
- "Is our plan protecting and enhancing critical area functions and values?" and

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://scc.wa.gov/vsp/>

⁵ [RCW 36.70A.720 \(2\) \(b\) \(i\) and \(c\) \(i\)](#)

⁶ [RCW 36.70A.705 \(e\)](#) and [RCW 36.70A.730 \(1\)](#)

⁷ See Ibid., above

- “How do we know?” (What evidence do we have to support our answers to the first two questions?).

The Commission is working on guidance and a template for submitting the 5-year review and evaluation report. When that guidance and template is ready, the Commission will provide informational sessions on its use.

To follow the progress of the development of the guidance and template, please attend (or listen to the webinar recording) the meetings of the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee. Meeting schedules and materials can be found on the Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee web pages.⁸

This 5-year report is due to the director and the county “*not later than five years after the receipt of funding for a participating watershed....*”⁹ Each county has their own unique deadline for submitting 5-year review and evaluation report, tied to the date they originally received VSP funding.

Policy Advisory 05-18 addresses 2 year and 5 year reporting requirements, and has been updated to include this information.

Summary of Differences Between the 2-year Status Report Versus the 5-year Review and Evaluation Report	
2-year Status Report	5-year Review and Evaluation Report
Due at the end of every biennium, no later than August 30	Due every five years from the date a county initially received VSP funds
Reports on the status of “plans and accomplishments:	Reports on whether or not the county work group believes the VSP work plan is meeting its goals and benchmarks
Is not reviewed by the Commission, Technical Panel or Statewide Advisory Committee	Is reviewed and evaluated by the Commission, Technical Panel, and Statewide Advisory Committee
No requirement to include details on monitoring, cost-share projects, or adaptive management	Must include details on monitoring, cost-share projects, and adaptive management (if an adaptive management plan is required)
Cannot trigger statutory provisions leading to a county failing out of VSP	May trigger statutory provisions leading to a county failing out of VSP
Commission guidance complete in Policy Advisory 05-18	Commission guidance and template for report not yet complete

FIVE YEAR REPORT GUIDANCE AND TEMPLATE: The Commission, with the assistance of the VSP Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee, is currently working on a guidance document and template for county work groups to use for their five year reporting requirements under VSP. We hope to have a final version of the guidance and template available soon. Watch this space for updates!

⁸ <https://scc.wa.gov/vsp-techpanel/> and <https://scc.wa.gov/vsp-state-ac/>

⁹ Ibid.

FIVE YEAR REPORT DUE DATES:

All VSP counties and their technical service providers should be well into implementing their VSP work plans.

An important part of implementation is monitoring of critical areas functions and values, and assessing whether the data gathered is enough to determine if work plans goals and benchmarks are being met. Presenting this information to the work group by those gathering the data is an important piece to gauge how well goals and benchmarks are being met.

Don't hesitate to have those meetings as the work group is responsible for submitting in the five-year review and evaluation reports of each county work plan. The Commission is working on a guidance and template for counties to use to submit their reports, and the due dates are coming up later this year.

As a reminder, the due dates are as follows (Chelan and Thurston counties, as the original pilot counties in VSP, have already submitted their five-year reports):

COUNTY	5 YEAR REPORT DUE
Chelan*	7.20.19
Thurston*	7.20.19
Kittitas	11.17.20
Mason	11.24.20
Garfield	11.30.20
Asotin	12.14.20
Grant	12.14.20

San Juan	12.21.20
Cowlitz	12.22.20
Pacific	12.22.20
Okanogan	12.28.20
Benton	1.12.21
Skagit	1.19.21
Whitman	1.19.21
Columbia	1.20.21
Yakima	1.21.21
Douglas	1.22.21
Pend Oreille	2.2.21
Franklin	2.24.21
Walla Walla	3.7.21
Stevens	3.10.21
Ferry	3.14.21
Grays Harbor	3.21.21
Lincoln	3.21.21
Lewis	4.18.21
Spokane	4.22.21
Adams	5.23.21

VSP AND COVID-19: We have received a few questions about impacts to the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and VSP related to COVID-19 and the Governor's ["Stay Home, Stay Healthy" Proclamation \(20-25\)](#).

Though things could change, here are a few answers based on current information:

- The SCC is fully operational with all staff in telework status. Our office is closed.
- There may be small delays in processing VSP reimbursements or vouchers due to slow network connections and telework conditions.
- VSP funds administered by the SCC are available to allocate to

counties. VSP implementation has not been put on hold by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- VSP Technical Service Providers (TSPs) should communicate with their county about the status of county government operations. Each county is complying with the Governor's directives, including the "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" Proclamation. That may mean some county activities are shut down, curtailed, or limited. These temporary measures could affect the county's ability to process VSP vouchers and reimbursements through the Commission. TSPs that have a more direct relationship with the Commission (i.e. where the county isn't involved in the administration of VSP funds, but has delegated that responsibility to the TSP) shouldn't see any problems other than slight delays as Commission staff are still processing reimbursements but under telework conditions. We suggest that TSPs review their agreements with the county and contact appropriate county staff for questions specific to that contract.
- Counties and TSPs may have to curtail, shut-down, or stop their VSP implementation efforts depending on how compliance with the "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" proclamation impacts

the goals/benchmarks of their work plan (e.g. if one of the benchmarks is to attend grower meetings, which now have been cancelled due to the pandemic). In such cases, the county and TSP should document those goals and benchmarks, their efforts to meet them, and why those efforts were not possible (e.g. due to meeting cancellations). Another example would be if the TSP has entirely closed their office / business and cannot conduct VSP activities due to the pandemic. Once normal operations resume, the TSP, county, and county work group should address the effect the pandemic and/or compliance with associated proclamations had on VSP implementation in their county and their ability to meet work plan goals and benchmarks.

- In either example described above, VSP work plans may need to be adaptively managed in order to meet goals or benchmarks interrupted by the COVID-19 situation.
- Questions about VSP monitoring and data gathering should be directed to [Levi Keesecker](#).
- While holding remote / virtual / or on-line webinar meetings of VSP work groups is possible under the Proclamation, please remember that the [Open Public Meetings](#)

[Act](#) must still be complied with, though the [Governor's Proclamation 20-28](#) should help with how the public can be accommodated. Please make sure you review the [Governor's Proclamation 20-28](#) in its entirety for new requirements before proceeding. For example, the proclamation temporarily suspends the ability of an agency to take "action" on matters at a meeting unless they are necessary and routine, or necessary to respond to the current pandemic. The latest [Guidance issued by the Attorney General's office is here](#).

- Commission staff are available to help! Contact [Karla Heinitz](#) for VSP-related contracting and cost-share questions and [Bill Eller](#) for general VSP-related questions.

NOT MEETING YOUR WORK PLAN GOALS AND BENCHMARKS? While gathering data, monitoring critical areas and otherwise implementing your VSP work plan, what should you do if you discover that you are not on track to meet a goal or benchmark in your work plan? You should bring that to the attention of your VSP work group right away.

[Policy Advisory 03-18](#) identifies the roles of each of the various entities responsible for VSP implementation.

County work groups should be meeting regularly to meet statutory obligations, monitor progress, and take adaptive management actions.

Overseeing implementation, providing direction and oversight to the VSP technical service provider on compliance with VSP goals and benchmarks, and adaptively managing implementation if those goals and benchmarks are not being met are among the most important duties of the work group.

Each county work group should be regularly communicating with the technical service provider(s) implementing the VSP work plan to address any issues that arise. Perhaps a benchmark was set to high, or new information renders a goal insufficient to meet needs. Review of the benchmarks and goals is part of the adaptive management process.

NEW COUNTY WORK GROUP MEMBERS? With the end of winter, many county work groups are meeting more frequently and seeking new members as current members leave. With the arrival of new work group members, it is important to provide them with the background, history, work group function, and current state of VSP in your county, so that they can be effective work group members.

County watershed group members should read the county's VSP work plan, understand its terms and requirements. Work group meetings are open public meetings under the [Open Public Meetings Act, RCW Chapter 42.30](#), so all volunteer members of the 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 for all members every four years.

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

VSP VOUCHERING: Remember, the Commission's agency policy requires monthly reimbursement requests for all VSP contracts (as well as any other contracts). However, we have noticed some counties are sending in reimbursement requests quarterly. Monthly reimbursement requests allow entities to stay on top of expenses and contract end dates. So, please remember to voucher monthly for VSP expenses as stated in your VSP contract.

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](#). VSP WORK GROUP MEETINGS: Please add Bill Eller (beller@scc.wa.gov) and Levi Keesecker (lkeesecker@scc.wa.gov) to your email notices for your local VSP county work group meetings. Commission staff want to attend as many of those meetings as we can in order to be a resource to you and your work group as you move forward with VSP implementation. Not all counties list their work group meetings on their county web site, so the easiest way to get notice of the meetings is to join your email list.

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NEWSLETTER: New subscribers
should access this link and choose the
subscription for the “*Voluntary
Stewardship Program (VSP)*” under the
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If you have any questions on how to
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(beller@scc.wa.gov) or Laura Johnson
(LJohnson@scc.wa.gov) at the
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