

July 2020 VSP Newsletter

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QUARTERLY REPORT DUE JULY 10, 2020: Just a friendly reminder that the [VSP quarterly report](#) for April 1 through June 30, 2020, is due July 10, 2020. If you are having trouble completing the quarterly report due to COVID-19

considerations, please contact [Bill Eller](#).

JOINT MEETING OF THE STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND TECHNICAL PANEL: The next joint meeting of the Statewide Advisory Committee and Technical Panel will be July 14, 2020, at 1 pm. This meeting will be by webinar-only.

Due to the increased concerns surrounding the COVID-19, 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 amclendon@scc.wa.gov.

Please register online by clicking on the link provided:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/9017417424131078157>

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

VSP AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES DEFINITION JOINT MEETING: To continue protecting the health and safety of our staff, volunteers, and the public, this meeting will be conducted via online webinar and teleconference. All members of the public are welcome. If you would like to join us online, please follow the link included in the agenda to receive additional information on how to participate.

The joint meeting of the Statewide Advisory Committee and Technical Panel to discuss the VSP definition of agricultural activities and how it is applied in local land use decisions at the county level will be Friday, August 7, 2020, from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. This meeting will be my webinar only. The agenda is [here](#).

We are cautiously optimistic that Spokane County will be in Phase 3 of the [Governor's phased approach to re-opening Washington](#) by that time, which will allow for such an in-person meeting. Attendance by webinar will also be an option.

We are asking for input and/or presentations by a number of counties and/or technical service providers.

A link to the Commission's Policy Advisory #04-19 is [here](#). It is the Commission's current statement of policy with regards to this issue. A draft proposed agricultural activities decision tree for use by county planners is available [here](#).

The decision tree is designed to be used by county planners or VSP technical service providers when to assist them in deciding how the definition would apply.

VSP 2-YEAR STATUS REPORTS VERSUS 5-YEAR REVIEW AND EVALUATION REPORTS: The Commission has updated Policy Advisory #05-18 to highlight the differences between the 2-year VSP status report versus the 5-year review and evaluation report. The revised PA #05-18 can be found on the [Statewide Advisory Committee's web page](#) or directly at this [link](#).

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 for 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!

FIVE YEAR REPORT DUE DATES:

COUNTY	5 YEAR REPORT DUE
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.

- 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.

HOW TO MEET YOUR WORK PLAN GOALS AND BENCHMARKS: An important part of implementation is monitoring of critical area functions and values, and assessing whether the data gathered is enough to determine if work plan 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. If existing data and approaches are not sufficient to assess critical area functions and values, such as due to gaps in data, monitoring should be augmented via adaptive management.

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.

Questions about VSP monitoring and data gathering should be directed to [Levi Keesecker](#). He can be reached by phone at (360) 789-3650 or by email at lkeesecker@scc.wa.gov.

[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.

Question: *When do VSP cost-share projects need to be completed?*

Answer: All VSP cost-share projects need to be completed no later than the end of the current state legislative biennia (June 30, 2021). VSP funds are considered operating funds from the state legislature. VSP funds available to each county are allocated by the Commission on a biennial basis, meaning they must be used between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2021. Funds cannot be "carried-over" beyond the end of the biennia. So, all cost-share projects using VSP funds must be completed no later than the end of the current state legislative biennia.

Question: *Who decides what kind of monitoring is used in a VSP work plan?*

Answer: Each county work group. Each county VSP work plan must meet goals and benchmarks set by the county work group. Those goals and benchmarks are based on statutory requirements, but are unique to each VSP county.

Each county work group crafted their county work plan to protect critical areas while maintaining agricultural viability. A critical part of the work plan is monitoring to measure success vis-à-vis meeting those goals and benchmarks.

[Each county work group has identified monitoring or a suite of monitoring practices to use to meet those goals and benchmarks.](#) Some of those practices complement [monitoring already happening in the county.](#) Others might need to be created to meet the unique needs of a particular VSP county.

Regardless of the method or methods used, the monitoring must be scientifically sound and produce scientifically-valid results.

It is important to remember, however, that while there are many monitoring methods and resources to choose from, the ultimate choice for which to use is each county work groups' to make.

The adaptive management component of VSP is designed to allow a county work group to pursue a monitoring method and, upon discovery that it isn't meeting the data needs of the work plan, to bring on another method or switch entirely to a new method.

Local, state, or federal agencies, non-governmental entities, and others might suggest monitoring methods for the VSP

work group to use, and we welcome that input. However, the decision is the VSP county work groups' alone.

The Commission recently hired a natural resource scientist to assist VSP county work groups with analyzing their monitoring methods, and providing suggestions on options, methods, and data-gathering efforts.

Questions about VSP monitoring and data gathering should be directed to [Levi Keesecker](#). He can be reached by phone at (360) 789-3650 or by email at lkeesecker@scc.wa.gov.

COMMISSION SEEKS ENVIRONMENTAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE SAC: An important part of the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) is the Statewide Advisory Committee (SAC) appointed by the director of the Conservation Commission (Commission).

The SAC is comprised of environmental, agricultural, and county members, and tribal representation is also sought. The SAC serves to advise the director of the Commission on a variety of policy and programmatic aspects of VSP.

The Commission is currently seeking an environmental representative to serve on the SAC. The term is for two years. Meetings are generally held every month or every other month. Members serve as volunteers to help the

Commission achieve the goals of VSP, which include protecting critical areas while maintaining agricultural viability.

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More information on the SAC can be found at the [Commission's VSP web page](#). If interested in serving, interested persons should contact Ron Shultz, Director of Policy and Intergovernmental Relations, rshultz@scc.wa.gov or by phone at 360-407-7507.

VSP PRESENTATION AT EASTERN WASHINGTON PLANNERS FORUM: Commission staff will present on the difference between the two year and five-year VSP reports at the [Eastern Washington Planners forum](#), scheduled for July 22. Look for links to the web meeting in next month's VSP newsletter.

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) or Laura Johnson (LJohnson@scc.wa.gov) at the Commission.