

Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)

A collaborative process that helps Washington communities ensure healthy landscapes and strong farms today and for the future.



What are critical areas?

Washington's Growth Management Act covers five critical areas that counties must identify and protect:

1. Wetlands
2. Frequently flooded areas
3. Critical aquifer recharge areas
4. Geologically hazardous areas
5. Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas (emphasis on anadromous fish)

Background: Managing growth in Washington

- ▶ The Washington State Growth Management Act (Chapter 36.70A RCW) requires counties to develop plans for managing population growth and development.
- ▶ Plans must:
 - » Identify and protect critical areas (see left), including those on agricultural lands.
 - » Preserve farmland and prevent urban growth from crowding out agriculture.
- ▶ Prior to 2011, the main tool for counties to protect critical areas on agricultural land was regulation.
- ▶ Regulation threatened farm viability and led to legal battles.

What makes VSP different?

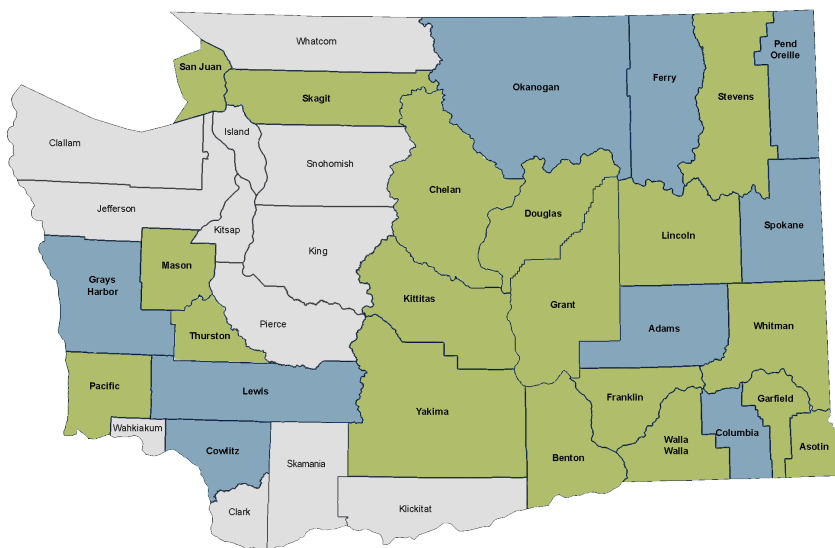
- ▶ VSP (created in 2011) gives counties the option to develop locally led work plans that use voluntary, incentive-based tools to protect critical areas and viable agriculture.
- ▶ The process to develop and implement a work plan is:
 - » *Inclusive*: It brings local stakeholders — including agricultural, environmental, and tribal interests — to the table.
 - » *Informed*: Plans fuse best available science with local knowledge of landscape, economy, and “on-the-ground” conditions.
 - » *Proactive*: Stakeholders discuss and resolve conflicts during VSP planning and implementation.

27 counties

participate in the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP).

Counties marked in blue are in the process of developing VSP work plans.

Counties marked in green have approved VSP work plans.



How it works - Three phases of VSP

Phase 1: Develop Work Plan

- ▶ Local stakeholders form a VSP workgroup and develop a work plan.
- ▶ Work plan is sent to the Washington State Conservation Commission for approval.
- ▶ Workgroup begins outreach to agricultural landowners about the program.

Phase 2: Implement Stewardship Plans

- ▶ Local technical assistance providers conduct outreach in priority areas and create stewardship plans for agricultural landowners who choose to participate.
- ▶ Stewardship plans provide best management practices that meet agricultural and resource goals.
- ▶ Existing voluntary, incentive-based programs are used to help landowners implement stewardship plans.

Phase 3: Monitor Results

- ▶ Workgroup monitors workplan progress over 5-10 year intervals.
- ▶ Workgroup delivers status reports to Washington State Conservation Commission — must show progress on measureable benchmarks.
- ▶ If progress toward goals is not met, new incentives may be sought or created.

Current status: As of June 2018, 18 counties have approved VSP work plans (Asotin, Benton, Chelan, Douglas, Franklin, Garfield, Grant, Kittitas, Lincoln, Mason, Pacific, San Juan, Skagit, Stevens, Thurston, Walla Walla, Whitman, and Yakima). The remaining 9 VSP counties (Adams, Columbia, Cowlitz, Ferry, Grays Harbor, Lewis, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, and Spokane) are on-track to complete their work plans by the end of 2018.

VSP administration



Local

Counties designate themselves or another local entity (e.g. conservation district) to administer the VSP workgroup. The workgroup administrator:

1. Coordinates workgroup meetings,
2. Administers program funds, and
3. Oversees the outreach plan and establishment of stewardship plans using best management practices.

State

The Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) is the state-level administrator for VSP.

The SCC executive director is in charge of reviewing and approving VSP work plans with assistance from a state advisory committee and technical panel.

Partners supporting VSP



Contact

Bill Eller, VSP Coordinator
beller@scc.wa.gov
509.385.7512

scc.wa.gov/vsp

SCC-VSP-06-18

Please call our office (360-407-6200) to request content in an alternate format.



Updated: June 2018