

**WHITMAN COUNTY
VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM
MEETING
BOCC CHAMBERS
February 13, 2024
2:00 p.m.**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

**Jon Jones
Alan Thomson
Art Swannack
David Lange**

**Kim Weerts
Jeff Pittmann
Nancy Belsby**

Zoom: Brad Johnson, Palouse CD

Others: Gerrit Bass, Palouse CD

2:08 p.m. – Brad called the meeting to order. I know everyone knows each other and Gerrit Bass is here today from the Palouse CD. Gerrit, would you like to introduce yourself to us?

Gerrit Bass – Yes, I am the Research and Monitoring specialist at the Palouse Conservation District. The main reason I’m here today, is I am #5 on the agenda. Before we get into it and start writing stuff, I’ve just gone through and summarized what you said you wanted to do for monitoring.

MOTION by Kim Weerts and seconded by Art Swannack to approve the minutes from December 13, 2023. Motion passed.

Brad Johnson – At our last session we had a discussion when a work group member decides to get off the work group. What is the succession plan for the VSP, and at the bottom you can see what I came up with: *“When a Work Group member is interested in resigning his or her position on the Whitman County VSP Work Group, if possible, they should recommend a replacement? Other Work Group members are also encouraged to identify a replacement.”* This is what we were talking about at our last meeting in December.

Art Swannack – It doesn’t necessarily cover what the Conservation Commission says, it does. Because you are supposed to do outreach to cover broad representation. If you can find somebody that meets that requirement then that’s fine, but if that person is leaving and you can’t find somebody, you still have to do the search and advertise the position.

Brad Johnson – So, what you are talking about, Art, is under that next paragraph:

Page 7, "The County Work Group must continue to seek out a broad representation of key watershed stakeholders to serve on the Work Group"

Do you want something more in that section down below, Art?

Art Swannack – You really have an incomplete plan, Brad. Because it says that person should find somebody. That's nice. Hopefully they can. Another member should try and find someone. That's great. How are you doing this? It doesn't say anything about the how or why the process, etc.

The succession plan should also identify that the Work Group has to nominate somebody to the BOCC to be appointed. "To select someone for the BOCC to appoint," would be better way to say it. The BOCC can't decide who it is. That is up to the Work Group. I think it is incomplete. But that is just my opinion.

Brad Johnson – No, I don't disagree with you, Art. Should I add a sentence that says something to the effect that says, "The recommended replacement is forwarded to the BOCC?"

Jon Jones – That would be good, Brad. The BOCC is kind of in charge.

Art Swannack – Actually not, in this case.

Brad Johnson – In this case the Work Group is in charge.

Jon Jones – Oh, I see.

Art Swannack – Do you want me to re-write it and present it to the next meeting? I can do that.

Brad Johnson – If you want to, Art. It doesn't matter to me.

Jon Jones – The BOCC still has to approve the recommendation.

Art Swannack – The work group selects and the BOCC appoint. The BOCC can't appoint someone the Work Group doesn't select.

Kim Weerts – You said we needed outreach, can't we just make a general statement that the work group will propose and send the direction for outreach with applicants forward?

Mark Storey – You are already paying for someone to do outreach for you and the CDs, they could tag that onto the outreach that they are already conducting and you guys can sit back and approve some people that might apply through the outreach that you are already doing.

Kim Weerts – If members are going to reach out to people that they know or the person resigning is going to reach out, theoretically, and/or other work group members, we could just tag them.

Mark Storey -Correct. You have a group of friends that all know each other. What you need to do is reach out to those that are not participating right now, which is probably not easy for your members to do. It is much easier to do outreach through the CDs, to tag that on as another facet for them. That is part of what the Conservation Commission tasks you to do.

Those are just my thoughts. If all you are doing is saying you are going to talk to your friend to help, then you have a little group of friends that have one perception of what this group should be doing.

Art Swannack – It is supposed to represent at a minimum of Ag, Environment and Tribes. We know the Tribes have been asked and Tribes have chosen not to participate. We have to maintain at least the environmental and anybody else that might be interested. It is supposed to be as diverse as possible.

Kim Weerts – That’s why at the last meeting, I suggested we put an ad in the paper.

Alan Thomson – Whose budget is that coming out of?

Kim Weerts – Your salary.

Art Swannack – As far as the implementation process for the plan, it should be part of the budget of the CD is being paid to do this.

Kim Weerts – It should come out of their budget.

Mark Storey – You don’t have to over-think this. You just have to make it a task that is automatically going to happen to some degree.

Art Swannack – Ideally, we don’t have rotation every time we turn around on this.

Alan Thomson – If we don’t have any diverse applicants, another farmer might be the better choice.

Mark Storey – You have to make a reasonable effort toward that goal.

Brad Johnson – Maybe this isn’t enough, but I added, *“The Work Group will recommend a replacement to the BOCC for consideration to be on the Work Group.”*

Then we could say something to the effect, I don’t disagree with what anybody is saying, but if we take our last presentation with Joan on the Palouse Prairie and she recommended Mary so that keeps the diverse background. I get what Mark is saying, that we don’t want this to be a band of brothers and sisters but we have everything but the Tribes, and we have ag and the

environmental covered. I want to respect Art, if he wants to re-write this, we can table it until the next meeting. So, what do you want to do?

The Work Group decided to table this until the next meeting and Art will re-write the resolution and bring it to the next meeting.

Brad Johnson - So, we have the scoring and ranking process here. I went through the previous meeting minutes and we talked about where we wanted to go. I tried to read through everything and tried to understand and get a better understanding of what everybody felt we were coming from on some of this stuff.

But the one that always kept coming to the front was this, Ranking question #2. *“Is this application implementing NRCS practices that address Wetland and Streams? (30 points) I don’t know if you had a chance to read over #1 or #3, but I added numbers on the right to add up to 100. But I don’t even know if people agree 100% with talking about the critical areas.*

If you address more than one critical area, you score higher, and I don’t have any points for #7 or #9 because on #9 we have not yet developed. We don’t have priority practices and in #7 it should be in a critical area to be eligible. We were going to give points if it was an NRCS practice but it didn’t address the critical areas.

I don’t know where you want to start on this. I put a short power point talking about what is in the supplemental funding specifically that was in the cost-share, and everyone knows this, but the practice would have to be in the work plan. The practice would have to have a 10-year life span. The Work Group would have to approve the project at an open public meeting and then the project gets entered into CPDF.

One thing I really looked into and I agree, that we want to have a scoring and ranking process but there is no direction from the Commission on how the scoring and ranking process works. They just want the work group to approve the project in an open public meeting.

So, what is the pleasure of the work group? Do you like this? The Ranking #2 as presented back, I think we went over this couple of different times.

Alan Thomson – What are the NRCS practices in critical areas? What exactly does that mean?

Brad Johnson – So Alan, within our work plan, we have those stewardship actions, there are those practices, and actions all of them entered in our work plan are NRCS practices. Fencing, alternative water development, tree planting, everything that is in our work plan that we identify to protect or restore critical areas are NRCS practices.

Jon Jones – Could there be practices that we haven’t identified as a group that are in the NRCS? Should they get points, too?

Brad Johnson - There could be but if it is not in our work plan it is not eligible. I think the work group did a good job when they were writing the plan of identifying the practices that will protect critical areas.

Art, what is your feeling on this. I know that when we initially talked about this you were concerned about a farm that had more critical areas scoring more, but again, we are not trying to make a project score more or less. We are trying to figure out how to score oranges to oranges and apples to apples. You've been a part of the Snake River process and you can never, those score cards that we wrote for the salmon recovery regions, after the first time you used them, you did some tweaking to them.

Art Swannack – One of the concerns was that you could end up not allowing as many people to participate in the process if you stacked it so that things were added (inaudible) benefits. Maybe you could use a couple of benefits and it could qualify a little bit higher. We wanted to make sure that people across the County had the opportunity. So, you weren't, for example, focused on the North Fork of the Palouse River and all of a sudden, all these benefits they are all stacked in with a little area of the County that gets (inaudible). That's what I remember of the conversation, Brad.

Brad Johnson – That is why I brought it up because I don't want to downplay anything like that. But if we get projects in, the work group makes the, but if they are addressing critical areas and their 10-year practice life you can submit all of them or some of them, or you can submit them in a ranked order however you want to do it. You have to come up with a way when we get projects in how we are going to score it. That's where we are at now with what I have on the screen. I just put the numbers on the side to add up to 100 as opposed to 205.

Jon Jones – I wouldn't worry about it being a 205 instead of 100. We have to score. One hundred is a nice even number to work with but I don't think we should fret about it as long as they are ranked. It looks to me this is a good way to rank the projects.

Art Swannack – I thought we talked about #6 not have that much of a weight to it.

Brad Johnson – You are right, there, we did talk about that. I left that the same.

Art Swannack – Do you remember what we concluded as a group as to what we were going to how much we were going to weight that?

Brad Johnson – We didn't come up with a recommendation in the note. We talked about it and then went on to something else. We could take that weight down. I took some of the weight down above. I agree with Jon, we don't have to worry about the score. What do people, again, I don't want to get off of that question, but #7 and #9 should come off but that is just my recommendation.

Jon Jones – In regards to #7 it says, “... *Areas adjacent to a critical area.*” Almost all areas are adjacent to a critical area. It is kind of bad wording and confusing. Not a bad question. I don’t have a problem with deleting that question either.

Art Swannack – I think #6 might change the points down to a maximum of 20 or 30. I don’t think we want 5 benefits for adding to the total. Instead of having 10 points for each practice up to 50 points, make it 10 points for a total of 30, so you are not weighting it as much.

Kim Weerts – That sounds good.

Gerrit Bass – Just cut it in half. Five each per practice.

Art Swannack – What do you think? Five per practice? So, make the 10, 5 and then the max 25. So, on #6 change to 5 points for a total of 25. We deleted #7 and #9, because that duplicates #6. Now you are at 125 points total.

Brad Johnson – Now you are at 170. Number 6 went to 25, #7 went to zero and #9 goes to zero, because we are getting rid of those questions.

Art Swannack – Go down below and add 10 and then you are at 125.

Brad Johnson – Yes, we are at 125.

Kim Weerts – I have a concern in giving someone points on whether monitoring will be allowed. We don’t require that on,

Art Swannack – I get what you are saying, Kim, but this is political. The issue becomes being able to keep VSP viable and showing that it is doing stuff and that would be the reason to allow 10 points if you are going to allow someone to monitor versus not. You could make it 5 points if you want to.

Kim Weerts – But that is going to put us into the weeds when you go through and try, at least after going to the previous VSP meeting last week, we don’t have a definition of monitoring yet. The Conservation Commission doesn’t have a definition of monitoring yet, so that is why I am a little concerned. They want monitoring but they don’t have any kind of direction or definition that they are giving to the CDs on what monitoring is going to be. They are going to go back and re-write the definition of monitoring. That is what I understood. That was really the crux of the this past VSP meeting.

It wasn’t supposed to be, but there are a lot of CDs that are extremely concerned about what the State is going to require for monitoring, coupled with the fact that they haven’t given the CDs any more money to monitor, but they are going to require them to each have an approved monitoring plan, but they don’t have a definition of monitoring.

Brad Johnson -Kim is not wrong at all. I go back to what Art was alluding to. In the VSP work plan our monitoring is pretty vague so that is why Gerrit is here to talk on #5 on the agenda. We just want to make sure that we are monitoring what we said in the Plan and that it is not any worse than prior to 2011.

We discussed this in a previous meeting too. This monitoring can take the shape of photo documentation or just a practice of being put, or it can also be used for some of the parameters that we are monitoring in our current plan. I know this can make some of you nervous, but we have done well in the first 5-year report and extremely well leading up to the next 5-year report. I don't know if it needs to be in there or not but we do have to do the monitoring that we said we would do in the VSP work plan.

That is all we would be asking for if someone did a project, if we could come out and monitor for X, Y, and Z, depending on the type of practice that was put in. But I don't want to put too much weight on that, Kim, because I'm like you, we said we were going to do some monitoring and it was pretty vague and we have done really good at documenting what will protect the critical areas. So, I hope that helps a little bit.

Kim Weerts – If that is the kind of monitoring that we are going to do, I don't think anyone would have a problem with that. My only problem is that within the next however long the Commission decides that their monitoring that they are going to require, that they are going to have a required approved plan for it and each county is going to be the type of monitoring that we haven't explained to someone who is getting funding for a project.

Jon Jones – The (inaudible) quality project plan whatever someone submits to a request for funding goes to, and says that he will have a monitoring plan, that is subject to approval to the Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission will say that sounds pretty good or it doesn't. Or this is what else you need in your monitoring plan. It wouldn't make any difference if it is photo monitoring or water quality monitoring or length of the straw or whatever, as long as it is a plan that is approved by the Commission. I think that the Commission would be the final one to,

Jon Jones – But it is pretty vague, I mean it is,

Art Swannack – They don't get an additional approval of what we are doing after they have approved our plan. It would be whatever fits within the work group as the monitoring activity. Because they approved our plan and it may be generic but they said OKAY.

Kim Weerts – This is extra money, this is extra commission money. This is on top of what we already have because we are going to look at these and we are going to send them to the Commission and they, am I wrong, Brad? Don't they get the ultimate decision on those plans that are going to be funded.

Kim Weerts – I think he is right, because it is their money.

Art Swannack – No, because this one is, our county plan was approved by the Commission.

Brad Johnson – Yes, so Gerrit is going to talk about what he is going to develop in that monitoring plan and that monitoring plan will be approved based on what is on our work plan. So, everyone is kind of right. They can't ask us for anything more than what is in our plan. Basically, the monitoring plan, is the who, what, where, when and why, that addresses what we currently have, which is vague. Every plan in the State is vague.

The thing the Commission wants people to understand and what they have to stand up against is, is it defensible? This monitoring plan should make it defensible with what we have in our plan. They did give us extra money, and it is just filling out how we are going to be about doing this. So, in 5 years if it is still going and I'm not here, someone else can pick this up and say this what was done, this is how they did it, this is when they did it who did it and why.

Kim Weerts – Why do they have to go into the data base if we are the ones who are going to be giving out the money for projects? Why does it have to go into the Commission data base? Then I still believe that they said they have final approval on approving projects with that supplemental money. Am I wrong?

Art Swannack – They got monitoring for monitoring requirements to comply with VSP.

Kim Weerts – Where do you see these ranking projects for supplemental money to rank projects? Aren't we? Isn't that what this was for?

Alan Thomson – The way how I understand it. We are going to be ranking projects based on these NRCS practices. We are going to identify what these NRCS practices are. We have to in order to rank something. So, if somebody says, "I'm going to do A, B, C ranking of NRCS practices," we want to be able to make sure they are doing that. That would be the monitoring plan that we the group here know that they are actually doing it. That is the way I'm looking at it.

So, this monitoring plan has to be something that we can verify what these landowners are doing. If they say they are going to put a bunch of fences in there, we need to know that they put the fences up and are doing something with water. So, the water monitoring plan, we want to know that they are doing that successfully.

Kim Weerts – This basically stays with us. This doesn't go to the commission.

Alan Thomson – Eventually the plan goes to the Commission and they rank them and they choose.

Kim Weerts – I get it. I was trying to mush them together.

Art Swannack – All this ranking is, "Will you allow monitoring or not?" That is all, this isn't the actual, what monitoring is required of the WC Work Group in order to stay compliant with our

2-year, 5-year plan. The Table 5.8 in our plan actually lists monitoring indicators and that is really what we would be looking at in terms of actual monitoring. This is simply, are you going to let them on your land and let them measure all this stuff? Yes or no. How many points are they worth?

Alan Thomson – That statement is important on #8. Somebody from the CD has to go on their land and verify,

Art Swannack – We've got to be able to verify in our whole plan monitoring that we are doing successfully. Now that may be at the end of the river where the water flows through from all those places. But it is not per parcel that we have to monitor in order to be compliant with VSP. That is CAO, Critical Areas Ordinance law, the regular way, not VSP way. VSP is by watershed.

Brad Johnson – Thank you, Art. I was going to say it is not on practice basis. It is on a watershed basis.

Alan Thomson – So in the watershed, we need to verify that the landowner is doing what he is supposed to be doing. So, yes, we need to identify what, we are going to go and look at that particular location.

Kim Weerts – Because they are taking money.

Alan Thomson – They are taking money and they are saying they are doing something.

Art Swannack – I'm not sure that is honest. That is a good question.

Gerrit Bass – If it is an NRCS practice, then it should be (inaudible).

Art Swannack – Brad, if somebody gets a project, and we recommend a project and it gets funded by the State, who does the enforcement if the person doesn't implement the project?

Brad Johnson – The money is coming through the, this money here would be whoever the, whatever the district sponsor but whoever implements, so if it came through the Palouse CD, we would have to ensure that is it done right. If not, we would go through the proper channels to get the money back from the producer. Art, is that what you are saying?

Art Swannack – Yes, so it is the CD that will enforce whether the project is done to the standard they said they would. It is us simply to recommend whether or not it is a good idea to fund this project to the Conservation Commission. But we don't have to go down the monitoring on that piece. That is the CD's job.

Alan Thomson – Then why do we need more (inaudible)?

Art Swannack – That is simply, like I said, political. Do we want to encourage people to encourage to allow monitoring?

Alan Thomson – It's not, as you said, (inaudible) it is the NRCS.

Art Swannack – They are monitoring the implementation of the project. Can we use this as another site to collect data to make sure that VSP is valid throughout our watershed?

Gerrit Bass – Maybe the difference is in the wording just like in the work plan you have to have a difference between direct monitoring and indirect monitoring. That could just be like what they were going to do. Indirect is like the collection of physical parameters like water quality or soil samples or something.

Mark Storey – You are better off with the question (inaudible)

Art Swannack - Maybe leave it in and give it 5 points instead of 10.

Mark Storey – It also sends the signal that someone filling it out that they are expected to allow monitoring. Just my opinion. I'm not on the group, so.

Brad Johnson – Do we want to change that to 5? I changed that to 5.

Kim Weerts – I don't think we should.

Art Swannack – Leave it alone, Brad.

Brad Johnson – I'm changing it back. Is there any more discussion?

MOTION by Art Swannack and seconded by Jon Jones to approve the VSP Ranking criteria as modified. Motion Passed.

Brad Johnson – I will get this cleaned up and send it out to the work group and the VSP Technical Service providers so they know that when we have a call for projects this will be how we will score and rank projects.

Okay, back to the agenda here. Gerrit, you are up.

Gerrit Bass – I'm going to pass these around because I just went through the work plan and tried to pull it out. I didn't get a copy to Brad so it won't be up on the screen. This document here is a little bit for my own, so I could understand what you were thinking about doing. I went through the work plan and most of it is just an overview about what you do for monitoring.

The first section here, is mostly for my own working through there and seeing what critical areas are, what is the goal of benchmarks and then separating out the language in it, between direct

and indirect monitoring. To me it seems like for monitoring plan indicators is what the CDs will be focusing on.

On the second page here, the parameters of water quality, hydrology, soil, habitat with some additional monitoring. A lot of it in the first 5-year plan, we did to some extent but now we kind of need to formalize it and figure out what we can do with it. Water quality stuff, a lot of those will be issues that are coming from the DOE. They are the ones who have the (inaudible) a little bit further back and reach for the baseline stuff.

Going forward, once we have this plan, we can start trying to collect some supplementary data. One of the overlying things that I saw in reading through this, Kim already touched on this, this whole idea of monitoring is still kind of vague, so it will take a bit of working out (inaudible) conversations.

In water quality stuff we have hydrology which we will be looking at. I was talking to Brad, and I think there is a USGS at Hooper and another one in Potlatch, Idaho. I think there might have been a third monitoring location that we agreed upon.

Alan Thomson – I think there is one on the South Fork of the Palouse.

Jon Jones – Those are flow gauges.

Gerrit Bass – Those are flow gauges. So those were, I was thinking what we did for the last, maybe it was for the 5-year monitoring plan, assessment, Brad, we worked with looking at (inaudible) and looking at fences. My boss was actually working with a statistician at the U of Idaho, to get more refined in that area for looking at differences between 2011 data and whatever the most current data is. So that was what the hydrology team would be looking at those statistical differences from 2011 until now.

Alan Thomson – There might be some kind of monitoring on Hangman Creek that may be in Spokane County and Whitman County.

Jon Jones – Ecology has a monitoring station on Hangman Creek.

Gerrit Bass - It is actually in Idaho.

Jon Jones - No, it is the Spokane area. It's not a flow gauge. Just general water flow and parameters. But there is some data there.

Gerrit Bass – I think that we were connected to (inaudible) all these kind of things. Then we have soil tests which has a little (inaudible) soils and what sort of things as far as direct physical tracking in these soils. I don't know what is out there from previous years, if you go out and look at things as far as like organic matter or increased infiltration rates, that would keep more water in the

fields and help keep it from erosion. I'm not sure what you had in mind as far as active soil if you wanted to do a better job (inaudible)

Alan Thomson – I think the more important one is maybe erosion along the banks. You don't want something in the water (inaudible) property and the CDs plan on helping out with that, making it more secure (inaudible).

Gerrit Bass – So, in that case would monitoring more be a classification of things being done to decrease that or would it be measurements of natural decrease (inaudible)?

Alan Thomson – It would depend if there was more soil in the bank or not.

Gerrit Bass – The harder question would be how would you quantify that? One way might be the water quality and turbidity.

Art Swannack – What I remember in our discussion a while back was, we didn't know how much money we were going to get from the VSP work group to actually fund monitoring. There was a lot of focus on keeping it simple. But that's the only place where we were getting money is whatever we get has gone to Palouse CD is what we have.

Kim Weerts – That is what the discussion centered around on February 6th at the VSP meeting and that is what a lot of CDs are hot about. The Conservation Commission is requiring these approved monitoring plans but they are not giving counties any more money at this point. From what I got from that meeting, SCC is going to take a step backwards do a little of "Can we go back to the drawing board and try and figure out a little bit clearer picture of what they want?" But there was still no indication that any additional money was going to come.

Art Swannack – So, to follow that, the conversations we had were basically what data is out there that we can gather that we don't have to spend a bunch of money to collect. That was going to be the first priority in terms of monitoring. Then if there was something that we could do that we could afford within the money that we got to implement the plan, we could add those. But we didn't want to create long term obligation monitoring because we didn't think we could fund it. If that gives you the background, Gerrit.

Gerrit Bass – No, that is good background for sure.

Art Swannack – Some of the stuff we talk about in here is basically follows that plan. Some of that is like, okay what is turbidity? Where is there a station? There is one here on, I'm looking at the USGIS map and there is one right on the Idaho border and there is one down at, you know where that goes into Spokane, basically. Some are showing on their map in places. But if there are other ones, we can gather information from without having to go and pay for a station, put it in place and all this other stuff.

Gerrit Bass - We already have some of that on Thorn Creek we have a couple of multiples that we can use like (inaudible).

Art Swannack – Is there anything like South Fork Palouse, North Fork Palouse, down at the end of the mouth of the whole Palouse system? Those type of things where we can collect data that tells us this watershed is putting this water here, in this condition and we have the 2011 data? Because it is supposed to be 2011 data that we were gathering. I'm assuming, Brad, you guys got?

Gerrit Bass – Our stations are more, (inaudible) Ecology station, one on Kamiak Creek and one on Thorn Creek and one by St. John. We have two there that have been there quite a while. Then we have some stuff (inaudible). We have to try and get recent data. The hard thing would be to go back and figure out what data we have like, for baseline.

Art Swannack – Just like that Table 5.8 that you have the tracking compared to 2011, so there is supposed to be some baseline stuff that was created, here is what the 2011 numbers look like.

Kim Weerts – Yes, and it seemed to me they were monitoring a lot of water back then.

Art Swannack – I assume there should be like Penewawa Creek and in some of those areas there should be some water going into the Snake because that is what, 35?

Mark Storey – They put some monitors on some of those creeks but I couldn't tell you which ones they are.

Art Swannack – I was just remembering there was something down in that area.

Jon Jones – One of the things that I thought was interesting was the photo monitoring of stream bank cutting. That is a pretty cheap way to monitor. Set up some photo stations along the creek and collect the data. It doesn't take very long to collect that data. Compiling it takes more time.

I know some years the river is really mucky and you don't know where it is coming from. It is from the highwater cutting into the stream bank. You can see where it is cutting, it is pretty obvious but my memory isn't as good as a photo. But that might be something to consider if we are trying to do it on the (inaudible), and be able to convert that into turbidity. You know, there is a correlation between the two. It's just a thought.

Gerrit Bass – So now one of the things we are trying to use, the drone that we acquired. You can set a location in a camera angle and everything, so they can find that same spot and take that exact same picture so that part is easy. It would just be figuring out what the location is that we want to do that on.

Jon Jones – So you might be able to calculate the amount of soil that was lost from that piece of the bank.

Gerrit Bass – That might be a little harder because that would be on the mapping and that would if you want to be able to at least, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Art Swannack – The challenge is correlating it backwards to 2011 and what the level was then.

David Lange – My concern is that stream bank monitoring between Colfax and the Idaho line on the Palouse River. I mean it is 99% natural habitat. The river wants to meander anywhere so it is natural,

Jon Jones – It is going to be natural stuff, and we would like to know.

David Lange – How do you blame that on agriculture, or how do you properly categorize it?

Jon Jones – Above the natural is what we are interested in. There is always going to be stream bank cutting. It is a natural process.

David Lange – A drone thing is a good idea.

Gerrit Bass – Or going back to the metric (inaudible) we were talking about, maybe instead of measuring turbidity in the stream you are using as a proxy for that. How many feet or miles of bank stabilization projects or like bumpers that people put in through some of those sections?

Kim Weerts – Come out to Elberton. I have a good one. What's left of it.

Alan Thomson – In some of the farmer's practices on some of those areas, farmers are going right up to the banks. Their equipment is going right up to the banks in a lot of the areas, so that could be impacted.

David Lange – It is probably pretty small.

Alan Thomson – It might be in some places but it is enough to take over. If you have a bit of erosion going on all of a sudden you have a tractor coming along.

David Lange – Probably the County,

Art Swannack – I saw that one coming. But remember, if they were doing that in 2011, that is the baseline. So, you have to maintain or improve. If they were doing it up to the shore in 2011 and they are still doing the same thing, they aren't making it worse, they are doing the same thing as in 2011. They are probably doing no-till so they are probably doing less. They are doing min-till or what they were doing before. But just remember, 2011 is the baseline so what was the activity in 2011 versus now? If it is better, great. If it is not any worse, that is acceptable.

Alan Thomson – So we are in bad practice to 2021.

Art Swannack – So you have the same bad practice there and it is by watershed, so some of the guys downstream are probably better.

Alan Thomson – So quit bad practicing?

Art Swannack – We're not doing it by individual piece, Alan. Remember, this is VSP, not CAO.

Alan Thomson – But bad practices are impacting the watershed.

Kim Weerts – If you want to buy everybody new equipment. You have two things you are running up against. You are running up against conventional farmers that have always done it that way and you are running up against (inaudible).

But in that four CD meeting, they were talking about some of these guys using no-till or min-till, are starting to, the CDs are encouraging them to plant the banks and leave them. That is the first time that there is an awareness. That is the first time I heard they were doing that. It is kind of an interesting,

Gerrit Bass – Are you talking about a commodity buffer program?

Kim Weerts – I don't think he was talking about a commodity buffer. Who was talking? Who was sitting down on the end?

Jon Jones – When you are talking about planting a perennial crop next to the creeks, alfalfa or,

Kim Weerts – No, the banks, going down to the river to the road. Talking about erosion on the road. There have been a couple of times at that meeting, who was sitting down on the end?

Gerrit Bass – The meeting in Colfax? It was Casey Lowder talking about a producer who put a 50-foot strip seeding grass along the edge of the bank along the road.

Kim Weerts – Along the road.

David Lange – It was a commodity buffer.

Kim Weerts – But it is an idea and the first time I have heard of it. It sounded like an interesting practice that could be implemented through the CD projects to help with erosion.

Gerrit Bass – So in that particular field of (inaudible) angle all the way down to the road so he seeded the grass and put up a 50-foot buffer to try and keep it from going over the breaks. The only thing that was in the soils subject that was in the work plan was the tract soil commission. The examples they had were organic matters, physical, chemical, biological standards. Do you guys have thoughts on that stuff?

Art Swannack – That is going to be a hard one, unless you got an independent funding source. That will take a lot of money.

Kim Weerts – Yes, that will take a lot of money.

Gerrit Bass – That’s what I mean.

Art Swannack – Unless you have a funding source to do that.

Kim Weerts – Tracking organic matter.

Art Swannack – We could claim a percent of no-till, a percent of min-till, a percent of conventional, but I don’t know if that is accurate when you get into all the different areas of the County where you get a lot of rain. You might have higher organic matter with conventional just because of the amount of crop you can grow.

Jon Jones – You start quantifying what is min-till and what is no-till and it becomes a real problem. I know that from personal experience. One of the CDs when I worked with Ecology, they sent in the reports of how many acres of direct seed they had done every year. I looked at the stats and this particular CD was claiming more acreage of no-till than they had. There were 100 acres available and they were claiming 125 acres.

So, we decided to go out and do a ground truthing on minimum-till and no-till. That is pretty hard to do that for a whole CD. All of Spokane County is what we did. Wait, it was Hangman Creek. It was hard to explain to people what no-till was and what they were to look for so we sent them out with a bunch of pictures, this is what we are looking for. It turns out we were looking for residue on the surface. That was the easiest thing that we could train them.

Gerrit Bass – So, one project that we have going right now, I think it is for all of WC, we have been going out and making residue measurements every Fall, and then working with U of I to correlate that back to satellite history, with the idea of being that we will be able to go and estimate residue cover based on satellite history.

So, then when we want to do something like residue cover as a proxy for increase in some other soil commission capacity, that is something we can use. I’m not 100% sure that we could. We could work with them and try to go back to 2011 benchmarks and try to compare that and look at the difference.

Jon Jones – It would be infrared or a,

Gerrit Bass – Yes, and infrared, I don’t know if,

Jon Jones – Or the color of the ground,

Kim Weerts – They are already doing a project like that it shouldn't cost,

Gerrit Bass – There wouldn't be any additional cost.

Kim Weerts – I think those are the things you should look at, at least if or until the Conservation Commission comes up with additional funding for monitoring, because you know it gets very expensive, very quickly.

Brad Johnson – The Commission is doing a lot of work with a group out of the mid-west and have done a lot of this work, too. We have them plugged into what Ryan and Gerrit are talking about and they are going to help with that too, so the cost is going to very minimal.

Kim Weerts – That's perfect.

Jon Jones – Minimal is good.

Gerrit Bass – Brad, could you talk more about that habitat and what we have been doing with Amanda Stahl?

Brad Johnson – Amanda Stahl, is a graduate student who now works at WSU, with the habitat stuff. We just used that aerial of remote fencing to detect any changes. There was no statistical difference at all in a lot of these areas, the priority habitat, the CDC, wetlands, or land cover.

So, we will just continue on with that type of work, too. We came out of the 5-year report with glowing recommendations based on we are not losing a lot of habitat in our development. We are not losing ag land or priority habitat, species or game birds or raptors.

Kim Weerts – That sounds good.

Brad Johnson – Really, the only one here is that last one, the climate data. No one really had that, they didn't really lean on us for that. Gerrit, I don't know, what you can talk to PRISMs about here, what we could do there but, really in monitoring we weren't in it, in any bad shape or form.

Gerrit Bass – On PRISM, we just don't know (inaudible) what side or time frame you want, so, I think on that one we should be able to go back to 2011 and see what it is now. It just seems like a large-scale thing to do to correlate with something that has happened in the watershed.

Art Swannack – The reason for that being present was we had concerns when we go from a wet regime to a dry regime and how it would affect practices for people to stay in business with. Or vice versa we went from a dry regime to a really, really wet regime. We need to be able to show, okay, if we are not achieving something it is likely because of this weather pattern change.

Gerrit Bass – It is more for tracking additional variables that would throw off what we are trying to do and less about trying to say no-tilling is changing the content.

Art Swannack – The simple factor, ideally, I might have brought it up, in the Lamont area, if we lose 3-4 inches of rainfall, the no-till will not work very well, because you can't get it up in the Fall to get your crop established. It doesn't work well in the Spring if it gets real dry all the time and you don't get a crop.

So, then you might see more conventional, and here is the justification why we didn't have what we expected as we get to reporting. That's what I remember. You guys might remember something else.

Gerrit Bass – So we talked about habitat, soils, and hydrology. We will look at those water levels and creeks. Water quality, it sounds like turbidity is one of the main things we were worried about. Stuff like agricultural toxins and temperature, probably go and see what Ecology has on that from 2011. Maybe not from those exact same areas, but, similar data from some of the sites that we already monitored. Are there any other concerns or monitoring ideas that you might want to go into a monitoring plan?

Art Swannack – It's just the money. We can only get so much done with what we have.

Gerrit Bass – Exactly, and going back to the difference between the indirect monitoring, which is one of the indicators in the direct monitoring, (inaudible) do you guys see a monitoring plan as mainly being in reference to these indirect indicators or, things like conservation usages and verification and things like that? Is this stuff that needs to be in a monitoring plan? Or is that the stuff that is already happening?

Jon Jones – Could you put it in a monitoring plan?

Gerrit Bass – Yes, so that would be the question for you and I can go back and look at the plan too. For monitor as far as direct things, I think we can get that from Brad's, the map online and how many acres are in VSP and the statistics.

Kim Weerts – I think those are the things we are looking for as opposed to constant water monitoring and (inaudible). It always goes back to 2011.

David Lange – Alan and I were talking about this as far as how the farmer farms up against the edge of the ditch. Does the group feel that the drainage close to a county or state highway should be treated differently than ground that is not next to a highway, with the implications that moving, keeping the water from moving away from the road will keep the valley over the road, whereas, a natural?

Art Swannack – I don't think it qualifies. It has to be a critical area. The only thing we monitor and the reason we implement this plan is for critical areas, ag critical areas. So, the ditch next to a road unless it was an ag critical area, wouldn't be something that this plan would address.

Alan Thomson – Well, that is a different question. Is there roadside ditching in critical areas? Yes, it can be. But we ditch roadside ditches.

Art Swannack – And we have an NBDES department that we operate under.

Alan Thomson – I was thinking about the agriculture activities right next to the stream, as it goes right up to the bank and the erosion going into the water. It could be wetlands down in there.

David Lange – But if you can see it, there is probably a road nearby, which in reality, creates the erosion problem because the road puts out a lot of water in an irregular pattern, which puts a big flood into the ditch. (Inaudible) obviously back between Colfax and Pullman.

Art Swannack – I can tell you it wasn't the road that caused the flooding. It was (inaudible) water coming off the road and caused the erosion.

David Lange – There are two ways. The ditch moved a ton of water and my thought is that that road creates the water problem, just because it captures the water and then dumps it in a concentrated area. If you think about it 20 years down the road, if we made those guys quit farming that and it turned into a stream, then pretty soon the weakest link is, it becomes a state highway. That is what we need to think about, that we don't create something that damages the infrastructure.

Jon Jones – Some of those have a ditch next to them that is a main stream.

Alan Thomson – That's a critical area.

Jon Jones – Is it a county problem or a state problem?

David Lange – I just don't want to create something that damages our infrastructure 20-30 years down the road.

Alan Thomson – The solution there is (inaudible)

Jeff Pittmann- Flying cars and flying combines.

Brad Johnson – Gerrit, do you feel confident that you got your questions answered? Gerrit asked if he could come and talk to you guys. I appreciate him coming today. Is there anything else you need from the group?

Gerrit Bass – No, I think I got everything answered. Thanks. I figured this was a better way to do it rather than come back and have it get torn apart completely.

Brad Johnson – Any more questions for Gerrit?

Kim Weerts – No.

Art Swannack – No.

Brad Johnson – The last thing I had was Kim and Nancy and myself, and we have already talked about this stakeholder meeting a little bit. I just want to give a couple of points from that meeting and then ask Kim and Nancy if they have anything to add.

The Commission held a meeting in Spokane. One of the things they discussed was how VSP was working. We've got a new director at the Commission and he is dedicated to making VSP work. But there have been a lot of problems, and a lot of areas and we talked about some of those with monitoring.

One of the big take-home for me was when the supplemental funding, when it first came out, and I saw it when we were discussing at our previous meeting, and that was that salmon-centric, they are taking that off of the supplemental funding, the salmon-centric stuff coming off of that. Kim or Nancy, do you have anything to add from that Stakeholder meeting?

Art Swannack – Did they change the law, Brad?

Brad Johnson – No, the law, the Commission put that in. It's not that it was or wasn't in the law. They just said it doesn't have to be there. That is the take-home message I got. I think that Lorraine Loomis was there at the same time this came out or around that time, and they put that salmon-centric in at the Commission level.

Art Swannack – That pretty much covers it, doesn't it, Kim?

Kim Weerts – Yes, I'm looking at my copious texts to Brad during the meeting.

Brad Johnson – A couple of other interesting facts. We got 5 action map entries and some big producers. We are getting some traction on that. That will help with us during the next 5-year report.

The February 22nd Alternative Cropping Symposium, Gerrit can talk a little more about it. Is this the 3rd annual symposium or is it the 4th?

Gerrit Bass – That's a great question.

Brad Johnson – The next VSP Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee Meeting is on March 12, 2024. I really appreciated, Art, you participated and Kim and Nancy. Unless there are questions, that is all I have for the work group.

MOTION by Art Swannack and seconded by Kim Weerts to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed.

Adjourned – 3:20 p.m.