



San Juan County Voluntary Stewardship Program Quarterly Work Group Meeting Notes

Tuesday, March 4th, 2025

In Attendance: Pauline Chiquet, Maggie Long, Paul Andersson, John Latimer, Tyler Davis, Dean Dougherty, Charlie Behnke, Morgan Krueger (WDFW)

1. Work Plan Progress Report

- Implementation
 - Three Individual Stewardship Plans (ISP) were completed this quarter.
 - Walt Andrews from SJICD is working on a Resource Management System (RMS) plan for his planner certification. SJICD has onboarded two new farm planners in the last year, which will greatly expand the District's capacity to fulfill ISP demand.
- Monitoring
 - Two Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (SVAP) and two Wetland Rating System (WRS) assessments have been completed on agricultural parcels. Roughly fifteen of each assessment type will be conducted over the next two months. Assessments are divided by watershed over the course of five years, and this year's assessments will be conducted in all of San Juan Island watersheds excluding False Bay. The schedule of watershed assessments by year can be found in the Monitoring Plan.

2. 2025 Biennial Report

- The Biennial Report is due August 30, 2025. A draft will be shared with the Work Group at the second quarterly meeting during the first week of June for work group approval.
- The biennial report is informational in nature, as compared to the Five-Year Report, which is more data driven. The Biennial Report will focus on addressing the following questions provided by the Conservation Commission:

1. Progress on the protection and enhancement of critical areas within the area where agricultural activities are conducted
2. Maintenance and improvement of the long-term viability of agriculture
3. Reducing the conversion of farmland to other uses
4. The maximization of the use of voluntary incentive programs to encourage ecosystem stewardship as an alternative to historic approaches used to protect critical areas
5. Leveraging existing resources by relying upon existing work and plans in counties and local watersheds, as well as existing state and federal programs to the maximum extent practicable to achieve program goals
6. Ongoing efforts to encourage and foster a spirit of cooperation and partnership among county, tribal, environmental, and agricultural interests to better assure program success
7. Ongoing efforts to improve compliance with other laws designed to protect water quality and fish habitat.
8. A description of efforts showing how relying upon voluntary stewardship practices as the primary method of protecting critical areas does not require the cessation of agricultural activities.

- Case studies to highlight in the report include the agrivoltaics project on San Juan Island and the restoration/planting of native edible species at Beaverton Marsh Preserve.
 - i. The work group discussed expanding the definition of agricultural activity to include non-traditional “ag lands” such as wetlands when they are managed for traditional foods. This will be an ongoing discussion and will be alluded to as an area of ongoing interest in the Biennial Report.
- Morgan mentioned that each county is undergoing a Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) review as part of the Comprehensive Plan update process. Colin Maycock is leading efforts in San Juan County and will be a good resource to better understand changes and interactions with the CAO and VSP.

3. Five-Year Report

- The Five-Year Report is due December 31, 2025. An outline will be shared at the quarterly work group meeting in June, and a first draft will be shared in September for conceptual approval.
- A second draft will be shared at the December meeting, which will leave one month to incorporate feedback before the December 31 submission deadline.
- The Commission is in process of developing a new online template for use in reporting. Pauline and Maggie have participated in the task force responsible for developing the template. The template is still in its early stages and will be finalized in the summer of 2025.
 - i. The template draws from our specific goals and benchmarks to ask for each critical area and agricultural viability if the County has met the metrics outlined in protecting and enhancing critical area functions and values.
- The group discussed a list of tables that will be used to inform the report. These tables are still in development and will be highly contextualized, titled, and explained within the report. The tables are broken up into four categories:
 - i. BMP implementation data

1. This includes data and BMPs from all SJICD historic ISPs and cost share projects, entered into the District's database, QuickBase.
 - ii. Field monitoring data (Stream Visual Assessment Protocol, Wetland Rating System, Biology Technical Note 14)
 1. Field monitoring data is not sufficient at present to track changes over time. Tables will instead be used to demonstrate baseline conditions, until enough data is available to track meaningful changes.
 2. The group discussed looking at SVAP categoric scores, rather than numeric scores, as these scores may be more statistically significant and account for changes in technician or uncontrollable climactic discrepancies.
 - iii. Spatial data (High Resolution Change Detection)
 1. New data will be available through WFDW by summer 2025.
 - iv. Agricultural viability data (Ag Viability Survey, census data)
 1. Pauline is working to adaptively manage the ag viability goals and benchmarks.
- The report will integrate data from multiple sources to determine if benchmarks are being met. For example, spatial data may identify canopy loss in a riparian area, but the loss may be offset by riparian forest plantings captured in implementation data. Implementation and effectiveness data will complement each other to tell the story of whether goals and benchmarks have been met.

4. New Member Onboarding

- The County Council has asked the VSP Work Group to formalize the process of selecting new work group members to better be appraised of who is seeking membership and what their qualifications are.
- The County has an application form for serving on county committees. The group proposed using the County's existing template and modifying branding to VSP and to the Work Group.
- Accompanying the application form is a memo which can be sent to interested applicants to describe the program and the commitment.
- The group is actively seeking new membership, particularly needing more farmer representation. John, Faith, and Kathy are currently the only farmers on the Work Group.
 - i. Work Group members can begin to brainstorm who would be a good fit and who might receive the memo. Broader distribution may occur once application systems are in place.