



San Juan County Voluntary Stewardship Program Quarterly Work Group Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, June 6th, 2023
10:30-12 p.m.

Attendees: Laura Pitts, Pauline Chiquet, Cathi Winings, Paul Andersson, Vicki Heater

1. Welcome – Welcome and Introductions

2. Work Plan & Adaptive Management Plan Progress Report

- Implementation: Individual Stewardship Plan (ISP) updates and 2021-2023 biennium wrap-up on deliverables status

Two ISPs have been completed this quarter, both on San Juan, and three ISPs are underway, all on San Juan. ISPs this quarter have taken place on vegetable farms, livestock operations, and developing orchards. Sixteen landowners are on the waitlist to receive an ISP. All ISP deliverables have been met for the biennium. Many of these landowners receiving ISPs are in the cost share queue.

- Monitoring: HRCD data and SVAP surveys

HRCD: SJICD is wrapping up baseline High Resolution Change Detection (HRCD) analysis with the help of GIS staff intern Bernard Cowen, who has populated a table of acres and types of change in critical areas where agricultural activities are occurring. The work will be finalized by the end of the month and updated with 2021 captured data when the data becomes available. The baseline data will inform a number of protection benchmarks in the Adaptive Management Plan.

SVAP: Throughout April and May, the District performed twelve Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (SVAP) surveys on stream reaches for eight unique properties within the West Sound, Eastsound, and Garrison watersheds. SVAP assessments provide planners with a measurement of stream quality to inform the focus of restoration efforts. SJICD will be using this tool to assess streams that intersect with agriculture, and surveys will be conducted at the same site every five years to track progress against the baseline conditions currently being established. An SVAP monitoring plan is in development. This plan will include a timeline of rotating watersheds to be tested each year. The digitization of the SVAP survey in Survey123 is almost complete, and planners have been trialing the new tool in the field to capture geolocations and photos and aggregate collected data online. An SVAP report template is being developed to send to landowners after their assessment is conducted.

The SJICD is working to develop a GIS dashboard for reporting on monitoring metrics. Dashboards will be produced for SVAP and eventually BMP Implementation and will highlight key metrics such as number of assessments conducted, SVAP scores, and types and numbers of BMPs in place.

3. 2023 Biennial Report

- 2023 Biennial Report: Outline Review and Ag Viability Study

Work is underway on the outline for the Biennial Report due August 2023. Eight questions form the basis for this report, which focuses on progress made throughout the biennium and differs from the Five-Year Report in its more narrative approach. A draft outline was reviewed during the meeting and edits were proposed. The updated outline is attached with the minutes. The Agricultural Viability Study will form the basis of the report and informs several questions. This study is underway, and the hope is that it will be complete by the time of the report deadline; however, progress has been stalled on this study, and results may not arrive in time for the report. The report will be drafted and circulated via email for final review before submittal.

4. Budget Updates/Funding Outlook

- End of biennium: VSP budget depletion schedule through June 30, 2023

Biennial contract monies are depleting, and just under \$5000 remains for the month of June. April and May received higher than usual activity due to the seasonal SVAP assessment spendings, onboarding of new interns, and general closeout of the biennial contract.

- WSCC budget updates

New 2023-2025 biennium contract guidance will be released shortly. \$240,000 will be allocated to each county (instead of \$235,000 previously), and indirect rates will be increased from 20% to 25%. More information is still forthcoming regarding an additional \$47,000 per county to be used specifically for monitoring. This money would be very helpful in building and implementing a monitoring plan. The Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) has changed their policy on cost share maximums for each landowner; the new policy states that \$100,000 is available per landowner per year (vs. \$50,000 previously). The CD will look into changing its policy as well to match that of the commission.

- Budget revisions for new grant cycle beginning July 2023

The District will be proposing a similar budget to the previous grant cycle, with only slight changes to dollar amounts and umbrella tasks for each line item; however, the District will condense billable budget items from 25+ to 4 to increase simplicity with 5+ staff members billing to VSP. The county has agreed to a preliminary budget, which allocates 100% of funds directly to the San Juan Islands Conservation District.

5. VSP Project Funding

- VSP Capital project approval requests:
 - i. New Hannah Farm – Irrigation Efficiency: unanimous approval
 - ii. Plum Berry Farm – Water Catchment: unanimous approval

Both projects received unanimous approval from the Work Group members present. The Work Group previously received the project approvals request from CD staff for comment via email and no concerns were voiced. Because all approving members present were CD board or staff, the projects will be put out to the larger Work Group a final time. If no objections are received, the District will move forward with the projects.

- Discussion of cost share processes and the formation of a subcommittee for VSP project approval

Processes are in development at the Conservation District to streamline project ranking and approval. A new ranking tool will inform project scores to be used with projects which are actively ready for funding. These projects will be ranked internally at the SJICD and assigned a source of funding. While many funding sources exist, only projects which will use VSP Capital funds will require VSP Work Group approval. While this month necessitated a quick turnaround for projects hoping to be submitted by the end of the biennium, in the future, project approvals will occur at VSP Work Group meetings and not via email. For this reason, it will be beneficial to develop a VSP Work Group Project Approval Subcommittee for streamlining this process. No members have joined the subcommittee at this time. The subcommittee is seeking members to join with a time commitment of one hour per quarter in advance of VSP Work Group meetings. Please email pauline@sjicd.org if interested in joining.

A recommendation was made to expand upon the current VSP Project template, adding critical areas impacted and additional details surrounding project scale.

6. Other updates and next steps

- The Work Group is seeking new members. Due to the loss of two Work Group members this quarter (David Williams and Byron Rot), there are open spots available. Two names were brought up as potential candidates: Tyler Davis (as a county representative) and Lovel Pratt (from Friends of the San Juans). The current VSP Work Group Roster is as follows:

Cathi Winings, SJI Conservation District
 Charlie Behnke, SJC Land Bank
 Dean Dougherty, San Juan Preservation Trust
 Faith Van De Putte, Midnights Farm
 Grant Carlton, San Juan County Manager’s Office
 Kathy Morris, West Beach Farm
 Laura Pitts, SJI Conservation District
 Paul Andersson, SJI Conservation District
 Pauline Chiquet, SJI Conservation District
 Vicki Heater, SJI Conservation District Board

Attachments:

- *New Hannah Farm – Irrigation Efficiency project proposal*
- *Plum Berry Farm – Water Catchment project proposal*
- *2023 Biennial Report Outline Draft*