



San Juan County Voluntary Stewardship Program Quarterly Work Group Meeting Notes

Tuesday, March 5th, 2024
10:30-12 p.m.

Attendees: Pauline Chiquet, Paul Anderson, Maggie Long, Roger Bairstow, John Latimer, Faith Van De Putte, Dean Dougherty, Sean Williams, Grant Carlton, Jessa Madosky, and Tyler Davis

Absent: Cathi Winnings, Laura Pitts, Vicki Heater, and Kathy Morris

- **Welcome** – Welcome and Introductions

The group welcomed John Latimer to the Work Group. Sean Williams from WDFW also joined the meeting.

- **Work Plan Progress Report**

- Implementation: Individual Stewardship Plan (ISP) updates

Two ISPs were completed this quarter, one on Orcas and one on Lopez. Planner trainees Maggie Long and Walt Andrews have been onboarded and have begun writing ISPs. Several cost share projects are underway and in development phases for irrigation, silvopasture, compost facilities, and water conveyance systems. Several additional riparian cost share projects are being completed for practices such as riparian forest buffers and beaver dam analogs.

- Joint Meeting Presentation: March 12th presentation to Technical Advisory Committee

At the annual meeting of VSP counties and technical advisory committee members, Pauline will present for San Juan County with a focus Monitoring Plan updates and processes surrounding agricultural viability monitoring. Virtual attendance is open to work group members – email Pauline if interested in attending. Paul and Grant will also be attending.

- **Monitoring Plan**

A monitoring plan is now a requirement for all VSP counties. Monitoring is an opportunity to prove that San Juan County is protecting and enhancing critical areas throughout the county. The final plan is due in July, and a draft will be sent to work group members prior to the next meeting in June.

- Outline: Discuss outline and tables

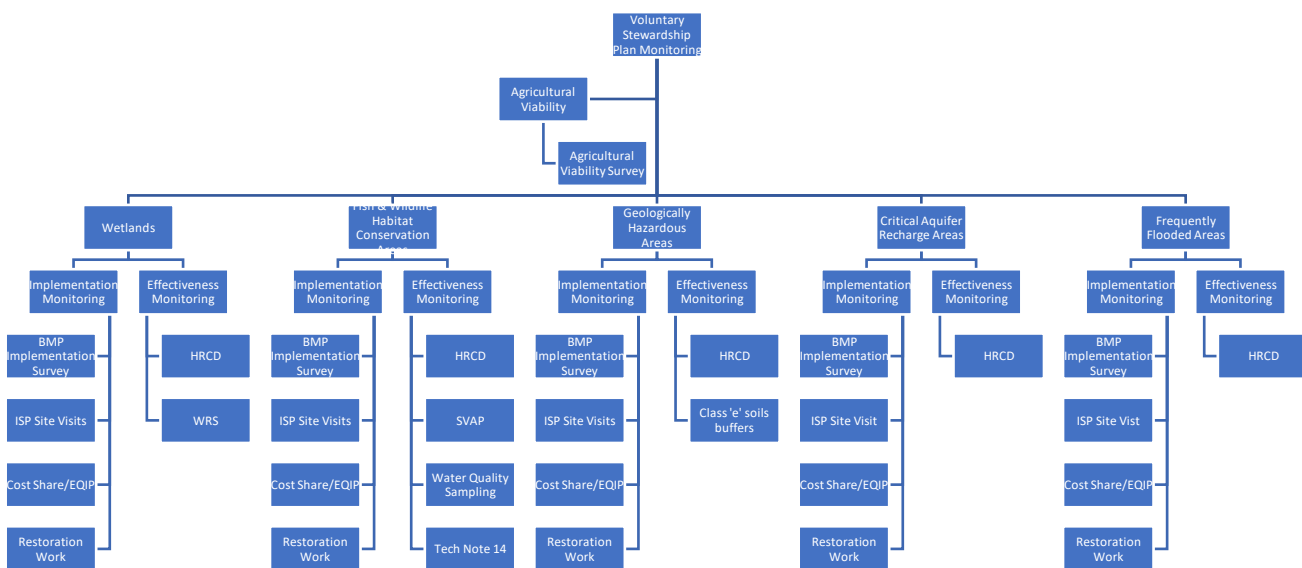
The group discussed the outline in preparation for the Monitoring Plan due in July 2024.

The monitoring plan structure is based on the 2021 Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) and guidelines issued by the Washington State Conservation Commission. The Adaptive Management Plan currently

outlines goals, benchmarks, and monitoring tools for each of the five critical areas and agricultural viability.

The monitoring plan will build off the AMP to delineate the what, who, where, how, and why of each assessment tool to be used in monitoring. Monitoring is categorized as either Implementation Monitoring, Effectiveness Monitoring, or Participation Monitoring. Implementation monitoring measures how many instances and amounts of BMPs have been implemented where. Effectiveness monitoring measures how BMPs are affecting critical area functions and values. Participation Monitoring measures the level of engagement of agricultural producers over time. Participation Monitoring is tracked across all critical areas through landowner and farmer engagement with the San Juan VSP; metrics include individual ISP, cost share, and BMP Implementation Survey participants.

Chart: Voluntary Stewardship Program: Monitoring Categories and Assessments



Effectiveness monitoring data is analyzed at the watershed/county scale as an average over time. Scale is somewhat dependent on the measurement tool. Most effectiveness monitoring data is collected by SJICD, but other sources of data include:

- i. Water quality data from UW Friday Harbor Labs or state and county departments of health – WA DOH already conducts water quality assessments in shellfish growing areas;
- ii. County Environmental Stewardship data from restoration projects, i.e. those implemented with Preservation Trust and Land Bank;
- iii. County Department of Community Development wetland delineations (WRS) on ag parcels.

Jessa and Tyler will look into specifics of sharing this data with SJICD.

Field monitoring protocols for VSP have already gone through the adaptive management process after the first Five-Year Report found that San Juan County was not meeting benchmarks and goals as written in the Work Plan. SJICD proposes subsequent adaptive management in coordination with the release of the Monitoring Plan. Proposed adaptive management includes:

1. A shift away from NRCS Biology Technical Note 14 for wetlands effectiveness monitoring to Department of Ecology Wetland Rating System;
 2. A transition of language from a fine grain approach (e.g. water quality testing in False Bay Creek) to a coarse approach (e.g. SVAP as a proxy for water quality sampling across a wider range of sites), while still allowing for the use of partner water quality data, when and if available;
 3. Removal or clarification of column titled “2011 Baseline.”
- Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (SVAP): overview of monitoring strategy

The group discussed Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (SVAP) monitoring in particular, highlighting maps that were developed to show ag parcels intersecting with streams. Data was gathered to demonstrate that 284 ag parcels contain an intersect with streams.

A Five-Year plan was developed to break up the number of parcels/stream reaches by watershed. Each watershed and its representative parcels will receive an SVAP every five years on a rotational basis. In theory if all parcels received an SVAP assessment, 56 assessments would be conducted each year. The group raised the following questions with regards to SVAP testing:

1. Given limitations with a) staff capacity at SJICD and b) landowner willingness for repeated land access and testing on the same parcels year after year, the group determined 56 is not a feasible number of assessments per year. The question was posed on what both a representative and feasible number may look like.
 - i. Feasibility may allow for about 15 assessments per year.
 - ii. More analysis will need to be conducted to see if 15 is a representative number, as this would include ¼ of all parcel stream reaches.
2. Which metrics will allow for prioritization of parcels? How will the group decide which parcels to include?
 - i. Many Preservation Trust and Land Bank properties or easement are obvious choices for inclusion, many are already working with SJICD, and there is landowner willingness.
 - ii. Further metrics for parcel selection could/may include:
 - a. Landowner willingness for repeated surveys
 - b. Representation from each watershed (demonstrates representiveness of samples) *or*
 - c. Priority watersheds with 1) restoration potential, 2) previous engagement with SJICD through ISPs or cost share, 3) areas with major resource concerns.
3. Faith asked about the potential of using volunteers to conduct SVAPs – Pauline noted that it is better to keep the testing in house to maximize statistical significance since the tool has a high potential for user bias, and there is also a concern of liability issue with volunteers on private property.

Similar questions will be asked for wetlands monitoring, and maps are in process of being built to address these questions. See attached example tables and maps for more information.

- **Budget Updates/Funding Outlook**

- Capital Fund Guidelines: Updates and funding release date

\$1.3 million of WSCC VSP capital funds were slated for released at beginning of year, but funds were held up by proposed changes to the guidelines. Stakeholders met to discuss funding allocation after the last round of funds was depleted in only three months, and it was clear from the meeting that many counties are in support of set allocations per county.

The Commission released the funds without a change to the guidelines but mentioned that counties that have not yet received capital funds this biennium will be prioritized. San Juan County has already received funding for two projects this biennium. SJICD will still plan to submit two projects for the March 26 review date, but funding is not guaranteed. More VSP Capital funds will be available in the next biennium.

- **Project Funding Project Recaps and New Approvals**

The group recapped previously funded and ready for funding projects:

- Previously Funded Projects Underway—these projects are in the implementation stage and have until June 2025 to be completed
 1. New Hannah Farm – Irrigation Efficiency
 2. Plum Berry Farm – Water Catchment
- Previous Work Group Approved Projects to Be Submitted for Review by March 26th
 1. Saturn’s Return Farm – Irrigation Efficiency
 2. Midnight’s Farm – Heavy Use Area
- No new projects will be presented this quarter for Work Group approval. Projects will be directed to other funding sources.

- **Follow-ups**

- Work Group Membership

1. New members to be presented to County Council for appointment:
 - i. Tyler Davis, San Juan County Environmental Stewardship
 - ii. Jessa Madosky, San Juan County Department of Community Development
 - iii. Roger Bairstow, 4th Seed Farm
 - iv. John Latimer, Seagate Farm
2. Old member to resign from Work Group
 - i. Cathi Winings, San Juan Islands Conservation District
3. Paul will propose changes in membership to the County Council at the end of March/early April.
4. The goal is to increase private landowner participation. County representation has always been great, and SJICD will be trying to reduce district representation to balance voices at the table. Laura will stay on as a member but will not show up to meetings unless needed; other CD planners will be present to gain exposure to the program.
5. Kathy Morris, West Beach Farm, is still on the roster but has not attended in a while; Pauline will ask if she wants to remain or be removed from the group.

- Agricultural Viability Survey: Data interpretation underway

SJICD presented updates on the survey status. This survey is a joint effort from ARC, WSU, SJICD, and the Ag Guild. The 2023 survey is the third iteration of the survey and was sent to approximately 280 producers with 80 respondents. The survey results have received preliminary analysis, and a draft report has been circulated internally, with the goal to populate a final report for public consumption (including County Council).

SJICD is asking Work Group members who are interested in contributing to look at the report and list of further questions/analysis metrics to determine gaps in the data analysis. Learner Limbach has agreed to take on further data analysis on the past three surveys. Faith mentioned now may be a good time to include new 2022 Ag Census Data in the report. Funding is available from SJICD and hopefully partner organizations to support this work.

Additional opportunities for data sharing include a data dashboard the Food Systems Team is working to put together.

Pauline will present San Juan County's process of measuring ag viability at the March 12th Joint Meeting, as many other counties and technical advisory members have expressed interest in learning more. Here is an [article](#) by Learner on the process for ag viability in the county.

Attachments:

- SVAP Five-Year Monitoring Maps
- Example Tables for VSP Monitoring Plan
- DRAFT Agricultural Viability Survey
- 2021 San Juan County Adaptive Management Plan