



## San Juan County Voluntary Stewardship Program Quarterly Work Group Meeting Notes

Friday, August 29th, 2025

**In attendance:** Dean Dougherty, Charlie Behnke, Pauline Chiquet, Maggie Long, Vicki Heater

### 1. Work Plan Progress Report

- Implementation
  - One Individual Stewardship Plan (ISP) was completed from July 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>.
- Monitoring
  - Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (SVAP) and Wetland Rating System (WRS) assessments begin again in the rainy season. These assessments will be conducted by the Islands Conservation Corps (ICC), who were trained in the spring.
  - High Resolution Change Detection (HRCD) analysis is underway for the Ten-Year Report. This dataset represents areas of change from 2021 to 2023.

### 2. Administrative Updates

- New Contract and Budget
  - The new biennium began July 1. The County is responsible for the contract with the Commission. They have signed their portion of the contract and are awaiting signatures back from the Commission. The County will employ a subcontract with the District, which is still pending.
  - The budget was presented to the Work Group for approval, with two changes noted from the previous biennium:
    - Line items are simplified, as per the Commission's updated Program Guidelines.
    - More money was allocated to the County to cover administrative costs associated with overseeing the program.
  - The budget was approved unanimously.

### 3. Reporting

- 2025 Biennial Report
  - The final draft of the Biennial Report was submitted to the Work Group prior to this meeting and was presented for approval. The report was approved and submitted.
- Ten-Year Report
  - Preliminary data analysis on the upcoming Ten-Year Report, due December, was conducted and presented to the Work Group. In advance of a draft report, an excel table was presented detailing which goals and benchmarks were met, not meant, lacking information,

and needing adaptive management. The group reviewed each benchmark and proposed the following changes:

- Benchmark 4.1: 75% was cited as an arbitrary metric for determining the success of riparian implementation. The group moved to adaptively manage this benchmark to remove the numerical threshold and keep language consistent with other benchmarks.
- Benchmark 15.2: The group was impressed that 41% of all San Juan County farm acres have received an ISP at some point and recommended including this in more program and District materials.
- Benchmarks 1.2, 3.2, 5.2, 7.2, and 9.2: Each of these benchmarks pertains to the use of HRCD analysis:
  - The group recommended better contextualizing the data in terms of total area analyzed. In the report, change acres per year will be reported as a percentage of the total acreage of each agricultural critical area.
  - The group discussed the statistical significance of small areas of change and moved to adaptively manage these benchmarks to allow for a loss of less than one percentage point to still meet protection standards.
  - The group discussed if the wording of the benchmarks as written allows for restoration efforts to be compared alongside HRCD to demonstrate losses in canopy cover and gains in semi/impervious surfaces offset by gains in BMPs implemented. This will be revisited once data has been further analyzed.
- Benchmarks 3.3, 3.4, 4.2, and 4.3: Each of these benchmarks pertains to the use of SVAP analyses:
  - It was suggested that given the imprecision of the score across multiple possible technicians to focus on qualitative rather than quantitative scores over time.
- Benchmarks 13.1, 13.2, 13.3, 14.1, and 14.2: Each of these benchmarks pertains to frequently flooded areas:
  - The group suggested that not all critical areas are required to be treated the same. Given the lack of County maps delineating frequently flooded areas beyond flood hazard areas (often shoreline), the possibility of removing these goals and benchmarks was proposed. Many wetlands encompass frequently flooded areas in the County, and there is a possibility they could be treated as one critical area. More discussion is needed.
- Benchmarks 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 8.1, and 8.2: Each of these benchmarks pertains to geologically hazardous areas:
  - These areas are currently mapped using just class 'e' soils; however, the group agreed to expand the definition to include unstable bluffs, coastal zones, and slopes over 15% in areas other than stream banks.
- Other comments:

- The group recommended including case studies (i.e. West Sound watershed) to showcase enhancement where the data does not yet capture enhancements to critical area functions and values.
- Field assessments protocols were noted to need an update in the Monitoring Plan. One proposed change was to conduct assessments on any site before restoration occurs.
- A special meeting was proposed for mid-October to further refine the report.

#### **4. Project Approvals**

- Funding Update
  - No projects were selected to be funded for San Juan County in August's first VSP Capital funding round. Funding for projects has been increasingly competitive this biennium, and it may be necessary to use the District's internal ranking system to determine which projects move forward for submission.
- New Project Approval Requests
  - Sun Beach Road Farm – Water Catchment
    - This project was approved, though Vicki expressed a concern that these types of practices promote irrigating in areas with low ground-water availability, when best practices might suggest not irrigating at all in these areas.

#### **5. Other**

- Training Update
  - Walt and Pauline from SJICD attended a cultural resources training in Spokane, allowing them to receive NRCS Certified Planner designation.