



San Juan County Voluntary Stewardship Program

Quarterly Work Group Meeting

Meeting Notes

Tuesday, September 10th, 2024

Attendees: Pauline Chiquet, Faith Van De Putte, Tyler Davis, Morgan Krueger, Paul Andersson

1. Work Plan Progress Report

Two farm plans were completed so far this quarter, including a newly developed carbon farm plan on San Juan Island. Several other plans are in process across the islands and will address farms with livestock, vegetables, and other crops.

Monitoring activities have occurred as usual for each of these farms. Monitoring for streams and wetlands will commence again, per the Monitoring Plan, and once the rains have returned.

2. Monitoring Plan and Adaptive Management Plan Follow-Up Discussion

The group discussed next steps for these two documents and processes.

- Water Quantity:

Water quantity was cited as an area of need for future adaptive management. Gaps in available water quantity data have made monitoring in the county difficult in the past.

USGS will be releasing a survey that analyzes recharge to inform water availability. This survey is part of larger Puget Sound efforts to understand groundwater aquifers. The Work Group will continue to follow the progress of the study to may inform future adaptive management.

- Agricultural Viability:

The group discussed the framework of agricultural viability as one of the major areas of focus for the next round of adaptive management. Much work went into developing the original agricultural viability tables in the Work Plan (2018) and subsequent Adaptive Management Plan (2021); however, the group is looking to revise these elements once again.

At the heart of the discussion, the group questioned the use of the Agricultural Viability Survey to answer questions surrounding agricultural viability. The group pointed out several pitfalls of the survey: 1) the unreliability of sample size, 2) an inability of survey to answer all of the goals cited in the Work Plan, 3) a significant overlap of the survey with the national census, and 4) a cumbersome process requiring significant time and money for analysis.

The group recommended exploring alternatives to the current survey, focusing on leveraging existing resources across the county. Various groups are already working closely on agricultural viability: Agricultural Resources Committee, Ag Listening Sessions, and Ag Org Retreats. These groups could be tapped for further assistance.

In addition to the existing groups, one alternative mentioned was a focus on qualitative data gathering to complement the already existing quantitative Agriculture Census. It was suggested that focus group of farmers could be assembled yearly to look at the question of agricultural viability and provide a report based on collected narratives of farmers across the county.

Faith pointed to the American Farmland Trust as a model of an organization in process of developing metrics for measuring agricultural viability. While their model draws from farms across the country, the system may be adaptable and relevant for the islands as well.

Other proposed alternatives involve looking at the gaps of data not available through the Ag Census and developing alternative means of tracking metrics to answer questions surrounding goals and benchmarks. Faith recommended working with the Orcas Food Co-op to track the percentage of food locally produced and purchased on the islands, for example.

Action Items: Faith and Pauline to meet to develop a rubric of data available and unavailable through the Ag Census. Faith and Pauline to rework the original ag viability table in the Work Plan to recategorize the goals as related to ag viability.

- Initial Feedback from WDFW:

Shortly before the submission of the Monitoring Plan, WDFW met with the Conservation District to offer several pieces of feedback relating to the plans. Much of this feedback is being considered for incorporation.

Morgan mentioned a table in development and almost finalized that will incorporate biologist recommendations for individual species specifically found in the San Juan Islands. This table will help the San Juan County VSP Work Group to further define Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas by narrowing areas of focus and providing further resources to assist planners in identifying these critical areas.

Morgan mentioned the possibility of inviting Kurt License, the WDFW biologist in charge of developing this tool, to the next meeting to present on this topic.

The group also discussed “no net loss” language and the difficulty of addressing this goal fully. Pauline mentioned that the Conservation District historically worked with Rick Mraz from the Department of Ecology to develop language to account for ongoing, and unavoidable, losses, by looking at the rate of loss over time instead of the amount of total loss.

In response to WDFW feedback that the Work Group include mitigation strategies to show the offset of losses, Pauline also mentioned that Conservation District conducted an initial essay using HRCD data looking at both total losses as compared to BMPs installed and rate of change compared to rates of BMPs installed. Planners found that acres of BMP installed surpassed acres of canopy cover loss and impervious/semi-impervious surface gain from 2011-present, and that rates of BMPs installed were higher than rates of canopy cover loss and impervious/semi-impervious surface gain over the same period of time in wetlands and riparian areas, leading the Conservation District to conclude that mitigation is indeed offsetting losses. Morgan mentioned citing this finding in the Monitoring/Adaptive Management Plan.

Action Items: As the Work Group continues to incorporate feedback from various agencies, Pauline will add a column to the feedback received with the responses from the Work Group.

Pauline and Morgan to coordinate on inviting Kurt License to the next Work Group meeting.

3. Membership Updates

Several members of the Work Group have shifted roles. Jessa Madosky and Grant Carlton are no longer with the county and have stepped down from their roles as VSP Work Group members. Roger Bairstow will likewise step down from the group. The three vacancies left behind by these members will be open for additional community members to fill.

Tyler will take over Grant's role as VSP liaison at the county. The Conservation District will meet with Tyler to coordinate on tasks such as finance and contracting.

Department of Community Development representation has been critical in the past success of the program. Future DCD representation will be sought for this work group.