

Columbia County Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Group Meeting Minutes

April 8, 2021 ~ Columbia Conservation District/Zoom

I. Call to Order

Work Group Member Roland Schirman called to order the second quarter 2021 meeting of the Columbia County VSP Work Group at 5:02 p.m. on April 8, 2021. Schirman facilitated the meeting as former Chair Marty Hall has been sworn in as Columbia County Commissioner and will attend in an advisory/informational capacity for future meetings. The meeting was held at the Columbia Conservation District boardroom and was available via the Zoom meeting platform due to COVID 19 meeting restrictions.

II. Attendance

In-person attendance: Roland Schirman, Joy Eckhoff, Terry Brugeman, Tom Schirm (WDFW), Nicholas DePaulo (Conservation District Staff), Tracy Hanger (USDA-NRCS), Marty Hall (Commissioner), Levi Keesecker (State Conservation Commission), Aneesha Dieu (Conservation District Staff) Dena Martin (County Planning Staff)

III. Approval of Minutes

Eckhoff moved to approve the minutes of the January 19, 2021 meeting; Bruegman seconded. All approved.

Due to the lack of voting members in attendance Schirman requested to stray from the agenda order to accommodate the limited availability of Bruegman and address action items with a quorum present.

IV. Implementation Action Items

• VSP 2019-05 Amendment:

- Staff had not realized that a \$50,000 annual cap applied to VSP funded cost share projects when the Peyton spring development/watering station project was approved by the work group at a cost of nearly \$94,000. Dieu has worked with the landowner to split the project into two parts – one for watering facilities and one for spring development. The watering facility portion will take place this funding cycle as the landowner has found the appropriate cisterns that are currently available. The spring development portion of the project will be submitted in a separate application in the 2021-2023 biennium.
- *Eckhoff motioned to amend VSP 2019-05 to reflect only the watering station project, at a budgeted cost of up to \$50,000 in the current biennium, and delay the watering station portion of the project until the upcoming biennium. Bruegman seconded. All approved.*

• VSP 2020-01 Fletcher Reduced Till:

- Dieu introduced a proposed reduced till project that will reduce water, nutrient and soil runoff, resulting in cleaner surface water. The practice also improves water, soil and air quality. Dieu said the

producer will contract out direct seed application to determine if the practice is successful on the 202 project acres. If so, the landowner will consider purchasing his own equipment to use in future plantings in this and additional acreage.

- The work group discussed the project, including cost-per-acre and potential benefits. Following discussion the work group agreed that if the trial run brought another producer on board with the practice, it was worth the investment.
- *Bruegman motioned to approve the project as discussed. Eckhoff seconded. All approved.*

V. Adaptive Management

Martin requested that the work group approve the hire of a consultant to aid with updating the existing work plan to reflect adaptive management amendments. The SCC allows for outright hire of a service provider for projects under \$10,000. As there are only eleven weeks until the end of the funding cycle, staff proposed soliciting Ben Floyd, who is extremely familiar with the area and has worked on multiple county VSP plans. Unused funds would be moved from the Cost-share portion of the budget to the Adaptive Management and Monitoring line items.

- *Bruegman moved to approve the transfer of budget funds and the recruitment of a consultant to craft adaptive management as discussed. Eckhoff seconded. All approved.*

Following the close of all action items, Bruegman left the meeting, which was officially closed at 5:29 p.m.. Attendees remained to discuss additional non-action items of relevancy.

VI. Updates from State VSP

- Staff asked about sending additional information to the tech panel prior to the June public meeting. Keesecker indicated that supplementary material tended to add confusion and that a letter of explanation at the meeting is the best approach. He said that the work group should not stress too much as all counties have been in the same position.
- Keesecker indicated approval of plans to update goals and benchmarks, linking them to critical areas and watersheds and shifting money from cost-share to adaptive management.
- Staff asked if there was a due date for the adaptive management updates. Keesecker said that, if it was agreed that the County was on-target to meet goals, then the six-month adaptive management plan timeline will not apply.
- Staff asked about pairing state and federal dollars for use in VSP projects and Keesecker commented that leveraging of such relationships was encouraged. Hanger noted that her agency has paired with counties on VSP projects as well.
- Keesecker indicated willingness to work with an adaptive management committee on updated monitoring methods.

VII. Implementation Progress

Conservation District Manager Aneesha Dieu provided an update on current cost-share projects.

- Phase one of the Bret Touchette Reforestation Project (VSP 2019-03) has been completed and final steps are being taken prior to submitting for cost-share reimbursement.
- Other approved projects are in-process and should be finished up prior to the June 30 deadline.
- The Hutchens nutrient management initial test results are back. Final results are not anticipated for two years.
- Dieu mentioned a possible new project where erosion caused a pump site to fall into the river. She will review to see if it is a good fit for VSP.

VIII. County Updates

- **Quarterly report:** The second-quarter report was submitted to the state and was made available for work group review.
- **Work group membership:**
 - Martin sent out emails and postcards to former work group members, asking for a return to active participation.
 - Rick Turner and Skip Mead have indicated that they will return to active work group membership.
 - A press release was submitted to the Waitsburg Times and the Dayton Chronicle, and was printed in The Times.

IX. Adaptive Management

- Martin, Dieu, Turner and Eckhoff will get together for a half-day work session to nail down key points to address with adaptive management. Martin will send out a Doodle Poll to gauge availability in the next week or two.
- Schirm reiterated Keesckker's comments not to stress and that many counties were in the same predicament over frustration with the reporting method and trying to determine how to best adapt to it.

X. Next Meeting

No meeting date was set. A meeting will need to be held in May or early June to approve adaptive management and a letter to be drafted to be read at the tech panel public meeting in June. .

XI. Adjournment

The informal portion of the meeting was closed at 5:11 p.m.