

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 17, 2017

TO: Benton County Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Work Group

FROM: Lisa Grueter, Principal, BERK Consulting

RE: Materials for January 23, 2017 Work Group Meeting

The January 2017 Meeting will continue with Work Group review of early draft Work Plan Chapters. We anticipate in February we will bring back prior chapters reviewed in fall 2016 plus the ones review in January 2017 with changes per the Work Group direction.

Attached are the following chapters and appendices for Work Group review in January 2017 with some discussion questions:

- Chapter 7. Measurable Benchmarks: This chapter is provided in two parts. First, in Section 7.1 goals and benchmarks regarding critical area protection and enhancement are provided together with related agricultural viability aims. Second, participation goals and benchmarks are provided in Section 7.2. The documents build on the Work Group’s past discussions of broad goals (see PDF with track changes) and provides more specific language in draft goals and benchmarks.
 - Questions: Do the Chapter 7 draft goals and benchmarks reflect Work Group intent now that you see the more specific language that could be part of the Work Plan? What changes or clarifications would you make? Should any vary by basin or location?
- Chapter 8. Monitoring and Appendices: This chapter describes a three part implementation process.
 - First, producers and technical providers would develop stewardship plans to help achieve goals and benchmarks. The VSP law indicates the Work Plan should be implemented by individual stewardship plans by producers. The law does not describe what the stewardship plan looks like, and there is some flexibility. Some stakeholders such as the Farm Bureau have suggested a checklist would be most efficient and effective as a stewardship plan format. We have developed a draft checklist that considers the conservation practices that have been implemented by Benton Conservation District, NRCS, and individual producers over time (see Chapter 3 of the Draft Work Plan). The menu of potentially relevant practices is listed by broad category of water efficiencies, habitat, and soil conservation, and linked to a NRCS practice code. This would allow technical providers and producers a short hand to the NRCS specifications for that practice; the specifications help identify to the Washington Technical Panel vetted activities that promote conservation and critical area protection. There are columns for the relationship of conservation practices to other voluntary and market-based programs such as Global GAP and Salmon Safe; the idea is to show producers that they can “kill two birds with one stone” by participating in VSP and other programs.
 - Questions: Does the Work Group like the idea of a checklist to address the VSP law requirement for a stewardship plan? Do you have suggestions on the checklist menu of

conservation practices? Do you have suggestions on linking the VSP checklist to other programs like Global GAP? What do you think would make it a more useful tool?

- Second, the results of the checklists plus other voluntary enhancement efforts on agricultural land would be input into a tracking tool by technical providers and the results provided annually to the Work Group to help monitor results ahead of required reporting that follows the Work Plan adoption (see Chapter 9). We will prepare this tracking tool after getting feedback on the goals and benchmarks, checklist and matrix (below) from the Work Group.
- Third, an adaptive management matrix would identify monitoring strategies and responsibilities to help ensure goals and benchmarks are implemented as well as what actions would be taken if goals and benchmarks are not achieved. This helps fulfill a requirement under the VSP law to “Conduct periodic evaluations, institute adaptive management, and provide a written report of the status of plans and accomplishments...” Though we realize that the goals and benchmarks are still under review, we thought it helpful to prepare the first draft of the adaptive management matrix. It can prompt thinking on the wording of the goals and benchmarks due to potential level of monitoring effort and responsibilities.
 - Questions: Do you have thoughts on implementation strategies or responsibilities that would improve the VSP Work Plan?
- Chapter 9. Plan Approval Process and Timeline: This Chapter provides an overview of the key dates in the Work Program approval and implementation process.
- Chapter 10. Definitions: This includes key definitions based on the law and the Work Group discussion (e.g. Agricultural Viability).