

BENTON COUNTY VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Portion of Chapter 7 Participation Objectives | March 2017

This is a subsection of Chapter 7 and follows the critical area protection and associated agricultural viability objectives under separate cover. It has been edited since January 2017 based on workgroup comments.

7.0 GOALS, BENCHMARKS, AND PERFORMANCE METRICS

7.2 Participation Objectives

Participation and stewardship goals and benchmarks are to be identified in the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Work Plan.

RCW 36.70A.720 Watershed group's duties - Work plan - Conditional priority funding.

(1) A watershed group designated by a county under RCW 36.70A.715 must develop a work plan to protect critical areas while maintaining the viability of agriculture in the watershed. The work plan must include goals and benchmarks for the protection and enhancement of critical areas. In developing and implementing the work plan, the watershed group must:

(c) Develop goals for participation by agricultural operators conducting commercial and noncommercial agricultural activities in the watershed necessary to meet the protection and enhancement benchmarks of the work plan;

Farmers and ranchers directly participate in VSP by implementing conservation projects on their properties, often with the help of participating technical providers.

Examples of such activities include the creation of individual stewardship plans and implementation of conservation practices such as irrigation efficiencies, grazing management, and others. See Appendix X for a checklist that could [lead to the development of serve as](#) an individual stewardship plan.

Indirect participation of agricultural producers in stewardship activities consists of many of the standard industry practices identified in Chapter 3, Agricultural Context, that are implemented on the initiative of a producer without the use of a federal, state, or non-profit incentive program. Examples of standard practices that have protective or beneficial impacts to critical areas [to those are](#) identified in Appendix X Checklist. Because many practices are installed without participation in a particular program, but they have the effect of protecting or enhancing critical areas, the presence of the practices should be tracked and monitored.

Communication Steps

[The VSP will be implemented through the voluntary participation of private agricultural producers. To entice these producers to participate, it is anticipated that the Benton Conservation District will contact each producer with information on VSP. The message will include what VSP is, how it could benefit the producer, and how to participate. Potential communication steps with producers are outlined below.](#)

Exhibit 1. Participation, Checklists, and Interface with Technical Providers

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Details</u>
<u>Step 1: Using the VSP Work Plan priorities and benchmarks, and information on producers in areas of critical area intersect, identify producers who may be interested in VSP</u>	<p><u>Agricultural owners in areas of critical area intersect are estimated in Exhibit 2.</u></p> <p><u>Once the Work Group has developed its goals and benchmarks in Section 7.2, priorities for contact and participation can be established.</u></p>
<u>Step 2: Invite producers to participate</u>	<u>The Conservation District could send a letter to agricultural producers, introducing them to VSP and inviting them to participate. See Outreach Plan Appendices for a draft letter</u>
<u>Step 3: Producer fills out the short checklist</u>	<p><u>Prior to interfacing with the Conservation District, the District could provide a flyer and a short form to the producer to get some information ahead of a walk through.</u></p> <p><u>And/or the short-form could serve as a self-certification form for larger producers where there are more staff resources and less need to interface with technical providers.</u></p>
<u>Step 4: Producer meets with Technical Service Provider</u>	<u>Technical providers fill in long form based on a one-on-one discussion with the producer.</u>

Agricultural Producers in Areas of Intersect

Based on a review of 2012 Benton County assessor data regarding agricultural parcels intersecting critical areas in Benton County, the total number of unique names is 4,484. The total may overstate owners since some parcel records appear to be the same persons but may have additional middle names, etc. that cause them to be unique inadvertently. This information is a starting point to understanding the potential largest pool of potential VSP participants.

Exhibit 2. Agricultural Owners in Areas of Critical Areas Intersect

<u>Watershed</u>	<u>Irrigated</u>	<u>Drylands</u>	<u>Rangelands</u>	<u>Numeric Total of Agricultural Types</u>	<u>Total Unique Parcels</u>
<u>Alkali - Squilchuck</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Lower Yakima</u>	<u>2,488</u>	<u>750</u>	<u>302</u>	<u>3,540</u>	<u>3,087</u>
<u>Rock - Glade</u>	<u>1,140</u>	<u>285</u>	<u>148</u>	<u>1,573</u>	<u>1,393</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>3,632</u>	<u>1,036</u>	<u>454</u>	<u>5,122</u>	<u>4,484</u>

Source: Benton County Assessor 2016, The Watershed Company, 2017, BERK Consulting 2017

Participation Goal

Promote volunteerism and stewardship of agricultural land and critical areas.

Participation Benchmarks

- A. Sufficient participation by commercial and non-commercial agricultural operators that achieves the protection of critical area functions and values across WRIA basins.
- B. ~~Passive-Indirect~~ participation by commercial and non-commercial agricultural operators in VSP conservation practices is maintained or increased over 10 years on agricultural land.

Measurement

1. Indicators of ~~active-direct~~ participation include:
 - ~~• Number of outreach events~~
 - ~~• Number/percentage of landowners contacted~~
 - ~~• Number of event attendees~~
 - ~~• Number of VSP participation signs and marketing materials distributed~~
 - ~~• Education opportunities provided~~
 - Technical assistance sought by producers (as tracked through meetings, calls, applications, and contracts with technical assistance providers)
 - Number of farms, acres, conservation practices, etc. implemented.
 - Number of applications submitted for conservation practice assistance (technical or financial).
 - ~~Self-certification~~Checklists completed: See Appendix X for a checklist.
2. ~~Passive-Indirect~~ participation in common stewardship practices may be tracked and reported using one or more methods:
 - Mapping and aerial photo evaluation with on-the-ground verification, as needed, of practices in place, and
 - Random sampling of farmers and ranchers in the field by technical assistance providers with willing landowners, or
 - Phone, mail, or online surveys, or
 - Census of agriculture or other broadly gathered and published information (only available periodically).