



Skagit Voluntary Stewardship Program

Work Group Meeting Minutes

Monday, March 9, 2026

8:00-10:00 am

Welcome

Attendance: Shannon Rupert, Maggie Taylor, Terry Sapp, Bill Dewey, Brian Lipscomb, Emmett Wild, Jenn Johnson, Emily Derenne, Taylor Scott, Ryan Gelwicks (SCD)

Agenda & Meeting Minutes

March Agenda

- ✓ Motion to approve as presented: Bill
- ✓ Second: Emmett
 - Discussion: None
 - Yea: 6
 - Nay: 0
 - Abstain: 0
- ✓ Motion passed

General VSP

VSP funding guidelines roundtable 3/9 (today!)

- Taylor has reached out to the CD for some topics of discussion, one of those being the “tribal partnership” column, which almost all projects statewide scored a 0. From the state (email from after the meeting): *“Tribal partnership is any project that has been developed with, sanctioned by, or identified as an important specific project or sub-basin to a Tribal partner. This may include Tribal participation in your work group and the project approval process via that route, or it may include documentation from the Tribal partner that a specific project has their explicit support in the form of a document or study they have authored, OR as you suggest, a letter from the Tribe supporting the project itself.”* Taylor has met with other VSP Counties, and it sounds like many will be bringing their thoughts to the meeting. She will give an update in May of what was discussed.
 - The WG is interested to see what projects were funded since many seem to be irrigation projects.
 - Emmett: The CD funded a pivot irrigation system and the landowner reported they are only using 25% of the water from previous years along with better yields and soil moisture.
 - Skagit VSP work plan does not focus on irrigation, but rather FWHCA.

- The WG acknowledges the importance of tribal partnership and is interested in understanding the level of support the SCC is seeking, but to also address that two criteria ask for tribal partnership/support.
- Maggie: EZ-1 form alerts the tribes but does not receive their support. Maybe there is a possibility of agreeing on certain sub basins as a high priority
- The next funding round is April 18th, and Taylor will ask for letters of support.

Statewide Advisory Committee 6/3

- Taylor and Jenn will attend to present the 10-year report.

New Membership

The WG reviewed 4 applications. It was noted there was a minimal amount of information required to apply and one applicant did not submit a resume so members that did not have a previous relationship were not able to review this person.

- Terry Sap endorsed Jason VanderKooy. He has worked with him in the past and is an established dairyman in the valley.
- Emmett endorsed Larry Iaccino. The CD and NRSP are currently working with him, so he understands government programs, the goals of VSP and even hosted the Tech Panel visit in June. Emily agreed he has been great to work with.
- Shannon endorsed Loren Fuell since the environmental interest and educational background would fit well with the VSP. Taylor noted Loren Fuell was recommended by the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group.
- One applicant had no relevant experience so there was no discussion.
- ✓ Motion to recommend Jason VanderKooy, Larry Iaccino and Loren Fuell to the Board of County Commissioners where preference be VanderKooy and the BoCC to fill the 2nd open seat: Bill
- ✓ Second: Shannon
 - Discussion: The Group wanted to confirm that Iaccino will be able to continue working on his property, since he used the CD and VSP to plant a riparian management zone. Emily confirmed that he will not be pursuing anymore VSP funds.
 - Yea: 6
 - Nay: 0
 - Abstain: 0
- ✓ Motion passed

Project Review

Benson Scope Change

This project was heavily affected by the floods. The riparian forest buffer, fence, and pasture are destroyed. NRSP/County is asking for a scope change to dig the remaining plants from the sand and remove the fence pieces; t-posts, wire, large wooden posts. The WSCC has ok'd a BMP change to Obstruction Removal.

- Taylor shared after photos, budget, and her experience from the 2019 floods when she dug saplings out from under the sand at the adjacent property, those trees are now over 7 feet tall
- Terry shared that it was not a surprise that the flood would have this impact and that the landowner would cease to farm. He has personally watched this farm flood 15 times in his life. Questioned why the WG funded the project in the first place. Now he questions the object of the re-scope. Is it to preserve land or help her to get back into farming?
 - Emily spoke to the fact this project was catered to when the landowner was seeking assistance for water access for the cattle. Now that the cattle are gone, the change in scope is to remove any VSP funded items and essentially “clean up,” not to create a viable pasture. The landowner is seeking disaster funds for that.
 - Emmet clarified that Skagit only got 65k for disaster response and this project would not compete well when compared to other damage.
- Shannon pointed out this is the project with the waterers and now the resource concern is gone.
 - Taylor has asked the WSCC and the waterers are a County asset.
- Some questioned why we would remove the debris, just leave them there.
 - Emily specified NRSP is only interested in removing fence material, not clearing the field for future farming.
- WG asked Emily to double check a private contractor could save money
- All discussed how the flood fence performed and why it cost so much. It seems the fence did break away in pieces as it was built to. WG suggested that some monitoring take place of how close a fence like this can be placed on the waterbody, seems 75 feet was too close.
 - Emily reminded the group that if we didn't get a flood in 2025 the project could have protected water quality for many years
- Shannon shared she is in for spending time to uncover the trees and pick up the materials, but there was a lesson learned in this kind of project.

Maggie agreed, specifically we don't want 200ft of wire going down river.

- ✓ Motion to approve as presented: Bill
- ✓ Second: Shannon
 - Discussion: None
 - Yea: 5
 - Nay: 0
 - Abstain: Brian
- ✓ Motion passed

New Hedgerow Project

The Conservation Commission announced there will be another funding round, this will give our Butler Creek project another chance to compete and allow us to allocate that money somewhere else. Ryan,

SCD Farm Planner quickly prepare the application materials for your approval. This project is in the VSP Samish Watershed near Edison Slough. This is an Ag-NRL parcel owned by landowner who was farming at Viva. The project will install over 200 native trees and shrubs that will act as a windbreak, reduce any erosion and provide habitat for surrounding pollinators.

- Shannon asked what type of trees and shrubs would be planted.
 - Ryan shared that this project will not be planted until fall, plant availability varies, but some options would be shore pine and dogwood.
- Shannon asked why the landowner is not planting a harvestable buffer?
 - Ryan answered that they are organic and would not be able to do that
- Shannon disagreed with calling the project a pollinator hedgerow since there will be pine, which is not pollinator forward
 - Ryan said he was not opposed to Shannon's idea and would be open to sharing a plant list
 - Shannon shared that it is not an idea, it's good science and it's frustrating to spend money on a project where they said they cannot get organic hazelnuts and elderberry
 - Emmett clarified that they could get organic plants, but the farm cannot have organic standing since they cannot control what their neighbors are doing adjacent. Ex spray herbicides
 - Shannon says there is a huge demand for elderberry
 - Taylor confirmed with Ryan that the landowner is not interested in a harvestable hedgerow.
- Shannon discussed the soil needs for pine trees, and the project has not been thought through enough to be viable.
 - Emmett spoke on planner needs and that VSP does not pay sponsors to go through this application process
- Taylor asked if she could now go through how the project scored in the VSP ranking sheet
 - The project scored 20 points
- Shannon says she understands the scoring process but there is a flaw. She can recommend plants but that is not her job and would like to have a commitment from the CD to have the plants "make sense"
 - Emily asked for clarification on what that meant
 - Shannon says it needs to be a commitment to either being a pollinator, windbreak, forest farm, hedgerow.
 - Taylor showed the NRCS BMP has multiple purposes.
 - Shannon explained that there are scientifically different types of hedgerows and the CD should pick one purpose and that the two species mentioned must be easy to get, and that it is bad planning to select species based on availability
- Taylor shared that the NRCS document is the scientific document the CD must follow and Ryan plays a crucial role in working with the landowner and the document to meet somewhere in the middle to formulate a project and get trees in the ground. Plant availability is something every planner must deal with, and Ryan specifically budgeted for potted plants (which are more expensive) just in case he can't find the bare roots.

- Brian asked if we could remove the word pollinator?
 - Ryan and Taylor said yes
- Brian asked if there is any connectivity directly to Edison slough?
 - Ryan and Bill said it seems that the property drains to the north and out to the bay.
- Benefits were discussed, shade being one of them, especially with tall trees.
- Shannon reiterated it's a good project, other than the specific plants going in
 - Bill appreciates her comments and her knowledge as a scientist and Ryan will work with the landowner to take her comments into consideration.
- ✓ Motion to approve as presented: Brian
- ✓ Second: Bill
 - Discussion: None
 - Yea: 4
 - Nay: Shannon
 - Abstain: Emmett
- ✓ Motion passed

–

Open Discussion

- The 10-year report will be reviewed for pass/fail in August.
 - Either way, we will open the work plan for adaptive management. There are some items that need to be updated, like dates.
 - This means May and July might be light meetings.
- Clarification on new members?
 - Jenn: We will draft a resolution and route it to the Board. Hopefully the new members will be able to attend the next meeting
- Terry shared some information about the FIR licensing agreement
- Terry requested Taylor attend the Agriculture Advisory Board meeting

Adjourn

Next Work Group meeting May 11th, 2026.