



Skagit Voluntary Stewardship Program

Work Group Meeting Minutes

Monday, July 13, 2026

8:00-10:00 am

Welcome

Attendance: Shannon Rupert, Maggie Taylor, Terry Sapp, Brian Lipscomb, Emmett Wild, Loren Fuell, Larry Iaccino, Jeff McGowan, Taylor Scott, Jenn Johnson

Agenda & Meeting Minutes

May Minutes

- ✓ Motion to approve as presented: Larry
- ✓ Second: Brian
 - Discussion: None
 - Yea: 8
 - Nay: 0
 - Abstain: 0
- ✓ Motion passed

July Agenda

- ✓ Motion to approve as presented: Emmett
- ✓ Second: Brian
 - Discussion: None
 - Yea: 8
 - Nay: 0
 - Abstain: 0
- ✓ Motion passed

General VSP

Updates

Taylor attended the Agricultural Advisory Committee meeting. Attendees were excited about VSP and the importance for farmers. They let Taylor know of some potential monitoring sources and ideas.

The Work Group briefly looked at the survey results. Noted the low return rate. Outreach avenues included post card, letter, social media, and newsletter.

- The goal of the survey was to get information about what landowners are doing if they are not a part of a formal program.

- Taylor will continue to promote the survey and when we have enough results we can take a look and figure out how to report on this as there will be caveats.
- Emmett received a survey from WSU, which got a 17% return rate. They sent a postcard, and then a letter with a QR code and medium sized survey. There was a raffle gift card for people who participated.
 - Unsure if we can use government funds this way
 - Possibility of donation?
- Larry noted that if we already received this much information with only 20 responses, there is probably so much going on in the watershed without us knowing!
- The WG talked about who received the mailers and why it was only Ag-NRL and RRc-NRL since there is more going on throughout the County and that the health of critical areas are still important whether or not its agriculture.
 - Loren lives on Rural Reserve, not farming, but stewarding the critical area.
 - Taylor reiterated that VSP is supposed to focus on how agriculture affects critical areas and there will be a lot of improvements from non-farming that we wont capture.

5-year report [video](#)

- Loren: (Per Brians comment) The whole idea of integrated pest management is to consider biological, organic and cultural control, and not just chemical controls. Chemical controls are the ones that he sees most drastically, potentially impacting water quality and therefore he is perhaps pushing us to include more outreach on those.
 - Can use WSDA Pesticide monitoring as a baseline
 - Would need to confirm its coming from agriculture activities
 - The WG noted how monitoring will require more funding than before
- Larry noticed on his own property since the discontinuation of herbicides the number of amphibians and other species has increased. So, there are more opportunities than just water quality sampling and is important to get landowner buy in.

“What is VSP”

The Work Group worked through an exercise reviewing possible projects and whether that would be applicable for VSP funding. There were no motions.

- Landowner A lives on a tributary to the Samish, they want to plant 3 acres of riparian area, its zoned Ag-NRL, but they currently aren’t farming.

Discussion:

- This is not ongoing agriculture
- Shannon brought up that we have had projects come to the Work Group with no ongoing ag and there was a bit of discontent on how to move forward and likes the idea of a clear-cut answer for the future.

- Are we trying to gatekeep?
 - No, going forward the WG needs to be able to distinguish what projects help VSP reach its goals, and ongoing agricultural is a major component of VSP.

Landowner B lives near a wetland in the Middle Skagit, they have goats, pigs, and chickens and want to install a heavy use area, its zoned RRc-NRL.

Discussion:

- Wetlands are protected by the Skagit Critical Area Ordinance
- How close would the HUA be to the wetland is important for the Work Group to know
- Jenn noted that most agricultural producers think they are exempt from CAO because of the farming.

Landowner C lives on an Ag-NRL parcel with ditches on all sides, they grow corn and want to plant a 30ft buffer zone.

Discussion:

- Work Plan exempts “artificial watercourses”
- Group agreed they would need more information on the connectivity of the ditches and the distance from a salmon bearing stream in order to decide.
- Shannon said the Work Plan language is a old fashioned way of thinking and might need to be updated.

Landowner D lives on a fish bearing stream in the Nookachamps and is interested in riparian restoration, they have cows, its zoned Rural Reserve.

Discussion:

- Work Plan states we cannot count Rural Reserve towards enhancements
- Shannon thinks we might reconsider this requirement since most of the parcels in the upper valley are RR.
- Loren offered an idea of where the projects meet x of out 4 requirements then using this a prioritization tool.
 - Taylor thinks this would be nice because the Work Group would still get to see the project and use their best judgement with metrics like distance to the CA, zoning, etc.
- Emmett wanted to remind the WG that they do not make any funding decisions, you get to recommend then the state decides yes or no. We want to provide support to people in the community who are volunteering to do stewardship. He also noted that we did not rank well at the state level
 - Taylor followed up that when her and Emily took the time to fill out the application in round 4, they ranked 1st.
- Loren shared that they have gotten outreach materials and sometimes think “oh I don’t fit into this program,” and move on. So VSP needs to remain accessible to people.

- Taylor stated that some agencies are hoping for mandatory buffers on those agricultural parcels, that is why its so important we engage those land designations to essentially show that ongoing agricultural is not having a negative effect on our critical areas. If we start to count other parcels with no agricultural, our data is skewed.

Jeff: Any updates on the Watershed Council?

- Jenn: They want us to fund the ask
- Taylor went ahead and reached out to Ecology and RCO for data (that was available online) in excel tables to upload into GIS. This will allow us to report acres by watershed, but there are only points, not shapefiles, and getting more project information will take a lot of staff time.
- The WG would still like to work with SWC.

Report Update

GIS Layers & Monitoring

Taylor showed the critical areas web map she created in GIS. To monitor these areas, the first step was distinguishing the locations of them. Layers and owners as follow; FFA (FEMA), GHA (DNR), CARA (USGS), Wetlands (NWI), and FWHCA (DNR).

Discussion:

- All layers are outdated
 - The FEMA and NWI layers in particular
- Are we able to map the current projects
 - Yes, in another table Taylor has pulled data from Ecology and PRISM to map project points.
- Why does the FWHCA eliminate ditches?
 - Page 31 in Skagit [Work Plan](#) calls for artificial watercourses to be exempt.

Larry shared that it would be better to have the technical providers do the monitoring vs asking landowners to do so.

Taylor touched on a study done by [KCD about manure storage](#). Something like this could be beneficial, but how do we do it?

- Possibly link to CARA and nitrates
- Also beneficial to hear how farmers are applying manure and when because this changes with each season, this is an outreach opportunity as well
 - Larry says it all comes back to practice, the farmer. What are they doing on their land.
 - Landowner highlights is something Taylor thought would be good for the two year report in Aug 2027.

Taylor talked about the possibility of using layers like the channel migration zone to prioritize or think about projects

- Larry said that USDA will actually not fund a project within the CMZ as the potential to be destroyed is higher.
- There is opportunity to use the CMZ as a tool to expand the RMZ we are focused on, since that channel could move closer to adjacent parcels in the future.

How is farmland loss tracked? Like the property lost at Benson.

- Taylor used the USDA ag census, but the HRCD data shows all types of loss.

Maggie: We could prioritize different project types for each watershed, since the ideal project changes in each basin. This could help in our outreach if we knew what types of projects and where would be most beneficial

The Work Group agreed with the idea of bringing in professionals, guest speakers, to help us answer these questions. To get their perspective in terms of the wording for our Work Plan/Monitoring Plan, how they interpret it and then use that to help us, you know, make sure that we're stating things the best that we can to accomplish the goals.

Open Discussion

None

Adjourn

Next Work Group meeting September 14th, 2026.