



VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

FACT SHEET FOR CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (Oct. 2015)

This fact sheet is designed to help conservation districts in counties that have opted into the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) determine what role(s) you want to play in the program.

BACKGROUND ON VSP

1990 – Washington Legislature passes Growth Management Act (GMA), which requires state and local governments to manage growth by identifying and protecting critical areas, designating urban growth areas, and preparing and implementing plans and regulations. Implementation of GMA requirements meets with years of conflict and lawsuits.

2006 – State Supreme Court in the case of *Swinomish v. Skagit County* declares agricultural lands are not exempt from critical area protection requirements.

2007 – In response to GMA conflicts, Washington Legislature charges Ruckelshaus Center—a collaborative, problem-solving center—to examine the conflict between protecting agricultural land and protecting critical areas under GMA.

2010-11 – Based on recommendations of the Ruckelshaus Center, the legislature creates VSP at the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC). VSP represents a voluntary, incentive-based approach that offers counties an alternative for meeting GMA requirements related to protecting critical areas and agricultural lands. No new state funding provided for VSP, and counties are not obligated to implement it until funding is made available.

2012 – Counties given choice to opt-in to VSP or continue to meet GMA requirements as written under existing law. Twenty-eight of 39 counties opt-in to VSP.

2013 – State funds made available for two pilot counties — Thurston and Chelan — to begin VSP planning process.

2015 – State provides funding for 26 remaining VSP counties to begin planning process.

WHAT ARE CRITICAL AREAS?

There are five critical areas identified in Washington's GMA:

1. Wetlands
2. Frequently flooded areas
3. Critical aquifer recharge areas
4. Geologically hazardous areas
5. Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas (emphasis on anadromous fish)

More information is available on the Department of Commerce website: <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Services/localgovernment/Growth-Management/Growth-Management-Planning-Topics/Critical-Areas-and-Best-Available-Science/Pages/default.aspx>



WHAT CONSERVATION DISTRICTS SHOULD BE DOING NOW:

1 – Decide what role your conservation district would like to play.

The list below provides an overview of the entities involved in VSP and their roles. While some roles are pre-determined in statute, those marked in **blue** indicate roles that your conservation district may want to play (subject to county approval). Your level of participation is scalable based on your district's capacity. At a minimum, it's recommended that your district is a member of the watershed workgroup.

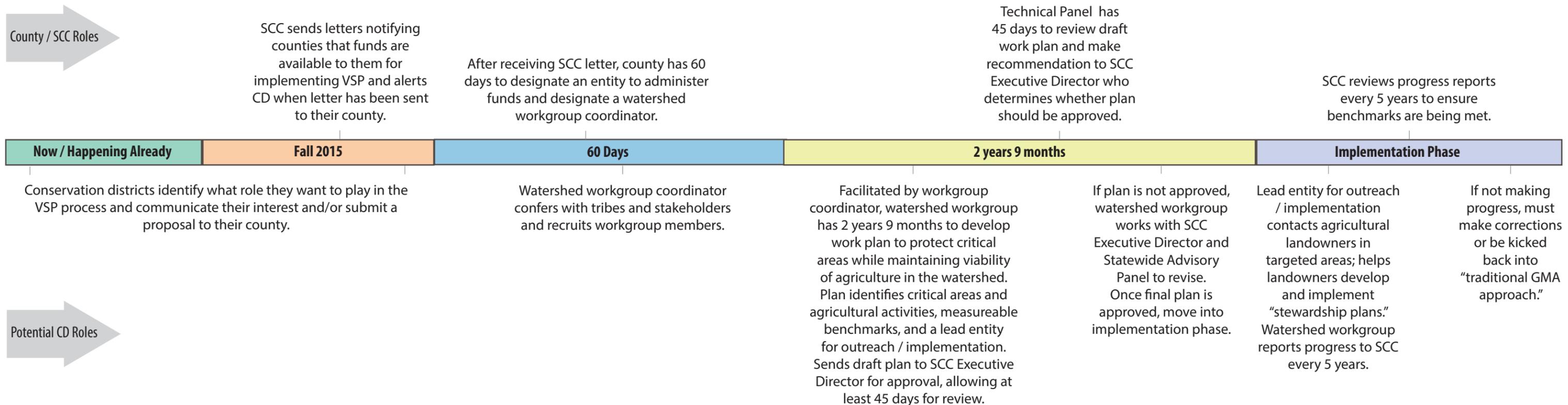
- **Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC):** Administers VSP statewide; Executive Director approves / rejects work plans submitted by watershed workgroups.
- **County:** Decides which entity will administer funds; designates watershed workgroup coordinator (counties may designate themselves for either or both of these roles).
- **Watershed Workgroup Coordinator:** Recruits members to participate on watershed workgroup in accordance with statute guidance on stakeholder representation; Facilitates watershed workgroup meetings and timely progress toward deliverables; May be designated as entity to administer funds.
- **Watershed Workgroup:** Develops local work plan; Identifies lead entity for outreach / implementation of the work plan; Provides progress reports to the SCC.

- **Lead Entity for Outreach / Implementation:** Proactively reaches out to agricultural landowners in targeted areas in accordance with approved work plan; Helps agricultural landowners develop "stewardship plans" (essentially farm plans) that include best management practices to help protect critical areas associated with their property and maintain viability of the landowner's operation.
- **Technical Panel:** Reviews draft work plans submitted by the watershed workgroup and makes recommendations to SCC Executive Director on whether to approve or reject the plan; Members represent directors (or director-designees) of the Washington Departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, Agriculture, and the SCC.
- **State Advisory Panel:** Works with SCC Executive Director and watershed workgroup to revise draft work plans that are rejected; Panel's statutorily designated members include two representatives each from environmental interests, agriculture, and counties, and two tribal representatives are invited to participate.

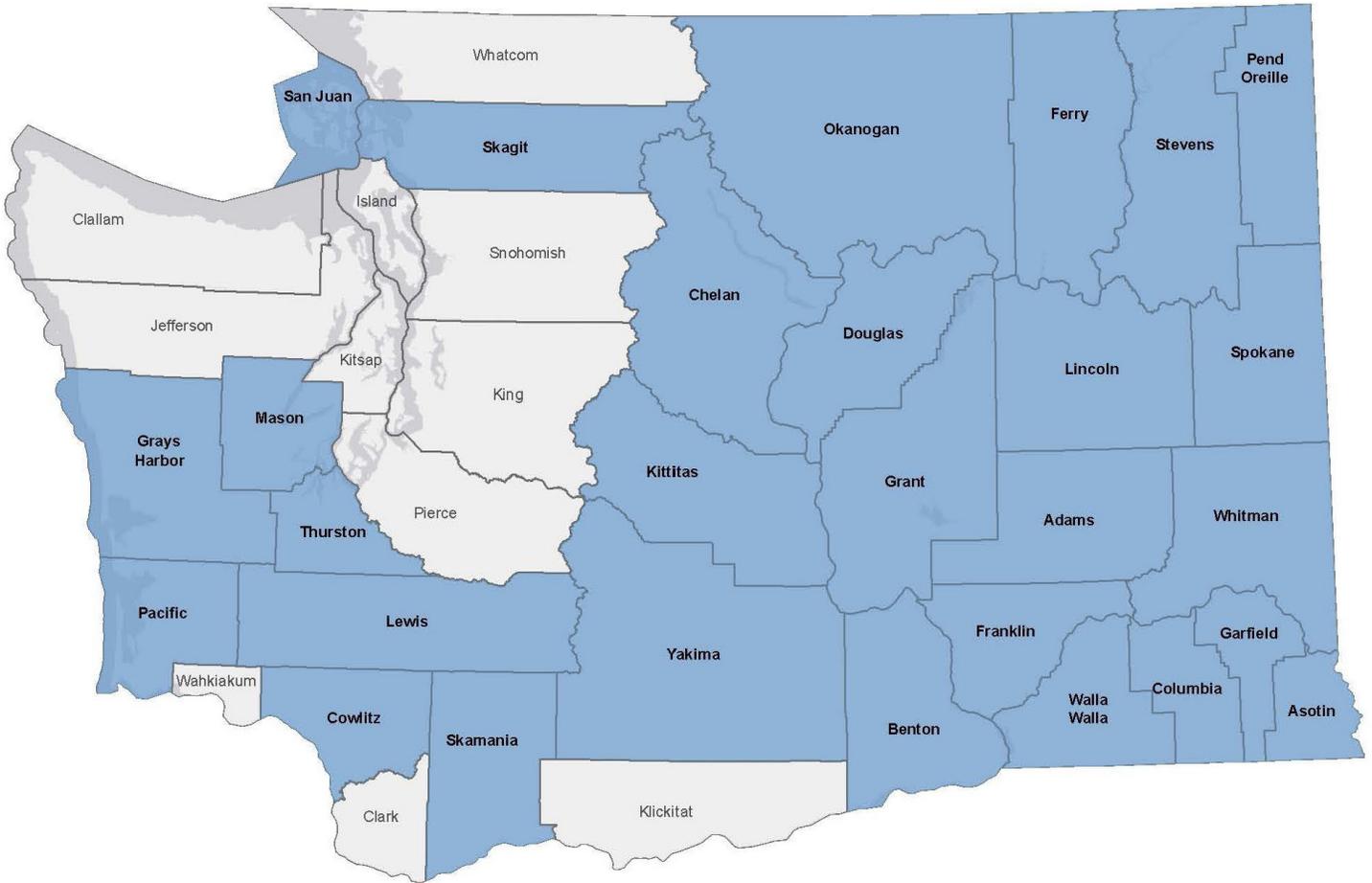
2 – Contact your county with a proposal

Once you've made a decision about the role(s) your district wants to play, contact your county with a clear proposal. Focus on the unique services and qualifications your district brings to the table. If you're interested in being the watershed workgroup coordinator or the lead entity for outreach / implementation, it's appropriate to submit a scope of work that includes what your services will cost. See this example of a letter and scope of work from Spokane Conservation District: http://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/topic_files/WASCC/WAS-CC_45/2015/10/22/file_attachments/438795/SpokaneCD_CoProposal__438795.pdf

VSP TIMELINE - OVERVIEW



COUNTIES THAT OPTED-IN TO VSP (in blue):



QUESTIONS?

Contact:

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Washington State
Conservation
Commission

Web Resources:

- Growth Management RCW 36.70A:
<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/Rcw/default.aspx?cite=36.70A>
- Voluntary Stewardship Program RCW 36.70A.705:
<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=36.70A.705>