

VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM



COUNTY WORK PLAN REPORTING GUIDE

Revised June 2025

*Note: This document replaces **Policy Advisory #05-18: Approved VSP Work Plan Implementation Reporting Requirements & Procedure***



Voluntary Stewardship Program: County Work Plan Reporting Guide

Washington State Conservation Commission

Mike Poteet, VSP Coordinator
Victoria Fischella, VSP Specialist

With support from the VSP Technical Panel

Revised June 2025

I. Introduction

Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) counties are required to create watershed work groups (work groups) to prepare work plans that protect and enhance critical areas through the establishment of goals and benchmarks. Each county must submit regular reports to their respective county government and to the Executive Director (Director) of the Conservation Commission (Commission). There are two types of reports that are required under the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) governing VSP: two-year reports and five-year reports. This Reporting Guide provides counties with an overview of how to develop their two-year reports and how to prepare for submission of five-year reports using the template provided by the Commission.

A. Two-year Reports

Work groups must conduct periodic evaluations, institute adaptive management, and provide a written report of the status of plans and accomplishments to the county and to the commission within sixty days after the end of each biennium.¹ VSP staff and participants have historically referred to these as the “two-year reports.” These must be submitted by August 30 of odd-numbered years, coinciding with each biennium’s end. Work groups should prepare reports in their preferred manner and submit them to the Commission and to their county government.

B. Five-year Reports

Reports must be submitted at five-year intervals from the date of receipt of funding. These reports, referred to as “five-year reports,” are sent to the Director of the Commission and to a county’s legislative authority after approval by its respective county work group.² Following advisement by the Technical Panel³ and the Statewide Advisory Committee, the Director must decide to concur, or not, with each county work group’s determination whether it is meeting its work plan’s goals and benchmarks for protection and enhancement.⁴ Protecting critical areas under VSP means protecting their functions and values.

¹ [RCW 36.70A.720 \(1\) \(j\)](#)

² [RCW 36.70A.720 \(2\) \(b\) \(i\) and \(c\) \(i\)](#)

³ [RCW 36.70A.725 \(2\)](#)

⁴ [RCW 36.70A.730](#)

II. Report Content & Submission

A. Two-year Reports

1. Two-year reports should include a summary of how the work plan implementation is affecting each of the following:⁵
 - The protection and enhancement of critical areas within the area where agricultural activities are conducted;
 - The maintenance and improvement of the long-term viability of agriculture;
 - Reducing the conversion of farmland to other uses;
 - The maximization of the use of voluntary incentive programs to encourage good riparian and ecosystem stewardship as an alternative to historic approaches used to protect critical areas;
 - The leveraging of existing resources by relying upon existing work and plans in counties and local watersheds, as well as existing state and federal programs to the maximum extent practicable to achieve program goals;
 - Ongoing efforts to encourage and foster a spirit of cooperation and partnership among county, tribal, environmental, and agricultural interests to better assure the program success;
 - Ongoing efforts to improve compliance with other laws designed to protect water quality and fish habitat; and
 - A description of efforts showing how relying upon voluntary stewardship practices as the primary method of protecting critical areas and does not require the cessation of agricultural activities.
2. Two-year reports should be submitted as a PDF by email to the Commission's VSP staff. Upon receipt by the Commission, a confirmation email will be sent back to the sender to confirm receipt. The two-year report will be posted on the Commission's VSP web page.⁶ Statute requires county work groups to submit their two-year reports to their county's leadership.

There is no statutory authority in the VSP statute for the Commission, Technical Panel, or Statewide Advisory Committee to review and evaluate two-year reports. No entity has any

⁵ Summarized from the goals of [RCW 36.70A.700 \(2\)](#)

⁶ [Washington Voluntary Stewardship Program | VSP](#)

statutory authority to review or evaluate two-year reports. However, Commission staff will read two-year reports, and if requested, provide feedback to a county.

Monitoring results are not required to be reported in the two-year report unless a county wants to demonstrate progress and results of its work plan. Work groups submitting two-year reports with summaries or notices of official work group business related to adaptive management or other program changes should alert Commission staff to those inclusions. A comprehensive adaptive management plan should be submitted separately of the two-year report.

B. Five-year Reports

Important: Five-year reports must be submitted by the deadlines shown in Section IV. Please allow time prior to the submittal due date for your work group to approve both the content and the submittal of the report using the most current reporting template. The five-year report template has been updated from the Access database system provided for the first 5-year reporting cycle. To submit a report, work groups must use the reporting template provided by the Commission.

To assist counties with the 5-year reporting process, the Technical Panel agencies and Commission staff developed the following recommendations based on RCW [36.70.700-760](#) and VSP [Policy Advisories](#). Following these instructions and recommendations will help counties ensure reviewing agencies have the necessary information to determine if they agree with the assertion that the county is meeting its goals and benchmarks. Counties are not required to follow these recommendations, however sufficient evidence that the county is meeting its goals and benchmarks along with how the county is maintaining agricultural viability and protecting critical area functions and values must be provided.⁷

Private, public, and tribal lands that have agricultural activities in place (as referenced in RCW [36.70A.703](#) and defined in RCW [90.58.065](#)) may be included in monitoring data and when reporting outcomes to meet work plan goals and benchmarks. VSP operates at the watershed scale within each county, so outcomes located on any lands with agricultural activities are eligible for inclusion in five-year reports when determining impacts on watershed health and critical area functions and values.

For clarity, definitions of specific language used in VSP are provided throughout.

⁷ [RCW 36.70A.720 1\(e\)](#)

- *Goal: Long term objective (e.g. protect wetland critical area functions and values)⁸*
- *Benchmark: Specific supporting evidence required to determine if a goal is being met (e.g. maintain baseline (2011) wetland acreage within agricultural areas).*

Note: One goal may have multiple benchmarks that work together to achieve the desired objective. Where applicable, the Technical Panel recommends each benchmark have performance metrics for education and outreach, stewardship activities, and critical areas impacts (monitoring) that provide evidence that the benchmark is being met. This is not required by statute but portrays a comprehensive look at program implementation.

Note: Goals and associated benchmarks should be developed and evaluated such that, if achieved, they demonstrate that critical area functions and values are protected or enhanced.⁹

The following recommendations should help counties navigate the updated reporting template developed for the second five-year reporting cycle.

1. County Information

County Basic Information

If any critical areas in agricultural lands are relying on development regulations to help achieve goals and benchmarks for protection, known as the “regulatory backstop,” describe how those development regulations have been incorporated into the work plan to achieve any protection goals and benchmarks.¹⁰ Any supporting documentation that the regulatory backstop is protecting the critical area(s) may be considered when the Director makes a final determination.

- When addressing specific goals and benchmarks that are connected to a regulatory backstop(s), counties **may** submit evidence that the regulatory backstop is working to protect the critical area(s). Supporting evidence that the regulatory backstop is functioning as intended may include scientific monitoring of the critical area functions and values, documentation of violations (or absence thereof), documentation of permit application and review, and documentation of regulatory complaints. (NOTE: Providing data that a

⁸ [VSP Monitoring Project Development Guide V2 \(May 2023\) pg. 17](#)

⁹ [RCW 36.70A.720 1\(e\)](#)

¹⁰ [RCW 36.70A.720 1\(h\)](#)

regulatory backstop is protecting critical area(s) is not required of non-VSP counties, and therefore is not required for those enrolled in VSP.)

- A five-year report may include documentation that the county has reviewed its critical area ordinance within the period covered by the report and determined that no revisions to the ordinance are necessary to protect critical areas where agricultural activities are occurring. If any relevant changes were made to the ordinance since the last five-year report, summarize those changes.

If the county work group determines that protection or enhancement goals and benchmarks have NOT been met in the preceding five years, explain why.

Summary Overview

To assist in the review of the county's program, provide a summary of the major agricultural industries, natural resource concerns, and priority stewardship practices that support agricultural viability and critical area protection. The summary does not need to replicate the Work Plan but should provide context for the rest of the report.

If any VSP Operating or VSP Capital funding has been used on cost-share or DIP projects in the previous five years, those projects should be reported.¹¹ Where possible, include information about the amount of funding used on projects, which watersheds they occurred in, the BMPs deployed, and how those projects relate to work plan goals and benchmarks.

2. Goals & Benchmarks

NOTE: If specific goals and benchmarks have been removed from or amended in a county work plan as part of an approved and accepted adaptive management plan, those goals and benchmarks should be addressed as such in the reporting. The updated or new goals and benchmarks must be included in the Adaptive Management portion of the five-year report. See "5. Adaptive Management" below.

Goals Results

The Commission's reporting template preloads all previously adopted goals and benchmarks from the counties' work plans. (NOTE: Adaptively managed goals and benchmarks that have

¹¹ [VSP Program Funding Guidelines May 2024.pdf](#)

been added or changed since the first five-year report are not included in the template for the second five-year report.) Each goal may be assigned a type: Protection, Enhancement, Agricultural Viability, or Participation. Each goal may be assigned more than one type.

Every goal from the work plan will have a brief section to assert whether the goal has been met or not and assess if it requires adaptive management. Counties are asked to provide a brief narrative explanation describing how the individual goal has been met or not. This is not the section of the reporting template to share adaptive management activities related to goals.

- Be mindful that enhancement at a project site can only be achieved if protection criteria have been met for that site.
 - *Protection: prevent the degradation of functions and values existing as of July 22, 2011.*¹²
 - *Enhancement: improve the processes, structure, and functions existing, as of July 22, 2011, of ecosystems and habitats associated with critical areas.*¹³
 - If an enhancement goal has not been met, determine voluntary actions to meet the goal and associated benchmarks.
 - If degradation of functions and values has occurred, then goals and associated benchmarks should be adaptively managed.

Benchmarks Results

Consider each benchmark and the applicable goals it addresses as stated in the Work Plan, along with any objectives or metrics relevant to the evaluation of the county's program. Assert whether each goal and associated benchmark has been protected or enhanced. This is required for protection and enhancement of critical areas, but only recommended for goals and benchmarks associated with agricultural viability and landowner participation.

A county can assign each individual benchmark to multiple goals. Reporting on benchmarks should indicate whether the benchmark was not met, met, exceeded, or still requires more data to determine. The 2011 baseline should be considered, and the implementation efforts to meet the benchmark should be described. This should include how activities protected or enhanced critical area functions and values where possible. Include supporting evidence for landowner participation, stewardship activities, and critical area monitoring.¹⁴ When discussing goals and

¹² [36.70A.703\(8\)](#)

¹³ [36.70A.703\(4\)](#)

¹⁴ [36.70A.720 \(1\) \(a\)-\(l\)](#)

benchmark results, attempt to include baseline (2011), actual (2025-26), and target protection and enhancement metrics for comparison.

Accomplishments may be included for each benchmark. These can be reported at a watershed scale according to a water resource inventory area, salmon recovery planning area, or a subbasin as determined by the county.¹⁵ Provide additional background on the strategy and accomplishments where prompted, and targets and results can also be reported for NRSC BMPs associated with each accomplishment. Some possible considerations and background you may wish to include in this section of the report could be:

- What BMPs were implemented or are ongoing?
- To what practice standards were they implemented? (NRCS CPS's, Tribal BMP's, etc.)
- And to what scale, if known? (How many acres, # of fish screens, # of manure compost facilities, etc.)
- What are adjacent tributaries or groundwater systems?
- What larger waterbody does that tributary flow into?
- Does that larger waterbody have resource concerns? (source drinking water, TMDL exceedances, salmon bearing, state or federal threatened or endangered species, irrigation needs for food security/ag viability, etc.)
- How do the BMPs implemented or ongoing help said resource concern(s)?

There is also space to discuss which monitoring tools and approaches have been used to make these determinations and explain how the monitoring data supports whether the benchmark in question has been achieved.

There are techniques that may be incorporated into the report that will help reviewers evaluate progress against work plan goals and benchmarks. These include describing the scope, scale, and intended effect of stewardship activities on critical area functions and values and “connecting the dots” between practices and functions and values. For example:

- Critical area impacts:
 - Provide evidence to show whether the 2011 baseline condition of critical area functions and values has been degraded, protected, or enhanced. The functions and values measured should directly support work plan goals and benchmarks.

¹⁵ [RCW 36.70A.703 \(12\)](#), [RCW 36.70A.715 \(1\) \(b\)](#), and [RCW 36.70A.720 \(1\)](#)

- Describe if the “lift” from the county’s stewardship activities is enough to outweigh the “drag” occurring on agricultural land elsewhere in the watershed to determine if voluntary actions are being implemented at a level sufficient to protect critical areas.
- *NOTE: Spatial data quality is regularly improving, so newer datasets or tools are expected to capture more granular and accurate data, which will be given consideration during the review process.*
- Ways to document critical area impacts:
 - Document how monitoring data supports the county’s conclusion. This can be done using data, graphs, statistical analysis, or other means. Provide data results and summarize data methodology, which may include type of data, data source, data interval, measurement location, and connection to agricultural activities.
 - Some of this data may best submitted as attached documents, which may be done at the bottom of the page.
 - Describe how the monitoring data is being used to inform the county’s program, such as:
 - Increasing outreach to producers within a target critical area.
 - Prioritizing stewardship activities that address a specific benchmark or resource concern.
 - Utilizing a different monitoring approach that provides better data collection on specific critical area impacts.

For goals and/or benchmarks related to landowner outreach and participation in the program, consider how stewardship activities have been adopted and provide evidence to show that agricultural producers are participating in voluntary and incentive-based measures at a level sufficient to meet work plan benchmarks.¹⁶ This may include describing the types and number of stewardship activities occurring in each watershed and their intended impact to critical area functions and values. This can be considered based on the expected results from the adoption of specific stewardship activities.

Like critical areas protection and enhancement goals and benchmarks, the current template provides opportunities to give examples that document stewardship practices, such as:

- Reporting on the conservation practices implemented, to what practice standard, and to what scale or quantity (i.e., feet, acres, miles).

¹⁶ [RCW 36.70A.720 1\(c\)](#)

- Documenting that BMPs were installed to proper specifications and have been maintained overtime. If the information is available, describe BMP maintenance plans and timelines, and identify who has the responsibility for this maintenance and any certification that it is being or has already been completed.

3. Critical Areas

If critical areas losses have occurred, provide any information that is known about the losses. Identify where the loss(es) have taken place, which critical area types were affected, and how monitoring activities helped identify the loss(es). The [Monitoring Plan Reviews & Scoring Rubric](#) document can help counties assess if their monitoring and reporting approach is adequate. If known, explain how implementation efforts have been able to offset the reported loss(es) with references to critical area functions and values.

There is an optional section on Critical Areas Monitoring in the current template. This is where users may go into greater detail on how monitoring approaches were used to help analyze critical area impacts from work plan activities. This information can help reviewers interpret a county's results and potentially provide helpful feedback. The information provided in "2. Goals and Benchmarks" may be informative for helping complete this section.

- If applicable, document if there are critical area losses affecting the county's 2011 baseline (e.g., reduction in riparian habitat or BMPs). Report the total acres (or relevant unit) of critical area loss, identify which functions and values were impacted, and describe how the county's stewardship activities offset the loss with specific attention to the functions and values. This may be further addressed in the Adaptive Management section of the reporting template.
- Identify any impacts outside of agricultural lands that may be negatively impacting the baseline functions measured in the monitoring data. Provide explanations as needed. These impacts may include, but are not limited to, the following situations:
 - Expansion of urban growth boundaries and associated residential and commercial development.
 - Timber harvesting in upper reaches of a watershed impacting downstream critical area functions and values.
 - Wildfires, droughts, floods, or other natural events that may have impacted work plan goals and benchmarks.
 - Septic system failures in non-agricultural lands affecting water quality across a watershed.

4. Agricultural Viability & Landowner Participation

Describe the status of agricultural viability¹⁷, successes and challenges faced by producers, and the key strategies or activities that are being implemented or have been identified to achieve the program's goal of maintaining the viability of agriculture. Consider issues both inside and outside the scope and control of VSP.

Education, outreach, and cost-share for stewardship practices are crucial for agricultural viability and help maintain and improve agriculture throughout a county. All these collective activities do not need to be repeated in the agricultural viability discussion; however, a county may elect to highlight specific stewardship activities that have contributed to overall improvement of economic viability. Additional information not included in the goals and benchmarks may help reviewers understand how agricultural viability is protected or enhanced within the county.

- Examples of ways to document agricultural viability:
 - Change or percentage change of total acres of agricultural land (e.g., agriculture land losses to development or economic factors).
 - Change in arable acres due to implementation of stewardship practices.
 - Local land use regulations, conservation easements, or other programs that support continued use of agricultural land.
 - Formation or loss of co-ops, markets and marketing programs, or other projects like equipment rentals or labor retention and training programs that provide producers with increased opportunities.
 - Implementation of new technologies or adoption of new equipment or production techniques that may not improve critical area functions and values but contribute to economic viability.
 - Impact of the stewardship activities that improve critical area functions and values but may reduce agricultural viability.
 - Examples of new or roll-over funds made available to local producers through grant and loan programs. This may include information from publicly available sources on grant awards to local producers during the previous reporting cycle.

Provide evidence that outreach and technical assistance is available to landowners and that landowner participation is at a level sufficient to meet the county's benchmarks.¹⁸ Show how outreach efforts have led directly to the adoption of new stewardship activities or enrollment of

¹⁷ [RCW 36.70A.720 1](#)

¹⁸ [36.70A.720\(1\) \(c-d\)](#)

new VSP participants. Explain how those outreach efforts were developed to target specific goals and benchmarks. Describe what outcomes have been achieved because of these activities.

- Examples of ways to document landowner participation:
 - Total number or percentage of participating landowners.
 - Has participation remained the same, increased, or decreased compared to the 2011 baseline?
 - Total acres of farmland enrolled in stewardship practices. Total acres of farmland managed by farms that are participants in stewardship programs.
 - Number of Individual Stewardship Plans or Farm Plans.¹⁹
 - Number and description of outreach activities to producers (e.g., newsletter articles, direct mailings, radio ads, tabling events, producer meetings).

5. Adaptive Management

Counties should adaptively manage²⁰ their programs and address changing circumstances. Even if a county is meeting its goals and related benchmarks, it may find that adaptively managing its work plan can improve communicating, monitoring, or reporting on how goals and benchmarks are protecting or enhancing critical areas. Counties are encouraged to document adaptive management needs in their five-year reports; however, an Adaptive Management Plan is needed if changes are made to the work plan ([SCC Policy Advisory 07-22](#)).

The current template allows counties to manually enter newly created or amended goals and benchmarks. If a county has gone through any adaptive management processes since its previous five-year report, that information should be described. That should include:

- New goals
- New benchmarks
- Whether the goal/benchmark is for protection or enhancement
- The status of the new benchmark
- The 2011 baseline for the new benchmark
- How the work plan implementation efforts contribute to meeting the new goal or benchmark
- How the activities protect or enhance critical area functions and values

¹⁹ [RCW 36.70A.720 1\(g\)](#)

²⁰ [RCW 36.70A.720 2b\(iii\)](#) ; [Policy Advisory #07-22](#)

- Any Accomplishments associated with the new goal or benchmark
- Whether the benchmark has been met
- Any additional information on monitoring approaches and how the data supports conclusions made about the benchmark

If a county has reworked and updated its work plan goals and benchmarks, it may submit minimal content in the Goals and Benchmarks Results sections of the current template. In that instance, the county would populate all its new goals and benchmarks in this Adaptive Management section, along with supporting data and accomplishments.

6. Reviewing Report Content

The current template may be used to create draft .pdf files of the most-recently saved version of the five-year report. Draft versions of the final report can be printed or saved and shared with the work group or other interested parties. Before submitting the final five-year report, county or district VSP staff may email the current saved draft to themselves or directly to work group members for review. These .pdf files will **not** include any attachments that have been added to the report contents.

The current template requires verification that the report has been approved by the work group on the first data entry page. The report should be submitted on or before each five-year interval from the date the county first received VSP funding (see Section IV. below).

Attachments & Supporting Documentation

Additional materials, documents, or information a work group would like to make available to support its assertions in the database should be maintained by the county or its work group, and those materials can be attached in the reporting template during preparation of the final report. The reporting template provides multiple opportunities for narrative descriptions of work efforts and how certain goals and benchmarks are being met.

To transmit any attachments that have been included in the report to work group members or other parties reviewing the draft report, users will need to send those files directly to the desired recipient(s) in a separate email message. The draft .pdf generated in the current template **will** include any supplemental information entered in the template about those attachments.

All information necessary for the Director to concur, or not, with the work group's determination should be documented and explained in the final submission. Any

supporting materials or attachments do NOT need to be sent to SCC staff separately from the reporting template. All documents uploaded into the current template will transmit to SCC VSP staff and presented to the Technical Panel, Statewide Advisory Committee, and SCC leadership for review and consideration.

III. Definitions

The following definitions should be considered during all reporting processes. The TP and SAC are given the following uniform definitions for reference throughout their review process. These terms are not defined in statute, but the Commission wants to provide guidance on the following concepts:

- Goal: the end toward which effort is directed. Goals should identify what the project is trying to accomplish – what the results will be (e.g., what functions you want to protect). If objectives were used to clarify your goals, they may be included in your goals.
- Benchmark: something that serves as a standard by which others may be measured or judged; a point of reference from which measurements may be made. Benchmarks typically contain numbers for measurement, not action verbs, unless the action is in reference to a number. Benchmarks are specific conditions used to determine whether the work plan is achieving its objectives. If indicators were used to obtain your benchmarks, they must be included in your benchmarks.

IV. Submittal Dates

SCHEDULE FOR SUBMITTAL OF FIVE-YEAR REPORTS†#					
COUNTY	FUNDING RECEIVED	(COMPLETE) 5-YEAR	(ACTIVE) 10-YEAR	15-YEAR	20-YEAR
Chelan*	1.20.14	7.20.19	7.20.24	7.20.29	7.20.34
Thurston*	1.20.14	7.20.19	7.20.24	7.20.29	7.20.34
Kittitas	11.17.15	11.17.20	11.17.25	11.17.30	11.17.35
Mason	11.24.15	11.24.20	11.24.25	11.24.30	11.24.35
Garfield	11.30.15	11.30.20	11.30.25	11.30.30	11.30.35
Asotin	12.14.15	12.14.20	12.14.25	12.14.30	12.14.35
Grant	12.14.15	12.14.20	12.14.25	12.14.30	12.14.35
San Juan	12.21.15	12.21.20	12.21.25	12.21.30	12.21.35
Cowlitz	12.22.15	12.22.20	12.22.25	12.22.30	12.22.35
Pacific	12.22.15	12.22.20	12.22.25	12.22.30	12.22.35
Okanogan	12.28.15	12.28.20	12.28.25	12.28.30	12.28.35
Benton	1.12.16	1.12.21	1.12.26	1.12.31	1.12.36
Skagit	1.19.16	1.19.21	1.19.26	1.19.31	1.19.36
Whitman	1.19.16	1.19.21	1.19.26	1.19.31	1.19.36
Columbia	1.20.16	1.20.21	1.20.26	1.20.31	1.20.36
Yakima	1.21.16	1.21.21	1.21.26	1.21.31	1.21.36
Douglas	1.22.16	1.22.21	1.22.26	1.22.31	1.22.36
Pend Oreille	2.2.16	2.2.21	2.2.26	2.2.31	2.2.36
Franklin	2.24.16	2.24.21	2.24.26	2.24.31	2.24.36
Walla Walla	3.7.16	3.7.21	3.7.26	3.7.31	3.7.36
Stevens	3.10.16	3.10.21	3.10.26	3.10.31	3.10.36
Ferry	3.14.16	3.14.21	3.14.26	3.14.31	3.14.36
Grays Harbor	3.21.16	3.21.21	3.21.26	3.21.31	3.21.36
Lincoln	3.21.16	3.21.21	3.21.26	3.21.31	3.21.36
Lewis	4.18.16	4.18.21	4.18.26	4.18.31	4.18.36
Spokane	4.22.16	4.22.21	4.22.26	4.22.31	4.22.36
Adams	5.23.16	5.23.21	5.23.26	5.23.31	5.23.36

† All timelines subject to continued legislative funding.

Each county work group must approve of the information in the report before it is submitted. Please allow enough time prior to the submittal due date for your work group to approve both the content and the submittal of the report.

* Special note on Chelan and Thurston County: Both Chelan and Thurston County were pilot projects that received funding earlier than the rest of the counties that opted into VSP. As such, their timelines are substantially different. Other counties have later deadlines based on when additional funding was made available to them.