Voluntary Stewardship Program Monitoring Plan Reviews & Scoring Rubric

June 2025

Summary

In 2024, Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) counties developed monitoring plans to document the monitoring protocols used to evaluate the work plan's goals and benchmarks and whether critical area functions and values are being protected or enhanced at the watershed scale. Monitoring plans are expected to be "living" documents that are regularly updated and improved based on the availability and quality of data sources, the capabilities of county or conservation district staff, funding, and other factors. This document describes the process for counties to request written feedback from the State Conservation Commission (SCC) and Technical Panel (TP) agencies or conduct a self-assessment of their monitoring plans.

Written Reviews of Monitoring Plans

Counties interested in receiving a comprehensive review of their monitoring plans should request a staff review with feedback provided in writing from SCC and TP Coordinators. A written review may take up to 90 days to complete, depending on capacity. Priority will be given to counties according to the 10-year report submission schedule. All requests should be sent to the SCC VSP Coordinator.

Counties requesting a written review will be evaluated using the scoring rubric outlined below. The assessment will evaluate how well a county's monitoring plan aligns with the SCC's [Watershed Monitoring Project Development Guide for the VSP in Washington](). While counties are not required to follow the guide, the principles within serve as building blocks for developing a scientifically robust plan and provide a framework to review the Monitoring Plans.

Feedback from each agency reviewer will be compiled into a single document. Specific comments or assessments from individual agencies will be treated as "collective feedback," meaning that the agency responsible for the comment will not be identified. Any review comments provided by the SCC and TP may not necessarily reflect any future decisions as to the meeting of goals and benchmarks during reviews of 10-year reports.

Counties can also reach out to TP agencies at any time to discuss their monitoring plans and are encouraged to request feedback at VSP site visits, office hours, and statewide meetings. However, the feedback provided by the SCC and TP Coordinators through these channels may not be as thorough as what is provided through a written review.

Self-Assessment of Monitoring Plans

Counties are encouraged to use the below scoring rubric to conduct a self-assessment of their monitoring plans. Counties are encouraged to conduct a self-assessment prior to requesting written review from the SCC and TP Coordinators. Counties should consider, at a minimum, whether the following items are incorporated in their monitoring plans when conducting a self-assessment:

- Does the plan include procedures to monitor landowner participation, stewardship activities, and the effects on critical areas?
- Are the Work Plan's goals and benchmarks measurable and attainable, and are the data sources and monitoring procedures utilized properly to address the goals and benchmarks?
- Is data sufficient to evaluate changes to critical area functions and values in relation to the 2011 baseline?

Monitoring Plan Scoring Rubric

The following scoring rubric guide will be used to provide feedback on a county's Monitoring Plan. To provide clarity and ease of review, the scoring rubric uses a numerical rating from 1 to 5 for each question:

No or Unaddressed	Minimally Addressed	Partially Addressed	Mostly Addressed	Yes or Fully Addressed
1	2	3	4	5

This scoring rubric is designed to identify strengths and weaknesses in a VSP county's monitoring plan; it does not constitute a formal grading system, nor does it determine a pass or fail outcome for self-assessment participation. Reviewer responses will be combined, and an average score will be given for each question. Additional feedback from reviewers will be provided in the comments section. All comments will be provided back to the county as part of the general feedback, with no attribution to any agency.

For additional details about the scoring criteria, refer to the page numbers in the table below from the Watershed Monitoring Project Development Guide for the VSP in Washington.

Scoring Rubric

Rating (1-5)	Evaluation Criteria	Reference Page #
	1. Are the goals and benchmarks measurable and attainable?	17-20
	a. Do they address a specific critical area or function and value?	34-37
	b. Is data available to evaluate the goals and benchmarks?	30-31, 43-45, 71-76
	2. Is there an established procedure to monitor landowner participation, outreach, and the implementation of voluntary stewardship plans (i.e., Individual Stewardship Plans (ISP) and Farm Plans)?	21, 32-33, 57
	a. Is there a method to assess landowner participation in VSP and enrollment in voluntary stewardship plans (ISP's)?	15-17, 21
	b. Is there a method to track outreach efforts and assess if those efforts are effective at engaging producers?	21, 32, 57
	3. Is there an established procedure to monitor the amount, type, and proper implementation of stewardship activities?	21, 31-32, 56-57
	a. Is there a system in place to manage stewardship data and report the data in accurate and appropriate units (i.e., NRCS practice code, acres/linear feet of practice, etc.)	21, 31-32
	b. Is there a method to compare 2011 baseline stewardship data to current levels of implementation?	32
	c. Are there methods to ensure stewardship activities are being implemented and maintained as designed?	21, 32, 56
	d. Do you have a list of stewardship activities to assess each critical area and are those activities effective for that critical area?	32, 47, 57
	4. Is there an established procedure to monitor the effects on critical areas and agriculture relevant to the protection and enhancement benchmarks?	21, 30, 56
	a. What is the hypothesis or monitoring question?	26-28, 60-61, 121
	b. What are you monitoring? (i.e., variable of interest)	26-30
	c. Where is monitoring occurring? (i.e., location and geographic scale, monitoring locations within agricultural intersect)	45-53, 55-56, 97-98
	d. How are you monitoring? (i.e., methodology)	53-54

	e. Why is this methodology appropriate for your county?	17, 53-56, 88-90
	f. What data will be collected? (i.e., data attributes)	103-109
	g. How will you analyze the data? (i.e., statistical analysis)	77-88
	h. How does the data relate to critical area functions and values?	34-43
	i. What conditions will demonstrate that protection or enhancement has been met?	60-71
	j. What conditions will trigger adaptive management? (i.e., do something level)	70-71
5. Are appropriate quality assurance and control measures identified and considered?		114-116
	a. What is your implementation plan? (i.e., schedule, personnel, training)	123, 134-136
	b. How will you collect, manage, and validate the data? (i.e., protocols, equipment, quality control)	136-143
	c. Are the data and procedures clear, unbiased, repeatable, accurate and precise, and at the appropriate scale?	124-134
	d. Are there data gaps that make it unclear whether stewardship activities are protecting critical areas?	126-133
	e. Do external data sources have a Quality Assurance Protocol Plan (QAPP) or similar quality assurance process?	115-116
6. Is there an established procedure to monitor agricultural viability? Topics of interest may include:		
	a. What are the ag viability concerns?	13-16, 17
	b. What are the ag viability trends? (i.e., ag-land loss, total arable land, changes in farm size, ability of farmers to support farm without off farm jobs, etc.?)	21, 53-54, 139-145
	c. How does VSP support ag viability?	21, 29-30
	d. How do policies and programs outside of VSP support ag viability?	55-58

Additional Reviewer Comments: