

# Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)

## What VSP Counties Do



Develop county work plans



Develop projects



Monitor



Adaptatively manage

## What is VSP?

Washington State's [Growth Management Act \(GMA\)](#) requires that counties develop and follow plans to preserve local critical areas and farmland. This includes ensuring that critical areas are protected or enhanced in places where agricultural activity is conducted.

VSP provides an alternative opportunity for counties and landowners to implement voluntary, site-specific practices that help protect critical areas while also promoting agricultural viability.

## How it works

- Counties establish a volunteer VSP watershed work group to create and implement a county-wide plan.
- County-wide work plans must protect critical areas that are affected by agricultural activities, while maintaining agricultural viability.
- Plans are implemented by a technical service provider—often a local conservation district—that works with agricultural landowners and producers to make stewardship plans.
- Work groups and the technical service provider monitor county-wide work plan implementation and critical area functions and values to determine if the plan is protecting critical areas.

## Background

- Prior to 2011, the main tool for counties to ensure protection of critical areas on agricultural land was regulation.
- Regulation of agricultural landowners can threaten farm viability and lead to legal battles.

Learn more at  
[www.vsp.wa.gov](http://www.vsp.wa.gov)



# Digging into the details

## Phase 1: Develop a county-wide work plan.

- Key community members — including agricultural, environmental, and tribal representatives — are invited to participate in VSP watershed work groups.
- Groups develop work plans to protect critical areas and maintain viable agriculture in their watershed. Plans are sent to SCC for approval.
- The group begins outreach to agricultural landowners who might participate in the program. *All 27 current VSP counties have approved plans.*

## Phase 2: Implementation and stewardship plans.

- Each VSP watershed work group uses local technical assistance providers to conduct outreach to agricultural landowners in priority areas identified in the county-wide work plan.
- Technical assistance providers create individual stewardship plans (ISPs) or farm plans for participating landowners.
- ISPs provide site-specific best management practices to help landowners, producers, and the county meet agricultural and natural resource conservation goals, protecting critical areas.

## Phase 3: Monitoring.

- Existing incentive programs and on-the-ground expertise help implement the county-wide work plan, which includes assisting landowners to implement conservation practices that will achieve the goals in the work plan.
- Science-based monitoring is used to assess trends in critical area functions and values

## Phase 4: Reporting and adaptively managing.

- Data generated from monitoring is used for adaptive management and reporting.
- The VSP watershed work group submits a report every 5 years summarizing the effects of work plan activities (e.g., implementation of practices, outreach, and community engagement).
- If work plan goals are not being met, the watershed work group may adaptively manage the work plan to reorient strategies and approaches.



Currently, 27 counties are enrolled in VSP.

All counties have turned in their five-year reports and successfully passed their first five-year report check-in.

As of 2023, counties not yet enrolled in VSP may do so.

## What are critical areas?

### Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife protection areas are guided by WDFW's priority habitat species list. Protection of these areas aims to increase fish habitat.



### Wetlands

Wetlands are areas saturated by surface or groundwater vegetation.



### Frequently Flooded

Areas in the floodplains that are subject to 1% chance of flooding are considered frequently flooded areas.



### Aquifer Recharge

Areas that have crucial recharge effect on potable water and recharging aquifers are critical areas.



### Geologically Hazardous

Geologically hazardous areas are subject to erosion, sliding, earthquakes, or other geological events.



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