



FERRY COUNTY VSP BIENNIAL REPORT

2021-2023

Compiled for the Washington State Conservation Commission
on behalf of the Ferry County VSP Work Group
by the Ferry Conservation District

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ecology	Washington State Department of Ecology
FY	Fiscal Year
ISP	Individual Stewardship Plan
Ferry CD	Ferry Conservation District
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
RCPP	Regional Conservation Partnership Program
RCW	Revised Code of Washington
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
VSP	Voluntary Stewardship Program
WDFW	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Work Group	Ferry County Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Group
Work Plan	Ferry County Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Plan
WSDA	Washington Department of Agriculture
WSCC	Washington State Conservation Commission

1 Introduction

This Report for fiscal years (FY) 2021-2023 documents the status and accomplishments of Ferry County's Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Work Plan (Work Plan; Anchor QEA 2018), which was approved by the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) in November 2018. This report documents implementation efforts that have occurred between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2023. This report documents ongoing and planned implementation efforts, which will be included in future reports to the WSCC.

The Ferry Conservation District (Ferry CD), under the direction of the Ferry County VSP Work Group (Work Group), developed this report to provide a periodic review of the effectiveness and accomplishments of the County's Work Plan in meeting the purpose and intent of VSP (Revised Code of Washington [RCW] 36.70A.700(2)).

This report includes the following:

- A summary of actions and accomplishments made by the Work Group in meeting the VSP goals **between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2023.**
- A report on the progress towards meeting the goals identified in the Work Plan as measured under the Work Plan
- A description of how adaptive management needs are being identified and instituted.
- A report of the status of Work Plan implementation, including progress towards meeting the protection and enhancement benchmarks

1.1 Requirements

This report fulfills the state requirements outlined under RCW 36.70A.720 (1)(j), which states that as a part of Work Plan implementation, the Work Group must "conduct periodic evaluations, institute adaptive management, and provide a written report of the status of plans and accomplishments to the county and the commission within sixty days after the end of each biennium." Therefore, the report for FY 2021-2023 is due no later than August 30, 2023.

Table 1 provides the location in this report where information on the status and progress toward meeting the intent of VSP can be found. The numbers in the left column correspond with the elements found in VSP Policy Advisory #05-18.

Table 1
Summary of Progress Towards Meeting VSP Intent

No.	VSP Intent	Ferry County VSP Biennial Report (FY 2021–2023)
1	The protection and enhancement of critical areas within the area where agricultural activities are conducted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.1 describes outreach to landowners by the Ferry CD that has encouraged participation in stewardship strategies and practices to protect critical areas and promote agricultural viability. • Section 2.2 describes conservation strategies and practices implemented since Work Plan approval.
2	The maintenance and improvement of the long-term viability of agriculture	Section 2.6 describes how implementation efforts and other factors are affecting agricultural viability.
3	Reducing the conversion of farmland to other uses	Section 2.6 discusses challenges related to farmland conversion.
4	The maximization of the use of voluntary incentive programs to encourage good riparian and ecosystem stewardship as an alternative to historical approaches used to protect critical areas	Section 2.2 summarizes projects implemented by landowners since the approval of the Work Plan, which includes funding from different voluntary incentive programs benefiting ecosystem stewardship.
5	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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.2 summarizes voluntary incentive programs that provide funding to benefit ecosystem stewardship. • Work Plan Appendix D: Existing and Related Plans, Programs, and Regulations describes available resources, plans, and programs being utilized or available to support VSP implementation.

No.	VSP Intent	Ferry County VSP Biennial Report (FY 2021–2023)
6	Ongoing efforts to encourage and foster a spirit of cooperation and partnership among county, tribal, environmental, and agricultural interests to better ensure the program's success	Section 2.1 summarizes the methods the Ferry CD uses to reach out to interested parties and landowners, including public meetings and regular website updates to encourage partnerships in the community.
7	Ongoing efforts to improve compliance with other laws designed to protect water quality and fish habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.3 describes monitoring efforts from the Ferry CD that include the use of data that is also used to determine compliance with existing water quality and fish habitat laws. • Section 2.2 summarizes projects implemented by landowners since the approval of the Work Plan.
8	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	Section 2.6 describes how participating in VSP allows landowners to protect and enhance critical area functions while also increasing agricultural viability.

2 Summary of Actions and Accomplishments

This section includes a summary of activities the County, Ferry CD, and others have implemented or completed that support VSP Work Plan implementation and monitoring between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2023. Ferry County has delegated to the Ferry CD to manage and facilitate the VSP process.

The County is 1,434,878 acres in total area. 605,759 acres (42%) belong to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. 530,869 acres (37%) are owned by Federal, State, or local governments. Just 290,348 acres (20%) are privately owned. 132,450 acres of private land are designated timberland.

2.1 Outreach

2.1.1 Completed Outreach Activities

Continued public outreach and education are integral to implementing the Work Plan. Each year, Ferry CD has committed to reaching out to 10% of the producers that operate the farms and ranches in the County. County records show that 175 landowners perform agricultural activities on 548 parcels of land. The primary agricultural activities in the County are livestock and hay production.

Ferry County presents a unique situation for outreach. No newspaper covers the entire County, and no radio station reaches the whole area. Internet coverage remains inconsistent in the areas outside the County seat, Republic. However, Ferry CD has developed written outreach materials for mailing to agricultural landowners and outreach materials for social media.

The CD completed two "Farm to Table Guides" advertising local producers in the Tri-County area in the newspaper. Weed spraying cost-share information was mailed out to producers and an ad for a Noxious Weed Workshop. The CD also completed a display ad promoting the WSU Weather Station. A summary of the public outreach events and meetings held between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2023, is included in Table 2.

There are a significant number of absentee agricultural landowners in Ferry County that present a unique challenge for outreach. Individual mailings to these landowners have had mixed success. Participation may increase by developing absentee landowners' ability to provide information about their stewardship practices digitally. Engaging these landowners will continue to be a priority.

Table 2
Public Outreach Meetings Since July 1, 2021

No.	Date	Meeting	Location	Participants	Notes
1	September 3-5, 2021	Ferry County Fair	Republic, WA	150	Provided VSP materials and promoted the program to individuals
2	September 2-4, 2022	Ferry County Fair	Republic, WA	170	Distributed VSP materials to attendees along with a video loop promoting the program
3	February 14 th , 2023	Pesticide Credit Event	Republic, WA	20	VSP Presentation on managing weeds and forest health
4	April 15 th , 2023	Conservation Fair and Plant Sale	Republic, WA	200	VSP Outreach and Overview; Distribution of VSP Materials While Selling Plants

2.1.2 Ongoing and Future Outreach Efforts

VSP's success relies on producer participation in implementing conservation actions. The implementation budget for each biennium provided to the County includes funding for education, outreach, and technical assistance with activities that include stewardship plan development, reporting, and educational materials (see Table 6-2 in the Work Plan). Ongoing and future outreach and implementation efforts include maintaining regular Work Group meetings, conducting outreach, providing technical assistance, continuing to develop the monitoring and reporting framework, and identifying adaptive management needs. Ongoing and future outreach efforts are summarized as follows:

Work Group Meetings: The VSP Work Group has met quarterly throughout the reporting period. The Work Group has focused on implementation and ongoing outreach activities. Work Group meeting agendas and minutes are available on the Ferry CD VSP website.

Email Updates: As the VSP Coordinator, the Ferry CD has provided periodic email updates to Work Group members. These emails will continue, with information updates sent out quarterly, at a minimum.

Informational Forums: The Ferry CD has partnered with the Ferry County Weed Board to invite speakers to provide technical information for practices that impact critical areas.

Ongoing Individual Stewardship Plan Development: In the 2021-2023 biennium the Ferry CD has been working with the Work Group members to develop new strategies designed to increase participation in Individual Stewardship plans. There is some apprehension among agricultural producers about maintaining anonymity if they report. The WSCC is responsible for making this determination which remains unclear.

- **Monitoring, and Reporting:** To support ongoing outreach, implementation, and future monitoring and reporting requirements, the Ferry CD is working to improve its GIS capability. Targeted outreach to agricultural landowners with critical areas will continue using GIS mapping to prioritize implementation. VSP flyers will continue to be mailed to producers with follow-up outreach in person or by phone is planned as an ongoing effort.

Ferry CD will also use GIS to map implemented practices. See Figure 1 for the Phased VSP Outreach and ISP Development Flow Chart.

For developing methods for monitoring and evaluating critical area functions, VSP funds were used to hire Herrera Environmental Consulting. Their draft recommendations continue to be evaluated for potential implementation. This may be included in the WSCC requirement for a monitoring plan by July 1, 2024.

Figure 1
Phased VSP Outreach and ISP Development
Flow Chart

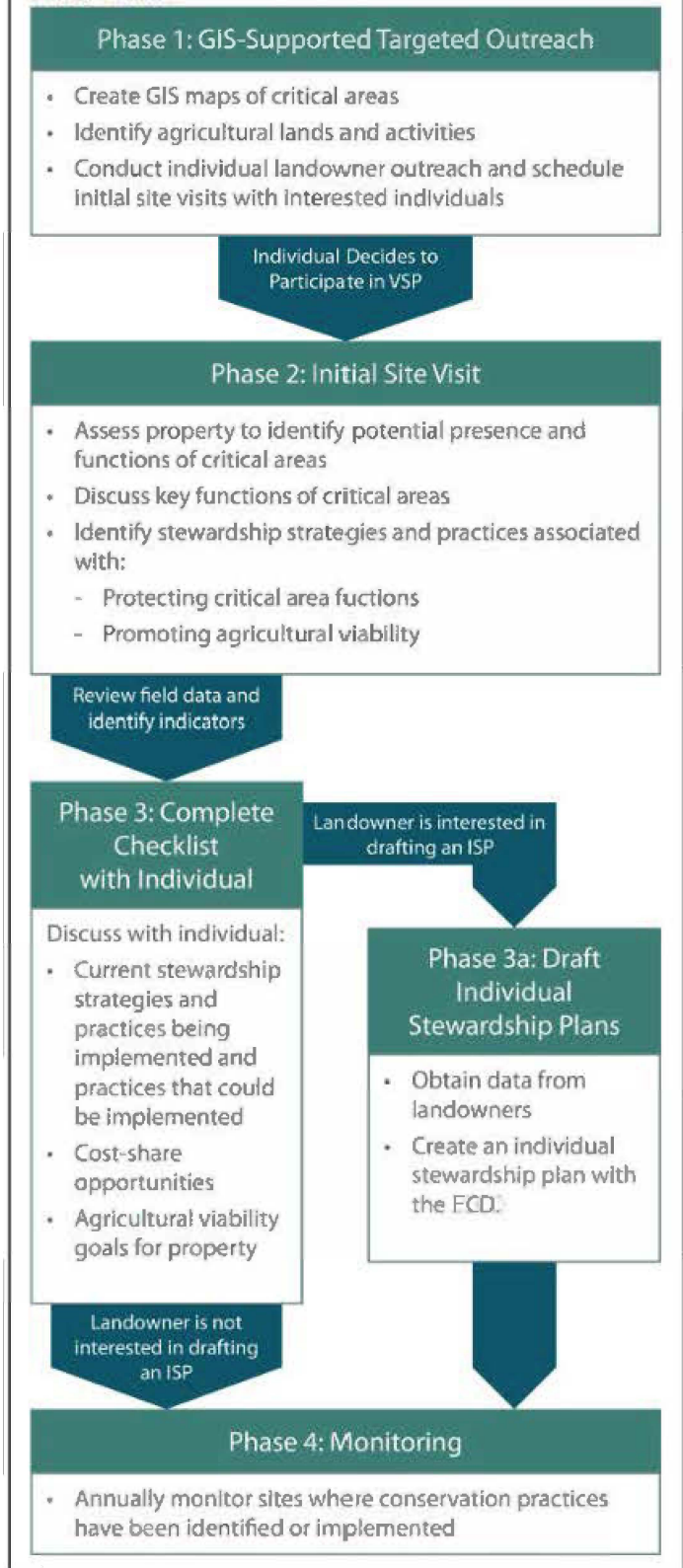


Table 3 provides an update on ongoing and planned outreach activities as described in the Work Plan (Appendix E of the Work Plan).

Table 3
Status of Public Communication and Outreach Activities

Type	Completed and Ongoing Activities
Maintain and Update Email List	Ferry CD continues to maintain an email list containing all interested subscribers.
Update Website and Media	Ferry CD created a webpage specifically for VSP and has continually updated the site. All meeting notices and materials as well as documents will continue to be provided on the Ferry CD VSP webpage. Future developments planned for the VSP webpage include the ability for landowners to identify critical areas on their property and submit information about their voluntary conservation via an online form. Ferry CD also posts announcements and updates on social media.
News and Success Stories Publications	Ferry CD publishes news and success stories on its website. Information about VSP has been and will continue to be included.
VSP Checklist	The VSP Overview & Checklist was included as Appendix F of the VSP Work Plan. This checklist helps facilitate participation in VSP and tracking of currently ongoing conservation strategies and practices. The VSP Checklist is available as an online fillable document and is being modified as needed.
Notifications, Handouts, and Landowner Maps	With GIS support, Ferry CD will be conducting outreach to agricultural landowners who may have acreage that intersects with critical areas. Recognizing the limits of technology in the county, the Ferry CD will develop educational handouts outlining common best management practices that protect and/or enhance critical areas.
Individual Stewardship Plans	Ferry CD continues to work with producers to help them prepare stewardship plans for their farms and support them in implementing these plans. See Figure 1 for the Phased VSP Outreach and ISP Development Flow Chart.
Reporting on Stewardship Strategies and Practices	Ferry CD will continue to work with NRCS and the Farm Service Agency annually to collect information related to ongoing and new practices implemented. Additionally, Ferry CD will also work with individual producers to collect information on self-funded practices implemented. Data will be used in developing biennial and 5-year reports. Information will be collected during the GIS-supported landowner outreach and VSP webpage participation.
Educational Opportunities	Educational materials focused on particular critical area issues and agricultural practices are available to producers at their convenience. These can be used at booths at fairs, public meetings, or farmers' markets.

2.2 Conservation Practices

The Ferry County Work Plan was formally approved in November 2018.

Larger conservation efforts in the county have been hampered by intermittent staffing at the NRCS Republic office. Normally the Ferry CD would partner with the NRCS in technical assistance and outreach, and NRCS conservation projects help work toward VSP goals; therefore, this staffing arrangement has greatly impacted the VSP programs.

Summary of agencies and their involvement in the VSP program:

- **Voluntary Stewardship Program:** VSP funding is allocated to each participating county for implementation to meet the goals and objectives of their work plan.
- **Ferry Conservation District:** Ferry CD allocates resources intended to meet the needs of local landowners to conserve soil, water, and other natural resources.
- **Washington State Department of Ecology:** The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) provides funding for water-quality improvement and protection projects through various grant programs and partnerships with local conservation districts.
- **Washington State Conservation Commission:** The WSCC supports conservation districts through financial and technical assistance grants. The Ferry CD uses these grant programs for landowners to complete natural resources enhancement projects.
- **Ferry County Weed Board:** The Ferry County Weed Board partners with the Ferry CD to map invasive weeds and develop information for cost-shares to manage noxious weeds in Ferry County.

During the five-year reporting period that includes 2021-2023, participation in key stewardship strategies offset the county's reduction in conservation practices. Protection and enhancement objectives for 2021 and 2026 (participation acres) have been met based on reported acres in stewardship activities from 2011 to 2023. A more comprehensive list of implemented stewardship strategies and practices through other publicly funded sources such as NRCS, and privately funded projects is reported in the 2017-2021 5-year status report.

The Ferry CD is working to field verify 10% of implemented conservation practices through monitoring and visual recognition annually. The GIS mapping, ISPs, related cost-shares, and other outreach practices incorporate the 10% verification process. Figure 1 shows the phasing Ferry CD intends to use to approach field verification and ISP development with interested landowners, including outreach, site visits, and monitoring. The Ferry CD conducts field verification following the installation of all practices and projects they facilitate. Field verification aims to confirm that practices have been installed consistent with best management practice specifications. Table 4 represents the key stewardship practices in place in Ferry County within the years 2021-2023.

Table 4
Key Stewardship Practices in Ferry County

Type	Key Stewardship Practice	Units
Livestock/Range Management	Reseeding Mixed Use Pasture	210 acres
	Spring Development	1
Nutrient/Pest Management	Weed Spraying	1,259 acres
Habitat Management	Access Control (Wetland)	1,500 feet
	Fish and Wildlife Structure (Fish Barrier Replacement)	2

2.2.1 Individual Stewardship Plan

Ferry CD continues to develop Individual Stewardship Plans with interested producers. This will be an area of emphasis for the next reporting period.

2.3 Monitoring

Ferry CD is committed to monitoring performance, reporting progress, and implementing adaptive management measures as discussed in Section 5.4 of the Work Plan. Monitoring focuses on measurable benchmarks and indicators described in Section 5 of the Work Plan to be informally evaluated every 2 years to support the 5-year performance review. The monitoring performed for the 2017-2021 Five-Year status report indicated that implemented conservation practices exceed the Work Plan benchmarks. The Five-Year Report Technical Panel made recommendations on how to improve monitoring and the Ferry CD will work with the agency panel members. Results shown in Table 5 are consistent with Table 5-9 in the Work Plan.

Table 5
Producer Participation Monitoring

Participation Goal: Promote producer participation in voluntary stewardship of agricultural lands and critical areas to meet the protection and/or enhancement benchmarks and protect critical area functions and values at a County-wide watershed level.		
Objectives/Benchmarks	Performance Metric/ Monitoring Method	Biennial Status
Sufficient active participation by commercial and non-commercial agricultural operators (farmers and ranchers) over 10 years that achieves the protection of critical area functions and values at a County-wide watershed level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of acres reported in key stewardship practices • Number of VSP self-assessment checklists submitted • Sufficient producer participation necessary to meet protection and enhancement benchmarks 	Producer participation exceeds the benchmarks described in the Work Plan during the reporting period.
Passive participation by commercial and non-commercial agricultural operators in VSP stewardship practices is maintained or increased on agricultural land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping and aerial photo evaluation of practices in place • Random sampling of farmers and ranchers in the field by technical assistance providers with willing landowners 	Ferry CD will improve its capability to track critical areas and assist in targeted landowner outreach. Figure 1 demonstrates the process for site visits and technical assistance.
Technical assistance and outreach are provided to agricultural producers to encourage stewardship practices and VSP participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of outreach and education events • Number of event attendees 	Outreach occurred at the Ferry County Fair in Sept. of 2021 and 2022 (170 attended/year). The CD hosted the Spring Conservation Fair in April of 2023 (210 attended), and a Pesticide Credit Event in Feb. 2023 (20 attended).

County-wide monitoring of resources, particularly water quality and quantity, was performed for the 2021 to 2023 biennial report. Data sources included the Washington Department of Ecology's 303(d) listings for the county, readings from USGS water gauges on the Kettle River, information from the Washington Department of Health on drinking water contamination, and a basic aerial imagery check. There was no apparent connection between agricultural activities and adverse effects on resources. Further information on VSP monitoring can be found in the Work Plan, Section 6.3.

2.4 Adaptive Management

No adaptive management is required at this time, consistent with the 2017-2021 five-year status report results and the WSCC Executive Director concurring with the County's assessment that it is meeting its goals and benchmarks as asserted in that report. However, the Ferry CD has self-identified areas of concern for the VSP program in the county and will proactively adjust its outreach strategies to successfully meet VSP goals and benchmarks throughout the next five-year reporting period (2021-2026). These adjustments are distinct from the adaptive management actions discussed in the Work Plan, which are only needed if the County does not meet its goals and benchmarks as documented in a five-year status report.

These adjustments are at the discretion of the Ferry CD and the Work Group and could change over time as needs and resources dictate. There were also recommendations from the Five-Year Report Technical Panel that will be considered going forward.

2.5 Reporting

This report is intended to be a summary of accomplishments and plans of commitments in the Work Plan between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2023. A full description of the Goals and Benchmarks is available in the approved Work Plan in **Table 5-7** (p59).

2.6 Agricultural Viability

Implementing VSP remains the best opportunity to protect critical area function intersecting with agriculture. However, the viability of agriculture has been, is, and will be challenged by critical areas. **Table 3-4** in the Work Plan describes threats to agricultural viability: Loss of land base to development, predation of livestock by wolves, costs of weed management, wildfires and landslides, and new regulations. All these threats have increased during the reporting period.

Land Conversion

As discussed in the Work Plan, conversion of agricultural land to other uses remains a serious threat to agricultural viability. During the reporting (2021-2023) raw land values have continued to increase dramatically with the driver being the migration of urban people to rural areas like Ferry County. The price of raw land is beyond what agricultural production can monetarily support. This does not allow expansion of existing operations and is a barrier to developing new operations. Although conservation easements can help stem agricultural land loss, there are very limited opportunities to put them in place due to the capacity of the entities involved. Once agricultural land is converted, there has historically been little chance that is re-established.

Endangered Species

Endangered species can impact agricultural viability. Gray wolves remain state-listed as endangered in Ferry County but not federally listed. The Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (Wolf Plan) passed by WDFW in 2011 established a recovery goal for the regions in the state that continues to be exceeded three-fold in the region, including Ferry County. Wolf policy around the required use of non-lethal deterrents before lethal removal is considered has had a bigger impact on livestock producers than the actual cost of depredations by wolves which was recognized as a threat to agricultural viability in the Work Plan. Wolf depredations of livestock can be compensated for if they meet strict criteria in determining how the animal died. The wolf policy developed by WDFW requires more resources to be provided by livestock producers in the form of non-lethal deterrents than was anticipated by the producers during the development of the Wolf Plan and is unsustainable. The deterrents require an investment in time that most producers do not have available, and no amount of compensation will create more time. WDFW made it clear during a rulemaking process during this reporting period that as wolf recovery expands across the state there will likely be less support provided to producers.

"It is important to note that many of the businesses that are affected by wolf depredation, particularly those that are implementing extensive non-lethal deterrence techniques, rely to some extent on available financial support.⁴⁹ This support ranges from sharing of costs of deterrents with WDFW through the DPCA_L program and provision of tools such as fox lights and fladry by WDFW at no cost to producers, and the use of state-funded range riders through WDFW, CPoW, and NEWWCC. These resources are limited, subject to availability, and not guaranteed to be available in the long term. To the extent that financial support becomes more limited, a greater portion of current and future costs of non-lethal deterrents may be borne by the individual producers. Additionally, implementation of non-lethal deterrents may increase as a result of the rule, or as a result of wolf populations expanding to new areas of the state. This may result in available resources being dispersed more widely across a greater number of producers, reducing the existing levels of support individual producers are currently receiving. Industry representatives identified that the availability of state-funded range riders is already highly limited, as are state-provided tools such as fox lights and fladry (with most of these resources currently going to producers in the northeastern part of the state). Increased demand for these resources may also increase the proportion of deterrent costs that are paid out-of-pocket by producers."

(WDFW SBEIS 2/10/22, ppg 2-12 to 2-13)

There are also funds from the state legislature that the Washington State Department of Agriculture administers that are part of a competitive grant process to supply range riders to livestock producers at no charge. Two nonprofits have provided the services for the last three grazing seasons: the Cattle Producers of Washington and the NE Washington Wolf-Cattle Collaborative. One of the questions asked in the grant application is:

"Sustainability — Would your proposed actions be sustainable for producers long term without continued outside funding? When answering this question, please consider the capacity of the producers with regard to cost, time available, training, ability to manage additional employees if necessary, and if there is a trained and equipped workforce available to hire."

The NE Washington Wolf-Cattle Collaborative, which has the most experience, answered this way:

"Most ranches in Northeastern Washington graze cow-calf pairs on USFS allotments from June to October while they are putting up hay for the winter. Producers have different size operations, some are larger than others. The capacity of producers to sustain the actions proposed also varies and may

depend on the size and situation of their ranch. In other words, the inherent capacity of a ranching operation to absorb the additional, relatively high labor level and therefore financial cost of adding sustainable wolf deterrence on large acreage, generally riding horseback, is variable across the landscape. A cost that is new, significant, and not well integrated into the business plan, such as a new heavy workload during haying, will not be sustainable. This capacity is measured in the additional time and financial resources a ranch has available to conduct a preventative effort. The proposed actions in this document include the training and management of additional employees and paying their salaries during a busy part of the year. The costs would preclude most ranches from taking on a similar project. We do know what it costs to have efficient and effective range riding on every operation, and this is an important metric to know when discussing sustainable methods. What we do is not sustainable for individual ranches to accomplish with their own financial resources.

While the Northeast Washington Wolf-Cattle Collaborative cannot estimate the ability of each ranch operation to absorb the cost of deterring wolves on a particular federal grazing allotment, what the Northeast Washington Wolf-Cattle Collaborative can determine is which grazing areas have higher risk of wolf conflict due to wolf reproductive activity, pack size, landscape ruggedness, road access, and other factors, and also whether an operation wants our assistance. If the answer is moderate to high wolf risk and yes to wanting help, we then put our heads down and get to work.

The Northeast Washington Wolf-Cattle Collaborative, and other groups, have developed a locally trained, well-equipped (GPS units, horses, trucks, trailers) workforce that knows how to look for cattle, cattle injuries, wolf sign, and sign of other carnivores. The Northeast Washington Wolf-Cattle Collaborative has accomplished the development of this work force by placing horseback riders on the landscape for years and learning through experience. This has taken time and hard work to gain a quality work force.

The proposed actions may cost too much and be unsustainable for some ranches, with no outside funding. The effort may not be as difficult, although still difficult, to sustain for other ranches. However, the cost of the social divide in Washington state, between those in favor of wolves on the landscape and those who lose livestock to wolves is also costly to the state, potentially in dollars spent in court, but also in social well-being and shouldn't be overlooked."

The NE Washington Wolf-Cattle Collaborative spent \$195,084 on range riding for eight livestock producers in Ferry County's three WIRAs during the 2022 grazing season. They stated 5-10 other livestock producers needed their services but could not help them due to budget reasons. The Cattle Producers of Washington also spent \$110,000 riding for seven livestock producers in 2022 in Ferry County WIRAs. The Census of Agriculture (USDA 2017) for Ferry County stated that the gross market value of products sold (likely nearly all livestock) was \$3,914,000. If the net profit for livestock is 20%, that would be \$782,800. The combined expenditures for the nonprofits providing range riding in Ferry County for 2022 were \$305,084. That alone equates to nearly 40% of the net profit on livestock in the county. That doesn't account for livestock producers who had to use their own funds because they could not get coverage from the nonprofits. Just like in the case of WDFW, it is unlikely that funding will remain available, and these costs will be the livestock producer's responsibility.

Pressure from wolves has also disrupted the key conservation practice of prescribed grazing identified in the approved Ferry County VSP Work Plan. This practice covers the largest amount of acreage in the county of any conservation practice. This has caused uneven forage utilization in private pastures and leased public allotments resulting in over-grazing in some areas. This

problem was brought to the attention of WDFW during a PowerPoint presentation to the agency in July of 2021. WDFW Wolf Policy Lead Julia Smith responded, "This is not WDFW's problem". It is a problem for both livestock producers and the VSP program. A substantial decrease in the Prescribed Grazing practices could be construed as the county not reaching its goals and benchmarks but the cause being beyond the capacity of livestock producers and the control of the county.

Invasive Species

Weeds were identified in the Work Plan as a threat to critical area functions. In developing the Five Year VSP Report it became clear that weeds had a greater impact on agricultural viability and critical area function than was expected. Uncontrolled weeds were noted in the land, including converted agricultural land, parcels owned by absentee landowners, and public land owned by various agencies. Infestations of invasive weeds on non-agricultural lands over time spread to agricultural lands and critical areas. This reduces agricultural viability due to increased costs to control weeds that reduce production and product value. It also increases herbicide use, potentially impairing water quality and other critical area functions. Weeds in critical areas such as wetlands are difficult to control once established. In conjunction with the Ferry County Weed Board, the Ferry CD has developed a cost-share program for weed control. The program is gaining popularity and provides an opportunity to document other VSP practices.

Regulatory Uncertainty

Washington Department of Ecology Stock Water Policy 1025 continues to be unresolved. The policy would prohibit livestock from drinking surface water without a water right. Although the policy is not currently being enforced, its uncertainty is a huge concern for livestock owners. Enforcing the policy would essentially end most of the county's livestock production, leading to the land being converted to other non-agricultural activities.

The Work Plan states, "In Ferry County, the primary agricultural product is livestock, which is entirely dependent on public rangelands for grazing." Lawsuits aimed at ending federal public land grazing in Ferry County are pending in the courts. The effect on livestock would be devastating.

Both WDFW and Ecology were asked specific questions about the issues related to this section and cooperated with information as best they could. Further discussions are merited.

2.7 Spirit of Cooperation

The conservation districts in neighboring Stevens and Pend Oreille counties have been vital partners to Ferry CD in implementing the VSP in northeast Washington. Collaborative projects between the three Districts include developing a "Farm to Table" guide for all three counties published in local newspapers, discussing common goals and challenges for VSP, and sharing staff resources. Ferry CD would particularly like to thank Dean Hellie, Adam Cares, and Alex Case-Cohen who implement VSP for their respective counties for their partnership and insight. Debra Hansen and Kathryn Hoogheem from WSU Extension Stevens County have supported VSP in all three counties. Leslie Michal from the Washington Department of Agriculture has helped with understanding soil health in the county and general VSP knowledge. In addition, Levi Keesecker of the Washington State Conservation Commission has provided valuable guidance on VSP monitoring.

References

Anchor QEA, LLC, 2018. *Ferry County Voluntary Stewardship Program Approved Work Plan*. Approved by Washington State Conservation Commission on April 27, 2018. Prepared for Ferry County in cooperation with the Ferry Conservation District. Prepared with assistance from White Bluffs Consulting. November 2018.

WSCC (Washington State Conservation Commission), 2018. VSP Policy Advisory #05-18:

Acknowledgments

The Ferry Conservation District would like to commend VSP Work Group member Dolly Watkins on her 90th birthday. Her dedication to this cause and her insight have brought this program to a better place.