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August 2021
Pend Oreille County Voluntary Stewardship Program

Biennial Report: 2019–2021

Work Group Review Draft: 08/12/2021

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Prepared for
Pend Oreille County and
Washington State Conservation Commission

Prepared by
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Appendix A Outreach Materials

ABBREVIATIONS

Ecology	Washington State Department of Ecology
FY	fiscal year
ISP	Individual Stewardship Plan
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
POCD	Pend Oreille Conservation District
PUD	Pend Oreille Public Utilities District
RCW	Revised Code of Washington
report	Biennial Report: 2017–2019
VSP	Voluntary Stewardship Program
WDFW	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Work Group	Pend Oreille County Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Group
Work Plan	Pend Oreille County Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Plan
WRIA	Water Resource Inventory Area
WSCC	Washington State Conservation Commission

1 Introduction

This Biennial Report (report) for fiscal years (FY) 2019–2021 documents the status and accomplishments of Pend Oreille County’s Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Work Plan (Work Plan; White Bluffs Consulting 2018) implementation, which was approved by the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) in October 2018¹. This report summarizes implementation efforts that have occurred from July 2019 through June 2021. This report also describes ongoing and planned implementation efforts that will be documented in future reports to the WSCC.

The Pend Oreille Conservation District (POCD), under direction of the Pend Oreille 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 by the Work Group in meeting the VSP goals from July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2021
- A report on the progress towards meeting the goals identified in 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 to the commission within sixty days after the end of each biennium.” The first report for FY 2019–2021 is due no later than August 31, 2021 (WSCC 2018).

Per the VSP Policy Advisory 05-18 issued by the WSCC, the report should include a summary of how Work Plan implementation is making progress towards meeting the purpose and intent of the VSP (RCW 36.70A.700(2)).

Table 1 provides the location in this report where information on the status and progress towards 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.

¹ The Pend Oreille County VSP Work Plan was approved by the Washington State Conservation Commission on September 28, 2018. The approved version of the Work Plan was issued in October 2018.

Table 1
Summary of Progress Towards Meeting VSP Intent

No.	VSP Intent	Pend Oreille County VSP Biennial Report (FY 2019–2021)
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 POCD that has encouraged participation in conservation practices to protect critical areas and promote agricultural viability. • Section 2.2 describes conservation practices that have been implemented for the reporting period. • Table 4 summarizes conservation practices implemented for the reporting period.
2	The maintenance and improvement of the long-term viability of agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.6 describes how implementation efforts have improved agricultural viability.
3	Reducing the conversion of farmland to other uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Table 4 describes conservation practices that have been implemented for the reporting period that have a beneficial effect on agricultural viability. • Tables 2 and 3 summarize outreach efforts from the POCD and participation by landowners to implement conservation practices that benefit agricultural viability.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.2 summarizes projects implemented by landowners for the reporting period, which include funding from five different voluntary incentive programs benefiting ecosystem stewardship, including VSP.
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 E: Existing and Related Plans, Programs, and Regulations describes available resources, plans, and programs being utilized or available to support VSP implementation. No additional resources have been added for this reporting period.
6	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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.1 summarizes the methods the POCD is using to reach out to interested parties and landowners, including public meetings and regular website updates to encourage partnerships in the community.

No.	VSP Intent	Pend Oreille County VSP Biennial Report (FY 2019–2021)
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 POCD that include the use of data that is also used to determine compliance with existing water quality and fish habitat laws. New, publicly available information collected by the POCD during monitoring will be made available to the appropriate agencies as applicable to assist with their monitoring programs. • Section 2.2 summarizes projects implemented by landowners since the approval of the Work Plan.
8	A description of efforts showing how voluntary stewardship practices are the primary method of protecting critical areas and does not require the cessation of agricultural activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Table 4 demonstrates that, based on efforts for the reporting period, Pend Oreille County is on track to meet goals and benchmarks, indicating successful implementation of VSP. This will be further supported and verified through continued monitoring and implementation efforts that will be captured in the next 5-year report (2026). • 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, POCD, and others have implemented or completed that support VSP Work Plan implementation and monitoring between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2021.

2.1 Outreach

2.1.1 *Completed Outreach Activities*

The Pend Oreille VSP Work Group has given POCD responsibility for managing and facilitating the VSP implementation process. Continued public outreach and education is integral to implementing the Work Plan. The VSP coordinators continued public outreach efforts primarily through the production and distribution of educational videos. Four videos have been produced on topics such as shoreline stabilization, riparian restoration, and no-till farming techniques. Efforts to publicize and share these videos are planned for the current biennium (2021-2023).

Completed videos include:

- [Shoreline Stabilization Future Project in Metaline, Washington](#)
- [Streambank Restoration Project Example](#)
- [Pend Oreille County Voluntary Stewardship Project Examples](#)
- [Pend Oreille Valley Farm Tour, Blue Slate Ranch](#)

Table 2
Public Outreach Meetings Since July 2019

No.	Date	Meeting	Location	Participants	Notes
1	8/16-8/18/2019	Pend Oreille County Fair	Cusick, WA	100	Displayed VSP materials and spoke with at least 6 interested participants
2	8/28/2019	VSP Work Group Meeting	Newport, WA	4	Public VSP Work Group meeting to discuss progress and plan
3	10/23/2019	VSP Work Group Meeting	Newport, WA	5	Public VSP Work Group meeting to discuss progress and plan
4	11/16/2019	Soil Health Workshop	Stevens County	33	Discussed soil health benefits and relevance in the VSP program
5	1/18/2020	Soil Health Workshop	Stevens County	20	Discussed pasture renovation/restoration and relationship to soil health
6	1/22/2020	VSP Work Group Meeting	Newport, WA	9	Public VSP Work Group meeting to discuss progress and plan
7	4/25/2020	Soil Health Workshop	Virtual	20	Discussed grant funding and rotational grazing
8	4/29/2020	VSP Work Group Meeting	Virtual	11	Public VSP Work Group Meeting to discuss progress and plan
9	6/18/2020	VSP Work Group Meeting	Virtual	7	Public VSP Work Group Meeting to discuss progress and plan
10	7/18/2020	Soil Health Workshop	Virtual	20	Virtual presentation discussing monitoring techniques for soil health
11	9/30/2020	VSP Work Group Meeting	Virtual	7	Public VSP Work Group Meeting to discuss progress and plan
	11/5/2020	VSP Work Group Meeting	Virtual	7	Public VSP Work Group Meeting to discuss progress and plan
	12/16/2020	VSP Work Group Meeting	Virtual	9	Public VSP Work Group Meeting to discuss progress and plan
	1/28/2021	VSP Work Group Meeting	Virtual	11	VSP presentation and discussion of 5-year monitoring report and results
	2/13/2021	Soil Health Workshop	Virtual	14	Virtual presentation discussing bale grazing projects
	4/1/2021	VSP Work Group Meeting	Cusick, WA & Virtual	7	Public VSP Work Group Meeting to discuss progress and plan
11	4/17/2021	Soil Health Workshop	Virtual	12	Virtual presentation discussing seed selection and no-till hay planting
12	5/22/2021	Soil Health Workshop	Pend Oreille County	30	Conducted a field day of soil health research projects in Pend Oreille County
	6/15/2021	VSP Work Group Meeting	Virtual	5	Public VSP Work Group Meeting to discuss progress and plan

No.	Date	Meeting	Location	Participants	Notes
13	6/26/2021	Soil Health Workshop	Stevens County	40	Participated in a field day to observe rotational grazing in Stevens County

2.1.2 Marketing and Direct Landowner Outreach

POCD made approximately 6,400 points of contact for the reporting period, well exceeding the goal of approximately 570 contacts per the VSP Work Plan. This includes the distribution of newsletters, flyers, and checklists sent to producers, along with materials handed out at public events such as the County fair. A letter from a well-known producer in support of the VSP and POCD was sent out to 700 other producers in 2020 as well. Additionally, when in-person contact was not possible, POCD took advantage of social media to share VSP information, promoting the program on Facebook and through YouTube in a video campaign. One video campaign in the summer of 2020 resulted in more than 2,000 views of VSP videos.

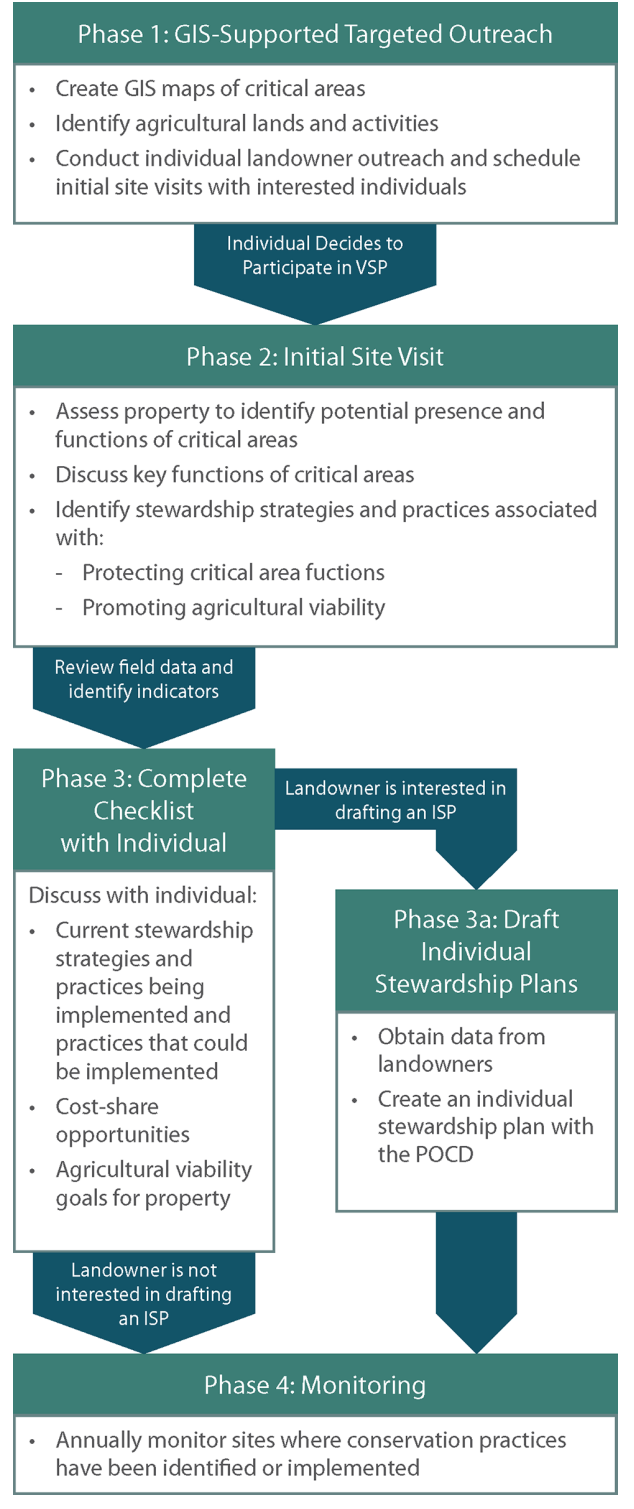
The POCD has also launched an interactive web map accessible from the POCD VSP website that allows users to identify critical areas mapped anywhere in the county. The map was shared by email to subscribers to the VSP email updates. The map is currently under construction.

2.1.3 Ongoing and Future Outreach Efforts

VSP success relies on producer participation to implement conservation practices. The implementation budget for each biennium provided to the County includes funding for education, outreach, and technical assistance with activities such as stewardship plan development, reporting, and educational materials (see Table 6-1 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.

- **YouTube Videos:** The POCD has published informational videos on YouTube to provide a visual aid to the greater public regarding VSP.
- **Work Group Meetings:** The VSP Work Group has met several times since the approval of the Work Plan to focus on implementation and ongoing outreach activities. Meeting agendas and minutes are available on the POCD VSP website².
- **Email Updates:** The VSP Coordinator has provided periodic email updates to Work Group members
- **Ongoing Individual Stewardship Plan (ISP) Development:** In the 2019–2021 biennium the VSP Coordinator worked with Work Group members and others to develop ISPs. See Figure 1 for the Phased VSP Outreach and ISP Development Flow Chart.
- **GIS Outreach, Monitoring, and Reporting:** To support ongoing outreach, implementation, and future monitoring and reporting requirements, POCD is working with the Pend Oreille County GIS to develop a GIS monitoring program and implementing a targeted outreach plan to landowners using critical area mapping and historical imagery. These maps are available on the web and being used by POCD to identify

**Figure 1
Phased VSP Outreach and ISP Development
Flow Chart**



² <https://www.pocd.org/voluntary-stewardship-program>

landowners within critical areas who can be contacted for site visits.

Table 3
Public Engagement and Outreach Efforts

Type	Completed and Ongoing Activities
Maintain and Update Email List	POCD maintains an email list containing all interested subscribers from the POCD website. Anyone may subscribe to the email list from the POCD website: https://www.pocd.org
Update Website and Media	POCD created a webpage specifically for the VSP and has continually updated the site. All meeting notices and materials as well as documents will continue to be provided on the POCD VSP webpage. POCD also posts announcement and updates on social media, including Facebook. The website can be found at https://www.pocd.org/voluntary-stewardship-program
News and Success Stories Publications	POCD publishes news and success stories on their website. Information about VSP has been and will continue to be included on the website.
VSP Checklist	The VSP Overview and Checklist was included in VSP Work Plan Appendix E. This checklist helps facilitate participation in VSP and tracking of currently ongoing conservation practices. An abbreviated checklist is available as an online fillable document that is used to identify parties that may be interested in an ISP.
Notifications, Handouts, and Landowner Maps	With GIS support, POCD is conducting outreach to agricultural landowners who may have acreage that intersects with critical areas. POCD has developed educational handouts outlining common best management practices that protect and/or enhance critical areas. Landowners who request additional information from the POCD will receive these handouts along with site-specific maps outlining critical areas on their lands based on County maps. Three informational postcards were also developed and sent to landowners encouraging participation in the VSP.
Individual Stewardship Plans	POCD is working 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 Conservation Practices	POCD is working with NRCS and the Farm Service Agency to annually collect information related to ongoing and new practices implemented on individual farms. Additionally, POCD is working with individual producers to annually collect information on self-funded practices implemented, with associated metrics to use in developing biennial and 5-year reports and performance reviews. Information will be collected during the GIS-supported landowner outreach.
Educational Opportunities	Educational materials focused on targeted critical area issues and agricultural practices are available to producers at their convenience. These materials will be used at booths at fairs and public meetings again once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.
Farm Tours	POCD-led annual tours are opportunities to share information with producers, partners, and the public. Planned tours were postponed due to COVID-19, but will include on-farm testing and demonstration and field trials.
Video Productions	POCD created online videos on YouTube introducing VSP elements and guidelines that are being distributed via social media and ongoing email communications/virtual newsletters.

2.2 Conservation Practices

This report documents implementation of conservation practices that have been facilitated or led by the POCD since July 2019. Section 4.2 of the Work Plan documents conservation practices that were implemented since the establishment of the VSP on July 22, 2011, to 2016, which established appropriate goals and benchmarks for ongoing implementation of the program.

For the reporting period, the POCD has supported producers with implementation of approximately 24 unique types of stewardship projects in partnership with several existing state and local programs, including the following examples:

- **Pend Oreille Public Utilities District (PUD):** In an effort to improve shoreline conditions and wildlife habitat along the Pend Oreille River, POCD is working closely with the PUD in a Cottonwood Planting Program and an Erosion Control Program where landowners can receive up to 75% cost share for the implementation of bank stabilization and erosion prevention practices. All PUD projects occur on the Pend Oreille River within the Box Canyon Dam Reservoir and provide a net ecological benefit to the area, thus contributing benefits to agricultural lands.
- **Washington State Department of Natural Resources:** In order to improve forest health, increase wildlife habitat, and minimize wildfire risk, POCD works closely with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources Small Forest Landowner Office. Many of these projects are targeted on or adjacent to agricultural land.
- **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):** Much of the technical assistance provided to agricultural landowners in Pend Oreille County originates from NRCS. POCD collaborates regularly with the local and regional NRCS offices to help facilitate conservation practice implementation and allocate cost-share funds for projects.
- **Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW):** Private Lands Biologists are working with WDFW to provide technical assistance and cost share to landowners who are interested in wildlife habitat protection and enhancement on their property.

Funding sources for implementation of POCD-supported stewardship projects have been provided through five different cost-share programs:

- **VSP:** VSP funding is allocated to each participating county for implementation to meet the goals and objectives of their Work Plan.
- **POCD:** POCD allocates resources with the goal of meeting the needs of local landowners to conserve soil, water, and other natural resources.
- **Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology):** Ecology provides funding for water quality improvement and protection projects through various grant programs and partnerships with local conservation districts.

- **PUD:** PUD provides landowners with up to 75% cost share in the cottonwood planting and erosion control programs.
- **WSCC:** Through the Natural Resources Investment grant, WSCC allocates up to 75% cost-share funding for up to four natural resource projects on an annual basis.

Table 4 summarizes the types of conservation practices implemented since approval of the Work Plan and identifies 2021 Performance Objectives, consistent with Work Plan Tables 5-6 and 5-7.

Projects implemented over the last biennium had agricultural viability benefits that included producing habitat for beneficial species, protecting against erosion, promoting land fertility, and protecting livestock herd health. The projects included protections for all five critical areas (wetlands, habitat conservation areas, critical aquifer recharge areas, geologically hazardous areas, and frequently flooded areas).

Based on the number and type of projects that have already been completed, it appears Pend Oreille County is on track to meet protection and enhancement benchmarks described in the Work Plan by the 5-year reporting period in 2021. As demonstrated in Table 4, protection performance objectives for 2021 have already been exceeded in the categories of Livestock/Range Management, Forest Understory Management, Pest Management, and Habitat Management. A more comprehensive list of implemented conservation practices through other publicly funded sources such as NRCS and privately funded projects will be reported on in the 5-year status report.

POCD is working to field verify 10% of implemented conservation practices through monitoring and visual recognition annually. The GIS mapping, ISPs, and other outreach practices are incorporating the 10% verification process. POCD currently conducts field verification following installment of all practices and projects that are facilitated by the POCD. The purpose of field verification is to confirm that practices have been installed consistent with best management standards and specifications.

2.2.1 Individual Stewardship Plans

POCD worked with agricultural producers and successfully developed fifteen ISPs during the previous biennium, highlighting a variety of stewardship strategies and practices (see Appendix A for a copy of the finalized ISP template being used by POCD). The ISP addresses identified critical areas on private lands along with other natural resource concerns (soil, water, air, plant, and animal) that occur in Pend Oreille County. The ISP also suggests best management practices relevant to critical area implementation and investigates current and potential interest and ability of landowners to implement them. This document template will be updated and refined over time, as necessary, to address the changing resource concerns of the landowners.

**Table 4
Summary of Projects Implemented in the 2019-2021 Biennium**

Key Stewardship Strategies			Projects		2019-2021 Protection Performance Objectives ¹	2026 Enhancement Performance Objectives ¹
Type	Key Conservation Practice	NRCS #	Implementation Agency	Approximate Units		
Livestock/Range Management	Watering Facility	614	NRCS/POCD	3 facilities	0 acres 0.8 watering facility	1 acre 1 watering facility
	Heavy Use Area Protection	561	NRCS	0.4 acre		
	Prescribed Grazing	528	POCD	50 acres		
	Silvopasture	381	POCD	20 acres		
Forest Understory Management	Forest Stand Improvement	666	NRCS/POCD/DNR	500 acres	89 acres	1,936 acres
	Woody Residue Treatment	384	NRCS/POCD/DNR	500 acres		
	Brush Management	314	NRCS/POCD/DNR	500 acres		
Habitat Management	Site Preparation	490	POCD/NRCS	24.6 acres	140 acres 5 feet 4 pond/structure	3,066 acres 104 feet 94 pond/structure
	Tree and Shrub Establishment	612	POCD	22 acres		
	Herbaceous Weed Control	315	POCD/NRCS	460 acres		
	Structures for Wildlife	649	NRCS	79 structures		
Soil Management	Forage and Biomass Planting	512	POCD/NRCS	320 acres	3 acres 1,467 ft 0 structures	24 acres 32,038 feet 0 structures
	Nutrient Management	590	POCD	35 acres		
	Residue & Tillage Management – No Till	329	POCD	165 acres		
	Residue & Tillage Management – Reduced Till	345	POCD	250 acres		
	Cover Crop	340	POCD	50 acres		
	Conservation Crop Rotation	328	POCD	100 acres		
Other (Agricultural Viability)	High Tunnel System	325	NRCS	4,440 square feet	—	—

Notes:

1) These are the 2021 protection performance objectives from Table 5.7 of the Work Plan.

2) These are the 2026 enhancement performance benchmarks for the Work Plan; they should be adjusted to reflect a more accurate representation of disenrollment and were set at aspirational levels that were not anticipated to be met by 2021. They are shown here to show progress toward that goal.

3) Conservation Practices highlighted in **bolded italics** were approved as key conservation practices for the POC VSP on April 1st, 2021

2.3 Monitoring

The POCD is committed to monitoring performance, reporting progress, and implementing adaptive management measures as discussed in Work Plan Section 6.3. Monitoring focuses on measurable benchmarks and indicators described in Work Plan Section 5 that are to be informally evaluated every 2 years to support the 5-year performance review. In preparation for data monitoring and indicator analysis for the 5-year report, POCD hired a Regional Farm Planner with extensive GIS experience to develop a VSP mapping system to help support an outreach, monitoring, and reporting program. The VSP Coordinator and Outreach Specialist are also committed to monitoring and reporting public participation in stewardship strategies and practices every 2 and 5 years. Results of efforts by POCD to monitor producer participation are summarized in Table 5, consistent with Work Plan Section 5, Table 5-9.

A list of monitoring indicators included for each critical area function in Work Plan Section 5, Table 5-8 is used to inform whether protection of baseline conditions is being achieved during the 5-year reporting period. Indicators will also be used to identify trends and focus efforts on high-priority areas. Some indicators being used to support conservation practice monitoring, such as surface and groundwater tracking through Ecology and WDFW habitat assessments, are also designed to support other environmental compliance laws including water quality standards and fish habitat protection.

The Pend Oreille County VSP 5-year monitoring report included the most recent summary of indicator monitoring results. More time and more robust data collection will be needed to show the efficacy of the Pend Oreille County VSP, but initial results show an overall increase in critical area functions.

2.4 Adaptive Management

Currently, POCD has far exceeded the outreach efforts committed to in the Work Plan. The Work Plan commits to reaching out to 10% of producers annually, which equals 43 producers per year. Based on newsletter publications and postcard distribution, POCD has made over 6,000 contact efforts since Work Plan approval and including the reporting period. With the help of the Work Group, POCD will continue to adapt and refine their outreach efforts to continue to make progress on VSP goals and benchmarks, and to support agricultural producers throughout Pend Oreille County.

Aside from outreach and engagement, no adaptive management needs have been identified at this time. Pend Oreille County is early in the implementation and monitoring stage of VSP and believes it is meeting protection and enhancement benchmarks as indicated in the 5-year report issued earlier in 2021 (Pend Oreille VSP Work Group 2021). Adaptive management will be triggered in the future if

the 5-year performance review suggests that the VSP may not be protective of critical area functions existing in 2011. Adaptive management will be applied on an ongoing basis as needed and is not restricted to actions included in biennial or 5-year reports. See Work Plan Section 5.4 for discussion of the adaptive management process and thresholds that are to be met by the 5-year performance review.

**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 ¹	<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 	POCD has been tracking and reporting key stewardship strategies and practices for the reporting period, summarized in Table 4. Producer participation is on track to meet protection and enhancement benchmarks at the next 5-year reporting period.
Passive participation by commercial and non-commercial agricultural operators in VSP stewardship practices is maintained or increased over 10 years on agricultural land ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping and aerial photo evaluation and/or rapid watershed assessment of practices in place • Random sampling of farmers and ranchers in the field by technical assistance providers with willing landowners 	POCD has hired GIS support to develop methodology for GIS tracking of critical areas and to 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 	POCD engaged with over 160 potential participants at four outreach events for the reporting period. VSP outreach materials were presented at these events. See Section 2.1.2 for more information. POCD staff have conducted over 25 technical assistance site visits for the reporting period.

Notes:

1. Active participation includes conservation practices reported either through publicly funded programs or self-reported through the VSP self-assessment checklist in coordination with the VSP Coordinator or technical assistance provider.
2. Passive participation includes un-reported conservation practices.

2.5 Agricultural Viability

Conservation practices implemented in Pend Oreille County also have the potential to sustain agricultural viability. Many of the cost-share projects planned or completed in this biennium have allowed producers to benefit from ecosystem services while also protecting herd health, promoting yield, and protecting against risk of erosion. Continued VSP participation by landowners is expected to result in additional conservation practice implementation along with the intrinsic benefits to agricultural viability that can be realized. VSP participation provides resources and incentives to producers for protecting critical areas without discontinuing agricultural activities or converting agricultural land to other uses.

2.6 Spirit of Cooperation

Since approval of the Work Plan, the POCD has collaborated, partnered, contracted, or coordinated with the following:

- The Kalispel Tribe of Indians
- Palouse, Pomeroy, Stevens, Ferry, Lincoln, Franklin, and Spokane Conservation Districts
- The Pend Oreille County Weed Board and Information/Technology Department
- PUD
- NRCS

Through these partnerships, POCD has leveraged resources to provide the VSP with the following:

- Cultural resource and engineering professionals and cost-share funding for participants
- Natural resource technical assistance
- GIS technical development
- Outreach and education
- Bookkeeping support

To continue building relationships with local, state, and public organizations, POCD updates the website and social media platforms regularly to keep community members consistently informed of different aspects of the VSP.

3 Voluntary Stewardship Program Successes

Since 2018, POCD has worked with landowners to coordinate implementation of stewardship strategies and practices that not only protect and enhance critical areas functions and values, but also support the viability of agriculture for individual agricultural producers. Some of these successes are highlighted in the following sections.

3.1 No-Till and Reduced Till Forage Planting

Since 2018, 10 landowners were able to leverage POC VSP, NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program, and private funds to plant over 400 acres of permanent and rotational crops using reduced till and no-till methods. Utilizing practices that minimize soil disturbance protect and improve soil health, reduce erosion on steep slopes, improve water quality, and protect riparian habitat.

Photograph 1
Oats Planted in the Spring Using No-Till Practices



Source: Jon Paul Driver

3.2 Forest Health Improvements

Two main funding sources were made available to landowners: 1) through the Environmental Quality and Incentives Program, the NRCS was able to assist 16 landowners with the implementation of fuel breaks, forest stand pruning, and slash treatment practices on over 200 acres of private land; 2) of the 15 ISPs conducted, over 10 landowners have worked with the Washington Department of Natural Resources Small Forest Landowner Office to manage brush, prune and thin trees, and treat slash on over 300 acres. As a result of these practices, wildfire risk was reduced as rangeland and forest health conditions improved.

Photograph 2

WA DNR Forest Stand Pruning and Pollinator Habitat for Forest Health Improvement



Source: POCD

3.3 Exclusion Fencing of Waterway

Since 2018, POCD was able to secure WSCC and Ecology funding to make possible the implementation of 4,500 feet of exclusion fencing for four producers in Pend Oreille County. While these exclusion fences immediately improve water quality by reducing nutrient loading of waterbodies, they also improve water quality and habitat by allowing for riparian trees, shrubs, and groundcover to establish and better filter out nutrients before they reach the waterbody.

Photograph 3
POCD Exclusion Fencing Example



Source: POCD

3.4 Watering Facilities

Since 2018, NRCS and POCD have installed 7 watering facilities with heavy use protection areas to provide an alternative watering source for livestock. Installing a watering facility allows livestock producers to practice rotational grazing and prevents livestock access to waterways. Keeping livestock out of the river prevents excess sedimentation, nutrients and bacteria from degrading water quality. In most cases, livestock prefer drinking from off-channel watering facilities.

Photograph 4
POCD Watering Facility Example



Source: POCD

3.5 Riparian Plantings

Using a combination of funding provided by the WSCC and PUD, POCD was able to work with 15 landowners to install 7,378 native trees and shrubs along various waterways in Pend Oreille County. Many of these plantings included wildlife browse protection and mulching practices for weed control. These native plants help to improve soil and water quality by developing roots that bind soils together and filter nutrients as they enter waterbodies.

Photograph 5
Riparian Planting Example



Source: POCD

4 Response to Comments on 5-Year Report

4.1 Approach to WRIA Based Monitoring

In response to comments made by the WSCC and WDFW, the Pend Oreille VSP Work Group will continue to report best management practices and other conservation practices, but will clarify in which Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) the activity occurred. This will allow reviewers to evaluate how specific practices within a WRIA protect the watershed and associated critical areas.

4.2 Additional Sources of Information Identified and Reported

Moving forward, additional sources of information will be utilized and leveraged to clarify and evaluate accomplishments. As mentioned earlier, conservation practices will be reported by WRIA to evaluate how the watershed and associated critical areas would benefit from the action taken. Additionally, the Work Group will work to establish firm links between the provided data and how it is connected to agricultural activities. Additional hydrology and water quality information will be collected and reported. WDFW has recommended monitoring and evaluating system-level responses in the tributaries of the Pend Oreille River, as opposed to the mainstem, to provide a stronger link to VSP implementation efforts. Potential partnerships and data sources include the Kalispel Tribe of Indians water quality data, Ecology, state-level data, and other available data in the region. Pend Oreille and other local counties are exploring avenues for a full staff position to conduct monitoring.

5 References

Pend Oreille County VSP Work Group, 2021. *Five-year Report to Washington State Conservation Commission*. Submitted March 2021. Prepared for the VSP Work Group and Pend Oreille Conservation District with assistance from Anchor QEA and White Bluffs Consulting, March 2021.

White Bluffs Consulting, 2018. *Pend Oreille County Voluntary Stewardship Program Approved Work Plan*. Approved by Washington State Conservation Commission on September 28, 2018. Prepared for Pend Oreille Conservation District and Pend Oreille County. Prepared with assistance from Anchor QEA, LLC. October 2018.

WSSC (Washington State Conservation Commission), 2018. VSP Policy Advisory 05-18: Approved VSP Work Plan Implementation Reporting Requirements & Procedure. June 2018. Available at: <https://scc.wa.gov/vsp-counties-workgroups/>.

WSSC, 2019. May 2019 VSP Newsletter. May 2019. Available at: <https://scc.wa.gov/vsp-newsletters/>.

Appendix A

Outreach Materials

- One-Page VSP Flyer
- Five Critical Area Handouts
- VSP Overview & Checklist
- Individual Stewardship Plan Template