Benton County
Voluntary Stewardship Program Overview and Checklist

Working together, farmers can use volunteer efforts to avoid additional regulatory controls. The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) is a new, non-regulatory, and incentive-based approach that supports individual farm operations and viability while protecting critical areas and maintaining agriculture viability in Benton County through **voluntary stewardship strategies and practices**.

Failure to meet protection and associated participation goals in the County will trigger the **traditional regulatory approach** to critical area protection under the County's Critical Areas Ordinance process.

How can the VSP support operations on your farm?

VSP allows farmers to have more flexibility than Benton County's traditional critical area regulations by promoting tailored stewardship strategies and practices to individual farms to protect critical areas and maintain and enhance agricultural viability.

This VSP checklist is intended to help each farmer contribute to the goals and benchmarks of the Benton County VSP Work Plan. Many farmers in the County are already implementing stewardship strategies and conservation practices that promote farm viability while also providing protections to critical area functions. **Working together, farmers can use volunteer efforts to avoid additional regulatory controls.**

Balanced Approach of Critical Area Protection and Agricultural Viability

VSP Checklist

The VSP Checklist has the following main objectives:

- Identify and document existing stewardship strategies or conservation practices you have implemented since 2011 (effective date of VSP), either through existing publicly funded programs or voluntarily implemented through producer-funded practices.
- Identify opportunities to:
  - Maintain or improve existing stewardship strategies and conservation practices.
  - Implement additional stewardship strategies and conservation practices on your land and connect you with technical service providers for implementing these practices.
- Encourage high producer participation, through implementation of voluntary stewardship strategies and conservation practices to help ensure the success of VSP. **Failure of the County to meet protection and associated participation goals will trigger the traditional regulatory approach to critical area protection under the County's Critical Areas Ordinance process.**

What are critical areas?

Critical areas include:

- Wetlands
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas
- Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas
- Geologically Hazardous Areas
- Frequently Flooded Areas

Conservation Practices on Your Farm

A conservation practice is broadly defined as any practice, that when implemented, further protects critical areas directly or indirectly, and maintains or improves agricultural viability whether or not it meets a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation practice or other standard.

This checklist can assist in documenting all stewardship strategies and conservation practices currently being implemented by producers in the County and identify additional conservation practices that might apply to your property. Because stewardship strategies and conservation practices may fall under multiple categories, please include each implemented practice **only once**.

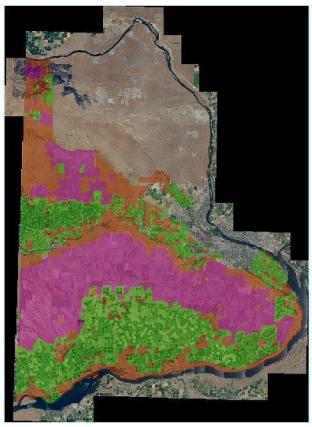
Disclaimer:
Stewardship strategies and voluntary conservation plans documented through a local government agency, such as the Conservation Districts, are generally exempt from disclosure under the state Public Records Act. Note that cost-shared practices are not exempt. The VSP Work Group requires some level of substantive information to be able to monitor ongoing program effectiveness in meeting VSP requirements and goals and benchmarks, and to support the Work Group's finding that aggregate baseline critical area conditions are being protected.

Information collected by producers using this checklist will be used to quantify, at the County-level, stewardship measures that have been implemented, as well as associated critical area protections and enhancements, and agricultural viability benefits.

Name:		Phone number and/or email:	
Site Address:			

General Location (voluntary information):

If you are inclined to share, what area is your farm located within?



Ag. Land (left)

- ☐ **Dryland**
- ☐ **Irrigated**
- ☐ **Rangeland**

Watershed (right)

- ☐ **Alkali-Squilchuck**
- ☐ **Lower Yakima**
- ☐ **Rock-Glade**

Land Management and Agricultural Viability:

What types of land management or agricultural viability concerns do you have on your property?	
☐ Soil composition (organic matter)	☐ Pollinator/beneficial organism management
☐ Soil loss (erosion)	☐ Yield/fertility
☐ Water quantity/quality	☐ Reduce inputs (e.g., pesticides or fertilizers)
☐ Moisture management	☐ Other(s) please list: _____
☐ Weed management	

Erosion

Residue- and till-management strategies are applied by producers in the County to reduce erosion caused by tillage and manage soil moisture content.

Sprinkler Irrigation

The conversion from rill irrigation to sprinkler irrigation also helps to reduce irrigation-induced erosion for irrigated agricultural purposes.

What conservation practices are being implemented on your farm?

Stewardship Strategies and Conservation Practice Examples	I do this	I'm interested in this	Does not apply	Not interested	Average units/year (acres/feet/percentage)
Residue and Tillage Management					
Mulch Till	○	○	○	○	
Reduced Till	○	○	○	○	
No Till/Direct Seed	○	○	○	○	
Other(s): _____	○	○	○	○	
Chemical and Nutrient Management					
Pest Management	○	○	○	○	
Nutrient Management	○	○	○	○	
Other(s): _____	○	○	○	○	
Water and Filtration Management					
Filter Strips	○	○	○	○	
Sprinkler Systems Upgrades	○	○	○	○	
Irrigation Water Management	○	○	○	○	
Pumping Plants					
Other(s): _____	○	○	○	○	
Range/Pasture Management					
Prescribed Grazing	○	○	○	○	
Range Planting	○	○	○	○	
Stock Watering Facilities/Wells	○	○	○	○	
Fencing	○	○	○	○	
Other(s): _____	○	○	○	○	
Soil Management					
Conservation Crop Rotation	○	○	○	○	
Cover Crop	○	○	○	○	
Mulch	○	○	○	○	
Critical Area Planting	○	○	○	○	
Other(s): _____	○	○	○	○	
Habitat Management					
Conservation Cover	○	○	○	○	
Herbaceous Weed Control	○	○	○	○	
Tree/Shrub Establishment	○	○	○	○	
Other(s): _____	○	○	○	○	

Additional Information and Assistance

Critical areas exist throughout the County. You can direct questions about the presence of critical areas on your property to the Benton County VSP Coordinator by using the contact information below.

Benton County VSP Coordinator Provider:

Benton Conservation District
Melissa Pierce (Resource Conservationist)
Benton Conservation District
10121 W. Clearwater Ave, Suite 101
Kennewick, WA 99336
509-736-6000
Melissa-pierce@conservewa.net
https://www.bentoncd.org/

Other Local Resources:

- Washington Cattlemen's Association: http://www.washingtoncattlemen.org/
- Benton County Farm Bureau: https://wsfb.com/benton-county-farm-bureau/
- Washington Wheat Growers Association: http://www.wawg.org/
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service:
    - http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome
- Washington State University Extension: http://extension.wsu.edu/