

WHATCOM COUNTY
Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226-9097
360-778-5900, TTY 800-833-6384
360-778-5901 Fax



Mark Personius, AICP
Director

Agricultural Advisory Committee **Regular Meeting**

LOCATION

**Hybrid Meeting: Zoom (details below) and
Northwest Annex Conference Room
Whatcom County Planning and Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226**

Date: February 11, 2026

Time: 2:00-4:00 P.M. Pacific Time PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Whatcom County PDS is inviting you to a scheduled in person or Zoom meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86432152429?pwd=matGxIV4BjnL6vS8DMoQDxVMShkReJ.1>

Meeting ID: 864 3215 2429
Passcode: 000000

One tap mobile

+12532158782,,86432152429#,,,,*000000# US (Tacoma)

Dial by your location

• +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

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Mark Personius, AICP
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Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting Agenda

for

February 11, 2026

2:00 P.M. - 4:00 P.M.

1. Roll Call & Introductions (5 min)
 - o Determination of Quorum
2. Agenda Review & Adjustments (5 min)
3. Open Public Session (5 min)
4. Review & Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (5 min)
 - o January 14, 2026
5. Special Topics (50 min)
 - o [Whatcom County Food System Plan](#)
 - o Continued discussion on Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)
6. Subcommittee Updates (20 min)
 - o Agricultural Staff
 - o Meat Processing
7. Staff & Member Updates (20 min)
8. New Business (5 min)
9. Action Items & Next Agenda (5 min)
10. Adjournment

Attachments:

- Draft minutes for AAC Meeting 1/14/26

Individuals who require special assistance to participate in the meetings are asked to contact AAC staff at least 72 hours in advance at: dstranik@whatcomcounty.us, 360-778-5911.

**Agricultural Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
January 14, 2026**

Start Time:	2:00 p.m.
Location:	Hybrid Meeting – Zoom & at Whatcom County Planning & Development

Meeting Highlights
There were 11 people in attendance (Voting members: 7 of 10, Staff members: 2, Ex-Officio: 0, Others: 2).

Attendees – Members	Affiliation	Present
Kubalek, Roger (chair)	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Steele, Eliza (vice chair)	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Chapman, Alan	Whatcom Conservation District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Likkel, Fred	Whatcom Family Farmers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pehl, Clay	Consumer of Ag Products	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hawley, Roger	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Del Giorgio, Isaiah	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Lenssen, Austin	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Richner, Brandon	Ag Producer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Byers, Michael	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
VACANT	Ag Producer	<input type="checkbox"/>
VACANT	Ag Processing	<input type="checkbox"/>
VACANT	Ag Programs	<input type="checkbox"/>

Quorum Present	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
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Attendees – Ex-Official/Contributing	Affiliation	Present
Corina Cheever	Whatcom Conservation District	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chris Benedict	WSU Extension	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alex Hall	NRCS	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emma Karber	FFA Youth	<input type="checkbox"/>

Attendees - Staff
Dakota Stranik, Planner PDS Alex Harris, PDS

Others Present
Mike Poteet, SCC Victoria Fischella, SCC

Recording:

<https://www.whatcomcounty.us/AgendaCenter>

1- Roll call and introductions – starting at 00:00:08 in recording
WCC 2.3.100(2) establishes that “a quorum for the purpose of holding a meeting and taking action will be more than one-half of the total number of filled voting committee positions.” A quorum was established with 7 of 10 appointed voting members present.

2- Agenda Review & Adjustments – starting at 00:01:25 in recording
No adjustments were made to the agenda.

3- Open Public Session – starting at 00:01:38 in recording
There was no public comment.

4- Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes – starting at 00:02:04 in recording
Minutes were reviewed for the previous meeting on December 10, 2025. Alan motioned to approve and Roger H seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved with one edit to correct a spelling error.

5- Special Topics – starting at 00:02:54 in recording
Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) – starting at 00:02:54 in recording
Mike Poteet, VSP Coordinator with the Washington State Conservation Commission, gave a presentation on the [Voluntary Stewardship Program \(VSP\)](#), which provides an alternative approach to protecting and enhancing Critical Areas, as opposed to the standard approach of a [Critical Areas Ordinance \(CAO\)](#), currently used by Whatcom County (under [WCC 16.16](#)) and a number of other Puget Sound Counties. The VSP program is specifically built for agriculture while incorporating close participation and feedback from partners such as tribes, local government, conservation districts, and environmental agencies such as the WA Dept of Ecology and the WA Dept of Fish & Wildlife. The program was developed through a number of reports and studies developed by the [William D Ruckelshaus Center](#). A map of enrolled counties as well as links to their respective work plans and reports is [available online](#). Presentation slides are attached. After some Q&A after the presentation, it was suggested to have some follow-up discussion at the next meeting to determine an official committee stance on VSP adoption and next steps.

December Flood Impacts – starting at 01:17:20 in recording
The discussion was brief due to the previous topic running long. Alan shared efforts by the Conservation District to gather information from impacted agricultural operations and their needs. Eliza asked what opportunity exists for the AAC to engage with long term planning around flooding and the impacts to agriculture. Isaiah mentioned drainage and ditch maintenance as an area that has impacts to agriculture (increased flooding, disease from too much moisture, etc) but maintenance seems to be prioritized in residential areas. Alan mentioned the FLIP team being coordinated by River & Flood for integrated planning, as well as a number of flood zone advisory committees as opportunities to engage. Dakota mentioned challenges with flood impacts to EPL Feed in Sumas and the concern that brings for local dairy farms, as well as potential limitations with manure storage on dairies

6- Subcommittee Updates – starting at 01:29:40 in recording
Ag Staffing Subcommittee -

This subcommittee met and discussed possible options. VSP funding could potentially provide some options for agricultural staff in a certain capacity. Precedents for other counties' existing ag planners are also being considered.

Meat Processing Subcommittee -

This subcommittee has developed some draft code changes to consider moving forward to council. PDS will possibly be docketing this work in February or March, which would enable council support for PDS to work on further analysis of the code changes and moving them forward for consideration by Council. Dakota provided a brief review of the code changes currently being discussed. Michael motioned to enable Dakota to take next steps to get the action of updating the meat processing (slaughterhouse/packinghouse) code to the docket. Eliza seconded the motion. Alan suggested bringing the issue to council first via a presentation before docketing. The motioned passed with Eliza, Roger H, Isaiah, and Austin in favor and Alan opposed. Roger K did not vote.

7- Staff & Member Updates – starting at 02:05:42 in recording
There were no staff or member updates.

8- New Business – starting at 02:05:51 in recording
Roger K mentioned he is reaching out to three potential candidates for member vacancies and will update the group if anything moves forward.

9- Action Items & Next Agenda – starting at 02:06:31 in recording
The topics of agritourism as well as the Whatcom County Food System Plan are possible special topics for discussion at the February meeting.

10- Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:08 p.m. The next regular meeting will be scheduled on Wednesday, February 11th from 2pm to 4pm. The meeting will be held as a hybrid via Zoom and in person at Whatcom County Planning & Development Services (5280 Northwest Drive).



Voluntary Stewardship Program: Past, Present & Future



Background Information for Opting-In Discussions

Mike Poteet, VSP Coordinator

Whatcom County Agriculture Advisory Committee / January 14, 2026



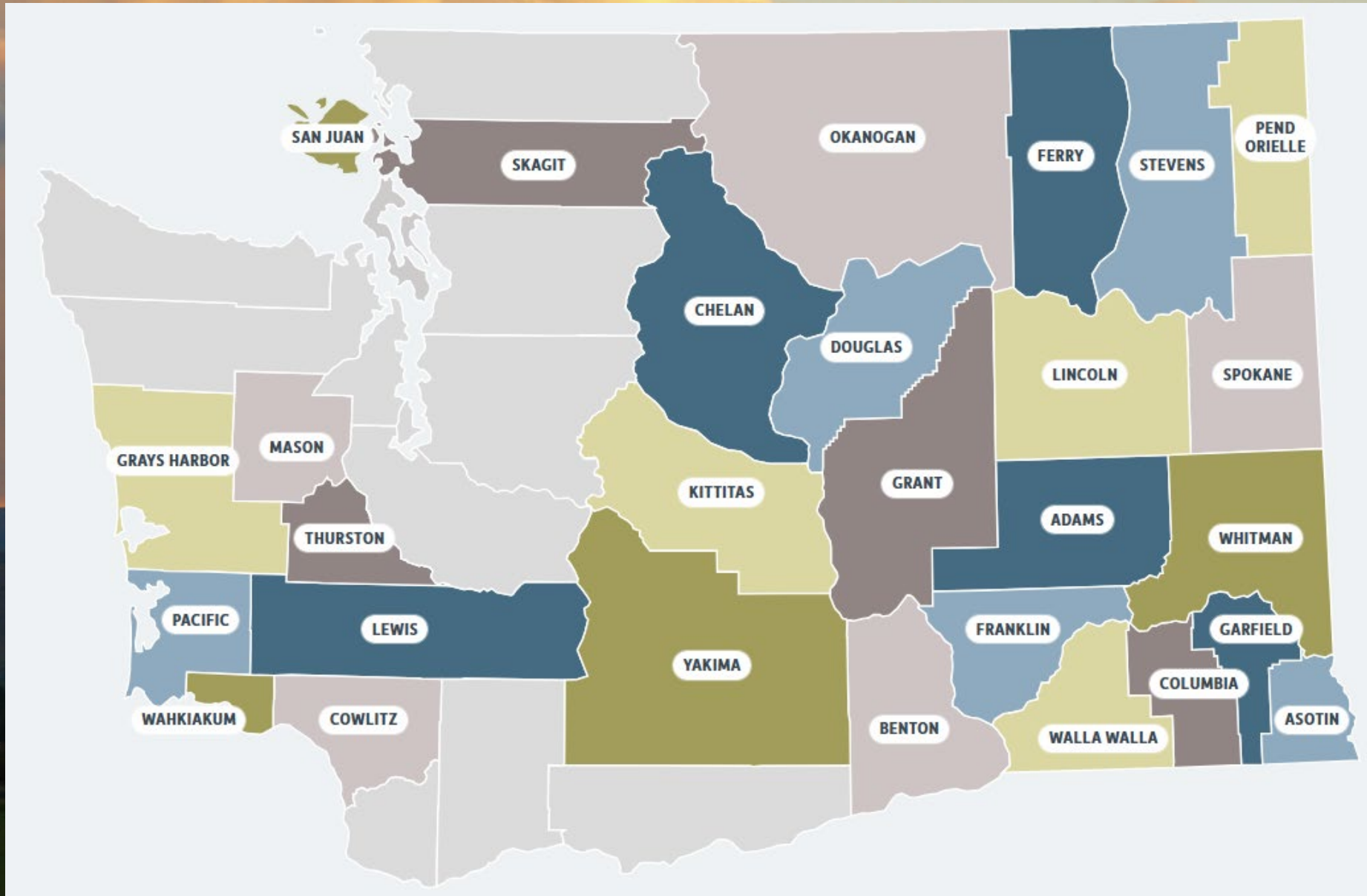
1970s – 2010

- 1972: Shoreline Management Act (existing Ag exempt)
- 1990: Growth Management Act includes Critical Areas Ordinance to protect critical areas
- 2000's: Ag exemptions to CAO challenged in courts and ruled against – Ag must be regulated in CAO
- 2007: Ruckelshaus Center directed to help resolve conflicts between policies, agencies, counties, and landowners
- 2010: Ruckelshaus Center publishes [A Framework for Stewardship: Final Report of the William D. Ruckelshaus Center on the work of the Agricultura and Critical Areas Committee](#)

ESHB 1886 – May 16, 2011

- RCW 36.70A.700-760 becomes law, implementing recommendations of the Ruckelshaus Center process.
 - SCC authorized to implement the program (VSP)
 - Established a Statewide Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Panel
 - Counties had until January 22, 2012 to opt-in, at which time the program was closed to additional enrollments
 - SCC begins developing program guidance and structure
 - Two pilot counties identified (Chelan & Thurston); 25 others opt-in
 - SSB 5353 (2023) created open-ended opt-in window for non-VSP counties

28 Counties as of 2026



Five Critical Areas under GMA

What are the 5 Critical Areas of Conservation?

The [Growth Management Act \(GMA\)](#) requires all cities and counties in Washington to adopt regulations protecting “critical areas” in order to preserve the natural environment, wildlife habitats, and sources of fresh drinking water. Critical area regulation also encourages public safety by limiting development in areas prone to natural hazards like floods and landslides.

[RCW 36.70A.030\(6\)](#) defines five types of 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.



Program Requirements & County Responsibilities

- Create watershed work groups
- Develop watershed work plans
- 2-Year Reports (recurring at end of each biennium)
- 5-Year Reports (recurring on anniversary of first funding)
- Monitoring Plan
- Not mandatory, but ...
 - Biannual visits with Technical Panel
 - Program trainings & information sharing
 - Collaboration with other County teams



Each county operates its program independently and under its own structure. Several models are currently employed around the state:

- County only
- County + CD – Collaborative partnership
- County + CD – County administers & coordinates, CD implements & reports
- County + CD – County handles contracting & finances, CD administers, implements & reports
- County + CD – County signs initial contract, CD manages all aspects

Current Program Management

- SCC has Program and Contracting Staff dedicated solely to VSP
- Develop, maintain, and improve program tools such as support from Technical Panel, reporting templates, program guidelines, adaptive management processes, and technical resources (Science Hub, etc.)
- Second 5-Year Reports under review in 2026
- Work Plan creation phase contract rate = \$10,000/month
- Implementation/Operational contract (25-27) = \$290,000
- Capital funding allocations (25-27) = \$40,000 (pilot)
 - Multiple Competitive funding rounds each biennium (\$3M total Capital in 25-27)
- Improved tracking of program financials and BMP implementation using VSP Operating and Capital funds

Four Primary Components of VSP



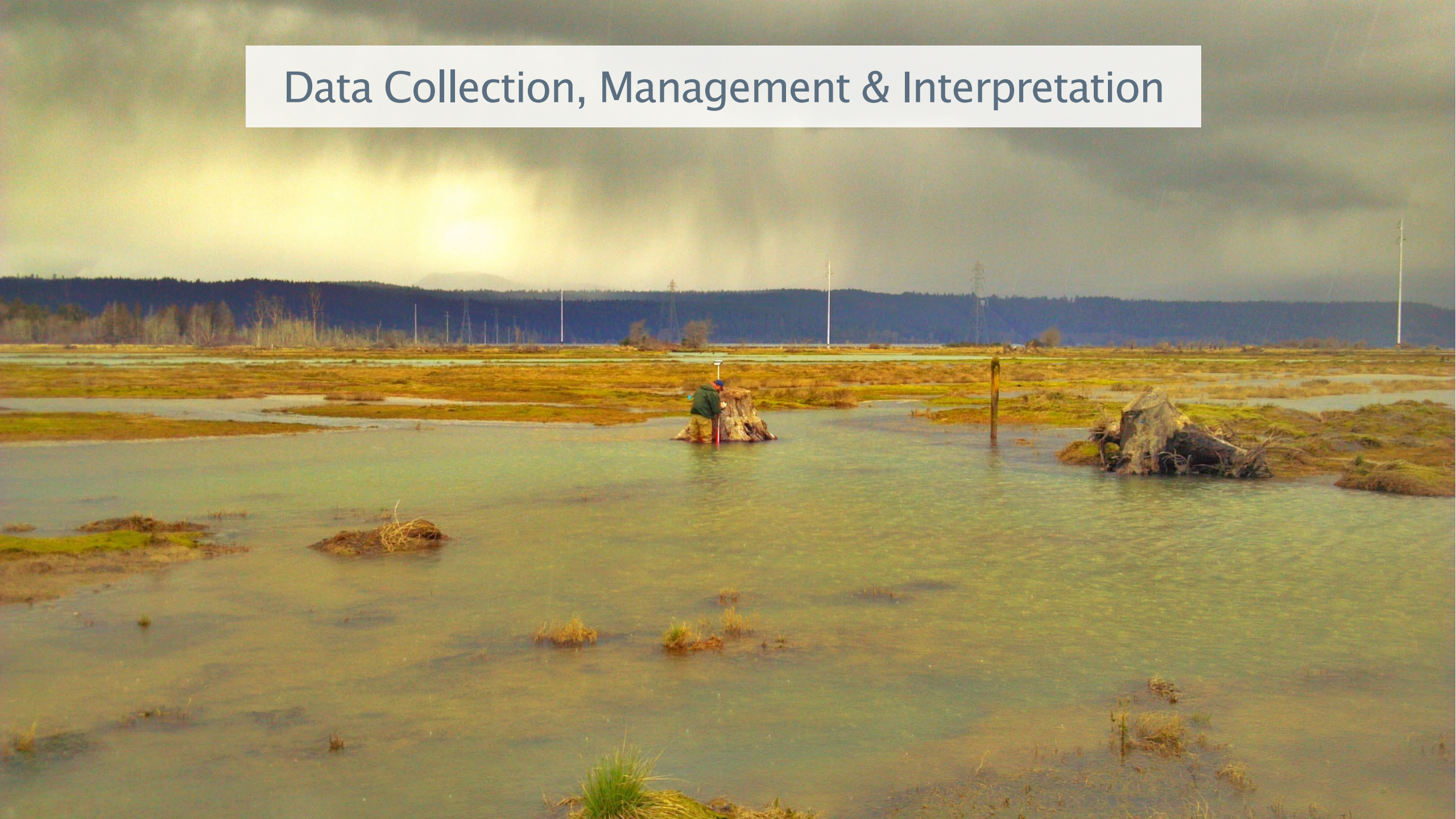


Community Engagement & Agricultural Viability

BMP Implementation



Data Collection, Management & Interpretation





Reporting Requirements and
Program Status following
Five-Year Reports

Future of the Program

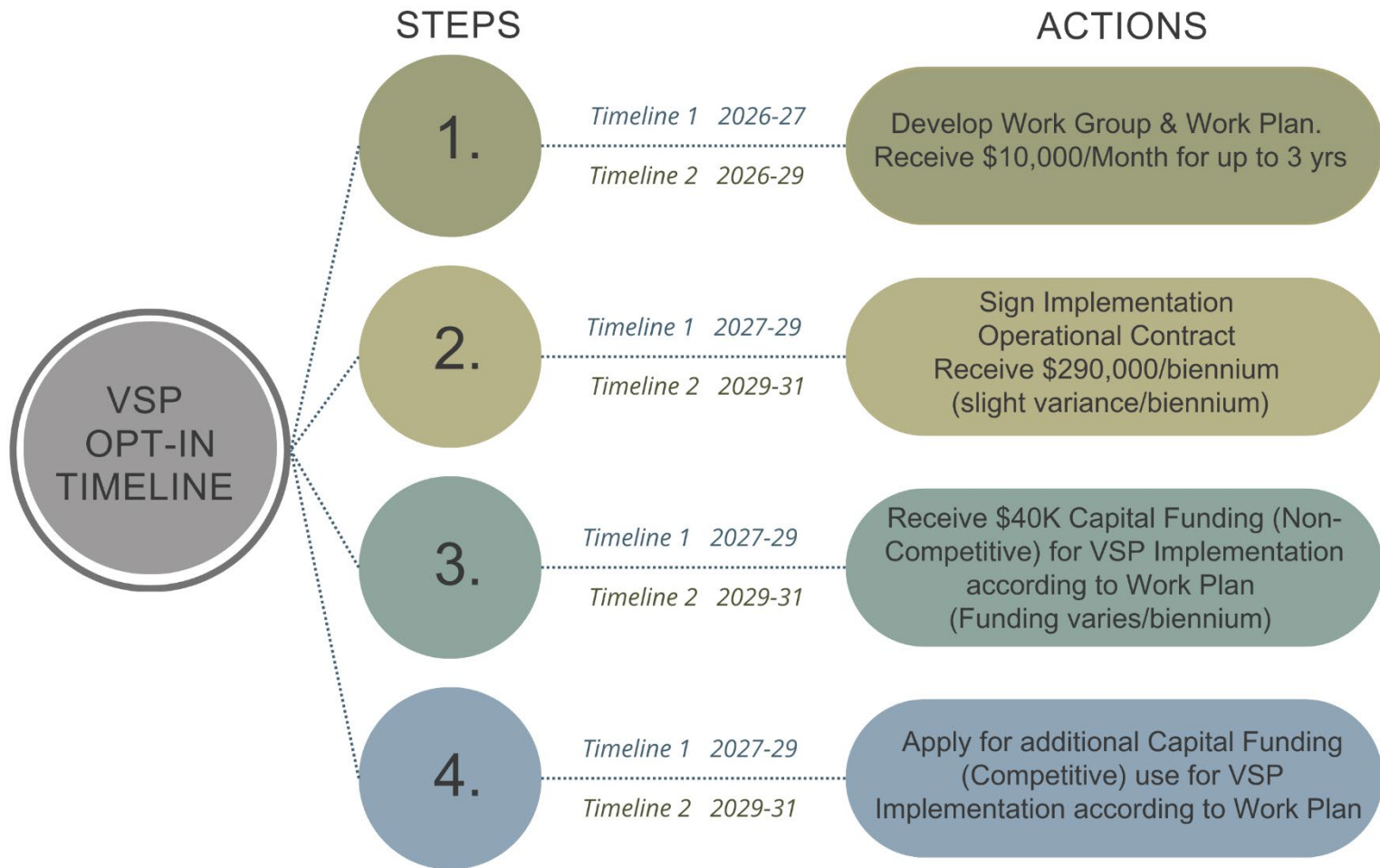
- Develop more streamlined & uniform plans and processes for VSP counties – work plan structure, funding opportunities, revisions needed by counties to work groups, work plans, monitoring plans, etc.
 - **“Adaptive Management” per statute**
- Further refine and update reporting templates
- Improve data collection and organization tools at SCC and for counties (new technology investments)
- Continue testing alternate approaches to capital funding allocations (and seek more \$)
- Define roles and responsibilities of program partners (Technical Panel and Statewide Advisory Committee)

What does Opting In Look Like?

- SCC has Program and Contracting Staff dedicated solely to VSP
- Develop, maintain, and improve program tools such as support from Technical Panel, reporting templates, program guidelines, adaptive management processes, and technical resources (Science Hub, etc.)
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What does Opting In Look Like?

VSP Opt-In Timeline Options



Questions & Discussion





Thank you!

Contact:

Mike Poteet

VSP Coordinator

mpoteet@scc.wa.gov

564-250-5619



Washington State
Conservation Commission