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Cowlitz County Voluntary Stewardship Program

February 2021

The VSP Voice



VSP Conservation Farming Staff Available for WSOSFF 2021 Grant Proposal Development

The Tilth Alliance and the HumanLinks Foundation have opened the 2021 cycle for the Washington State Organic & Sustainable Farming Fund. This is the competitive grant funding source that awarded \$8,481.56 to fund the Hemlock Creek Farm Protection & Wildlife Enhancement Project in Toutle, Washington in 2020 (read page 2).

This grant program is available only to Washington State Farmers, and is not open nationwide – which gives local landowners better odds of obtaining funding to make farm improvements during 2021.

The Tilth Alliance will be accepting applications from farmers seeking financial assistance to support projects that will improve economic viability, social impacts, or environmental stability of their farm businesses. The goal of this grant program is to enhance the operations of farmers practicing responsible and progressive methods, such as sustainable soil management, crop diversification, habitat preservation, climate change mitigation and

environmentally-safe waste management practices.

This grant program is a single year grant, running May-January. At this time, multi-year grants are not available.

Note that an individual farm business is not eligible to receive more than \$20,000 over a five-year period.

This grant is open to all Washington State farmers who:

- Have been in business for at least 2 years
- Currently employ or are adopting practices that follow regenerative, sustainable, and/or organic principals (this includes conventional farms that are transitioning into organic, sustainable, or regenerative production
- Are seeking to improve and/or expand their operation, improve environmental impacts, or become a more sustainable business

Funded Topics:

Grant funds are available for projects that will improve

environmental, sustainable, social, and economic impacts to farm businesses, through actions that will create a new revenue stream, improve quality of life, improve operations, or increase sustainability.

Funding Levels:

Grant requests can be made up to \$10,000.

Cowlitz County VSP staff is available to assist with grant applications. Applications can be downloaded from:

<http://www.tilthalliance.org/about/apply-washington-state-organic-and-sustainable-farming-fund>

Applications must be postmarked or received electronically no later than February 19, 2021.

Call today if you'd like assistance!



Priority will be given to:

- Projects that enhance and measure carbon sequestration, restore soil health, utilize cover crops, preserve and create habitats, increase biodiversity, and employ environmentally safe waste management practices
- Conventional farmers who want to transition to organic, sustainable, or regenerative practices.
- Projects that involve resource sharing and community impact (i.e. Can more than one farm benefit from the project? Will you be able to share research, knowledge, and resources acquired through the grant with others?)
- Previous grantees are eligible to apply, but priority will be given to new applicants.

Are you interested in Conservation Farming?
Sign up for the VSP today!
Contact: Mark Taylor
taylor@co.cowlitz.wa.us
or call: (360) 577-3052, Ext. 1-6660

Five Nonprofit Groups Provide Support for Hemlock Creek Project

Something truly unique is starting to occur along Hemlock Creek on the Hagen beef farm in the Toutle Valley – a collaborative partnership between Five Nonprofit Groups and local landowners to put an important farm protection and habitat enhancement project on the ground.

It all started with a visit to the Silver Lake Grange. Cowlitz County VSP staff was out and about, attending Grange meetings in efforts to recruit local farmers to participate in Washington State’s new Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP).

Basically, the VSP protects environmentally sensitive (critical) areas while maintaining the economic viability of production agriculture. Hal and Judy Hagen were one of two farms to join. The main resource issue they wished to address on the farm was mud management. The top left photo shows a “Before” shot showing how bad the mud and manure issues were during the wet, cold winter months. In addition to posing a health risk to the hooves of livestock, the pooled mud, manure, and urine in

this location caused a potential water quality issue to Hemlock Creek, as the Hagen’s farm is in a Frequently Flooded Area. During the heaviest of fall and winter storms, if Hemlock Creek were to top its streambanks, large amounts of fine sediments and organic chemicals would be washed back into the stream and flow directly into Silver Lake (which is already listed as an Impaired Waterbody on Washington State Department of Ecology’s Water Quality Assessment 303 d list.

Silver Lake periodically gets high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus, which causes algae blooms during hot summer months. And while the bright green layer floating atop the

water may look interesting or even pretty to the untrained observer, that dense excessive layer of algae can be deadly to aquatic life below. That thick layer of scum prevents sunlight from reaching aquatic plants below the surface, causing them to die off, and triggers a process called **eutrophication**, often creating an oxygen-depleted zone that kills off all aquatic life swimming below.

In addition to resolving mud and manure issues, the Hagens wanted to remove all barbed wire on the farm and replace it with more wildlife-friendly fencing, to protect their livestock and deer & elk populations as well.

To date, the Hagens have used grant



Photo credit: Judy Hagen, Toutle, Washington

funding from a Washington State Organic & Sustainable Farming Fund 2020 grant (WSOSFF) to construct a mud-free concrete winter feeding station, have already replaced most of the barbed wire and are waiting to fence off the riparian zone until completing streambank stabilization and riparian planting with native trees. The WSOSFF 2020 grant was made possible from a joint partnership funding program from the **Tilth Alliance** & the **HumanLinks Foundation**.

And this is where the story becomes really interesting. VSP staff were approached by two additional nonprofits wanting to help out.

The **Carbon Capture Foundation** (CCF) is a brand new nonprofit, dedicated to the

reduction of detrimental effects, due to climate change, by planting native trees. The trees will sequester carbon from the atmosphere through the process of photosynthesis over the span of decades, if not centuries – Oregon white oaks live up to 500 years, remember?

CCF has graciously donated \$1,000 in native trees to enhance the riparian corridor.

And as VSP staff were going to be hard put, during the COVID-19 pandemic, to find volunteers in time to help plant the trees needed to restore the natural function of the riparian corridor along Hemlock Creek,

RiverJunkys Conservation, a nonprofit dedicated to cleaning trash from local streams, is stepping up to provide a volunteer labor force.

Once established, a mature riparian canopy will improve water quality to help Federal ESA-listed salmonids by cooling streams beneath shade during summer and increasing the level of dissolved oxygen for fish.

Mature trees also introduce organic matter, in the form of dead leaves, as a food source for benthic macro-invertebrates (visible aquatic insect larvae and mollusks), which in turn become a food source for juvenile salmon and steelhead. Deep, branching root systems anchor the soil in place along streams, thus stabilizing collapsing banks, effectively protecting valuable farmland, reducing risk of injury to farmer and livestock alike, reducing fine sediments that may cover salmon redds, and filtering any agricultural runoff.

In addition, the **Lower Columbia Fish Enhancement Group** is donating between 4,000 & 5,000 plastic tubes to protect the seedlings from browsing animal damage from livestock, deer, and beavers. Their generous donation has a value of about \$7,000.

The WSOSFF 2021 round is now open!

Cowlitz County VSP Sub-Committees Seeking Members

Are you dedicated to supporting local agriculture and protecting and enhancing the environment? Would you like to help increase the economic viability of local production agriculture, and help local families get access to locally grown, farm-fresh eggs, fruits, vegetables, and meat? If you answered yes, Cowlitz County VSP needs you!

How Can I Help?

If you're interested in local agriculture and the environment, consider joining the Cowlitz County VSP work group and becoming involved with one or more of the various Sub-committees.

You don't have to get your hands dirty – unless you want to during a field day at a habitat enhancement project on a local farm. Just bring your smile and enthusiasm, be ready to give your thoughts as we discuss the topics at hand, and don't forget to let us know if you have any special hidden talents, such as: graphic design, photography, videography, event planning, and/or public speaking.

How often does the main VSP Work Group meet?

Cowlitz County VSP Work Group meets quarterly (every 3 months) with members of the various sub-committees meeting virtually between regular work group meetings, and then reporting their findings and recommendations back to the entire work group the next time all the members meet as a whole.

The real fun is being an active member of a sub-committee, as that's where brainstorming, project research and interaction occurs. Members are very friendly, the meetings take place in an informal setting, and everyone's point of view plays an important role towards the success of Cowlitz County VSP conservation farming.

Which sub-committees can I serve on?

The Cowlitz County VSP Work Group is calling for interested stakeholders to participate in one or more of the following sub-committees:

- Water Quality/Quantity and Habitat
- Physical Safety – Floodplains and Geohazards
- Agricultural Viability

Agricultural Viability Sub-committee

The Agricultural Viability sub-committee is currently active and has been meeting every two weeks. Current topics of discussion include:

- Virtual Farm Tours
- Permanent ADA-accessible Farmers Market
- USDA-certified Food Processing Center
- Cowlitz County VSP Web Site Revisions
- Cowlitz County Farm Maps & Directory

Need Assistance Setting up and Using the GoToMeeting app?

Are you new to Virtual Meetings and could use some assistance with how to set up and use the GoToMeeting app? If so, contact VSP staff for more information. If needed, we can also schedule a training session to give you an opportunity to try it out before a meeting.

Cowlitz County Conservation Call-to-Action

The success of any conservation program is dependent upon willing landowners and interested stakeholders throughout local watersheds. If you'd like to help make a difference for water quality for fish, forests, farms, and families, please contact VSP staff to join one or more of the various VSP Work Group sub-committees today!

Contact: Mark Taylor, Assistant Resource Land Planner
taylor@co.cowlitz.wa.us or call:
(360) 577-3052, Extension 6660

Community Events

Silver Lake Watershed Advisory Council Mtg.

Tuesday, February 9th, 2021 – 1:30 pm to 2:45 pm

Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS, or Android:

<https://wsu.zoom.us/j/7756056320?pwd=RzVxbTl0dXpyUjJlSDdsWnJuTXdydz09>

Meeting ID: 775 605 6320

Password: 12345

Phone Call: +1 253 215 8782

+12532158782,,7756056320#

You must register with Zoom, if you haven't already (directions below)

To join Zoom (Here it is an on-line video how to

join <https://youtu.be/dim2rOV--zg>).

1.) create a FREE Zoom account at zoom.us

2.) be signed into your account to attend any Extension-sponsored meeting.

3.) Download the Zoom app on your laptop or computer.

VSP Ag. Viability Committee Meeting

Tuesday, February 9, 2021 4:00 pm to 5:00 pm

* This will be a VIRTUAL meeting using GoToMeeting.com

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone at:

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/483345261>

You can also dial in using your phone at:

1 (872) 240-3311 Access Code: 277-336-573

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT CONSERVATION FARMING?

VSP staff & partners are available to offer:

- site assessment to identify resource needs
- assistance with conservation farm planning
- assistance with seeking funding opportunities

Share Your Success!

If you're already putting conservation farming practices on the ground, help us to share your success so that our elected officials keep funding programs to help

local farms! For information contact VSP staff at:

(360) 577-3052, Ext. 6660 or via email at:

taylor@co.cowlitz.wa.us

Cowlitz County Voluntary Stewardship Program
Building and Planning
207 Fourth Avenue North, Rm. 119
Kelso, WA 98626-4124
www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/vsp

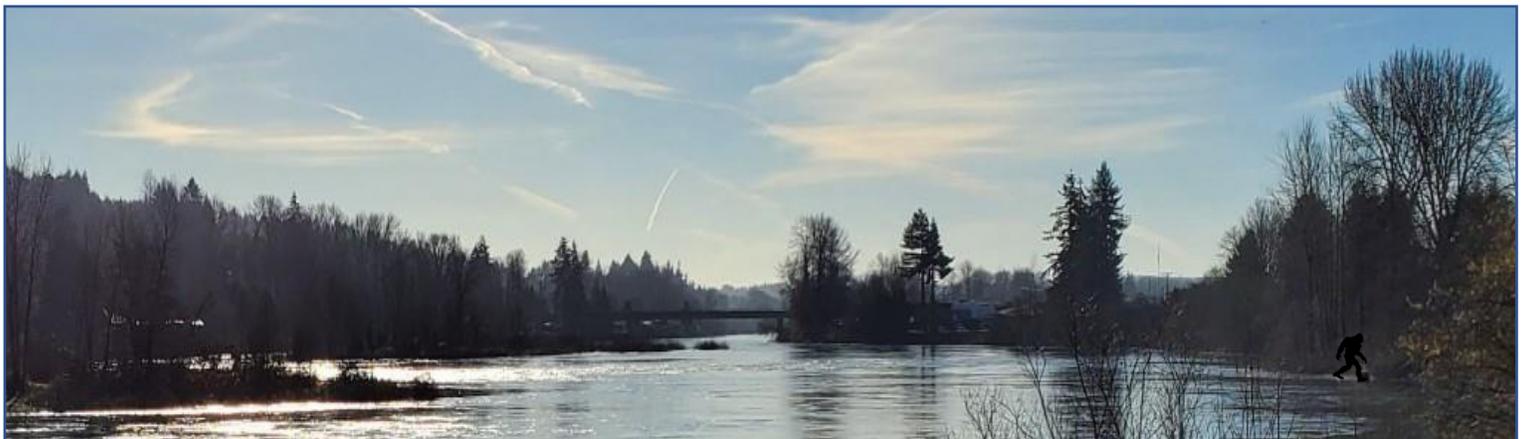


February 2021 issue!

Cowlitz County VSP

Dedicated to strengthening agriculture viability through conservation farming practices that protect water quality and enhance environmentally critical areas, and to the promotion of productive farmland(s) so that future generations can choose to farm.

Conservation Partners... and participating local landowners!



Conservation Farming: Clean water, thriving farms, healthy communities.