

Protecting environmentally critical areas is good for agricultural land?



Enhanced and protected critical areas provide valuable natural watershed functions which contribute to clean, abundant water for farming, forests, fish, & families.

What kind of Best Management Practices (BMPs) can we do on the farm to protect critical areas?

- Work with Conservation partners to develop a Conservation Farm plan designed to enhance farm viability while protecting natural resources.
- Bio-engineered streambank stabilization
- Riparian plantings utilizing native grasses, shrubs, and trees.
- Soil Erosion Prevention Practices
 - No-Till Planting
 - Planting Cover Crops
 - Grassed Waterways or Filter Strips
- Wetland Enhancement
- Regenerative farm practices designed to increase soil fertility.
- Prescribed Grazing Management
- Integrated Pest Management
- Noxious Weed Control
- Nutrient and Mud Management

WHY PARTICIPATE?

Incentives for VSP Participants

- Policies and regulations that support agricultural operators
- Free Watershed Stewardship Training
- Technical assistance for conservation farm planning
- Priority funding may be available for VSP participants
- Permitting process assistance, fee reduction or waiver
- Promotion through Ag. Branding
- Agricultural Tourism
- VSP Signage for farms implementing Best Management Practices
- Media promotion

VSP Conservation Partners

- Cowlitz Conservation District
- USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
- WSU Cowlitz County Extension Office
- Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Columbia Land Trust & Ducks Unlimited

To schedule a farm consultation contact:
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Voluntary Land Stewardship practices designed to protect & enhance environmentally critical areas while maintaining & improving agricultural viability throughout Cowlitz County.



www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/vsp

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What is VSP?

The Voluntary Stewardship Program is a collaborative process designed to help local Washington communities ensure healthy, natural landscapes and strong, viable farms for current and future generations.

Technical assistance providers work with local producers to develop Conservation Farm plans. These plans are designed to implement Best Management Practices that protect and enhance natural resources while keeping local agriculture economically viable.

VSP encourages and fosters a spirit of cooperation and partnership among various interests such as: local farms, natural resource conservationists, fish & wildlife managers, and tribal & governmental entities.

* Critical Areas in Cowlitz County include:

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

* So long as the county participates in the VSP, regulatory requirements under the County's critical areas ordinance do not apply to agricultural activities.



Photo courtesy of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe

Maintaining and improving agricultural viability

- **Local agriculture accounts for over 700 jobs, \$20.6 million in income & \$99.0 million in value of output in the county.**
- **Cowlitz County's annual Market Value of Agriculture Products Sold totaled \$8,959,000** (USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture).
- Cowlitz County commodities included:
 - Poultry and eggs (#12 in state)
 - Cultivated trees, short rotation woody crops.
 - Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, sod
 - Cattle, hogs, sheep, and goats
 - Fruits, tree nuts, and berries
 - Grass seed, pumpkins, corn, and vegetables
 - Honey and also Mason bees for pollination



Photo courtesy of Swofford Family Farm, Toutle, WA

Benefits of Conservation Farming

- **Mature Riparian Corridors** anchor soil in place to prevent collapsing stream banks thus preventing loss of farmland. Riparian areas increase biodiversity of native wildlife, provide shade for domestic livestock during hot summer months, and keep local streams cool for native fish.
 - **Healthy rangelands** absorb carbon, provide open space for wildlife, and improve welfare of domestic livestock by providing animals with a healthier alternative to confined feeding operations.
 - **Wetlands keep water clean** by functioning as natural bio-filters, and provide valuable refuge and rearing habitat for native fish & migratory waterfowl.
 - **Integrated Pest Management** to reduce crop damage from agricultural pests and Noxious Weed control increases viability of local farms.
 - **Free-flowing river systems, natural shorelines, and reconnected floodplains** provide complex natural habitat for native flora and fauna and can reduce flood risk to downstream communities.
 - **Habitat enhancement projects help stimulate local & rural economies.**
 - Every \$1 million spent on watershed enhancement results in an average 16.7 jobs with 80% of money staying in the county where the project is located.
 - Economists say for every estimated \$1 million spent on enhancement of environmentally critical areas, \$2.2-\$2.5 million is generated thus boosting the total local economic activity.
- Funding for fish recovery has boosted local economies more than \$1.1 billion since 1999.**

"The VSP recognizes the importance of enhancing agricultural viability and growing the capacity for investment in voluntary projects and technologies that can improve both critical areas and the producer's bottom line. Producers cannot be required to participate or take any action to enhance critical areas under the VSP. The VSP is truly voluntary."

A message from the members of the Washington Agricultural Community to Washington State County Commissioners encouraging participation in the Voluntary Stewardship Program.

February 17, 2015