



# San Juan County Voluntary Stewardship Program

## Quarterly Work Group Meeting

### Notes

Wednesday, December 4th, 2024

Attendees: Pauline Chiquet, Charlie Behnke, Faith Van De Putte, John Latimer, Tyler Davis, Morgan Krueger, Sean Williams, Beth Tate, Kurt License, Cathi Winings, Laura Pitts, Maggie Long, Paul Anderson

#### 1. Welcome – Welcome

The group welcomed WDFW staff Morgan Kruger, regional land use lead; Kurt License, district wildlife biologist; Beth Tate, habitat biologist; and Sean Williams, VSP Coordinator to discuss designating and monitoring Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas (FWHCAs) for VSP.

#### 2. Work Plan Progress Report

- Implementation:
  - Five Individual Stewardship Plans (ISP) were completed this quarter.
  - Thirty-one cost share projects were completed this biennium across the District, with seven funded through VSP Capital funds. Several projects are wrapping up this fall, and the rest will be due by June 2025.
- Monitoring: Monitoring activities were limited this quarter, and the District will resume stream (SVAP) and wetland assessments (WRS) in the winter/spring in False Bay and begin monitoring the third out of five groups of watersheds, as identified in the Monitoring Plan.

#### 3. Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas Discussion

- Presentation: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to present new report
  - WDFW uses best available science to designate critical areas. They rely on local and federal recovery plans (USFWS IMB, SJC Salmon Recovery Plan) and resources from state agencies.
  - WDFW Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) list and map represent the best available science to classify species and habitats requiring special conservation measures and where those species and habitats are located. The PHS list focuses on species with the greatest conservation need: threatened, endangered, or sensitive species; species of recreational, cultural, or tribal importance; and habitats which are unique and provide significant value to many species (e.g. riparian, Garry oak). The map is not comprehensive, and some sensitive data is hidden but can be requested with a sensitive data release form. Encourage landowners to submit observations of wildlife through the [WDFW Wildlife Observations](#) survey.
  - WDFW has management recommendations for all PHS listed species/habitats. See also the recommendations in the San Juan PHS List.
  - WDFW supports monitoring and reporting to fill data gaps and better identify areas/species that need protection.

- The San Juan PHS Species List includes species not included in PHS but prevalent in the county.
- For Riparian FWHCA: Use site- and species-specific data for establishing buffers. Best available science is to use [site potential tree height](#) to determine the width of the riparian management zones (RMZ). The RMZ is part of the critical area, not just a buffer on one. All parts of the stream network (fish and non-fish bearing streams) are equally important to protect.
- Discussion: How to incorporate this feedback to adaptively manage monitoring and reporting to better support the functions and values of this critical area
  - Based on PHS, most parcels in the county would qualify as an FWHCA critical area. A question was raised on whether to or how to narrow focus.
  - The data is not robust enough for species-specific monitoring. It is best to use HRCD data as habitat proxy for effectiveness monitoring at the county level and track species/practice specific enhancement benchmarks through implementation monitoring (e.g. number of bat boxes or rock piles for snakes). The implementation monitoring can have a narrower focus on species/habitats of local importance.
  - Faith brought up the idea of tapping into farmer/landowner knowledge to fill data gaps and highlight good stewardship. This could be added to the BMP Implementation survey.
  - Tyler pointed out that the Eight Basin Report referenced in the San Juan PHS Species Table should be replaced with the 2022 Salmon Recovery Plan; the Eight Basin Report is not approved by the county council.
  - The group discussed how to incentivize landowners to submit wildlife observations and the potential for this to trigger permitting requirements.