



# Spokane County Voluntary Stewardship Program

# Critical Areas



1990 - Growth Management Act (GMA), RCW 36.70A.

- Wetlands
- Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARA)
- Frequently Flooded Areas (100-yr Floodplain)
- Geologically Hazardous Areas (Erosion)
- Fish and Wildlife Conservation Areas (Priority Habitat)



# History



- 2007 - Futurwise vs Washington State
  - Agriculture no longer exempt from Crit Areas Ord (CAO)
- 2011- RCW 36.70A.700. Establishment of Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)
  - Alternative to regulation, Counties can opt-in
- 2018 Work Plan approved
- 2019 Implementation begins

Board of County Commissioners

(BOCC)

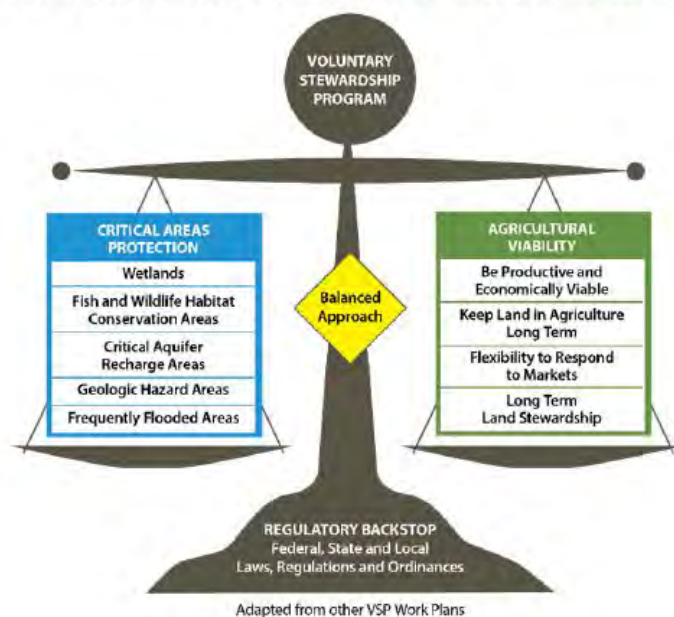
State Level Administrator- WA State Conservation Commission

(WSCC)

# VSP In a nutshell

- Protect critical areas
- Maintain viability of agriculture

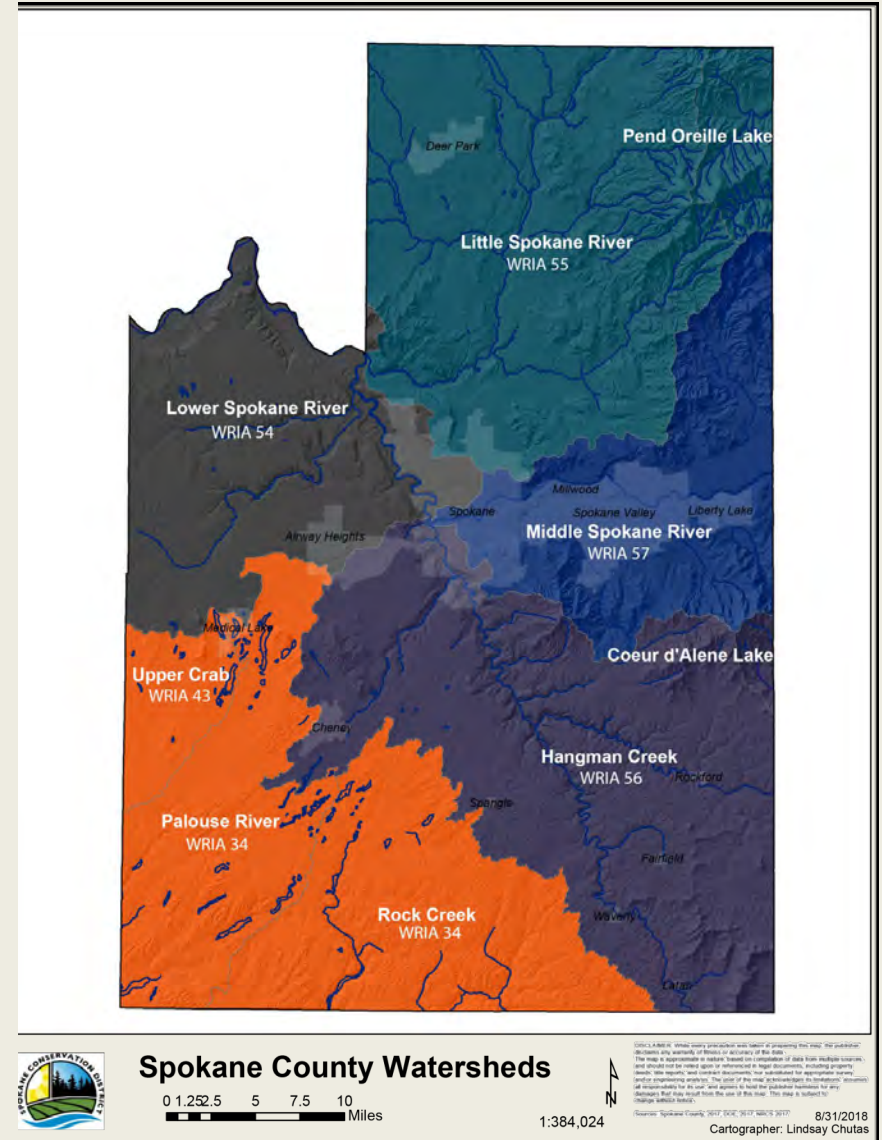
Figure 1  
Balanced Approach to Critical Area Protection and Agricultural Viability



1. Technical/Financial Assistance
2. Outreach/Education
3. **Monitoring**
  - Critical Areas
  - Conservation Practices

# Monitoring Critical Areas

- 5 Major HUC 8 Basins
- No net loss of Quantity/Quality at watershed scale
- Functions/Values
- Difficult, to say the least



**Table 1: Spokane County Intersection of Agricultural Activities and Critical Areas**

Spokane County Summary		Critical Area Acreage that Intersects with Agricultural Land							
	Total Agricultural Activities (acres)	Frequently Flooded Areas	Wetlands	Geologic Hazards	Critical Aquifer Recharge	Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas			
2017	377,000	6,212 (2%)	8,216 (2%)	16,523 (4%)	27,537 (7%)	193,781 (51%)			
2011	373,495	5,943 (2%)	8,719 (2%)	16,461 (4%)	24,958 (7%)	194,217 (52%)			
Difference	3,505	269	-503	62	2,579	-436			

*note: critical areas may have overlap*

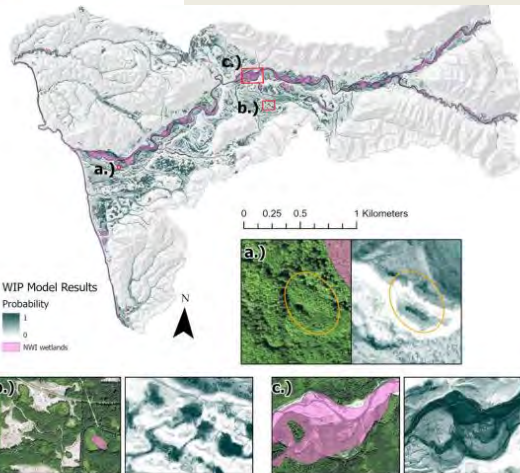
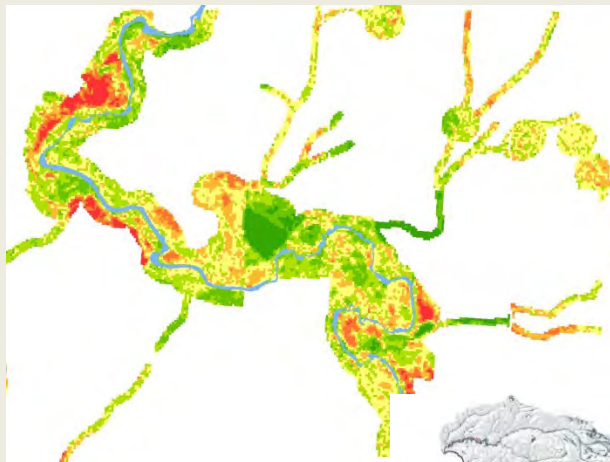
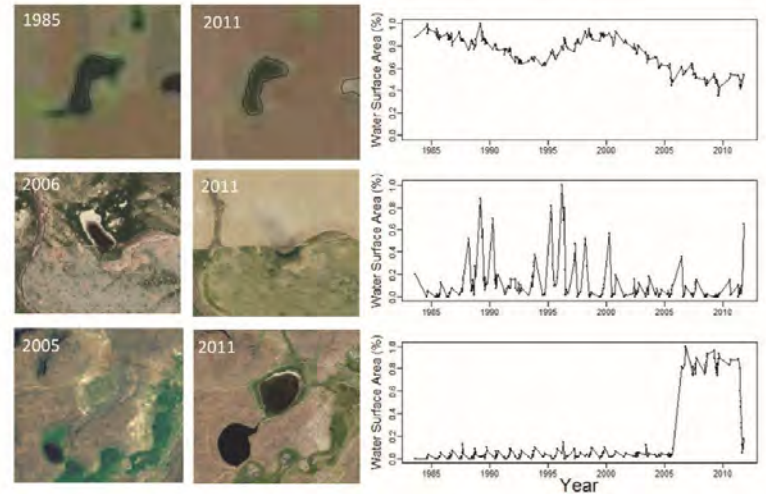


Figure 3. Wetland probability map of the entire study area with three examples: Depressional wetland (a), peatland (b), and riverine wetland (c).



Halabisky 2017

# Monitoring Conservation Practices

## Key Conservation Practice Baseline, Protection Benchmarks, and Adaptive Management

Key Stewardship Practices			Benchmark	2022 Target	Enrollment 2011-2022	
Management Type	Conservation Practices	NRCS Code	Objectives		Spokane County	Hangman Watershed
Tillage	Conservation Tillage (ac)	329/345	No net Loss in acres	6,260	113,923	47,376
Nutrients	Nutrient Management (ac)	590	No net loss of acres under nutrient management	5,322	72,908	24,450
Buffers/ Habitat Management	Riparian Forest Buffer (ft)	391	No net loss of feet managed under wildlife habitat practices or loss of structures for wildlife	2,934	80,295	5,950
	Streambank and Shoreline Protection (ft)	580		246	8,175	6,400
	Grass Buffer (ft)	386/393		1,073	420,643	176,986
Livestock	Stream Crossing (#)	578	No net loss of number or feet of livestock management practices	0	5	1
	Heavy Use Area (sqft)	561		2,622	47,325	13,697
	Fencing (ft)	382		2,064	46,393	32,973
	Waste Storage Facility (cu ft)	313		1	1,470	964
	Off Creek Watering (#)	533/614/642		0	44	17
Forest	Forest Stand Improvement (ac)	666	No net loss of acres managed under wildlife habitat practices or loss of structures for wildlife	54	1,375	214
	Tree and Shrub Establishment (ac)	612		22	2,007	209
	Tree and Shrub Pruning (ac)	660		50	883	259



# Commodity Buffer Program

- Fairly compensate a producer annually for value of buffer area out of production.
- Protect a producer's bottom line.
- Make the buffer an asset instead of a liability.



# Why Not Use Buffers?

- Reduces acres used for cropland
- Removes most profitable land from production
- Financial burden to install and maintain with little to no return
- Negative impact on bottom line of operation



# Determining Buffer Width

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Develop connection between upland practices, stream types.

## Stream Type

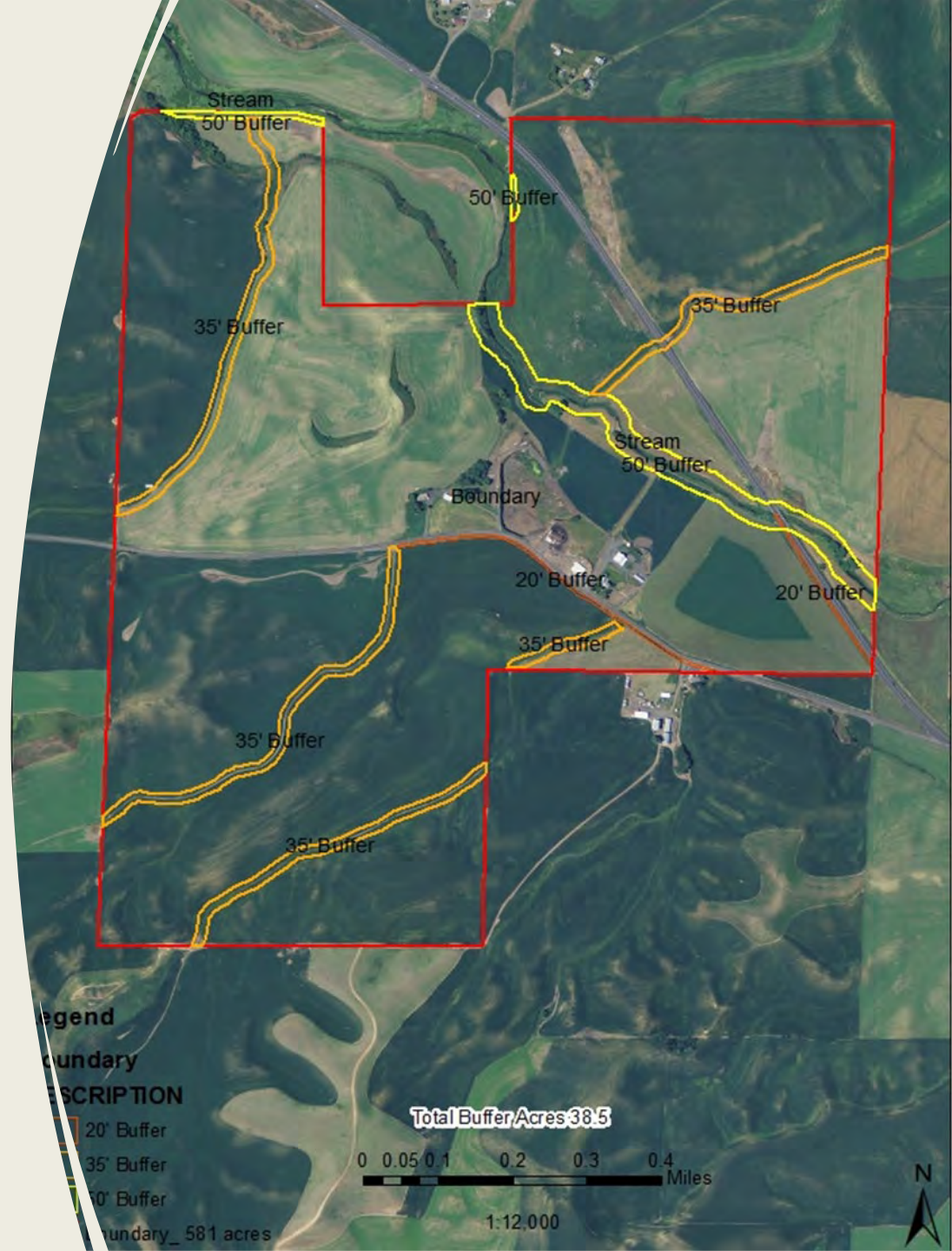
- Ephemeral
- Intermittent
- Perennial
- Fish Bearing

## Upland Practices

- Conservation Tillage
- Conventional Tillage

# Example

- Direct Seed/No Till (STIR <20) on a Perennial Fish-bearing stream
  - 50' minimum buffer, qualifies for payment on up to 75'
- Conventional Tillage (STIR >80) on a Perennial Fish-bearing stream
  - 75' minimum buffer, qualifies for payment on up to 35'



# Payment

$$\text{Payment} = \text{Acres} * \text{RMA} * (\text{APH} + (\text{APH} * 0.3) + (\text{APH} * 0.1))$$

- Risk Management Agency (RMA) Crop Prices
  - 2022 - \$6.59/Bushel for winter wheat
- APH (Actual Proven History) Yields for the majority adjacent Crops (+30%)
  - Winter Wheat ~80 bushels/acre
- Add additional 10% for woody vegetation

$$\text{Payment} = 3 * 6.59 * (80 + 24 + 8) = \$2,214$$

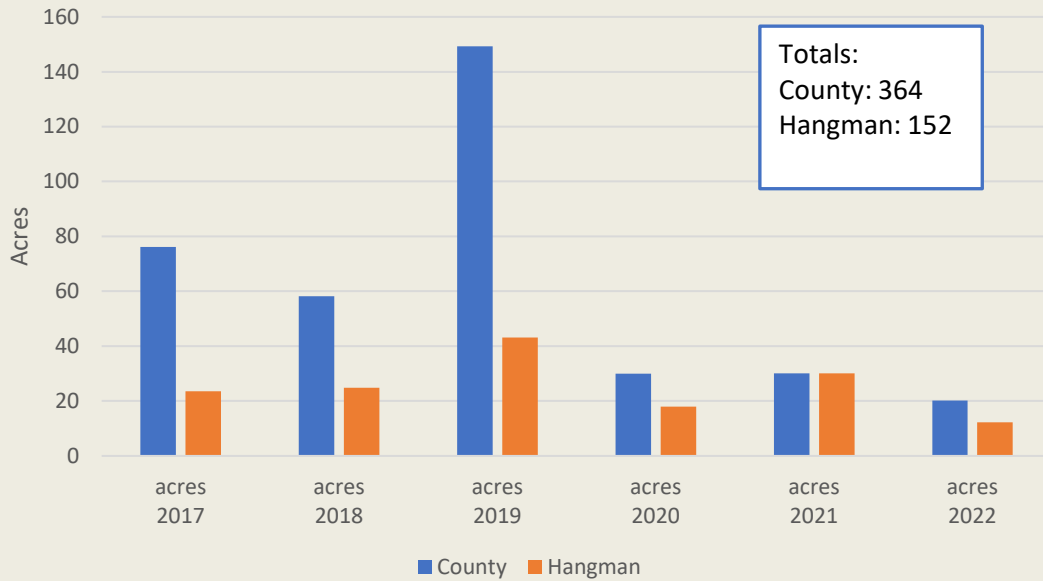
# Program Characteristics

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- Typically, 3-year contracts, paid annually
- Allow existing buffers but prioritize new buffer implementation
- Buffers can be hayed after July 1
- Build relationships with landowners.
- The hope is that buffers stay in buffer long-term



### Acres of Buffer Implemented



### Miles of Buffer Implemented

