



## Citizens' Alliance for Property Rights

Citizens' Alliance for Property Rights-Spokane Chapter  
Kevin Paulson-CAPR President  
10321 E. Bigelow Gulch Rd.  
Spokane, WA 99217

January 12, 2012

Dear County Commissioners:

The Spokane County Chapter of Citizens' Alliance for Property Rights (CAPR) has some concerns with the proposed Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP). The VSP was created when Governor Christine Gregoire commissioned Bill Ruckelshaus to protect environmentally sensitive areas in our state while preserving farm land. Please include this letter as public testimony that our chapter is not in favor of the VSP.

As you may know, John Koster, who is the immediate Past President of the WA State Association of Counties (WSAC), is also strongly opposed to the VSP. He said the program is rife with potential problems. Koster said the WSAC should not be advocating for or against the program. He cautioned that "counties should exercise extreme caution and consider their participation carefully."

We understand that by January 22, 2012, every county in Washington State must declare its intent to opt into the VSP or continue to comply with existing law in the Growth Management Act (GMA).

The supposed intent of both programs is to protect Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) on agricultural lands. In our opinion, both options violate private property rights and are unconstitutional. What authority grants the GMA and now the proposed VSP from not being superseded by the constitutions of the state of Washington and the United States? Our constitutions are meant to protect us from this sort of government overreach. Mandates from both the VSP and the GMA deprive rural American farms, ranches, and timberlands from profitable use, and are counter to everything a free society stands for.

In addition to these concerns, why should another program or bureaucracy micromanage rural property or private farmland in our state? Currently, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) assists rural American farmers to help preserve and protect their soil from erosion. These programs have largely been voluntary, but are required in order to participate in the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) program. An extremely high percentage of America's farmers participate in the FSA programs.

Through the current system, farmers have implemented direct seeding, reduced tillage, reduced airborne dust emissions and soil erosion. Furthermore, new technologies such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) are helping to guide farm machinery and thereby reduce overuse of fertilizer, agricultural chemicals, and seed. Input costs have gone down and yields have shown an increase as overlapping of machine passes are reduced with the use of GPS.



## Citizens' Alliance for Property Rights

We already have in place a very efficient system of preserving and protecting America's farms, ranches, and timber lands from degradation. Why would another expensive and stringent layer of policy makers from a desk removed from rural America make our current programs more effective? From the Spokane County Citizens' Alliance for Property Rights perspective, this is just another attempt to remove control of natural resources from those who work the land.

There appears to be nothing voluntary about the Voluntary Stewardship Program! We will have increased regulatory control, implemented from afar by people who do not understand the issues like the farmers and ranchers on the ground. Thomas Jefferson warned us, "Were we directed from Washington when to sow and when to reap, we should soon want bread."

Another bureaucratic layer of administration with enrollment in the VSP to protect rural America from the Growth Management Act does not make sense. It is time for the Growth Management Act to be revised or for counties in rural Washington State to opt out of the GMA.

Whatcom County has decided not to opt into the VSP. Their county attorney found ways the VSP could be appealed to the Growth Management Hearing Board. Even if you have already opted into the VSP program, further review should be made as to whether this program will provide temporary relief or further burden our courts with lawsuits.

A better option than opting into the VSP is to eliminate or correct the GMA so that regulatory restrictions which affect farming, ranching and forestry activities on agricultural lands are eliminated. We currently have voluntary conservation programs in place and the VSP appears to be a move to implement mandatory regulations upon agriculture. Nothing good has ever come from the Ruckelshaus Commission, and that includes the VSP.

Cordially,

Kevin J. Paulson  
CAPR President  
Spokane Chapter  
(509) 922-5048



**Citizens' Alliance for Property Rights**