



5-Year Plan (2010 to 2015) Whatcom Conservation District

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CONTEXT FOR THE WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT

What we are: The District is a political subdivision of the State of Washington. Its authorities, powers and structure are set forth in Chapter 89.08 RCW. These include developing and implementing programs to protect and conserve soil, water, air, prime and unique Farmland, rangeland, woodland, wildlife, energy, and other renewable resources on nonfederal lands. Districts also help stabilize local economies and mediate conflicts in land use. Its boundaries include all of Whatcom County.

Who we are: The District is governed by a volunteer board of five supervisors who are all local residents. Three are elected by the residents of Whatcom County. Two are appointed by the Washington State Conservation Commission. The Board of Supervisors is assisted by a staff of professionals with diverse skills, training and experiences necessary to accomplish the District's goals.

The realities within which we function:

Globally: Earth is our only livable planet. It is home. Earth's ability to support life as we know it is dependent on individual and collective efforts to conserve the natural resources of land, water and air. We are temporary occupants and passing stewards and custodians of these natural resources. Failure to take care of our home's natural resources – for ourselves and for those who will follow – is not an option. The alternative is an unsustainable civilization.

Internationally: We share the Fraser River Valley, Georgia Basin/Puget Sound International Airshed and Georgia Strait marine waters with our British Columbia, Canada neighbors. Mutual resource concerns include: nitrates in groundwater, pathogens, nutrients and toxics (e.g., asbestos) in surface waters, stream flows supporting fish and farms and pollutants in the air.

Our State: Much of our funding comes from the State of Washington. So we work within broad, legislatively defined goals including:

- Improve water quality in streams, rivers, lakes and Puget Sound
- Improve air quality
- Reduce the amount of toxics released into the environment
- Maintain healthy fish and wildlife populations
- Support responsible agriculture and timber management as the best stewards of our natural resources

Our District: The District's Board of Supervisors developed this Long Range Plan and its Annual Plans of Work based upon their knowledge of local resource needs and issues as informed by individual experience, watershed plans and staff & stakeholder input. The Whatcom Conservation District interacts with other key decision-makers in our community.

GUIDING ELEMENTS FOR THE PLAN

Vision of the Whatcom Conservation District

Whatcom County shall have healthy soils, water and air while maintaining sustainable and productive agriculture, fisheries, and natural resource-based industries.

The District shall be acknowledged as the independent and trusted agency of choice for leadership in the conservation, protection and stewardship of natural resources.

Mission of the Whatcom Conservation District

The Whatcom Conservation District assists land managers with their conservation choices.

Functions of the Whatcom Conservation District

To serve present and future generations of Whatcom County by fostering a healthy, sustainable relationship between people and the environment.

To provide a program of conservation leadership and partnership by making available to local land managers technical, financial and educational resources that meet the needs of conservation of soil, water, air and related natural resources.

Values of the Whatcom Conservation District

- The development and application of best management practices that protect natural resources and promote sustainable use of those resources ensuring their availability to future generations.
- To serve all the people of Whatcom County by providing the highest quality of technical assistance and education on the application of best management practices.
- To promote stewardship of natural services as the best alternative to regulation and coercion.

Trends Impacting Conservation in the Whatcom Conservation District

- From 2000 to 2009 the population of Whatcom County has grown 15.75%, to 193,100 residents.
- With the increasing age of landowners and operators, and current tax and land use regulations, there will be continued changes in the character of our agriculture.
- Increasing conversion of farmland to rural residences with increasing frequency of keeping livestock and poultry on small acreages resulting in an increasing concentration of livestock onto a shrinking land base.
- Increasing demands for water and lack of processes to resolve current water rights issues.
- Continuing need to improve management practices using our evolving understanding of the functioning of the Whatcom county environment.
- Increased regulatory oversight intervention to achieve Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Clean Water Act (CWA) goals.
- Increased costs of energy.
- Impacts from natural and human caused Climate Change including: increased winter rains and flooding, decreased growing season precipitation, and increased sea levels impacting river delta farmland.
- Eventual impacts of climate change on plant and animal species and the environment they depend on. This includes species ability or resilience to adapt and/or long term changes in where species are found.

THE PLAN

Priorities & Goals: Natural Resources

- GOAL: To protect water quality and enhance quantity for beneficial uses.
 - STRATEGY: Raise funds from agencies and foundations to address priority issues and programs.
 - TASK: Establish fundraising targets.
 - MEASURE: Document actual funds raised and compare to level of funds targeted.
- GOAL: To maintain farmland and productive, sustainable agriculture.
 - STRATEGY: Strengthen partnership with NRCS and FSA by working collaboratively and efficiently in delivery of farm programs.
 - TASK: Work collaboratively and efficiently with the NRCS and FSA in the delivery of farm programs.
 - MEASURE: Document whether the manner in which the partnership was targeted for strengthening, actually occurred.
 - MEASURE: Document changes in delivery of farm programs and whether the changes led to both strengthened and more effective farm plans.
 - STRATEGY: Ensure effectiveness of farm plans.

- **TASK:** Assist Drainage and Watershed Improvement Districts in developing and implementing maintenance plans that provide drainage yet protect resource values.
 - **MEASURE:** Document how assistance to DIDs and WIDs improved or ensured effectiveness of farm plans.
- **GOAL:** Provide guidance on water management to achieve productive agriculture, fish and wildlife uses.
 - **STRATEGY:** Work with Shellfish, Farmland Protection and TMDL Implementation Committees to implement activities consistent with our charter.
 - **TASK:** Participate in meetings of the Shellfish Protection, Purchase of Development Rights and TMDL Development Committees.
 - **MEASURE:** Document activities implemented as a result of working with the identified committees.
 - **TASK:** Develop a voluntary farm plan alternative to regulatory mandated mitigation measures.
 - **MEASURE:** Ensure that farmers and land operators are aware that a voluntary farm plan alternative is available to regulatory mandated mitigation measures in strategies and implementation plans.
 - **STRATEGY:** Work with the County, Cities, Special Districts, Tribes and NGO's to restore natural processes.
 - **TASK:** Pursue funding and create partnerships to effect restoration of priority areas.
 - **MEASURE:** Document activities in Birch Bay to restore the upper watershed of Terrell Creek.
 - **MEASURE:** Document activities in Lynden and North Lynden Watershed Improvement District to consolidate Double Ditch into a single, complex, sinuous channel.
- **GOAL:** To create climate change adaptation strategies designed to ensure that farmland and productive, sustainable agriculture are protected.
 - **STRATEGY:** Work with stakeholders to explore river corridor management options that anticipate increased winter flooding (levee setbacks, sediment extraction).
 - **TASK:** Participate in meetings with WCFCZD, Diking Districts, APC, Tribes, Landowners and other stakeholders.
 - **MEASURE:** Document activities planned and implemented as a result of working with stakeholders (landowner agreements, funding applications, permit applications etc).
 - **STRATEGY:** Work with stakeholders to encourage irrigation efficiencies that will be needed when summer precipitation decreases and air temperatures increase.
 - **TASK:** Participate in meetings with WDOE, NRCS, Tribes, Landowners and other stakeholders to plan future, functional irrigation systems capable of using existing or reduced water withdrawals.
 - **MEASURE:** Document activities planned and implemented as a result of working with stakeholders (funding application, withdrawal agreements, BMP installations).
 - **STRATEGY:** Work with stakeholders to conduct assessments of river delta farmland vulnerability to rising sea levels.

- **TASK:** Participate in meetings with WCFCZD, Diking Districts, APC, Tribes, Landowners and other stakeholders.
 - **MEASURE:** Document activities planned and implemented as a result of working with stakeholders (landowner agreements, funding applications, permit applications etc).
- **GOAL:** In restoration and resource planning consider long term impacts of climate change on plant and animals and the environment on which they depend. Planning should include measures that may help species be more resilient and adapt to climate change.
 - **TASK:** Since knowledge and predictions about impacts of climate change on species is limited, staff should be encouraged to gain greater understanding through training and scientific literature and then to apply new understandings to resource planning.

Critical Geographic Areas: (attached map)

- For Water Quality concerns, selected sub-basins of WRIA 1.
- For Air Quality concerns, the GB/PS IAS
- For Climate Change concerns, selected sub-basins and Nooksack River corridor

Priorities & Goals: Public Information, Outreach and Education

- **GOAL:** To educate the landowners of Whatcom County in the principles and practices of good natural resource stewardship.
 - **STRATEGY:** Develop a multi-faceted public education and outreach program to target appropriate stewardship messages to identified audiences.
 - **TASK:** Participate in the Whatcom Watershed Information Network.
 - **MEASURE:** Document participation in the Whatcom Watershed Information Network.
 - **TASK:** Make presentations to agencies, industry, professional and citizen associations and groups about District programs that address resource concerns identified in this long range plan of work.
 - **MEASURE:** Document the number of presentations made and follow-up inquiries.
 - **TASK:** Publish an annual District newsletter and articles for local newspapers and nongovernmental newsletters.
 - **MEASURE:** Document publication of the annual newsletter and document published articles in local newspapers and nongovernmental newsletters.
 - **TASK:** Maintain a District website.
 - **MEASURE:** Document updates to the website and monitor the number of visits to the site.
- **GOAL:** To educate County legislators and the public in the value of agriculture and other natural resource-based industries practiced sustainably, to Whatcom County.
 - **STRATEGY:** Engage the Washington State Conservation Commission, WACD, State Legislators and County officials to develop effective programs that are adequately funded.
 - **TASK:** Members of the Board and Staff will meet with local legislators frequently to discuss local resource concerns program needs and accomplishments.
 - **MEASURE:** Document the number of meetings with local legislators and any outcomes.

- **TASK:** Conduct a tour of District projects each biennium.
 - **MEASURE:** Document the number and types of project tours conducted.
- **GOAL:** Consult with agencies on policies and programs that protect/enhance the environment and sustained agriculture.
 - **STRATEGY:** Work with NRCS, WSU and Canadian Resource Agencies to adapt new and refine existing management practices.
 - **TASK:** Meet and collaborate with NRCS, WSU, and Canadian Resource Agencies on specific issues and topics.
 - **MEASURE:** Document participation on working committees and task forces that address resource concerns common to WCD, NRCS, WSU, and Canadian Resource Agencies.
- **GOAL:** Serving as an advocate for science-based policies and practices that protect and enhance natural resources.
 - **STRATEGY:** Identify advocacy opportunities, both targets and messages.
 - **TASK:** Implement advocacy opportunities.
 - **MEASURE:** Document the number of advocacy opportunities that occurred.
- **GOAL:** Assist landowners to obtain financial assistance for the implementation of Best Management Practices.
 - **STRATEGY:** Pursue cost share assistance from Federal, State and Local sources.
 - **TASK:** Target specific sources of funding to pursue, including if partnering with other organizations would enhance the odds of obtaining such funds.
 - **MEASURE:** Document the applications for specific funding sources.
 - **MEASURE:** Document partnerships with local governments, tribal, governments, and non-governmental organizations to capture grant funds.
- **GOAL:** Promote sustainable forestry practices to produce healthier stands, provide bio-energy, and reduce fire hazards.
 - **STRATEGY:** Work With DNR, WSU and Farm Forestry Association to improve forest resources.
 - **TASK:** Identify specific opportunities to promote sustainable forestry practices, such as thinning of forests.
 - **MEASURE:** Document partnerships with DNR, WSU, and the Farm Forestry Association to promote sustainable forestry practices.
 - **TASK:** Identify and provide specific opportunities for staff professional development.
 - **MEASURE:** Document completion of staff professional development activities.

Priorities & Goals: District Operations

- **GOAL:** Continue to serve as a technical assistance resource to community.
 - **STRATEGY:** Provide customer service through one on one and group meetings and written materials.

- **TASK:** Develop effective website so materials (written and video) are available upon demand to answer common questions.
 - **MEASURE:** Document creation of written and video materials to answer common questions (video community folks asking questions and staff responding) and placement onto website.
 - **MEASURE:** Create place on website for anyone to make suggestions and comments and pose inquiries.
- **TASK:** Hold regular staff meetings to ensure staff is acquainted with one another's work.
 - **MEASURE:** Document regular staff meetings.
- **TASK:** Identify ways to recognize staff who have demonstrated superior service. Involve staff in defining superior service and in identifying recognition options.
 - **MEASURE:** Document adoption of definition of superior service and development of list of recognition options.
- **STRATEGY:** Pursue stable funding for district programs.
 - **TASK:** Identify funding sources and develop steps to pursue.
 - **MEASURE:** Document efforts to seek funding from various sources, and successes.
- **STRATEGY:** Mitigate the future impacts of human caused climate change by modifying district behaviors relative to greenhouse gasses including energy use and conservation.
 - **TASK:** Conduct an energy audit to identify possible ways to conserve energy.
 - **MEASURE:** Document completion of the energy audit and implementation of steps, activities, behaviors to increase conservation of energy.
 - **TASK:** Develop cost effective measures to reduce energy consumption by district staff which may include:
 - Moving away from high maintenance landscaping.
 - Transition to more fuel efficient vehicles.
 - Foster ridesharing among staff
 - Reducing travel through telecommuting in appropriate circumstances.
 - **MEASURE:** Document implementation of measures to reduce energy consumption by staff.
 - **MEASURE:** Document energy consumption savings. Modeling the behaviors we would like the community to consider replicating is both good leadership and good public relations.

Staffing Needs (FTE's)

Administrative & Office Support	2
General Conservation Assistance	1
Stream Rehabilitation (CREP & DID)	3
Commercial & Non-commercial Livestock Operations	4
Public Information, Outreach & Education	1

Annual Budget Needs (budget represents salaries to support staff)

Improving Water Resources	\$343,533.89
Sustaining Agriculture	\$ 6,053.40
Forest Protection	\$ 7,546.50
Habitat Enhancement	\$282,054.42
Public Information & Education	\$ 68,065.99
District Operations	\$137,359.80
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Sub-total	\$844,614.00
Overhead (25%)	\$211,153.50
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Total	\$1,055,767.50

Benchmark, Timeline & Actions: Listed under Strategy, Task and Measure

Washington Conservation Districts: assisting land managers with their conservation choices



2010 Small Farm Tour