The Year in Review

The past year has been one of continued progress for Whatcom Conservation District (WCD). As the demands on Whatcom County’s natural resources grow, the District is meeting the challenges of those demands by continuing to provide and improve a variety of services to foster a healthy relationship between the environment and all segments of Whatcom County’s population. WCD’s programs include Dairy Planning, Small Farm Technical Assistance, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Geographic Information System support, and Public Information and Education.

As the region addresses endangered species issues and evolving environmental regulations, the WCD will continue to pursue partnerships and seek workable solutions to today’s natural resource challenges.

“In the end, we will conserve only what we love, and we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.”
-Baba Dioum, Senegalese conservationist

Dairy Program

With over 200 active dairy farms, Whatcom County is one of the largest dairy producing counties in the United States. In November 2000, Whatcom Conservation District (WCD) added a third dairy nutrient management professional to its Dairy Team. The District’s Dairy Team is fully staffed and on target for completing necessary planning and approval activities by the June 30, 2002 deadline mandated by the state’s Dairy Nutrient Management Law (Chapter 90.64 RCW). Dur-
(Dairy Program continued from page 1)ing the past year the District’s Dairy Team accomplished the following:

Planning:
The Dairy Team wrote and approved plans for 48 dairies and approved 7 dairy nutrient management plans written by private consultants. Total acreage planned for during the last year amounted to 15,100 acres. Overall, these numbers brought the approved nutrient management plan total to 128 and the total area included in planning to more than 46,000 acres.

Cost-share Assistance:
This year, 54 producers received funding through the federal Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and state Dairy Nutrient Cost-Share Program. The WCD Dairy Team joined NRCS staff in evaluating each applicant’s farm for its environmental protection needs as well as each project’s relative environmental merits. Forty-four Whatcom dairy producers were offered contracts with EQIP funds ($426,620) and ten were offered contracts with state funds worth $289,352.

Implementation:
During the past year, WCD’s Dairy Team and NRCS personnel assisted with the installation of 6 manure transfer systems, 4 waste storage ponds, 16 waste distribution pipelines, 3 underground outlets, 3 access roads, 4 outlet lines, 3 crop field drain systems, and 3 roof runoff systems. In addition, the District’s Dairy Team reviewed nutrient management records for 34 farms.

Information and Education:
To keep local dairy producers informed about District programs and the latest developments in Nutrient Management practices and technology, the Dairy Team hosted a Nutrient Management Workshop at a local Grange Hall in partnership with WSU Cooperative Extension. The Dairy Team also contributed articles to the District’s quarterly newsletter (Whatcom Conservation News), including a regularly featured column, Agronomy Notes.

“We can do no great things, only small things with great love.”
- Mother Teresa

John Postma, a Whatcom County dairy farmer, working with his son on the riparian forest buffer project installed along a stream running through his dairy.
Mission Statement:
The Whatcom Conservation District promotes conservation education and provides technical assistance to foster a healthy relationship between people and the environment.
Salmon Recovery

Ag, Fish, and Water Process
During the past year WCD continued its leadership in addressing salmonid recovery issues in lowland agricultural areas of the Nooksack River watershed. District participation in the Ag, Fish and Water (AFW) process included attending weekly meetings of stakeholders and facilitating communication about the AFW process among local community members.

Nooksack Recovery Team
WCD staff has provided administrative and technical support to the Nooksack Recovery Team (NRT), an alliance of tribes, landowners, local government, and other stakeholders who work cooperatively to restore fish habitat in the Nooksack Watershed. WCD provided planning and program support for the annual NRT-sponsored Salmon Summit, held in October 2000. Over 250 people attended the Salmon Summit, which covered a variety of salmon related issues, from policy to on-the-ground recovery efforts. The District hosted workshops highlighting the accomplishments of its cooperators (33,000+ acres in plans) and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

Lead Entity
Through June 2001, District professionals provided technical and administrative support to the Lead Entity’s Joint Technical Advisory Group (JTAG) and Citizen’s Habitat Committee (CHC). The JTAG is developing a chinook recovery plan and provides technical support to restoration efforts of the NRT and CHC. The CHC prioritizes the list of projects that is submitted to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) for funding.

With Whatcom County Water Resources, WCD staff coordinated Salmon in Our Future – A Local Project Open House, a March 2001 event to highlight on-the-ground salmon recovery efforts in Whatcom County. District staff also developed a Salmon Recovery in WRIA 1 display for use at various public events.

Small Farm Program

Technical Assistance
The emphasis of WCD’s small farm planning program has been to minimize the impacts of livestock to surface and ground water resources by encouraging implementation of best management practices (BMPs). Since June 2000 the District has provided to over 30 small farms, technical assistance in implementing BMPs that include fencing animals away from water bodies, improving manure storage and handling techniques, reducing mud, planting woody riparian buffers or maintaining vegetative filter strips along fish-bearing streams. The District’s small farm outreach includes site visits, workshops, and farm tours.

Financial Assistance
Two farms received cost-share assistance totaling $12,782 under the federal EQIP program for implementing best management practices.

Public Information and Education

Volunteer Programs
June 2001 concluded the first year of the District’s Stream Team program. The Stream Team is a coalition of volunteers whose goal is to improve water quality through public education and action projects. Stream Team education and restoration efforts are focused in the Bertrand Creek and Fishtrap Creek watersheds, areas identified as having water quality problems related to elevated bacteria levels, as well as a decline in fish and wildlife habitat.

Initially, ten Stream Team participants received classroom and field instruction related to water quality and salmon lifecycle. Following training, the volunteers participated in water quality monitoring, ripar-

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Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

Public Outreach
During the past year, WCD staff presented information about the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) at a dozen locations throughout Whatcom County. Outreach materials included a display highlighting the CREP process and local projects, as well as informational handouts. In addition, a local television station prepared a news story about CREP.

Research
Restoration is an interdisciplinary field requiring expertise in a variety of subjects. Continuing education activities for CREP staff included training with the Society for Ecological Restoration and with Washington State Department of Agriculture in Pesticide Use. In addition, District CREP professionals meet every other month with a workgroup of local restoration ecologists from a various sectors (tribal, county, state, non-profit, and private restoration contractors). With financial assistance provided by a grant from the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development, WCD staff began research to determine best management practices for restoration of reed canary grass sites.

Implementation
To facilitate a large workload during the past year, CREP staff developed templates, worksheets and boilerplate documents. During winter months, CREP staff standardized and compiled documents for use by other districts. The final compilation is referred to as “CREP-In-A-Box” and is available as a hardcopy or on CDROM.

During the past year CREP staff assisted over 100 landowners. This assistance resulted in 21 signed contracts (CRP-1), with 16 projects implemented during winter 2001 and 5 to be planted during winter 2002. Twenty-three additional projects are planned for implementation during winter 2002.

The past year’s planting season was limited due to shortage of available planting stock, primarily conifers. CREP staff have established plant specifications based on NRCS guidelines to ensure success on Whatcom County CREP projects. Conifers planted this season will survive harsh winters and periodic flooding.

Whatcom County CREP Highlights

- Planted 311 acres of forested stream buffer
- Installed CREP buffer on 3 Whatcom County Dairy Farms
- Planted 126,043 seedlings, including 50,000 conifer seedlings

August 2000: Site before preparation
February 2001: Site after plant installation

Tree protection tubes are installed during planting to protect seedlings against animal damage, to provide shelter against adverse weather, and to help identify seedlings when maintaining competing vegetation. Imagine a grown tree for every tube!
ian restoration/revegetation projects, and preparation for the District’s Native Plant Sale.

Public Outreach
During the past year, public information booths were maintained at eight community events, including the Northwest Washington Fair, two Shellfish Conservation District open houses, Walk for Wildlife, Salmon in Our Future open house, Bellingham Kid’s Festival, and Horses for Clean Water workshops. These events provided a forum for interaction with the public of all ages, through the use of a non-point pollution model, craft activities, map displays, and other visual program information and handouts. In addition, District staff hosted three different educational farm tours of a horse, a dairy, and a raspberry farm. These tours, open to the public and to students, offered participants the opportunity to get their questions answered by the hosting farmers and other resource specialists.

WCD’s newsletter, Whatcom Conservation News, is published quarterly and has a mailing list of approximately 6000. The newsletter continues to promote name recognition and District programs, maintains community awareness of conservation-related events and farming practices and recognizes outstanding cooperators. WCD’s website, www.whatcomcd.org, is also a valuable outreach tool and source of up-to-date District program information.

During spring 2001, WCD hosted its 8th Annual Native Plant Sale. This event offered healthy native trees, shrubs, and perennials for purchase to the local community. The annual plant sale continues to be a positive way to initiate and maintain contact with community members, promote the use of native plants, and support local revegetation projects. Proceeds from the plant sale support the District’s educational programs.

Public School Programs
In partnership with the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association’s Students for Salmon program, District staff visited six county schools during the past year to provide water quality and macroinvertebrate training to students in grades 4th-6th. Streams visited included Anderson, Ten Mile, Kendall, Padden and Chuckanut Creeks.

This year, the WCD hosted the regional high school Envirothon competition. Annually, the WCD and WSU Coop Extension support this event and the 6th Grade Forest Conservation Tour. WCD also continues to participate in the Washington Waterweeks program, a statewide series of habitat related education and action activities that takes place during the fall. A watershed tour, a shellfish tour, and stream clean-up days were Washington Waterweeks events sponsored by WCD during the past year.

These activities have all been possible through partnerships with the following groups: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA), City of Bellingham, Northwest Indian College, Portage Bay and Drayton Harbor Shellfish Protection Districts, Washington State Department of Ecology, Lummi Nation, Nooksack Indian Tribe, WSU Cooperative Extension, City of Lynden, Whatcom County, and many others. Conservation is truly a community effort!

Mapping Project.

The District’s GIS professional updated the NRT Project Map during the past year to reflect the over 489 projects documented in the NRT database. The latest NRT Project Map was completed in June 2001 and is used by NRT members to communicate salmon recovery project location and progress.

District staff also provided GIS support to the Fish Presence Mapping Project, an effort to map the upper range of salmonid species presence within the Whatcom County/WRIA 1 watershed. The mapping process included distinguishing between each salmonid species, and where possible, between individual stocks. Upper extents were grouped by species and maps were created for each species. District GIS staff also developed a comprehensive map as an overview of salmonid presence.