



Long-Range Program (2017 to 2022) Whatcom Conservation District

For More Information Contact: 360.526.2381 or wcd@whatcomcd.org

Organization of the Whatcom Conservation District

The District is a political subdivision of the State of Washington. Its authorities, powers and structure are set forth in Chapter 89.08 RCW et seq. 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. It 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 experience 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. However, we must have food, fiber and energy to exist.

Internationally: We share the Salish Sea, Fraser River Valley and Georgia Basin/Puget Sound International Airshed 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 frustration is that they are not providing the same level of protection to our shared natural resources.

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 based upon their knowledge of local resource needs and issues as informed by their individual experiences (farming, ranching, forestry & education), watershed plans and staff, public & stakeholder input. The Whatcom Conservation District interacts with other key decision-makers in our community.

Function of the Whatcom Conservation District

Our function is to make available, focus and coordinate technical, financial and educational resources, from whatever their source, so that they meet the needs of the local land manager in advancing the conservation of soil, water and related natural resources.



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We Serve & Why

- We want to achieve:
 - No net loss of Whatcom Co. prime soil farmland
 - Improved Water Quality and Quantity to reopen shellfish harvest areas, improve fish habitat and availability to farmers, ranchers & producers
 - Regulatory fairness in the development and application of state laws and local ordinances to agriculture based upon best available science
 - An improved reputation for the district and local farmers, ranchers and producers
 - A Rate & Charge to provide a dependable base of funding for District core programs and activities

- We want to preserve:
 - Voluntary, incentive-based programs to afford landowners flexible, effective options to remain economically viable while addressing natural resource concerns
 - A multi-disciplinary team of professionals who can effectively assist landowners with their conservation choices.
 - The conduct of research, educational or demonstration projects on local farms to advance the knowledge and adoption of effective conservation practices

- We want to avoid:
 - Conflict and litigation within our community over water quality, quantity and habitat.
 - Loss of Whatcom's status as the seventh leading agricultural county in the state
 - Imposition of "one-size fits all" solutions when less intrusive, tailored solutions are available to achieve both individual and community objectives.

- We want to eliminate:
 - The negative impression created in landowner minds when they are referred to us for assistance by regulatory agencies.
 - Ineffective tenor and forms of communication to foster greater understanding and appreciation for conservation
 - Potential losses to fire due to the lack of defensible spaces and unhealthy forest lot management.

Our Mission

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

- Whatcom County shall have healthy soils, water and air while maintaining sustainable and productive agriculture, fisheries, and other 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.
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Our Values

- To serve all the people of Whatcom County (urban, suburban & rural) by providing the highest quality of technical assistance and education on the application of best management practices.



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- 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 promote stewardship of natural services as the best alternative to regulation and coercion.
 - We believe that principles of conservation and agriculture should be included in K-12 education.
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Natural Resource Data & Information:

- From 2000 to 2015 the population of Whatcom County has grown 27%, to 212,284 residents.
 - Water quality over the Portage Bay shellfish harvest areas has and continues to decline closing or conditioning harvest to hundreds of acres.
 - There is an increased potential for litigation over water quality, water quantity and lack of fish habitat.
 - There is increased insecurity of farmers due to political pressure to lessen the historic priority of protecting farmland from flooding and promoting the conversion of productive farmland to habitat through government buyouts.
 - 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.
 - There is 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.
 - There is a continuing need to improve management practices using our evolving understanding of the functioning of the Whatcom county environment.
 - There is increased regulatory oversight/intervention to achieve Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Clean Water Act (CWA) goals. We expect recognition for agriculture achievements in this area.
 - There are increasing impacts from climate change including: Less water stored as snow, increased winter rain intensity and flooding, decreased growing season precipitation, and increased sea levels impacting river delta farmland.
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Criteria for Selecting Conservation Priorities: The action(s) will

- Support and sustain agriculture into the future with practical, effective conservation choices and protecting working lands from flooding and urbanization
 - Meet the needs of the landowner as well as the needs of our community as identified in local salmon recovery, shellfish harvest area protection and watershed plans.
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Priority Natural Resource Conservation Needs & Geographic Areas, Measures of Success and Goals:

- District natural resource conservation concerns in priority order are:
 1. Poor water quality (too much bacteria in surface water & nitrate in groundwater)
 2. Inadequate fish & wildlife habitat (fish blockages, lack of vegetation & channel complexity)
 3. Potential negative impacts to agriculture from climate change
 4. Loss of working lands
 5. Too little water in the lower tributaries of the Nooksack River, Dakota, California and Terrell Creeks
- Critical geographic areas for natural resource conservation in the district are:
 - For water quality concerns, drainages that lead to recreational or commercial shellfish harvest areas.
 - For habitat concerns, the South Fork of the Nooksack and Lowlands of Whatcom County



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- For water quantity concerns, areas within Watershed Improvement, Diking and Drainage District boundaries.
- For climate change concerns, Western Whatcom County
- Measures of Success
 - Bacterial pollution from livestock operations no longer contributes to the closure of shellfish harvest areas.
 - There will be appropriate vegetative buffers along 20 miles of agricultural watercourses without negatively affecting other resource concerns.
 - There will be no net loss of farmland to development.
 - There will water management plans in each of the Watershed Improvement Districts that address drainage & fish.
 - Staff will be informed as to how climate change could be considered in the plans they develop.
- Goals
 1. Protect and enhance water quality for beneficial uses by addressing nitrate in groundwater and fecal coliform of the Nooksack River and its lowland tributaries; California, Dakota and Terrell Creeks; and Sumas River.
 - a. Strategy – Assist livestock operators to capture, store and apply the manure generated by their animals.
 - b. Strategy – Assist berry and crop farmers with their use of manure.
 2. Improve fish and wildlife habitat by establishing appropriate riparian cover along watercourses and wetlands on agricultural lands
 - a. Strategy -- Deliver an effective program of voluntary restoration of riparian and wetland areas to advance locally developed plans that recover fish without eroding Whatcom's base of prime farmland.
 - b. Strategy -- Work with others (Whatcom County, Cities, Special Districts, Tribes and other stakeholders) to restore natural processes.
 3. Conserve and enhance Whatcom County's Green Infrastructure Network.
 - a. Strategy – Support the County's creation and implementation of effective programs for the purchase or transfer of development rights
 - b. Strategy – Ensure that there is a farm plan alternative to standard buffers in the County's Critical Areas Ordinance
 - c. Strategy -- Build confidence in the agricultural community that there will be land and water for them now and into the future
 - d. Strategy – Advocate for the County to Integrate a Green Infrastructure plan into its land use plans with the object of protecting working lands and creating opportunities for farmers and landowners to sell environmental services.
 4. Protect and enhance water quantity for beneficial uses
 - a. Strategy -- Assist Drainage and Watershed Improvement Districts in developing and implementing maintenance plans that provide drainage for growing crops yet protect instream values.
 - b. Strategy -- encourage the widespread adoption of water conservation practices;



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- c. Strategy -- re-establish important watershed processes through the construction of enhancement of wetlands;
 - d. Strategy – work with homeowners and businesses to adopt low impact development practices.
5. Protect agriculture and rural residents from the anticipated potential negative impacts of climate change
- a. Strategy – Develop climate adaptation strategies
 - b. Strategy -- Work with stakeholders to explore river corridor management options that anticipate increased winter flooding due to more intense rain and rain into higher elevations.
 - c. Strategy -- Work with stakeholders to encourage irrigation efficiencies that will be needed when summer precipitation decreases and air temperatures increase.
 - d. Strategy – Work with rural residents and communities to establish defensible space to reduce potential loss from forest fire.

Information – Education & District Operations Priorities, Measures of Success, and Goals:

Information & Education

- Goals
 1. Farmers, ranchers, producers, and landowners will exhibit good conservation stewardship by protecting and enhancing soil health, water quality/quantity and wildlife habitat.
 2. All Whatcom County residents and elected officials will value natural resource-based industries (farming, forestry and fishing) such that they support the protection of working lands and support their local land managers.
 3. The Whatcom Conservation District will be a vital part of community interaction being seen as a trusted advisor, with a depth of understanding of both the regulatory framework and effective beneficial land management practices.
- Strategies
 1. Identify and cultivate potential leaders from farmers, ranchers, producers and landowners to be good examples of conservation stewardship to the community.
 2. Promote our local farming and ranching industries through diverse interactive opportunities (elementary school presentations, tours, internships)
 3. Maintain a professional, motivated, multi-disciplinary staff

District Operations

- Goals
 1. Provide effective, practical and economical management practice recommendations to farmers, ranchers, producers and landowners to facilitate their voluntary adoption of conservation practices that prevent/reduce resource pollution.
 2. Convince regulatory agencies, the public and legislators as to the value of the empowering farmers, ranchers, producers and landowners to voluntarily select and implement conservation practices that achieve environmental values while maintaining the productivity and economic viability of their operations.
 3. Build climate resilience in farming. identifying and adapting management practices and infrastructure to avoid potential negative impacts due to projected changes in climate.



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Strategies

1. Enable landowners to adopt the conservation practices needed to achieve the District's natural resource goals through a program of technical and financial assistance.
2. Implement the Washington Discovery Farms Program in Whatcom County and beyond to demonstrate the impact of various land management and conservation practices on water quality.
3. Assist farmers, producers, and landowners in understanding their symbiotic interactions with resources (i.e., surface water, groundwater, soil) through research and demonstration projects.
4. Provide technical expertise and science based input on local and state programs, policy, regulation, and/or practices that affect farmers, ranchers, producers and landowners.

Land Manager Needs

- Rural livestock owners need technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices that are protective of surface and groundwater resources from nutrients or bacteria.
- Rural landowners need technical and financial assistance to improve fish and wildlife habitat by replacing fish barriers, establishing riparian forest or hedgerow buffers or installing large woody debris.
- Urban landowners need assistance retrofitting their parcels with rain gardens and other practices to reduce contaminated stormwater runoff.
- Farmers and ranchers need to see how conservation practices can improve water quality, quantity and contribute to their economic bottom line.
- Rural residents and communities need assistance in creating defensible space to lessen the potential impacts of forest fire.

FY 2017 Milestones, Timeline & Actions

Priority: Reduce Nutrient & Bacterial contamination of surface and groundwater.

Measurable Goal: Bacteria trends show significant decline in Dakota, California, Bertrand, Fishtrap, Kamm, Scott Ditch and Tenmile watershed.

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
10 Operations	FY 2017	Assist NRCS in the designing/installation of NWQI & EQIP funded conservation practices.
4 Operations	FY 2017	Design/install Conservation Commission funded conservation practices
4 Operations	FY 2017	Design/install Whatcom County funded conservation practices for non-dairy operations
100 Landowners	FY 2017	Assist in developing conservation plans
20 Berry Growers	Dec 2016	Assist in proper use of manure as a fertilizer or soil amendment

Priority: Inadequate fish & wildlife habitat (fish blockages, lack of vegetation & channel complexity)

Measurable Goal: 35 Habitat Enhancement Projects

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
25 New CREP Projects installed	June 2017	Enroll landowners, complete plans, obtain approval oversee installation and contractor payment.
120 CREP Projects maintained	June 2017	Complete inventories, prescriptions, oversee maintenance and contractor payment.
25 CREP Projects re-	June 2017	Complete inventories, draft plans and obtain approval to re-



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enrolled		enroll projects into the program.
Remove 10 fish barriers	June 2017	Assist landowners to replace culverts to provide fish passage
Install 2 riparian mitigation projects	June 2017	Assist Whatcom County River & Flood to install riparian plantings required as part of flood protection projects.

Priority: Potential negative impacts to agriculture & rural residences from climate change

Measurable Goal: Reduce fire loading around rural residences and provide training to staffs on Climate Change.

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
Obtain funding for Firewise Activities	July 2016	Develop a scope of work and obtain funding for FY 2017.
Develop a Community Firewise Plan	December 2016	Work with one or more communities to develop a plan to become Firewise
Reduce fire loads around rural residences	June 2017	Help rural landowners to develop Firewise plans and remove fire loading.
Climate Change Training	June 2017	Identify and create opportunities for staff to receive training on climate change germane to their programs

Priority: Loss of working lands

Measurable Goal: No net loss of Whatcom County farmland to development.

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
Identify District's representative on Whatcom County Ag Advisory Committee	Sept 2016	To advance the District's Long Range Plan of work
CAFO Permit	August 2016	Provide comments to Dept. of Ecology to help protect water resources without unduly burdening livestock operations.
Discovery Farm	Sept 2016	Install edge of field monitoring stations to assess conservation practice effectiveness
Workshops/field days	June 2017	Provide training to livestock operators on practices that can add to bottom line while protecting water quality
Green Infrastructure	June 2017	Participate in efforts to create markets for farmers to sell environmental services.

Priority: Too little water in the lower tributaries of the Nooksack River, Dakota, California and Terrell Creeks

Measurable Goal: Water conservation practices are included as a priority in the EQIP program

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
Participate in Local Work Group	Oct 2016	Work to elevate water conservation measures as priority for EQIP funding
Assist Watershed Improvement Districts	Jun 2016	Help in development of watershed plans to garner funding for water conserving practices.
Lagoon Pasteurization Project	Dec 2016	Pilot technology that makes potable water from liquid manure



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Staffing Needs

- *Water Quality:* Dairy Resource Specialist, Non-dairy Resource Specialist, Engineer, Engineering Technician, Stormwater Specialist.
- *Education/Outreach & Research:* Educator, Educator Assistant, Research Scientist, Research Assistant, Intern.
- *Habitat/Firewise:* Restoration Specialists (3), Program Assistant, Firewise Specialist.
- *Administration:* Executive Director, Administrative Specialist, IT/Cartography Specialist, Office Assistant.

Annual Budget Needs

Programs	Full-time Equivalents	Estimated Funding
Water Quality (Livestock & Urban)	5	\$ 396,000
Habitat Enhancement	5	\$ 406,000
Education/Outreach & Research	4	\$ 319,500
District Operations	3	\$ 238,750
	17	\$ 1,360,250
Overhead (25%)		\$ 340,063
TOTAL:		\$ 1,611,562

Washington Conservation Districts assisting land managers with their conservation choices

