

2002

# Annual Report

WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT

JULY 2001-JUNE 2002



## The Year in Review

As Whatcom Conservation District reviews our accomplishments of the past year, we also reflect on the changes in resource management practices that have evolved during the District's 56 years of existence. Under current conservation planning efforts, the District's once more diverse program goals continue to converge as standards from processes such as Ag, Fish & Water become integrated into these programs. With increasing recognition of the importance of water quality and quantity protection to benefit people and the environment, the District has made great progress in assisting landowners with implementing best management practices and making better resource management decisions.

Such progress is illustrated through accomplishments during the past year that include success in meeting the deadline for dairy nutrient management plan development, expanding the success of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, meeting Total Maximum Daily Load bacteria level goals for the Lower Nooksack basin, and increasing the District's opportunities for community education and outreach.

## Agriculture Preservation

WCD's District manager and staff have provided technical assistance to a variety of committees, governments, and caucuses to coordinate, develop, and promote an effective farmland protection strategy for Whatcom County. An important objective of the District's work in protecting farmland is to link incentives with regulation to enable farmers to stay in business. Farmers who follow best management practices are better for the environment than the alternative of urban sprawl.

The well-being of a people is like a tree.  
Agriculture is its root,  
Manufacture and Commerce are its  
branches and its leaves.  
If the root is injured,  
the leaves fall, the branches break away,  
and the tree dies.

-- Chinese Proverb



## DISTRICT PROGRAMS

**Agriculture Preservation**

**Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program**

**Resource Management**

**Dairy Planning**

**Engineering**

**Geographic Information System**

**Information & Education**

**Small Farm Technical Assistance**

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During the past year, District staff participated in the Agriculture Advisory Committee (AAC) to review development standards affecting agriculture and to advise the Whatcom County Council on matters related to agriculture. AAC worked with Whatcom County Planning and Development Services (PDS) to provide revised language for the *Resource Land* agricultural section of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan 2002 update, to make recommendations to PDS regarding land covenants that supercede Agriculture Protection Overlay requirements restricting agricultural use of land, and to review existing Agriculture Mitigation Banking programs. District staff served on a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) committee to design a PDR program for Whatcom County. It is anticipated the Whatcom County Council will adopt the PDR ordinance in September 2002.

- CREP and providing links to further information.
- WCD technicians encouraged current CREP participants to market the program to neighboring landowners.
- Non-CREP funds were used to develop informational project signs, identifying a project as a CREP stream restoration effort. The signs provide contact information and are posted on project sites highly visible to the public.

WCD technicians have played a pivotal role in promoting the activities of the local Riparian Restoration Working Group. Members meet regularly to facilitate exchange and dissemination of information about the evolving field of riparian restoration. Additionally, a District CREP technician planned and facilitated the Salmon track at the annual Washington Association of District Employees (WADE) training in June 2002.

## Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

### Public Outreach

Whatcom County's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) continued its strong expansion during the past year. WCD staff have promoted CREP to local landowners in a variety of ways, including direct mailings by watershed, personal field visits and site assessments



in high priority areas, informational displays at community events, and distribution of brochures, posters and fact sheets outlining the purpose and advantages of the program.

- WCD technicians gave two presentations about CREP at the 2001 Salmon Summit held in Bellingham with over 300 attendees.
- The District's website includes a page promoting



A CREP contractor uses a tree-planting machine to speed the process of planting the species mix with consistent spacing and depth. This CREP project on Bertrand Creek covers 47 acres of planting totalling 1 1/4 miles of restored stream buffer.

### Implementation

Two WCD CREP technicians coordinate technical, financial, and educational assistance to landowners for design, implementation and maintenance of best management practices (BMPs) necessary to implement CREP in Whatcom County. During the past year, these technicians provided one-on-one assistance to over 100 landowners interested in CREP and worked with 54 landowners on buffer planning and preliminary mapping. Technicians discuss CREP with landowners, provide informational materials, answer questions, and direct landowners to the Farm Service



6975 HANNEGAN ROAD • LYNDEN, WA 98264

(360) 354-2035 • Fax (360) 354-4678 • Email: [wcd@whatcomcd.org](mailto:wcd@whatcomcd.org) • Website: [www.whatcomcd.org](http://www.whatcomcd.org)

#### SUPERVISORS:

Ken Thomas, Brian Cieslar, Robert Barker, Fred Tjoelker, Jerry VanDellen

#### NRCS STAFF:

John Gillies, Erica Fifer, Bill Bonsen, Travis Bouma, Anitra Gorham

#### WCD STAFF:

George Boggs, Dawn Bekenyi, Wayne Chaudiere, Chris Clark, Sabina Gouran, Beth Chisholm, Andrew Phay, Chuck Timblin, Andrea Hood, Mark Ockey

#### FSA STAFF:

Tanya Dostal, Mark Turner, Darcy Maldonado, Arlene Noteboom, Theresa Tripp, Betty Snell

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Agency (FSA) office to schedule an appointment for enrollment. District staff completed 47 Conservation Plans of Operation (CPOs) for CREP projects and coordinated with FSA to complete 38 new CREP sign-ups (CRP-2s) during the past year.

In monitoring CREP project progress, District technicians performed 49 maintenance inspections during the past year. As part of CREP maintenance, WCD has used bi-annual site surveys to ensure proper stocking, control of competing vegetation and project success. Photo documentation is used to record buffer establishment, including digital pictures taken before, during, and after project planting.



This machine planted CREP project located on a tributary of the Sumas River totaled 17 acres of land area.

WCD has continued to work on the CREP database to track CREP participation leads, signups, and project information such as buffer length and acreage, annual rental rates and restoration costs, and overall project success. The database enables District technicians to query all projects for variables that may affect project success, such as herbicide type, nursery source of plant material, timing of installation, timing of herbicide, herbicide application rate, etc.

Database reports generate information on CREP totals for number of projects, buffer length and acres, as well as project averages for rental rates, cost and size. WCD now has 64 CREP projects totaling 880 acres and 49 lineal miles of stream buffer.

## Resource Management

District staff provided technical assistance to numerous committees and task forces working on watershed planning, salmon recovery, and groundwater and commercial shellfish recovery efforts during the past year. WCD staff strengthened partnerships through involvement with:



- Nooksack Recovery Team (NRT) – District staff participated as part of this team dedicated to the restoration of fish habitat in the Nooksack watershed.
- Drayton Harbor and Portage Bay Shellfish Committees – District staff participated on committees to maintain communication concerning farm planning and water quality improvements.
- Citizen's Habitat Committee (CHC) – A WCD staff member chairs the CHC. During the past year, the CHC adopted an interim salmon recovery strategy and reviewed and ranked one round of salmon recovery projects. Whatcom County applicants received \$3.5 million in funding from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board.
- Tenmile Watershed Pilot Project – WCD is administering the grant and serving on the Advisory Committee for a locally led, sub-watershed based riparian habitat restoration pilot project.
- Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) support – District staff created a database to report on the District dairy team's participation in TMDL implementation activities.
- Whatcom County - The District continued to administer for Whatcom County the State Revolving Loan Program to address septic system failures. Participation in the program has been minimal; therefore, the county has decided to discontinue the program as of August 2002.
- Whatcom County Planning and Development Services – District staff maintained communication and addressed non-commercial farm planning needs in response to Critical Area Ordinance referrals.

### **Mission Statement:**

The Whatcom Conservation District promotes conservation education and provides technical assistance to foster a healthy relationship between people and the environment.

## Dairy Planning Program



### Planning:

The WCD Dairy Team developed dairy nutrient management plans (DNMPs) for 60 dairies and approved 19 additional DNMPs written by private consultants during the past year. Acreage planned for during the past year amounted to 17,382 acres, bringing the countywide area included in planning to 63,000 acres. As of June 30, 2002, only two of the 197 dairies in Whatcom County remained without an approved DNMP.

### Cost Share Assistance:

During the past year 36 producers submitted applications for the federal Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). The District Dairy Team worked with NRCS staff to evaluate each applicant's farm for its environmental protection needs as well as each project's relative environmental merits. Though District staff prepared EQIP contracts, the new Farm Bill froze these contracts. New contracts are being prepared. State cost-share funded \$445,267 worth of Best Management Practices (BMPs) implemented during the past year.

### Implementation:

From June 2001-July 2002 WCD's Dairy Team and NRCS personnel assisted with the installation of:

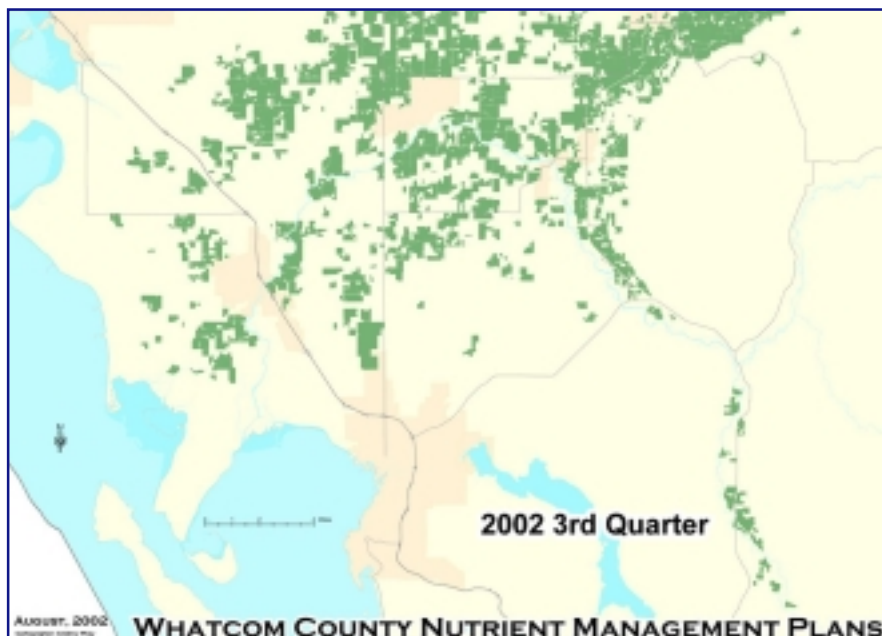
- 6 manure transfer systems
- 9 waste storage structures (including 1 waste storage pond, 2 tanks, and 6 drystacks)
- 17 waste distribution pipelines (62,785 ft)
- 9 underground outlets
- 3 access roads
- 2 subsurface drains
- 9 roof runoff practices
- 5 forest buffers (4.8 acres)
- wetland restoration



Crew installing waste transfer pipeline at dairy farm north of Lynden in Whatcom County.

### Management:

District staff reviewed nutrient management and relay crop records for 66 producers covering 14,164 acres. Providing soil test review assistance to farmers helps farmers adapt application rates to improve crop production and protect ground water.



The green areas of this map indicate the distribution of Whatcom County dairy farm acreage with approved dairy nutrient management plans for the time period through second quarter 2002.

### Information and Education

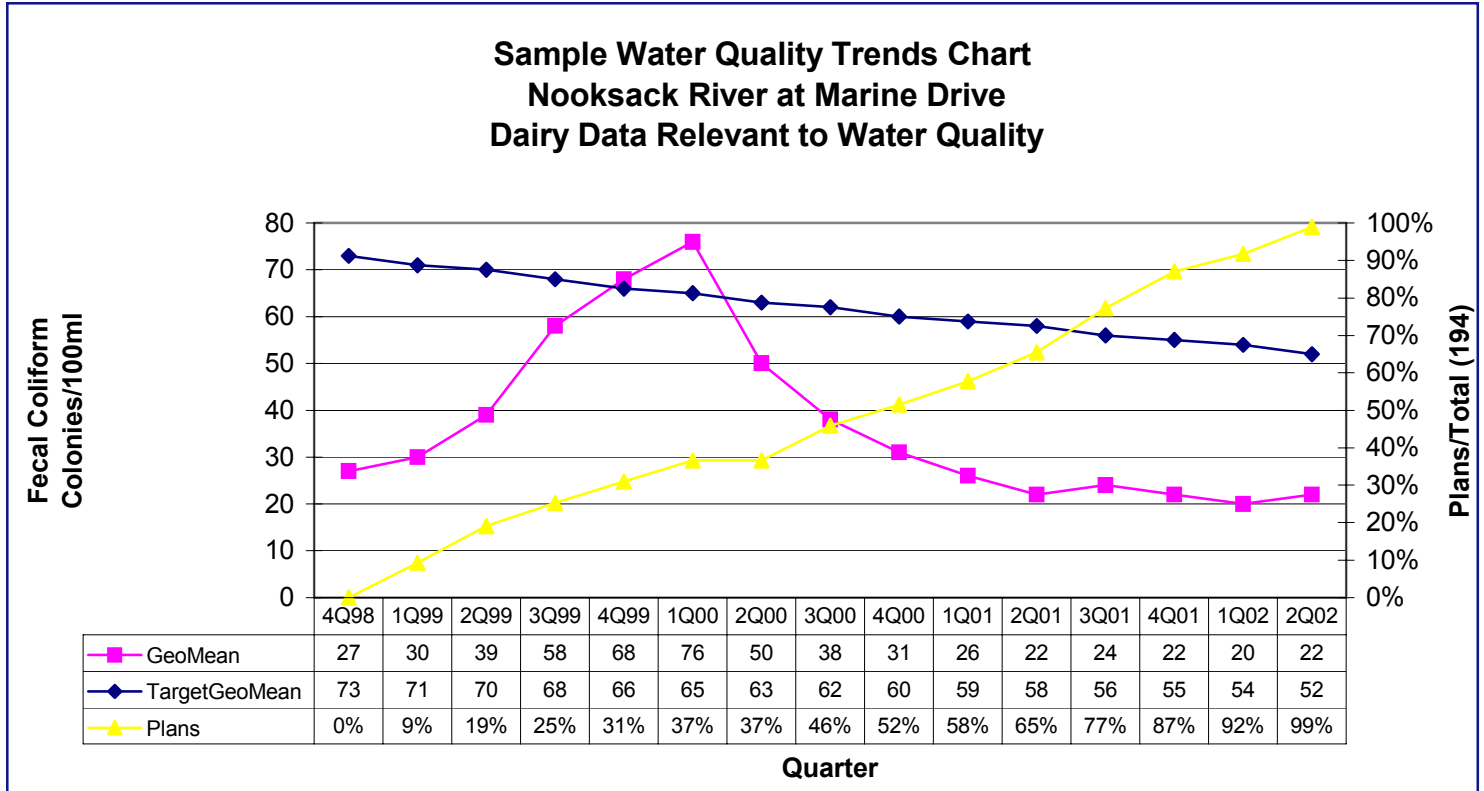
During the past year District technicians presented information about the principles of methane digestion at the Dairy Industries Annual Banquet and about nitrate testing at a fall 2001 Nitrate Workshop. In addition, District Dairy Team members contributed to the District's newsletter as well as published three issues of *In Balance*, a newsletter targeted specifically at the local dairy community. *In Balance* contains technical information, updates concerning water quality monitoring results, and announcements such as cost-share programs, deadlines, and testing requirements.

The success of cumulative effects of activities facilitated by the District and cooperating

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agencies working toward water quality improvement has been supported by water quality monitoring results. Water quality in tributaries of the Nooksack River has continued to show significant improvement since the 1997-1999 Lower Nooksack River Basin Bacteria TMDL evaluation. Results through 1st quarter 2002 indicate that fecal counts have been reduced by an average of 77% in five watersheds included in the monitoring program. Dairy farmers have contributed to the dramatic improvement over the last three years by implementing filter strips and nutrient management practices. Countywide, filter strips are being maintained on over 3000 acres of farmland adjacent to streams and ditches.



## Engineering

WCD continues to utilize the services of the cluster Engineer for the Conservation Districts of San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom, and Whidbey Island to plan and design diverse projects related to stream habitat restoration and implementation of livestock management BMPs. Projects completed during the last year include:

- Planning, design and permit coordination for two stream habitat restoration projects and a drainage improvement project on Tenmile Creek;
- Planning, technical assistance, and surveying in support of a plan to restore habitat functions along 1.25 miles of Tenmile Creek;
- Conceptual planning and coordination of biological assessment for channel restoration on a segment of Double Ditch in coordination with a CREP project;
- Inspection of a manure storage tank installation and coordination of seismic design of the tank footing;
- Survey and technical assistance in support of Lummi Natural Resources Department's log jam project on the South Fork Nooksack; and
- Technical assistance related to two cattle crossings over water bodies.



The District engineer facilitated design and installation of this manure storage tank, a BMP paid for through state cost share funds.

## 2001 - 2002 Whatcom Conservation District Financial Report

### Whatcom County

CAO Contract	\$4,624
DID Mapping Contract	\$4,000
OSS Loan - Admin Services	\$750
Salmon Recovery Grant	\$10,485
<b>Whatcom County Total</b>	<b>\$8,624</b>

### State Grants

Basic Funding	\$958
Puget Sound Basic Funding	\$8,791
CREP 2001 Grant	\$11,233
CREP 2001 Cost-share	\$82,976
CREP 2002 Grant	\$113,410
CREP 2002 Cost-share	\$189,066
Dairy 99 Technical Assistance	\$32,043
Dairy 99 Cost-share	\$261,965
Dairy 2002 Technical Assistance	\$145,313
Dairy 2002 Cost-share	\$213,246
Engineering Cluster Grant	\$194
Implementation 1999 Grant	\$8,278
Implementation 2001 Grant	\$36,451
Irrigation Efficiencies Grant	\$5,000
Puget Sound 99 Grant	\$11,879
Puget Sound 2001 Grant	\$15,524
NSEA Volunteer Coordinator Grant	\$5,010
DOE - Bertrand Creek Grant	\$33,576
DOE - NRT Priorities Grant	\$8,475
DOE - Tenmile Creek Grant	\$31,548
DOE - WQ Compost Grant	\$4,530
DCTED Grant	\$12,926
SPU - Work Study	\$2,986
<b>State Total</b>	<b>\$1,235,379</b>

### Federal Grants

DOE - Shellfish Protection Grant	\$3,349
DOE - South Fork 2000	\$4,368
<b>Federal Total</b>	<b>\$7,717</b>

### Other Revenues

Rental Income	\$61,880
Copier Fees	\$1,952
Sales of Merchandise	\$942
Native Plant Sale	\$14,083
Donations	\$1,341
Interest on Accounts	\$4,957
<b>Other Revenues Total</b>	<b>\$85,155</b>

**Total District Grants & Programs** **\$1,336,875**

### Loan Programs

CREP PIP Loans	\$7,970
OSS Loan Repayment	\$16,091
SRF - Darigold Loans	\$11,453
<b>Total Loan Programs</b>	<b>\$35,514</b>

### Contributed Services

FSA (EQIP)	\$361,937
FSA (CREP)	\$362,486
Practice Incentive Payments	\$307,785
<b>Total Contributed Services</b>	<b>\$1,032,208</b>

### Total 2001-2002 Revenues

**\$2,404,597**



Volunteers helped to package preorders before the District's March 2002 plant sale. The number of customers for the annual spring plant sale was up 45% from the previous year; almost 300 customers purchased over 18,000 trees and shrubs!



Proceeds from the District's annual plant sale support WCD educational programs, including activities to involve young people in learning about conservation and protecting local natural resources.

## Geographic Information System (GIS)

### District Program Support

The District's GIS professional has been instrumental in providing mapping, database, and information management support for use in District programs including dairy nutrient management planning, non-commercial farm planning, public information and education efforts and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

### Regional Assistance

GIS tasks included map creation and database maintenance for a variety of Whatcom County and WRIA 1 projects supporting water quality protection, habitat enhancement and salmon recovery efforts. Examples include:

- Nooksack Recovery Team (NRT) - The District's GIS professional updated the NRT Project Map to reflect the over 550 projects documented in the NRT database. The latest NRT Project Map was completed in March 2002 and is used by NRT members to coordinate salmon recovery project locations and communicate progress.
- Tenmile Creek Riparian Restoration Project - District staff provided GIS support to the Tenmile Creek Riparian Restoration Project. Tasks included creation of overall project area maps as well as parcel maps for each participating landowner to show proximity to the stream and to other parcels.
- Drayton Harbor Shellfish Committee – The District GIS professional created a map showing habitat conservation areas along with other significant features in the Drayton Harbor watershed as a visual tool to facilitate communication among committee members.

Additionally, the District's GIS professional coordinated the GIS track at the 2002 Washington Association of District Employees (WADE) annual training conference in June 2002, including leading a session introducing new software.

## Information and Education

WCD's information and education activities have expanded beyond publishing a single newsletter and participating in periodic community events. The District now publishes three newsletters to distinct audiences and works to strengthen the public outreach component of each District program and grant. Through public outreach efforts, District staff seek to educate, encour-



District staff led second graders in working together to plant native vegetation along Fishtrap Creek.

age participation, inform, recognize cooperators and accomplishments, and garner overall community support for the work of the District.

### Volunteer Programs

June 2002 concluded the second year of the District's Stream Team program. The Stream Team continues to be a coalition of volunteers whose goal is improve water quality of the Bertrand Creek and Fishtrap Creek watersheds through public education and action projects. After a September 2001 watershed bicycle tour, District staff coordinated once-per-week educational classes during a six week period for the ten fall 2001 Stream Team participants. Volunteers then participated in watershed tours, ongoing water quality monitoring for fecal coliform, spawning surveys, and preparation for the District's spring 2002 Annual Plant Sale.



District staff prepared an informational Power Point program outlining the purpose, structure and value of the Stream Team program. WCD staff presented the program to other district employees during June 2002 Washington Association of District Employees training conference (water quality track), to the Portage Bay Shellfish Advisory Committee, and to attendees at the 2001 Salmon Summit.



At the "Into the Woods" event in Lynden, District staff demonstrated the watershed model to visitors of all ages and provided information about Stream Team volunteer opportunities, salmon habitat, and stream restoration.

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District staff also coordinated other stream enhancement projects with volunteers, including a stream maintenance project on McClelland Creek with 20 Japanese Exchange students and a planting project on Fishtrap Creek with 40 second graders.

### Events

During the past year, District staff hosted informational booths at many public events, including the Northwest Washington Fair, Bellingham Kids' Festival, a shellfish recovery celebration event called "Shuckin' on the Spit", and the 2001 Salmon Summit. WCD continued its participation in annual educational events such as the



In support of Washington Waterweeks, WCD staff led a fall 2001 bicycle tour through the Bertrand Creek watershed to kick off the new Stream Team training classes. The tour allowed participants to view CREP projects and other stream enhancement efforts on local farms.

Envirothon and Whatcom County's 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Forest Conservation Tour and also worked with the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association to make classroom presentations related to macroinvertebrates and salmon recovery.

Additionally, District staff provided support to Timberidge Alternative High School for a water quality field day and assisted the "Farmers Growing Trees for Salmon" program with a weekend tree give-away. At several events, District staff demonstrated the potential effects of non-point pollution using an educational watershed model.

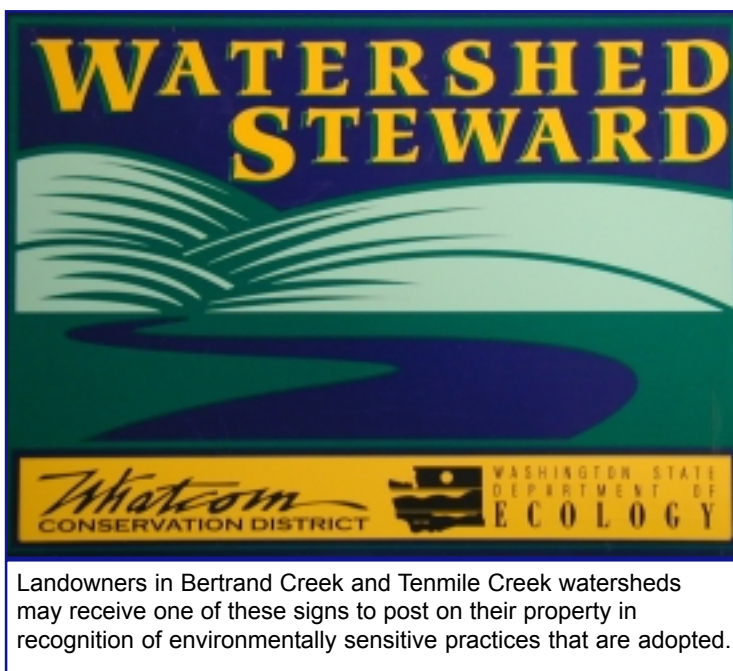
WCD hosted its Annual Cooperator's Banquet in November 2001 to recognize cooperators who have worked during the past year to improve land management and implement conservation practices in Whatcom County. Just over 100 people attended the 2001 Cooperator's Banquet to celebrate agriculture and natural resources in Whatcom County.

### Publications

Water quality improvement data, District accomplishments, technical information, recognition of outstanding conservation efforts, and notification of upcoming events and opportunities are all part of WCD's three newsletters. *Whatcom Conservation News* is a quarterly publication distributed to just over 6000 agencies, groups, and individuals. *Stream Team News* is published twice a year and contains news about Stream Team activities, water quality data, and current projects specific to Bertrand/Fishtrap Creek watersheds. *Stream Team News* is distributed to approximately 500 Bertrand/Fishtrap Creek watershed residents. *In Balance* is a quarterly newsletter, with a distribution of approximately 300, containing technical information and designed specifically for the Whatcom County dairy community.

### Small Farm Technical Assistance

In February 2001 WCD formally suspended its proactive planning program for non-commercial farm operations, anticipating that some clarification of appropriate practices would result from the Ag Fish & Water (AFW) process. Since the AFW process began, the WCD manager has participated as a member of the AFW Integrated Technical Team working to bring some resolution and regulatory certainty to riparian area management standards in Northwest Washington. Despite much effort, the AFW agreement relating to riparian buffer standards never materialized.



Landowners in Bertrand Creek and Tenmile Creek watersheds may receive one of these signs to post on their property in recognition of environmentally sensitive practices that are adopted.

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Horse manure and used bedding are collected and transferred to this farm's 3-bin composting facility. This horse farm near Birch Bay was chosen as WCD's 2001 Small Farm of Merit in recognition of its owners outstanding efforts to protect the environment and the health of their four horses.

### Program Development

During the latter part of 2001, small farm planning fieldwork was limited to responding to Whatcom County Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) violation referrals and asking small farm owners to observe standard buffers. District staff also worked with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees and policies to create a small farm planning template that incorporates a catalog of soil types, NRCS standard best management practices (BMPs), and the NRCS Customer Service Toolkit.

District staff members developed a Cooperator Database to compile information about each landowner, including property location, site inventory conditions, critical areas, and live-stock.

### Technical Assistance

The emphasis of the District's small farm planning program is to minimize impacts to surface and ground water resources through implementation of BMPs for livestock keeping. Though no regulatory certainty as to appropriate buffer widths has yet resulted from the AFW process, 2002 brought continued effort by District staff to contact small farmers, conduct site meetings and assessments, provide mapping services and research, and develop BMP recommendations for individual landowners.

Landowner requests for assistance came through workshop contact, word of mouth, and through Whatcom County referrals. Site visits addressed CAO violations and recommended management practices such as composting, manure storage, fencing, pasture rotation and management, and relocation of heavy use areas to reduce environmental impacts.

In support of the Bertrand Creek watershed improvement efforts, District staff developed a map of the Bertrand watershed indicating parcel ownership by acreage (acreage amount categories = <2, 5-10, 10-20, 20-115). The map shows only ownership within 100' of Bertrand Creek or its tributaries and does not include commercial dairies. This map is being used in conjunction with habitat assessment work being completed by Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association to prioritize future restoration efforts. The map and landowner contact information associated with it will facilitate small farm planning prioritization in the future.



District staff led high school students and community members in assisting a farmer to plant 400 trees and install tree protection tubes along an unnamed creek running through his property in the Drayton Harbor watershed.

