



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 land use conflicts. Its boundaries include all of Whatcom County. It is governed by a volunteer board of five supervisors who are all local residents, three of which are elected by the residents of Whatcom County and two of which 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, Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe of Indians. Mutual resource concerns include: nitrates in groundwater; pathogens, nutrients, and toxins (e.g., asbestos) in surface waters; stream flows supporting fish and farms; and pollutants in the air. Our frustration is that the Canadians are not demonstrating the same level of protection for these resource concerns.

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

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

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, and education); watershed plans; and staff, public, and 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.

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, profitable 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 (rural, urban and suburban) by providing the highest quality of technical assistance and education on the application of best management practices.
 - 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 achieve stewardship of natural resources, promote a voluntary incentive-based program as the preferred alternative to one where regulation and coercion are the primary motivating forces.
 - We believe that principles of conservation and agriculture should be included in K-12 education.
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We Serve & Why

- We want to achieve:
 - No net loss of Whatcom County prime soil farmland
 - Improved water quality and quantity to reach and maintain “Approved” status of shellfish growing areas, improve fish habitat and improve water availability to farmers, ranchers, and producers
 - Fairness and efficacy in the development and application of state laws and local ordinances to agriculture by providing input on best available science and barriers to implementation including economics.
 - Improve the District reputation for providing effective, practical solutions in a friendly, helpful manner by better communication of successes in this regard.
 - Improving the general agricultural communities’ reputation for acting as good stewards of the land by clear and strong recognition of achievements.
 - A rate & charge to provide a dependable funding base for District core programs and activities.
- We want to preserve:
 - Voluntary, incentive-based programs that provide landowners flexible, effective options to remain economically viable while addressing natural resource concerns
 - A multidisciplinary 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 response created in some landowner minds when they are referred to us for assistance by regulatory agencies.



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- Ineffective tenor and forms of communication so as to foster greater understanding and appreciation for conservation
 - Potential losses to fire due to the lack of defensible spaces and unhealthy forest lot management.
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Natural Resource Data & Information

- From 2000 to 2015 the population of Whatcom County has grown 27%, to 212,284 residents.
 - 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.
 - Water quality over the Portage Bay shellfish harvest areas has and continues to decline, limiting the harvesting of shellfish from hundreds of acres.
 - There is an increased potential for litigation over water quality, water quantity, and lack of fish habitat.
 - 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 acreage, resulting in an increasing concentration of livestock onto a shrinking land base.
 - There are increasing demands for water and a lack of political commitment 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 ecosystems.
 - There is increasing regulatory oversight/intervention to achieve Endangered Species Act (ESA), Clean Water Act (CWA), and Growth Management Act (GMA) goals.
 - 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
- Protect working lands from flooding and urbanization.
- Meet the needs of the landowner as well as the needs of our community as identified in WRIA 1 salmon recovery, shellfish harvest protection, and watershed management plans.

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 & nitrates in groundwater)
 2. Inadequate fish and wildlife habitat (fish passage blockages, lack of functioning riparian zone, and channel complexity)
 3. Too little water in the lower tributaries of the Nooksack River, Dakota, California, and Terrell Creeks
 4. Loss of working lands (farmland & forest)
 5. Potential negative impacts to agriculture from climate change.



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- Critical geographic areas for natural resource conservation in the district are:
 - For water quantity concerns: Areas within Watershed Improvement Districts and the Diking, and Drainage District boundaries and other properties with availability of water is a documented concern.
 - 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
 - For climate change concerns: Those portions of Whatcom County that drains into Bellingham Bay, Drayton Harbor and Birch Bay.
- Measures of Success
 - Reductions in bacterial pollution from livestock operations such that they do not contribute to the closure of shellfish harvest areas.
 - Nutrients are applied in a manner that protects groundwater by meeting crop needs based on best available science, realistic crop yields and average growing seasons.
 - There will be appropriate vegetative buffers along 20 miles of agricultural watercourses without negatively affecting other resource concerns.
 - Maintaining a base of 100,000 acres of productive farmland in Whatcom County.
 - There will be water management plans in each of the Watershed Improvement Districts that provides for irrigation, drainage, water quality and the needs of fish and water quality.
 - Staff will receive training in order to address near term potential negative impacts of climate change affecting the efficacy of the plans they develop.
 - For the pesticides that people are currently using, reduce their or eliminate their runoff into lowland streams of Whatcom County.
- Goals
 1. Protect and enhance water quality for beneficial uses by addressing nitrates in groundwater and fecal coliform bacteria in the Nooksack River and its lowland tributaries; California, Dakota, and Terrell Creeks; and the Sumas River.
 - a. Strategy – Assist livestock operators to properly capture, store, and apply the manure generated by their animals.
 - b. Strategy – Assist berry and crop farmers in properly applying manure.
 - c. Strategy – Participate in Whatcom Clean Water Program and assist Portage Bay and Drayton Harbor Shellfish Protection Districts and WIDs.
 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 Whatcom County, Cities, Special Districts, Tribes, and other stakeholders to restore natural ecosystem processes while ensuring that needs of agriculture are also met.
 3. Conserve and enhance Whatcom County's Green Infrastructure Network.
 - a. Strategy – Build confidence in the agricultural community that there will be land and water for them now and into the future.
 - b. Strategy – Support the County's creation and implementation of effective programs for the purchase or transfer of development rights within the boundaries of Whatcom County.
 - c. Strategy – Advocate to maintain a farm plan alternative to standard buffers in the County's Critical Areas Ordinance.



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- d. Strategy – Advocate for the County to develop and integrate a landscape plan into its land use plans with the objectives of protecting working lands, maintaining ecological function and habitat connectivity, 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 and landowners in developing and implementing maintenance plans that provide drainage for crops yet accommodate the needs of fish.
 - b. Strategy – Encourage the widespread adoption of water conservation practices.
 - c. Strategy – Re-establish important watershed processes through the construction, enhancement, and/or protection of wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, riparian areas, and floodplain areas.
 - d. Strategy – Work with homeowners and businesses to adopt low impact development practices.
 - e. Strategy – Support the completion of water quantity studies to eliminate the uncertainty around what is actually available for beneficial use.
5. Assist agriculture and rural residents to become more resilient to the likely near term, 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 (instead of snow) at 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 fires.
 - e. Strategy – Work with rural residents and communities to install and maintain climate resilient practices.

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

- Goals
 1. Farmers, ranchers, producers, and landowners 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 economy.
 3. The Whatcom Conservation District will be a vital part of community interaction, recognized as a trusted advisor with a depth of understanding of both the regulatory framework and effective beneficial land management practices.
 4. Support Firewise including educating the public that fire is a natural process and annual fuel reduction will require additional funding.
- Strategies
 1. Identify and cultivate potential leaders from farmers, ranchers, producers, and landowners to be good examples to the community of conservation stewardship.
 2. Promote our local farming and ranching industries through diverse interactive opportunities such as school presentations, tours, internships, etc.



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3. Maintain a professional, motivated, multidisciplinary 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 or reduce resource pollution. An example is the site specific seasonal management of pasture to provide temporary buffers when needed to protect water quality.
 2. Convince regulatory agencies, the public, and legislators as to the value of empowering farmers, ranchers, producers, and landowners to voluntarily select and implement conservation practices that protect downstream uses and achieve environmental values while maintaining the productivity and economic viability of their operations.
 3. Help farmers, ranchers and dairy producers to build resilience into their operations against the projected potential negative impacts of climate change.
- Strategies
 1. Enable and encourage 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 to demonstrate the impact of various land management and conservation practices on water quality.
 3. Assist farmers, producers, and landowners in understanding their symbiotic relationship with resources (i.e., surface water, groundwater, soil) by assisting them to assess soil health, conducting research and demonstration projects.
 4. Provide technical expertise and science-based information on local and state programs, policy, regulation, and/or practices that affect farmers, ranchers, producers, and landowners.

Land Manager Needs

- Landowner needs to be confident that the Conservation District is a non-regulatory organization.
- Rural livestock owners need technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices that protect surface and groundwater resources from nutrients, toxins, or bacteria.
- Farmers and ranchers need to see how conservation practices can improve water quality and quantity and contribute to their economic bottom line.
- Urban landowners need assistance retrofitting their parcels with rain gardens and other practices to reduce contaminated stormwater runoff.
- 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.
- Rural residents and communities need assistance in creating defensible space to lessen the potential impacts of forest fires.

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.



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Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
10 Operations	FY 2017	Assist NRCS in the design and 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	FY 2017	Assist in proper use of manure as a fertilizer or soil amendment
200 Landowners	FY 2023	Provide a soil test and interpret the results as a means for landowners to realize that healthy soils are the key to fostering more productive, profitable and sustainable farms—for healthy, sustainable, long-term returns.

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, and oversee installation and contractor payment.
120 CREP Projects maintained	June 2017	Complete inventories, prescriptions, and oversee maintenance and contractor payment.
25 CREP Projects re-enrolled	June 2017	Complete inventories, draft plans, and obtain approval to re-enroll projects into the program.
Remove 10 fish barriers	June 2017	Assist landowners in replacing culverts to provide fish passage
Install 2 riparian mitigation projects	June 2017	Assist Whatcom County River & Flood Division in installing 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 staff 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	Train staff on climate change issues and strategies germane to their programs.

Priority: Loss of working lands

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



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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 profitability while protecting water quality
Green Infrastructure	June 2017	Participate in efforts to develop a landscape plan and 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 develop watershed plans to garner funding for water conserving practices.
Lagoon Pasteurization Project	Dec 2016	Pilot technology that makes potable water from liquid manure.

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