



Washington State Conservation Commission

07-13 Strategic Plan

May 2006

Washington State Conservation Commission

The Washington State Conservation Commission is pleased to provide the Office of Financial Management and the citizens of the state the following information on the State Conservation Commission.

Mission Statement

The Washington State Conservation Commission, by providing structure and leadership for good governance to Washington State's 47 Conservation Districts, guides the delivery of education, technical assistance, and the implementation of best land management practices to the citizens of the state who commit through wise stewardship and conservation to the enhancement and protection of soil, water, and other natural resources on private lands.

Vision

The landscapes of Washington State will evolve to demonstrate the universal application of best stewardship practices.

The Conservation Commission is recognized as the independent and trusted agency of choice that implements stewardship in the state of Washington in partnership with conservation districts, other agencies and organizations.

Values

The Conservation Commission values all Washington lands, both private and public, the state's natural resources and the people who own and use them. We demonstrate these by valuing:

- Healthy, diverse landscapes that reflect sustainable economic use of natural resources.
- Voluntary, incentive-based application of best management practices on working lands that reflect state, local and community priorities.
- Partnerships in resource management that involve local, state, federal and tribal agencies and organizations.
- Diverse cultures and ideas

- Accountability for the effective and efficient use of public funds.
- The economic contributions of natural resource-based industries, operating to achieve sustainability.
- WSCC, its commissioners, staff and the conservation districts, their supervisors and staff, demonstrate the highest standards of ethics and personal and institutional integrity.
- Policies and governance procedures that assure the effective and efficient use of public resources.
- Open communications and transparency of operations.
- Pride in land stewardship

Statutory Authority References

**Washington State Conservation Commission Enabling Legislation
1939**

89.08 RCW

**Budget Provisos authorized by Legislature and signed by
Governor**

Ongoing

**Natural Resource-related and environmentally based grant and
loan programs – Administration and monetary assistance – Report
to Legislative committees**

43.41.270 RCW

Water Quality Account Distributions - Limitations

70.146.060 RCW

**Fish habitat enhancement project – Permit review and approval
process**

77.55.290 RCW

Salmon Recovery

77.85 RCW

**Grazing Lands – Fish and Wildlife goals – Technical Advisory
Committee – implementation**

79.13.610 RCW

Dairy Nutrient Management

90.64 RCW

Puget Sound Action Team	90.71 RCW
Conservation Commission	Title 135 WAC
Uses and Limitations of Centennial Clean Water Funds	
	Title 173 WAC
Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team	Title 400 WAC
Salmon Recovery Funding Board	Title 420 WAC

Roles and Responsibilities

The WSCC supports and guides the Conservation Districts as important, non-regulatory resources of information, guidance, and technical services for private landowners in dealing with land, water, and air quality conservation. Washington State's citizens are the clients of this unique system consisting of a state agency (WSCC) and 47 municipal corporations of the state (conservation districts). In total, 455 people dedicated to responding to the conservation needs of the state by providing technical, educational, and financial services for natural resource conservation. Of these, 240 are volunteers serving as Supervisors of the Conservation Districts and as State Commissioners. The others are professional and technical staff. The role of the WSCC and Conservation Districts, which have no regulatory function, is to educate landowners and other stakeholders on the value and need for natural resource conservation and to effectively and efficiently deliver conservation programs through voluntary compliance and with a minimum of bureaucracy. Our approach is to facilitate and encourage dialog between landowners, local stakeholders, and State and Federal agencies on critical natural resource conservation issues and on the means for their resolution. In addition, we implement essential conservation practices expertly and efficiently and at minimum cost to the State and other supporting agencies.

By statute, the Conservation Commission sets policies and procedures for the operation of the State's 47 Conservation Districts, reviews district operations, coordinates programs across district boundaries, resolves conflicts, appoints district supervisors, facilitates and guides district resource conservation programs and activities. In addition, the Commission reviews contracts and agreements; garners cooperation with state, tribal and federal agencies; coordinates activities with the Governor's staff and lead staff of other state, tribal, and federal agencies; determines the distribution of state funds to conservation districts; and monitors their expenditure.

Goals, Key Strategies and Outcomes

The following items were developed by reviewing the key strategies outlined in POGIII and consultation with all members of the staff and a complete review and approval by the Commission members.

Sustaining or Improving and Increasing Habitat for Fish and Wildlife

Key Strategies

Working through the conservation districts, provide technical, financial, and educational assistance to improve the health of private lands in all watersheds.

Coordinate district programs with other groups and organizations.

Foster voluntary landowner responsibility for sustainable resource management.

Ultimate Outcomes

Water quality and quantity and in-stream habitat improved and maintained and able to support sustained harvestable fish populations.

Natural habitats for wildlife are robust, and species currently endangered or at risk are protected.

Landowners understand conservation values and are enthusiastic about implementing them.

Stable funding is available for voluntary best management practices and other conservation practices.

Intermediate Outcomes

A steadily increasing number of stream miles are protected with improved riparian and in-stream habitat.

Practices related to wildlife habitat improved, created, or recovered

Immediate Outcomes

Annual increases in the number of farmers and other landowners committed to managing according to an approved conservation plan.

Changing Individual Behaviors & Choices

Key Strategies

In collaboration with conservation districts, provide educational, technical, and financial assistance for voluntary conservation of natural resources on private lands.

Teach private land managers to make good conservation choices and to use conservation districts as a resource to deal with state and federal environmental mandates.

Collaborate with the Washington Association of District Employees, the Washington Association of Conservation Districts, and Federal and State agencies to provide continuing educational opportunities for Conservation District technical and support staff.

Ultimate Outcomes

All landowners in environmentally sensitive areas will manage their holdings using best management practices as defined in plans developed in collaboration with conservation districts and will view districts as trustworthy sources of resource management assistance.

The staff of the Conservation Districts will assist landowners in achieving desired natural resource conservation by application of current best management practices.

Intermediate Outcomes

Increased numbers of landowners adopt stewardship goals and move from conservation district educational activity to planning and implementing conservation practices.

The number of contracts for implementation of conservation practices and acres protected increases annually.

Technical competence of district staff will be maintained to meet the changing requirements of conservation programs.

Immediate Outcomes

Continued increase in the number of landowners seeking technical and financial assistance from conservation districts.

Continued voluntary participation of landowners in the development and implementation of conservation plans.

Continued increase in the number of landowners contacting conservation districts for resource management assistance.

Opportunities will be provided for advanced training to ensure district staff provides the highest quality of landowner assistance

Improve, Maintain, Restore Water Quality for Beneficial Uses

Key Strategies

Demonstrate the success of voluntary implementation of practices that improve water availability and quality for beneficial use.

"Beneficial use includes but is not limited to: Domestic water supplies; irrigation; fish, shellfish, game and other aquatic life; recreation; industrial water supplies; generation of hydroelectric power; and navigation."

Ultimate Outcomes

Private landowners, through voluntary initiatives supported by conservation districts and state and federal cost-share, have implemented effective practices that protect water quality and enhance water availability for beneficial uses.

Intermediate Outcomes

Each conservation district will demonstrate that voluntary conservation practices result in improved water quality and economic use of resources need not contribute to surface or ground water pollution.

The number of stream miles and the acres of wildlife habitat enhanced to protect water quality and irrigation efficiencies are steadily increased.

Immediate Outcomes

Ensure conservation districts provide technical assistance needed for landowner education and plan development.

Provide financial assistance to implement required practices.

Increase the number of installed practices that reduce the impact of livestock, domestic animals, and agriculture on water quality.

Improving Watershed Health

Key Strategies

Assist conservation districts in providing technical, financial and educational assistance to landowners seeking to improve watershed health.

Utilize conservation districts to bring landowners and other stakeholders, including regulatory agency representatives, together to collaborate on programs that improve watershed health.

Demonstrate that watershed scale improvements provide economic and human health benefits.

Ultimate Outcome

Washington watersheds reflect the application of best management practices and are managed to ensure long-term sustainable use for state residents and wildlife.

Intermediate Outcomes

Conservation districts engage landowners in watershed-scale projects to improve watershed health. Projects include in-stream enhancements, riparian buffers, sediment exclusion, removal of barriers and water-protecting forest management plans.

Immediate Outcomes

Work with districts and partnering agencies to create natural resource inventories of watersheds, plans for implementation of practices and documentation of results.

Increase Productivity of Land and Sustaining Natural Resources

Key Strategies

Demonstrate ways to landowners/managers that protecting natural resources benefits long-term productivity and is economically sound.

Build environmental and cultural resource awareness and responsibility.

Ultimate Outcomes

Natural Resource based industries will continue to be among Washington's major industries. The State's natural resources will be robust and able to sustain natural resource industries.

Intermediate Outcomes

Washington landowners will use conservation district technical assistance to learn and utilize conservation practices addressing soil, water, air, plants and animals.

Immediate Outcomes

Working with conservation districts and partnering agencies to identify practices which need to be implemented to enhance land productivity while protecting or enhancing a natural resource. Examples of practices include installing windbreaks for soil erosion control, reducing the impact of pests, increasing solid piping water delivery, improving pasture management, and forest health practices.

Appraisal of external environment

How do potential changes in the economy affect clients or demand for the agency's services?

Global competition and generally downward pressure on prices of natural resource products and agricultural commodities reduce Conservation District client's ability to participate in conservation practices that require cost share on their part. Impacts vary across the state depending on the mix of agricultural commodities and natural resource products. For example, a substantial negative impact is felt in Central and Eastern Washington where low prices for wheat, barley, dry peas, lentils, potatoes and corn coupled

with high prices for energy, fuel, equipment, and fertilizer, put an economic squeeze on the farming community. Only strong prices for livestock have kept pace with escalating input costs.

Despite this economic situation, conservation district cooperators continue to seek conservation practices that reduce expenses while maintaining revenue. In most cases, however, incentives with lower requirements for producer cost share are also being requested.

As documented by the recent population census and the increase in the number of rural landowners with operations that impact natural resources, the need for additional education and technical assistance is acute.

Demand has remained high across the state for technical assistance. Conservation Districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service have a substantial backlog of conservation practices needing implementation. Reduced federal staffing to implement the contracted practices and a directive to enter into contracting for some of these services has further increased the backlog of implementation.

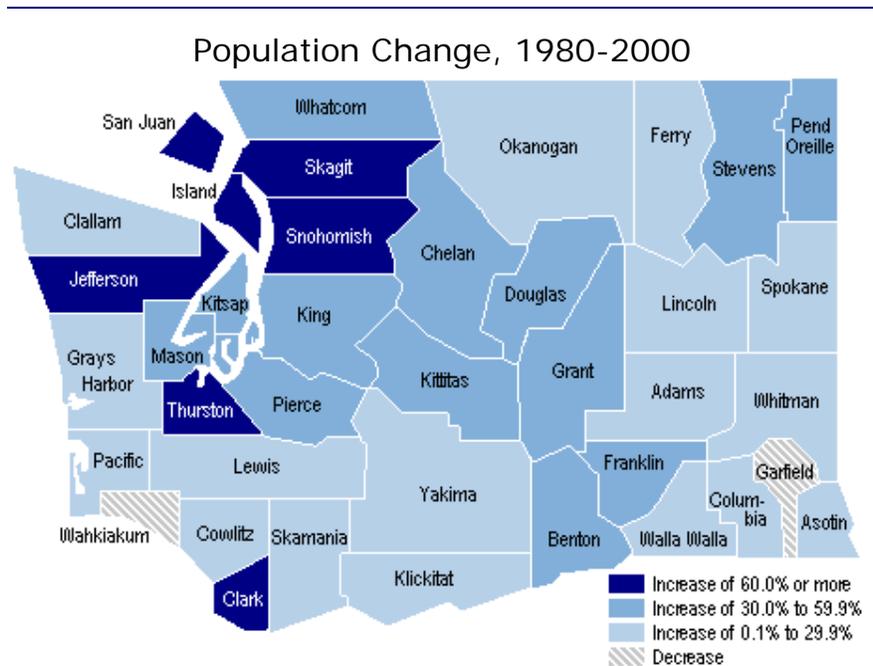
A shortage of technical assistance, which is becoming common, leads land managers (clients) to become frustrated. They don't pursue conservation goals if they cannot obtain technical aid, cost sharing funds, or other services needed to develop conservation plans and implement practices.

As larger land holdings become sub-divided into smaller ownerships, the negative impacts on water quantity and quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and native plant species have increased. With larger ownerships, ecosystems were less likely to be disrupted since many landowners had conservation plans and had implemented conservation practices. Landowners of smaller acreages tend to be less aware of how their practices impact natural resources leading to degradation of natural systems. The Conservation District structure is ideal for addressing the natural resource conservation issues in the urban/suburban interface, but faces a severe shortage of technical personnel to address the technical assistance workload required to work with this large population of potential clients.

In 2005, 37 of the 47 conservation districts estimated the number of livestock operations in their districts; the total came to over 166,000. Extrapolation to the remaining districts puts the State total above 220,000. The largest numbers of small livestock operations are located in the most populous counties. A technician who works with smaller acreage landowners reports that she receives over 200 new requests for assistance each year.

Small acreage landowners are the fastest growing client group for conservation districts. Because of this, the impact of small acreage operations on natural resources will be a major focus of the Conservation Commission's long-range plans as well as appropriate budget increases to address this critical conservation workload.

In addition, emerging issues continue to make assistance to large-scale agricultural operations a priority. For example, it is becoming clear that animal operations will have to manage the accumulation of nutrients, in particular phosphate to protect ground water, and control air emissions of ammonia. Horticultural, hay and vegetable operations require help in dealing with irrigation efficiencies and ground water contamination. Dry-land operations also need continued assistance to reduce erosion and improve soil quality.



Source: Office of Financial Management, Trends

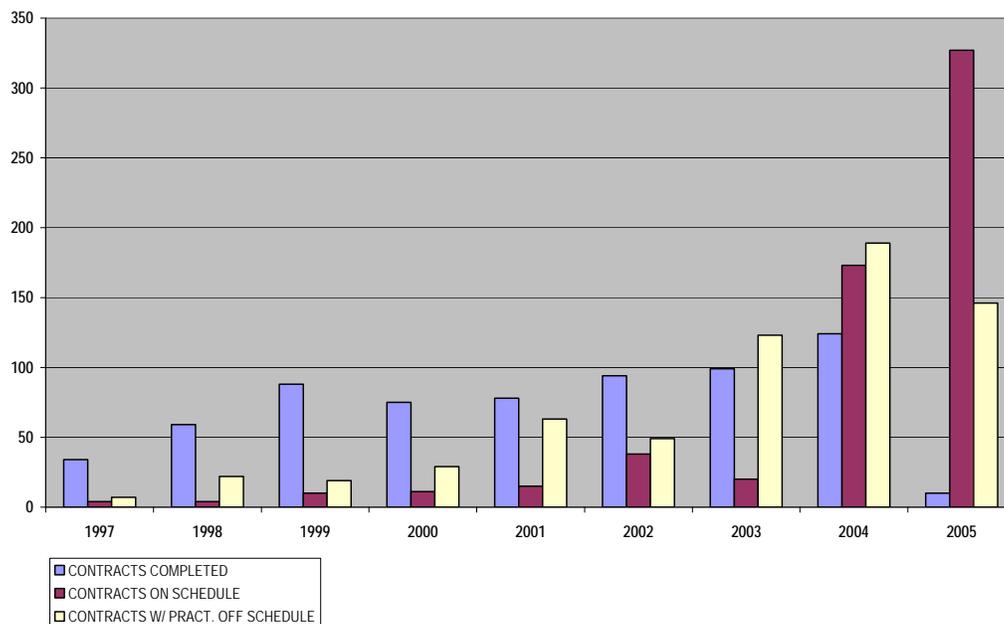
What potential partners exist in the external environment and how could they enhance our ability to achieve our conservation goals?

The most important and most numerous potential partners are the landowners and managers who have not yet planned and/or implemented conservation practices. In addition, those with conservation plans also require assistance as their operations and conservation practices evolve and as the world economy changes resulting in changing operations. These landowners and managers are the essential partners whose cooperation will determine whether or not conservation initiatives succeed.

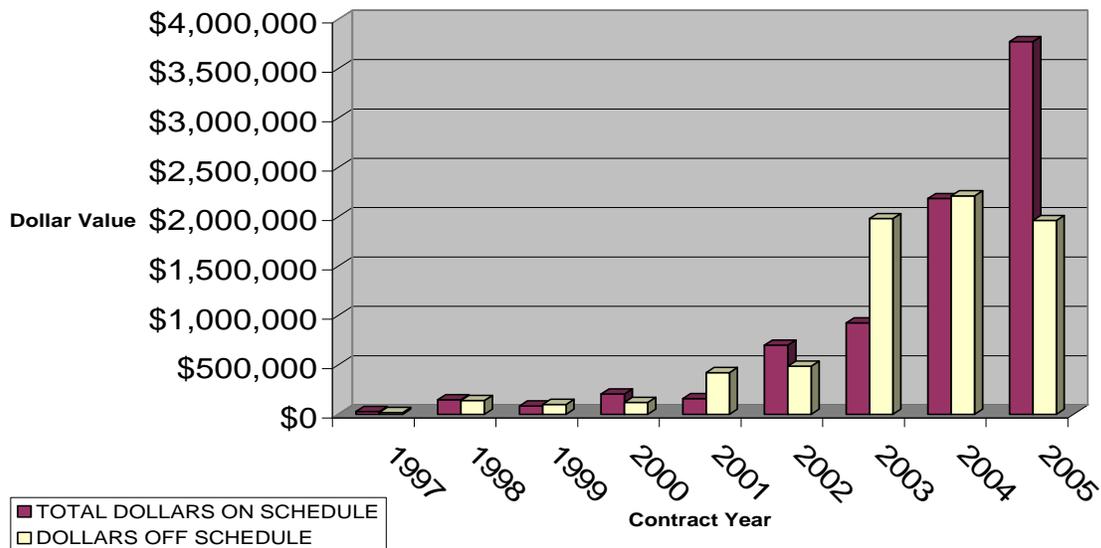
Conservation districts are the principal clientele for Conservation Commission programs and services. The Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) represents conservation districts before all levels of government and is the Commission's primary partner in the development and implementation of programs to serve private landowners. WACD's board of officers and directors oversees the policy making activities of the Association and serves as their focal point for interactions with the Conservation Commission. All WACD committees and task forces receive assistance from Commission staff.

To engage the steadily increasing number of clients and potential clients, Conservation Districts need funds to expand their technical assistance capabilities. Developing a conservation plan for a new client requires a range of 20 to 120 hours of technical assistance and the same to implement the planned conservation practices. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Social Sciences Unit has determined that an average of 5 face-to-face meetings with a land manager is needed in order to establish the working relationship necessary for development of a conservation plan. Additional on-site meetings with the land owner/manager are necessary for the practice application. At present there are over 2,000 conservation practices under contract and waiting to be installed and/or implemented by Washington State land owners/managers but are delayed because of the lack of technical assistance to complete the work.

Schedule Summary of Environmental Quality Incentive Projects (EQIP)



**Value of Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Contracts
1997-2005**



Other potential partners include federal natural resource agencies, such as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Farm Services Agency; Forest Service; the Bureau of Land Management; the Bureau of Indian Affairs; the Bureau of Reclamation; and the Environmental Protection Agency. The Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service and Bureau of Reclamation have technical employees who through cooperative agreements with Conservation Districts could provide technical assistance to local land managers.

The Environmental Protection Agency and Bureau of Indian Affairs have funds for conservation. WSU Cooperative Extension assists by dissemination of research findings. However, in most cases, these agencies require matching funding for cooperative activities. State funding for conservation district technical assistance is needed to capture federal technical assistance and funds that are available only when matched from non-federal sources. This strategy will generate the much-needed expansion of technical capacity to meet the State's natural resource protection needs.

Washington State Natural Resource Agencies (Agriculture, Natural Resources, Ecology, Parks, Fish and Wildlife) present substantial but unfulfilled opportunities to partner with Conservation Districts in addressing conservation challenges. Technical staff could be assigned to Conservation District offices to assist with conservation planning and practice application, ensuring that the agencies' requirements are addressed.

Both State and Federal agency leaders could work together to eliminate existing barriers to client participation in programs that implement conservation practices.

Non-government natural resource organizations, natural resource industry groups, and environmental organizations can assist by promoting conservation planning and practices to their clients. They can also support funding requests for CD technical assistance and provide volunteers to work in CD offices on practice implementation.

It is important to note the State requirement that counties develop and implement growth management policies creates opportunities and demands for the technical services districts can provide to protect agricultural lands and other natural resources.

The collaborations suggested above have been implemented in a number of conservation districts and demonstrated to be effective and efficient with savings in costs and excellent conservation outcomes. Landowner clients have benefited from the collaboration and have engaged voluntarily in recommended practices when, in other similar situations, regulatory enforcement has been less successful and more costly to all parties.

The Washington Association of District Employees (WADE) plays an important role in ensuring the Conservation District employee receive timely and appropriate technical training. The partnership between it and the Commission is very effective. Each year about 160 district employees and supervisors receive training at an economical rate. In 2005, forty-five speakers from local, state, federal agencies and private enterprise volunteered their time as program presenters.

What other risks and barriers could affect capacity?

As indicated above, a major barrier to developing the capacity to address the challenges of changing land use and population increases in environmentally sensitive areas is the lack of technical services funds. Additional funds can be utilized immediately to provide technical assistance to land managers seeking conservation plans and implementing practices. The State's investment will be multiplied by funds from other sources that require matching not currently available.

As documented by the recent population census and the increase in the number of rural landowners with operations that impact natural resources, the need for additional education and technical assistance is acute.

Although well intentioned, some local, state, and federal legislation and rules inhibit conservation practice application. This makes collaboration between agencies, especially at the leadership and local levels, critically important to successful conservation implementation.

It is important to recognize that planning and implementation rarely provide a permanent fix for a conservation need. Landowners and agricultural practices change. Climate and natural resource conditions change. Best practices have to be adjusted to respond to these changes. Regulatory agencies, drawing on the technical expertise of districts, should adapt regulatory requirements to fit these evolving needs. For example, new state initiatives to support bio-fuel production will alter many farm practices and require new strategies to protect resources. Use of crop waste for ethanol production may deplete soil of organic matter requiring new strategies to limit erosion. Waste products from other bio-fuel operations will need to be managed to ensure systems are sustainable.

There is an expectation in some agencies that technical assistance of the kind provided by conservation districts will be available from third party providers. This is rarely the case. Conservation districts are by far the best source of assistance needed by the agricultural community. And they provide the best environment for the development of additional technical talent.

Another barrier is the ability of land managers to meet cost share requirements if they are set too high. Nor do most agriculture and natural resource based businesses have the financial "margin" needed to experiment with new methods of cultivation, harvest, planting, or other land-based operations. They can only engage in new practices when research demonstrates their efficacy and when technical assistance is on hand to guide their implementation.

Various programs and agencies in the state have invested millions of dollars in the development of watershed plans that anticipate substantial implementation of conservation practices. Given that most of the required expertise resides in conservation districts and their partner agencies, there is a risk that the limited capacity, due to under-funding, of conservation districts to provide technical assistance will result in the return on the investment not being fully realized.

A shortage of technical assistance, which is becoming common, leads land managers (clients) to become frustrated. They don't pursue conservation goals if they cannot obtain technical aid, cost sharing funds, or other services needed to develop conservation plans and implement practices.

Is the agency experiencing trends in customer characteristics or demographics which might indicate the need to modify services and/or service delivery methods?

As stated above, in many parts of the state, land use is changing and the proportion of the population living on small acreages, owning livestock and practicing small-scale agriculture is growing rapidly. Most of these operations have no conservation plans and, in sum, they impact soil, water, and other natural resources to an extent that will grow to exceed the effects of large-scale commercial operations. The majority of potential clients will be these small landowners. Most are unaware of their responsibility for resource conservation and of the agencies charged with protecting those resources. The Conservation Districts are the agencies best suited to undertake the enormous task of education, demonstration and conservation implementation needed to mitigate these dramatic and deleterious changes in land use.

Commercial agriculture also continues to evolve. Smaller operations tend to become bigger, best practices change, new challenges emerge and commercial operators, even those with conservation plans, need continuing technical assistance. For example, dairies have protocols to manage nitrogen applications and to control runoff of nutrients to surface water. But, it is becoming clear that control of air emissions and management of phosphate, and carbon will have to be addressed to make the industry fully sustainable. Other natural resource industries present similar evolving needs for technical help driven by our continually evolving understanding of what is needed to achieve sustainability.

What are the needs, preferences, and expectations of the agency clients?

WSCC's and Conservation District's clients are the citizens of Washington State, with the primary clients the citizens who own and/or manage lands. As the needs, both recognized and unrealized, of landowners change, the demand for technical assistance increases and the expertise needed to provide it changes. These changes increase the need for training district technical personnel. These changes also require conservation district supervisors to deal with increasingly complex operations. WSCC is responsible for guiding operational improvements, organizational development, policies and procedures, resolving legal questions, appointing supervisors and educating them in governance protocols. The WSCC is responsible also for managing state funds that support conservation districts and their clients, and for ensuring those funds are properly accounted for and accomplish the state's mission.

operations are major contributors to water pollution, soil erosion, loss of soil productivity and noxious weed invasions.

Washington State is also a client of the Conservation Commission, as are state and federal agencies who share a conservation mission. It is increasingly clear that conservation objectives are best achieved when regulatory agencies and private stakeholders collaborate and find a common cause. WSCC and its conservation district partners, with their technical expertise and service (non-regulatory) orientation, provide an effective vehicle for generating and guiding these collaborations.

Are there better ways to reach and provide services to clients to meet their expectations?

The services provided by WSCC staff are determined by the needs and expectations of the Conservation Districts and the State requirements for fiscal and program oversight. At present, staff is fully occupied providing needed services. To address emerging and unmet needs and conservation district expectations, WSCC needs additional funds to add a Public Affairs Specialist to assist districts and to lead statewide public outreach activities. These activities will be essential to the successful engagement of the thousands of new landowners in resource conservation.

Assessment of trends in the service area, market, or industry

Increased costs of production, coupled with decreased agricultural commodity prices, has increased the need for cost share and other incentives for conservation practice implementation.

Increased numbers of land owners with small acreages, many of whom lack knowledge of conservation planning and of recommended best practices, generate need for both education and technical assistance beyond what conservation services can presently deliver.

The steadily increasing size of commercial agriculture, ranching, and forestry operations are coupled with a decrease in the number of family owned and operated farms. Large farms try to operate with as few staff as possible which limits the landowner's ability to assess the condition of the land. In many cases, farm operations are carried out by independent contractors further decreasing the landowner's knowledge of the land and its resources. These trends require Conservation Districts to develop the technical skills to assist larger operations and the contractors who serve them, and at the same time meet needs of the smaller acreage land managers noted above. These dichotomies are becoming a serious concern to CD boards and their technical staff.

For many districts, county government is emerging as an important client and collaborator as counties address the challenges of growth management, Critical Area Ordinances, including the conservation of agricultural lands. Local governments are also increasingly concerned with natural resource issues. They look to conservation districts as the source of reliable, objective technical advice.

Changes in various environments

- **Federal, state, and local governments**

All levels of government are struggling with funding the highest priority needs of their clients. County and city governments find funding conservation difficult in the face of other priorities. The federal government also is challenged by its mounting deficit and the need to provide hurricane relief, fund the Iraq war, and finance the war on terrorism. The state funds for environmental remediation are insufficient to support local conservation districts, which are critical to the implementation of already paid for statewide plans.

- **Trends and outlook for key issues such as access, possible changes in laws and regulations, cost escalation, funding and reimbursement patterns, taxation, debt**

Laws and regulations continue to be written that impact conservation activities in the state without adequate funding or staffing to implement them. The cost of operating a Conservation District has increased by 50% over the past 10 years.

Recently, inter-agency collaborations have successfully involved all stakeholders in seeking solutions. This collaborative process has resulted in significant “on the ground” conservation developments. When regulatory agencies have committed to the joint process rather than to command and control protocols, willing landowners have cooperated to provide the state’s most effective route to sustainable land use.

New legislation for alternative energy, bio-energy, and new agriculture production techniques and needs will have an impact on conservation needs, technical assistance for land managers, and overall program delivery.

- **Public opinion**

The public supports conservation planning and implementation as a major strategy for improving the environment. The effectiveness of voluntary,

incentive-based approaches to conservation practice application has been proved and is supported by conservation district collaborators.

Authorizing environment and stakeholder expectations of the agency

RCW 89.08 provides the appropriate authorization for WSCC to meet both agency and landowner expectations, but its ability to fulfill this mandate is weakened by the lack of operating funds.

Federal, state, local agency and non-government organization's expectations of the WSCC include providing services, products, and leadership to ensure that conservation districts are able to provide the technical and educational services essential for successful conservation implementation.

Conservation districts rely on WSCC for guidance on policies, procedures, organizational development, accountability, long-range strategic and annual planning, reporting, and leadership development.

The legislature and the administration also are stakeholders with specific expectations of the agency. These include substantial collaboration with both state and federal agencies who have roles in the conservation mission and in providing information and reports to legislative committees and the governor's office.

Agency trends in meeting those expectations

WSCC resources are stretched to the maximum to meet even the basic expectations of the Conservation Districts. This is due in part to the initiation of new programs such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) for which WSCC provides in-house grant management and which also requires additional staff support to districts.

WSCC has reached a high degree of efficiency and effectiveness, but there is a critical need for additional staff to meet the ever-increasing expectations of Conservation Districts and its many other clients.

Major partners

Are major partners, such as other state agencies, critical to key initiatives? What are each partner's responsibilities?

Land managers throughout the state are the primary partners of the conservation districts and WSCC. They are the essential participants in conservation on private lands. Without their collaboration, conservation will not occur; engaging them, educating and working with them is the only sure

route to conservation success. Although landowners are responsible for compliance with rules and regulations deriving from federal and state laws, the agencies that can enforce those requirements have limited capacity to do so. Compliance driven by sanctions is unlikely to have a lasting effect. Because of this, landowner responsibility for resource management is best realized when engagement is voluntary and is based on understanding and enthusiasm for underlying conservation values.

The relationship with Department of Ecology is key in supporting initiatives for funding, technical assistance and education for Conservation District staff while working with and through WSCC. They are responsible for water quality, water resources, air quality, and the regulatory activities involved in these areas.

The Department of Agriculture also is critical to key initiatives through support, funding and technical assistance to Conservation District staff working with and through WSCC. They are responsible for animal feeding operations, confined animal feeding operations, pesticide licensing and related regulatory activities.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service sets the standards for conservation practices. It provides technical assistance to conservation district clients as well as training, practice standards and protocols, vehicles and office space to conservation districts. It has a 60+ year history of working with and supporting conservation districts and WSCC.

What are the trends affecting partners and the agencies' relationships with them?

Land managers now have less income available for conservation practice implementation. Unless cost savings are realized or incentives are offered, conservation practice planning and implementation will decrease throughout the state. Attempting to replace incentive funding with regulatory sanctions will be more expensive and much less successful in achieving sustainable resource management.

Staff of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has been reduced from over 16,500 in the early 1980's to approximately 12,000 in 2006. This reduction has adversely impacted NRCS technical assistance to land managers throughout the state; it has slowed implementation even for practices approved for funding through various conservation programs. The administration's withdrawal of funds from federal agencies has had an additional negative impact on NRCS program delivery. The agency is changing also as staff provide fewer technical services, spend more time with program management, and, in keeping with federal policies, attempt to

obtain technical services from third party private sector providers. All of this has led to a short supply of technical services resulting in delaying and sometimes derailing conservation initiatives.

Each of the WSCC partners depends on Conservation Districts for effective, efficient, timely, and land-owner-based delivery of conservation planning and practice implementation.

Assessment of internal capacity and financial health

The Conservation Commission has appropriated 12.3 FTEs. Of this, .5 FTE is assigned to the Commission Members, leaving 11.8 FTEs for the management and coordination of \$30 million in grants and loans and oversight of 47 conservation districts with 240 volunteer supervisors and approximately 200 staff. Based on strategic direction of this plan, at least 17 FTEs are needed to meet the forecasted workload.

The agency depends in part on its partnerships with other agencies to provide needed services. For example, at present, WSCC has an inter-agency agreement with the Department of Fish and Wildlife to provide support for a staff member to represent WSCC on the Governor's Monitoring Forum, SWIMTAC, to conduct a biological assessment of the CREP program, to support the CREP technical advisory group and the Watershed Data Pilot Project. Without this individual the Commission's participation with these various projects would be minimal at best. It would not be able to provide the technical oversight these programs warrant. The current agreement with Fish and Wildlife terminates December 31, 2006.

In addition, WSCC has a shared position with the Department of Ecology for an individual who manages the Irrigation Efficiencies program in collaboration with conservation districts for conservation of water using more efficient technologies for irrigation. A second shared position with the Department of Ecology supports the Coordinated Resource Management Program Coordinator who provides assistance to groups of local citizens, agency representatives and organizations that are developing and implementing natural resource conservation plans in geographic areas such as watersheds.

The Conservation Commission manages 30 separate program indexes with multiple grants and loans within each source. Over the course of a biennium, approximately 600 individual grants, loans and contract amendments are managed and audited by four staff in the grants department.

Four Regional Managers are responsible for training, information dissemination, accountability and guidance as needed for the volunteer supervisors and staff of the 47 conservation districts. Requests for these services and for training have consistently become more numerous and more complex. The Executive Director and the other 2.8 staff in the WSCC office are mainly engaged in meeting the demand for information and collaboration at the executive level with the large number of agencies and offices who have legitimate and continuing need for input from the agency.

Current Internal Capacity

To implement this strategic plan outlined in this document will require 17 FTEs, 4.7 more than are currently available to the Commission.

Presently, the work load generated by the statutory responsibilities of the Commission and the increased needs of Conservation districts due to their successes in implementing conservation practices exceeds the capacities of the staff. Careful management and setting strict priorities plus the dedication of staff to getting the work done allows the Commission to meet most of its clients needs. But there is a growing gap which, if not filled, will result in lost opportunities to capture all the natural resource benefits that can accrue from the Commission's extended network of agencies and volunteers.

Most of the issues that should be addressed, but are not, or that are increasing in number and complexity, derive from the rapid increase in the number of small landowners whose activities impact the State's natural resources. These potential clients, who are populating the rural-urban interface and creating "*rurban*" environments, often need almost as much time and technical support as larger landowners. Most of the latter have a deeper knowledge of the land and the value of conservation. New landowners and county agencies dealing with the changes in land use they are causing increasingly need assistance from Conservation District staff. There are few third-party providers who can help with the technical issues involved in conservation and assist in dealing with the agencies having regulatory and practice standard mandates. In Districts where this trend is strongest, the numbers of animals housed on small properties can exceed the number in dairies and other large animal operations. Nutrient (manure) production from these sources can exceed that of the human population since one large animal may produce thirty times more than a human.

Clearly the Commission and the Districts have the capability (technical expertise) to address these emerging issues but they do not have the capacity to fully meet that challenge.

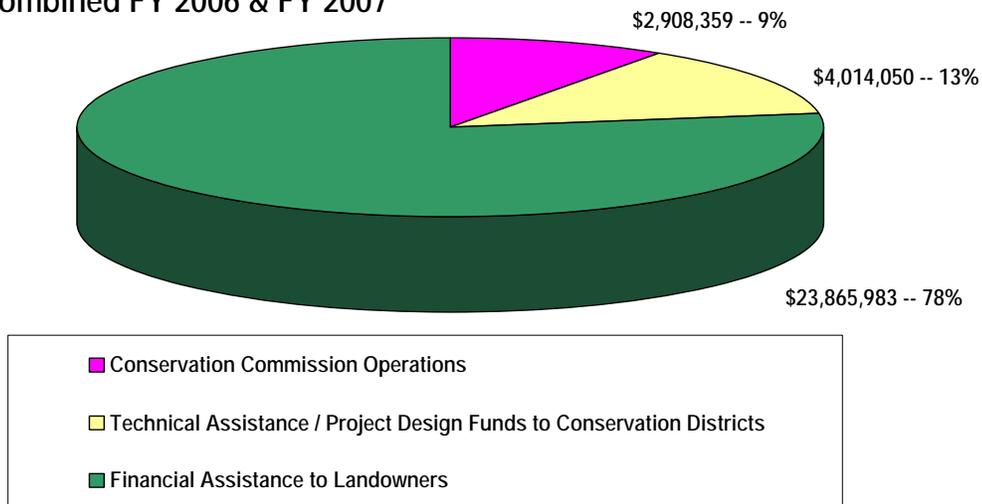
Although changing land use presents the biggest emerging challenge for the State's conservation programs there is a continuing critical need for technical assistance to large landowners and operators of commercial animal and crop operations. Both environmental challenges and best practices evolve over time. Changes in ownership as well as changes in scale add to the need for continuing technical assistance. For example, changes in the State's policies for assistance to large animal operations resulted in the loss of support for dairy farmers even though it is clear their need for assistance has not diminished. Nor have the needs of State agencies responsible for monitoring and regulating these operations.

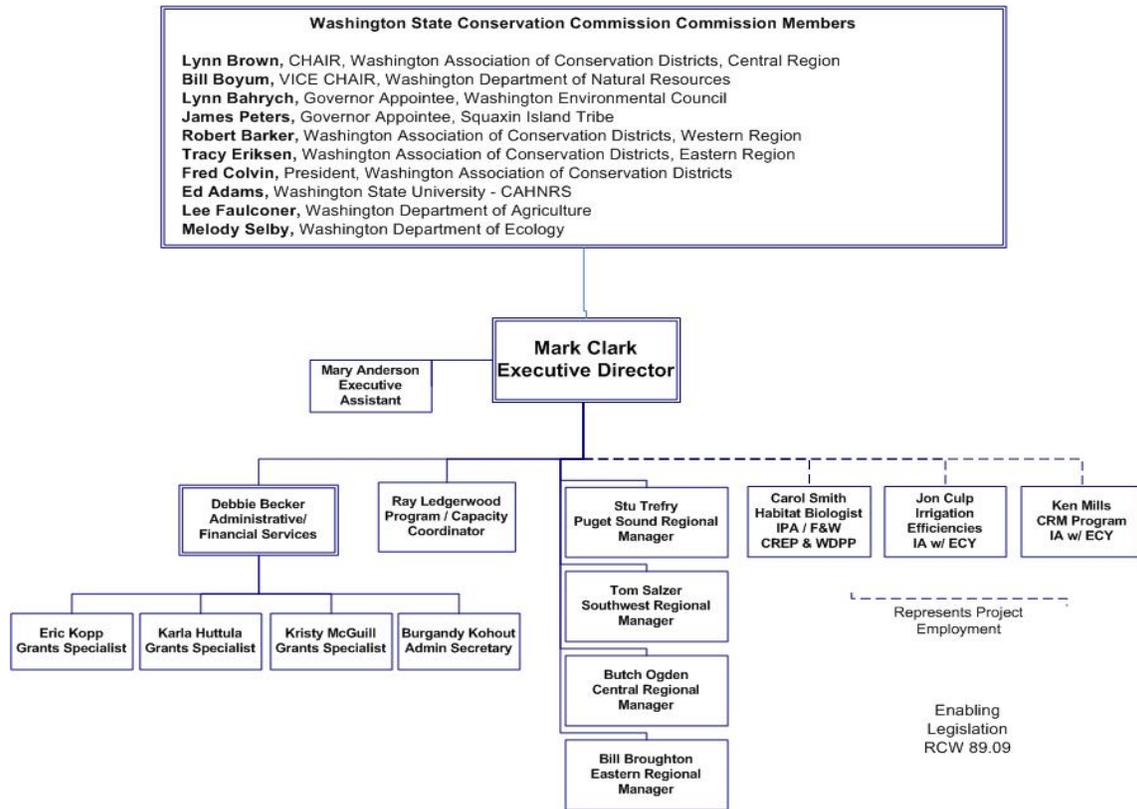
The Commission's and Districts' capacity to meet the State's needs is significantly dependent on the availability of assistance from agencies such as NRCS, WSDA, DOE, DFW, and others. They also depend on the availability of grant and cost-share funding. All of these resources have decreased in recent years and can be expected to continue to do so unless the State takes a proactive role in conservation of private lands.

Financial Health

The Commission operates in financial balance but, as described above, is limited by both funding and authority to increase staff in its capacity to address important State needs in preserving and enhancing its natural resources.

Washington State Conservation Commission
Combined FY 2006 & FY 2007





Governance

Increasing the effectiveness of conservation district supervisors and achieving broad landowner involvement is one of the major goals of the Conservation Commission. The training and oversight needs of conservation districts continue to be a primary goal. These efforts include:

- Improving conservation district business operation efficiencies.
- Increasing local involvement in elections, and increasing overall local input and involvement of the local community in conservation activities.
- Improving reporting of conservation practice implementation and the impact of investments.
- Assisting in conservation district planning and capacity building that better reflect local priorities.
- Improve financial management and grants administration utilizing approved and appropriate accounting standards.

- Improve the cooperation between conservation districts, their county governments, state agencies, and private organizations.
- Assisting in publishing, promoting and marketing the conservation district concepts and activities to the public on a state-wide scale.
- Assist conservation districts with Supervisor recruitment, orientation, training and development to excel in their role and responsibilities related to natural resources and the community.
- Assist conservation districts with long range planning, annual planning, and reporting.

Key Agency Activities

A001 – Administration 3.3 FTE

Statewide Strategy: Preserve and restore natural systems and the environment

The Washington State Conservation Commissioners oversee state funding of the 47 conservation districts and the private-landowner natural resource improvement projects they implement. The administration activity supports agency functions by providing leadership, cross-program support, and staff presence throughout the state. Administration manages the agency's long-term financial health and provides information to support sound decision-making and resource management by managers. The Commission examines issues pertaining to the rights and needs of the conservation district community, and makes recommendations to the Governor, Legislature, and state agencies for changes in programs and laws. Administration staff serve as liaisons to Congress, the state Legislature, conservation districts, and citizen groups. Administration helps managers and employees create a safe, supportive, and diverse work environment by providing comprehensive human resource services. It also oversees facility and vehicle management; maintains the agency's centralized records and library resources; responds to public records requests; certifies conservation districts elections and appointment processes.

Expected Results

Annually certify each of the 47 district elections and appointment processes. Commission grant policies are compliant with state and federal laws. Leaders in the state recognize the Conservation Commission and conservation

districts as the delivery mechanism for natural resource education and improvement with private landowners.

A002 – Financial and Program Compliance 4.2 FTE

Statewide Strategy: Change individual practices and choices related to natural resources.

The grant management staff processes 300+ proposals per year, ensures their compliance with required reporting and audit practices, assures all deadlines are met and that funds are dispersed only on the basis of work accomplished.

Expected Results

Natural resource enhancements are achieved as required by the granting authority. All transactions are accounted for in timely and audit-perfect style.

A003 – Governance, Training 4.8 FTE

Statewide Strategy: Safeguards and standards to protect natural resources

The Commission Staff provide direct guidance and oversight to the 47 conservation districts. They assist in orienting supervisors and staff, coordinating collaborations and assuring compliance with state and federal requirements, compliance with open public meetings and oversight of elections and appointment processes.

Expected Results

Conservation districts operate smoothly and efficiently in compliance with state and federal rules and with continuing success in the implementation of sustainable conservation.

Strategic Plan Approval

The Conservation Commission Members approved this Strategic Plan at a Special telephonic Commission meeting on May 26, 2006.

Signature/Date		Signature/Date	
Signature: 		Signature: 	
Print first and last name: Mark Clark		Print first and last name: Lynn Brown	
Title: Executive Director	Date: May 26, 2006	Title: Chair	Date: May 26, 2006

Washington State Conservation Commission

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