



Washington State Conservation Commission

2009-2015 Strategic Plan

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Acronyms Listing

CD – Conservation District

CREP – Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

DIS – Washington Department of Information Services

DNR – Washington Department of Natural Resources

Ecology – Washington Department of Ecology

EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program

ESA – Endangered Species Act

ISB – Washington Information Services Board

IT – Information Technology

NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Service

OFM – Washington Office of Financial Management

OFFP – Office of Farmland Preservation

POG – Priorities of Government

RCW – Revised Code of Washington

SCC – State Conservation Commission

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

WDFW – Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife

WSU – Washington State University

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 about the State Conservation Commission.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Washington State Conservation Commission is to lead the citizens of the state in the wise stewardship, conservation, and protection of soil, water, and related natural resources.

Vision

Washington State shall have healthy soils, water, air, and ecosystems, with sustainable human interaction with these resources.

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, and other agencies and organizations.

Conservation districts are seen as the implementers of actions in local areas to accomplish natural resource conservation goals.

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 this by valuing:

- Healthy, diverse landscapes that reflect sustainable economic use of natural resources;
- Voluntary application of conservation systems on working lands that reflect state, local, and community priorities;
- Partnerships in resource management that involve local, state, federal and tribal agencies and organizations;

Values

- The highest standards of ethics and personal and institutional integrity for Conservation Commission members and staff, and the conservation districts supervisors and staff;
- The economic contributions of natural resource-based industries, operating to achieve sustainability;
- Accountability for the effective and efficient use of public funds;
- Policies and governance procedures that assure the effective and efficient use of public resources;
- Open communications and transparency of operations;
- Diverse cultures and ideas; and,
- Education for current and future generations.

Role and Responsibilities

The Conservation Commission supports and guides the conservation districts as important, non-regulatory resources of information, guidance, and technical services for private land owners and managers 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 (SCC) and 47 municipal corporations of the state (conservation districts). In total, 485 people are dedicated to responding to the conservation needs of the state by providing technical, educational, and financial services for natural resource conservation. Of these, 235 are individuals volunteering their time serving as Supervisors of the conservation districts and as State Conservation Commission members. The others are professional and technical staff.

The role of the SCC and conservation districts, which have no regulatory function, is to educate land owners, managers, and other stakeholders about the value and need for natural resource conservation, to effectively and efficiently deliver conservation programs through voluntary compliance, a minimum of bureaucracy, and accountability for results. Our approach is to facilitate and encourage dialog between land owners, land managers, 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.

Role and Responsibilities

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, and facilitates and guides district resource conservation programs and activities. In addition, the Commission 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.

SCC Core Functions

- Provide assistance to conservation district supervisors in carrying out their programs to promote conservation of natural resources;
- Inform conservation districts of the activities and experiences of other conservation districts, and disseminate this information statewide;
- Review agreements between conservation districts and any other entities;
- Encourage cooperation and collaboration of state, federal, regional, tribal, interstate, and local public and private agencies and secure their assistance with conservation districts;
- Recommend funding packages necessary to finance the activities of SCC and districts and administer resulting funds;
- Issue regulations establishing guidelines and suitable controls on the use of public funds, property, and services by conservation districts;
- Review budgets, administrative procedures, and operations of conservation districts, and advise the districts concerning their conformance with applicable laws and regulations;
- Compile information and make studies, summaries, and analysis of conservation district programs in relation to each other and to other resource conservation programs on a statewide basis;
- Assist conservation districts in obtaining legal services from state and local legal officers;
- Establish procedures for district elections, canvass the returns, and announce the official results;
- Require annual reports, annual plans, and long range plans from conservation districts;
- Establish accounting and auditing procedures for conservation districts with the assistance and advice of the Washington State Auditor's Office;
- Appoint two supervisors to sit on each conservation district's five-member board of supervisors; and
- Process boundary change requests and changes of conservation district names in coordination with the Washington Secretary of State.

Statutory Authority References

Washington State Conservation Commission Enabling Legislation 1939	RCW Chapter 89.08
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	RCW 43.41.270
Water Quality Account Distributions - Limitations	RCW 70.146.060
Fish habitat enhancement project – Permit review and approval process	RCW 77.55.290
Salmon Recovery	RCW Chapter 77.85
Grazing Lands – Fish and Wildlife goals – Technical Advisory Committee – implementation	RCW 79.13.610
Dairy Nutrient Management	RCW Chapter 90.64
Puget Sound Water Quality Protection	RCW Chapter 90.71
Conservation Commission	WAC Title 135
Uses and Limitations of Centennial Clean Water Funds	WAC Title 173
Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team	WAC Title 400
Salmon Recovery Funding Board	WAC Title 420

Statewide Goals

- Improve the quality of Washington's Environment.
- Improve the ability of state government to achieve results efficiently and effectively.

Ultimate Outcomes

- Land owners and managers understand conservation values and are enthusiastic about implementing them.
- Stable funding is available for voluntary best management practices and other conservation practices.
- All land owners & managers in environmentally sensitive areas will manage their lands 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.
- Private land owners and managers, 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.
- Washington watersheds reflect the application of best management practices and are managed to ensure long-term sustainable use for state residents and wildlife.
- 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 the natural resource industries.
- Water quality, water quantity, and in-stream habitat improved and maintained with the ability to support sustained harvestable fish populations.
- Natural habitats for wildlife are robust, and species currently endangered or at risk are protected.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increased numbers of land owners and managers adopt stewardship goals and move from conservation district educational activities to planning and implementing conservation practices.
- The number of contracts for implementation of conservation practices and acres protected increases annually.
- Washington land owners and managers will use conservation district technical assistance to learn about natural resource conservation, including conservation systems and practice implementation.
- Each conservation district will demonstrate that voluntary conservation practices result in improved water quality, and that the economic use of resources need not contribute to surface or ground water pollution.
- Conservation districts engage land owners and managers 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.
- The number of stream miles and acres of wildlife habitat enhanced to protect water quality and irrigation efficiencies is steadily increased.
- 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, other land owners and managers committed to managing according to an approved conservation plan.
- Continued increase in the number of land owners and managers seeking technical and financial assistance from conservation districts.
- Continued voluntary participation of land owners and managers in the development and implementation of conservation plans.

Immediate Outcomes

- Continued increase in the number of land owners & managers contacting conservation districts for resource management assistance.
- Assurance that conservation districts provide technical assistance needed for land owner and manager education and plan development.
- Financial assistance provided to implement required practices.
- Increase the number of installed practices that reduce the impact of livestock, domestic animals, and agriculture on water quality.
- Working with districts and partnering agencies to create natural resource inventories of watersheds, plans for implementation of practices and documentation of results.
- Work with conservation districts and partnering agencies to identify practices that need to be implemented to enhance land use productivity, while protecting, or enhancing a natural resource.

Agency Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Performance Measures

The following items were developed by reviewing the key strategies outlined in the Priorities of Government process, interviews with conservation districts, partner representatives, consultation with all members of the SCC staff, and a complete review and approval by Commission members.

Pages 11 - 18 - This section of the strategic plan includes SCC strategic priorities, goals, objectives, strategies, and performance measures for **Agency Activity A001 - Technical Expertise and Program Delivery**.

Pages 19 – 20 - This section of the strategic plan includes SCC strategic priorities, goals, objectives, strategies, and performance measures for **Agency Activity A002 – Conservation District Operations and Accountability**.

Pages 21 – 23 – This section of the strategic plan includes SCC strategic priorities, goals, objectives, strategies, and performance measures for **Agency Activity A003 – SCC Operations and Administration**.

Technical Services and Program Delivery

Ultimate Achievement

Provide conservation services, including timely planning, practice implementation, permitting, and other requirements for conservation work by maintaining a recognized, high quality conservation district technical and administrative staff with the needed training, knowledge, and demonstrated skills.

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
Water Use	<i>Improve efficient use of water through user education, installation and management of irrigation systems.</i>	Recognize and improve the balancing of water needs including stable, adequate water supplies for agriculture, in-stream flow, and other uses.	Commission staff will work with key stakeholders, the Legislature, Governor's Office, and other agencies to identify a legislative approach to correct relinquishment and enhance incentives for water conservation.	Amount of water placed into trust with long term agreements, including cubic feet per second. Increase in plans developed, conservation systems applied and stream segments benefited.
			Demonstrate the success of voluntary implementation of practices that improve water availability and quality for beneficial use.	
			Obtain a watershed-based inventory of use, and analysis of needs to develop a sub-basin plan and priorities for technical and financial assistance and state legislation if needed.	
			Utilize conservation districts as the mechanism to teach private land owners and managers on the importance of making good conservation choices and how to address changing state and federal environmental rules and regulations.	

Technical Services and Program Delivery

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
Water Quality	<p><i>Conservation districts maintain successful water quality program education and implementation programs that address water quality issues, resulting in fewer water bodies impacted by pollution.</i></p>	<p>Reduction in water pollution originating from working lands through technical, education, and financial assistance and practice application.</p>	<p>Implement a water quality program to investigate the effectiveness of riparian buffers and existing incentive programs such as CREP.</p> <p>Increase program capacity for addressing livestock and working lands water quality issues, including increasing funding for livestock cost share.</p> <p>With Ecology and EPA, develop a strategy for enhancing the non-point source pollution program funding, including an evaluation of the workload, priorities and program delivery.</p> <p>Through conservation districts, provide technical, financial, and educational assistance to private land managers to enhance the health of private lands in all watersheds.</p> <p>Coordinate district programs with other groups and organizations.</p> <p>Utilize conservation districts to bring land owners, managers, and other stakeholders, including regulatory agency representatives, together to collaborate on programs that improve watershed health.</p> <p>Develop capacity to demonstrate that improvements in watershed health provide economic and human health benefits.</p> <p>Promote practices to private land managers that benefit long-term productivity, and are economically sound.</p>	<p>Increased number of water bodies meeting water quality standards.</p> <p>Conservation plans, practices applied, and acres benefited.</p>

Technical Services and Program Delivery

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
<p>Farmland Preservation</p>	<p><i>A future that ensures sufficient quantities of quality working agricultural lands in Washington State.</i></p>	<p>Strategic plan developed and implemented for the farmland preservation program.</p>	Developing a farmland preservation strategy for the state and fostering the development of local farmland preservation strategies.	<p>Acres enrolled in a farmland preservation program.</p> <p>Rate of conversion drops in areas that are identified for preservation.</p>
			Conduct an assessment of farmland that should be preserved, data on susceptible lands and solutions to preserve them.	
			Recommend appropriate policy changes, develop and support a growing network for local programs for achieving measurable farmland preservation.	
			Grow grants to local governments and broaden the scope of entities that could use the funds for local programs.	
			Field a staff of new Farmland Preservation caseworkers to assist the ever-growing number of citizens who contact the OFP with requests for assistance with their farmland preservation issues.	
			Collaborating with counties, Tribes, and key stakeholders on critical area ordinances for protecting, restoring, and enhancing functions.	

Technical Services and Program Delivery

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
Puget Sound	<i>Have a visible and effective role for the Conservation Commission and districts in Puget Sound recovery.</i>	Increase conservation district activities and “on-the-ground” actions based on identified threats and measurable outcomes for the Puget Sound. Increased role for SCC in Puget Sound Protection processes and activities.	Through the conservation districts, provide technical, financial, and educational assistance for private land managers to improve the health of private lands in all watersheds and foster voluntary land owner or manager responsibility for sustainable resource management.	Increased assistance to land managers, developing conservation plans and implementing practices applied on private lands in the Puget Sound area.
SCC as a key player with specific tasks to implement and actions identified in the Action Agenda.				
Increase “on-the-ground” activities based on identified threats, and with measurable objectives.				
Coordinate district programs with other groups and organizations.				
Small Acreage and Urban/Suburban	<i>Protect natural resources from the impact of houses, roads, animals, and lawns through education, technical, and incentive-based assistance for small rural parcel owners on conservation and care of the land.</i>	Increase assistance to small acreage land owners by having a fully functioning small acreage program for conservation planning and practice implementation for at least 20 conservation districts.	Work with core work group of interested districts to develop a program.	Number of small parcel owners who have had training and education in conservation systems for small acreage land owners. Small acreage land owners assisted, conservation plans developed, and practices applied.
Assistance for small acreage land owners to address water quality issues, by providing engineering, cost share, technical and educational assistance.				

Technical Services and Program Delivery

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
Forestry and Grazing	<i>Forest and grazing land managers receive adequate technical, educational, and incentive assistance for application of conservation systems.</i>	Increase in forest lands that are managed to ensure sustainability from the effects of fire, insects and disease.	Work with DNR, NRCS, US Forest Service, Ecology, and WDFW on small forest land owners program needs.	<p>Number of homes that have Firewise practices implemented.</p> <p>Number of range management plans and acres managed.</p> <p>Small Forest Land owners assistance provided, plans developed and forest practices implemented.</p>
		<p>Increase in grazing lands prescriptions that are implemented to ensure sustainability of the resource; these lands are improved over time to a desired future condition.</p>	Develop a grant program through the Commission for conservation districts to receive the resources they need to provide small forest land owner assistance.	
			Increased management of our rangeland, range management plans, and funding for noxious weed control.	
			Working through the conservation districts, provide technical, financial, and educational assistance to improve the health of private lands in all watersheds and demonstrate to land owners and managers that protecting natural resources benefits long-term productivity, and is economically sound.	
CREP and Other Habitat Restoration	<i>Ecological – Assist with recovery of at-risk species and keeping common species common.</i>	<p>Increase in contribution to goals and objectives identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan, Biodiversity Plan, and other planning efforts.</p> <p>Increase interest and participation in the CREP program.</p>	Consider formalized partnerships to obtain fish and wildlife expertise.	<p>Land owners assisted, plans created, and acres of CREP habitat developed.</p> <p>Contributions made to habitat goal and objectives identified in State Wildlife Action Plan, Biodiversity Plan, and other planning efforts.</p>
			<i>Economic – Explore ways to use habitat protection/enhancement and associated fish and wildlife-based recreation to diversify rural economies and keep working lands working.</i>	

Technical Services and Program Delivery

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
Agriculture Issues	<i>Assist with the development and implementation of an environmentally and economically sustainable strategy for agriculture in Washington State.</i>	Increase commitments for partner agencies and agriculture community to develop and implement strategy for promoting viable, environmentally sound, agricultural operations on working lands.	Create a strategy with partners to provide for the governmental structure to support a viable agriculture throughout the state.	Numbers and acreage of agricultural operations meeting clearly defined environmental goals.
			Halt the declining agriculture productivity trend as seen over the past ten years.	
			Maintain the rights of the land owners.	
			Assist private land owners to plan and implement science-based systems on working lands that maintain or enhance current levels of agriculture.	
Conservation Markets	<i>Establish pilot conservation markets program to benefit working lands and natural resources.</i>	Increase the numbers of people buying and selling in an ecosystem marketing system with the institutions in place to make the markets work.	Establish a system to inform land owners and managers about the markets, and a credit certification process.	Ecosystem purchases and sales volume are recordable and reportable.
			Find ways to reduce energy consumption or generate energy on farms.	
Disaster Assistance	<i>Conservation districts partner with the appropriate agencies and organizations for disaster assistance related to natural resource conservation land manager assistance.</i>	Utilize SCC experiences in partnering to provide assistance on wildfire and flooding disaster recovery.	Improve awareness of lead agencies in the role of SCC and conservation districts in supporting disaster assistance response.	Numbers of land managers assisted with natural resource disaster recovery.

Technical Services and Program Delivery

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
Technical Expertise	<i>Districts employ, high quality conservation district technical and administrative staff with the training, knowledge, and demonstrated skills to provide conservation services, including timely planning, practice implementation, permitting, and other requirements for conservation work.</i>	Increase the number of conservation districts that have adequate qualified technical staff or access to a technical work force. Increase conservation districts' technical capabilities on cultural, historical, and archeological resource protection while effectively assisting land managers with conservation practice application.	Develop and implement a grant program that recognizes high quality district technical and administrative staff with the training, certification, and knowledge of available technology to provide conservation services; including timely planning, practice implementation, permitting, cultural resource reviews, and other requirements for conservation work.	Increased number of programmatic agreements for greater technical expertise. Increased number of training opportunities to meet workforce needs. Reduction in number of conservation projects delayed by cultural resource assessments.
			Continue technical training and coordinate with the accreditation and technical standards of partner agencies and organizations.	
			Expand the statewide engineering services program to meet the increasing backlog of conservation practices implementation needing engineering.	
			Continue the efficiency and productivity work to get conservation practices on the ground so that the investment of the state is utilized for soil, water and air conservation work.	
			Enhance the knowledge of conservation district personnel to achieve successful implementation of practices in cooperation with other state and federal agencies.	
			Develop a memorandum of understanding between SCC and Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation that includes guidance to conservation districts.	
			Provide training for conservation district employees working on conservation practice applications, regarding local, state, federal, and tribal rules, procedures, key contacts for assessment and approval, and programs for cultural, historical, and archeological resources.	

Technical Services and Program Delivery

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
Community Outreach and Education	<i>Citizens of Washington State would know the expertise provided by SCC and conservation districts, as well as types of services offered.</i>	<p>Increase number of conservation districts with assessments and assist with educational campaigns.</p> <p>Increase number of conservation districts with public information and education programs.</p> <p>Increase number of informed voters participating in district supervisor elections.</p> <p>Increase conservation education activities and programs available for conservation districts to use in school districts.</p> <p>Assist publishing, promoting and marketing the conservation district concepts and activities to the public on a state-wide scale.</p>	<p>Develop and implement a successful targeted public outreach campaign that includes identification of key audiences, messages, and media. Reach land managers and citizens to change attitudes and behaviors toward conservation activities, planning and practice application.</p> <p>Enhance the public education component beyond just farm planning, including educating citizens who have property with conservation needs, such as compliance with critical areas ordinances.</p> <p>Raise community awareness on the need for food raised environmentally and in a sustainable way. This includes participating in related programs that exist with our partners.</p> <p>Increase public involvement and awareness of conservation districts by advertising and educational outreach to improve participation in election processes.</p> <p>Work with land owners on described conservation practices to showcase conservation project activities.</p> <p>Increase education outreach to students, by using interns, hands-on presentations, and other youth conservation education opportunities.</p>	<p>Number of outreach activities and education and training events.</p> <p>Number of new conservation district assessment ordinances adopted by local government.</p> <p>Number of people that have been contacted or participated through targeted educational activities.</p> <p>Measurable increase in voters in conservation district elections.</p>

Conservation District Operations and Accountability

Ultimate Achievement

All conservation districts successfully provide conservation technical, financial incentive, and educational services to land owners and managers addressing natural resource issues in their communities through an infrastructure of qualified technical and administrative staff, board member leadership, long range and annual planning, conservation district operations and accountability.

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
Conservation District Operations and Accountability	<i>Effective, functioning conservation districts covering the entire state with emphasis on quality of leadership, serving the public good, and accountability for conservation program delivery that addresses natural resource issues.</i>	Increase effective conservation district operations and accountability through field level assistance, grants management training, and sharing best operating practices for district operations.	<p>Provide conservation district staff with access to appropriate training on technical and administrative issues as part of on-going proficiency training and accreditation.</p> <p>Create a "Learning Institute" for conservation district supervisors and employees.</p> <p>Assist all conservation districts with attracting and retaining interested, committed Supervisors that are performing at a high level through orientation, training, and mentoring.</p> <p>Assist districts with electronically storing and reporting data important to natural resource improvements and impact so that natural resource conservation actions can be merged across agencies for a more complete progress report on important issues such as the Puget Sound Initiative and salmon recovery under ESA.</p> <p>Assist with increasing local involvement in elections, and increasing overall local input and involvement of the local community in conservation activities.</p>	<p>Number of training events held</p> <p>District operations information materials developed and distributed.</p> <p>Supervisor elections and appointments successfully certified.</p> <p>Annual internal and state audits completed, and reduction in audit findings.</p> <p>All conservation districts with current, high quality long range and annual plans of work.</p>

Conservation District Operations and Accountability

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
Conservation District Operations and Accountability			Provide each district with access to a consistent cadre of specialists who would know the sources of funding and the people in the communities on the ground doing the conservation work.	
			Continue improving the financial management and grants administration utilizing approved and appropriate accounting standards.	
			Assist districts that want to consolidate.	

SCC Operations and Administration (A003)

Ultimate Achievement	<i>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, and other agencies and organizations.</i>			
ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
SCC Capacity	<i>Be recognized as an effective, independent, and trusted agency of choice that implements stewardship in the state of Washington in partnership with conservation districts, other agencies, and organizations by performing its core functions, mission and strategic priorities.</i>	Each biennium, provide continuing high quality service to conservation districts to increase their effectiveness in district operations.	<p>Organize a feedback mechanism, including surveys, and sensing interviews, to provide the recommendations for improving capacity and services.</p> <p>Provide producers a neutral place to seek help with meeting environmental expectations while producing food, and conserving soil, water quality, and habitat.</p>	<p>Number of services provided by SCC staff to conservation districts.</p> <p>Positive constituency feedback including conservation districts, land managers, agencies and organizations.</p>
Partnerships	<i>Provide leadership with state, local, tribal, and federal agencies, and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) regarding conservation on private and public land to strengthen relationships with the various organizations in the state to assure complementary rather than duplicative efforts.</i>	<p>Increase in recognition by partner entities of conservation districts as the important link to the land owners and managers.</p> <p>Increase in the number of formal Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) documenting the relationship between organizations, agencies, SCC, and conservation districts for shared funding, staffing, equipment, materials, vehicles and other resources.</p>	<p>Improve coordination internally and externally with partners including a discussion of role and strategic priorities of SCC in relation to other partner organizations.</p> <p>Use the Farming and Environment Group as an advisory group for input to SCC on agricultural issues.</p> <p>Expand partnerships with federal, state, and local agencies, and other organizations to bring resources together from various sources so that collective resources go further.</p> <p>Outreach to agricultural and environmental partners that can support SCC and conservation districts activities, programs, and funding.</p>	<p>Increase the number of memorandums of understanding which document formal agreement for shared resources.</p> <p>Number of projects and collaborative work completed with partner organizations and agencies.</p>

SCC Operations and Administration

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
Funding	<p><i>SCC will meet the needs of the conservation district's technical, educational, and financial incentives including the administration services identified in the conservation district long range and annual plans.</i></p>	<p>Funding will meet the identified needs in the SCC proposed budget for the district's conservation technical, educational, and administration services work identified in their budget requests reflected from their long range and annual plans.</p>	<p>State conservation funding needs are identified by 47 conservation district funding requests describing the technical, educational, and administration services work to be completed.</p> <p>Improve and conserve natural resources in Washington State by supporting conservation districts' efforts to implement more on-the-ground projects including assurance of quality control and prompt implementation.</p> <p>Identify and pursue non-government organization funding.</p> <p>Secure and use federal conservation funding and programs to support local needs in order to match conservation district long range plans.</p> <p>Continue to improve upon the current streamlined system for SCC funding distribution and vouchering, including connected accountability for performance.</p> <p>Provide assistance to conservation districts for writing grants. Provide training and planning assistance for districts without assessments.</p>	<p>Plans developed, projects completed, and services provided.</p> <p>Acres benefited.</p> <p>Stream segments benefited.</p> <p>Funding levels increased for conservation projects, technical assistance, incentives and education activities.</p>

SCC Operations and Administration

ACTIVITY	GOAL	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE
Information Technology	<i>Provide technology, leadership, and services needed for SCC to accomplish its mission and goals.</i>	Prepare and implement an Information Technology Portfolio and requirements by Department of Information Services and Information Services Board annually	Equip all staff with current hardware and software configurations on desktop and/or laptop computing platforms, sufficient to support the day-to-day operations of the agency.	Meet all ISB requirements and deadlines, including; investment plan, Disaster recovery plan (tested annually), IT Portfolio, Security Plan, Section 903 expenditures and services needed through ISB.
			Provide mobile communications technology to key staff, Commission Members and those who travel, for management efficiency, and safety.	
			Transition wireless computing away from unsecured Wi-Fi access points, and toward cellular-based wireless broadband services.	
			Implement agency-wide document management to improve accessibility to knowledge and data, and to help respond to public disclosure requests.	
			Improve agency capacity in geospatial data management and graphics generation.	
			Improve our web-based conservation practice management and reporting system.	
			Create more opportunities to collaborate with other agencies on technology needs and solutions.	
			Implement videoconferencing technology to connect our headquarters office with staff and Commission Members in satellite locations, for reasons of safety (reduced winter travel), sustainability (less fuel consumed), and efficiency (less time spent in travel status).	
			Continue to improve citizen access to conservation and agency information, primarily through document management and web-based document libraries.	
			Upgrade core servers to support lower power consumption and enhanced services for more effective internal operation of the agency.	
			Plan for the future IT needs for staff and use of technology to communicate with the clients, stakeholders and public.	
Provide leadership with WACD and districts on IT solutions.				

Performance Analysis

Actual performance different than expected at this point and why

Actual performance is higher than expected from the 2006 strategic plan with the addition of the Office of Farmland Preservation into the SCC by the state legislature. Staffing changes have also led to better performance than expected in the areas of public outreach and education, Puget Sound conservation activities, and field services to conservation districts. Staff leadership with an overhaul of our granting procedures, contracts and accountability has also increased the SCC overall performance.

Agency is learning from its internal GMAP process

The staff and members of SCC have benefited from the identification of ultimate outcomes, intermediate outcomes, immediate outcomes, and performance measures in relation to accomplishing the vision of the agency. The identification of performance measures and targets by strategic area for this plan also led to the need to correctly align the agency's activity inventory with the identified performance measures.

Performance results compare to those of similar organizations or industry standards

On a national scale, SCC is recognized as a leader among state conservation agencies for performance and innovation in relation to its size of staffing. An example of this "national" leadership is the organizing of a "field staff conference" to share techniques and strategies for working with conservation districts. The National Association of State Conservation Agencies will be hosting its fourth such event that originated from a concept by staff of the Conservation Commission.

The requests received from partner agencies for ideas and recommendations on grant procedures, strategic planning, program development, organizational capacity building, information technology, data collection, district operations, and agreements are a testimony to a high standard of performance expected from staff and members of the SCC.

Performance gaps that are most important to close and how they will be closed

While performance in SCC is high, the staff additions, training and development remain a most important priority for improvement. Over the next biennium, SCC will concentrate on training and staff performance, the development of staff knowledge, skills, abilities, evaluations, and organizational

Despite these economic conditions, 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.

A slow-down in the overall state economy may lead to an anticipated tightening of state revenues, and consequently a reduction in state funding for Commission activities. With these reductions in state revenue there will be an increased emphasis on the effective and efficient use of state funds. The Commission and districts present an opportunity to address these challenges by providing a readily available structure for accountability and on-the-ground results.

Client populations, demographics client/citizen needs, preferences or expectations

SCC's and conservation district's clients are the citizens of the State of Washington, with the primary clients being those that own or manage lands. As the needs, both recognized and unrecognized, of land owners and managers change, the demand for technical assistance and the expertise needed to provide it increases. These changes increase the need for training district technical personnel, and require conservation district supervisors to deal with increasingly complex operations.

SCC is responsible for guiding operational improvements, organizational development, policies

and procedures, resolving legal questions, appointing supervisors and educating them in governance protocols. The SCC is responsible also for managing state funds that support conservation districts and their clients, and for ensuring that those funds are properly accounted for and accomplish the state's mission. Clearly the changing demands on conservation districts increase the need for office space, vehicles, technical and administrative support personnel, and office equipment.

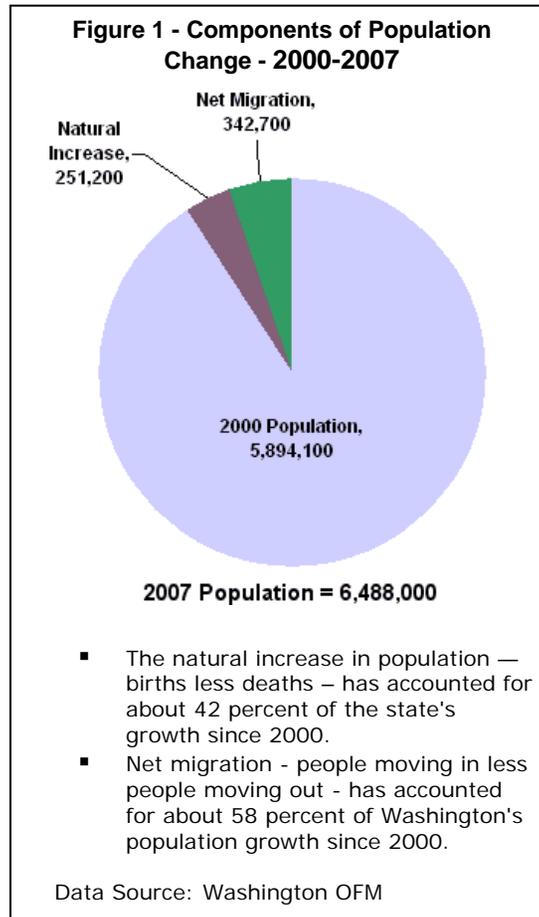
The SCC's primary clients are the 47 Conservation Districts, their Supervisors and staff. Each of the 235 Supervisors serves a three-year term, and each year approximately 78 new Supervisors are appointed and a varying number of new employees are hired. SCC is responsible for orienting and training these new participants in the state's conservation initiatives. So, although the number of conservation districts doesn't change, turnover generates a continuing demand for SCC services.

In preparing this strategic plan, sixty-five sensing interviews were conducted with conservation districts, partner organizations, SCC members and staff. Results indicated that the conservation district boards of supervisors and their employees expect that the SCC will provide funds to meet these growing needs. They expect that state funding and SCC services will be available and delivered quickly, efficiently and without interruption or unproductive requirements. They also expect a simplified application and reporting process and quick, accurate, technically sound answers to questions.

SCC is expected to lead efforts in statewide public relations and educational campaigns to promote work being done by conservation districts. All of these service demands are increasing but are expected to be delivered with modest increases in SCC staff and budgets.

The largest increase in conservation client population is occurring in the conservation districts where new land owners have purchased one to ten acre parcels and need technical assistance for conservation planning and practice implementation. Watershed monitoring data indicates that these small 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 local, state, federal, tribal agencies and non-governmental organizations that share a conservation mission. It is increasingly clear that conservation objectives are best achieved when regulatory agencies and private stakeholders collaborate and find common cause. SCC and its conservation district partners, with their technical expertise and service (non-regulatory)



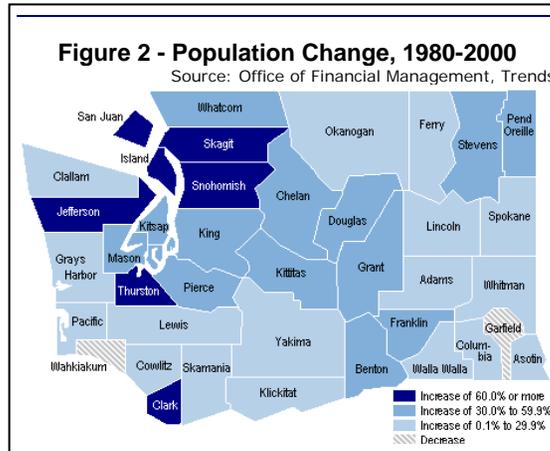
orientation, provide an effective vehicle for generating and guiding these collaborations. According to population census and OFM estimates, the population enjoying our Washington State "way of life" increased from 5,894,100 in 2000 to 6,488,000 in 2007 (Figure 1). This increase of 593,900 people along with the existing population continue to stress the availability, need, and use of our states natural resources – water, air, soil, plants, animals.

There is a corresponding increase in the number of rural land owners with relatively small operations that impact natural resources, making the need for additional conservation education and technical assistance critical. As an example of the technical assistance need, the Clark County Executive Horse Council estimated the numbers of horses in the county at 35,000, mostly on small acreages, demonstrating the need for increased technical, educational, and cost share assistance for this new client base while maintaining assistance to the existing client base.

In Figure 2, the population changes from 1980 to 2000 are illustrated with over 60% population increases in some counties.

Demand continues to increase across the state for conservation technical, educational, and cost sharing assistance. Conservation districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service have a substantial backlog of conservation practices awaiting implementation. An example is the USDA Environmental Quality Incentive Program, currently with 11,567 practices scheduled for implementation through 2016 including 861 practices that were scheduled for installation in 2007.

The demand of new land owners and managers requesting assistance coupled with demand from existing clients with on-going conservation projects has resulted in a shortage of technical assistance. This shortage leads land owners and managers (clients) to become frustrated. They often will not pursue conservation goals if they cannot obtain technical aid, cost sharing funds, or other services needed to develop conservation plans and implement practices.



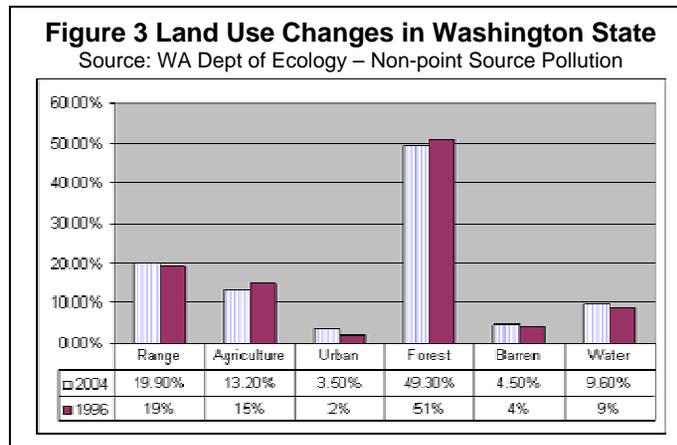
Changing demographics in land managers are coupled with changes in land use across the state. Figure 3 depicts the changing land uses with development and land use changes affecting natural resource conservation needs.

A significant challenge exists to provide incentives for land owners to protect prime, unique, and priority farmland from development pressure. While protection of these lands is critical, an equally critical component is the economics of sustaining an agricultural operation along with the farmland. Assistance to conservation districts and local governments is important in meeting these challenges. The new Office of Farmland Preservation has begun

work with a statewide task force to bring forward recommendations to the Conservation Commission.

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

land owners and managers had conservation plans and had implemented conservation practices. Land owners 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 these new client bases of small acreage, urban / suburban interfaces, but faces a severe shortage of technical personnel to address the technical assistance workload required to work with this large and increasing population of clients.

Small acreage land owners and managers are the fastest growing client group for conservation districts. Because of this, the impact of small acreage operations on natural resources will be a focus within the SCC's strategic plan. Appropriate budget increases will be necessary 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, fruit and vegetable operations require help in dealing with irrigation efficiencies and ground water contamination. Dryland operations also need continued assistance to reduce erosion and improve soil quality.

Trends in customer characteristics or demographics that 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. Most are unaware of their responsibility for resource conservation and of the agencies that are 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 potassium, 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.

Increasing food costs combined with a concern for the quality of food available, consumers are more interested in finding high quality, locally produced, food. This trend has seen an increased opportunity for land owners and managers to tap in to local markets to enhance their sales – and income, creating more opportunities for economically viable agricultural activity on working lands of all parcel sizes. Many districts are already engaged in assisting land owners & managers with plugging-in to these opportunities, but the increasing consumer interest will create more demand for this type of assistance from districts.

The services provided by SCC staff are determined by the needs and expectation of the conservation districts and the state requirements for fiscal and program oversight. At present, staff is fully occupied providing the needed services. To address emerging and unmet needs and conservation district expectations, SCC needs funds to acquire additional legal services, and to increase field and grant staff.

As state revenues are reduced, pressure is increased on state agencies to become more efficient with their program expenditures. This is also more interest in investing state resources in activities that will have direct, measurable, and on-the-ground results. The Commission and districts are ideally situated to work with other agencies to provide these kinds of activities.

A serious reduction in staffing for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to implement the already contracted practices and a directive to outsource some of their technical assistance services

is causing a serious backlog in practice application implementation.

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 between 20 to 120 hours of technical assistance. Another 20 to 120 hours is required to implement the planned conservation practices. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Social Sciences Unit has determined that an average of five 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 1,000 conservation practices under contract and waiting to be installed and/or implemented by Washington State land owners and managers but are delayed because of the lack of technical assistance to complete the work.

Other delays in technical assistance for conservation practice implementation are related to the need for increased levels of engineering services available to conservation districts due to the time consuming, expensive, and often duplicative permitting requirements, regulatory requirements, and cultural, historical, and archeological assessments.

Partners that exist and how they could enhance our ability to achieve our conservation goals

Land owners and managers throughout the state are the primary partners of the conservation districts and SCC. They are the essential participants in conservation on private lands. Without their collaboration, conservation will not occur; engaging them and, educating and working with them are the only sure route to conservation success. The most numerous potential partners are the land owners and managers who have not yet planned, completed, 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.

There are an increasing number of small acreage land owners (1 to 80 acres) who would like to manage their land in an environmentally sustainable way. These land owners may have a few horses, may have some animals for their own consumption, or they may be interested in taking advantage of consumer demand for locally produced food to provide additional income. But these land owners, especially if they have recently purchased the land, need additional assistance from districts to ensure that their activities do not impact natural resources.

Although land owners and managers 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 lasting effect. Because of this, land owner or manager responsibility for resource management is best realized when engagement is voluntary and is based on understanding and enthusiasm for underlying conservation values.

Land owners and 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 far less successful in achieving sustainable resource management.

Partnership with the **Department of Ecology** is critical to the success of key initiatives through support, funding, technical assistance and education for conservation district staff working with and through SCC. They are responsible for water quality, water resources, air quality, and the regulatory activities involved in these areas.

Partnering with the **Department of Agriculture** also is critical to key initiatives through support, funding and technical assistance to conservation district staff working with and through SCC. They are responsible for animal feeding operations, confined animal feeding operations, pesticide licensing and related regulatory activities.

As regulatory agencies, both Ecology and Agriculture are not always able to provide the close one-on-one technical assistance and support that districts are able to provide. This is due in some part to the perceptions that land owners or managers have of regulatory agencies. By working closely with Ecology and Agriculture, the WSCC and districts can accomplish voluntary, incentive based solutions, while these agencies maintain their regulatory responsibilities to ensure the resources of the state are protected.

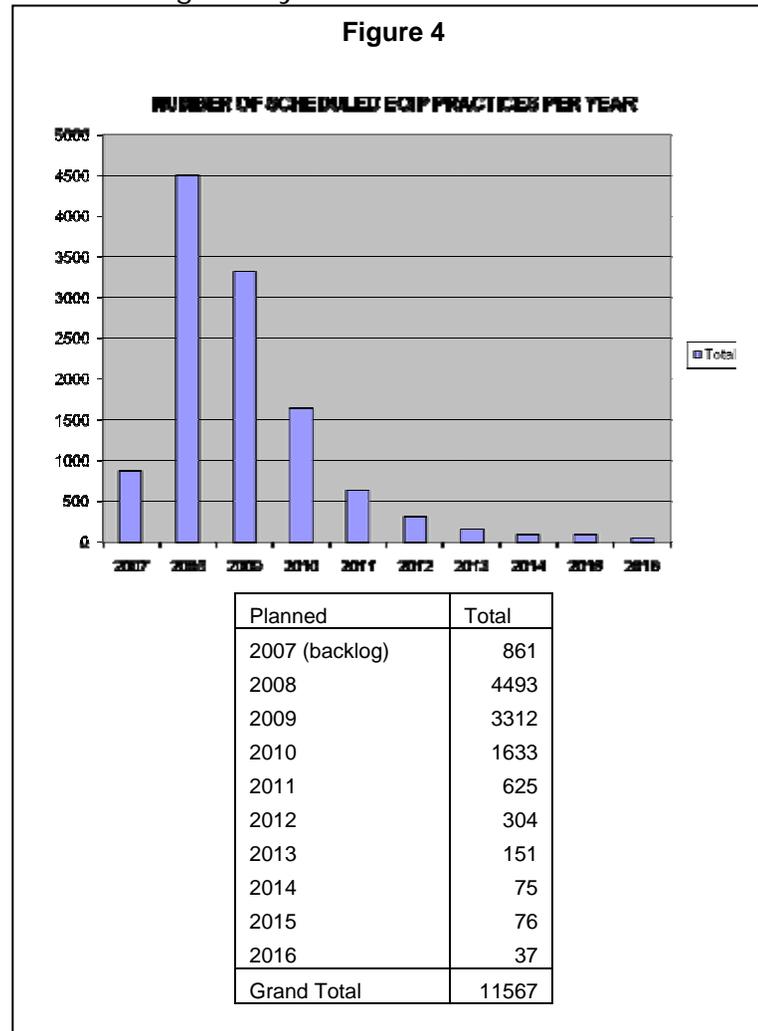
The **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** has had an ongoing 71-year partnership with the SCC and conservation districts in Washington State that continues through a unique signed Cooperative Agreement between the USDA Secretary of Agriculture, the Governor, and each conservation district. NRCS provides technical assistance to conservation district clients as well as training, practice standards and protocols, vehicles, and office space

to many conservation districts.

Staffing levels of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service have been reduced nationally from over 16,500 in the early 1980's to approximately

11,000 in 2008. There has been a corresponding decrease in NRCS personnel in Washington State from over 250 staff in 1985 to 175 staff in 2008.

This reduction in staff has adversely impacted NRCS technical assistance to land managers throughout the state; it has slowed implementation practices already approved for funding through various conservation programs. The current administration's withdrawal of funds from federal agencies has had an additional negative impact on NRCS program delivery. The agency is changing as staff provides fewer technical services, spends more time with program management, and federal policy requirements, and attempts 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.

As of June 2008, 861 conservation practices from the 2007 Environmental Quality Incentives program signup still remain to be implemented in 2008. In addition, new practice signups will continue to take place through 2016. A critical component of technical assistance is the Technical Service Provider program where state funding is matched with federal funding to increase technical assistance to producers already committed to application of conservation practices.

Other potential partners include federal natural resource agencies, such as the **USDA Farm Services Agency; Forest Service; Bureau of Land Management; Bureau of Indian Affairs; Bureau of Reclamation; and 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 Washington 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 conservation district technical assistance and provide volunteers to work in conservation district offices and on practice implementation.

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

Non-government agricultural associations can also assist by promoting conservation planning and practices to their members, by recommending ways to improve technical services and by supporting district requests for funding.

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. Land owner and manager 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.

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

What other risks and barriers or opportunities 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 in funds will be multiplied by funds from other sources.

As documented by the recent population census and the increase in the number of rural land owners or managers 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 and do not recognize local natural resource priorities. This makes collaboration between agencies at all levels critically important to successful conservation implementation.

It is important to recognize that planning and implementation rarely provide a permanent fix of a conservation need. Land owners, managers, 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 the kind of assistance needed by the agricultural community. They provide the best environment for the development of additional technical talent.

Another barrier is the ability of land owners and managers to meet cost share requirements if they are

set too high. Most agriculture and natural resource based businesses do not 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 of conservation districts to provide technical assistance, due to under-funding, will result in the return on the investment not being fully realized.

A shortage of technical assistance, which is becoming common, leads land owners and managers 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.

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

Increased cost of production, coupled with widely fluctuating 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 the 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 is coupled with a decrease in the number of traditional family owned and operated farms. These trends require conservation districts to develop the technical skills to assist larger operations and at the same time meet needs of the smaller acreage land managers. These dichotomies are becoming a serious concern to conservation district 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, and 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 and 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, the need to provide disaster relief, fund the

Iraq war, and finance the war on terrorism. The current state funds for environmental remediation are insufficient to support local conservation districts in 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 ten 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 land owners or managers have cooperated to provide the state’s most effective route to sustainable land use.

New legislation for alternative energy, ecosystem markets, bio-energy, and new agriculture production techniques 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 Chapter 89.08 provides the appropriate authorization for SCC to meet both agency and land owner and manager 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 SCC 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. This includes substantial collaboration with both state and federal agencies that have roles in the conservation mission and in providing information and reports to legislative committees and the governor’s office

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

Assessment of Internal Capacity and Financial Health

Key workforce issues that will affect agency performance

The SCC and the 47 conservation districts are known for their proven ability to get conservation projects completed on-the-ground through their effective working relations with land managers. This positive reputation among clients, agencies and organizations has placed the SCC and conservation districts in a situation where growth in programs and related staffing increases is critical to continued success. To meet the growing need for orientation, training, infrastructure, and district operations assistance, the conservation districts are requesting SCC services at a rate the agency has not experienced in the past.

SCC staff has reached a high degree of efficiency and effectiveness at providing needed services for conservation districts including oversight of the 47 conservation districts, their 235 elected or appointed supervisors, and over 240 staff. Increases in the number of grants and loans administered led to improvements in grant administration and procedures. An audit and district operations review system is currently in place.

Workforce issues must be addressed to achieve business goals

Careful management and setting strict priorities, plus the dedication of staff to getting the work done, allows the Conservation Commission to meet most of its clients' needs. But **growth in size and number of programs**, and **ever-increasing expectations** have created 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.

SCC's reputation for successful program implementation and management has led to additional programs. As **additional programs** are added to the agency, it is anticipated that additional programmatic staff will be needed to carry out these added programs.

This need is particularly evident with the addition of such new programs as the Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP). As with most new programs, OFP will require additional staff. New programs take an extraordinary amount of workforce in the startup phase, in particular when new task groups are forming and beginning operation.

The SCC's and conservation district 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.

SCC has a shared position with the Department of Ecology for a staff member 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.

Most of the natural resource issues that are not yet addressed and that are increasing in number and complexity derive from the rapid increase in the number of small land owners 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 land owners. Many larger land owners and managers have a deeper knowledge of the land and the value of conservation.

New land owners 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 conservation 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 conservation districts have the capability (technical expertise) to address these emerging issues, but they do not have the capacity to fully meet that challenge. Increases in needed engineering and assistance with cultural resource requirements have slowed the accomplishment of conservation goals.

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 land owners 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 that their need for assistance has not diminished. Nor have the needs

diminished for state agencies responsible for monitoring and regulating these operations.

Need or opportunity for changes in service delivery methods

SCC grants staff are continuing to improve and make more efficient the agencies grants contracting, vouchering, administration, fill-in forms, and reporting systems, including the use of electronic vouchering.

Field staff will be identifying ways to reduce late night travel, fuel consumption, and risk through the use of electronic communication. However, in-person meetings continue to be most effective for working with conservation district supervisors and staff.

Several strategies outlined in the information technology section of the strategic plan will be implemented. These strategies will improve agency capability with geospatial data management and graphics generation, also updating conservation district boundaries, and conservation practice locations, web-based conservation practice management, long range and annual planning information, and reporting systems.

Collaboration on the use of resource data information with other state and federal agencies will be an opportunity for change in the current service delivery including the ability to capture natural resource inventory and to monitor impacts data.

Strategies require an increase in staff, need for more space or change in the type of space, maintenance and operations needs

Staff increases are identified above. A more “neutral” office space location could provide advantages to the current location that is not conducive to meeting with clients concerned about actions from regulatory agencies. The current layout of office space is not suitable for discussion of sensitive topics and needs of clients. Expansion of staff for new programs will require a larger and different type of space requirements.

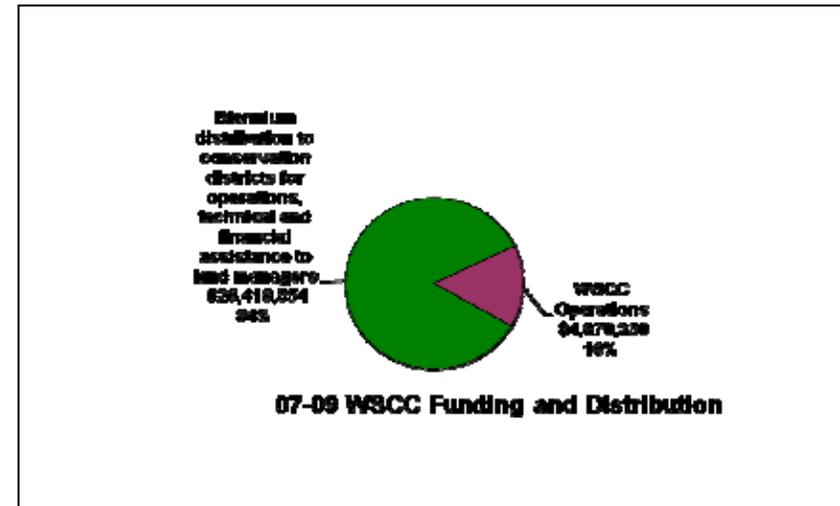


Figure 5

Technology investments will be needed

The technology investments needed include updated computer hardware and software, mobile communications technology, transition wireless computing, collaborative computing environment such as SharePoint, document management technology, geospatial data management and graphics technology, web-based conservation management and reporting system, video conferencing technology, and upgrade core servers.

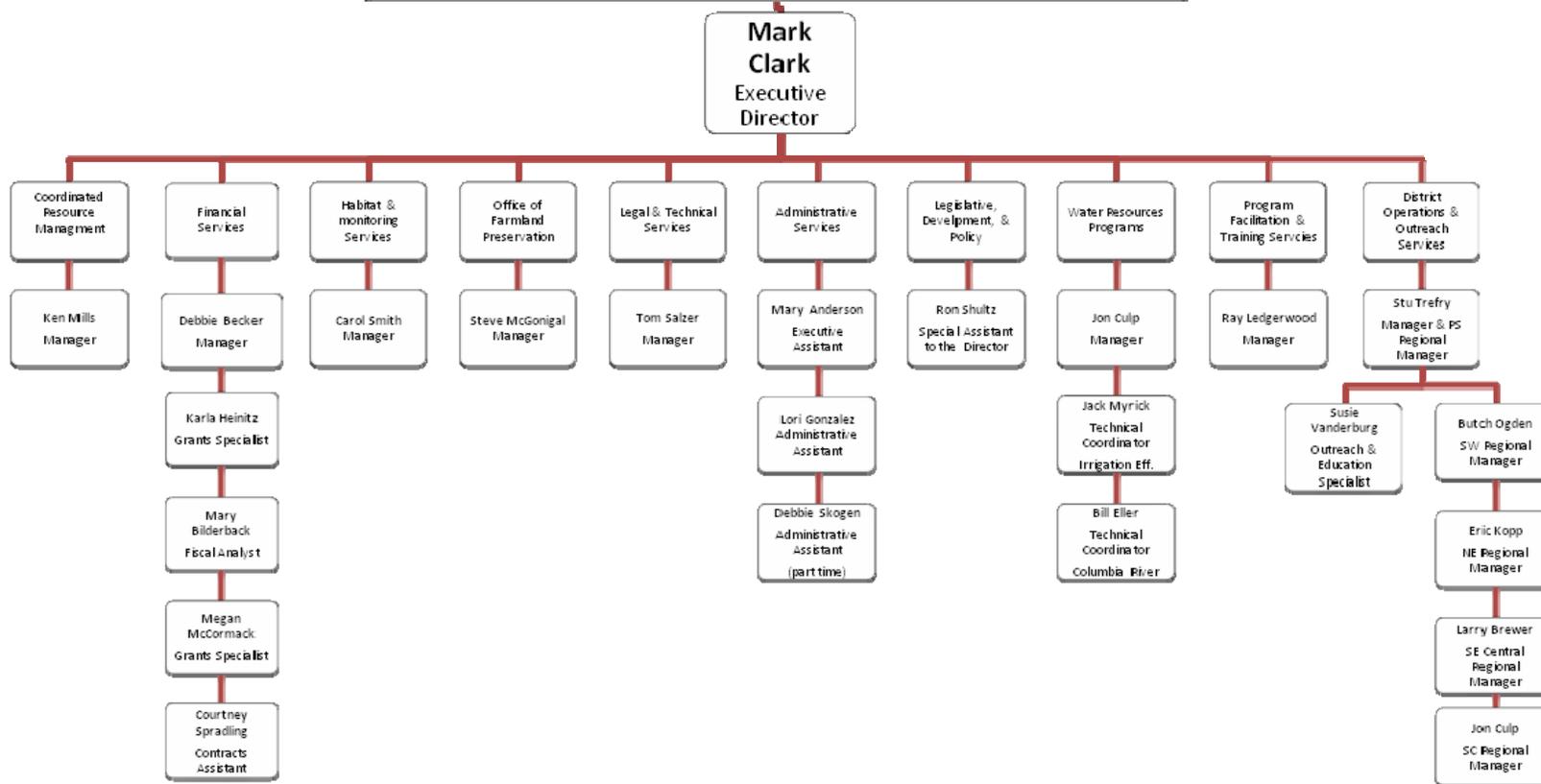
Trends in revenue sources, fund balance changes, or cost pressures that may affect financial sustainability

The Commission operates in financial balance. However, 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.

The current forecasts for state revenue shortfalls could impact delivery of services. Increases in transportation costs, in particular fuel are significant to the field staff providing on-site services.

Washington State Conservation Commission Members

Bill Boyum - Chair Lynn Brown Dean Longrie Tracy Eriksen James L. Peters	Lynn Bahrych Pete Jacoby Fred Colvin Lee Faulconer Melodie Selby
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Key Agency Activities

A001 – Technical Expertise and Program Delivery 8.7 FTE

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

SCC Strategic Priorities: Community Outreach and Education, Water Use, Water Quality, Farmland Preservation, Conservation Markets, Puget Sound, Agriculture Issues, Forestry and Grazing, Small Acreage and Urban / Suburban, and CREP and Other Habitat Restoration.

The SCC Members and staff provide the statewide organizational framework and network for technical expertise and conservation program delivery through the 47 conservation districts. The conservation districts are providing the unique and critical connection to local land managers for conservation program delivery. The conservation district infrastructure provides technical and educational assistance, and incentives to local land managers that are willing to implement conservation systems to improve, enhance, and/or protect soil, water, air, plants, and animal natural resources. Conservation districts identify critical natural resource issues, and goals through the development of five-year plans, annual plans, and budget requests for conservation program implementation. Examples include: Community Outreach and Education, Water Use, Water Quality, Farmland Preservation, Conservation Markets and Energy, Puget Sound, Agriculture Issues, Forestry and Grazing, Small Acreage and Urban / Suburban, and CREP and Other Habitat Restoration.

Performance Measures:

- Number of land owners/managers assisted.
- Number of conservation plans developed.
- Number of conservation practices and systems applied.
- Number of acres benefited.
- Miles of stream segments benefited.
- Increased number of water bodies meeting water quality standards.
- Amount of water placed into trust with long term agreements, including the cubic feet per second.
- Number of homes that have firewise practices implemented.
- Acres enrolled in a farmland preservation program.
- Rate of conversion drops in areas that are identified for preservation.
- Ecosystem purchases and sales volume are recordable and reportable.

- Numbers of successful cultural resource assessments related to conservation practice implementation.
- Number of outreach activities and education and training events.
- Number of people who have been contacted or participated through targeted educational activities.
- Number of new conservation district assessment ordinances adopted by local government.
- Measurable increase in voters in conservation district elections.

A002 – Conservation District Operations and Accountability 8.66 FTE

Statewide Strategy: Improving the quality of Washington’s environment and the ability of state government to achieve results efficiently and effectively

SCC Strategic Priority: Conservation District Operations and Accountability

The SCC staff provides direct guidance and oversight to the 47 conservation districts. They assist in orientations and training for conservation district supervisors and staff, coordinating collaborations and assuring compliance with state and federal requirements, compliance with open public meetings, annual and long range planning, annual reporting of accomplishments, district operations reviews, assistance with internal audits, assistance with workload planning, personnel recruitment, sharing best operation practices for district operations, and oversight of elections and appointment processes. The overall goal of these services is effective, functioning conservation districts covering the entire state. The emphasis is on quality of leadership, serving the public good, and accountability for conservation program delivery that addresses natural resource issues.

Performance Measures

- Number of supervisor elections and appointments successfully certified.
- All conservation districts with current, high quality long range and annual plans of work.
- District operations information and materials developed and distributed.
- Number of training events held.
- District operations reviews completed and deficiencies corrected.
- Annual internal audits and state audits completed.
- Reduction in audit findings.

A003 – SCC Operations and Administration **5.65 FTE**

Statewide Strategy: Improving the quality of Washington’s environment and the ability of state government to achieve results efficiently and effectively

SCC Strategic Priorities: SCC Capacity, Partnering, Funding, and Information Technology.

The Washington State Conservation Commission Members oversee state funding of the 47 conservation districts and the private-land owner 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 serves as liaisons to Congress, the Washington 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; and certifies conservation districts elections and the appointment processes.

Performance Measures:

- Number of services provided by SCC staff to conservation districts as outlined in core functions.
- Positive constituency feedback including conservation districts, land managers, agencies and organizations.
- Funding levels increased for conservation projects, technical assistance, incentives and education activities.
- Documentation of memorandums of understanding representing formal agreement for shared resources.
- Number of projects and collaborative work completed with partner organizations and agencies.
- All ISB requirements and deadlines are met, including investment plan, disaster recovery plan (tested annually), IT Portfolio, Security Plan, Section 903 expenditures, and services needed through ISB.

Strategic Plan Approval

The Conservation Commission Members approved this Strategic Plan at a Special telephonic Commission meeting on June 9, 2008.

Signature/Date		Signature/Date	
Signature:		Signature:	
Print first and last name: Mark Clark		Print first and last name: Bill Boyum	
Title: Executive Director	Date: June 9, 2008	Title: Chair	Date: June 9, 2008