

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



75 Years of Conservation

# ABOUT WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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## VISION

We envision a thriving community that protects and benefits from clean and plentiful water, productive working lands, and resilient natural habitats.

## MISSION

We form partnerships with Whatcom County residents and entities to advance resiliency and ecological processes on working lands, residential landscapes, waterways, and open spaces for current and future generations.



# WELCOME TO YOUR WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT



We are pleased to present our first full Annual Report to the people we serve - you, the Whatcom Conservation District community. With the stability and enhanced capacity provided by rate-based, local funding, WCD has been able to serve more farms, protect more natural resources, and educate many more local stewards of our community.

To get here, we implemented a strategy to listen and learn. Throughout the spring of 2022, we engaged the Whatcom community about the work we do, the value we bring, and the tools needed to build resilience in the face of growth and climate change. We interviewed our partners and surveyed the people who live in Whatcom County to understand your priorities.

Once we built a solid foundation of information based on community priorities, we developed a strategic plan and submitted it with a rate proposal to the Whatcom Council. Together, these secured a modest base of stable funding that will continue to leverage grants from federal, state, and local sources. In October 2022, the Whatcom County Council passed legislation that approved funding our work with a per-household annual rate of \$2.99-\$5.00.

With that modest organizational, rate-based annual funding of approximately \$450,000, in 2023 Whatcom Conservation District brought an additional \$3.8M into our community from federal, state, and local sources to:

- Build our region's climate resiliency & preparedness
- Improve fish & wildlife habitat
- Help people manage water sustainably
- Improve the productivity and sustainability of working lands
- Improve and expand the local food system

2023 is the first year we received direct funding from the residents of Whatcom County, and this is our report to you. We're excited for the future and invite you to look through our Annual Report to find ways in which we can work together.

*Heather Christianson*  
Board Chair

*Brandy Reed*  
District Manager

# THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



Whatcom County Council • City councils of Bellingham, Blaine, Everson, Ferndale, Lynden, Nooksack, and Sumas • Lummi Nation • Nooksack Indian Tribe • Federal partners such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency • Other governmental entities such as Department of Natural Resources, Department of Ecology, Whatcom Water Alliance, Whatcom Clean Water Program, school districts, watershed improvement districts, shellfish protection districts, water and sewer districts, and fire districts • Non-governmental organizations such as Whatcom Family Farmers, Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association, Whatcom Land Trust, Whatcom Million Trees, RE Sources, Wild Whatcom, Garden of the Salish Sea, Whatcom Chapter of the Backcountry Horsemen of Washington, Whatcom County Cattlemen's Association, Whatcom Coalition of Environmental Educators • Residents, land managers, and landowners in Whatcom County • State and federal policymakers from Washington State Legislative Districts 40 and 42, and Federal Congressional District 2

# WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT BY THE NUMBERS



**2,232**

STUDENTS TAUGHT



**66.5**

ACRES OF RIPARIAN HABITAT RESTORED



**3**

WILDFIRE RISK REDUCTION PROJECTS



**37,500**

NATIVE PLANTS DISTRIBUTED



**4,422**

STEWARDS EDUCATED



**20**

HOMEOWNERS WERE ASSISTED WITH FREE WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENTS



**8**

FARMS INVOLVED IN CONSERVATION RESEARCH



**100**

EQUIPMENT RENTALS TO HELP FARMERS



**14**

FARMERS RECEIVED COST SHARE ASSISTANCE ON PROJECTS



**163**

FARMERS ASSISTED



**\$1,190,878**

COST-SHARE TO IMPLEMENT CONSERVATION PRACTICES



**471,200**

GALLONS OF WATER SAVED

# PROGRAM

## CLIMATE RESILIENCY & PREPAREDNESS

Climate change is increasing flooding, impacting agriculture and forests, and exacerbating pressures on stream flows and groundwater recharge. Our climate programs focus on improving fire preparedness and forest health, planting native trees, and building healthy soil to store carbon.

Cover crops are a way to help soil retain moisture and build resiliency. WCD added a free cover crop seed program in 2023.

WCD is implementing a water-use rebate program for residents and a water curriculum for local school districts that are improving water use savings among residential ratepayers.

Each May, WCD engages residents during Wildfire Awareness Month in addition to year-round support on home risk assessments, fire preparedness planning, and community enrollment in Firewise USA.



Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Chipping Event

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

**27.5** Acres Cover Crop Planted

**4** On-Farm Carbon Assessments

**18** Communities Educated on Wildfire Risk

**471,200** Gallons Water Conserved

Funded a New Forest Stewardship Program



Disaster Preparedness Workshop

# HIGHLIGHTS

## FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT IMPROVEMENT

The Nooksack River and coastal watersheds in Whatcom County provide critical freshwater habitat for endangered Chinook salmon and Steelhead. WCD offers voluntary and incentive-based programs to foster salmon recovery efforts and help landowners steward the land. Woodland and aquatic restoration is critical to recovering wildlife habitat as we face climate change.

WCD's habitat improvement focus area this year was the South Fork Nooksack River watershed, home to a dwindling population of spring Chinook salmon. WCD partnered with three landowners to plant large buffers and install fencing to protect these salmon.

WCD also offers information and education, low-cost native plants, and technical support to residents interested in restoring habitats large and small along Whatcom fish-bearing streams and wetlands.



South Fork Nooksack River Watershed Riparian Planting



Volunteer at Earth Day Planting Party

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

**48,250** Native Trees & Shrubs Planted

**69** Acres Native Trees & Shrubs Planted

**16,900** Feet of Stream Bank Restored

**3** Fish Passage Barriers Removed

**7,100** Feet of Fish Habitat Opened

# PROGRAM

## COMMUNITY STORMWATER & HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS

Our region experiences heavy seasonal rainfall and storm events that wash oil and other pollutants into our streams, rivers, and the Salish Sea degrading these ecosystems and impacting the health of people and salmon.

WCD partners with local municipalities and landowners to protect water resources by providing information, technical assistance, and financial incentives. In 2023, we helped the City of Lynden and Port of Bellingham identify urban forestry and green infrastructure actions and applied for implementation funding.

We help people use native landscaping in Whatcom backyards to build wildlife and pollinator habitats, infiltrate water, and reduce flood risk. This year we worked with Lake Whatcom and Birch Bay landowners to reduce pollutants entering waterways and improve overall water quality.



Homeowners posing with their newly planted native plant garden

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

**12** Residential LID Projects Implemented

**52,915** Sq. Ft. of Lawn Replaced with Native Plants

Implemented Pet Waste & Septic Behavior-Change Programs

**1,219,743** Gallons Water Infiltrated

**37,500** Low-Cost Native Plants Sold to 1047 Residents



Native Plants Ready To Be Planted To Protect Lake Whatcom

# HIGHLIGHTS

## WORKING LANDS PRODUCTIVITY & CONSERVATION

The fertile river bottom soils of Whatcom County are productive agricultural lands that provide food, fiber, and fuel, recharge aquifers, reduce the severity of stormwater and flooding, and provide habitat.

Over the last decade, WCD contributed to the upgrade of 2,504 acres of Whatcom shellfish growing areas. In 2023, we continued to help people steward upper watershed lands to prevent pollution and recover the health of our bays.

WCD offers free programs and financial assistance to help farmers enhance natural resources and farm sustainability by managing manure, planting hedgerows, and improving livestock paddocks for animal health and water quality.

WCD's Nutrient Management Training and annual Farm Expo provide farmers with opportunities to learn from other farmers.



Soil sampling for nutrient management & tillth



Heavy use area improvement with Whatcom CD Small Grants Program

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

**20** Farm Conservation Plans Written

**\$409,801** Assistance to Local Farmers

**20** Manure Spreader Rentals

**16** Soil Samples Analyzed

**497** Farmers Attending Trainings

# PROGRAM



Goat Dairy Farmer With Goats & New Rotational Grazing System

## COMMUNITY AGRICULTURE & LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

A healthy and diverse local food system is part of a resilient community. WCD collaborates with our partners to grow local products.

WCD supports local agriculture and farmers by providing a low-cost equipment loan program. This year, we added a no-till seed drill and had the most renters to date for the poultry processing equipment.

WCD received a USDA Equity in Conservation grant with Skagit Conservation District to work with cultural ambassadors and pilot focus groups in the Latino community to build culturally relevant programming and create written materials and online video resources to improve access to our programs.

WCD participates in the Whatcom County Food Policy Steering Committee and helps implement priorities in the Food System Action Plan.

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

**70** Poultry Equipment Rentals

Purchased No-till Seed Drill

**10** No-Till Drill Rentals

**12** Food Policy Council Meetings

**21** Food System Action Plan Priorities under way



Whatcom CD Staff & Poultry Processing Equipment For Rent

# HIGHLIGHTS

## COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

WCD is an independent, non-regulatory agency, a trusted mentor and partner of Whatcom's residents and landowners. We partner with people to improve the sustainability and productivity of their land, large or small. Whatcom is home to rural farms, a destination city, and vibrant small towns – Our Communications and Engagement program centers on helping community members access the expertise and programs that work for them.

We use community-based social marketing, traditional communications such as our newsletter and website, peer-to-peer learning opportunities like the farm speaker series, and community events like the annual Native Plant Sale and Celebration to help Whatcom residents connect with and protect our natural resources.

Through our diverse efforts, we are building a deep connection to place and support for working lands



Whatcom CD highlights farmers in Conservation Stories

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

4 Whatcom County Committees Engaged

11% Increase in Website Traffic

3 High-quality Digital Library Resources Developed on Stewardship Topics

30% Increase in Social Media Presence

1,109 Residents Received 1:1 Assistance



Run with the Chums Smolt Sprint Starting Line Up

# PROGRAM

## ADULT, YOUTH & COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION

WCD partners with local people ready to take action while we prepare the next generation to create a healthy and resilient community. We reach Whatcom's diverse residents - youth and adult, urban and rural.

We introduce youth to environmental science in outdoor settings, preparing them for careers and building appreciation for nature. We partnered with local school districts on the Snow to Sea Program, bringing students to Whatcom farms to explore the intersection of agriculture and watershed stewardship. Our tools include the interactive Whatcom Explorer: Mobile Watershed trailer that connects youth with their local watershed.

We also partnered with five Whatcom farms for our Farm Speaker Series showcasing innovative technologies and practices because we understand that sometimes people learn best from their friends and neighbors.



Farm speaker series presentation

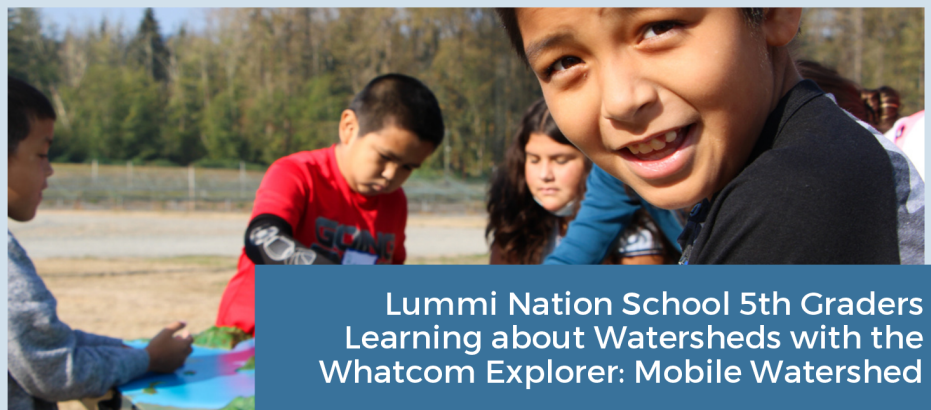
## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

2,232 Students Receiving Environmental Education

18 Schools in 4 Districts Engaged Through the Watershed Curriculum

4,000 Residents Reached Through 20 Community Events

18 Events Coordinated to Reach 2,500 Participants



Lummi Nation School 5th Graders Learning about Watersheds with the Whatcom Explorer: Mobile Watershed

# HIGHLIGHTS

## ADMINISTRATION, OPERATIONS & FUNDING DEVELOPMENT

We are fortunate to live in a place of beauty and abundance. We take stewardship seriously, so we're building a strong conservation district for a beautiful and resilient Whatcom County.

With your support, we stabilized operations and secured new funding for community priorities, including \$93,700 in federal Inflation Reduction Act funds and \$1,636,000 in state Climate Commitment Act funds. In 2023, \$1 of rate revenue leveraged \$7 in other funds, and \$1 in local revenue leveraged \$2.5 in federal and state funds.

In 2024, we will use these and other secured grants to:

- help minority farmers access farming support
- engage neighborhoods in improving wildfire resiliency
- collaborate with cities to improve urban tree and forest cover
- assist landowners in stewarding small woodlots and forests
- aid residents and farmers in conserving water



Nooksack Headwaters



Foraging for Shellfish

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

**\$3,966,000** Project Funds Secured

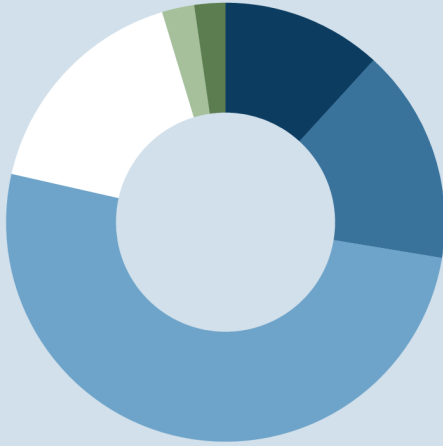
**28** Projects Funded

**9** New Initiatives Launched

**28** Ongoing Initiatives Sustained

**\$1.18 M** In Financial Assistance to Community Members

# FINANCIAL REPORT



Revenue By Source

## REVENUE BY SOURCE

■ Rates & Charges	\$450,023
■ Grants - Federal	\$604,127
■ Grants - State	\$1,944,758
■ Grants - Local	\$641,558
■ Native Plant Sale	\$90,994
■ Misc.	\$86,891
	<hr/>
	\$3,818,351



Spending By Priority

## SPENDING BY PRIORITY

■ Climate Resiliency & Preparedness	\$261,500
■ Fish & Wildlife Habitat Improvement	\$1,142,752
■ Community Stormwater & Habitat Improvements	\$263,517
■ Working Lands, Community Agriculture, Local Food	\$877,543
■ Communications & Engagement	\$107,539
■ Adult, Youth, & Community-based Education	\$118,809
■ Administration, Operations, & Funding	\$448,213
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	\$3,219,873

## BALANCE SHEET (12/31/23)

Current Assets	\$856,139
Fixed Assets	\$560,000

<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$1,416,139</b>
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Current Liabilities	\$15,122
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<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$15,122</b>
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Retained Earnings	\$807,124
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Net Income	\$539,892
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<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>\$1,401,017</b>
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<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Equity</b>	<b>\$1,416,139</b>
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Whatcom Conservation District is a cash-based special purpose district. Some 2023 revenue reimbursed prior year expenses.

# MEET THE TEAM

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS



**HEATHER  
CHRISTIANSON**  
CHAIR



**SUZZI  
SNYDAR**  
VICE CHAIR



**VALERI WADE**  
SECRETARY &  
AUDITOR



**ALAN CHAPMAN**  
SUPERVISOR



**FRED BERMAN**  
SUPERVISOR



**LARRY DAVIS**  
ASSOCIATE



Back Row: Robert Walters, Zen Wilhelm, Andrew Phay, Josh Kursky, Aneka Sweeney, Brandy Reed, Adam Brayton, Trevor Gearhart, Emily Hirsch, & Katherine Kiendl. Front Row: Elizabeth Link, Tristan Simons, Alexis Bryson, Dawn Bekenyi, Wayne Chaudiere, Cynthia May, Alexi Guddal, & Corina Cheever. Not Pictured is Frank Corey



# CONTACT US

**WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

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**75 Years of Conservation**