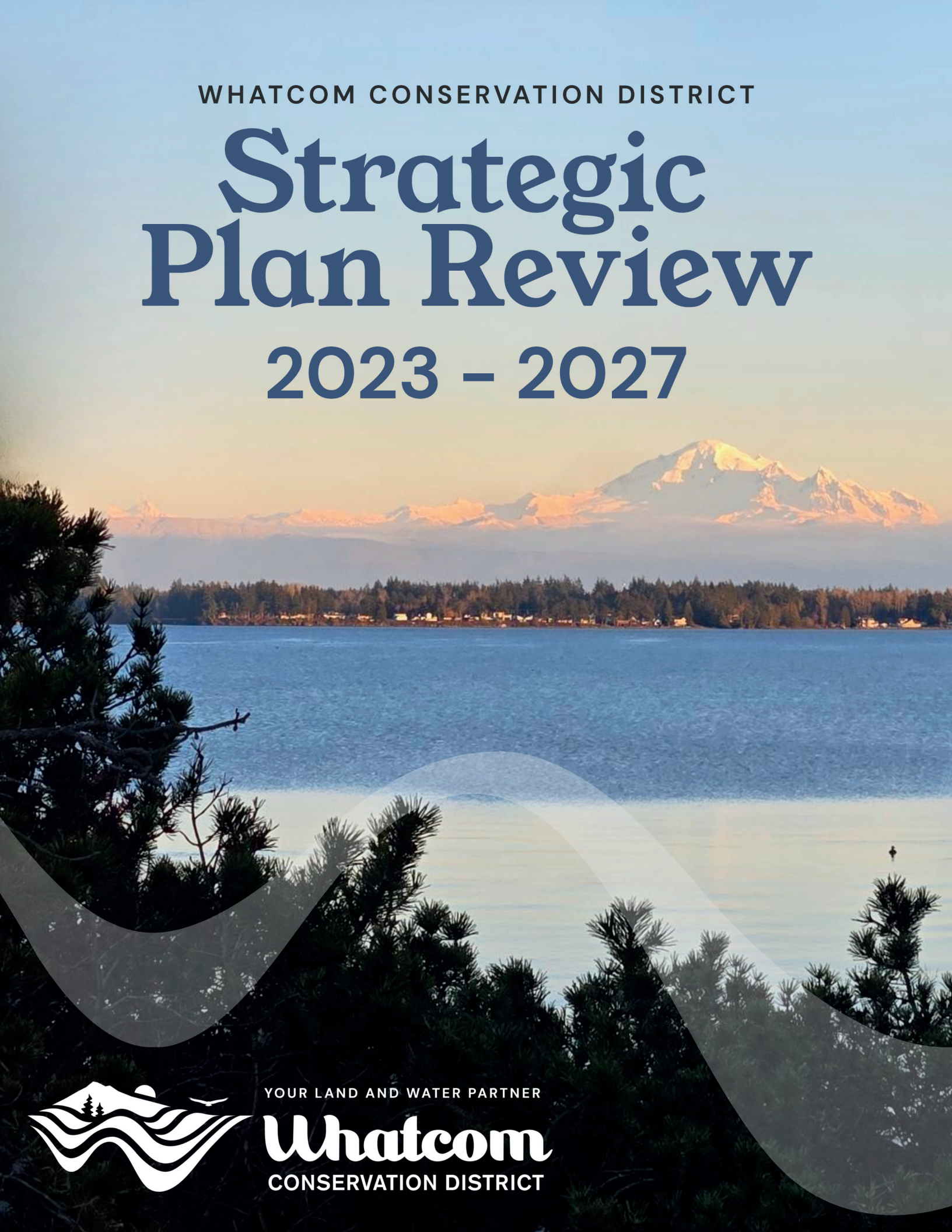
WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Strategic Plan Review

2023 – 2027



YOUR LAND AND WATER PARTNER

Whatcom
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Message from Leadership

Welcome to the Whatcom Conservation District Strategic Plan Review! Our Strategic Plan serves as our roadmap for reaching the goals and fulfilling the vision we built with our community in our **Long Range Plan and Program of Work** in 2022. That work helped us define how we can best serve our community and develop metrics to measure our accomplishments. Thank you for partnering with us in this journey to build a healthy and resilient Whatcom County.

With a foundation of stable funding from you, the people we serve, we are leveraging federal, state, and other funding to move forward in all the areas we prioritized together:

- Climate Resilience
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat Improvement
- Community Stormwater and Habitat Improvement
- Working Lands Productivity and Conservation
- Community Agriculture and the Local Food System
- Adult, Youth, and Community Education
- Communications and Engagement
- Administration, Operations, and Finance

Through these pages, we hope to lay out the path we are traveling together. We think the future of our collaboration looks bright – thanks for stepping into it with us.

Valeri Wade
Board Chair

Brandy Reed
Executive Director

Suzzi Snydar	Heather Christianson	Fred Berman	Alan Chapman	Larry Davis
Vice Chair	*Secretary/Treasurer*	*Member*	*Member*	*Associate*



Land Acknowledgement

Whatcom Conservation District respectfully acknowledges that the territory where we live and work is the ancestral homeland of the Coast Salish people, which includes the Lhaq'temish (Lummi Nation) and Nuxwsa'7aq (Nooksack Indian Tribe), who are the original stewards of this land since time immemorial. There have been significant losses and impacts since European settlement. We honor the Tribes' work as guardians of what remains, and we commit to action and building lasting relationships to grow together so that all may prosper.



Our Vision, Mission & Values



VISION

We envision a thriving community that enjoys clean and plentiful water, productive working lands, and resilient natural habitats from generation to generation.

MISSION

We partner with people and organizations in Whatcom county to solve environmental challenges and support the health of working lands, residential landscapes, local waterways, and open spaces.

VALUES

To support our mission, we commit to:

- **Collaboration** – We serve all people of Whatcom county. We respect the needs and unique characteristics of our diverse community. We build strategic partnerships to maximize impact.

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- **Impact** – We affirm the relationships between land, water, and other environmental factors. We support agricultural land management and local food production. We perform our work with scientific and social integrity.

- **Compassion** – We invest in our staff and community and follow equitable and inclusive policies.

Our Role & Strategies

WHERE

Whatcom Conservation District supports a healthy environment and working lands in Whatcom county. We develop and implement programs to protect and conserve soil, water, air, prime and unique farmland, woodlands, native flora and fauna, and other natural resources. Our work in Whatcom County is part of a larger context and is best implemented collaboratively.

WHO

Whatcom Conservation District serves all members of the Whatcom county community. To deliver the most impact, we collaborate with other public agencies, both local and statewide, non-profit organizations, the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe, and local land managers and residents. We partner with commercial farmers, small-acreage farmers, woodland managers, and urban homeowners and residents to protect and improve sustainable ecosystems in any context. Working together, we improve the health of our interconnected waterways, air quality, habitats, and working lands.

HOW

Whatcom Conservation District supports a sustainable Whatcom county by providing expertise, resources, demonstrations, education, equipment, and sharing opportunities with our community. Our service delivery pathways range from workshops to participating in community events, partnering with school districts to bring sustainability science into the classroom, supporting implementation of best practices on the farms and woodlands, providing native plants for rural, suburban, and urban properties, renting small-scale farm equipment, and hosting volunteer service events to expand native habitat and share habitat expertise.



Strategic Priorities



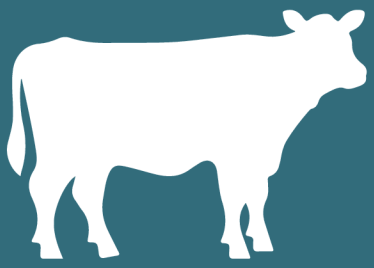
CLIMATE RESILIENCE & PREPAREDNESS

Increase resilience through carbon sequestering and carbon emissions reducing practices * Promote forest health * Reduce wildfire risks * Increase water use efficiency practices and address water management concerns * Assist working land managers in adapting to extreme weather events and changing climate conditions



FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT

Improve riparian areas along fish-bearing streams and other waterways * Increase access to fish habitat by removing fish passage barriers * Improve in-stream fish habitat by installing habitat structures * Restore and enhance upland and wetland habitat and wildlife corridors * Improve shellfish habitat



WORKING LAND PRODUCTIVITY & CONSERVATION

Improve water quality and soil health * Promote, retain, and increase agricultural lands in viable agricultural production * Conduct research and effectiveness monitoring to demonstrate effective soil, water, and habitat practices



COMMUNITY AGRICULTURE & LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

Collaborate with funders and partners to expand the delivery of community agriculture and local food system programs and projects



COMMUNITY STORMWATER & HABITAT

Implement green infrastructure projects to improve stormwater quality and reduce stormwater runoff volumes * Conduct education and outreach to build awareness and promote personal actions to prevent stormwater pollution * Help Whatcom communities enhance and steward urban tree canopies and frontyard and backyard habitat.



ADULT, YOUTH, & COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Utilize Community-Based Social Marketing methods to increase the adoption of priority conservation behaviors * Implement education programming to reach diverse audiences using age-appropriate messaging and a variety of engagement pathways



COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT

Develop and implement a Whatcom Conservation District communications strategy and build and communicate our unique identity * Foster collaboration on natural resources conservation across constituencies through commonality



ADMINSTRATION, OPERATIONS, & FUNDING

Attract, retain, and develop talented staff * Maintain Whatcom Conservation District facilities and equipment * Continue to update key elements of Whatcom Conservation District's administrative systems

Climate Resilience & Preparedness

WHATCOM THRIVES IN A CHANGING CLIMATE



STRATEGIC VISION

Whatcom county farm operators, landowners, and residents are sequestering carbon, irrigating and using water efficiently, reducing wildfire risks, and readily recovering from extreme weather events.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Improved soil carbon sequestration
- Reduced conversion of woodlands and forests
- Reduced wildfire-associated risks and losses
- Increased use of water efficiency technology
- Improved weather response and recovery



PRIORITY ACTIONS AND MEASURES

CARBON

- Launch carbon farm planning services
- Launch cover crop planning services
- Implement cover cropping practices
- Connect farmers to energy audit services

MEASURES

Carbon emissions reduced, carbon sequestered, best practices implemented

FORESTS

- Launch forest stewardship (FS) planning services
- Conduct FS trainings, tours, and events
- Implement FS practices
- Provide current use enrollment services

MEASURES

Forest health improved, trainings and events provided, best practices implemented, enrollment

WILDFIRE

- Expand residential and community fire risk management services
- Conduct trainings and fuels reduction events
- Implement risk management practices

MEASURES

Wildfire resiliency improved, trainings and events provided, best practices implemented

WATER

- Promote water use efficiency practices
- Implement water conservation practices
- Educate youth on water use efficiency
- Measure and report on water savings

MEASURES

Efficiency practices adopted, students educated, water systems improved

WEATHER

- Help farmers plan for extreme weather event resiliency
- Mobilize resources to help farmers respond to extreme weather-related impacts

MEASURES

Adaptive management plans prepared, technical and financial resources delivered

IN YOUR WORDS...

Biochar for fuels reduction and carbon sequestration

"We are always looking for ways to be better stewards of our 5 acres. Biochar fits well with our regenerative homestead efforts."

- Jessica Lee



Fish & Wildlife Habitat Improvement

THRIVING FISH & WILDLIFE



STRATEGIC VISION

Whatcom county is a place where fish and wildlife thrive in abundant and healthy forests, streams, rivers, and the Salish Sea and co-exist with vibrant towns and cities and productive agricultural lands.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Improved streamside riparian areas
- Improved freshwater fish habitat
- Increased access to quality and productive upstream habitat
- Improved wetland and upland habitat connectivity
- Stabilized plant and wildlife populations
- Improved productivity of shellfish harvesting areas



PRIORITY ACTIONS AND MEASURES

RIPARIAN HABITAT

- Fund, plan, plant and maintain buffers on agricultural land
- Fund, plan, plant and maintain riparian areas on rural residential, commercial, and other lands

MEASURES

Funds secured, acres and miles planted maintained

STREAM HABITAT

- Collaborate with Tribes and other partners
- Fund, plan, design, and construct fish passage barrier removal projects
- Fund, plan, design, and construct in-stream habitat enhancement

MEASURES

Project identified, funds secured, barriers removed, structrures installed

OTHER HABITAT

- Collaborate with partners to improve upland and wetland habitat connectivity
- Fund, plan, and plant hedgerows and pollinator gardens
- Fund, plan, design, and plant wetland enhancement projects

MEASURES

Partnerships and funding secured, acres planted and maintained

SHELLFISH

- Secure funding to assist tribal efforts to improve substrate in shellfish growing areas
- Secure funding to assist tribal efforts to improve tide gates and other infrastructure in tribal shellfish growing operations

MEASURES

Projects identified, funds secured, projects implemented

IN YOUR WORDS...

Salmon Recovery Riparian Program

"We are doing a third to a quarter bigleaf maple trees in this planting. It doesn't really matter what we plant [for the fish] as long as they grow up and give a good canopy for shade."

– Elvin Kalsbeek





Working Land Productivity & Conservation

HEALTHY PRODUCTIVE FARMS



STRATEGIC VISION

Whatcom county working lands are retained, protected from environmental, population, and climate threats and operate within a strong and vibrant local food system.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Improved health of working land soils and water
- Retained, increased, and protected viable agricultural lands
- Effective agriculture-friendly conservation practices
- Demonstrated improvement in soil, water, and habitat on agricultural lands



PRIORITY ACTIONS AND MEASURES

SOIL & WATER

- Plan and implement water quality protecting and manure management best practices
- Conduct soil testing to maintain soil health and water quality
- Utilize water quality data to prioritize work

MEASURES

Plans, soil samples, equipment loans, best practices implemented

RETENTION

- Assist with accessing farm bill programs and services
- Assist with accessing current use and easement programs
- Support succession planning and new farmer training

MEASURES

Programs accessed, best practices implemented, benefits leveraged

RESEARCH

- Test and document the effectiveness of conservation practices
- Explore and apply new innovative technologies
- Collect water quality data and contribute to county-wide data visualization

MEASURES

Practices tested and used, data driven decisions and communication

IN YOUR WORDS...

Hedgerows - living fences

"The hedgerow is gorgeous. We have a lot more birds on the site now. I am so excited to see the effect it's having of blocking the road visually and the traffic sounds. I think it makes the horses more comfortable and less stressed."

- *Kim Barron and Amy Gospodinovich*

SPOTLIGHT ON

Flower Feather Farm

Suzanne Chandler discovered she was eligible for two Whatcom CD grants that helped her manage roof water runoff, and install new footings in her goat and chicken pens. With this Whatcom CD support, water across her farm is better managed and runoff is cleaner.





Community Agriculture & Local Food System

HEALTHY FOOD FOR ALL



STRATEGIC VISION

Whatcom county's local food system is strong, where everyone has access to local, healthy, affordable food, and community and school gardens and other programs bring food and nature into food deserts and built environments.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Expanded partnerships to innovate and implement priority community agriculture and local food system actions
- Increased awareness and access to programs that benefit community agriculture and local food systems
- Increased viability of Whatcom county's agriculture community and local food system



PRIORITY ACTIONS AND MEASURES

BUILD ACCESS

- Collaborate to identify and implement food system actions
- Fund WC Food System Action Plan priorities
- Promote and use the Natural Resources Conservation Service's urban agriculture program

MEASURES

Partners and funds leveraged, programs accessed, priorities met

IN YOUR WORDS...

Students Tour & Connect with Local Agriculture

"Thank you for letting us go on the field trip to your farm. I learned that the water from the rivers and the creek is very important to the watershed and is full of life and used for many things."

-Nooksack Valley Middle School Student

SPOTLIGHT ON

Steensma Creamery

Makers of Icelandic-style yort skyr, the Steensma family farm that supports 200 cows, birds of prey, steelhead, and myriad other wildlife along 2 tributaries of the Nooksack River. Their Whatcom CD farm plan helps them succeed with rotational grazing, the building of riparian zones, and more.

IN YOUR WORDS...

Poultry Processing Equipment

"We recognized the great time saving value offered by having access to the scalder, plucker and table. The scalder is big enough to easily handle a turkey. The plucker is amazing with chickens and especially with turkeys."

-Nora & David Weisenhorn

SPOTLIGHT ON

Hilda's Farming

A fixture at the Bellingham Farmers Market, Hilda connects local farmers with Whatcom CD programs and resources. She also is a Cultural Ambassador, listening to local small scale farmers to identify gaps in community services and programs the District might fill.





Community Stormwater & Habitat Improvement

CLEAN, ABUNDANT, STABLE WATER



STRATEGIC VISION

Communities and neighborhoods have tree canopy and frontyard and backyard habitats that support wildlife, reduce stormwater runoff, and improve quality of life.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Regreened communities and neighborhoods.
- Improved stormwater quality
- Reduced stormwater runoff volumes
- Increased awareness and personal actions reduce stormwater volumes and prevent stormwater pollution



PRIORITY ACTIONS AND MEASURES

EDUCATION

- Provide jurisdiction-based NPDES-associated education and outreach activities
- Deliver community stormwater education and outreach programs
- Deliver stormwater-focused youth education curricula

MEASURES

Events and activities facilitated, students and residents reached

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Plan and install stormwater management projects
- Plan and install native plant landscaping projects
- Implement community tree canopy projects

MEASURES

Projects planned and installed, area treated, gallons infiltrated

SPOTLIGHT ON

Native plants

Early every spring, Watcom Conservation District hosts its annual Native Plant Sale and Celebration putting over 40 species of native plants in the hands of people across Whatcom county. In the last decade, people have planted 297,710 native plants on farms, in backyards, and all sorts of places in between.

IN YOUR WORDS...

Homeowner Incentive Program

"The native plants require very little water, and comparatively, very little maintenance. We don't have to fertilize, or fuss with the plants. They just do their thing which means we can spend more time doing the things that bring us enjoyment."

- Deb Walrath

SPOTLIGHT ON

Neighborhood Native Landscaping Program

NNLP helps homeowners convert lawns into native landscapes. It provides planning, permitting, plants, and mulch, and coordinates installation. NNLP is a partnership of Whatcom CD, Birch Bay Watershed & Aquatic Resources Management District, and Whatcom County Public Works.



Adult, Youth, & Community Education

KNOWLEDGE-BASED STEWARDSHIP



STRATEGIC VISION

The people of Whatcom county have greater conservation awareness and adopt practices to steward natural resources today and into the future.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Increased engagement with adults through events, workshops, and other learning opportunities
- Increased youth accessing outdoor education opportunties
- Increased knowledge of conservation behaviors
- Increased adoption of conservation behaviors



PRIORITY ACTIONS AND MEASURES

ENGAGEMENT

- Utilize innovative and proven social marketing techniques and tools to increase adoption of conservation behaviors
- Identify new priority behaviors for future Community-Based Social Marketing strategies

MEASURES

Strategies implemented, barriers addressed, practices adopted

EDUCATION

- Deliver learning opportunities across diverse audiences to promote broad adoption of conservation behaviors
- Develop multilingual and accessible materials for diverse audiences

MEASURES

Learning opportunities, youth and adults reached, materials developed

SPOTLIGHT ON

Cultural Ambassador

Whatcom Conservation District hired a CA to build meaningful service relationships within the Latinx agricultural producer community. CAs help co-create culturally responsive, place-based education, outreach, and services. Our goal is to better serve Whatcom's diverse agricultural audiences.

IN YOUR WORDS...

"My son loved the pine tree booth, the bees, and learning about the Next Generation Farmstand business."

-Farm Expo Attendee

"The live demonstrations were excellent. We loved the goat hoof trimming and learned so much about better caring for our fruit trees."

-Farm Expo Attendee

SPOTLIGHT ON

Whatcom Explorer

What's more fun than building a sand castle? Building your very own sand watershed! Whatcom CD's classroom on wheels brings conservation education to schools and events, providing a fully hands-on experience for participants. Teachers can contact us to schedule a visit.





Communications & Engagement

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS



STRATEGIC VISION

Whatcom Conservation District is a recognized and trusted partner in Whatcom county and beyond. Whatcom community members seek our help and engage through our programs, and our partners rely on our expertise.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Enhanced communications and identity increase awareness of our programs and services
- Expanded partnerships and collaboration with local, regional, and state conservation and agricultural organizations achieve shared goals.



PRIORITY ACTIONS AND MEASURES

IDENTITY

- Build awareness, knowledge, and participation through communications
- Communicate in measurable outcomes and accomplishments
- Further our mission and priorities through increased awareness

MEASURES

Website, e-News, social media content, reports, brand and style update

COLLABORATION

- Host events and engagements to connect with our community
- Align our activities with community values and stakeholder input
- Further our mission and priorities through strategic partnerships

MEASURES

Tours, events, audience surveys, joint priorities, strategic engagement

SPOTLIGHT ON

Leadership Tours

Each year we bring together Tribal, County, State, and Federal agency representatives for a field tour showcasing sustainable agriculture, forest stewardship, and rural community resilience practices in action. The landowners and communities visited are proud of the actions they are taking.

IN YOUR WORDS...

Orca Recovery Day

"This was the best work party I have ever been to! There was amazing energy, and the tour afterwards made the work I did feel like it was making a difference, a part of larger efforts happening in the ecosystem."

-Maddie Gavigan Martin

SPOTLIGHT ON

Website Accessibility

Whatcom Conservation District is collaborating with a website team specializing in accessibility to develop a new website that meets WCAG 2.1 standards. Our efforts are leading the way in website content accessibility among conservation districts in our region.





Administration, Operations, & Funding

BEST PRACTICES FOR A HEALTHY ORGANIZATION



STRATEGIC VISION

Whatcom Conservation District is a transparent, ethical, and innovative agency with dedicated staff, up-to-date systems that provide effective operations, and management strategies that provide stable programs and services.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Recruited and developed staff and board talent
- Retained institutional knowledge
- Maintained and updated facilities and equipment that reflect our values and demonstrate conservation and sustainability
- Updated and maintained management, operational, and financial systems
- Stabilized program and service funding



PRIORITY ACTIONS AND MEASURES

TALENT

- Maintain a competitive compensation system
- Maintain competitive benefits program
- Provide professional development and traininig opportunities

MEASURES

Transparent and unbiased salary administration, Human Resources support, training budgets

FACILITIES

- Maintain equipment and follow up to date replacement schedules
- Upgrade and electrify the Whatcom CD's fleet
- Maintain a healthy and safe public facility and grounds

MEASURES

Equipment maintenance, fleet development, facility repair and efficiency upgrades

PRACTICES

- Develop Board governance policies, update administrative and personnel policies
- Implement a system of rates and charges and continue leveraging federal, state, and other grant sources

MEASURES

Well run, budget-conscious, and transparent conservation district

IN OUR WORDS...

NW Area District of the Year

"I had no inkling this award was coming and found myself a bit emotional. This award presents an opportunity to take a moment and absorb the acknowledgment of our peers in the conservation district community."

– Brandy Reed
Executive Director

SPOTLIGHT ON

Energy Efficiency Demonstration

Whatcom Conservation District will utilize a WA Commerce grant to support planning an energy efficiency upgrade, including insulated windows, heat pump system, rooftop solar panels, battery storage, and community and fleet electric vehicle charging stations.







Guiding Principles

SERVICE

Whatcom Conservation District serves all the people of Whatcom county. Everyone can access our knowledge, support, programs, or resources, whether they run a commercial farm or small farm, steward a forest or a backyard in Bellingham, or teach a science class to eighth graders. Our role is to equip the stewards of today and tomorrow with the tools they need to improve our community for everyone.

RESPECT

Whatcom Conservation District respects the knowledge, expertise, and customs of our neighbors, partners, and those who have come before. We respect the needs of our diverse community and the strengths inherent in that diversity. We strive to listen and respond in ways that enhance and improve what we have to offer.

PARTNERSHIPS

Whatcom Conservation District is honored to count many organizations and individuals as respected partners. As a small public agency, Whatcom CD relies on effective partnerships to multiply our impact on the community. We value our relationships with the Nooksack Tribe and the Lummi Nation, other conservation districts, non-profits, school districts, municipalities, and ports, as well as land managers, and Washington State.

AGRICULTURE

Whatcom Conservation District is working to increase water quality protection and soil health practices on working lands. We strive to promote, retain, and increase agricultural lands in viable agricultural production. We conduct research and effectiveness monitoring to demonstrate improvements to soil, water, and habitat through conservation practices.

ENVIRONMENT

Whatcom Conservation District has partnered with land managers to protect Whatcom's natural environment since 1946. A lot has changed in those 80 years, but we remain committed to ensuring this place we all call home continues to support wildlife, fish, Orcas, and people and can rise to the challenge of climate change and population pressures in innovative ways today and far into the future.

INTEGRITY

At Whatcom Conservation District, our integrity is our north star. We conduct our work using best practices, strive to incorporate ever-better tools of transparency, and know that we serve our community best when we listen and collaborate. We bring the best available science to our work and develop new pathways to include members of our communities who may not have accessed our organization in the past.

INVESTMENT

Lasting results require solid investment. Whatcom Conservation District invests in a well-trained and respected staff to develop relationships with our community partners and forward institutional knowledge. We have continued investing with you on sustainable land management practices, and are improving our infrastructure for improved efficiency and climate resilience. We are here for the long term.

INCLUSION

Whatcom Conservation District understands that the greater the variety of voices, the broader the lived experience and expertise. We welcome staff and relationships that present a spectrum of expertise and perspectives on the challenges that face our community. Inclusion of these voices fosters creativity and innovation and increases our opportunities for success.



Our Team

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS



Valeri Wade
Chair



Suzzi Snydar
Vice Chair



Heather Christianson
Secretary & Auditor



Alan Chapman
Supervisor



Fred Berman
Supervisor



Larry Davis
Associate



Summer 2026 - Welcome Jim Shaver, Thank you Heather Christianson

BOARD & STAFF

Summer 2026



Back Row: Caroline Slagle, Fred Berman, Katie Penke, Alan Chapman, Larry Davis, Zen Wilhelm, Emily Hirsch, Robert Walters, Jim Shaver, Adam Brayton, and Mickey Brady. Middle Row: Aneka Sweeney, Alexis Bryson, Dawn Bekenyi, Val Wade, Elizabeth Link, Suzzi Snydar, Wayne Chaudiere, Cynthia May, and Tristan Simons. Front Row: Hilda Sandoval, Corina Cheever, Josh Kursky, Andrew Phay, Brandy Reed, and Alexi Guddal. Not Pictured: Katharine Kiendl

STAFF

Winter 2025



Back Row: Tristan Simons, Zen Wilhelm, Frank Corey, Corina Cheever, Robert Walters, Trevor Gearhart, & Josh Kursky | Middle Row: Wayne Chaudiere, Katharine Kiendl, Emily Hirsch, Andrew Phay, Adam Brayton, Katie Penke, Alexis Bryson, Aneka Sweeney, & Brandy Reed | Front Row: Dawn Bekenyi, Elizabeth Link, Alexi Guddal, & Cynthia May



Contact Us

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