



Washington State Conservation Commission

Meeting Packet

November 30, 2023

****This meeting will be held in-person with options to participate online or via teleconference***

Wenatchee, Washington

Our Mission:

“To conserve natural resources on all lands in Washington, in collaboration with conservation districts and partners.”

WSCC Business Meeting

Wenatchee Convention Center
121 North Wenatchee Ave, Wenatchee, WA 98801

Time

Please note that the times listed below are estimated and may vary. [Please visit the SCC website for the most up-to-date meeting information.](#)

Meeting accommodations

Persons with a disability needing an accommodation to participate in SCC public meetings should call Lori Gonzalez at 360-791-0226, or call 711 relay service. All accommodation requests should be received no later than Monday, November 20, 2023 to ensure preparations are appropriately made.

Online Meeting Coordinates

To participate online, please click on [this link](#) to register. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting virtually. You may use your computer audio, or dial into the meeting using the information provided after logging in. Guests will be muted by the host upon login to allow for full discussion by Commissioners.

Public Comment

Public Comment will be allowed prior to adopting each action item. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per comment.

Agenda – Please note: All agenda items needing action will be listed under Tab 1.

TIME	TAB	ITEM	LEAD
8:30 a.m.		Call to order/Welcome/Introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roll Call• Introductions• Pledge of Allegiance• Additions/Corrections to agenda items	Chair Williams
8:50 a.m.	1.	Consent Agenda (<i>Action items</i>) Public Comment will occur prior to adopting each action item. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per comment. a) September 21, 2023 Draft Meeting Minutes b) November 2, 2023 Draft Special Meeting Minutes	Chair Williams

TIME	TAB	ITEM	LEAD
8:55 a.m.	1.	Commission Operations (<i>Action items</i>)	
		Public comment will occur prior to adopting each action item. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per comment.	
		c) Nomination of Chair and Vice-Chair d) SCC Final Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy	Chair Williams Commissioner Policy Team
9:15 a.m.	1.	District Operations (<i>Action items</i>)	
		Public comment will occur prior to adopting each action item. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per comment.	
		e) Grays Harbor Conservation District Supervisor Appointment f) Jefferson County Conservation District Supervisor Appointment	Commissioner Longrie Commissioner Longrie
9:25 a.m.	1.	Program Updates (<i>Action items</i>)	
		Public comment will occur prior to adopting each action item. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per comment.	
		g) Disaster Assistance Program Final Guidelines h) Farmland Protection and Land Access Funding Authorization	Jean Fike Kate Delavan
10:10 a.m.	1.	Policy Updates (<i>Action Items</i>)	
		Public comment will occur prior to adopting each action item. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per comment.	
		i) Policy Update <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency requested legislation CREP Update 	Alison Halpern
10:30 a.m.	–	15 MINUTE BREAK	
10:45 a.m.	2.	District Operations (<i>Information Only</i>)	
		a) District Operations and Regional Manager Report	Mike Baden

TIME	TAB	ITEM	LEAD
11:00 a.m.	2.	Program Updates <i>(Information Only)</i>	
		b) Office of Farmland Preservation Overview	Kate Delavan
		c) Sustainable Farms and Fields Proviso Funding	Karen Hills
		d) Riparian Grant Update	Shana Joy/Alison Halpern
12:00 p.m.	–	Lunch	
12:30 p.m.	2.	Partner Updates <i>(Information Only)</i>	
		e) Natural Resources Conservation Service	<i>Packet Item Only</i>
		f) Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	<i>Packet Item Only</i>
		g) National Association of Conservation Districts	<i>Packet Item Only</i>
		h) Center for Technical Development (SCC)	<i>Packet Item Only</i>
		i) Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10	Nick Peak
		j) Washington Association of Conservation Districts	Tom Salzer
12:50 p.m.		Executive Session , as allowed by RCW: 42.30.110(1) (g) - To evaluate the qualifications of an applicant for public employment.	Chair Williams
1:10 p.m.	2.	Commission Operations, cont. <i>(Action Item)</i>	
		k) Return from Executive Session for Executive Director appointment	Commission Members
1:30 p.m.		Closing remarks- Adjourn	Chair Williams

TAB 1

Regular Business Meeting ~

The Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission/SCC) met virtually as well as in-person on Thursday, September 21, 2023 in Clarkston, Washington. Chair Daryl Williams called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m.

Note: All meeting materials can be found on our [meetings webpage](#). You will find the meeting packet with background information, presentations and past meeting information.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Daryl Williams, Chairman, *Governor Appointee*
Larry Cochran, Vice-Chairman, *elected eastern region rep.*
Cherie Kearney, *Governor Appointee*
Brook Beeler, *Department of Ecology*
Dean Longrie, *Elected west region rep*
Harold Crose, *Elected central region rep (online)*
Jim Kropf, *Washington State University (online)*
Mike Mumford, *Washington Association of Conservation Districts*
Perry Beale, *Department of Agriculture*
Terra Rentz, *Department of Natural Resources (online)*

Quorum present.

COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT

Kirk Robinson, *Interim Executive Director*
Alicia McClendon, *Administrative Assistant*
Alison Halpern, *Scientific Policy Advisor*
Brian Cochran, *Habitat and Monitoring Coordinator*
Jean Fike, *Puget Sound Regional Manager (online)*
Jon Culp, *Water Resources Program Manager*
Josh Giuntoli, *Southwest Regional Manager (online)*
Mike Baden, *NC and NE Regional Manager*
Paige DeChambeau, *Communications Director*
Sarah Groth, *Director of Accounting & Budget*
Shana Joy, *District Operations Manager*

PARTNERS REPRESENTED

Angie Reseland, *Dept of Fish and Wildlife (online)*
Doug Rushton, *National Association of Conservation Districts*
Jon Wyss, *Farm Service Agency (online)*
Nick Vira, *Natural Resources Conservation Service*
Nick Peak, *EPA Region 10 (online)*
Nick Werner, *Farm Service Agency*
Lucy Edmondson, *Environmental Protection Agency (online)*
Tom Salzer, *WA Association of Conservation Districts*
Roylene Comes at Night, *Natural Resources Conservation Service*

GUESTS ATTENDED

Please see “**Attachment A**” for full list of attendees.

ACTION MINUTES TAKEN

Meeting called to order at 8:31am. Lori Gonzalez to call roll call. States there is a quorum present. After Commissioner roll call, introductions were done for those in person at the meeting as well as online.

Chair Williams calls for a minor change to the agenda. Requests that Nez Perce to adjust time for Nez Perce tribal priorities to 11:30 a.m.

Chair Williams thanks Asotin County Conservation District (ACCD) for hosting the tour and dinner on September 20, 2023. Representative from ACCD thanks everyone for coming to the westside and joining the conservation tour put together by staff.

Chair Williams thanks Commissioner Terra Rentz for her time on the Commission. Terra will be taking a different job away from Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and will no longer be serving as a Commissioner on the board. DNR has assigned Karen Zirkle to serve as an interim until someone is appointed permanently. We wish you all the best, Terra!

CONSENT AGENDA

Chair Williams moves onto Consent Agenda.

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to adopt the September 21, 2023 draft business meeting minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Cochran. Motion passed.

COMMISSION OPERATIONS

Chair Williams moves to Commission Operations and opens for public comment.

Annually, the Regional Managers work with other Commission staff and conservation districts to propose meeting locations and host conservation districts for the upcoming year of Commission meetings. A proposal for the following years' meetings is brought forward to the September Commission meeting for review and requested action.

Below are a list of dates and locations presented to Commission Members.

January 18, 2024- Host: Whatcom CD (virtual tour only) in/near Lacey, WA

March 20 & 21, 2024- Host: Mason CD, in/near Shelton

May 14, 15, & 16, 2024-Host: Palouse CD in/near Pullman

July 17 & 18, 2024- Host: Clark CD in/near Vancouver

September 18 & 19, 2024- Host: Okanogan CD in/near Omak

December 5, 2024- WACD Annual Meeting TB

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to approve the proposed Commission meeting dates, proposed locations, and hybrid meeting format for calendar year 2024. Seconded by Commissioner Mumford. Motion passed.

Chair Williams calls on Jean Fike to discuss the Community Engagement Plan.

The HEAL Act (70A.02 RCW) is an environmental justice law passed in 2021. At the time it was passed, seven agencies were included. The SCC was not among them, however, agencies receiving funding from certain sources also have obligations under the HEAL Act. We have been advised that we are required to adopt a community engagement plan in order to access certain funding awarded this biennium – those funds are listed in the meeting packet.

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to move to adopt the provisional community engagement plan as presented and direct staff to engage with districts and interested others in a process to customize. Also moves to authorize staff to develop a small grant program or other funding mechanism for support of district community engagement to utilize the one-time appropriation of funds. Seconded by Commissioner Beeler. Motion passed.

DISTRICT OPERATIONS

Chair Williams moves to District Operations.

Josh Giuntoli, Southwest Regional Manager brings forward a Petition for Inclusion of the City of Ocean Shores into the Grays Harbor Conservation District. Contents of the petition can be found in the business meeting packet.

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to approve the petition for inclusion of the City of Ocean Shores within the boundaries of the Grays Harbor Conservation District. Seconded by Commissioner Kearney. Motion passed.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Chair Williams moves on to Program Updates. Calls for public comment.

Public comments made around VSP funds handling. Discussion continues.

Shana Joy and Jean Fike to discuss updates on the Disaster Assistance Program.

At the July 2023 Commission meeting, staff received approval to circulate the draft revised guidelines for the Disaster Assistance Program (DAP) to conservation districts for comment. Staff anticipate bringing a summary of comments and proposed responses to the November Commission meeting with a proposed final set of DAP guidelines.

Motion by Commissioner Cochran to move to adopt the proposed DAP guidelines as interim with the intent to adopt a final version at next commission meeting on November 30, 2023. Seconded by Commissioner Longrie. Motion passed.

Chair Williams moves forward and calls Jon Culp to discuss Irrigation Efficiencies Grant Program update and Water Resources Report.

Staff propose changing guidelines of the Irrigation Efficiency Grants Program (IEGP) to adopt recommendations from interested conservation districts and the Efficiencies Steering Committee. The changes are proposed to enhance program accessibility and maximum water resource benefit. Jon Culp requests approval on the final guidelines for the IEGP.

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to adopt the final Irrigation Efficiencies Programmatic guidelines. Seconded by Commissioner Beale. Motion passed.

Chair Williams to call on Alison Halpern and Shana Joy to discuss on the Riparian Grant Program Update.

Administration of the Salmon Recovery Funding is progressing quickly with all currently available funds awarded to 30 successful proposals. If more funds became available once our reappropriation figure is clear we may review additional project proposals. A work group has been formed to begin work on the new Riparian Grant Program (RGP) guidelines and an advisory committee is open to all interested individuals to receive updates, information, and opportunities to weigh in on draft guidelines. Our aggressive timeline for work does not align well with the SCC meeting schedule so SCC staff are requesting Commissioner approval to distribute new draft RGP guidelines in advance of the November 30th Commission meeting to allow for a full 45 day review and comment period. Final guidelines, including an outline of comments and how they were addressed, would be presented to Commissioners in January 2024 for requested action at that time.

Motion by Commissioner Mumford to allow staff to distribute a draft of Riparian Grant Program guidelines in advance of the November 30, 2023 commission meeting in order to provide for a full 45 day review and comment period prior to the January 2024 Commission meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Cochran. Motion passed.

Informational Only items discussed.

Chair Williams calls for a closed, executive session. All discussion will be closed to Commission Members and Interim Executive Director only according to Executive Session pursuant to RCW 42.30.110 (g) To evaluate the qualifications of an applicant for public employment or to review the performance of a public employee. However, subject to RCW 42.30.140(4), discussion by a governing body of salaries, wages, and other conditions of employment to be generally applied within the agency shall occur in a meeting open to the public, and when a governing body elects to take final action hiring, setting the salary of an individual employee or class of employees, or discharging or disciplining an employee, that action shall be taken in a meeting open to the public. Meeting goes into closed executive session at 1:32pm to 1:45pm.

Meeting reconvened at 1:45pm with a request for 10 more minutes to finalize executive session.

COMMISSION OPERATIONS

Meeting opens back to the public.

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to appoint Sarah Groth as the SCC Interim Executive Director, effective September 22, 2023, until a new Executive Director has been appointed. Seconded by Commissioner Cochran. Motion passed.

Partner Updates discussed.

Meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Online Participants

1. Kaisha Walker, SCC
2. Becca Hebron, Ferry County CD
3. Rosa Mendez-Perez, King CD
4. Nick Vira, NRCS
5. B'Elanna Rhodehamel, SCC
6. Zorah Oppenheimer, Clark CD
7. Joe Holtrop, Jefferson CD
8. Karla Heinitz, SCC
9. Ben Rau, ECY
10. Alan Chapman, Whatcom CD
11. Jean Fike, SCC
12. Stuart Crane
13. Sean Williams, WDFW
14. Brandy Reed, Whatcom CD
15. Jan Thomas, CTA
16. Jennifer Boie, Palouse CD
17. Nick Peak, EPA
18. Josh Giuntoli, SCC
19. Sarah Wilcox, SCC
20. Kate Delavan, SCC
21. Ashley Wood, SCC
22. Larry Davis, Whatcom CD
23. Kate Ubermuth, SCC
24. Renee Hadley, Walla Walla County CD
25. Paige DeChambeau, SCC
26. Alex Case-Cohen, Pend Orielle CD
27. Heather McCoy, Whidbey CD
28. Joy Garitone, Kitsap CD
29. Allisa Carlson, SCC
30. Bill Eller, SCC
31. Toyo Garber, SCC
32. Josh Monaghan
33. Karen Hills, SCC
34. Ryan Williams, Cascadia CD
35. Anna Lael, Kittitas County CD
36. David Marcell, Pacific CD
37. Evan Bauder, Mason CD

- 38. Dean Hellie
- 39. Mike Nordin, Grays Harbor CD

Other In-Person Participants:

- 1. Levi Keesecker, WSCC
- 2. Brian Cochrane, WSCC
- 3. Ryan Baye, WACD
- 4. Heather Wendt, WACD
- 5. Megan Stewart, Asotin County CD
- 6. Jerry Hendrickson, Asotin County CD
- 7. Craig Nelson, Okanogan CD
- 8. Josh Larson, Whitman CD
- 9. Mike Tobin, North Yakima CD
- 10. Aneesha Dieu, Columbia CD
- 11. Jennifer Zipse, Asotin County CD

Special Commission Meeting ~

The Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission/SCC) met virtually as well as in-person on Thursday, November 2, 2023, in Lacey, Washington. Chair Daryl Williams called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m.

Note: All meeting materials can be found on our [meetings webpage](#).

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Online)

Daryl Williams, Chairman, *Governor Appointee*
Larry Cochran, Vice-Chairman, *elected eastern region rep.*
Cherie Kearney, *Governor Appointee*
Brook Beeler, *Department of Ecology*
Dean Longrie, *Elected west region rep.*
Harold Crose, *Elected central region rep.*
Jim Kropf, *Washington State University*
Mike Mumford, *Washington Association of Conservation Districts*
Perry Beale, *Department of Agriculture*

COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT

Sarah Groth, *Interim Executive Director*
Lori Gonzalez, *Executive Assistant*
Alicia McClendon, *Administrative Assistant*

Please see **"Attachment A"** for full list of online attendees.

Quorum present.

PARTNERS REPRESENTED (Online)

Angie Reseland, *Dept of Fish and Wildlife*
Tom Salzer, *WA Association of Conservation Districts*
Ryan Baye, *WA Association of Conservation Districts*

GUESTS ATTENDED

Please see **"Attachment A"** for full list of online attendees.

ACTION MINUTES TAKEN

Meeting called to order at 1:02 p.m. Lori Gonzalez to call roll call. States there is a quorum present.

Chair Williams calls for a closed, executive session pursuant to RCW 42.30.110 (g) To evaluate the qualifications of an applicant for public employment or to review the performance of a public employee.

Session will be closed to Commission Members, Sarah Groth, Interim Executive Director, Lori Gonzalez, Executive Assistant, Stephanie Davidson, Department of Enterprise Services, Human Resource Business Partner to the SCC, and Tom Young from Reffett and Associates.

Meeting goes into closed executive session at 1:06 p.m. for 60 minutes.

Meeting reconvened in public session at 2:06 p.m.

COMMISSION OPERATIONS

Motion by Commissioner Cochran to accept the selection committee recommendation and to authorize the executive committee to begin negotiations with the top candidate.

Seconded by Commissioner Longrie.

Opposed by Commissioner Mumford.

Motion passes.

Meeting adjourned at 2:11 p.m.

Special Commission Meeting

Online Attendees:

Alan	Chapman	Ryan	Williams
Aneesha	Dieu	Sarah	Wilcox
Angie	Reseland		
Ashley	Wood	Sarah	Moorehead
B'Elanna	Rhodehamel	Shana	Joy
Ben	Kleist	Stephanie	Davidson
Bill	Eller	Thomas	Schienen
Brad	Riehle	Tom	Young
Brook	Beeler	Tom	Salzer
Cheryl	Kearney	Toyo	Garber
Christina	Hurley	Zorah	Oppenheimer
Craig	Nelson		
Daryl	Williams		
Dean	Longrie		
Dean	Hellie		
Delaini	Disher		
Elsa	Bowen		
Harold	Croze		
Heather	Wendt		
Jack	Clark		
Jean	Fike		
Jim	Kropf		
Kaisha	Walker		
Karen	Zirkle		
Karen	Hills		
Karla	Heinitz		
Kate	Delavan		
Kayla	Nathanson		
Larry	Cochran		
Levi	Keesecker		
Megan	Stewart		
Mike	Mumford		
Nicole	Boyes		
Paige	DeChambeau		
Perry	Beale		
Ryan	Baye		



Washington State Conservation Commission

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Sarah Groth, SCC Interim Executive Director

FROM: Commissioner Policy Group (Cherie Kearney, Daryl Williams and Mike Mumford)
Lori Gonzalez, Commissioner Support

SUBJECT: SCC Agency Policy# 23-05 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Action Item

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Informational Item

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Summary:

At the March 16, 2023, Regular Business Meeting, the commission adopted several new and updated agency administrative policies. One of the policies adopted was Interim Policy # 23-05 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Policy. During the time of policy development, the Commission was going through an agency wide review of its current DEI practices by contracted consultants, Andrew Adekoya and Ken Jennings from their firm Adekoya. Until this initial review and analysis was completed, Commissioners approved a temporary policy to put in place immediately with a sunset date of December 31, 2023.

Adekoya completed their review and provided a presentation to commission members and guests at the May 17, 2023, SCC strategic planning session. The assigned policy group in coordination with the agency staff DEI workgroup, reviewed the recommendations from Adekoya and made a couple of changes to the policy.

Following this memo you will find the clean version for member review, discussion, and approval and a “marked” up version showing the suggested changes made to the original document.

Requested Action:

Approve the amended Diversity, Equity and Inclusion SCC agency Policy #23-05.

Memo Contact:

Cherie Kearney, Commissioner, policy workgroup member
Daryl Williams, Commissioner, policy workgroup member
Mike Mumford, Commissioner, policy workgroup member
Lori Gonzalez, Commissioner Support



Washington State Conservation Commission

Policy Name and #	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy# 23-05
Applies to:	This policy applies to all Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) employees, applicants, contractors, and volunteers.
Effective Date:	November 30, 2023
Approved By:	

Applies to:

This policy applies to all Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) employees, applicants, contractors, and volunteers.

Governance:

Listed below are some, but not all, applicable governing requirements. Note: Laws and rules may change over time and such changes may take precedence over this policy.

- [Executive Order 17-01: Reaffirming Washington's Commitment to Tolerance, Diversity, and Inclusiveness](#)
- [Executive Order 13-01: Veterans Transition Support](#)
- [Executive Order 13-02: Improving Employment Opportunities and Outcomes for People with Disabilities in State Government](#)
- [Directive of the Governor 16-11: LGBTQ Inclusion and Safe Place Initiative](#)
- [State Human Resources Directive 20-02](#)
- [State Human Resources Directive 20-03](#)
- [Governor Inslee's Memo to State Agencies - Inclusive and Respectful Work Environments](#)
- [Executive Order 13985 | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](#)
- [Equity | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](#)

Reason for this policy

This policy makes it clear that:

- We must embed the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work;
- The SCC supports and promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Definitions

Bias is a prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way that's considered to be unfair. Biases may be held by an individual, group, or institution and can have negative or positive consequences.

There are two types of biases:

1. Conscious bias (also known as explicit bias), and,
2. Unconscious bias (also known as implicit bias). **Unconscious biases** are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.

Cultural humility means an approach to respectfully engaging others with cultural identities different from your own and recognizing that no cultural perspective is superior to another.

Diversity means differences within a given setting, collective, or group. An individual is not diverse—a person is unique. Diversity is about a collective or a group and exists in relationship to others. A team, an organization, a family, a neighborhood, and a community can be diverse. A person can bring diversity of thought, experience, and trait, (seen and unseen) to a team—and the person is still an individual.

Department of Enterprise Services (DES) provides HR support to smaller agencies like WSCC.

Dominant culture means the most institutionally normalized power that is widespread and influential across societal structures and entities in which multiple cultures are present.

Equity and fairness are distinct from equality, which refers to everyone having the same treatment without accounting for differing needs or circumstances. Equity has a focus on creating outcome fairness by eliminating barriers that have prevented the full participation of historically and currently oppressed groups. For the purposes of the SCC this means fair and just treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in overburdened and underserved communities; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

Historical trauma means the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding of an individual or generation caused by traumatic experiences or events; any group of people that experience a trauma can incur historical trauma - for example genocide, enslavement, or ethnic cleansing.

Human Resources or HR means the Department of Enterprise Services (DES) Division of Human Resources.

Inclusion means intentionally designed, active, and ongoing engagement with people that ensures opportunities and pathways for participation in all aspects of group, organization, or community, including decision-making processes. Inclusion is not a natural consequence of diversity. There must be intentional and consistent efforts to create and sustain a participative environment. Inclusion refers to how groups show that people are valued as respected members of the group, team, organization, or community. We create inclusion through progressive, consistent actions to expand, include, and share.

Microaggressions mean everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

Oppression means systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; when some people deny others something of value, while others have ready access. This can occur, intentionally and unintentionally, on individual, institutional, and cultural levels.

Overburdened (communities) Minority, low-income, tribal, or indigenous populations or geographic locations in the United States that often experience disproportionate environmental harms and risks. This disproportionality can be the result of greater vulnerability to environmental hazards, lack of opportunity for public participation, or other factors. Increased vulnerability may be attributable to an accumulation of negative or lack of positive environmental, health, economic, or social conditions within these populations or places. The term describes situations where multiple factors, including both environmental and socio-economic stressors, may act cumulatively to affect health and the environment and contribute to persistent environmental health disparities.

Privilege means any unearned benefit, position, power, right, or advantage one receives in society because of their identity, be it acknowledged or unacknowledged.

Racism means a way of representing or describing race or any action taken that creates or reproduces structures of domination based on racial categories, in other words, racism is racial prejudice plus power.

Underserved Communities refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the preceding definition of "equity." ([USDA, NRCS](#))

White fragility White fragility refers to the discomfort white people may experience in reaction to discussions about racism in which even a minimum amount of racial stress is deemed intolerable.

Policy Statement

SCC recognizes that in order to achieve our mission and vision in service of those who reside in Washington, we must lead with the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work.

The state of Washington is diverse, and SCC must reflect that diversity. When we are representative of the people we serve, we can better address the disparities in outcomes of our services for marginalized, underrepresented, underserved, and overburdened communities through purposeful, tailored, and equitable use of resources and programs.

SCC recognizes that although we cannot change the oppressive and discriminatory practices of the past, we have control over the workplace culture we create daily. As an agency and as individuals, we will accept our responsibility and seize every opportunity to dismantle statewide, administrative, and divisional policies, procedures, systems, and practices that perpetuate inequity.

Because of this, it is SCC's expectation that all employees, regardless of position, always treat others with respect and dignity and actively work to create inclusivity and equity, regardless of race, color, nationality, position, gender, age, or any other characteristic, background, or belief.

In keeping with this expectation, every employee should strive to do the following:

- Accept that mistakes will be made, acknowledged, and learned from. Much of this journey will require grace and learning through iterations of growth and failure;
- Recognize your role in creating and perpetuating equity and inclusion through overcoming your own individual biases, whether conscious or unconscious and be willing to walk the journey toward self-awareness and reflection;
- Co-create with your colleagues a welcoming, supportive, safe, affirming, and respectful work environment;
- Engage and support respectful dialogue and courageous conversations even when uncomfortable about racism, privilege, white fragility, dominant culture, oppression, and historical trauma;
- Participate in continuous learning, development, and training offered in the areas of diversity, inclusion, cultural humility, oppression, and equity;
- Identify and address microaggressions as they occur in our workplace, whether intentional or unintentional, and use these as opportunities to educate, learn, grow, listen, and respond with respect;
- Seek to show respect to other's values, beliefs, principles, and lived experiences.

The requirements and goals, developed by the SCC DEI working group, HR, and agency leadership, will be used in annual evaluations for employees as a specific competency required for satisfactory job performance. The agency expects supervisors to ensure all employees are complying, achieving, and exceeding the goals identified in this policy.

Related policy

This policy incorporates by reference other SCC agency policies specifically the following:

- Respectful Workplace Policy;
- Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Policy;
- Reasonable Accommodation Policy; and the
- Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy.

Failure to follow policy

The requirements of this policy are mandatory. By education of employees and through the expectations of this policy, SCC will actively seek to prevent, correct, and discipline behavior that violates this policy.

Employees violating this policy may be subject to disciplinary action under [chapter 357-40 WAC Discipline](#) and/or the provisions of applicable [collective bargaining agreement\(s\)](#). See the agency's discipline policy.

- SCC is committed to responding to complaints,
- SCC will take appropriate and swift action to address any violation of this policy, and,
- Any employee who initiates or participates in retaliation against individuals making a complaint pursuant to this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including, dismissal.

Responsibilities

All employees

- Read and comply with this policy.
- Review this policy and complete related training once a year, or as assigned.
- If you are not sure whether you are following this policy, ask your supervisor for advice or support so you can uphold the values described here.

Human Resources in coordination with the DEI work group

- HR will lead and coordinate implementation of this policy together with agency departments and provide support to employees in meeting their responsibilities under this policy. Implementation includes:
 - Develop and implement an annual training program;
 - Develop and put in place measurable objectives;

- Establish a purposeful, cyclical review process to measure progress.

Supervisors and managers

In recognizing the positional privilege supervisors and leaders hold and their associated responsibility, the agency directs all supervisors and leaders, with coordination and support from human resources, to do the following:

- Promote diversity in all hiring activities including recruiting, interviewing, and selection to attract diverse candidates as managers and leaders, including but not limited, to culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse candidates.
- Develop hiring practices and a hiring toolkit that address implicit biases within job descriptions and interview processes to improve accessibility.
- Actively engage in initiating, promoting, and championing inclusive strategies to retain workforce diversity in race, ethnicity, color, sex, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, veteran status, and disability status;
- Ensure equitable access to growth and leadership development, educational, and training opportunities, succession planning, mentoring opportunities, and other resources. This includes ensuring competitive internal and external recruitments rather than direct appointments where possible.

Executive Leadership Team including Commission members.

With support and coordination from human resources, leadership will do the following:

- Annually review this policy during the May strategic planning work session and make changes as necessary.
- Make diversity, equity, and inclusion a continuously-present focus and a core value in our agency decisions, especially as the decisions relate to the allocation of resources;
- Use the voices and perspectives of marginalized and oppressed communities to influence and inform our priorities now and in the future;
- Make SCC an anti-oppression institution with inclusive, full participation in decision-making and a purposeful commitment to restored relationships with marginalized and oppressed communities;
- Support progressive facilities and environment planning to transform the workplace into a welcoming, inclusive, and accessible environment for all staff and customers;
- Actively listen to the experiences of staff, especially those from marginalized groups, and take action to change discriminatory or exclusionary practices;
- Continue to assess and correct workforce inequities throughout the agency including leadership appointments, promotional opportunities, training requests, access to flexible and alternate work modalities, and compensation.
- Support the long term development and improvement of internal and external communications that facilitate accessibility and access to SCC resources and business.

Procedures

Please click here for the [Process for Reporting a Complaint](#), or you may request a paper copy from HR. Written process is also written at the end of this policy.

SCC has put in place a process to make sure protection and relief is available from any form of discrimination or sexual harassment. Protection and relief is available to all State Conservation Commission (SCC) employees, applicants, contractors, and volunteers.

History

First Effective: March 16, 2023

Updated and Finalized: November 30, 2023

Harassment, Discrimination, or Retaliation Complaint Process

We are committed to promoting an inclusive, respectful, and safe culture. Because of this, we will respond to all complaints related to harassment, discrimination, and retaliation. To help make sure this happens, we have put in place a complaint reporting process to make sure protection and relief is available from any form of discrimination or sexual harassment. No complaint is insignificant if it means an employee doesn't feel emotionally or physically safe in the workplace.

About the complaint reporting process

This complaint process supports and is used together with these agency policies:

- Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Policy,
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy,
- Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy,
- Reasonable Accommodation Policy, and the,
- Respectful Workplace Policy.

There are occasions that must inform employees that we are under a legal obligation to respond to allegations of behaviors covered by this policy. We are committed to responding because we want to promote an inclusive, respectful and safe culture.

Who can file a complaint?

Anyone who works, volunteers, interns, or does contracting work for the small agency can report or file a complaint. If you are a represented employee, this process will not conflict with a formal grievance process. Please refer to the [appropriate bargaining agreement](#) regarding complaints and grievances.

Should I submit a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, discontent, or unhappiness with an action, decision, or omission within the control or responsibility of the agency and includes an unresolvable problem or dispute. Use this process if the issue cannot be resolved informally at the supervisor level or falls into one of the categories below, a complaint should be submitted.

Use this process for:

- Unlawful discrimination (racial, sexual orientation, disability, religious, age, etc.)

- Personal harassment (inappropriate comments, offensive jokes, intimidation, ostracizing behavior, etc.)
- Physical harassment (hostile behavior, intimidation by destruction of property, direct threats, etc.)
- Sexual harassment
- Quid pro quo sexual harassment
- Third-party harassment (an individual outside of the organization)
- Bullying
- Cyberbullying
- Retaliation

We encourage everyone to raise issues that are of concern as soon as possible. We follow a transparent, fair, and timely process for addressing complaints and problems so that:

- Everyone involved is treated equitably.
- That no one who reports a complaint is penalized or disadvantaged.
- SCC will do our best to preserve confidentiality, handle all issues with discretion and preserve a space of respect.

How do I submit a complaint?

Complaints may be made in writing or verbally. Depending on the situation and your level of comfort, you can report the issue directly to your supervisor for resolution or schedule a conversation with your [assigned HR Business Partner \(HRBP\)](#).

We encourage you to use the [Personnel Incident form](#) when making a written complaint. If you choose to submit a complaint form to a trusted supervisor, manager, member of the leadership team, or to your HRBP, follow the directions on the form.

What happens once HR receives my complaint?

The assigned HRBP will review your complaint to determine next steps based on the issue described in the complaint. In all situations, we will make sure you are kept informed of the status of your complaint. Depending on the situation, you may be asked to provide additional supporting information for your complaint – requests for more information, if needed, may come in a variety of forms.



Washington State Conservation Commission

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Sarah Groth, SCC Interim Executive Director

FROM: Alicia McClendon, Administrative Assistant
Josh Giuntoli, Southwest Regional Manager

SUBJECT: Grays Harbor Conservation District Mid-Term Supervisor Appointment

Action Item

☒

Informational Item

☐

Summary:

The SCC received two applications for one vacant mid-term appointed seat on the Grays Harbor Conservation District Board of Supervisors.

The applications were sent to all Commission members for their review prior to the November 30th business meeting. Commissioners and Commission staff followed the process adopted in March of 2018 to conduct a more comprehensive vetting of the applications received for Commission appointment, including conducting an interview with the candidates listed below and contacting references.

A recommendation for appointment will be given by the appropriate area elected commission member.

Conservation District Mid-Term Supervisor Applicants

Conservation District	Name of Applicant (s)	Area Commissioner
Grays Harbor	1. Elaine Kist 2. Richard Boyer	Dean Longrie

Requested Action:

After recommendation and discussion, members will appoint one of the applicants to the conservation district board, as appropriate.

Staff Contact:

Alicia McClendon, amcclendon@scc.wa.gov

Josh Giuntoli, jgiuntoli@scc.wa.gov



Washington State Conservation Commission

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Sarah Groth, SCC Interim Executive Director

FROM: Alicia McClendon, Administrative Assistant
Jean Fike, Northwest Regional Manager

SUBJECT: Jefferson County Conservation District Mid-Term Supervisor Appointment

Action Item

☒

Informational Item

☐

Summary:

The SCC received one application for a mid-term appointment on the Jefferson County Conservation District Board of Supervisors.

The application was sent to all Commission members for their review prior to the November 30th business meeting. Commissioners and Commission staff followed the process adopted in March of 2018 to conduct a more comprehensive vetting of the applications received for Commission appointment, including conducting an interview with the candidate listed below and contacting references.

A recommendation for appointment will be given by the appropriate area elected commission member.

Conservation District Mid-Term Supervisor Applicant

Conservation District	Name of Applicant (s)	Area Commissioner
Jefferson County	1. John Bellow	Dean Longrie

Requested Action:

After recommendation and discussion, members will appoint the applicant to the conservation district board, as appropriate.

Staff Contact:

Alicia McClendon, amcclendon@scc.wa.gov

Jean Fike, jfike@scc.wa.gov



Washington State Conservation Commission

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Sarah Groth, SCC Interim Executive Director

FROM: Jean Fike, Puget Sound Regional Manager

SUBJECT: Disaster Assistance Program Revised Guidelines and Comment Response

Action Item

X

Informational Item

Summary:

At the July 2023 Commission meeting, staff received approval to circulate the draft revised guidelines for the Disaster Assistance Program (DAP) to conservation districts for comment. In your packet you will find comments received and responses to them.

Most of the comments received were requests for clarification. These are much appreciated, the program is unlike any other SCC program and we hope to minimize confusion. Additional detail and description of process were added in several places, definitions were added and language clarified. Other comments surrounded eligibility criteria and the activation threshold, also much appreciated. The draft revised guidelines intend to address the commentor's concerns.

The draft in your packet creates additional flexibility regarding the activation threshold in two ways. Firstly, it adds an acreage threshold to account for situations where large areas are impacted but land ownership patterns are such that less than 20 landowners are affected. Second it softens the language to clearly convey intent while leaving room for leadership to decide if a particular event fits the program or not.

Important to remember when considering activation decisions is that unlike other programs SCC funds, DAP is not fundamentally about natural resource conservation. It is simply a financial benefit to farmers and ranchers who have incurred expenses as a result of a natural disaster for which the SCC activates the program. It will therefore be especially critical to allocate funds equitably and be able to defend how those limited financial resources were distributed.

Also, statutory language for this program emphasizes outreach to all potentially affected producers and proviso language specifically requires that funding be prioritized for farmers and ranchers who are most economically vulnerable.

Original language:

For consideration under this program, a minimum of 20 farmers and/or ranchers shall have suffered losses to their farming/ranching operation, and total losses estimated to be well in excess of \$100,000.

Proposed revised language:

For consideration under this program, typically a minimum of 30,000 acres will have been impacted or 20 farmers and/or ranchers will have suffered losses to their farming/ranching operation, and total losses will be estimated to be well in excess of \$100,000.

Requested Action:

Adopt the revised guidelines.

Staff Contact:

Jean Fike

Puget Sound RM

JFike@scc.wa.gov

1. Program Background

The Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC), following direction from the legislature, has established this short-term disaster recovery financial assistance program – the Disaster Assistance Program (DAP) for farmers and ranchers sustaining physical damage or incurring expenses as a result of a natural disaster. It may partially reimburse eligible disaster recovery expenses or fund the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) that restore and/or increase disaster resiliency.

[RCW 89.08.645](#) requires SCC to coordinate with the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) and local conservation districts to conduct outreach to farmers and ranchers to increase awareness and understanding of the program and to ensure that farmers and ranchers are aware of other disaster relief assistance available through the state and federal government.

This program is different from other SCC grant programs in several ways. It is held in readiness until a decision is made by the Commission to “activate” the program. Once the decision is made to activate DAP in response to a specific natural disaster in a specific geography, the SCC will engage with the affected district(s) to provide technical assistance (TA) funding and other support (see Program Activation below).

DAP is not primarily focused on natural resource conservation, rather it provides limited flexible financial assistance to farmers and ranchers affected by a natural disaster. In order to ensure fairness in these awards it is imperative that robust outreach to potentially eligible landowners and farm or ranch operators be conducted. Additionally, a review committee is formed for each activation of the program to provide local knowledge, technical expertise, accountability and oversight. The committee includes both local and statewide representation (see Program Activation below).

These guidelines have been and may continue to be amended in response to feedback from interested stakeholders, additional legislative direction, or developing circumstances as the Program is implemented.

2. 2023 Proviso language

One-time funding is provided solely to support the continued development of the disaster assistance program established in RCW 89.08.645, which provides short-term financial support for farmers and ranchers during disasters. Funding must be prioritized for farmers and ranchers who are most economically vulnerable.

3. Definitions

- **Executive Committee of the SCC:** Consists of the Chair and Vice Chair.
- **Farmer:** Any person, firm, partnership, or corporation engaged in farming. If a person, firm, partnership, or corporation is engaged in activities in addition to that of farming, the definition shall only apply to that portion of the activity that is defined as farming in [RCW 46.04.183](#). ([RCW 46.04.183](#))

- **Farming:** The cultivation and tillage of the soil, dairying, the production, cultivation, growing, and harvesting of any agricultural or horticultural commodities (except forestry or forestry operations), the raising of livestock, bees, fur-bearing animals, or poultry, and any practices performed on a farm as an incident to or in conjunction with such farming operations. (RCW [46.04.183](#))
- **Livestock:** Includes, but is not limited to horses, mules, cattle, sheep, swine, and goats. (RCW [16.36.005](#))
- **Forestry:** Management directly pertaining to forest land and relating to growing, harvesting, or processing, timber or forest biomass.
- **Rancher:** A person who owns a ranch or who raises livestock as an occupation.
- **Review Committee:** A group convened for a specific activation of the DAP program in response to a particular disaster. Membership and responsibilities are outlined below under Program Activation (4).
- **Natural Disaster:** A natural disaster is the highly harmful impact on a society or community following a natural hazard event. Some examples of natural hazard events include: flooding, drought, earthquake, tropical cyclone, lightning, tsunami, volcanic activity, wildfire.

4. Program Activation

The intention of the program is to respond to major events affecting significant numbers of farmers and/or ranchers. Given the administrative costs involved and transparency/fairness considerations, smaller, isolated events are generally not a good fit for this program. For consideration under this program, typically a minimum of 30,000 acres will have been impacted or 20 farmers and/or ranchers will have suffered losses to their farming/ranching operation, and total losses will be estimated to be well in excess of \$100,000.

A request for program activation will typically come from the conservation district or conservation districts where the disaster occurs. To explore whether an event is eligible and a good fit for the program, districts may contact their regional manager and/or the DAP program lead. Requests to activate the program must be made in writing (email is fine) to the SCC executive director, copying the DAP program lead and the regional manager(s) for the affected conservation district(s).

Once a request is made, or at their own initiative, the Executive Committee of the SCC may designate a disaster or disasters for activation of the DAP program, or they may refer the question to a full meeting of the Commissioners. Once designation is made, SCC staff will work with willing district(s) in the area affected to coordinate outreach and implementation.

It is critical that as many affected farmers and ranchers are aware of the funding opportunity as soon as possible, and that they are made aware of any other relief programs for which they may be eligible. SCC communications staff will assist in updating webpages, as appropriate, with information that districts can link to and help develop handouts and other materials to assist with outreach.

Applications from landowners for reimbursement shall be submitted in a form and manner prescribed by SCC. SCC will contract with willing conservation district or districts in the affected area to lead the collection and initial review of applications.

Unless otherwise agreed to by SCC, applications will be reviewed by a committee specific to that disaster response. The review committee will typically be made up of one member each from the

Washington State Department of Agriculture, a CD Supervisor or designee (in the case that more than one CD is involved, a Supervisor from each CD Board may be included), SCC, and an agricultural industry representative. Other committee makeup may be considered as best fits the situation. SCC will approve the committee membership.

The review committee is responsible to:

- Provide technical insight and awareness of local conditions.
- Ensure consistency with funding procedures and funding intent.
- Provide for case-by-case consideration of projects that are unique cases.
- Review applications and make funding recommendations to the SCC executive director or their designee.
- Develop area and disaster-specific criteria to evaluate which applicants are considered most economically vulnerable and prioritize funding accordingly.
- Advise district staff and SCC on outreach strategies to inform potentially impacted producers of available assistance, including DAP, and to help to eliminate or remove barriers to participation, especially to economically vulnerable farmers and ranchers.

The review committee will meet as often as needed, virtually or in person, to review applications.

The conservation district will retain all applications, documents, receipts, and other materials related to the farmer or rancher's submittal to show proof of damage, loss, or expense incurred, subject to review by the review committee members and SCC (on request). It is recognized that from time to time, applications may need further review by the review committee or SCC leadership.

Upon approval of the application by SCC (and not before that time) the farmer or rancher will be notified by the district of the award. If awards present a cash flow difficulty for the district, they are encouraged to request a funding advance.

5. Prioritization

The Review committee shall ensure that funding is prioritized for farmers and ranchers who are most economically vulnerable.

- One tool for the review committee to consider in accomplishing this prioritization is the [NRCS definition of Limited Resource Farmer and Rancher](#).
- Another possible threshold to consider is prioritization of those who meet the Department of Housing and Urban Development's definition of low- and moderate-income household (household income at or below 120% of Area Median Income).
- Others may be proposed as are appropriate for the area and the disaster. The review committee shall select/establish criteria appropriate for the location and nature of the disaster to determine which applicants are most economically vulnerable and to prioritize funding for them.

6. Program Rules

- A. Payment can only be made on a reimbursement basis.
- B. Funds may be awarded for:
 - 1. New projects addressing impacts caused by a natural disaster designated by SCC for DAP program eligibility or,
 - 2. Reimbursement of expenses already incurred in response to a natural disaster designated by SCC for the DAP program and in compliance with these guidelines.
- C. To be eligible, a farmer or rancher must meet the following requirements:
 - 1. Meet the definition of farmer or rancher (above).

2. Have sustained physical damage or incurred cost to their farm or ranching operation due to a natural disaster such as a flood, earthquake, or wildfire for which SCC designates these funds available.
 3. Provide sufficient documentation of such damage and/or incurred cost as a result of that natural disaster and meet all other program requirements.
- D. The maximum grant reimbursement is normally 75% of the total eligible expenses incurred in the same fiscal year as the award. Depending on the funding source used by the legislature and the SCC to fund this work, expenses incurred in the prior fiscal year *may* be eligible. Contact the program lead for more information.
 - E. A farmer or rancher will be required to show all documentation of the entirety of the expenses paid to determine the SCC grant amount (Example: A farmer would need to submit documentation for \$2,000 of eligible expenses to receive \$1,500 in reimbursement).
 - F. Particular attention must be paid to outreach efforts that reach economically vulnerable and historically underserved farmers and ranchers and to remove or reduce barriers to their participation in this and other disaster assistance programs.
 - G. Lost or reduced income is not itself an eligible expense, though it may help establish producer eligibility under the program.
 - H. An application deadline will be established for each disaster approved by SCC for use of these funds.
 - I. Funding may be awarded on a rolling basis and if that is the case may be expended well before the application deadline. Early applications are encouraged.
 - J. Applications must be complete and have all required documentation to be considered. SCC reserves the right to request additional information or documentation to determine eligibility. Applications missing documentation or otherwise deemed incomplete will not be considered for funding until sufficient information has been received.
 - K. Physical damage or incurred expenses covered, in whole or in part, by insurance or other governmental sources are not eligible. Producers will need to stipulate to this in their application. Additional verification may be sought.
 - L. Farmers or ranchers must show that the physical damage or economic loss is to their farm or ranching operation. Damage to non-farm items, areas and structures is not eligible.
 - M. Forestry losses are not eligible, where forestry ground and farm and ranch land uses overlap, a case-by-case determination of eligibility will be made.
 - N. Grants can only be used to reimburse expenses incurred in whole or in part due to the disaster.
 - O. If an entity/business/operation/ranch/farm is owned by more than one person, only one application may be submitted.
 - P. If an entity/business/operation/ranch/farm which suffered damage or loss is leased, the owner must provide a letter giving permission for expenses to be reimbursed and a statement that the owner will not be applying for same expenses and that they are not covered by insurance.
 - Q. Except for approved DIP (District Implemented Projects), all expenses must be paid by the farmer or rancher before reimbursement will be provided.
 - R. Verification of the damage caused by the disaster is required. Please include any pictures, maps, certifications, or other documentation of the damage or cost. The review committee may assist in locating and verifying this documentation.
 - S. SCC reserves the right to deny applications if required documentation is not provided within the deadline provided. All determinations regarding the eligibility of expenses and funding amounts are final.
 - T. In order to make funding available to a greater number of applicants, awards are capped at a maximum of \$50,000 per applicant per fiscal year unless an exemption is granted. Exemption requests are considered on a case-by-case basis.
 - U. Depending on the funding source used by SCC in any given disaster response, expenses incurred in the prior fiscal year *may* be eligible. Contact the program lead for more information.

7. Use of Grant Funds

Grant funds may be used for approved projects recovering from the disaster or to reimburse for expenses **incurred because of the disaster**. Potentially reimbursable expenses include payroll, rent, building improvements (improvements limited to restoring to pre-disaster condition, enhancements may be considered if they contribute to disaster resiliency) or repairs, replacing damaged or lost crops, livestock, and equipment, and other operations and business expenses of a farm or ranch. Lost or reduced revenue is not reimbursable.

SCC grant funds shall be administered according to SCC grants policies and procedures, including but not limited to as described in the most recent version of the Grant and Contract Policy and Procedure Manual.

Depending on the funding source SCC uses for any particular activation, some expense categories may not be eligible.

Reasonable staff time and authorized expenses expended by the conservation district or districts in administering the work of this program, including outreach to potentially impacted producers regarding this program and other available assistance, will also be an eligible use of these funds. Technical assistance budget must be preapproved.

Disaster Assistance Program (DAP)– substantive comments received and responses

(Grammatical corrections and minor clarifications were much appreciated and taken but are omitted here)

November 2023

Topic Area	Comment	Response/Edit
What folks like about the program in current form	The ability to reimburse for expenses already incurred (if funding guidelines are followed) is a massive benefit to producers who have to response right away and aren't able to wait for project application and approval.	Agreed
What folks like about the program in current form	The Definition section was clear but could be expanded upon.	Have added several terms. If questions arise about terminology, please contact SCC staff.
Eligibility	Section 3. Definitions: Bullet 2. Farming: Will tree farms, such as Christmas tree farms, nurseries, greenhouses, and trees grown for natural resource projects (such as fire recovery projects) be considered "Farming" and qualify for relief, or will they be considered Forestry?	It seems like most if not all of those fit the definition of farming. As a general matter, any eligibility questions that the guidelines don't clearly address can be discussed by the review committee and final approval would be up to the SCC Executive Director.
Eligibility	Section 4. Program Activation: Paragraph 1: Sentence 2: Stevens County Conservation District (SCCD) understands that this particular program is designed for major events, however we would recommend that there be a consideration for acres impacted. It is possible, in our county, to have a major event where fewer than 20 farmers are affected. Larger acreage farm operations do not necessarily equate to more profit, or less economically vulnerable.	An acreage threshold has been added and language around all three thresholds has been softened to allow a judgement call to be made based on the specific situation.

	<p>There is a possibility that larger operations are more subsidized, have more expenses, and have slimmer profit margins. Smaller acreage operations have the capacity to be more densely packed than larger acreage operations. For the same size disaster incident, while more people could be affected in smaller acreage clusters, the conservation and natural resource implications would remain the same and leave larger operators with a greater burden of restoration.</p>	
Eligibility	<p>Section 4. Program Activation: Paragraph 4. / Section 6. Eligible Grant Recipients: Paragraph 1:</p> <p>SCCD would like to request that the program guidelines make a clearer statement as to who applies for this grant. Are conservation districts applying on behalf of the grouping of farmers? Or do 20 farmers need to come together, and apply themselves? In Stevens County, it is unlikely that 20 farmers would come together collectively, through their own initiative, to apply for this funding/program.</p> <p>Section 4. Program Activation: Paragraph 9: Sentence 2:</p> <p>This is the only sentence referencing that the funding will flow through the conservation districts, this could be made a little clearer. How is the funding distributed, and who applies to the commission/committee (i.e., the conservation district on behalf of a farmer/rancher collective, or the farmer themselves).</p>	<p>While not excluding a direct approach from the public, the normal process would be for a district to request activation of the program and -with support from SCC- seek applications from producers.</p> <p>Also, to clarify the 20-person threshold is regarding activation of the program, there is no requirement that 20 producers apply for funding once activation occurs.</p> <p>Additional language has been added to help clarify both questions.</p>
Eligibility	<p>Additionally, please make clear a timeline for the disaster and application process. We had questions on whether past events would qualify, if SCC would identify past events, or if this process is only for new disaster events moving forward.</p>	<p>The question of eligibility of events with a particular timing is complex and may depend in future what type of funding the legislature and SCC use. Please don't hesitate to ask with specifics and SCC staff will investigate and get back to you.</p>

Eligibility	<p>Page 3 item I, the grant guidelines should include language addressing use of grant funds for items that may be covered under an insurance policy.</p> <p>Maybe there should be language in the contract where the landowner self certifies that the cost share is not covering anything that insurance is paying for as well?</p>	<p>Additional language has been added to clarify and absolutely – even if something is <i>covered</i> under their insurance, it is not eligible for DAP.</p>
Working together	<p>Page 2, section 4, 4th paragraph - "SCC may contract with CD's to assist" WSCC should always be working with the local CD to implement locally led conservation. This should be revised to "WSCC shall work with CD's on all fire recovery efforts." WSCC and CD's have always been and should always be working hand in hand.</p> <p>Identify specific early response actions that could be taken that are highly likely for reimbursement or quick approval to facilitate expedited response.</p>	<p>Language has been adjusted to clarify.</p> <p>Absolutely the response is always envisioned to be with and through a conservation district or districts - though we cannot <i>force</i> a district to participate.</p> <p>Once program activation occurs, TA can be made available quickly.</p>
Eligibility	<p>1st paragraph at the top of page 2 section 4. The program limits eligibility to fires affecting "a minimum of 20 farmers and/or ranchers". We just had a 60,000 acre fire that only affected just over 20 landowners due to the scale of landownership in the region. Using the number of people affected doesn't capture the magnitude of natural resource damage or economic impact. The metrics for qualification should be geographic scale and natural resource impact rather than number of people affected. Or make the number of people much smaller if decision makers are tied to the human factor.</p>	<p>An acreage threshold has been added and language around all three thresholds has been softened to allow a judgement call to be made based on the specific situation.</p>

Documentation	<p>Section 6. Eligible Grant Recipients: Bullet "C": "Provide sufficient documentation..." SCCD would like a clearer definition of sufficient. Will there be considerations for those who lost records in a disaster event? Are areal photos considered sufficient or will planting/livestock records be necessary to prove pre-disaster conditions? SCCD would like considerations included in the program to ensure the application process and documentation required do not become a barrier to those who need aid.</p>	<p>This will have to be determined in light of specific circumstances. Every effort will be made to not penalize producers who through no fault of their own have limited documentation. Aerial photos have been used in past program work. Local information from the review committee is also key. Often folks on that committee will know exactly where the disaster impacts were.</p>
Clarification	<p>Section 7. Prioritization: Sentence 1 and all Bullets: SCCD found this section to be more for legislative purposes, awarding of grant funding, or committee guidelines. If the farmer or applicant is reading this section, will it apply to them? How will they know if they qualify? When the sentence states "One tool to consider..." or "Another possible threshold to consider is..." - it brings up the question of who is considering this tool? The farmer/rancher? The committee? Perhaps a better way to go about this section is: "Economic vulnerability may be determined by using the following methods:"</p>	<p>The review committee will be responsible for designing and implementing a method to comply with the proviso language.</p> <p>Several data sources are suggested but latitude is provided for local knowledge and disaster specifics to determine the right method in each activation.</p> <p>Clarifying language has been added.</p>
Clarification	<p>Section 7. Prioritization: Paragraph 2: This sentence is confusing. Is this sentence referring to prioritization of TA funding request from conservation districts? Please clarify.</p>	<p>Good catch, this does not belong under prioritization. The language has been moved and clarification added.</p>
Outreach	<p>WSCC and WACD to develop and provide literature that is ready to provide to landowners in advance of a disaster so that when disaster occurs CD's have that at the ready.</p>	<p>We have templates and can quickly produce literature and web content specific to a disaster. On a broader note - one of the goals of the program is to raise awareness among producers of not just this relatively</p>

		minor program but FSA, WASDA, FEMA and other programs that might be available in the event of a disaster. We welcome working with districts to accomplish this outreach.
Eligibility	Under 3. Definitions Livestock - Horses should only be considered agriculturally related if used for a livestock operation or are breeding stock. Not recreational equestrian.	Agreed, the definition of rancher should address this.
Eligibility	Forestry is excluded but a lot of grazing occurs in forested lands. Please be more specific about how this funding can or cannot be used in forested settings. Similarly for range and agricultural lands that are often interspersed with forested draws	Great question, language has been added to help support decision making but the determination will need to be made case by case.
Activation process and outreach	Section 4. Program Activation: Paragraph 5/6: Is the purpose of this Is the purpose of this Disaster Recovery Program to provide faster aid and relief? Will the time it takes to establish a committee hinder the dispersal of aid? With the time it takes for SCC (the Commission) to determine if a disaster event qualifies for this program, creation of a committee, outreach, collection of 20+ farmers, group application, there a way to identify priority areas ahead of a disaster to help expedite the process and provide aid sooner?	<p>The program can respond quickly. Working with Whatcom CD we were able to form a committee, conduct outreach and start gathering applications very quickly in – and that was while building a new program.</p> <p>Because the grants are mostly for reimbursement, folks typically need time to make repairs or replace livestock, feed and equipment before they can apply.</p> <p>There is no requirement to gain 20 farmers applications.</p> <p>One of the goals of the program is to raise awareness among producers of not just this program but FSA, WASDA, FEMA and other programs that might be available in the event of a disaster. We welcome working with districts to accomplish this outreach.</p>



Washington State Conservation Commission

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Sarah Groth, SCC Interim Executive Director

FROM: Kate Delavan, Office of Farmland Preservation Program Coordinator

SUBJECT: FPLA Project Approval – Beaver Valley Farm Funding Amendment Authorization

Action Item

☒

Informational Item

☐

Summary:

At the March 2023 Commission meeting, the Commission authorized use of up to \$345,000 in Farmland Protection and Land Access (FPLA) funding by Jefferson Land Trust to permanently protect the 39-acre Beaver Valley Farm property. Jefferson Land Trust is requesting an additional \$101,400 of FPLA funding to add an adjacent 8.5-acre parcel to the project. The FPLA Work Group (Work Group) recommends funding this request.

Requested Action:

The Work Group requests the Conservation Commission provide authorization to amend Jefferson Land Trust's FPLA contract for the Beaver Valley Farm to increase the funding award by \$101,400.

Staff Contact:

Kate Delavan, kdelavan@scc.wa.gov, 360-280-6486

Background and Discussion:

Project Overview

The Jefferson Land Trust secured a FarmPAI loan and purchased the 39-acre Beaver Valley Farm in January 2023 as the first step in a Buy-Protect-Sell (BPS) transaction. The Commission approved use of FPLA funds to protect the farm via an agricultural conservation easement, the second step in the BPS transaction, at the March 2023 Commission meeting. Jefferson Land Trust is seeking to acquire and protect an additional 8.5-acre parcel immediately adjacent to the project area. Jefferson Land Trust expects protection of the additional parcel to cost \$101,400. Commission authorization is required to approve Jefferson Land Trust's amendment request as the addition exceeds the current funding authorization. If approved for funding the 8.5 acre parcel will

be joined with the original 39 acres to create a permanently protected farmland property of 47.5 acres.

The Beaver Valley Farm property, located about 1.5 miles south of Chimacum on Beaver Valley Rd (Hwy 19) in Jefferson County, consists of mostly low-lying pastureland. Beaver Valley and nearby Center Valley contain the east fork and mainstem of Chimacum Creek and are the most productive agricultural lands in east Jefferson County. These valleys have been the focus of significant community efforts to protect working farms and salmon habitat over the last 30 years.

The property has a long history of agricultural use. It was used for hay and corn production and pasture for cattle going back to the 1970s. The most recent production was hay for cattle that are raised on their nearby home farm in the adjacent valley. Despite having different owners, the 39 acres and the 8.5 acres have been jointly managed and treated as one farm unit in recent years.

The 8.5-acre addition will enhance the agricultural conservation values of the project as it contains soils classified as Farmland of Statewide Importance and Prime Farmland if Drained. Jefferson Land Trust has also identified the inclusion of these 8.5 acres in the project as a priority due to the additional opportunities that will be offered to the eventual farm owner for increased farmland production. Additionally, according to American Farmland Trust's Farms Under Threat 2040, one of the existing leading threats to sustaining farmland is the development of low-density residential sprawl in rural areas. With a landowner who is seeking to sell his remaining 8.5 acres of farmland and has already had an offer made to him, Jefferson Land Trust believes that low-density residential development is the most likely alternative for the future of this property, if not protected. With the addition of this 8.5-acre parcel, Jefferson Land Trust's overall goal is to preserve the farm with a conservation easement that will retire two of the three existing development rights, prevent subdivision, protect the prime agricultural soils and allow for restoration of approximately 3-acres of low-lying wetland area. Jefferson Land Trust will work with the County, the Jefferson County Conservation District, wetland consultants and other partners to improve the wetland habitat while also ensuring the viability of the associated pastureland.

The Work Group met on October 16, 2023 to review Jefferson Land Trust's request. The Work Group consists of representative from WSU Extension, WSDA, Washington State Housing Finance Commission, American Farmland Trust, and the Conservation Commission. The Work Group finds the request aligns with the goals of the FPLA program and enhances the overall conservation values by increasing the protected area to 47.5 acres and removing the potential for conversion on what would have been a neighboring property. The Work Group recommends approving the amendment and allocating additional funding to the project.

Recommended Action:

The FPLA Work Group requests the Conservation Commission provide authorization to amend Jefferson Land Trust's FPLA contract for the Beaver Valley Farm to increase the funding award by \$101,400.

Draft Motion:

The Conservation Commission accepts the FPLA Work Group's recommendation regarding Jefferson Land Trust's Beaver Valley Farm amendment request. The Conservation Commission approves up to \$101,400 in FPLA funding to add the 8.5-acre parcel, bringing the total area to be protected to 47.5 acres.



Washington State Conservation Commission

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Sarah Groth, SCC Interim Executive Director

FROM: Kate Delavan, Office of Farmland Preservation Program Coordinator

SUBJECT: FPLA Project Approval – Centralia 43 Funding Authorization

Action Item

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Informational Item

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Summary:

The Farmland Protection and Land Access (FPLA) Work Group (Work Group) reviewed the Centralia 43 application from the Washington Farmland Trust. The Work Group found the application strongly aligns with the FPLA program intent and recommends the Centralia 43 project for FPLA funding.

Requested Action:

The Work Group request the Conservation Commission approves the Centralia 43 project for funding and authorizes the Conservation Commission's Executive Director to sign the conservation easement as a third-party beneficiary.

Staff Contact:

Kate Delavan, kdelavan@scc.wa.gov, 360-280-6486

Background and Discussion:

The Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) received the Centralia 43 application from Washington Farmland Trust in Oct. 2023. The Work Group reviewed the application on Oct. 16, 2023. The Work Group consists of representatives from Washington State University Extension, Washington State Department of Agriculture, Washington State Housing Finance Commission, American Farmland Trust, and the Conservation Commission.

Project Overview

Washington Farmland Trust (WFT) secured a FarmPAI loan and purchased the 43-acre property in May 2023 as the first step in a Buy-Protect-Sell (BPS) transaction. WFT is seeking FPLA funding to protect the farm via an agricultural conservation easement and complete the second step on the

BPS transaction. An FPLA funded easement would permanently protect the property for agriculture and remove its speculative development value. The estimated easement value is \$500,000. This easement will extinguish two residential development rights. The property is located in the Lincoln Creek valley West of Centralia, WA. The property was purchased via FarmPAI in order to support the Black Food Sovereignty Coalition's (BFSC) vision to create a farm incubator, shared cold storage and food processing space, and cultural center to support Black and Brown farmers. The property was selected because of its agricultural values, location near to markets and urban centers, and proximity to the I-5 corridor.

The Centralia 43 property consists of three parcels totaling 43 acres. The land boasts rolling hillsides used primarily for grazing, flat bottom ground ideal for row crop production, and numerous structures to support agricultural activities and residential occupancy. The farm historically has been used for cattle grazing, which continues for now, and the plan for the property is to develop the agricultural areas into a farm incubator and long-term lease opportunity for Black and Brown farmers seeking land. The buildings are ideal for development of shared food processing and cold storage, both of which are necessary infrastructure investments needed for successful agricultural enterprises.

The property's soils are primarily silt loams, and availability of irrigation is the most limiting factor in terms of productivity. The property does not include water rights, however there are three wells on the property for residential and livestock water. The property lies in the Lincoln Creek drainage surrounded by other agricultural and timber property. This area is experiencing rapid growth and this property is likely to convert to non-agricultural residential ownership if it is not preserved with an agricultural conservation easement. The elimination of development rights will also reduce the overall cost of the fee ownership to the BFSC who intends on purchasing the property before the FarmPAI mortgage is due.

The property includes 4 barns and a residence. The largest barn will provide the location for development of shared food processing and cold storage facilities in order for smaller agricultural enterprises to be able to bring their goods to market. The house provides housing for on-site farm manager and meeting space for BFSC board and staff. The property currently is custom grazed by a local cattle rancher, and its hillside aspects provide ideal pasture for grazing animals. The flat bottom land on the property will be utilized for row-crop production.

BFSC serves as a collaboration hub for Black and Brown communities to confront the systemic barriers that make food, place and economic opportunities inaccessible. BFSC is focused on meeting these barriers with creative, innovative, and sustainable solutions. Built on a decade of work of founding members of the Black Food Sovereignty Council and other Black-identified leaders and stakeholders in the Pacific Northwest, the BFSC mission is to ignite Black and Brown communities to participate as owners and movement leaders within food systems, placemaking, and economic development. The property includes numerous aspects that would benefit from natural resource investments. It is very close to Lincoln Creek (a salmon bearing

stream), adjacent farmland, and upland forests. As the current tenant, BFSC is already engaged with NRCS and the Lewis CD to develop a farm plan and make investments into the natural resources of the property.

Recommended Action:

The Work Group found the application strongly aligns with the FPLA program intent and recommends the Centralia 43 project for FPLA funding.

Draft Motion:

The Conservation Commission accepts the FPLA Work Group's recommendation regarding Washington Farmland Trust's Centralia 43 application. The Conservation Commission approves up to \$550,000 in FPLA funding for the acquisition of an agricultural conservation easement on the Centralia 43 property by Washington Farmland Trust. The Conservation Commission authorizes its Executive Director to sign the conservation easement as a third-party beneficiary.



Washington State Conservation Commission

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Sarah Groth, SCC Interim Executive Director

FROM: Alison Halpern, Interim Policy Director and Scientific Policy Advisor
Karla Heinitz, Policy Assistant

SUBJECT: Policy Update – Agency-requested legislation

Action Item

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Informational Item

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Summary:

At the July SCC meeting, Commissioners voted to amend the current statute (RCW 89.08.30) to clarify that one of the Governor-appointed members of the Board be a tribal representative. The Policy team has been working with the SCC Chair and a few legislators on the agency-requested legislation that will be introduced during the 2024 legislative session. The Commissioners will need to vote on final language, which will be presented at this meeting.

Requested Action:

The SCC Policy team requests that the Commissioners discuss and approve final language for the bill to amend the current statute (RCW 89.08.030) that makes it explicit that one of the Governor appointed members of the Commission be a tribal representative.

Staff Contact:

Alison Halpern, Interim Policy Director and Scientific Policy Advisor (ahalpern@scc.wa.gov)
Karla Heinitz, Policy Assistant (kheinitz@scc.wa.gov)

Background and Discussion:

At the July SCC meeting, Commissioners voted to amend the current statute (RCW 89.08.30) to clarify that one of the Governor-appointed members of the Board be a tribal representative. Currently, the language only requires that one of the appointed Commissioners shall be a landowner or operator of a farm. That second appointed seat has traditionally been held by a tribal member. This statutory amendment would ensure that there will always be tribal representation on the board.

At the September meeting, Commissioners were informed that efforts were underway with the Code Revisor Office to begin bill development to amend the statute based on the July directive:

Two members shall be appointed by the governor, one of whom shall be a landowner or operator of a farm, and one shall be a tribal representative.

However, to be consistent with other agencies, it would be advisable to clarify this language to refer to federally recognized tribes, i.e.,:

...one shall be a member from a federally recognized tribe.

The Policy team reached out to prospective sponsors in the Senate and the House and received some feedback, including the suggestions to increase tribal representative to two members – one east of the Cascades and one west of the Cascades and to specify that tribal members of the Commission be elected members of the tribe. Since the Commissioners did not discuss increasing the size of the Board, we suggest alternative language, i.e., that the federally recognized tribal position shall alternate between the east side of the Cascades and the west side of the Cascades, i.e.,

...one shall be a federally recognized tribal representative with terms alternating between representation from a tribe on the west side of the Cascade Mountains and the east side of the Cascade Mountains.

Based on feedback received, an additional option is to postpone this proposed legislation and explore other ways to increase tribal engagement with the SCC and its programs, such as undergoing more frequent tribal consultations, communicating more regularly with tribes about our programs and partnership opportunities, and establishing a stand-alone tribal liaison position at the SCC.

Recommended Action and Options:

SCC staff requests that the Commissioners consider the following options and vote on one:

Option #1: Two members shall be appointed by the governor, one of whom shall be a landowner or operator of a farm, and one shall be a tribal representative.

Option #2: Two members shall be appointed by the governor, one of whom shall be a landowner or operator of a farm, one shall be a member from a federally recognized tribe.

Or

Option #3: Two members shall be appointed by the governor, one of whom shall be a landowner or operator of a farm, one shall be a federally recognized tribal representative with terms alternating between representation from a tribe on the west side of the Cascade Mountains and the east side of the Cascade Mountains.

Or

Option #4: Postpone the agency-requested legislation and explore other ways to increase tribal engagement with the SCC and its programs.

Next Steps:

- The Policy team may reach out to Chairs of the Senate Ag, Natural Resources, Water, and Parks committee and the Senate Local Government, Land Use, and Tribal Affairs committee about the bill.
- Policy team may work with the Code Reviser's Office about preparing the bill for pre-filing (green sheet status).
- The Policy team may work with Commission Williams to communicate with tribal leaders, stakeholders, WACD, districts, agency partners, the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, and the Governor's Policy team.



Washington State Conservation Commission

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Sarah Groth, SCC Interim Executive Director

FROM: Alison Halpern, Interim Policy Director and Scientific Policy Advisor
Karla Heinitz, Policy Assistant
Brian Cochrane, Habitat and Monitoring Coordinator

SUBJECT: Policy Update – Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

Action Item

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Informational Item

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Summary:

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a voluntary federal program administered through a partnership between the Farm Service Agency (FSA), State Conservation Commission (SCC), and Conservation Districts (CDs).

Through this program, farmers are financially compensated for growing riparian habitat on productive or marginal farmland along salmon-bearing streams rather than growing crops. This program has made significant progress in increasing riparian buffers to improve salmon habitat, reduce stream water temperatures, and support farmers. Despite its successes, the CREP program faces some challenges. The FSA has initiated audits of CREP agreements. These audits began in Whatcom County last summer and are now being expanded to other counties across the state. The issues found during these audits are attributed to various factors, but they all point towards a need for better communication at every level - be it federal, state, or local.

Requested Action:

None.

Staff Contact:

Alison Halpern, Interim Policy Director and Scientific Policy Advisor (ahalpern@scc.wa.gov)

Brian Cochrane, Habitat and Monitoring Coordinator (bcochrane@scc.wa.gov)

Karla Heinitz, Policy Assistant (kheinitz@scc.wa.gov)

Background and Discussion:

A recent review was conducted late this summer and in early fall by FSA on Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) contracts and plans provided by Technical Service Provider (TSP) partners at Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and Whatcom Conservation District within Whatcom County. Results of the review led to the discovery that some contracts enrolled in the CREP under several CREP practices from 2008 to present did not comply with the Washington CREP Agreement and CRP requirements and policies. According to FSA, the review revealed that land was enrolled under erroneous land eligibility and/or did not otherwise meet the practice specifications at the time of enrollment. As a result of this audit, there were 102 agreement terminations, 85 of which were voluntarily terminated by the producers. A total of 17 were terminated by FSA. Numerous agreements were revised so that they could remain in CREP. Issues include:

- CREP agreements along salmon-bearing streams that were not added to the state CREP map. A new CREP map is in development now.
- Concern that the amendments (aka pink sheets) to the CREP handbook were adopted at the state level but not submitted to the federal FSA office for review and approval. CREP agreements established based upon those amendments and approved practices are now considered ineligible. The handbook and amendments are being re-written with a goal of having it ready by the March training.
- CREP agreements in which the plantings are out of compliance with the CREP handbook and CRP requirements and policies.

FSA is now reviewing additional agreements statewide, with a goal of resolving potential issues by the end of January.

Next Steps:

FSA is planning a training in March. Conversations between FSA, NRCS, and SCC are suggested prior to that training to identify and improve gaps in process and communication.

SCC staff has been working with the Governor's Office on the CREP issues and to find ways to support producers whose agreements have been terminated due to some eligibility issues, either voluntarily or by FSA, but are growing riparian habitat in salmon-bearing areas, for at least one more federal fiscal year. There may be a proviso in the supplemental budget directing the SCC to use CREP appropriations for those payments, e.g.,

A portion of funding from the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) (40000023) appropriation from the State Building Construction Account may be used to provide compensation equivalent to the annual FSA payment for one year to producers who were enrolled in CREP, and whose acreage meets state CREP goals of providing riparian habitat or hydrologically connected wetland enhancements in salmon-bearing streams as determined by WDFW but are now disenrolled due to contract termination by FSA or voluntary termination from September 2023 through the completion of FSA's statewide CREP audit.

TAB 2

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members

FROM: Sarah Groth, Interim Executive Director
Shana Joy, District Operations & Regional Manager Coordinator

SUBJECT: District Operations and Regional Manager Report

Action Item	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informational Item	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Report Summary:

Regional Managers offer this report of recent activities and support provided to conservation districts in various district operations aspects, Commission operations assistance, and program administration leadership and support.

District Operations

Conservation district operations includes many aspects of operating legally and efficiently many of which are included as part of the Conservation Accountability and Performance Program (CAPP). RMs keep an eye on CAPP requirements as well as opportunities for improvement throughout the year and report districts' status with CAPP in May and July annually. Regional Managers offer advice, resources, and assist with day-to-day operations matters including troubleshooting and problem solving when things do not go as planned in areas such as financial management, risk management, human resources, or board dynamics. Regional Managers, with Jean Fike as the lead, provide cultural resources assistance and coordination to conservation districts in relation to SCC programs. This assistance is individualized for each district's needs at the same time as Regional Managers share a collective body of knowledge, resources, experience, and approaches as a team that provides direct service to districts.

Commission Operations & Program Administration

Regional Managers lead the administration of the Implementation, Natural Resource Investments, Professional Engineering, Livestock Technical Assistance, Forest Health and Community Wildfire Resilience, Disaster Assistance Program, WSRRI, and RCPP grants funding with conservation districts and are the regional points of contact for NRCS staff and conservation districts on task order development, issues resolution, and progress tracking. RMs also administer pass-through appropriations

and funds provided under contract from partner agencies such as DNR. Work orders with DNR are currently under development for post-fire assistance.

Regional Managers also reviewed and summarized the Conservation Technical Assistance, Livestock Technical Assistance, and Salmon Recovery Funding grant reporting from CDs for metrics we can include in communications to the Office of Financial Management and Legislature.

Shana Joy is working with Alison Halpern to co-lead implementation of the new Riparian Grant Program appropriations in FY24. Program guidelines have been under development through work with a committee made up of CDs and partners as well as an advisory group. Draft guidelines will be distributed to partners for comment with final guidelines planned for approval at the January Commission meeting.

SCC-CD Round Tables

Regional Managers are hosting Round Table meetings via Zoom approximately monthly with districts to provide updates and information, answer questions, and open dialogue. At the October and November round tables topics included: supplemental budget requests, CREP, SCC-CD master contracts, communications updates, SCC program updates, and staffing updates.

Wildfire Recovery

Mike Baden is administering a special appropriation of \$961,000 to the SCC for FY24-25 for Whitman County fire recovery projects. A good portion of funding has been appropriated with additional projects expected to fully allocate the funds through the biennium.

Regional Managers continue to support districts that experienced impact from the 2023 wildfire season with the Newell Road, Gray, and Oregon Road fires by providing resources, connecting CDs with DNR post-fire program staff, and working with SCC finance staff to provide small amounts of technical assistance funds to impacted CDs. RM's have been in ongoing coordination discussions with DNR.

Forest Health and Community Wildfire Resilience

Final Forest Health and Community Wildfire Resiliency Program guidelines were adopted at the July Commission meeting and an initial round of applications from districts have been reviewed. Over \$13 million in proposals have been awarded. Monthly reviews of subsequent proposals will be conducted for as long as funds are available. Shana continues to serve on the Forest Health Advisory Committee representing the SCC/CDs.

Conservation District Elections

Regional Managers are administering Conservation District elections during the 2024 cycle. An elections training webinar was held on September 29th which is a mandatory training for Conservation Districts. RMs are

fielding questions from districts as they arise. Districts are currently starting the process of setting election dates and adopting elections resolutions.

Partnerships & Partnering Assistance

The Regional Manager team provides ongoing assistance with partnering or participated in partner and relationship building efforts with: individual conservation districts, WADE, PSCD Caucus, Center for Technical Development, Building Better, WACD, DNR, NRCS, Ecology, DFW, NACD, Washington Association of Land Trusts, State Auditor's Office, RCO, Department of Veterans Affairs, WA Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, Washington Conservation Society, and Arid Lands Initiative.

SCC participation and partnership with the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) is ongoing. Shana Joy is serving as President of the organization for 2023. Allisa Carlson is representing the Pacific Region on a new DEI Task Force and Mike Baden is representing the Pacific Region on the Policy Committee as well.

Regional Managers, with coordination by Mike Baden, are helping to organize content and speakers for the 2023 WACD Annual Conference in November.

Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration & Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI)

Allisa Carlson and Shana Joy are participating on a steering committee with WDFW and DNR staff to implement the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration & Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI).. More information can be found online at: [Shrubsteppe Fire Preparedness, Response and Restoration](#). A WSRRI long-term strategy advisory group (LTSAG) meets monthly to work on recommendations around long-term wildfire resiliency (habitat and human wildfire resiliency) in the shrubsteppe landscape with professional facilitators, finalizing the long-term strategy is planned for March 2024. The LTSAG has entered its first phase of review, public review is expected in January/February 2024. A more in-depth presentation and a draft LTS will come before the Commissioners at the January 2024 Commission meeting.

The Foster Creek, Lincoln County, Benton, Franklin, North Yakima, and Okanogan CDs have engaged in the LTSAG. 2020-2023 burned areas with high wildlife values are prioritized for WSRRI investment, but all areas throughout the Columbia Plateau are eligible. An updated solicitation for wildlife friendly fence projects was released on Friday, August 25th, and seven wildlife friendly fence projects to replace burned fence (over 50 miles total) were funded in Okanogan, Foster Creek, and Eastern Klickitat conservation districts. More information can be found here: [SCC WSRRI Webpage](#).

Chehalis Basin

Josh Giuntoli, SW RM, represents the Executive Director of the Commission as ex-officio member of the Chehalis Basin Board (CBB).

During this reporting period, the Director of Ecology approved the hiring of Jeff Zenk to be the new executive director for the Office of Chehalis Basin. Jeff comes to this position with extensive experience, including 8 years as a research analyst for the Washington State Senate and 25 years as the owner of a local public affairs

firm. Since 2019, Jeff has served as Ecology's Southwest Region communications manager and supported its air quality and climate programs. Perhaps even more important than Jeff's resume is his passion for the people who live, work, farm, fish, and recreate in the Chehalis Basin.

The CBB continues to make progress on a long term fish and flood strategy. Each meeting has a good portion of time to work through all the important aspects. The goal is to have a long term strategy finalized sometime during the 24-26 biennium.

SCC staff continues to coordinate with CDs and partners every other month. These are opportunities to share updates and information, identify possible issues, and generally stay connected. A highlight from the reporting period was a Grays Harbor reach scale restoration project of 2.0 miles along the Satsop River including engineered log jams (ELJs), riparian restoration, and invasives management. Staff presented it to the board and approval will come up for action at the December meeting.



Washington State Conservation Commission

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Sarah Groth, SCC Interim Executive Director

FROM: Kate Delavan, Office of Farmland Preservation Program Coordinator

SUBJECT: Office of Farmland Preservation: Overview and Strategy

Action Item

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Informational Item

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Summary:

The Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) takes a toolbox approach to meeting its statutory obligation of addressing agricultural land loss in Washington. In the last several years, OFP has added additional capacity and expertise to one of the tools in its toolbox: agricultural conservation easements. OFP seeks to strategically allocate its limited resources and identify areas in need of additional resources by developing a strategic plan specific to OFP. This memo summarizes OFP's current work and identifies staff's key considerations looking into the future.

Staff Contact:

Kate Delavan, kdelavan@scc.wa.gov, 360-280-6486

Background and Discussion:

Introduction to OFP

Directed by [RCW 89.10.010](#) and housed within SCC, the Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) works to address the loss of agricultural land in Washington. OFP purchases and funds agricultural conservation easements, assists local governments and organizations as they develop and implement measures to retain agricultural land, provides resources to assist with the transition of farmland and farm businesses from one generation to the next, and provides data and analysis on trends impacting farmland in Washington.

OFP works closely with farmland protection stakeholders spanning the state including conservation districts, land trusts and other non-governmental organizations, state and federal agencies, and county governments. OFP is also engaged in several national initiatives to develop and coordinate resources related to farmland protection, land access, and succession planning.

In 2022, OFP staff grew from one full time employee to two. This growth allowed OFP to expand programming, become more responsive to stakeholder requests, and to begin long-term visioning work.

Connection to Strategic Plan

While there are connections across the priority areas, OFP is most closely aligned with the “Agricultural and Working Lands Viability and Food System Support” priority of the strategic plan.

Current Work Plan

Conservation Easement Portfolio

OFP acts as a project sponsor and SCC the easement holder on agricultural conservation easement projects developed by conservation districts. To fund this work, OFP seeks grant funding from the [Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, Farmland Preservation Account](#). Due to increased demand for these services, OFP formalized the process for seeking sponsorship in the 2022 application round and will carry that process forward in 2024. By purchasing and holding agricultural conservation easements, SCC takes on a perpetual responsibility to monitor and enforce the easements. Agricultural conservation easements constitute real property rights. The resources necessary to meet this responsibility grow with each completed project.

With the creation of Farmland Protection and Land Access (FPLA) program in 2022, OFP expanded its conservation easement work to include funding for easement purchases made by other entities. Initially funded at \$2 million in the 2022 Supplemental Capital Budget, the program received a second appropriation of \$4 million in the 2023-2025 Capital Budget. FPLA serves the dual purpose of permanently protecting high-quality farmland and facilitating access to land for next generation farmers and ranchers. FPLA prioritizes projects that conserve high-priority agricultural land at imminent risk of development and that support land access for historically underserved producers as defined in 7 24 C.F.R. Sec. 1470.3 (2022), including young and beginning farmers, people of color, and veterans. The project applicant rather than SCC takes on the primary responsibility to monitor and enforce easements funded by FPLA.

In the last year, OFP’s easement portfolio experienced significant growth in both the number of completed projects, in the project pipeline, and in geographic scope. Two projects were completed in partnership with local conservation districts through WWRP funding (Thornton Ranch and Lazy Cross Ranch). Additionally, through conservation district partnerships, three projects were successfully funded through WWRP (Davenport Cattle, Swauk Prairie, and Emerick).

Through a partnership with Columbia Land Trust, OFP is celebrating the first completed FPLA project. Columbia Land Trust used a FarmPAI loan and a FPLA grant to facilitate a Buy-Protect-Sell transaction on 40 acres of agricultural land in Trout Lake, Washington. In addition to showing proof of concept for the new program, the project accomplished two major things: permanently protecting important farmland that provides organic dairy products to the region and facilitating transition to the

next generation of farmers. There are currently two additional projects (Valdez Farm and Beaver Valley Farm) under contract for FPLA funding and more projects are in the pipeline.

SCC Easement Portfolio						
Project Name	Funding Source	SCC's Interest	Partner	County	Acres	Easement Status
Davenport Cattle	WWRP	Primary holder	Central Klickitat CD	Klickitat	5,867	Under contract
Swauk Prairie	WWRP	Primary holder	Kittitas County CD	Kittitas	549	Under contract
Emerick	WWRP	Primary holder	North Yakima CD	Yakima	2,576	Under contract
Thornton Ranch	WWRP	Primary holder	North Yakima CD	Yakima	103	Completed
Hoch Farm	WWRP	Primary holder	Benton CD	Benton	26	Under contract
Lazy Cross Ranch	WWRP	Primary holder	Eastern Klickitat CD	Klickitat	2,852	Completed
Blain Ranch	WWRP	Primary holder	Eastern Klickitat CD	Klickitat	-	No longer moving forward
Schuster Ranch	WWRP	Primary holder	Central Klickitat CD	Klickitat	1,849	Completed
Stevenson Ranch	WWRP	Primary holder	North Yakima CD	Yakima	98	Completed
Lust Farm	Direct Appropriation	3rd Party Right of Enforcement	North Yakima CD	Yakima	281	Completed
Valdez Farm	FPLA	3rd Party Right of Enforcement	Whidbey Camano Land Trust	Island	156	Under contract
Schmid Farm	FPLA	3rd Party Right of Enforcement	Columbia Land Trust	Klickitat	40	Completed
Beaver Valley Farm	FPLA	3rd Party Right of Enforcement	Jefferson Land Trust	Jefferson	39	Under contract
Completed Projects		6	Total Completed Acreage		5,223	
Total # of Projects		12	Total Acreage		14,436	

Transition and Succession Planning

The [Planning the Future of the Farm workbook](#) is the foundation of OFP's transition and succession planning programming. OFP is exploring how to expand programming. A survey developed in partnership with American Farmland Trust, Washington Association of Land Trusts, and USDA NRCS Washington was sent to stakeholders in August 2023 and will inform how OFP builds out additional programming. The survey had 20 respondents representing 17 different organizations. Survey responses indicated the need for more communication and outreach of existing resources, more coordination across interested entities, and development of new resources. OFP has offered two continuing legal education workshops in partnership with the Washington State Bar Association on farm transition planning.

Information Sharing and Partner Coordination

OFP shares information and coordinates partners on topics related to farmland protection. OFP publishes a monthly newsletter and periodic reports, provides technical assistance, gives presentations when requested, and hosts regular stakeholder convenings.

Food Policy Forum and Food Systems Work

The OFP Coordinator and the SCC Policy Director have supported the Food Policy Forum (FPF) as co-leads with the Washington State Department of Agriculture since FPF's inception in 2016. Originally created via proviso, the FPF is now established in statute ([RCW 89.50](#)). Representing diverse interests across the food system, the FPF makes recommendations to improve the food system in Washington. Recent and current focus areas include the Farm Bill, land-use policy solutions to stem agricultural land loss, a state brand and marketing program, agriculture's representation in Climate Commitment Act investments, water availability, coordination with local food policy councils, and diversifying voices within the FPF. OFP staff also engage in statewide or regional conversations or partnerships on varying food systems topics.

Special Projects

OFP completes special projects as directed by the Legislature or as requested by stakeholders as resources allow. Currently OFP is leading two special projects: a legal analysis of easement affordability provisions and an urban agriculture study. The legal analysis of easement affordability provisions will result in a better understanding of when and how affordability provisions can be incorporated into agricultural conservation easements to support land access. The urban agriculture study originated from a consensus recommendation from the FPF and is directed by HB 1552 (2023-24). The report due June 30, 2024 will look at opportunities and barriers to urban agriculture in Washington.

Recognizing the power in taking a multi-benefit and partnership-based approach to farmland preservation, OFP staff engage with national, state-wide, and regional initiatives such as the Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group, FarmPAI review team, ACEP Team (oversight of RCPP easement liaison), Floodplains by Design Steering Group and project evaluation team, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition's Board (the SCC Director holds an ex-officio seat),

the Puget Sound Partnership's farmland and smart growth indicators work groups, the Western Washington Food Systems Partnership, American Farmland Trust's National Agricultural Lands Network, and the Land Access Policy Incentives Community of Practice.

Strategic Questions

OFP is considering several key strategic questions as it charts its vision for the next five to ten years.

Strategic Question #1: How to structure farmland protection work to have the most impact, to best leverage staff time, and to ensure our real estate portfolio is sufficiently resourced?

The SCC currently acts as both an easement holder and as an easement funder. Both approaches have important considerations.

Acting as an easement holder allows the SCC to serve landowners who otherwise may not have access to easement funding programs. At the same time, acting as an easement holder creates significant financial and legal obligations for SCC in perpetuity. Fulfilling these responsibilities requires planning for additional stewardship costs with each additional project and increases the likelihood SCC will have to respond to easement enforcement concerns in the future. Acting as an easement holder requires OFP to be directly engaged in the transaction process, which takes significant staff time. The majority of the OFP Specialist's time is currently dedicated to this portion of our easement portfolio. OFP's ability to respond to project demand from conservation districts and landowners is limited by staff resources.

Acting as an easement funder allows OFP to facilitate protection of high priority agricultural land without taking primary responsibility and liability for easement stewardship. This allows SCC to take a lighter touch approach to farmland protection. By funding easements, SCC enables others to complete projects and those entities are responsible for easement stewardship. OFP's ability to respond to demand is currently limited to projects that align with FPLA requirements and by available funding.

As SCC's easement portfolio grows, SCC will need to build out additional stewardship guidance including policies or procedures related to violations, amendments, and monitoring.

Strategic Question #2: How to reach producers and communities not served by existing programs?

To answer this question, OFP seeks to better understand who we are serving as well as unmet needs. Adapting existing tools (e.g. the FarmPAI/FPLA partnership to facilitate Buy-Protect-Sell rather than a traditional conservation easement) allows us to be responsive to new communities. Areas to be explored for expanded/additional resources include: urban/peri-urban agriculture, land access, succession planning, research, and land use policy and planning.

Strategic Question #3: What additional resources are necessary to fulfill the OFP statute? How to best leverage OFP staff expertise and resources to respond to emergent issues?

OFP's statute takes a toolbox approach to protecting farmland. In recent years, OFP and SCC have worked diligently to add resources to one of the tools: conservation easements. Additional tools such as policy and planning, succession and transition planning, land access, and agricultural viability require more focus to be responsive to stakeholder requests. Additionally, as SCC continues to grow and evolve, there are new opportunities for engaging in working lands protection. Emergent areas for growth and/or coordination include renewable energy siting, water availability for agriculture, forestland, and more.

Next Steps:

OFP will develop a strategic plan specific to the Office of Farmland Preservation aligned with the agency strategic plan over the next year.



Washington State Conservation Commission

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Sarah Groth, SCC Interim Executive Director

FROM: Karen Hills, SFF Program Coordinator

SUBJECT: Sustainable Farms and Fields Proviso Funding Update

Action Item

☐

Informational Item

☒

Summary:

Our new Sustainable Farms and Fields (SFF) grant program has submitted a [report to the legislature](#) on its inaugural year (Fiscal Year 2023), and SFF has committed \$1.3M of funding toward [24 projects](#) for Fiscal Year 2024 (ongoing funding from the operating budget). In the 2023-25 budget, the legislature appropriated proviso funding of \$30M for Sustainable Farms and Fields. Staff are working to implement these funds as outlined below.

A link to the SFF proviso wording is [here](#).

Requested Action:

None.

Staff Contact:

Karen Hills, SFF Program Coordinator (khills@scc.wa.gov, 564-669-3292)

Background and Discussion:

In the 2023-25 budget, the legislature appropriated proviso funding of \$30M from the Climate Investment Account for Sustainable Farms and Fields. SCC staff have assembled a Climate-Smart Livestock Management advisory committee co-chaired by WSDA including representatives from CDs, WSU, NRCS, Ecology, Commerce, WSDA, EPA & the Washington State Dairy Federation that has met 6 times between August 2023 and present.

The \$30M of funding will be allocated as follows in accordance with the language of the proviso:

Sustainable Farms and Fields	\$3 million	Current program – will follow programmatic guidelines.
Dairy Anaerobic Digester	\$22 million	RFP for one-time funding
Alternative Manure Management	\$3 million	RFP for one-time funding
Research and Demonstration	\$2 million	RFP for one-time funding

This group is advising SCC on the development of three separate RFPs focused on: dairy anaerobic digesters, alternative manure management, and research and demonstration. SCC has formed subcommittees that will be responsible for reviewing proposals in 2024.

Dates for the RFPs have not announced, as SCC is still working out some specific requirements that need to be met to access funds from the Climate Investment Account, but a timeline will be announced when possible and RFP release is expected to occur in early 2024. Commissioners can expect to have RFPs presented to them for approval at the January SCC meeting.

Next Steps:

- SCC will communicate timelines for accepting SFF applications and releasing RFPs once those dates are set.
- Hiring is expected to occur in 2024 for one program position and one fiscal position to administer these funds.
- Information webinars will be held for each of the three new one-time funding opportunities. (anaerobic digesters, alternative manure management, research and demonstration)
- Staff will present RFPs at the January SCC meeting for approval before release.



Washington State Conservation Commission

November 30, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Sarah Groth, SCC Interim Executive Director

FROM: Shana Joy, District Operations & Regional Manager Coordinator
Alison Halpern, Interim Policy Director and Scientific Policy Advisor

SUBJECT: Riparian Grant Program Update

Action Item

☐

Informational Item

☒

Summary:

The Riparian Grant Programmatic Guidelines workgroup has been meeting all fall to discuss resources pertaining to the new riparian grant program, including the proviso language, guidelines for the FY23 Salmon Recovery Funding guidelines, and other documents and tools. Each meeting has focused on specific topics pertaining to the guidelines, and progress by the workgroup has been shared with the advisory committee, which has been open to all interested individuals. At the September commission meeting, Commissioners approved staff to initiate the 45-day review and comment period prior to the November 30 meeting. The comment period is underway, open from November 20, 2023 – January 2, 2024. Commissioners will be presented with these documents to consider for adoption at the business meeting on Jan. 18, 2024. If accepted, they will go into affect immediately.

Requested Action:

None.

Staff Contacts:

Shana Joy, District Operations Director & Southeast Regional Manager (sjoy@scc.wa.gov)
Alison Halpern, Interim Policy Director & Scientific Policy Advisor (ahalpern@scc.wa.gov)

Background and Discussion:

For the 2023-25 biennial budget, the WA State Legislature approved funding for SCC to administer a voluntary riparian grant program (RGP) to support priority riparian restoration and protection projects. SCC staff have been convening a work group and an advisory committee to develop and review programmatic guidelines, based on the program framework described in the biennial budget proviso. We have made significant strides moving forward with scheduling work group meetings throughout the fall of 2023, with a target of presenting final RGP guidelines in January 2024. The Departments of Fish and Wildlife, Agriculture, and Ecology, the Recreation and Conservation Office, as well as several conservation district staff have volunteered to serve on the workgroup. Several other interested individuals have been added to our growing advisory committee as well. The first working group meeting was held on September 19 to kick off our work. A meeting to review the final draft guidelines was held on November 17.

The 45-day review period is underway with feedback due on January 2, 2024. SCC staff are sharing the draft riparian grant guidelines with conservation districts, tribes, state agencies, agricultural and environmental communities, business, local government, and other partners. The workgroup will come together again on Jan. 5 to review comments.

The draft guidelines are available for review here:

<https://sccwagov.box.com/s/4p0x6fxxcksddj6bj2qmx1s18t2ll3aj>

Next Steps:

SCC staff will schedule meetings with tribes who are interested in discussing the draft guidelines as part of the tribal consultation process.

Feedback from partners will be reviewed and, when deemed appropriate, incorporated in the draft guidelines prior to the January 18, 2024 meeting.



WASHINGTON

Partner Activity Report

Nov. 2023

We got this!

By **Roylene Comes At Night**
NRCS-WA State Conservationist

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. – What an incredible year for NRCS and our conservation partners! We were able to provide more than \$66 million in assistance to landowners and producers across the state!

While it was not easy, doing great work often isn't, and I could not be prouder of my team, and all the partners who helped us achieve this. I want to thank all of you for a job very, very well done.

Now, all eyes are on the future! I was a bit shocked a few weeks ago. Initially, all indications predicted that the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) would add on a bit more than \$9 million in funding in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24). Then, I received the notification that we received

an additional \$28 million this year above our normal Farm Bill allocation! That's not all, either. Five projects in Washington will receive \$74.3 million through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and six Equity in Outreach Cooperative Agreements were awarded across the state totaling \$2.3 million! This is all an amazing amount, and it is a bit scary to be honest, but I know we can do this.

How? I've laid out three primary goals for my staff: Communications & Outreach, Staffing, and Training. My staff is busy refining and implementing statewide strategies to address each of these areas. The goal? Getting producers through the door while having lots and lots of fully trained staff ready, willing, and excited to help them improve their stewardship.

Also, we're always looking for new and creative ways to utilize our partnerships, and to empower them to help us get this money on the ground. So far, we've signed 15 new agreements for \$17 million and three new contracts totaling \$1.9 million. Each and every one of these is a partner or company stepping up to the plate to help us hit this funding out of the park! If you have any ideas, please share them! Now is the time to think creatively and act boldly!

The Chief of NRCS, Terry Cosby, has directed all of us to see every IRA-penny on the ground, every year. While it will definitely stretch us to the limits, throughout history NRCS has always achieved its goals, and this time will be no different.

We got this!

Washington
Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov

Helping People Help the Land



East Area

By **Aubrey Hoxie**
East Area Conservationist

It's hard to believe the snow is already starting to fly and accumulate in some areas. I'm just not quite ready for it. And just like the changing of our seasons, another fiscal year has ended, and a new one is already underway. I'm looking forward to the changes that are headed to us in fiscal year 2024. NRCS hasn't quite seen anything like this, in my relatively short 15 years with the agency. We're in an unprecedented time that includes historic dollar amounts to put conservation on the ground! Reflecting on FY2023, here is a snapshot of the East Area, **which includes \$28 million in Financial Assistance!**

EQIP-IRA

We obligated 44 contracts for \$2,646,643, and contracted on over 26,249 acres.

Included within these EQIP numbers:

- 63% of the contracts were Historically Underserved Participants

EQIP-Farm Bill

We obligated 102 contracts for \$8,960,504, and contracted on over 85,087 acres.

Included within these EQIP numbers:

- 38% of the contracts were Historically Underserved Participants

CSP-IRA

We obligated 34 contracts for \$4,564,331 and contracted on over 86,467 acres.

Included within these CSP numbers:

- 29% of contracts went to Historically Underserved Participants

CSP-Farm Bill

We obligated 74 contracts for \$12,124,101 and contracted on over 190,824 acres.

Included within these CSP numbers:

- 21% of contracts were Historically Underserved Participants

RCPP

With the Palouse WRIA 34 Watershed project:

- Seven Contracts totaling \$1.3 million contracted on over 5,000 acres.

CTA

We reported over 231,756 acres, with the help of partners and the conservation accomplishments that were completed.

Staffing

We're looking forward to adding to the East Area this next year with the following positions:

- Area Resource Conservationist will be starting in December; selection has been made
- West Palouse DC will be starting in December; selection has been made
- Area Agronomist-TBD
- Area Range Specialist-TBD
- Cultural Resource Specialist-TBD
- Range Specialist in Colville FO
- Natural Resource Specialists across the area (several new ones have already started)
- Soil Conservationists in several offices
- Partner planner positions-TBD

Partnership Activities

This last month I got the opportunity to attend 3 of our conservation district area meetings. It was fun getting to hear all the great conservation that is going on across the East and Central area. It always amazes me the size, scale, and complexity of projects that our partners continue to work, and the great conservation that's being completed.

Thank you for all the work you do!





West Area

By David Rose

West Area Conservationist

Staff Actions

- We are working to fill the following vacancies: Area Forester in Olympia; Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) Planner position in the Area Office located in Olympia; Natural Resource Specialist (NRS) position in Chehalis.
- We have made selections for the following positions: RC positions in Port Angeles and Olympia; NRS in Bremerton. All names will be shared once they've arrived.
- New employees in the area include Chris Clark as CNMP Engineer position in Olympia, Erin Gutierrez as RC in Puyallup, Kari Gordon as RC in Longview, John Larsen as RC in Renton, and Dillon Sprague as Civil Engineer in Lake Stevens.

Program Update

The final FY23 Financial Assistance Programs tally for the West Area shows the following: EQIP - 147 contracts for over \$5.3 million, CSP - 20 contracts for over \$484 thousand, RCPP - 9 contracts for over \$289 thousand, **which is more than \$6 million in Financial Assistance!**

It's way too early to have any judgments about FY24, however we do currently have 353 applications for EQIP and 38 for CSP.

Project: Pheasants Forever

"I haven't ever really seen a pheasant around here!" is the first thing that a biologist working for Pheasants Forever in Western Washington hears at most introductions. Fortunately, this non-profit goes so much beyond upland game birds, and has really extended itself into fish and wildlife habitat conservation in general. From forestry projects in the mountains, to South Puget Sound prairie farmers and to cranberry bogs out on the coast, Pheasants Forever partner biologist Wyatt Wood has helped improve many of the diverse habitat types that you can find in the Evergreen State west of the Cascades. He works out of the NRCS office in Olympia but has worked in almost every county in the West Area, from Whatcom in the North to Clark County in the south.

Wyatt works primarily to administer and support Farm Bill programs for the USDA NRCS, his work has also partnered with so many other wonderful players in conservation work here in Washington. He has worked with many different conservation districts, even acting as a guest lecturer to talk about some of the incredible habitats and species present in the state with the public. The US Fish and Wildlife Service often partners with NRCS to implement conservation practices on the ground and have welcomed Pheasants Forever involvement in many of their projects. Wyatt regularly works with Service staff during site visits and meetings about the endangered fish and wildlife species that call Western Washington home. He has also been fortunate enough to work with some of the Native American Tribes, including consulting on a large-scale project with the Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe ranging from forestry concerns to small-scale agriculture and oyster aquaculture.

One of the best things about working in conservation is how many different players are involved in its implementation. So many passionate people from so many diverse backgrounds dedicate their careers and lives to helping the environment and our natural resources, and having more people involved in conservation is never a bad thing! Wyatt has been a great addition to the Western Washington conservation community, and he looks forward to what future opportunities and projects he might be involved in.





Central Area

By Austin Shero

East Area Conservationist

Washington NRCS is HIRING!!

Washington is overseeing the largest hiring effort we've had since 1986! How exciting! Recently, hiring managers across the state have reviewed applicant pools for Soil Conservationists, Range Management Specialists, and Natural Resources Specialists. We are seeing fantastic applicants, and have been able to extend offers to quite a few applicants!

To date, we have offered and received verbal commitments from:

17 Natural Resources Specialists in 11 locations across the state

2 Range Management Specialists in 2 different locations

3 Soil Conservationists in 3 locations across the state

We are excited to invest in these positions. This will allow us to better serve our fantastic producers and put more high quality conservation on the ground!

Look forward for more hiring in the coming months with similar positions and more! We're also excited to be working with critical groups to bring partner employees onboard to accomplish our conservation mission. These agreements are still being finalized, but should be ready to implement in early Fiscal Year 2024.

Ecological Sciences

NRCS Small Acreage and Urban Agriculture

By Rebecca Anderson Bellanca

Small Farms & Urban Ag Specialist

Washington NRCS Small Acreage and Urban Agriculture has always been a key component of our state's approach to conservation agriculture. When the National Office announced Urban Agriculture as a national priority, major shifts to better help our smaller acreage participants germinated quickly.

Newer practices available to smaller acreage clients include Low Tunnels (821), Raised Beds (812), Soil Carbon Amendment (336), Annual Forages for Grazing Systems (810), Soil Liming (805), and Organic Management Systems (823). An important new practice scenario for smaller scale grazing operations is the new Fence (382) scenario that allows participants to utilize temporary electric fence to better adapt their grazing operation to

facilitate greater stocking densities in smaller paddocks.

Almost all practices available to participants now have a small-scale payment scenario, reimbursing the participant on the per square foot, per thousand square feet, per linear foot, or for each instance of a practice installed.

Training for Field Office Planners has been increasing across the state. More and more, the new planners coming into our offices are keenly interested in small scale agriculture and are seeking training in how to best serve our smaller acreage participants. On the job training requests have come in from across the state, offering training for the planners while assisting landowners. State trainings on Basic Organic Systems and Small Farm Crop Systems are being created to provide formal training to planners, new and experienced, as well.

As urban and small-scale agriculture continues to proliferate across the state, NRCS Washington will keep an ear to the ground, truly hearing what producers and planners need to best get conservation on the ground, and seek to facilitate tools and training to best help them accomplish their goals.





Programs

Five projects in Washington to receive \$74.3 million through RCPP

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. (Nov. 3, 2023) – Five projects in Washington will receive \$74.3 million in funding through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

RCPP leverages a voluntary approach to conservation that expands the reach of conservation efforts and climate-smart agriculture through public-private partnerships. Historic funding is made possible by both the Inflation Reduction Act and the Farm Bill. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced improvements to RCPP as well as an unprecedented \$1 billion investment to advance partner-driven solutions to conservation on agricultural land through 81 projects across the nation.

“NRCS is honored to partner with these wonderful organizations to enhance stewardship across the state,” said Roylene Comes At Night, the state conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Washington (NRCS-WA). “Through strong partners in Washington, at the same time as this incredible level of investment through the Inflation Reduction Act, together, I’m proud to say we’re taking full advantage of this once-in-a-generation opportunity to enhance our natural resources across the state.”

Five projects were funded in Washington:

Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program EL 84.7 Landowner Extension Mainline

Lead Partner: Grant County Conservation District

Total Funding Request: \$19,666,600.00

This project will complete one of the nine lateral systems in the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program located in Central Washington. The finished EL 84.7 lateral will replace groundwater irrigation with Columbia River surface water for a total of 7,138 acres currently relying on rapidly declining groundwater wells, thereby helping to prevent source water depletion. Drilling deeper wells or converting to dryland crops are economic risks and won’t sequester as much

carbon as irrigated production can through biomass accumulation. By reducing the extraction from deep groundwater wells, the aquifer can recharge naturally over time, maintaining its long-term viability. This benefits the local communities who rely on it for their drinking water supply by ensuring a stable and reliable water supply for future generations.

Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program EL 80.6 Landowner Extension Mainline

Lead Partner: Grant County Conservation District

Total Funding Request: \$13,100,000.00

This project is part of the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program located in the heart of the Columbia River Basin in Central Washington, with the goal to replace groundwater irrigation with Columbia River surface water for 5,222 acres of high-value irrigated farmland currently relying on the rapidly declining Odessa Subarea Aquifer, thereby helping to prevent source water depletion. Once constructed, this project would deliver Columbia Basin Project water from the East Columbia Basin Irrigation District’s canal to a total of 10 farms effectively removing 11 wells from pumping groundwater and conserving 15,888 acre-feet (5.1 billion gals) of water in the aquifer each year.

Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program EL 86.4 On-Farm Project

Lead Partner: Grant County Conservation District

Total Funding Request: \$7,200,000.00

This project is part of the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program (OGWRP) located in the heart of the Columbia River Basin in Central Washington. The goal of the Grant County Conservation District’s project is to replace groundwater irrigation with Columbia River surface water for 5,426 acres of high-value irrigated farmland currently relying on the rapidly declining Odessa Subarea Aquifer, thereby helping to ... *(cont.)*





Programs *(continued)*



prevent source water depletion. Without more reliable surface water, farmers will continue to be impacted by declining groundwater levels. The goal is to conserve as much of the remaining aquifer as possible for the 25 communities that rely on it for their drinking water supply. This project will build upon funding through the Washington State Legislature to build the EL 86.4 mainline, utilizing RCPP to complete on-farm infrastructure.

Upper Yakima River Water Supply and Fish Habitat Improvements

Lead Partner: Kittitas County Conservation District

Total Funding Request: \$17,804,878.00

The Upper Yakima River Water Supply and Fish Habitat Improvements project will address critical needs for integrated conservation and restoration of watersheds in the Upper Yakima River of Central Washington. This supports the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, a 30-year water resiliency plan to protect and enhance fish and natural resources, improve water availability and reliability, establish more efficient water markets, manage the variability of water supplies, and prepare for the uncertainties of climate change through operational and structural changes throughout the watershed. The Kittitas County Conservation

District will k assist producers with on-farm and delivery irrigation practices and habitat practices to improve water use efficiency, water quality and fish habitat availability. This project will replace 6 irrigation diversion structures with fish friendly structures opening up 2 miles of habitat, install 3 acres of riparian habitat; realize over 1,000 acre/feet of annual water savings.

Absolute Enteric Methane Reductions in Washington State Dairies: A New Frontier on the Journey to Net Zero

Lead Partner: AGSPIRE INC.

Total Funding Request: \$16,500,000.00

Agspire Inc's Absolute Enteric Methane Reductions in Washington State Dairies project will help producers reduce and avoid greenhouse gas emissions. This project will generate a reduction of approximately 225,000 MTCO₂e from enteric methane production in the NDA milkshed – lowering the GHG impact in the region, while providing producers in the milkshed with approximately \$23 million in additional revenue from their use of 3-NOP. This reduction is equivalent to the carbon implications of taking 50,069 cars off the road, and it will come at no cost to production for the NDA milkshed, which produces over 9 million lbs. of milk annually and supplies over 1,900 jobs.





Management & Strategy

NRCS Washington Hiring Actions

By Chas Scriptor

ASTC for Management & Strategy

During Fiscal Year 23 NRCS-WA filled 41 positions, some of which were backfills. So far in FY24 we have filled 8 positions, plus there are 9 more positions where selections have been made and staff will enter on duty over the next weeks and months.

Currently there are 80 positions in process to be filled. Those 80 positions include new NRCS staff identified as needed to implement Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) activities as well as backfill positions. In addition, 50 IRA Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions are planned to be filled using agreements or contracts with partners. There are also other positions targeted to be added but not yet in the process of being filled.

With these additional staff hires comes the need for additional office space. We are working to find additional space in current locations, by potentially acquiring un-needed space from partner agencies, and we will look for new office space opportunities as current leases expire.

Positions Filled in FY23

Position	Location
Civil Engineering Technician (CET)	Chehalis
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Chehalis
Soil Conservationist	Clarkston
Soil Conservationist	Colfax
Soil Conservationist	Davenport
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Davenport
Administrative Assistant	Ephrata
Cultural Resources Specialist	Ephrata
District Conservationist	Ephrata
Soil Conservationist (1890 Scholar)	Lake Stevens
Resource Conservationist	Montesano
Administrative Assistant	Olympia
Area Program Specialist	Olympia
Urban Team Soil Conservationist	Olympia

Area Civil Engineering Technician (CET)	Olympia AO
Cultural Resources Specialist	Olympia AO
Civil Engineer	Pasco
Soil Conservationist	Pasco
Soil Conservationist	Port Angeles
Biological Science Technician	Pullman PMC
District Conservationist	Puyallup
Program Support Assistant	Puyallup
Soil Conservationist	Puyallup
Soil Conservationist	Puyallup
Soil Conservationist	Renton
Administrative Assistant	Spokane SO
Administrative Assistant	Spokane SO
Administrative Assistant	Spokane SO
Administrative Program Specialist (HR Specialist)	Spokane SO
Cultural Resources Specialist Archeologist - State	Spokane SO
Engineer (Design Engineer)	Spokane SO
Forester (State Forester)	Spokane SO
Program Specialist (Easements)	Spokane SO
Public Affairs Specialist (now vacant)	Spokane SO
Soil Conservationist	Spokane Valley
Soil Conservationist	Spokane Valley
Soil Conservationist	Vancouver
Resource Conservationist	Waterville
Resource Conservationist	Wenatchee
Resource Conservationist	Wenatchee
Area Easement Position	Yakima

Positions Filled in FY24 (Current as of Nov. 3)

Position	Location
IRA Soil Conservationist	Colfax
Natural Resource Specialist	Colfax
Rangeland Management Specialist	Colville
Natural Resource Specialist	Davenport
Natural Resource Specialist	Davenport
Resource Conservationist	Longview
Resource Conservationist	Puyallup
Resource Conservationist	Renton



Management & Strategy *(continued)*

Hiring Actions in Process

Position	Location
Natural Resource Specialist	Bremerton
Soil Conservation Technician	Colfax
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Colfax
CET / ENG	Colville
Forester	Colville
Natural Resource Specialist	Colville
Natural Resource Specialist	Colville
Program Support Assistant	Colville
Natural Resource Specialist	Davenport
Program Support Assistant	Davenport
Rangeland Mgmt Specialist	Davenport
Area Agronomist	Ephrata
Area CET	Ephrata
IRA Soil Conservationist	Ephrata
Natural Resource Specialist	Ephrata
Natural Resource Specialist	Ephrata
Natural Resource Specialist	Ephrata
Program Support Assistant	Ephrata
Resource Conservationist	Ephrata
CET / ENG	Ephrata
RCPP Coordinator	Ephrata, Ellensburg, Wenatchee, Yakima
Engineer	Ephrata or Yakima
IRA Soil Conservation Technician	Everson
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Lake Stevens
Soil Conservation Technician	Montesano
Natural Resource Specialist	Mt. Vernon
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Okanogan
Area Forester	Olympia
IRA Program Admin	Olympia
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Olympia
CNMP Ag ENG	Olympia WAO
CNMP Specialist	Olympia WAO
IRA Soil Conservation Technician	Pasco
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Pasco
Forester	Pomeroy
IRA Soil Conservationist	Pomeroy
Resource Conservationist	Port Angeles
IRA Soil Conservationist	Prosser
Natural Resource Specialist	Prosser

Biological Science Tech	Pullman
Biological Science Tech	Pullman
Biological Science Tech	Pullman
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Pullman
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Puyallup
Natural Resource Specialist	Republic
Soil Conservation Technician	Republic
Natural Resource Specialist	Ritzville
Natural Resource Specialist	Ritzville
Rangeland Mgmt Specialist	Ritzville
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Ritzville
Area CET	Spokane EAO
Area Range Specialist	Spokane EAO
Area Resource Conservationist	Spokane EAO
CNMP Specialist	Spokane EAO
Cultural Resources Specialist	Spokane EAO
Engineer (Pathways)	Spokane SO
Geologist	Spokane SO
Geologist (Pathways)	Spokane SO
IRA Area Programs Admin	Spokane SO
IRA Program Admin	Spokane SO
IRA Public Affairs Specialist	Spokane SO
Management Analyst (Grants and Agreements Specialist)	Spokane SO
Public Affairs Specialist	Spokane SO
Realty Specialist	Spokane SO
District Conservationist - Yakama Tribal Team	Toppenish
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Vancouver
IRA Soil Conservation Technician	Walla Walla
IRA Agronomist	Waterville
Natural Resource Specialist	Waterville
Soil Conservation Technician	Waterville
IRA Program Admin	Wenatchee
IRA Irrigation lead (planner)	Yakima
IRA Soil Conservationist	Yakima
Natural Resource Specialist	Yakima
Program Support Assistant	Yakima
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Yakima



Management & Strategy *(continued)*

FTE Positions Identified to be filled via Agreements with Partners

Partner	Position Type	Location
Specific CD Agreement	IRA Cultural Resources Specialist	Area Office
Tribes	IRA Tribal conservation planner (East/Central Floater)	East Area Office
Specific CD Agreement	IRA Cultural Resources	Ellensburg
Pheasants Forever	IRA-Easement Habitat Specialist	Ephrata
Pheasants Forever	IRA-Easement Habitat Specialist	Mt Vernon
Pheasants Forever	IRA-Easement Specialist	Mt Vernon
Washington Dairy Federation	IRA West Area Outreach Specialist	Olympia
Tribes	IRA Tribal conservation planner	Olympia
Tribes	IRA Tribal training coordinator and outreach	Olympia
Tribes	IRA TEK Agronomist	Olympia
Washington Wheat Growers	IRA East Area Outreach Specialist	Pasco
NFWF	IRA Forester	Puyallup
Tribes	IRA Forester	Quinault Nation
NFWF	IRA Forester	Republic
NFWF	IRA Area Forester	Spokane Valley
Pheasants Forever	IRA-Easement Habitat Specialist	Spokane Valley
NFWF	IRA Fish Biologist	Walla Walla
Washington Cattlemen's Association	IRA Central Area Outreach Specialist	Wenatchee
NFWF	IRA Area Forester	Wenatchee
NFWF	IRA Forester	Wenatchee
NFWF	IRA Area Biologist	Wenatchee

FTE Positions Identified to be filled via Contracts

Entity	Position Type	Location
Contractor	IRA Programs Assistant	Chehalis
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Soil Conservationist	Chehalis
Contractor	IRA Programs Assistant	Colfax
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Soil Conservationist	Colfax
Contractor	IRA Programs Assistant	Colville
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Soil Conservationist	Davenport
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Soil Conservationist	Ellensburg
Contractor	IRA Programs Assistant	Ephrata
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Planner/Irrigation Planner	Ephrata
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA CNMP Planner	Everson
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Soil Conservationist	Lake Stevens
Contractor	IRA Programs Assistant	Mt. Vernon
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA General Sciences	Okanogan
Contractor	IRA Programs Assistant	Olympia
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Soil Con Tech	Pomeroy
Contractor	IRA Programs Assistant	Prosser
Contractor	IRA Programs Assistant	Ritzville
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Soil Conservationist	South Bend
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Soil Conservationist	Spokane EAO
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Soil Conservationist	Spokane EAO
Contractor	IRA-RCPP Program Analyst	Spokane Valley
Contractor	IRA Programs Assistant	Walla Walla
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Soil Conservationist	Walla Walla
Contractor	IRA Programs Assistant	Waterville
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA RMS	Waterville
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA CRP Planner	Wenatchee
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA Soil Conservationist	Wenatchee
WSCC / Conservation Districts	IRA CNMP Planner	Yakima





Partnerships

LWG Update

(Local Working Group)

By Nick Vira

NRCS-WA Partnership Liaison

In October NRCS hosted a kickoff meeting for Local Work Group Chairs to announce new changes to the local work group processes for this year and to discuss new and emerging opportunities for work groups to get more involved. This year LWGs will have an accelerated timeline and are requiring all LWGs to set their meeting date by December 8, 2024 and to hold the meeting by May 10th, 2024.

This year, LWGs are primarily responsible for determining their local EQIP fund pools. Additionally, LWGs may recommend new needed conservation practices, recommend priority watersheds for the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), submit local initiatives, or develop Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funded project proposals for EQIP and/or CSP.

IRA Project Proposals

In FY24, NRCS awarded over \$4 million in additional funds to support IRA Project Proposals submitted by LWGs. LWGs may submit additional project proposals this year, and proposals must be submitted by the LWG chairperson by May 24, 2024. IRA project proposals must align with at least one of the overall priorities of the IRA: Soil Health; Livestock & Grazing; Energy, Combustion & Electricity Efficiency; and Agroforestry, Forestry, and Upland Wildlife Habitat. Only approved Climate Smart practices can be utilized to support these proposals, so proposals will need to select from the suite of IRA practices that directly improve soil carbon; reduce nitrogen losses; reduce, capture, avoid, or sequester carbon dioxide, methane, or nitrous oxide emissions associated with agricultural production. Proposed activities should align with IRA data layers

that have been provided to LWGs, which reflect practice suitability and priority across geographic areas of the state. All proposals must provide significant evaluation and demonstration of workload (landowner participation) to justify the amount of their financial request.

NWQI

The purpose of NWQI is to reduce sediment, nutrients and pathogens within 12 digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) watersheds. In Washington State, NWQI watersheds are proposed by LWGs. When an opening for new enrollment becomes available (following completion of an existing watershed project) NRCS works with State and Federal partners to select which watershed(s) will be selected for the “planning phase” of NWQI which is when a comprehensive watershed inventory and plan is developed. Once the watershed plan is developed and approved, that watershed is moved to the “implementation phase” at which time it is eligible to receive dedicated EQIP and CSP funds for a multiyear period until established goals have been met. Currently Washington has three active watersheds: Crab Creek in Grant County, Mill Creek in Walla Walla County, and Spring Creek/Union Flats in Whitman County.

Anyone seeking additional information on LWGs can contact their chairperson or Nick Vira, or follow the QR code.





Engineering

PL-566 | Small Watershed Program Activities

By Larry Johnson

NRCS-WA State Conservation Engineer

NRCS National Contract for A&E services – Status Report

NRCS relies heavily on a national NRCS contract to support watershed program activities ranging from Preliminary Investigation Feasibility Reports (PIFRs), Watershed Planning, engineering planning and design and more. Without an active contract, all work for the Small Watershed Program essentially comes to a complete halt. The most recent contract expired spring of 2023 and NRCS has been without an active contract for 6 months. Our NRCS national office announced an opportunity to be considered for a contract January 2023 and have been diligently reviewing proposals and awarding contracts around the country. It was anticipated that an award would be completed for our region by the time the existing contract expired, which isn't the case. It is anticipated that an award will be completed by the end of the December 2023, at which time we can move forward with Small Watershed Program activities.

Congressional Directed Spending

Clallam County received Congressional Directed Spending (Earmark) for the Dungeness Off-Channel Reservoir. The County requested an appropriation from Senator Patty Murray's office in the amount of \$2,728,000 to cover the estimated construction cost for piping the main Highland Irrigation District irrigation ditch. The funding was delivered to NRCS through the Small Watershed Program. Since the funding was delivered to NRCS through the Small Watershed Program, all programmatic requirements must be met. If we are required to

follow all programmatic requirements, we will not be able to pass the funding to the County for nearly 2 years. NRCS WA is discussing options with our national office to determine potential streamlining opportunities for the project. Our goal is to find the most efficient way to deliver the construction funding to the County.

Odessa Groundwater Aquifer Replacement Project

NRCS announced our intent to adopt the USBR FEIS for the Odessa Subarea Special Study and was announced November 2, 2023. Please follow the link for details. [NRCS intends to adopt Reclamation's Odessa Subarea Special Study Final Environmental Impact Statement \(govdelivery.com\)](https://govdelivery.com).

Once the USBR FEIS is fully adopted, NRCS and the East Columbia Irrigation District (ECBID) will be able to move forward with the development of a watershed plan to include all the remaining and pumping structures that area awaiting funding for construction. Preliminary watershed planning activities have already commenced. Full adoption will pave the way for NRCS to begin Tribal and Public scoping meetings. We anticipate that our tribal and public outreach activities will be initiated this month (November 2023).

The ECBID subcontracted with the Columbia Basin Conservation District (CBCD) to develop the watershed. A contract was awarded by the (CBCD) to the Farmers Conservation Alliance (FCA) to provide 100% technical support for all related watershed planning needs.

Clallam County Off Channel Reservoir

Clallam County has decided not to pursue funding through the NRCS Small Watershed Program.





Engineering *(continued)*

City of Brewster

FEMA has been working with the City of Brewster to developing new floodway zones through the city. The city is very interested to know if the Small Watershed Program can help them address the flood impacts that have been identified through the FEMA model. NRCS has completed initial screening the of project needs and have concluded that the project needs fall well within scope of the Small Watershed Program. NRCS has developed a Statement of Work (SOW) to complete a Preliminary Investigation Feasibility Report (PIFR) and have requested funding to complete a PIFR for the City or Brewster. The PIFR will be used to determine overall program eligibility for the Small Watershed Program. Update: No further action is possible until after the National Engineering Services Contract has been awarded.

Chelan County

The Chelan County Natural Resource Department (CCNRD) aims to coordinate watershed efforts to increase watershed resiliency through the implementation of projects designed to

restore river ecosystem processes, enhance floodplain connection, reduce erosion and sediment input, enhance water quality and quantity, improve water delivery systems, and promote the long-term viability of sustainable agriculture in the Wenatchee Watershed.

NRCS is planning on initiating a PIFR once the National Engineering Services Contract has been awarded.

Gardina Farms Irrigation - District Walla Walla County

This project was developed as part of a Comprehensive Irrigation District Management Plan (CIDMP) funded by Washington State Department of Agriculture. The plan uses a voluntary incentive-based approach that provides a means for irrigation districts to meet requirements under the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and continue supplying water to meet local irrigation needs. The

GFD is actively improving the efficiency of their

irrigation system and have completed several irrigation efficiency projects over the past 20 years. The proposed project is to replace the degraded Pine Creek Siphon and convert 11 miles of earthen canal to pipe.

NRCS is planning on initiating a PIFR once the National Engineering Services Contract has been awarded.

WA State Wildfires

Update: NRCS has completed evaluations a number of wildfires across the state for eligibility for the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP).

Newell Road Fire (Klickitat Co.)- Review completed, eligible for EWPP assistance.

Gray Fire (Spokane Co.) - Review completed, ineligible for EWPP assistance.

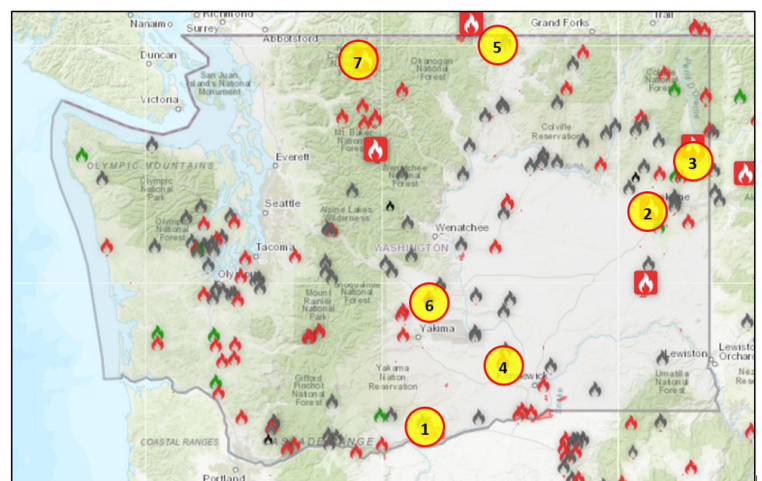
Oregon Fire (Pend Oreille Co.)- Review completed, ineligible for EWPP assistance.

Hanson Road Fire (Benton Co.) - Review completed, ineligible for EWPP assistance.

Eagle Bluff Fire (Okanogan Co.) - Review completed, eligible for EWPP assistance.

Baird Springs Fire (Grant Co.) - Review Completed, ineligible for EWPP assistance.

Sourdough Wildfire (Skagit Co.) - Review completed, eligible for EWPP assistance.





Public Affairs

Things are looking *great!*

By Nate Gallahan

NRCS-WA State Public Affairs Specialist

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. — It has been a busy few months and things are looking great!

We've recently hired on a new administrative assistant to my team, Macayla Leyden, who is a real rockstar! Her primary duties will be to help our small team with the more than 100 events we represent NRCS at. This not only includes preparing materials, but also helping with coordinating the financing and such. She's also excited to help with publishing our news releases and other communications products. I'm extremely excited to get her trained up!

Then, we've finalized our cooperative agreement with the Washington Dairy Federation, who hired on Alicia McCarthy as an area outreach coordinator. She'll be working hard to both assist dairy producers across the state and producers in the West Area connect with our agency to help them improve stewardship of their land.

We are also working similar cooperative agreements with the Washington Cattlemen's Association and the Washington Wheat Growers. WCA will be hiring an outreach coordinator to help raise awareness of our agency with the beef industry statewide, and producers across the central area. The Wheat Growers will be hiring an outreach coordinator to assist the small grain industry statewide connect with us, and producers across the east area.

Then, six other organizations have signed Equity in Outreach Cooperative Agreements with our National Headquarters. While each one is unique in its goals and methods of achieving them, each one is amazing and will help us get the word out to historically underserved producers.

These all represent a huge increase in our ability to reach out to producers and hopefully raise awareness of all the programs and opportunities we harbor.

This isn't everything though! Hopefully over the next few months, we'll be advertising two Public Affairs positions. One will concentrate on traditional and social media, and marketing. Then, the second will concentrate on story-sharing and product development. Once these two positions are filled, my team will finally be complete, and the sky will be the limit!

All of this is with the intent of implementing our comprehensive, synergistic, and streamlined Communications & Outreach strategy. The goal: raise awareness of who we are and how we can help everyone with the incredible capacity afforded us through the Inflation Reduction Act funding. I'll be sharing our Communications & Outreach strategy in the next Partner Activity Report, as I am a true believer in organizational listening, and I sincerely hope to receive some feedback on how it all looks from outside our agency and how I can make it the best it can possibly be.





NRCS-WA News



NRCS intends to adopt Reclamation's Odessa Subarea Special Study Final Environmental Impact Statement

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. (Nov. 1, 2023) – The Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is adopting the Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) 2012 Odessa Subarea Special Study Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) produced in cooperation with the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology).

With the NRCS adoption of the FEIS and issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD) that concurs with Reclamation's selected alternative, East Columbia Basin Irrigation District (ECBID) — in partnership with Reclamation, Ecology, and NRCS — will streamline the development of a Watershed Plan under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program authorized by Public Law 83-566 by utilizing the FEIS environmental compliance document already produced. With an Authorized Watershed Plan, ECBID will be eligible to pursue NRCS federal funding to support the phased implementation of the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program.

Located in Central Washington, ECBID is the largest irrigation district in the state, with authorization to irrigate 472,000 acres. Currently, 169,000 acres are developed and managed by 4,500 landowners within the federal Columbia Basin Project (CBP). The FEIS analyzed the potential to replace groundwater irrigation on up to 102,600 acres of land in the Odessa Subarea with surface water from the CBP.

The Odessa Subarea aquifer is experiencing significant declines in groundwater levels. Domestic, commercial, municipal, and industrial uses, as well as water ... *(Continue reading via the QR code.)*





RCPP News



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

**WE'RE WORKING
TO IMPROVE THE
REGIONAL CONSERVATION
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**

USDA Streamlines Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Invests Unprecedented \$1 Billion in 81 Conservation Projects

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is making historic investments to the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and streamlining the program to make it work better for producers and partners. This combination will deliver conservation at a scale never before achieved through RCPP. This year, more than \$1 billion is being invested to advance partner-driven solutions to conservation on agricultural land through 81 projects.

RCPP leverages a voluntary approach to conservation that expands the reach of conservation efforts and climate-smart agriculture through public-private partnerships. Historic funding is made possible by both the Inflation Reduction Act, part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda, and the Farm Bill.

RCPP Improvements

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has identified ways to streamline and simplify RCPP, ease the burden on employees and partners, and help maximize flexibility for partners to leverage their investments with NRCS resources and capabilities.

Through a concerted effort over the past eight months, using guidance, feedback and expertise from partners, employees, leadership and stakeholders, NRCS has identified several improvements that the agency will implement in the months and years ahead.

Improvements include:

- Streamlining RCPP agreements for fiscal year 2023 awards and moving to one programmatic agreement to begin implementing the RCPP projects awarded under the fiscal year 2024 notice of funding opportunity. This will allow partners to more quickly begin implementation of their RCPP projects.



(Read more via the QR code.)





RCPP News

Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program (OGWRP) EL 80.6 and 84.7 On-Farm Project RCPP Applications Deadline Announced

SPOKANE, Wash.

(Nov. 3, 2023) – The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will accept applications starting immediately, until December 8, 2023 for the “Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program (OGWRP) EL 80.6 and 84.7 On-farm Project” Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project. This RCPP includes Adams County.



(Read more via the QR code.)

Cascadia Conservation District now accepting Fuel Break and Forest Resilience RCPP applications

Landowners interested in improving forest health, wildfire, and drought resilience, along with helping protect critical infrastructure, are encouraged to apply for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) before November 15th 2023.

Cascadia Conservation District is working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation ...



(Read more via the QR code.)

Middle Columbia Steelhead Partnership RCPP Applications Deadline Announced

SPOKANE, Wash.

(October 18, 2023) – The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will accept applications starting immediately, until November 17, 2023 for the “Middle Columbia Steelhead Partnership” Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project. This RCPP includes lands in Kittitas, Yakima, Klickitat and Skamania Counties.



(Read more via the QR code.)

Clark Conservation District to start accepting RCPP Poop Smart Clark applications

VANCOUVER, Wash.

– Clark Conservation District and USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service will start accepting applications for their Poop Smart Clark Regional Conservation Partnership Program funding beginning October 9, 2023, until January 19th, 2024.

This RCPP covers all of Clark County, but the focus areas are the East Fork Lewis River and Lacamas Creek Watersheds. Primary Resource Concern ...



(Read more via the QR code.)





RCPP News *(continued)*



Palouse CD to start accepting RCPP Palouse River Watershed applications

PULLMAN, Wash. -

Palouse Conservation District and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service will start accepting applications for their Palouse River Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding starting Oct. 2, 2023, until Nov. 3, 2023. This RCPP covers land within the Palouse River Watershed (WRIA 34) and includes land in Whitman, Spokane, Adams, and Lincoln counties.

The Palouse River Watershed RCPP is a partnership program led by Palouse Conservation District that provides technical assistance and funding for land management activities. Funding is available for practices that improve Soil Health, Water Quality, and Habitat. Common practices include: No-Till, Reduced Till, Cover Crop, Nutrient Management, Field Border, Filter Strip, Riparian Forest Buffer, Conservation Cover, and Conservation Crop Rotation.



Primary Resource Concern Categories are:

- Wind and Water Erosion
- Concentrated Erosion
- Soil Quality Limitations
- Field Sediment, nutrient, and pathogen loss
- Terrestrial habitat
- Aquatic habitat

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to plan and implement conservation practices that improve soil, water, plant, animal, air, and related natural resources on agricultural ground. Eligible producers and entities interested in applying for financial assistance through this special RCPP sign-up may apply now.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service will work with partners through the RCPP to provide financial and technical assistance for landowners and producers wanting to address natural resource concerns in the Palouse River Watershed.

RCPP funding is limited, and applications will be subject to a ranking system. To be eligible, it is important that interested parties visit their local Farm Service Agency offices as soon as possible to ensure that their farm records are established.

All applicants must have their farm records established and their eligibility paperwork ...

(Read more via the QR code.)





NRCS News

USDA Increases Minimum Annual Payment for Conservation Stewardship Program

USDA is increasing the minimum annual payment to producers in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) from \$1,500 to \$4,000 in fiscal year 2024. The increase will address inflation and other challenges faced by small scale, underserved, and urban producers and improve equity in the program by making participation more financially beneficial for smaller operations. The new minimum payment amount will be available for new and renewed CSP contracts.

Farmers.gov Local Dashboard Now Available for Producers in Washington

Access local data to assist with your farming operation including weather forecasts and up-to-date commodity pricing

Farmers in Washington can now access county specific farming data and USDA resources all in one place via the new farmers.gov local dashboard. Your new farmers.gov local dashboard includes farming data and USDA resources including USDA news, commodity pricing, weather forecasts, historical climate data, past storm events, USDA service center locator and additional state resources for Washington and your county. The dashboard transforms complex data sets into easy-to-read charts and graphs to help you quickly find information that matters to you.



Share Your Harvesting Experience for Farmers.gov's #Harvest2023 campaign

As America's farmers harvest the crops that feed, clothe, and fuel our world, let's fill the Farmers.gov social media feed with their stories about this year's harvest season. We'd also like to see how it's going for farmers that participated in our #Plant2023 campaign in the spring.

To share your experience on @FarmersGov social media, follow these steps:

1. Collect photos of what's happening on your operation as you harvest. If you're comfortable, we'd love to see the people that make it happen, like friends and family.
2. Write an email to FP.Social@usda.gov, attach your photos/video, and tell us:
 - Your name, the location of your operation, and the name of your operation
 - Your operation's Facebook, Instagram, and/or Twitter pages, if you have them.
 - What are you harvesting this year?
 - Where does your harvest go? How is it used?
 - What are your personal thoughts on this year's harvest season?

Please note that by submitting your photo/video, you are granting USDA permission to use these materials for outreach and education purposes.

Remember to follow @FarmersGov on [Facebook](#), [X](#) (formerly known as Twitter), and [Instagram](#), and we look forward to sharing your story!





NRCS News



Learn How Keeping the Stubble Can Help Your Farm Throughout No-Till November 2023

Keep the stubble and help your farm by adopting no or reduced tillage

This November, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is again playing off the popular awareness campaign, "No-Shave November" with our very own campaign, "#NoTillNovember." No-till (also called zero tillage or direct seeding/drilling) is a way of growing crops or pasture year over year with minimal soil disturbance through tillage. Disturbing your soil through tillage reduces water infiltration, increases runoff, and can make the soil less productive. Tillage also disrupts the soil's natural biological cycles, damages soil structure, and increases erosion.



USDA Announces 2024 Tribal Scholarships and Fellowships

The application deadline is December 1, 2023.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced two tribal higher education opportunities to train the next generation of agricultural professionals and strengthen ties with tribal higher education institutions. The USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program offers a fast-track career path with USDA, and the Terra Preta do Indio Tribal Faculty Fellowship engages tribal college faculty with USDA resources and research. These programs reflect USDA's commitment to advance equity and remove barriers to service for tribal nations and encourage tribal workforce development. Today's announcement also marks the 29th anniversary of the day legislation was signed to give tribal colleges land-grant status.



Urban Producers, Public Invited to Attend November Meeting of Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

Meeting will take place November 29, 10 a.m. to noon PST

We're inviting urban producers, innovative producers, and other stakeholders to virtually attend a public meeting of the Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production on November 29 from 10 a.m. to noon PST.





The bumper sticker stating that 'Habitat is the Key to Wildlife' is so true. Habitat is the combination of food, water, shelter, and the spatial arrangement and connectivity of those resources that allows fish and wildlife to thrive.

At the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), we spend a lot of time working with partners to conserve habitat. Whether it is owning and managing wildlife areas, partnering with private landowners to provide technical assistance, or issuing hydraulic permits to protect aquatic life, our work to conserve habitat is critical to every aspect of our mission. Quality, abundant habitat is key to keeping common species common, recovering imperiled species, and providing sustainable hunting and fishing opportunities.

One of the major threats to fish and wildlife is human development and conversion of native habitat. The Office of Financial Management estimates that Washington's population will grow from less than 8 million in 2024 to more than 10 million in 2051. With more structures and houses come more roads and more transmission lines, further fragmenting an already fragmented landscape.

That is why state statutes like the Growth Management Act and the Shoreline Management Act are so important. They provide guidance to local governments on land-use plans and development regulations, helping direct growth through zoning and adopting critical area ordinances to protect habitat features. These important tools help planners meet human needs while conserving areas for wildlife.

The [Priority Habitats and Species \(PHS\)](#) program is one of our primary means of translating fish and wildlife information from our resource experts into data and recommendations that local governments, conservation districts, landowners, and others can use to protect habitat.

The PHS program provides a suite of tools to help local governments designate and protect critical fish and wildlife areas. PHS manages a list and maps of species and habitats so that land-use planners, local governments, and landowners can assess potential impacts when making development decisions. PHS also provides management recommendations, so project proponents and land-use planners know how to protect priority species and habitats.

Priority species include state- and federally listed species, vulnerable animal groups (e.g., seabird concentrations or bat colonies), and vulnerable species of recreational, commercial, or tribal importance.

Priority habitats are habitat types or elements with unique or significant value to many species. A priority habitat may consist of a unique vegetation type like [shrubsteppe](#), dominant plant species like juniper savannah, or a specific habitat feature like cliffs. There are 20 types of priority habitats in Washington. Three priority habitats have been in the

spotlight recently; these include riparian management recommendations, [shrubsteppe](#) mapping, and biodiversity areas and corridors.

PHS is influential with local government land-use planners because it has been recognized by the state Supreme Court as a source of Best Available Science (BAS). Our regional habitat biologists do outstanding work to advise local governments how they can align their protections of critical areas with BAS and find the right balance to conserve species.

Want to learn more about PHS? Contact the PHS Section Manager Dr. Julia Michalak or visit the PHS pages on our [website](#). As the state's population continues to grow and put more pressure on habitat, the work the PHS teams do is critical and foundational to almost every aspect of our agency's mission.

Sincerely,

Kelly Susewind, Director



Riparian areas, cliffs, and shrubsteppe — each a type of priority habitat — surround the Tieton River on Oak Creek Wildlife Area northwest of Yakima. Photo by Justin Haug.



WDFW staff at a hunter check station

Chronic wasting disease testing in eastern Washington

WDFW is once again asking hunters in the Eastern Region (Region 1 including Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, Walla Walla, and Whitman counties) to have harvested deer and elk tested for [chronic wasting disease](#) (CWD), a fatal illness of deer, elk, caribou, and moose. CWD has not been detected in Washington but has been confirmed in four Canadian provinces and 30 U.S. states, including Idaho. Hunter check stations are staffed on weekends throughout the Big Game hunting season in Region 1, as that is the closest part of Washington to Idaho. [Visit our webpage](#) for check station locations and hours. Any hunter who has their deer or elk

tested goes into a random drawing for a free multi-season deer tag for next year, courtesy of a partnership between WDFW and the [Washington Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers](#).



WDFW and Puget Sound Energy staff tour WDFW's Baker Lake Hatchery

Baker River sockeye reach record return through coordination by WDFW, tribes, Puget Sound Energy

A record number of Baker River sockeye made their way upriver this year. The sockeye co-managers — consisting of the Upper Skagit and Swinomish tribes and WDFW — are estimating a total return of more than 65,000 Baker sockeye for 2023. The Baker River is a tributary of the Skagit River. The sockeye run, which has been gradually on the upswing

from a low of less than 100 fish in 1985, well exceeded the previous record of 51,074 fish trapped and harvested in 2015. Fish captured in the upstream fish trap, operated by Puget Sound Energy (PSE), are used to fulfill broodstock needs at WDFW's Baker Lake Hatchery or are released to allow natural spawning and recreational fishing opportunity. Learn more about this successful conservation and fisheries collaboration between WDFW, Native American tribes, and PSE [in our joint blog post](#) with Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.



Photos by Conner Neander, Allison Lamb, Misty Mixon, and Craig Newberry

New Habitat at Home content helps Washingtonians create spaces for birds, bats, and pollinators

In September, our Habitat at Home program published three new wildlife-specific resources for Washingtonians to create habitat where they live, work, and play. These online resources focus on creating habitat for three types of wildlife including [Songbird Habitat](#), [Pollinator Habitat](#), and [Bat Habitat](#). Resources on the webpages are free and can be used by anyone, any business, or any school with a patio, balcony, rooftop, yard, or nearby greenspace. You can learn about beneficial plants, best practices, and [wildlife viewing](#) activities once your habitat is established. If you'd like to take your outdoor space a step further, you can also review certification requirements, either as an addition to your Habitat at Home plaque or as a standalone certification. Check the above webpages in

early 2024 for the application. The [Habitat at Home program](#) is free and open to all Washington residents.



Youth fishing at a WDFW event in eastern Washington

WDFW family fishing events host record-breaking year: volunteers sought for events next spring

Attendance at WDFW family fishing events continues to grow and [2023 was the biggest year in recent history](#), with nearly 5,000 attendees at more than two dozen events. WDFW began hosting youth fishing events in 1999 in partnership with local municipalities, community organizations and clubs, and volunteers. The events, held during spring and summer months, aim to educate the public, promote conservation, and help people learn how to fish. Participants learn about fish identification, water safety, fishing ethics, the basics of fishing gear and casting, and lessons in conservation. Plans are already in the

works for the 2024 family fishing event season, which is expected to be the biggest yet with a goal of 20 events. Dates and locations will be posted at the start of the year. Check the [youth fishing events page](#) for more info and check out the [volunteer page](#) to learn about getting involved. You can also support youth fishing events in your community [with a donation](#) to the Youth Outdoors Initiative.



WDFW Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) unit field staff sampling for mussels and other invasive species on the Columbia River

Invasive quagga mussels detected in Idaho; monitoring and prevention efforts ramp up in Washington

Last month, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) [announced](#) the presence of quagga mussels in the Snake River in the south-central area of that state near Twin Falls.

These small but sturdy invasive mussels can clog pipes and mechanical systems of industrial plants, utilities, locks, dams, and hatcheries, as well as cause serious environmental damage to native aquatic species and habitats. ISDA initiated rapid response containment and treatment actions, and established a [webpage](#) for their incident response. A regional effort is now underway to ensure invasive mussels stay contained. If invasive freshwater mussels take hold in Washington, officials estimate it would cost more than \$100 million each year to keep our power and water infrastructure running, in addition to causing ecological damage. Learn what WDFW's Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) unit is doing to monitor for and prevent the spread of [invasive mussels in our recent blog post](#). In other invasive species news, we've published our latest [European Green Crab Public Update](#), which includes detailed information on efforts by WDFW, tribes, and partners to control these harmful shore crabs on the Washington Coast, and in the Salish Sea where we're seeing signs of progress.



Tugboat discharging ballast water. Photo by W.carter / Public Domain

Ballast water management protects Washington from aquatic invasive species

Of all the fish, wildlife, and habitat management, conservation, and outdoor opportunity responsibilities under our purview, ballast water monitoring is one many people may not know about. Yet [ballast water management](#) plays an important role in protecting Washington's waters from harmful invasive species. Often outside the public eye, WDFW vessel inspectors and operations and data staff work hard to reduce the chances of invasive species entering our waters through ballast water — the additional weight large ships take on for stabilization. The Ballast Water and Biofouling Section of WDFW's Aquatic Invasive Species Unit leads our ballast water management efforts. Learn more about them [in this new blog post](#).



Angler with a white sturgeon. Photo by Eric Braaten

Anglers finding success during updated Lake Roosevelt sturgeon season

The Lake Roosevelt sturgeon season continues through November, and so far, it's been a productive season for anglers. This fishery was changed from a summer season in past years [to a fall fishery starting this year](#) to reduce stress from warm water temperatures on sturgeon that are caught and released. This does not appear to have affected angler's ability to catch these large fish. In the meantime, in October, WDFW staff stocked several thousand young [white sturgeon](#) in Lake Roosevelt for future generations of anglers to catch. At the rate these big fish grow, that could be a couple decades!



A gray wolf photographed in Stevens County, northeast Washington, by Robin Harina

Radio-Activated Guard boxes help deter wolf-livestock conflicts

WDFW's Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) will meet in Ellensburg Nov. 15 and 16 for their quarterly meeting. This meeting is open to the public to observe. Meeting agenda and location information will be posted to the [Wolf Advisory Group web page](#). In other wolf news, this grazing season we utilized new Radio-Activated Guard (RAG) boxes sourced through a partnership between WDFW and Defenders of Wildlife. RAG boxes are placed around pastures to scare off carnivores. They play loud sounds and flash bright lights when approached by radio-collared wild animals. Because the RAG box design was never standardized and no one produced them consistently, they were hard to find. WDFW was

down to one functioning box when it partnered with Defenders and other groups to design a more functional RAG box and work to have it produced on a consistent basis. You can read about the results from that partnership and get a look at the new and improved RAG box [in this blog post](#).



Squid jiggers fishing of a Puget Sound pier; a popular fall and wintertime activity in Western Washington

WDFW renews Puget Sound squid dockside surveys for the 2023–24 season

Squid jigging has become an increasingly popular and accessible fishing activity, and part of how WDFW fishery managers support a sustainable squid population is through angler catch-and-effort surveys throughout the eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound.

Between now and the end of January 2024, you may see WDFW dockside creel surveyors — easily identified by their agency logo or a bright reflective orange vest — at 20 piers across Puget Sound. The surveys will provide valuable information about squid in our local waters and provide new information about the recreational fishery along with insights into this species’ life history, migration, growth, and abundance. Learn more about “squidding” and our catch monitoring this winter [in our blog post](#).



WDFW employee measuring a large culvert to assess fish passage following construction work

Brian Abbott Fish Barrier Removal Board accepting grant proposals to remove barriers to migrating fish

The Brian Abbott Fish Barrier Removal Board [is accepting proposals](#) through Jan. 18, 2024 for projects to remove barriers that prevent salmon and steelhead from swimming upstream. Created by the Legislature in 2014, the board coordinates the removal of fish passage barriers on state, local, tribal, and private land that block salmon and steelhead access to prime spawning and rearing habitat. WDFW and Washington State Recreation

and Conservation Office (RCO) jointly administer the board's grant program, which has invested more than \$121 million in 117 projects to remove barriers to migrating fish. For more information about the grant application process and requirements, visit [RCO's website](#).



Students from St. George's School in Spokane heading out for a day for habitat restoration

Hands-on learning: students take a break from books to improve wildlife habitat

The “wild” life at a Spokane area natural area recently included about 30 excited sixth graders armed with cutting utensils. The students, from St. George's School in north Spokane, took their lessons outside for a day to learn about ecosystems, habitat restoration, trees and how they reproduce, and perform some community service at the

same time. St. George's is very close to the [Waikiki Spring Nature Preserve](#), a 95-acre natural area along the Little Spokane River that is managed by the Inland Northwest Land Conservancy (INLC) and adjacent to, as well as accessible through, WDFW's [Waikiki Springs Wildlife Area unit](#). Working together, WDFW and INLC manage and maintain this land, a total of 210 acres between the two agencies, for members of the public to use for everything from hiking and kayaking to fishing, dog walking, bicycling, cross country skiing, and snowshoeing. [Learn more about this collaboration](#) in land management and conservation education.

Director's Bulletins are also archived on the Director's [webpage](#).

NACD – National Association of Conservation Districts

1. 2023 Farm Bill

- The chairs and ranking members of the House and Senate agriculture committees are working to develop the bill but have recently collectively acknowledged that they will need to pass an extension of 2018 Farm Bill.
 - Congress is exploring attaching a year-long extension of the 2018 Farm Bill to a continuing resolution (a bill to keep the federal government funded at current levels), which will need to be passed by November 17 to avoid a government shutdown.
- Even though the 2018 Farm Bill expired on October 1, Congress will not be pressured to pass an extension until the end of this year.
 - Commodity programs can continue to function,
 - Crop insurance is permanently authorized,
 - And the IRA reauthorized conservation programs in addition to providing more funding – so programs, like EQIP, CSP, and RCPP will continue to be administered.

2. Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations

- The most pressing job Congress has is funding the federal government when the existing continuing resolution expires on November 17. (NOTE – this hopefully occurs prior to our 2023 WACD annual meeting.)
- We narrowly avoided a shutdown at the end of September.
- Congress must pass an additional continuing resolution or all 12 full appropriations bills before that date to avert a government shutdown.
- If an agreement is not reached and the government shuts down on November 17, USDA and NRCS will be forced to cease operations, greatly impacting many districts operations, and negatively impact the administration of conservation as a whole.
 - Many districts are co-located with NRCS offices and would not be able to enter offices or use shared resources if a shutdown occurs.

3. NACD 2023 Farm Bill Requests

- NACD's highest farm bill priority is to keep the \$18 billion the IRA provided for NRCS conservation programs (like EQIP and CSP) in those programs.
 - This funding is required so NRCS to continue progress in reducing the backlog in these programs.
 - NACD has also asked Congress to integrate this funding in the conservation title of the 2023 Farm Bill providing potential permanent increase in baseline funding for conservation programs.
- NACD has many other farm bill requests across USDA programs primarily focused on supporting locally-led processes, simplifying conservation program administration, and avoiding additional national carveouts.

4. **Friends of NACD grant applications** are open for innovative, novel approaches. Application period is open until November 30, 2023. Click [here](#) for more information.

5. **EPA Seeks Comments on NPS §319 Grants Guidelines**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) seeks comments on a revised draft of the nonpoint source (NPS) §319 grant guidelines. The “Draft Revision for Public Comment: Nonpoint Source Program and Grants Guidelines for States and Territories” can be accessed [here](#). The EPA will be taking comments through **December 31, 2023**.

Comments can be submitted:

- via this [online form](#);
- emailed to NPSguidelines2023@epa.gov; or
- mailed to 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, MC-4503-T, Washington, DC 20460.

EPA will host a webinar on **December 5, 2023** from **3:00-4:30 p.m. ET** to provide an overview of the guidelines. [Register here](#) to attend.

6. **New NACD Staff** –

- **Marquita Hall** is the new Southeast Region Representative. Her email is marquita-hall@nacdnet.org.
- **Chessa Frahm** is our new Grants Administrator. Frahm is based in Dawson, MN and can be reached at chessa-frahm@nacdnet.org.
- **Caleb Griffin** is our new NACD Pacific region representative. His email is Caleb-Griffin@nacdnet.org.

7. **NACD Annual Meeting** - 2024 Annual Meeting in San Diego, California on February 10-14, 2024 and with the themes below. [Registration](#) is open. There will be an evening on the *USS Midway*, the longest-serving aircraft carrier in the 20th century.

- Sustainable agriculture – compost, pollinators, and wine.
- Urban agriculture in southern San Diego County.
- Collaboration on forest health – a site managed by Girl Scouts

8. **Upcoming meetings**

February 10-14, 2024NACD 2024 Annual Meeting in San Diego
August 10-14, 2024NACD 2024 Summer Meeting in Boston
To Be Determined.....NACD 2024 Pacific/SW Region Joint meeting - Alaska
February 8-12, 2025NACD 2025 Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City
To Be Determined.....NACD 2025 Summer Meeting in Milwaukee
February 14-19, 2026NACD 2026 Annual Meeting in San Antonio
To Be Determined.....NACD 2026 Summer Meeting in Grand Rapids

Farm Bill and Appropriations information graciously provided by NACD Government Affairs staff, Chris Young and Connor Simons. Doug Rushton has more background information.

Submitted by [Doug Rushton](#), Thurston CD, WACD national director, NACD board member.
Information current as of 11/10/23.

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WSSC Center for Technical Development (CTD)

WA State Conservation Commission Meeting Update

November 2023

Explore more @ www.wactd.org

We're thrilled to announce that CTD is gearing up for some exciting new changes in the upcoming months. We received a number of exceptional applications for our new Training Coordinator position and are on-track to have someone on board by late November or early December. The new addition to our team will play a key role in enabling us to curate, develop, and deliver training to district staff. The CTD Leadership Team will also be dedicating some time this winter to long-term strategic planning, including prioritizing more CTD-hosted training, more in-field training opportunities, and additional training topics. We continue to develop and strengthen our partner relationships, allowing for new opportunities to offer training and professional development to district staff. We're excited to kick off the new year with additional capacity and new offerings!

Website

Find information on training, certification, planner resources, training library, networking forums and much more!

Newsletter

Sign up for the monthly CTD newsletter to stay up-to-date on all things CTD!

Training Events Calendar

An embedded events calendar lets staff quickly find training and networking events, and calendar links are available for all forums.

CTD Contact Information

For more information on CTD activities, please contact:

Jan Thomas, CTD Co-Chair /
Training Coordinator

Ryan Williams, CTD Co-Chair

info@wactd.org

Training

WADE 2024 - The WADE 2024 conference will be here before you know it! CTD continues to work closely with the WADE board and support WADE Track Coordinators. Final session schedules are due to the WADE Board by February 23, 2024. The 2024 conference will be in person, June 10-12, 2024 at the Sleeping Lady Resort, with virtual options provided by CTD for most sessions. Sessions will again be recorded and posted for viewing after the conference.

NRCS Training - The FY2024 Training Plan has been released and courses are currently being scheduled. CTD remains in close contact with NRCS staff to plan and build course rosters, and will work with individual staff to register for NRCS courses.

Webinars - The CTD has hosted several webinars this fall, including topics on rain gardens, soil carbon, wetlands assessments and more. All training event information is available on the CTD website Training Events page, and all virtual training and webinars are recorded and posted to the CTD Training Library.

Partnership & Coordination

Leadership: The CTD Leadership Team and partners (NRCS, WADE, WSCC) continue to meet monthly to ensure tasks are on track. The CTD will place an emphasis on expanding training opportunities and resources in the coming year. The CTD leadership team is currently seeking new members, and continues to actively pursue representation from both sides of the state, and from both small and large districts.

Partnership: CTD is an active participant in several training-focused partnership groups; Washington Association of District Employees (WADE), NRCS's Employee Development Committee (EDC), National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCPPI), and the WA Conservation Planning Partnership (WCPP). Building and maintaining these partner relationships is a vital piece of keeping conservation district employees connected to available training and professional development resources and opportunities.

Training Needs Inventory (TNI): The CTD TNI remains available on the CTD website, and is the primary way for district staff to request NRCS and other trainings. To date, more than 90 district staff have requested training through the TNI. Scheduling is currently underway for FY24 courses, and requests on the TNI will receive priority. The CTD also offers a [quick training request form](#) to help capture additional training ideas and requests.

Resources for Staff

Networking Forums: The CTD continues to host multiple Networking Forums for different planning disciplines and expertise. Currently the CTD hosts five networking forums: Cover Crop, Farm, Dairy, Riparian, Plant Sale, and most recently, Wildfire and Forestry. The CTD also supports a new Engineering focused forum, hosted by Snohomish CD and open to all staff. Forums are held quarterly and led by conservation district staff members who work in those fields. CTD provides direct support for forum leads as well as the meeting platform. The forums provide a much-needed space for planners and technical staff to share successes and challenges, ask questions, and connect year-round. An email listserv function and a shared Google drive hosted by the CTD complement each forum and provide additional space for connection and sharing.

The “Building Better: Leadership and Management Learning Community” series, hosted by the CTD in collaboration with WSCC, WADE, and WACD, is currently undergoing an update to bring in new contributing staff and ensure that the topics are timely and not duplicative of other efforts. Learning resources and materials from individual sessions, can be found on the [CTD website](#) in the interim.

Training Scholarships: Training scholarships remain a priority for the CTD. CTD will make \$5000 available again this year to district staff who are pursuing professional training opportunities. The awards are open to all district employees, but will prioritize providing support to those staff who are pursuing conservation planner certification.

Conservation Planner Certification

NRCS Planner Certification: The CTD coordinates closely with NRCS to help District staff through the NRCS Planner certification process. The Training Coordinator works in assisting new staff and planners in AgLearn with new sign ups, ongoing training, and completion of conservation planner programs. We've also been working hard behind the scenes to develop processes to streamline AgLearn and LincPass access for partners and improve training request processes. CTD materials are continuously updated to reflect changes, and are communicated to District staff through webinars, email announcements, and individualized assistance. The [CTD Training Plan Template](#) serves as a resource to assist in tracking training toward planner certification and can be found on the CTD website.

CTD Planner Certification: The CTD Planner Certification Program accepts applications on a rolling basis through an online submission process. The CTD will continue to evaluate our certification process, build internal capacity around certification, and target outreach efforts to increase participation in the program.



Washington Association of
Conservation Districts

November 2023 Partner Report



ADVOCACY

- Resolutions from Area Association meetings are being reviewed by WACD's lobbyist.
- WACD staff are discussing with WACD's lobbyist how best to support the Conservation Commission's decision packages. Previous support for Conservation Technical Assistance by WACD's membership means we do not need to wait for 2023 resolutions to be approved to support CTA.

BOARD MEETINGS

- January 22, 2024, WACD Business Meeting
- January 25, 2024, WACD Legislative Day
- February 10-14, 2024, NACD 78th annual meeting – San Diego, California

COMMITTEES

- WACD's committees provide important advice to the WACD Board. Several committees have been active since the September meeting of the Conservation Commission, including:
 - Finance Committee
 - Livestock Committee
 - Sustainable Funding Committee
 - Shared Resources Work Group
 - Legislative, Bylaws, and District Policies Committee
 - Natural Resources Policy Committee

OPERATIONS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

- Heather Wendt (WACD Director of Development and Engagement) was hired in August 2023, increasing WACD's capacity to serve our 45 member districts.
- Wendt and Amy McKay (WACD Vice President) secured significantly more sponsors for WACD's annual conference in 2023.
- In coordination with the Washington State Dairy Federation, WACD submitted a concept paper to the National Association of Conservation Districts, seeking \$4 million in funding for Technical Assistance and Cost Sharing in districts with significant dairy production.
- WACD contracted with Streamline to replace our public-facing website with a site that provides greater accessibility for all users. We expect uptime for the site to also be improved.

PLANT MATERIALS CENTER

- Sales of native plants are somewhat slower this fall compared to the last two years but overall, we project another cycle of strong sales.
- Fields are in excellent shape. Weed control costs declined this year, presumably because of strong investments in prior years to control weeds before they went to seed.
- One of three irrigation pumps may need to be replaced in the next six months. Also, we suspect the well lining has a hole, decreasing efficiency. We will be costing a new pump with variable frequency drive, and replacing the lining, this winter.
- The gravel bed project continues to improve. This year is the first year the PMC has offered non-dormant gravel bed plants for fall planting.

OTHER ISSUES / OPPORTUNITIES

- A few WACD member districts have declined to pay dues this year. Per WACD's bylaws, they remain members (albeit not members in good standing) and WACD continues to actively represent and advocate for them.