



Washington State Conservation Commission

Meeting Packet

March 21, 2024

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

Shelton, WA

Our Mission:

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

WSCC Business Meeting

Little Creek Casino Resort
91 WA-108, Shelton, WA 98584

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 Kaisha Walker at 360-407-7417, or call 711 relay service. All accommodation requests should be received no later than Monday, March 18, 2024 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. Chat will allowed between host and guests.

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	Chair Cochran
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roll Call• Introductions• Pledge of Allegiance• Additions/Corrections to agenda items• Squaxin Island Tribe - Welcome and Land Recognition• Opening Comments from Mason Conservation District	

9:00 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)	January 18, 2024 Draft Meeting Minutes	Chair Cochran
	b)	February 28, 2024 Draft Special Meeting Minutes	Chair Cochran

9:05 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)	Agricultural Conservation Easement Grants Authorization	Kate Delavan

9:35 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.	
	d)	Spokane Conservation District Mid-Term Appointment	Chair Cochran

9:45 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.	
	e)	New Professional Engineering Area Draft Process	Josh Giuntoli
	f)	Voluntary Stewardship Guidelines Comments	Sarah Groth

10:15 a.m. – 15 MINUTE BREAK

TIME	TAB	ITEM	LEAD
10:30 a.m.	1.	Budget and Finance <i>(Action Item)</i>	
		Public comment will occur prior to adopting each action item. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per comment.	
		g) Grant and Contract Policy & Procedure Manual	Sarah Groth
		h) Washington Association of Conservation Districts Contract	Sarah Groth
		i) Fiscal Year 24 End Funding Timeline	Sarah Groth
10:45 a.m.	2.	District Operations <i>(Information Only)</i>	
		a) District Operations and Regional Manager Report	Josh Giuntoli
11:00 a.m.	2.	Policy Update <i>(Information Only)</i>	
		b) Legislative Session and Tribal Engagement	Kate Delavan
11:30 a.m.	2.	Commission Operations <i>(Information Only)</i>	
		c) Water Supply Conditions for Washington Agriculture	Packet Item Only
		d) Diversity, Equity. And Inclusion - One Year Update	Packet Item Only
		e) SCC Agency Update	Sarah Groth
12:00 p.m.	–	Lunch	
12:30 p.m.		Farm Service Agency Update •Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Update Presentation by Jon Wyss, State Executive Director	
12:50 p.m.		Recreation and Conservation Office •Riparian Management Programs and Policies Presentation by Nick Norton, Planning and Policy Specialist	

TIME	TAB	ITEM	LEAD
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1:15 p.m.

Partner Updates

- f) Natural Resources Conservation Service

Packet Item Only
- g) Department of Fish and Wildlife

Packet Item Only
- h) Washington Association of Conservation Districts

Tom Salzer
- i) Center for Technical Development

Packet Item Only
- j) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Nick Peak

1:30 p.m.

Closing remarks- Adjourn

Chair Cochran

TAB 1

Regular Business Meeting ~

The Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission/SCC) met virtually as well as in-person on Thursday, January 18, 2024, in Olympia, Washington. Chair Larry Cochran called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m. Vice-chair Kearney facilitated the meeting in-person.

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

Larry Cochran, Chair, Elected eastern region rep.
Cherie Kearney, Vice-chair, Governor Appointee
Daryl Williams, Governor Appointee
Brook Beeler, Department of Ecology
Dean Longrie, Elected west region rep. (online)
Wade Troutman, Elected central region rep. (online)
Jim Kropf, Washington State University
Mike Mumford, Washington Association of Conservation Districts (online)
Perry Beale, Department of Agriculture
Karen Zirkle, Department of Natural Resources

Quorum present.

COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT

James Thompson, Executive Director
Alicia McClendon, Administrative Assistant
Jean Fike, Puget Sound Regional Manager
Karla Heinitz, Policy Assistant
Paige DeChambeau, Communications Director
Sarah Groth, Director of Accounting & Budget
Sarah Wilcox, Communications Specialist
Shana Joy, District Operations Manager

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

PARTNERS REPRESENTED

Angie Reseland, Dept of Fish and Wildlife
Doug Rushton, National Association of Conservation Districts
Jon Wyss, Farm Service Agency (online)
Lucy Edmondson, Environmental Protection Agency
Nick Vira, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Nick Peak, EPA Region 10 (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

Lori Gonzalez performed commissioner roll call and announced a quorum was present. After commissioner roll call, introductions were done for guests who attended the meeting in person as well as online.

Whatcom Conservation District Virtual Tour

Vice-chair Kearney welcomed and introduced Whatcom Conservation District to lead a virtual tour of district projects. Whatcom CD representatives Brandy Reed, Heather Christianson, Larry Davis, Susie Snider, Valerie Wade and Alan Chapman contributed to the presentation.

CONSENT AGENDA

November 30, 2023 Draft Business Meeting Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to approve the November 30, 2023, draft business meeting minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Williams. Motion carried.

Out-of-state travel – Washington D.C., March 2024

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) will be hosting an in-person Legislative Spring Fly-in on March 20, 2024, in Washington D.C. The SCC executive director, chair, and vice-chair, if available, along with Washington conservation leaders around the state meet with our congressional members on natural resource priorities in our state.

Discussion by members.

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to approve the out of state travel request for up to three SCC representatives to attend the National Association of Conservation District's legislative fly-in scheduled in Washington D.C. in March 2024. Seconded by Commissioner Williams. Motion carried.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Riparian Grant Program update and request

Shana Joy presented. The Riparian Grant Program work group, including representatives from conservation districts, WDFW, ECY, WSDA, and RCO met 8 times to discuss aspects of a new riparian grant program in accordance with a budget proviso attached to \$25 million in new Climate Commitment Act funding in the 23-25 biennial budget. SCC staff requested in September, and were subsequently directed, to publish draft programmatic guidelines in advance of the November 30th Commission meeting for a full 45-day review and comment period. Draft guidelines were published on November 20, 2023, with a deadline to comment of January 2, 2024. The SCC received two requests for more time, so the decision was made to extend the comment deadline to January 17, 2024, by 5pm. The extension does necessitate that the SCC postpone action on final program guidelines.

SCC staff are requesting that Commissioners direct staff to schedule a special commission meeting in February to take action on the Riparian Grant Program guidelines. We anticipate presenting final guidelines, a compilation of all comments received and if, and how, the guidelines were modified to address them at that time.

Public comment:

The following guests provided public comment regarding the Riparian Grant Program guidelines:

- Jim Peters, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
- Jay Gordon, WA State Dairy Federation
- David Marcell, Pacific Conservation District & Grays Harbor Conservation District
- Mike Nordin, Pacific Conservation District & Grays Harbor Conservation District

Discussion by members.

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to direct SCC staff to schedule a special commission meeting in February 2024 to take action on the interim Riparian Grant Program guidelines and for staff to develop a proposal for final guidelines to emphasize the inclusion of tribal participation. Seconded by Commissioner Beeler. Motion carried.

Office of Farmland Preservation – Emerick Rangeland

The SCC secured grant funding from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, Farmland Preservation Account in 2023 to acquire a permanent agricultural conservation easement on the Emerick Rangeland property in Yakima County. SCC will hold the easement and assume primary legal and financial responsibility for stewarding and enforcing the easement in perpetuity. The project was developed and brought to the SCC by the North Yakima Conservation District (NYCD).

SCC staff are requesting authorization for the SCC Executive Director to sign documents for acquisition of the Emerick Rangeland agricultural conservation easement contingent on completion of the appraisal review.

Discussion by members.

Motion by Commissioner Mumford to confirm the Commission has determined acquisition of a conservation easement on the property is consistent with the mission, duties, and purposes of the Conservation Commission.

The Commission hereby authorizes the State Conservation Commission's Executive Director to sign documents for acquisition of an agricultural conservation easement on the approximately 2,576-acre Emerick Rangeland in Yakima County, contingent on completion of the appraisal review. Seconded by Longrie. Motion carried.

Partner presentation by Rodney Snyder, US EPA Agricultural Advisor on the proposed ESA Mitigation Strategies for Pesticides and [Bulletins Live! Two](#).

Partner Updates discussed.

Chair Cochran adjourned the meeting at 2:45 p.m.

Online participants:

Jodi	Prout
B'Elanna	Rhodehamel
Bill	Eller
Brook	Beeler
Rod	Snyder
Nicholas	Peak
Wade	Troutman
Heather	Wendt
Stephanie	Watson
Joy	Garitone
joe	Holtrop
Megan	Stewart
Rodney	Heit
Jack	Clark
Sarah	Moorehead
Grant	Traynor
Jennifer	Johnson
Michelle	Graham
Jeff	Schibel
Kevin	Jensen
Levi	Keesecker
Jackson	Moody
Heather	Christianson
Rosa	Mendez-Perez
Alan	Chapman
Heather	Spore
Allisa	Carlson
Wade	Troutman
Mike	Mumford
Valeri	Wade
Dean	Longrie
Craig	Nelson
Ash	Roorbach
Ashley	Wood
Brandy	Reed
Becca	Hebron
Karen	Hills
Bradley	Johnson
Paul	D'Agnolo
Michael	Tobin
Larry	Cochran

Toyo	Garber
Heather Christianson (Whatcom CD)	
Jennifer	Boie
Larry	Davis
Aneka	Sweeney
Ryan	Williams
Alec	Sorensen
Christina	Hurley
Brian	Cochrane
Anna	Lael
Dave	Hedrick

Additional in-person participants:

Michael Nordin
David Marcell
Jim Peters

Special Business Meeting ~

The Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission/SCC) met virtually as well as in-person on Wednesday, February 28, 2024 in Lacey, Washington. Chairman Larry Cochran called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.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 on the meetings webpage also.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

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

Quorum present.

COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT

James Thompson, *Executive Director*
Lori Gonzalez, *Executive Assistant*
Kaisha Walker, *Administrative Assistant*
Sarah Groth, *Director of Accounting & Budget*
Shana Joy, *District Operations Manager*

PARTNERS REPRESENTED (in person)

Ryan Baye, *WA Association of Conservation Districts*

GUESTS ATTENDED (online)

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

ACTION MINUTES TAKEN

Meeting began with Kaisha Walker performing roll call. Kaisha announced that a quorum was present.

Public comment:

The following guests provided public comment regarding the Riparian Grant Program guidelines:

- **Jim Peters**, *Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission*
- **Jay Gordon**, *WA State Dairy Federation*

Chairman Cochran calls on Director Thompson to discuss the agenda's topic.

COMMISSION OPERATIONS

Riparian Grant Program Guidelines-Presented by Shana Joy

In the 2023 legislative session, the legislature appropriated \$25 million to the WSCC for a voluntary riparian grant program with prescriptive budget proviso language, including direction on tribal engagement. Due to transitions in key leadership positions, sufficient tribal engagement has not been completed prior to Commission contemplation of draft programmatic guidelines. The Commission has directed WSCC staff to advance tribal engagement, seeking review and feedback on proposed guidelines. The Commission further indicated an interest in adopting temporary guidelines for governing the program, to remain in effect until reaching a prescribed point, allowing for the completion of significantly more meaningful work with tribes.

*Motion by Commissioner Longrie to adopt the Interim Riparian Grant Program guidelines for a 1-year period to allow for work to begin while additional outreach to Tribes and further discussion about permanent protection projects occurs. Staff to present an updated edition of Riparian Grant Program Guidelines by March 2025 Commission meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Troutman. Motion passed. **Commissioner Beeler opposed.***

Chair Cochran adjourned the meeting at 2:34pm.

Online Participants

1. Evan Bauder, Mason CD
2. Fra Wilshussen
3. Alex Harwell, Cascadia CD
4. Brian Cochrane, SCC
5. Megan Stewart, Asotin CD
6. Angie Reseland, WDFW
7. Jenna Rolf
8. Christina Hurley, SCC
9. Karen Hills, SCC
10. Dani Madrone
11. Bill Eller, SCC
12. Jacob Taylor, Spokane CD
13. Paige DeChambeau, SCC
14. Heather Wendt, WACD
15. Thomas Salzer, WACD
16. Elliott DeLong, Columbia Basin CD
17. Anna Lael, Kittitas County CD
18. Lori Gonzalez, SCC
19. Allisa Carlson, SCC
20. Toyo Garber, SCC
21. Levi Keesecker, SCC
22. Alan Chapman, Whatcom CD
23. Stuart Crane
24. Jean Fike, SCC
25. Kim Weerts
26. Cindy Elston
27. Emmett Wild, Skagit CD
28. Ben Rau, Dept of Ecology
29. Joe Holtcamp, Skagit CD
30. Julie Ann Koehlinger
31. Shana Joy, SCC
32. Brandon Rogers
33. Frank Corey, Whatcom CD

34. Jan Thomas, CTD
35. Ryan Williams, Cascadia CD
36. Josh Giuntoli, SCC
37. Zorah Oppenheimer, Clark CD
38. Linda Lyshall, Snohomish CD
39. Rodney Heit, South Yakima CD
40. Brandy Reed, Whatcom CD
41. B'Elanna Rhodehamel, SCC
42. Chevelle Yeckel, Okanogan CD
43. David Domingo, EPA
44. Lucy Edmondson, EPA
45. Karla Heinitz, SCC
46. Nicholas Peak, EPA
47. Jon Wyss, USDA
48. Sean Williams, WDFW
49. Craig Nelson, Okanogan CD
50. Kristin Marshall, Snohomish CD
51. Doug Rushton, Thurston CD
52. Alicia McClendon, SCC
53. Anthony Waldrop, Grays Harbor CD
54. Tom Kollasch, Pacific CD
55. Mike Nordin, Pacific CD
56. David Marcell, Pacific CD
57. Kim Williams, Clallam CD
58. Cindy Pierce, Skagit CD
59. Brad Riehle, Asotin CD
60. Sarah Wilcox, SCC
61. Kate Delavan, SCC
62. Stephen Lesky
63. Eric Allen, Spokane CD

Other In-Person Participants:

1. James Gordon
2. Ash Roorbach
3. Jim Peters



Washington State Conservation Commission

March 21, 2024

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Paul D'Agnolo, Farmland Preservation Specialist
Kate Delavan, Acting Policy Director, Farmland Preservation Coordinator

SUBJECT: Authorization to Submit Agricultural Conservation Easement grant applications

Action Item

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Informational Item

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Summary:

The Conservation Easement Sub-Committee recommends five agricultural conservation easement projects to the Washington State Conservation Commission for authorization to pursue grant funding.

Requested Action:

The Conservation Easement Sub-Committee recommends the Commission formally authorize, by motion, the SCC Executive Director to sign required documents to submit grants for agricultural conservation easements on five properties: North Yakima Conservation District (NYCD) Williams Rangeland, Kittitas County Conservation District (KCCD) Foothills Farm, Cascadia Conservation District (CCD) Hinterlands, Central Klickitat Conservation District (CKCD) Swale Canyon and Luna Gulch. The proposed draft motion is included at the end of this memorandum.

Staff Contact:

Paul D'Agnolo, pdagnolo@scc.wa.gov, 564-669-0972

Background and Discussion:

SCC is responsible for implementing the Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) and those activities identified in the OFP statute (RCW 89.10). SCC has identified agricultural conservation easements as an important tool to assist in farmland protection and advancing conservation with willing landowners. RCW 64.04.130 explicitly authorizes SCC to acquire and hold an interest in land for conservation purposes.

SCC is an eligible applicant to the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) Farmland Preservation Category. (Chapter 79A.15, RCW). Eligible lands for this program must be devoted primarily to the production of livestock or agricultural commodities for commercial purposes. If SCC is a successful applicant to the WWRP Farmland program, the agency will be the primary holder of real property rights and assume the legal obligation to monitor and enforce the terms of the easement in perpetuity. The purpose of the easement will be to prevent the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses through a restriction of certain real property rights, including the right to subdivide and develop.

Per SCC [Policy 19-02](#), SCC's priorities for consideration of an agricultural conservation easement are:

1. The parcel proposed for preservation is expected to continue to be used for, and is large enough to sustain, commercial agricultural production.
2. The land is also in an area that possesses the necessary market, infrastructure, agricultural support services, and the surrounding parcel sizes and land uses to support long-term commercial agricultural production.
3. Without preservation, the land proposed for protection is likely to be converted to nonagricultural use in the foreseeable future.

OFP sent an announcement to conservation districts in December 2023 seeking applications for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Sponsorship (ACES) program. OFP received five applications from four conservation districts.

The Conservation Easement Sub-Committee established in SCC [Policy 19-02](#) met on February 27, 2024 to review the five ACES applications. The Sub-Committee discussed each project and came to consensus on the following recommendation:

1. The Sub-Committee recommends all five applications to the Conservation Commission for approval to submit grant applications to WWRP Farmland in spring 2024. The Sub-Committee finds these five projects to all be strong applications.

The Sub-Committee considered each project against established criteria to assess each project's alignment with the grant program and with the SCC easement priorities. The criteria included agricultural values, development pressure, environmental values, and farmland viability.

The composition of the Sub-Committee is guided by [Policy 19-02](#) and consists of:

- Addie Candib (Pacific Northwest Director of American Farmland Trust)
- Vanessa Kritzer (Executive Director of Washington Association of Land Trusts)
- Tom Salzer (Executive Director of Washington Association of Conservation Districts)
- Linda Lyshall (Executive Director of Snohomish Conservation District)
- Dave Hedrick (Executive Director of Ferry Conservation District)
- Kate Delavan (Acting Policy Director for the Commission and Coordinator of the Office of Farmland Preservation)

Project Overviews

If SCC successfully secures funding from WWRP Farmland, SCC, aided by the local conservation district, will work to purchase agricultural conservation easements on each property ensuring the land stays open and available for agriculture in perpetuity.

1. North Yakima Conservation District - Williams Rangeland

The Williams Rangeland Protection Project seeks to establish a conservation easement on approximately 1,563 acres of rangeland located in the Moxee Watershed. The subject property represents the landowner's private landholdings that are utilized with an additional 2,900 acres of leased Bureau of Land Management and private rangeland pastures. The landowner has several years of experience on this landscape and has first-hand knowledge of proper management provided by the previous rancher who is transitioning to retirement. Currently the property is used for winter and spring forage until the herd is transported to the Cowiche Watershed west of Yakima for grazing on private and public leased lands.

The landowner plans to use the proceeds from the easement to purchase adjacent rangeland with the goal of being a self-sustaining operation within the Moxee Watershed. Through expanding their acreage, the Williams will be able to enhance rangeland pasture management, increase pasture production, rest pastures, increase carbon sequestration, provide viable shrub-steppe habitat for critical species all while reducing input costs and managing financial risk of the operation. The subject property offers expansive views and has high-capacity power lines which creates a high risk of conversion to both solar and residential development.

2. Kittitas County Conservation District - Foothills Farm

Foothills Farm is a nearly 400-acre livestock and hay operation near the community of Thorp in Kittitas County. Thorp is a small unincorporated farming community known for its cattle, timothy hay, alfalfa, and grass hay farms on the western edge of the Kittitas Valley. Foothills Farm is in the Taneum Creek watershed of the Upper Yakima River. The main farm borders Springwood Ranch, a 3,600-acre parcel recently acquired for conservation purposes.

Craig and Melanie George own and operate Foothills Farm. Their children are the fifth generation on the farm and are involved with the operation. The original 146 acres of this farm property was purchased by their great-grandfather in 1928. Timothy hay has been the main crop in the last 50 years. Dairy and cattle production have played a large role on the farm. The pastures are currently used by their son Ethan's commercial goat herd (300 mother goats). Foothills Farm has a strong time-honored bond to the land. As land prices increase exponentially and development pressure builds, it is the family's goal to preserve the farmland for future agricultural operations, while realizing a financial return to maintain sustainability. The surrounding area has seen a continual increase in the rate of residential development and pressure on converting farmland to non-residential uses. This particularly

high pressure of conversion makes this project a tremendous opportunity to contribute to the future of agriculture in Kittitas County.

3. Central Klickitat Conservation District - Swale Canyon

This project seeks to protect agricultural viability of an 875-acre ranch. This is a multi-generational ranch with the original ownership dating back to being homesteaded in 1899 and adjacent properties being purchased in 1950. The ranch operation provides rangeland grazing pasture and produces alfalfa-grass hay for livestock feed. This unique property has many different and valuable habitat types including a steelhead stream and white-oak savannahs. The ranch has an 8-GPM groundwater right for stock watering as well as several ponds and springs across the property.

The threat to conversion is present in the area and with this property. Abundant views and proximity to utilities and major thoroughfares make this property appealing to developers. The current owners are three brothers who are approaching the twilight of their farming careers and wish to use the easement to ensure that their family property will always be available for agricultural and habitat purposes. The final product of this project will be three separate easements that will collectively protect the entire 875 acres.

4. Central Klickitat Conservation District - Luna Gulch

This project will place an agricultural easement on a 1,326-acre farm and ranch that borders an 1,850-acre property that has been permanently protected. The adjacent completed project and this proposed project combine to create a potential 3,176-acres of permanently protected farm and rangeland. Current operations use 685-acres as rangeland, 281 acres as pasture grazing, and 360 acres as cropland. Agricultural operations are supported by 9 water rights totaling approximately 20 CFS instantaneous flow and 208-acre feet.

The farm is located on the south side of Pleasant Valley with expansive views of the Simcoe Mountains to the north. The property includes one mile of Luna Creek and several tributaries. Luna Creek supports a native Steelhead run. The combination of a unique landscape with proximity to recreation and mountain views create high development pressure on this property. The current owner of the property is interested in ensuring the future of the property will remain available for agriculture and habitat.

5. Cascadia Conservation District - Hinterlands

This project will permanently protect 336 acres of orchard and shrub steppe habitat. The property is a working orchard nestled in the foothills near Lake Chelan near the town of Manson. The property is currently producing apples and cherries. The proceeds from the easement sale are intended to be put back into the property to cover expenses of modernizing orchard infrastructure as well as replacing a few of the orchard blocks with crop varieties that have greater consumer demand and to utilize production systems that improve crop yields and quality.

Irrigation water that supports operations comes from the Lake Chelan Reclamation District and is secured by water shares tied to each parcel. The proximity to Lake Chelan and the abundance of views from the property create a high risk of conversion to non-agricultural uses.

Recommended Action and Options:

The Commission has determined acquisition of agricultural conservation easements on the five properties is consistent with the mission, duties, and purposes of the SCC.

The Commission hereby authorizes the State Conservation Commission Executive Director to sign required documents to submit grants for agricultural conservation easements on five properties: NYCD Williams Rangeland, KCCD Foothills Farms, CCD Hinterlands, CKCD Swale Canyon and Luna Gulch.



Washington State Conservation Commission

March 21, 2024

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Alicia McClendon, Administrative Assistant
Mike Baden, NC & NE Regional Manager

SUBJECT: Spokane Conservation District Mid-Term Supervisor Appointment

Action Item

X

Informational Item

Summary:

The SCC received four (4) applications for a mid-term appointment on the Spokane Conservation District Board of Supervisors.

The applications were sent to all Commission members for their review prior to the March 21st 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 each 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
Spokane	1. Randy James 2. Chris Mahelona 3. Kris Neely 4. Sara Schlake	Larry Cochran

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

Mike Baden, mbaden@scc.wa.gov



Washington State Conservation Commission

March 21, 2024

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, Executive Director

FROM: Josh Giuntoli, SW Regional Manager

SUBJECT: Professional Engineering Program – Draft New Area Process

Action Item

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Informational Item

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Summary:

Staff will present a draft process for forming a new engineering area.

Requested Action:

Approve sending draft process to conservation districts for 45-day comment.

Staff Contact:

Josh Giuntoli, SW Regional Manager jgiuntoli@scc.wa.gov

Background and Discussion:

Currently there is no process in place to establish new engineering areas that receive funding from SCC. Currently, nine engineering areas exist and are organized by inter-local agreements.

The Professional Engineering (PE) engineering area program was implemented in 1999 and established nine engineering areas across the state composed of various Conservation Districts (CDs). Since then, the nine engineering area arrangements has not changed. Host districts and composition of CDs have changed over time, but still only nine engineering areas total.

In May 2023, SCC received a request to form a new engineering area and illustrated a lack of thoughtful criteria and process to evaluate or approve such formation. In response, Commissioners requested a survey be sent to CDs on engineering to in part, better understand the support for new engineering area areas.

In June 2023, an engineering survey was sent to CDs and one of the questions asked was:

Currently, there are 9 organized cooperative engineering areas (engineering areas) in Washington. Does your district support the formation of new cooperative engineering areas in the state? Why or Why not?

Of the 25 responses to this question, 13 answered Yes, 9 answered No, and 3 did not answer. See Attachment A of this Memo for written responses to this question from survey participants.

At the July 2023 Commission meeting, Professional Engineering programmatic guidelines were adopted and included:

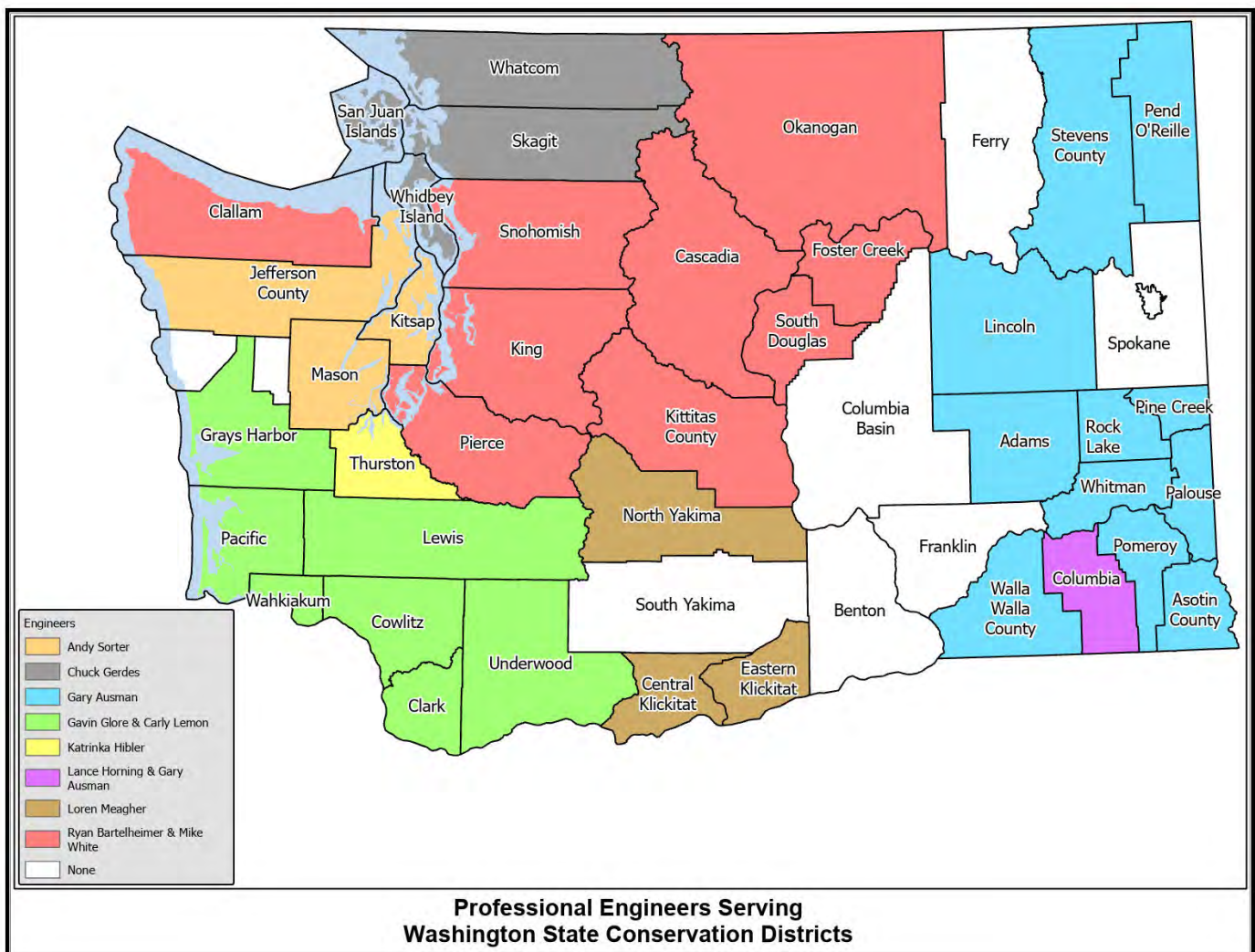
Forming a Cooperating Engineering Area - *Currently, the number of cooperative engineering areas is capped at nine until further work is concluded to establish a set process and criteria by which to evaluate requests to form a new engineering area or re-organize existing engineering areas.*

The Regional Manager team met over Fall 2023 to develop a concept for forming a new engineering area. The staff contact organized a meeting with the host areas and engineers in February 2024 to share what had been developed and gather feedback. We received both oral and written feedback, both summarized here.

The minimum number of CDs (4) proposed for an existing engineering area in general was not widely supported. The minimum number of CDs (4) for a new engineering area was generally accepted.

2 CDs responded in writing. The first provided that the current system is working well for their area and is generally not in favor of adding another area as it dilutes the funds. The decision to allocate funds should really be delegated by need, but there needs to be consistency not making changes in funding levels every two years. So staying as is - is the best. In addition, the respondent would not be opposed to reduction in funding in each area as long as there is enough for districts with engineer on staff to keep that person and the tools they need. Then have a state pool available to each area to apply for funding for larger specialized projects or additional tools needed or a specialized engineer through contract. They would not be opposed to an area receiving a larger sum and longer term is there is the overwhelming need for a second engineer. Additionally, the respondent felt the new area approval process is ok. But expressed concerns it is time consuming somewhat complicated and will create uncertainty in future funding as project priorities shift among areas. One suggestion was reorganizing areas based on miles the engineer has to travel and not the number of districts.

The second thinks the most critical provision of the proposed language is that engineering areas serve a minimum of 4 districts. Although workload is spread unevenly in space and time, they do think the 4-district minimum will prevent areas from taking up shared-state engineering resources. They think it would be useful to know more about genuine workload and time-to-design metrics from districts to determine how to shape the program more in the future. While they share the concern of many districts about the possibility to dilute funds, it does seem necessary to provide some relief to the Pomeroy area, where 9 districts are currently housed in one engineering service area.



Attachment A – Survey question response

Currently, there are 9 organized cooperative engineering areas (engineering areas) in Washington. Does your district support the formation of new cooperative engineering areas in the state? Why or Why Not?

1. If helpful to other districts.
2. "No it will dilute the funds, would agree to a thoughtful reorganization that may increase or decrease engineering areas"
3. If the need is there for a position, I'm in support of getting another engineering area. Seeing how funds are being delineated and requirements necessary for an engineer.
4. "I support the formation of new engineering areas in the following cases:
 - Districts are not receiving the services they need from their current engineering area. This could mean starting their own engineering area or joining a different one.
 - Workload in a engineering area has become too large. When the engineering areas formed they made some assumptions on workloads, some are small, some are large. With more funding and Districts who used to be small becoming larger, it may make sense to break up engineering areas into smaller groups to bring on additional support.
 - Logistics/travel requirements are too much for a engineering area to handle. Some engineers need to cover large landscapes or have limited ways to access areas (limited highways, ferries, etc.) and it doesn't make sense to send an engineer from one location on a long round-trip journey for a small project. If it is not cost effective to receive engineering services because of travel/etc, then that District should join a different district or work to form a new engineering area."
5. Why? Our engineering area worked until we couldn't afford to pay our engineer at a level to keep him employed with us. We have enjoyed a very successful engineering engineering area arrangement. The only way I could support a reorganization of engineer engineering areas is because funding was increased enough to hire a minimum of one engineer per two conservation districts to share.
6. We support additional areas if there is a need. We feel we are receiving adequate engineering services at this time though.
7. If you can prove that it is needed.
8. Unless there is additional funding it would dilute the funding, we have available in our area.
9. It would reduce the amount of funding for our area.
10. This will further divide funding availability, which is already limited considering the huge potential expense of in-stream/bank work to be performed with the riparian grant funding. If separate CDs don't want to work with other CDs in their area, making the remaining funding available via application to regional managers is the next best option.

11. "Formation of a new engineering area should be based on the need of that area. Often, I am unable to use my area engineering area engineer because of the skills/expertise required for the project but I am also unable to monopolize on other CD area engineers because their workload is full. Forming a new engineering area may be helpful but expanding our current engineering abilities (IBC compliant plans, CADD drafter) to help with current needs would be preferred.
12. Currently, my CD would not be able to use the SCC engineering funds if they are solely dedicated to engineering areas. "
13. "My true answer is ""I don't know"". I am open to this and support the need for an additional engineer to support SW. However, is this the only area request? What if others requests come about after this first request is approved? What criteria will be used? How many is too many before the funding is too diluted for anyone to be successful. Our engineering area survived for a long time with less funding. However, the bottom line is that even with the increased funding levels we will not have our engineer and engineering technician fully funded. We will continue to subsidize our engineering program with additional grants, contracts, etc. The current estimated annual cost of our engineer + tech + overhead + admin support is \$460,000. This cost is expected to increase every year.
14. "Ambivalent, the more important question is: 45 CD's divided by 9 should produce 5 CD's per engineering area, is that the case? My engineering area, as of right now, has 7 CD's in it. Which engineering area ('s) have less? In a perfect world, every CD would have as many engineers it needs, but that is not the real world, so decisions have to be made. These decisions should be as equitable as possible. In addition: the next question cannot be answered until there is a decision on if there will be more engineering areas, however my answer is based on current situation."
15. Possibly open to the option with additional information and justification. However, increased number of engineering areas means a decrease in funds for existing areas. Our engineering project workload already far exceeds the funding allocated. Through project prioritization, many projects get less engineer assistance than desired.
16. The more engineering capacity the districts can utilize the better.
17. Yes, it is important to have support for areas that currently struggle with engineering or engineering capacity. Having more engineering areas can greatly increase productivity and product capability.
18. CD's have grown in capacity tremendously and hiring an in-house engineer is not feasible for smaller CDs. Engineering areas or shared positions should be made where it makes sense. That said, funding for engineering areas should be divided equally based on how many CDs are participating the engineering area. (2 CDs = 2 x \$, 5 CDs = 5 x \$) The reality is, smaller engineering areas will need to have enough money to be able to put it towards funding a full-time engineer. Larger engineering areas will often need to hire surveying techs or EITs to assist 1 engineer covering such a large geography. Either way you slice it, the need is the same and the funding needs to be increased. Personally, I would like to see engineering area engineering time written into all WSCC funding programs, and not just relying on the PEG to fully support time. Having the grant program for in-house engineers is just as vital to cover activities that are

underfunded or unfunded by other sources. A good example is preliminary design work that makes funding applications shovel-ready and highly competitive. Our CD uses both our engineering area engineer and surveying team, along with our in-house engineer. They work together, collaborate, co-mentor, and support each other with their different areas of expertise. Engineering is a big field, and there is no way CDs can get by with just one flavor (just a structural engineer, or just a hydrological engineer, etc.).

19. This actually depends on why the new areas are being formed. The Spokane CD would support it if it does not negatively impact funding to other areas.
20. "Our current engineering area engineers have a very high demand for their services across their districts. Our need for engineering services is greater than the capacity available. While they do a great job and do their best to help everyone with their needs, a project can sometimes take years for a design to be completed. In addition, many of our projects require the services of a geotechnical engineer to determine project feasibility on steep slopes. This isn't a service that the engineering area engineers provide."
21. Our engineering area engineer was pulled away to help the Kittitas CD on contract at a very critical time for us- during the 11th hour of implementing NRI projects. Several of our NRI funded project will now not be completed in time and will have to pause and re-apply for 2023-2024 NRI funding. Even with two new engineers, our engineering area engineer seems to have too much on his plate to be taking on outside engineering area work.
22. "We support organizing engineering areas to support existing district engineers in the most effective way. If that means adding an engineering area or two, we support that. However, we do not support the unrestricted creation of new engineering areas. The paradigm under which these engineering areas were initially created no longer works for everyone involved. Funding should first go where it is needed to make whole districts with existing engineering staff, whether or not they are an engineering area engineer. If there is additional funding remaining, then funds should be distributed to areas looking to add staff. We support an examination of the engineers who are currently employed by districts and who have contracts with multiple districts, no matter which grant they are paid under. We support a reevaluation of the effectiveness of existing areas: How many projects have they created designs for in the last 24 months? If they are especially complex designs, perhaps there is another metric that could be used? How many districts have they completed designs for in the past 24 months, number of site visits for engineering, how many current active projects do they have, how many FTEs work in the engineering area (not including administration). The creation of engineering areas without much official oversight allows for the exploitation of the engineering area model. When the engineering areas work, they work well, but that isn't always the case and there is little recourse when things aren't working. We don't suggest the Commission oversees engineers. Still, since the engineering area funds should cover multiple districts but are assigned to one, perhaps there could be a way for districts to confidentially provide feedback on the effectiveness of the engineer/host district on a regular basis. "
23. Dilutes efforts to develop engineering programs in current engineering area areas.

24. Project demands exceed our area engineer's capacity to complete in a timely fashion. Adding an additional engineering area may provide the opportunity to invite additional skill sets. We would hope that the creation of a new engineering area would not negatively impact funding for the existing engineering areas or the services they provide at this time.
25. The current availability of engineering services for CD's in Washington is not adequate for the number of projects districts have that require an engineer.
26. Engineering program supporters have worked to increase funding for over a decade. Now that funding has increased the existing programs should have the opportunity to be fully established and provide services before reducing funding levels to the benefit of 1 or 2 regions at a cost to all others.
27. UCD opted out of the regional engineering program voluntarily with staff and the UCD board refusing to allow discussion on the regional engineering. UCD assured the conservation partners in that region it would not reduce their funding. Now UCD is seeking to reduce all 9 regions funding for their internal program. The conservation family should work together to find solutions that don't negatively impact the majority to benefit the few."
28. Forming new districts reduces the economy of scale and efficiency the engineering program was designed to accomplish. The program needs to support engineering teams across the state rather than be split up and reduce funding to only support 2 staff members. Fund the existing 9 programs at a higher level to get more return on investment.
29. "Yes, we support the formation of new areas where there is a documented need (such as existing engineering staff), workload and proven accountability. We don't support the unrestricted creation of new engineering areas. More specifically, we support the formation of at least one new area where we have an existing engineer on staff. Underwood CD employs a fully-licensed professional engineer with 11 years of district experience. UCD is a member of the SW Area Engineering area. Engineering services within the SW Area are provided by the P.E. employed by UCD and by the P.E. employed by Gray's Harbor CD (host district). The P.E. employed by UCD also provides engineering services to North Yakima CD, Okanogan CD and Columbia CD via MOU. The SW Engineering area has a fantastic working relationship between member districts and two highly-qualified, productive, accountable, and fully-licensed engineers. The request to create a 10th engineering area is based on documented workload, need and positive, productive work history. The project list for the SW Area is robust and requires at least two engineers to accomplish in a timely manner. Additional project funds are sought to leverage SCC PE funds, but these are inadequate to support two engineers. The vague concept of "fully-funding" any engineering area is unrealistic due to the endless demand and need for projects (in the SW Area and likely across the state), but in SW Washington the 10th area would allow the engineering area to split into two coordinated areas and provide an increased level of service within SW Washington and state-wide by continuing to provide engineering services where needed via MOU. The 10th area may include 3-4 participating districts. UCD already serves multiple other CDs, currently 10, 7 of which are in the SW Engineering Area. UCD already serves the function of a host district by employing an engineer that participates in the organized cooperative engineering area as well as serves districts across

the state. UCD is serving the function of a host district, fulfilling the intentions and purposes of SCC's PE program in an exemplar manner, without receiving SCC PE funding intended to support host districts.

Professional Engineering Grants Programmatic Guidelines

May 2023

Program Background

Professional Engineering Grant (PE) funds are operating funds. RCW 89.08.220(12) provides authority for conservation districts to share the services of professional engineering staff. PEs provide funding support to groups of cooperating conservation districts to hire or retain the services of professional engineers or engineering technicians under the supervision of a licensed professional engineer. The SCC provides PE funding to support professional engineering services and oversight, technical assistance, and staff training for conservation districts. Professional engineering programs are utilized to pool resources to access engineering services that:

- Are experienced with conservation projects' engineering requirements,
- Are familiar with local conservation districts operation and programs, and
- Are readily available to assist conservation district staff with all phases of conservation projects from initial project scoping, budgeting/grant development, permitting, construction, and final inspection and reporting.

In the 2022 legislative session, general operating funds were “*provided solely for the commission to make available to local conservation districts for project engineering services to enable permit and design work for conservation projects.*”

Program Rules

Eligibility to Receive Funds

Conservation districts must meet all of the Accountability requirements under the [Conservation Accountability and Performance Program](#) (CAPP) in order to be eligible to receive PE funds.

Timeline & Application for Funding

Professional Engineering Grant funds are allocated to conservation districts at the beginning of each fiscal year, no later than the month of July. Nearby districts are encouraged to work together cooperatively to hire or retain and share the services of licensed professional engineers.

Funds will be allocated to conservation districts based on complete applications submitted utilizing the [grant addendum form](#). Applications will be reviewed by Regional Managers and SCC financial staff for complete information and adherence to program guidelines before funds will be awarded. Funds will be allocated as follows:

- Allocate a set, equal amount per fiscal year to each cooperating engineering area, of no less than \$250,000 per fiscal year. Any cooperating engineering area may opt to request less funding if the full amount cannot be utilized.

- Additional engineering funds may be requested either for a cooperating engineering area program or by individual conservation districts.

It is SCC's intent to evaluate this funding allocation methodology on an annual basis. SCC may elect to fully allocate all available program funds only to cooperating engineering areas in future fiscal years if it is determined that district needs may be met with that approach. If one or more additional cooperating engineering areas are formed, the amount of funds available to be allocated to each cooperating engineering area may be reduced.

Specific Program Requirements

Professional Engineers

Districts may hire one or more licensed professional engineers to manage an engineering program. Program funding may be used to support the work of professional engineers and other staff working under the direction of a professional engineer to support program delivery. A professional engineer is defined by RCW 18.43.020(10)¹. Professional engineers and engineers in training (EIT) shall be licensed in the State of Washington. Districts are encouraged to build engineering capacity that includes EITs, surveyors, engineering techs and utilize other staff to support professional engineering staff in delivering engineering services. Districts may also contract out for professional engineering services to meet engineering needs as determined by participating districts.

Inter-Local Agreements (ILA)

Each cooperating engineering area of conservation districts must enter into an inter-local agreement governing: formation, membership, meeting frequency, and procedures of an area engineering committee (AEC), hire/fire and performance evaluation procedures for professional engineering staff, project/work prioritization methodology, general terms governing termination or amendment of the agreement, dispute resolution, liability, and insurance. A current, fully signed Inter-Local Agreement for each cooperating engineering area must be on file at the SCC. If an Inter-Local Agreement is in force until such time as terminated the document does not have to be re-signed by each cooperating conservation district each biennium. An email must be submitted to the sccgrants@scc.wa.gov at the start of each biennium indicating that review of the ILA has occurred, with the current ILA attached, and verifying the ILA is still current. Each district should review the agreement on an annual basis and ensure they are familiar with the terms and procedures contained in it.

Liability for Professional Engineers

In general, a conservation district as an employer is liable for their employees, including professional engineers if the employee is acting on behalf of the conservation district. In the event of a workplace injury, worker's compensation insurance through WA Labor & Industries applies. Additionally, the professional license that is held by professional engineers provides a measure of protection for liability if the engineer is working within the scope of that license. If the conservation district employing the professional engineer wishes to transfer liability to another district in which the engineer is performing work this should be addressed in the Inter-Local Agreement that governs sharing that engineer's services.

1

Changing the Host District

In the event a cooperating engineering area changes the designated host district, all equipment purchased with Commission funds (including purchases with overhead funds) must be transferred to the new host district. An inventory of such equipment shall be maintained and shared with the AEC annually or as prescribed by the ILA. All unexpended PE funds must be transferred to the new host district to continue to support the program. If the employment of professional engineering staff is transferred to a new host district, accrued sick/vacation leave and restricted host district funds accrued to cover the liability of this leave shall be transferred to the new host district. Host districts may only change at the start of a fiscal year and the SCC must be notified and approve of the change before processing any PE vouchers for the cooperating engineering area.

Forming a Cooperating Engineering Area

A group of conservation districts may choose to form a new cooperating engineering area. Cooperating districts must complete a new Inter-local Agreement, request in writing that the new engineering area be recognized by the SCC for PE grant purposes, and formally withdraw from any prior cooperating engineering areas included within. The SCC does not guarantee that new cooperating engineering areas will be recognized or provided with PE grant funding.

PE Services are to be made available to new and current engineering areas through a full time equivalent PE or equivalent contracted engineering services.

Each CD can only be a part of one established engineering area. A minimum of 4-conservation districts is required for new engineering area. Current engineering areas with less than 4 districts would continue. For all other engineering areas, if the engineering area falls below 4 districts, the engineering area has a one year grace period to get back to 4 cooperating districts. If after one year this has not occurred, the Commission reserves the right to halt grant funds.

Section 1 - New Cooperating Engineering Area Development Timeline:

1. The board of supervisors of each district involved approves initiating a new engineering area via a motion.
2. At least 6-months before the end of a biennium, interested CDs agree and notify in writing SCC local regional manager the intent of starting a new engineering area.
 - a. Include board approval motions
 - b. Include PE name if known or applicable
 - c. Include new engineering area name
3. Local regional manager briefs regional manager team and SCC Leadership Team.
 - a. If necessary, Regional manager conducts follow up questions with new engineering area
4. New engineering area notifies the respective existing engineering committee or Board of Directors. Current host district PE provides written support.
5. By April 15 in odd years, submit to regional manager a workload analysis (see details in next section)
6. Regional Manager submits request and workload analysis to SCC Leadership Team to discuss at a Leadership Team Meeting.
 - a. Questions will be directed to the Regional Manager who will share those with the petitioning CDs for response. Responses due back within 10-business days
 - b. Follow ups will be directed to Leadership Team for final decision
 - c. See evaluation criteria in Section 3
7. If approved, new engineering area develops an inter-local agreement and host district develops and submits to SCC a PE Services Agreement.

Section 2 - Workload analysis:

A workload analysis is required for new engineering areas by April 15 in odd years. This is to include, but is not limited to providing the following information:

1. Name of new engineering area Professional Engineer if applicable
2. Name of new engineering area host district
3. Names of CDs involved in new engineering area
4. Board Approval dates for initiating new engineering area process
5. If follow up questions requested from SCC – please include responses
6. Summary of previous 12-months PE accomplished to include in table format of CDs in the new engineering area:
 - a. Name of project
 - b. Indicate whether the following apply:
 - i. Preliminary Design
 - ii. Permit Design
 - iii. Fully implemented – completed or expected implementation timeline
 - c. For each project, indicate what CD the work was supporting
 - d. Indicate for each project whether SCC PE funding supported
 - e. If SCC PE funding was not used on a project, what was the source of funding.
 - i. I.E. SCC project funding or non-SCC funding
7. 12-month look ahead of expected and planned PE work of the new engineering area.
 - a. Provide a summary of expected work associated timeline for each
 - b. Indicate for each project whether SCC PE funding is expected to be used
 - c. If not SCC PE funding, indicate the likely source of funding

Section 3 - Evaluation Criteria used by SCC Leadership Team

1. Support from the new engineering area district board of supervisors
2. Review and recognition of PE engineer workload
3. Are the new engineering area districts actively pursuing grant funding that requires engineering
4. Do the districts have a track record of success in implementing engineered projects
5. If applicable, does the potential new engineering area engineer work well with existing engineering area engineer.
6. Is there support from existing engineering area CDs not joining the new engineering area
7. Do the new engineering area districts share a common district boundary
8. Does the new engineering area host/PE have agreements with CDs outside of the existing engineering area boundary
9. Is the potential host district a district in good standing (CAPP)
10. Available PE funding at SCC?
11. Is there still a need for an engineer in the new engineering area or just use contracting process with other engineers.
12. If denied, communicate back to CDs the reasons or reason for denial and provide appeal process outlined in Grants Manual – Section 2: Appeals

Expenditures

Eligible expenditures for PE funding include:

- Salary and benefits
- Overhead
- Goods and services
 - Such as contracted professional engineering, surveying, or geotechnical services
 - Software, hardware (computers etc.), and other equipment essential to performing engineering work
- Travel
- Training
- Vehicles (conditionally eligible on a case-by-case basis)

Ineligible expenditures for reimbursement from PE funding:

- General administrative goods and services (office rent, copy machines, electricity etc....)
- Education and outreach
- BMP implementation/construction/installation

Equipment

Equipment purchases anticipated to cost more than \$2,500 including but not limited to software, hardware (e.g. computer/laptop/tablet), essential tools (e.g. survey equipment) or vehicles should be included in the grant application as a separate outcome at the beginning of the grant cycle, where possible. Vehicles may only be requested on a limited basis utilizing the WSCC Vehicle Purchase Request Form. Once a grant is awarded, those software, hardware or equipment purchases included in the grant application are considered pre-approved and may move forward anytime during the fiscal year. All such purchases must be received in hand prior to June 30th of each year. Also, each applicable AEC must be informed of and approve of all such purchases over \$2,500 and this information must be included in the grant addendum form. If an equipment purchase over \$2,500 becomes necessary and was not included in the original grant addendum and award, pre-approval must be secured from SCC prior to making the purchase.

Reporting

Each conservation district receiving professional engineering program funds (either an individual district or a cooperating engineering area of districts) will submit a report of work accomplishments for the engineering program at the end of each fiscal year in a format to be provided by the SCC.

General Requirements (see also [Grants and Contracts Policy and Procedures Manual](#))

- An overhead percentage only is allowed to be billed based on actual district staff hours worked. The maximum overhead percentage allowed is 25%.
- Any district that does not utilize their awarded PE allocation in a timely manner or returns funding late in the fiscal year (April 1st or later each fiscal year) without a compelling explanation, may receive a reduced allocation or be deemed ineligible to receive future PE funding allocations.
- Please submit a [Operating Grants Returned Funds form](#) as soon as it becomes clear that funds will not be utilized.

Vouchering

Monthly grant vouchers are required. Refer to the [Grants and Contracts Policy and Procedures Manual](#) for further, detailed vouchering requirements and forms.

Definitions

- “Engineered” practice or engineering required practice: NRCS or SCC practices designated as requiring engineering oversight.
- Cooperating engineering area: a designated geographic area with several conservation districts that partner to pool financial resources to support an engineering program.
- Host district: one district within each cooperating engineering area acts as the designated PE administrator or “host”. Typically, this district is also the employer of professional engineering staff.



Washington State Conservation Commission

March 21, 2024

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Sarah Groth, Director of Accounting & Budget

SUBJECT: Send VSP Guidelines out for review and comment period.

Action Item

☒

Informational Item

☐

Summary:

Administration of the Voluntary Stewardship Program has been ongoing since it started at SCC in 2013, over the years as the program grew so did the guidance documents, staff have worked to consolidate all programmatic guidance into one document. Staff are seeking approval to send out draft VSP guidelines in accordance with our policy on policies for a 45-day review and comment period.

Once we send this out to districts for the 45-day review period, we will bring that feedback and comments to you at the May 16, 2024 Commission meeting for your consideration and final approval.

Requested Action:

Staff are requesting approval from Commissioners to distribute draft VSP Guidelines for the 45 day review and comment period.

Staff Contact:

Sarah Groth, sgroth@scc.wa.gov



Washington State Conservation Commission

March 21, 2024

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Sarah Groth, Director of Accounting & Budget
Shana Joy, District Operations & Regional Manager Coordinator

SUBJECT: Share revised Grant and Contract Policy & Procedure Manual for Review and Comment Period.

Action Item

☒

Informational Item

☐

Summary:

At the May 2023 the commission meeting the commission approved the current Grants and Contracts Policy and Procedures Manual. However, it has come to our attention that the State Auditor's Office guidance differs from our guidance regarding when an expenditure is considered to have occurred and this affects our vouchering requirements for conservation districts. In order to clarify our manual language further on this matter, SCC staff is working with the State Auditor's Office to be able to provide better clarification and guidance.

In accordance with our policy on policies we request to send this out for a 45-day review and comment period as soon as possible.

Once we send this out to districts for the 45-day review period, we will bring that feedback and comments to you at the May 16, 2024 Commission meeting for your consideration and final approval.

Requested Action:

Staff are requesting approval from Commissioners to distribute draft revised Grant and Contract Policy and Procedure Manual for a 45 day review and comment period.

Staff Contact:

Sarah Groth, sgroth@scc.wa.gov

Shana Joy, sjoy@scc.wa.gov



Washington State Conservation Commission

March 21, 2024

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Sarah Groth, Director of Accounting & Budget

SUBJECT: Reviewal of WACD & SCC Agreement

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

Summary:

Each year the SCC requests approval to enter into a contract with WACD for contract work on tasks identified by SCC Executive Director and SCC leadership.

Requested Action:

Approve the request for SCC Executive Director James Thompson to work with WACD Executive Director Tom Salzer to develop a scope of work. The tasks would include support for the annual meeting in December, preparation for fly-in meeting in concert with NACD and supervisor development and other smaller tasks as identified. The final amount of the contract and draft contract would be approved at the May 16, 2024 commission meeting.

Staff Contact:

Sarah Groth, sgroth@scc.wa.gov or 360-790-3501

Background and Discussion:

As in past years SCC would need to begin this work now to fully comply with the sole source contract requirements & review by Department of Enterprise Services (DES) and for the WACD contract to be able to start July 1, 2024.

Recommended Action and Options:

Approve the request for SCC Executive Director James Thompson to work with WACD Executive Director Tom Salzer to develop a scope of work to bring back a draft contract for review at the May 16, 2024 commission meeting.



Washington State Conservation Commission

March 21, 2024

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Sarah Groth, Director of Accounting & Budget

SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2024 Year End Funding Timeline

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

Requested Action:

*Review and approval of the proposed Fiscal Year 2024 Year End Funding Timeline and process to award operating funding **IF** any funding is available.*

Staff Contact:

Sarah Groth, sgroth@scc.wa.gov or 360-790-3501

Background and Discussion:

As in past years SCC Fiscal & Regional Manager staff are preparing for possibility of available fiscal year operating funds. This timeline is similar to last fiscal years and gives conservation districts more time to put their requests together and gives fiscal staff and Regional Managers more time to review and vet those requests. It also gives conservation districts more time once funding awards have been made to make their purchases and/or complete projects.

Below is a proposed timeline.

Proposed Fiscal Year 2024 Year End Funding Timeline

- March 21, 2024: present the commissioners with the timeline and request approval of timeline & process
- April 5, 2024: Send the form out to districts
- April 26, 2024: Form due back to SCC
- April 29-May 3, 2024: SCC fiscal staff to compile and roll up the submissions
- May 6-8, 2023: SCC fiscal staff & RM's will review submissions and pull together recommendations for final action at the May 16, 2024 commission meeting

Recommended Action and Options:

Approve process & timeline as listed above.

TAB 2

March 21, 2024

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, Executive Director

FROM: 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 (RMs) offer this report of recent activities and support provided to conservation districts in various district operations aspects, Commission operations assistance, and program administration 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 have recently gone through the preliminary CAPP review and notified districts. This winter time review allows RMs to 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.

CD Elections and Appointments

Regional Managers are administering Conservation District elections during the 2024 cycle. RMs have provided training and are fielding questions from districts as they arise. Districts are currently in the process of conducting elections. As of February 28, seven districts had completed their election process. In addition, from time to time supervisors leave during their term, and the Regional

Managers provide support and assistance to help the CDs through the process as needed to fill a mid-term vacant seat.

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.

Shana Joy has worked extensively with a working group to develop Riparian Grant Program Guidelines. These were presented and approved at the February 28 Special Commission meeting. A training webinar for conservation districts was conducted on March 5th. That webinar was recorded and posted to the SCC's [Riparian Grant Program](#) webpage.

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 February Roundtable, topics included legislative updates, staffing updates, program updates, and a CD led topic around using personal information for district business.

Disaster Assistance Program Activated

The WSCC Executive Committee activated the Disaster Assistance program on January 16 in response to a Snohomish County flood event in early December of 2023. The District has been reaching out to as many potentially eligible producers as possible, have issued a press release and convened a review committee. Communications staff have provided support with a website, flier and customized application form. Jean Fike is currently the DAP program lead.

Wildfire Recovery

Mike Baden is administering a special appropriation of \$961,000 to the SCC for FY24-25 for Whitman County fire recovery projects. The majority of the available funding has been appropriated with some funds held back for cultural resources costs.

RM's have been in ongoing partnership and coordination discussions with DNR. This includes planning for a post-wildfire workshop to be held in Spokane in late April/early May as well as 2 work orders with DNR for CDs to carry out post-fire activities. SCC is also coordinating with the Okanogan CD, NRCS, and DNR regarding potential NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) projects due to the Eagle Bluff Fire that occurred in 2023 near Oroville.

Forest Health and Community Wildfire Resilience

Over \$14 million in proposals have been awarded under this grant opportunity. The application opportunity is now closed. If funds are returned or otherwise become available, the application will open back up. Shana continues to serve on the Forest Health Advisory Committee representing the SCC/CDs.

Professional Engineering

Josh Giuntoli led a process to update the procedures for creating new engineering areas as a follow up from Spring 2023 when the program guidelines were approved. The RMs worked to draft and review draft updated guidelines to come before the Commissioners at the March 2024 meeting. Josh also coordinated a sharing session with host districts and engineers.

Community Engagement Plan Next Steps

Engagement with conservation districts to update and customize the provisional Community Engagement Plan (CEP) has begun. As you may recall, use of Climate Commitment Act funding required the Commission to adopt a CEP. A provisional CEP- based heavily on a template provided by the Environmental Justice Council- was adopted by the SCC at the September meeting with the intent to work with districts to tailor it to better serve the work of districts and the SCC. In response to a GovDelivery, we are receiving feedback on the CEP and offers of district staff with community engagement expertise to help with this work along. We also offered a one-time small grant opportunity to support districts in pursuit of their community engagement goals. District response to the grant opportunity was strong with over \$500,000 in requests for \$200,000 in funding. All requests were funded at least partially.

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.

RMs also, when requested, support NRCS in facilitation of Local Working Groups. There are 10 Local Work Groups around the state, and to date, 8 have held their meeting, with the rest occurring in April.

SCC participation and partnership with the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) is ongoing. Shana Joy is serving as Past President of the organization and Policy Committee Chair for 2024. 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.

Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration & Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI)

Allisa Carlson and Shana Joy serve on a steering committee with WDFW and DNR staff to implement WSRRI. The current focus is on the long-term strategy, a landscape scale 30-year strategy *“for shrubsteppe conservation and fire preparedness, response, and restoration to meet the needs of the state’s shrubsteppe wildlife and human communities.”* This facilitated and collaborative process has been guided by an advisory group, made up of diverse stakeholders, including conservation districts. The strategy is in the final draft review and revision stage, it will be submitted to the legislature March 2024. We anticipate a final draft will be available for public review (the final review stage) shortly after the January Commission Meeting. We will share details on how to comment when the draft is available. You can find more information about WSRRI here: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/habitat-recovery/shrubsteppe>

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 CBB held two meetings. A key topic everyone in the Basin is following closely is the ESA petition to list the spring-run component of the Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU) or list the entire (previously identified) Washington Coast ESU that includes summer, spring and fall run Chinook salmon.

NOAA Fisheries received a petition to list in July 2023. In December 2023, NOAA Fisheries announced a positive 90-day finding that the petitioned action may be warranted. Generally, NOAA makes a positive finding if a reasonable person reviewing the petition would conclude that the species may warrant listing. That doesn't mean that it does warrant listing, it just means that NOAA will conduct a status review to determine whether or not it warrants listing. Currently, NOAA is assembling a Status Review team to assess Washington Coast Chinook salmon risk of extinction.

One of the strategy comment elements is Agricultural Viability. Office of Chehalis Basin Staff presented work element descriptions and Board members were generally supportive of the agricultural viability work element description. In addition, Board members suggested that this work should be consistent and not get ahead of efforts of local conservation districts. For example, bi-monthly Voluntary Stewardship Program meetings provide an opportunity to engage with conservation district staff.

The Board continues moving forward with development of their integrated long-term strategy with a target date of Q1 2026 to approve.

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.



Washington State Conservation Commission

March 21, 2024

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, Executive Director

FROM: Kate Delavan, Acting Policy Director

SUBJECT: Legislative and Policy Update

Action Item

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Informational Item

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Summary:

SCC achieved the majority of its legislative priorities in the 2024 session. Director Thompson and staff continue to engage in the Riparian Roundtable. Staff are beginning development of a tribal engagement policy. SCC submitted four agency actions for consideration in the development of the statewide Climate Resilience Strategy.

Staff Contact:

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

Background and Discussion:

Legislative Session

The 2024 Legislative Session wrapped up March 7. Agency priorities included budget asks, tribal representation on the Commission, and building relationships with legislators. Director Thompson was active on the hill across session, with many productive conversations with legislators about the importance and role of voluntary conservation.

Budgets

SCC's 2024 budget priorities were to increase funding for Conservation Technical Assistance, fix proviso language to smooth implementation of existing funding, and to secure additional funding for SCC FTEs.

Capital Budget

- CREP: The supplemental capital budget includes an agency requested change to the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) proviso to allow use of state funds to support landowners recently disenrolled by the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

- RCPP: When agency decision packages were due, SCC anticipated it would need \$3,000,000 in state match for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Once the most recent round of RCPP awards were announced SCC determined it had sufficient funds from prior appropriations and did not need supplemental funding for the current biennium. The supplemental capital budget does not include any new RCPP funding.
- SFF: \$24,900,000 of Sustainable Farms and Fields (SFF) funding moved from the operating budget to the capital budget to better align eligible activities with budget constraints.

Operating Budget

- CTA: SCC requested \$10,000,000 in Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) across the biennium. SCC received an initial \$1,000,000 last session and an additional \$3,500,000 this session for a total of total of \$4,500,000 for the biennium. This is a significant success given the current budget climate.
- SCC FTEs: SCC requested \$600,000 to support additional staffing and received \$200,000.
- District Direct Appropriation: Central and Eastern Klickitat Conservation Districts received \$500,000 for FY25 for post wildfire recovery work.
- Organic and Climate Smart Agriculture Study: The deadline was pushed to May 1, 2025 as requested by the agency.

Request Legislation

SCC's request legislation, [SB 5921](#) "Concerning tribal representation on the conservation commission" did not pass. The bill unanimously passed the Senate and received a hearing in the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources. However, the bill did not receive a vote in committee and did not advance.

Initiatives

The Legislature faced additional considerations this session created by six initiatives submitted by public petitions. The Legislature held hearings on and passed three of the initiatives.¹ The three remaining initiatives all would have significant budgetary impacts and did not receive hearings.² Because the Legislature did not take action on the remaining initiatives, they will go to the citizens for a vote this November. Of the three remaining initiatives, Initiative 2117 to repeal the Climate Commitment Act (CCA) would have the largest impact on SCC. SCC currently has approximately \$86 million in CCA appropriations funding 10 different programs or activities. See the [handout](#) for more information on SCC's CCA funded activities.

Riparian Roundtable

SCC is an active participant in the statewide Riparian Roundtable with Director Thompson and staff attending the most recent in-person convening in Olympia in February. Directed by 2022 and 2023

¹ Initiative 2111, prohibits state and local governments from imposing an income tax; Initiative 2081, codifies access for parents and guardians of public-school children to materials and records and the opportunity to opt-out of certain activities; and Initiative 2113, removes certain restrictions related to police vehicular pursuits

² Initiative 2117, repeals the Climate Commitment Act; Initiative 2019, repeals the capital gains tax; Initiative 2124, allows people to opt out of the state's long-term care tax

proviso funding, the Governor's office has contracted with Plauche' and Carr to develop recommendations on proposed changes in policy and spending priorities to improve riparian habitat to ensure salmon and steelhead recovery. In addition to five in-person Roundtable meetings between October 2023 and May 2024, there are virtual Working Group Meetings to discuss topics such as WDFW's riparian guidelines, existing voluntary and regulatory programs, takings law, and tribal treaty rights. The Working Group meetings are designed to provide a common base of understanding and set expectations for the Roundtable meetings. The April Roundtable Meeting in Wenatchee will focus on developing recommendations for the 2024 report. SCC's participation is focused on continuing to find common ground solutions and elevating the importance of the voluntary approach.

Tribal Engagement Policy

SCC is beginning development of a policy to guide the agency's tribal engagement. In the initial phase, staff are gathering resources, setting up learning conversations with sister agencies and other entities, and developing a process to seek tribal input on policy development.

Climate Resilience Strategy

In 2023, the Legislature directed the Department of Ecology to convene an interagency team of 10 state agencies, including the SCC, to assist in updating the state's current [Climate Response Strategy](#) by September 30, 2024. The Climate Resilience Strategy is an important opportunity to position SCC's work and priorities in the broader state context. It is also an important opportunity to communicate SCC's financial needs related to climate resiliency activities. In March, SCC submitted four agency actions that capture SCC's climate resiliency current and future work as filtered through the Climate Resiliency priority area of our [strategic plan](#). SCC's agency action activities are organized under four themes:

- Science Coordination, Training, and Workforce Development for Conservation District Staff
- Agricultural Viability and Farmland Preservation
- Water and Natural Resources Resilience
- Community Resilience to a Changing Climate

The immediate next steps as facilitated by Ecology include topic-based meetings, refining proposed strategies and actions, funding developments, and draft strategy review. Ecology will seek public input over Summer 2024.

Next Steps:

SCC is hosting the All CD Meeting in Yakima March 26-27, 2024 to gather input on budget development for the next biennium. SCC's will seek Commissioner guidance on '25-'27 budget development from Commissioners at the May Commission meeting.

WHAT'S THE PLAN?



\$250,000

Community engagement and outreach (most of it going to grants for conservation district work)



\$30 MILLION

Climate-smart agricultural practices through SCC's SFF grant program



\$30 MILLION

Toward grants and education to promote voluntary salmon habitat restoration



\$15 MILLION

Wildfire recovery work, addressing our state's unhealthy forests and reducing fuel in our forests.



\$200,000

To study our state's organic and climate smart agriculture.

What is funded in CCA?

Riparian Work

- **2023-25 CREP (\$11 million)** to provide matching state funds for management and implementation to continue the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program with private landowners.
- **Riparian Restoration with Landowners (\$25 million)** to run a voluntary riparian grant program for riparian restoration and protection using the best available, locally applicable science. Develop and implement a framework that includes monitoring, adaptive management, and metrics.
- **Salmon Riparian Habitat Restoration (\$3 million)** to support the outreach, identification, and implementation of salmon riparian habitat restoration projects appropriated through the capital budget.
- **Education Communication Plan (\$2 million)** to develop and implement an educational communication plan for the general public and landowners in urban, suburban, rural, agricultural, and forested areas regarding the importance of riparian buffers and the actions they can take to protect and enhance these critical areas.

Sustainable Agriculture

- **Sustainable Farms and Fields Grants (\$30 million)** to expand climate-smart livestock management practices including anaerobic digesters on dairy farms, increasing the SFF budget to provide more TA/FA to producers, and funding research and demonstration projects that focus on innovative and beneficial practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Organic and Climate Smart Agriculture (\$200,000)** to conduct an evaluation of the current contribution that organic and climate smart agriculture makes toward Washington's climate response goals, what potential there is for increasing this contribution, and how additional investments will help realize this potential, while supporting resiliency.

Forest Health & Community Wildfire Resiliency

- **Address Unhealthy Forests (\$5 million)** SCC will work with conservation districts to address unhealthy forests and build greater community resiliency.
- **Reduce Forest Fuel Grants (\$10 million)** for SCC to provide grants to local government and private landowners for Firewise projects to reduce forest fuel loading in areas deemed a high hazard for wildfire.

Planning

- **Community Engagement Plan (\$250,000)** for the completion of a an agency community engagement plan and grants to districts for community engagement work on the ground.
- **Climate Response Strategy (\$23,000)** to cover staff time to represent SCC priorities in the statewide Integrated Climate Response Strategy.

March 21, 2024

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Jon K Culp, Water Resources Program Manager

SUBJECT: Water Supply Conditions Update

Action Item

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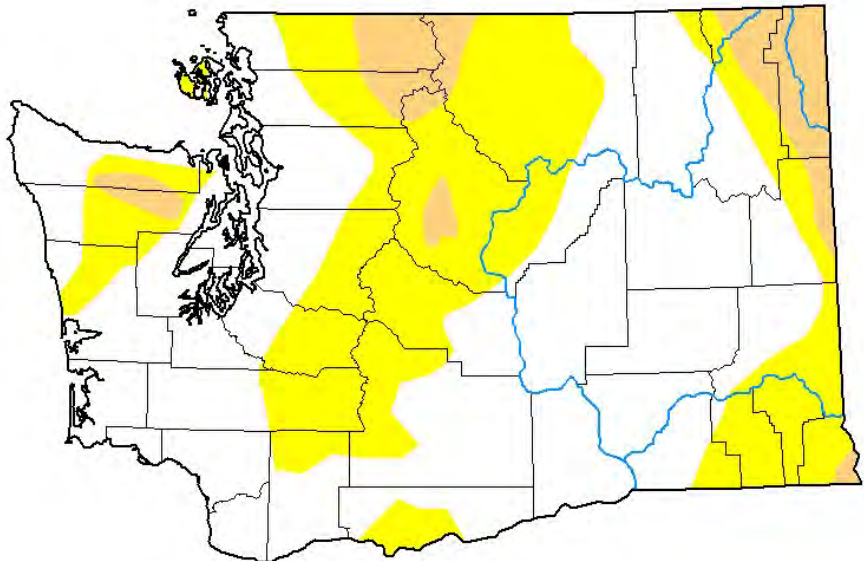
Informational Item

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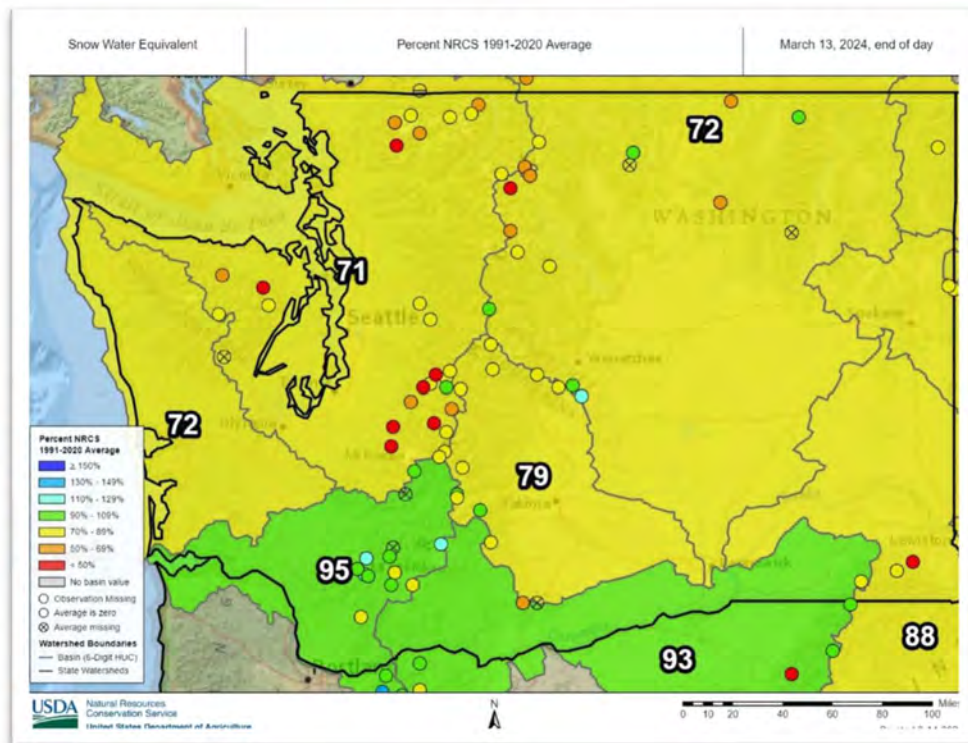
Summary:

El Nino strikes again!

The US National Drought Monitor shows about 41 percent of the state having abnormally dry conditions as of the 14th of March. These areas are yellow in the image below. It also depicts in tan the almost 8 percent of the state still in moderate drought. These areas are in the northeast corner of the state, the north cascades portion of Whatcom and Okanogan Counties, the southeast corner of Asotin County, some upland areas in Chelan County, and a portion of the Olympics on the peninsula. As a reminder, this national system takes soil moisture into account as well as precipitation.

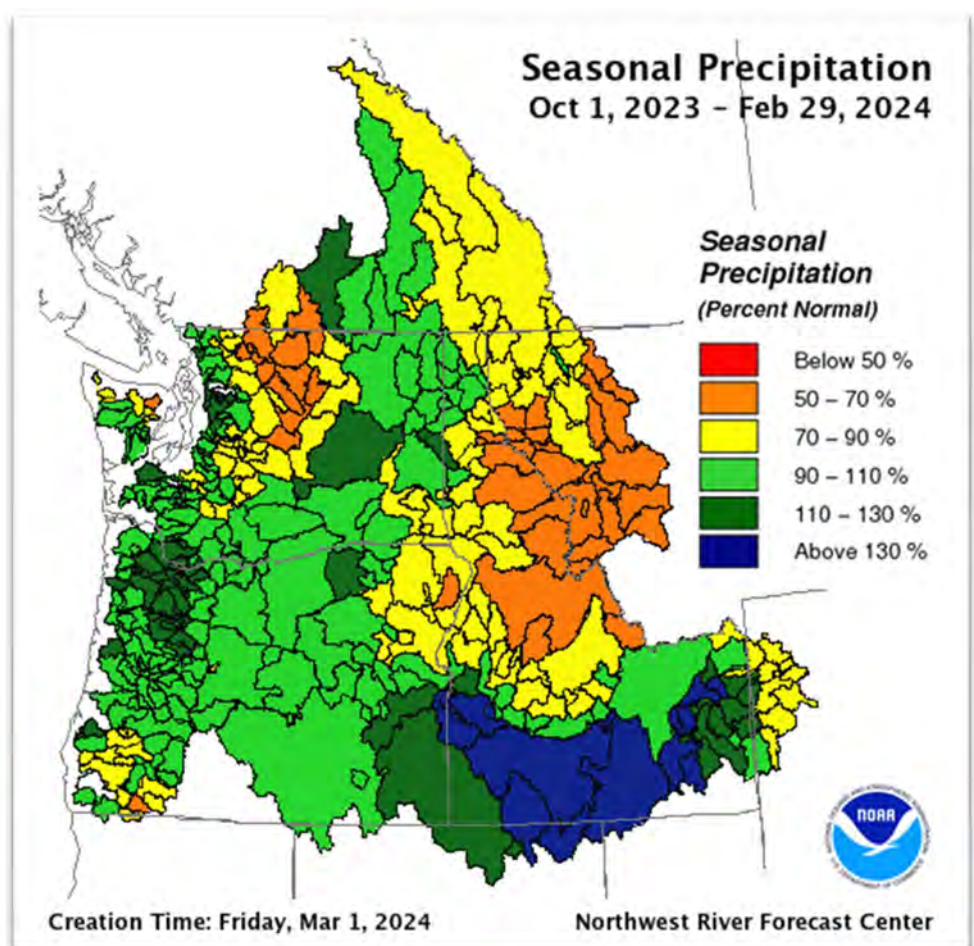


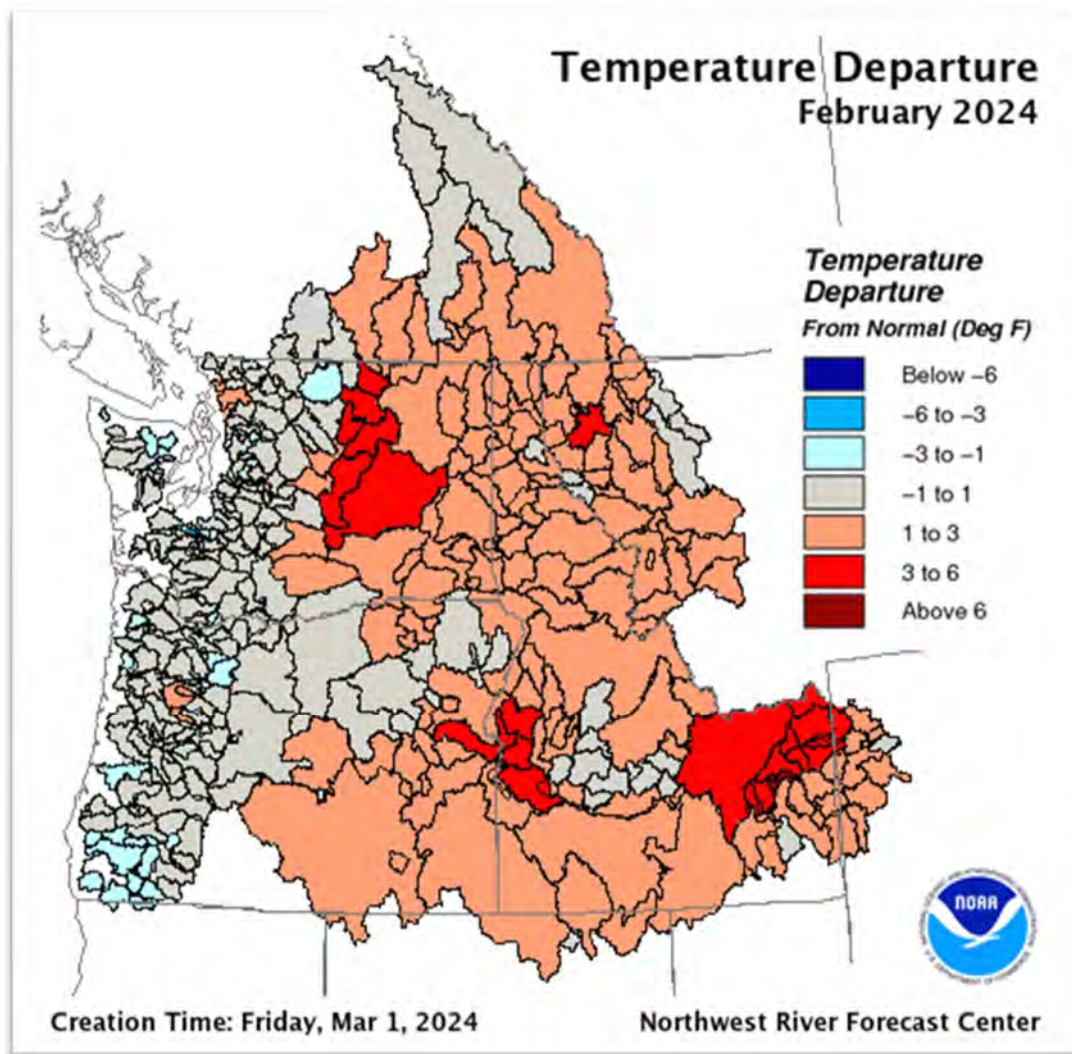
According to the Natural Resource Conservation Service's SNOTEL interactive map, the snow water equivalent, or SWE, is looking much better along the state's southern tier than the rest of the



state. This map is depicting the percentage of average SWE for this water year to date (Oct. 1, 2023-March 13 2024) relative to the period of record, 1991-2020. The dot's on the map, depicted below, show a great deal of variability at the SNOTEL sights relative to the basin averages.

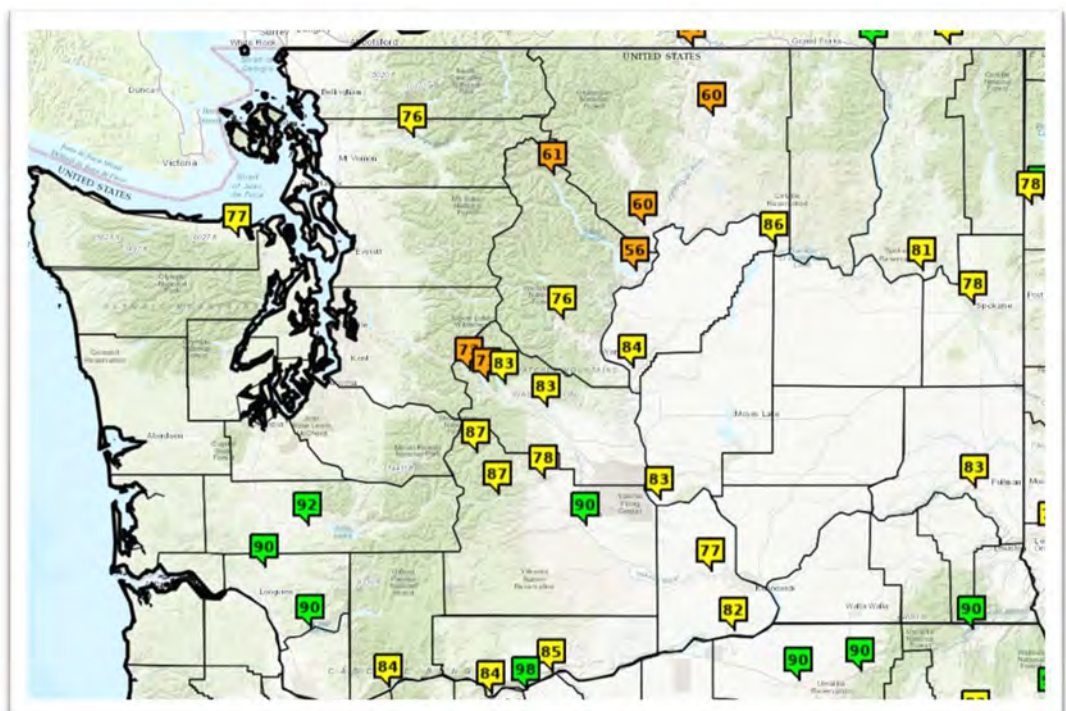
The Northwest River Forecast Center, in the map below, shows the percent of normal precipitation observed through the current water year, October 1, 2023 through February 29, 2024. As you can see, in most areas of the state, the amount of observed precipitation is close to normal. However, given the shortage of soil moisture going into this water year, Water supply available for normal uses and users may not correspond to the depiction here.





Also impacting the timing and availability of water supply for existing uses has been increase temperature through the water year. Below is a depiction of the temperature deviation from normal as recorded for the month of February.

Finally, I wanted to offer a look at the water supply forecasted as a percentage of normal for the upcoming period of April 2024 through September 2024. I wanted to show you this as an indicator of the probability to catch up to normal water supply in those places where we are still behind in



both soil moisture (which creates a deficit or debt to be paid in a water budget), and low carry over in natural and man-made water storage.

Despite closer to average snowfall in January, warmer temperatures at the end of that month caused some snow to melt. At this point, it is safe to say that there will be water supply and availability shortfalls for the upcoming growing season. We are anticipating some level of hardship in both irrigated and dryland agriculture this season.

Staff Contact:

Jon K Culp, Water Resources Program Manager jculp@scc.wa.gov

Next Steps:

Staff will continue to reach out to districts within the affected areas to gather anecdotal and other evidence of expected hardship.

Staff will be developing a water resources forum through our Center for Technical Development that will meet monthly to better understand local and statewide water resource issues and inform programming in order to better serve the public.

Staff will continue to monitor the situation while working with the Departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife and Agriculture to assist wherever we can.



Washington State Conservation Commission

March 21, 2024

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Jon K. Culp, Water Resources Program Manager and DEI Lead
on behalf of SCC Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Working Group

SUBJECT: DEI Assessment One Year Update

Action Item

☐

Informational Item

☒

Summary:

The Conservation Commission is a public entity with a statutory duty to ensure conservation practices, projects, and programs are available in all areas of the state for the benefit of all people. The Conservation Commission bears responsibility for making the best possible effort to provide equitable and inclusive services that meet the needs of Washingtonians, our natural resources, and our working lands. To that end, Conservation Commission staff have been incorporating equity into our strategic thinking, our conversations, and our work.

Staff Contact:

Jon K. Culp, DEI Lead, jculp@scc.wa.gov

Background and Discussion:

One year has passed since the finalization and acceptance of Adekoya and Associates' assessment of our agency culture and operations. We continue to implement the recommendations they offered in our agency DEI Assessment.

Staff will provide an in-depth summary of our agency action at the May Commission Meeting. In the meantime, if you subscribe to the Commission's Facebook page, you will be interfacing with some of the work in this space. Our communications team is leading our efforts to push engagement in new and creative ways. "Conservation Month" is another exciting example and can be found here: <https://www.scc.wa.gov/vote>. They have also been working to highlight conservation connections in some of the important heritage months like our series on Women's history month. Here is a post for an example: https://www.instagram.com/scc_gov/p/C4dxKD-v5KW/



Partner Activity Report

March 2024



Conservation Commission Meeting

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Message from the State Conservationist



One phenomenal year so far!

By Roylene Comes At Night
NRCS-WA State Conservationist

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. — We are having a phenomenal fiscal year already! We have \$120 million in our accounts, which is \$46 million more than what we started with in FY 23. Yet all of us are making some large strides to complete the huge tasks that are before us to ensure a majority of this funding implements conservation.

Staffing

We are making a steady increase of staffing:

This is more staff than the state had in 1998 through 2006. We are currently working on 25 priority positions for advertisement and hiring.

Programs

This is the earliest we have had this many contracts obligated and many funds in certain pools pre-approved:

- ◆ Three Conservation Incentive Contracts (CIC) fund pools have been pre-approved,
- ◆ All National Air Quality Initiative (NAQI), pre-approved
- ◆ All National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), pre-approved
- ◆ All Sage Grouse initiative (SGI), pre-approved
- ◆ Three Water smart fund pools --- (EL86.4 has not been preapproved, still open for applications), pre-approved
- ◆ IRA Statewide Grazing, pre-approved
- ◆ IRA Statewide Cropland, pre-approved
- ◆ IRA CNMP Implementation, pre-approved
- ◆ IRA Statewide Riparian Buffer, pre-approved

We have 31 Act Now preapproved or approved applications! Also, we have 110 EQIP preapprovals as of Feb. 21, 2024 with more to come.

Outreach & Communication

On the Outreach & Communications side, we have attended 64 outreach events across the state since Oct. 1 and plan to attend 178 more through the end of September! I sincerely believe without all of the hard work and dedication of my staff devoting themselves to helping to build trust relationships with producers through events like this, we wouldn't have received almost 1,800 applications this year! Especially considering nearly 71% of them are producers we haven't worked with within the 2018 Farm Bill.

I owe a huge thank you to my staff and partner employees for working so hard! Washington is in a tremendous place to be this early in the fiscal year!



West Area

Hello Western Washington!

By Jared Everson

Acting NRCS-WA West Area Conservationist

OLYMPIA — Hello Western Washington! My name is Jared Everson and I have been selected to serve as the West Area Conservationist for the next four months! I am coming to Washington NRCS from across the border in Idaho. I have been with the NRCS for 12 years and I'm always searching for challenges and opportunities to better myself and those around me. My favorite part of this position is the ability to help build strong and productive teams. When I'm not working, I enjoy spending time with my two young children doing anything outdoors. I am a ski instructor in the winter, soccer coach in the summer and ride off-road motorcycles everywhere in between. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of service and I look forward to meeting more of our great partners in the coming months!

We are going headfirst in the contract season for FY24! In Western Washington we received 396 EQIP applications and 42 CSP applications. Several of those applications have already been approved and the clients are beginning work on

those projects! We are continuing the ranking and funding process now for the remaining applications. As usual, our initial fund allocation isn't enough to fund all applications, so we are working on an additional funds request. If we receive these additional funds, we will be able to do even more in our communities. We are committed to doing everything we can to help move your projects forward.

We are continually searching for great talent to join our NRCS Team! Some of our best Team members are recruited through our extensive partner network. For college students, we can offer multi-year internships through our Pathways Internship Program. If you are looking for a career change we have several permanent, full-time positions in all disciplines. If you would like to volunteer, we have the Earth Team Volunteer Program where you can work to make a difference in your local community!

Washington NRCS relies heavily on our wonderful partners to meet the need in our communities. We appreciate your willingness to collaborate and find creative ways to further our joint mission! Together we have a stronger voice for conservation in our communities!



Central Area

Central pushing forward, together

By Austin Shero

NRCS-WA Central Area Conservationist

EPHRATA, Wash. — Central Area is rolling fast through the 2nd Quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2024! The first wave of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract preapprovals are currently being processed. I am proud to announce that between National Priorities, Statewide Priorities, Local Working Group Priorities (LWG), and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding, Central Area currently has over \$14 million in applications in preapproved status! Compared to previous years, this represents almost a 200% increase of funded conservation projects! Unbelievable! This is an awesome effort from our NRCS and partner planning staff to get these applications planned, assessed, and ranked, despite technological difficulties and time constraints! I am so proud of our folks! And of course, these applications have come as a direct result of outreach activities that both NRCS and our partners have supported in unity! An amazing effort, and now we're getting to reap the results of almost TWICE the volume of conservation activities funded!

Central Area partners received 4 NEW Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funded projects! Two different Conservation Districts (Columbia Basin Conservation District; Kittitas County Conservation District) received these projects. The CD's and NRCS are working through agreements currently to begin implementation of these projects in FY25! Both of these CD's have existing RCPP Projects that the newly funded projects will tie directly into. These will continue the great conservation efforts that are already underway in slightly different geographic areas. Amazingly proud of the work

these CD's and their staff's are doing to assist NRCS to implement high quality conservation through the RCPP program. I'll continue to encourage other CD's, as well as other partners, to explore RCPP possibilities and potential in their work areas (yes Craig, that means you!!)

For FY24, Central Area will be asking for assistance from partners to help us find fantastic places to work on Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)! Funding for this program has never been higher, and competition has never been lower! It's a great opportunity to explore possibilities and options through this program. Likewise, we'll continue to have partners help us with our EQIP WaterSmart funded project areas. We have several project areas that can continue to grow!

Partners in Central Area are beginning to have their Local Working Group Meetings. Big Bend Team kicked off our first meeting a couple of short weeks ago. Great input from producers, organizations, and partners was given and received! North Central Team was second across the line with their LWG meeting, having a whopping 47 people in attendance! Couldn't be happier of the producers and groups present to help us establish our priorities for FY25. South Central Team will be having their LWG meeting March 12, which is always well attended and has great discussions. NRCS WA always supports our LWG helping us establish our local priorities. This is something that is pivotal to how we operate, and part of our agencies true core. We thank all of our partners and producers for their input and participation!

Keep pushing forward! We have truly special partners in Central Washington. Keep showing the rest of the state and nation how special we are!



East Area

Staffing up for a big year!

By Aubrey Hoxie

NRCS-WA East Area Conservationist

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. — Here we are getting ready to end our second quarter, and pre-approvals and obligations are now underway. I'm extremely proud of the East Area, and the application workload they've sorted through this winter. Overall, we had around 754 eligible contracts for EQIP and CSP in our area! Thank you in helping us achieve that number and helping towards this big goal we've been as an agency. This year is going to be very exciting in the work we get on the ground, and the numerous new staff we bring into the agency in helping us get the work completed.

Staffing

We've had a lot of new faces and changes occur in the East Area since our last report.

In the Area Office, we hired on two staff members, Steve Sprecher and Reba Van Beusekom.

Steve Sprecher is now the East Area Resource Conservationist, filling in behind Jeff Kuhlmann; Steve started in his position on December 18th. As most know, Steve has been with the agency for 30+ years, with most of his career in the Spokane Valley Office. He's been a welcome breath of fresh air and we're happy to have him on staff and helping out our field offices.

Reba Van Beusekom is the CNMP Engineer for the Central and East Area, assisting in the engineering development of

CNMP plans and operations; Reba started with us January 15th. Reba came to us from NRCS in Minnesota where she was a civil engineer technician. We're excited to have Reba onboard to assist in the development and implementation of CNMPs.

In early December, we also hired Carolyn Edenbo in Ritzville. Carolyn was selected as the District Conservationist for the West Palouse team. She's been with NRCS-WA for 10 years. She started as a soil conservationist in Pasco, and then was promoted to Resource Conservationist in 2022. We're excited to bring her on in this new capacity to our leadership team.

We've also had quite a few new planners join us in our various teams across the East. If you get the opportunity to stop by these offices, please do so, and say hi!

- ♦ Dayton—Rachel Wall
- ♦ Ritzville—Elizabeth (Liz) Clark
- ♦ Colville—Jennifer (Jenny) Reeder

Partnership Activities

I had the opportunity recently to join in on a Local Work Group meeting in Ritzville, representing the West Palouse Team. It was a great turnout of local producers, and agency folks, all bringing great topics and conversations to the table. We still have two more local work group meetings planned for East Area: Palouse and Northeast Team, both will be in April. Please reach out if you need more information on them.



Management & Strategy

NRCS Washington Hiring Actions

By Chas Scripter
 NRCS-WA ASTC for Management & Strategy

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. — So far in FY24 we have filled 28 positions, plus there are 6 more positions where selections have been made and staff will enter on duty over the next weeks and months. Our current staffing level as of FY24 Pay Period 2 (February 10) is 170. At the same time last year we had 143 staff on board.

Currently there are 97 positions in process to be filled. Those 97 positions include new NRCS staff identified as needed to implement Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) activities as well as backfill positions and student interns. 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.



Conservation Commission Meeting

Positions filled in FY24

POSITION	LOCATION
Area Resource Conservationist	Spokane EAO
Biological Science Tech	Pullman PMC
CNMP Specialist	Olympia WAO
District Conservationist	Ritzville
Engineer	Lake Stevens / Mt. Vernon
GIS Specialist	Spokane SO
IRA Natural Resource Specialist	Dayton
IRA Soil Conservationist	Colfax
IRA Soil Conservationist	Ephrata
IRA Soil Conservationist	Yakima
Natural Resource Specialist	Bremerton
Natural Resource Specialist	Colfax
Natural Resource Specialist	Davenport
Natural Resource Specialist	Davenport
Natural Resource Specialist	Ephrata
Natural Resource Specialist	Ephrata
Natural Resource Specialist	Olympia WAO
Natural Resource Specialist	Waterville
Program Support Assistant	Colville
Rangeland Management Specialist	Colville
Rangeland Mgmt Specialist	Goldendale
Resource Conservationist	Longview
Resource Conservationist	Olympia
Resource Conservationist	Port Angeles
Resource Conservationist	Prosser
Resource Conservationist	Puyallup
Resource Conservationist	Renton
Soil Conservation Technician	Montesano

Data current as of February 23, 2024.

Hiring actions in progress

POSITION	LOCATION
Administrative Assistant	Spokane SO
Agronomist/Soil Conservationist	Pullman PMC
Area Agronomist	Ephrata CAO
Area Agronomist	Spokane EAO
Area CET	Ephrata CAO
Area CET	Spokane EAO
Area Conservationist	Ephrata CAO
Area Forester	Ephrata CAO / TBD
Area Forester	Olympia WAO / TBD
Area Forester	Spokane EAO / TBD
Area Range Specialist	Ephrata CAO
Area Range Specialist	Spokane EAO
Assistant State Soil Scientist	Spokane SO
Biological Science Tech	Pullman PMC
Biological Science Tech	Pullman PMC
CET / ENG	Colville
CET / ENG	Ephrata
CNMP Ag ENG	Spokane EAO
CNMP Specialist	Olympia WAO
CNMP Specialist	Spokane EAO
Cultural Resources Specialist	Spokane EAO
District Conservationist	Colville
District Conservationist – Yakama Tribal Team	Toppenish
Engineer	Ephrata or Yakima
Engineer (Pathways)	Spokane SO
Engineer (State Conservation Engineer)	Spokane SO
Forester	Dayton
Geologist	Spokane SO
Geologist (Pathways)	Spokane SO
Geologist (Pathways)	Spokane SO
IRA Agronomist	Waterville

Data current as of February 23, 2024.

POSITION	LOCATION
IRA Area Programs Analyst	Spokane SO
IRA Irrigation lead (planner)	Yakima
IRA Public Affairs Specialist	Spokane SO
IRA Soil Conservationist	Pomeroy
IRA Soil Conservationist	Prosser
IRA Soil Conservation Technician	Everson
IRA Soil Conservation Technician	Pomeroy
IRA Soil Conservation Technician	Walla Walla
Management Analyst (Grants and Agreements Specialist)	Spokane SO
Natural Resource Specialist	Clarkston
Natural Resource Specialist	Colville
Natural Resource Specialist	Colville
Natural Resource Specialist	Davenport
Natural Resource Specialist	Dayton
Natural Resource Specialist	Ephrata
Natural Resource Specialist	Ephrata
Natural Resource Specialist	Mt. Vernon
Natural Resource Specialist	Okanogan
Natural Resource Specialist	Pasco
Natural Resource Specialist	Pomeroy
Natural Resource Specialist	Prosser
Natural Resource Specialist	Republic
Natural Resource Specialist	Ritzville
Natural Resource Specialist	Ritzville
Natural Resource Specialist	Walla Walla
Natural Resource Specialist	Yakima
Natural Resource Specialist (Recent Grad)	Clarkston
Natural Resource Specialist (Recent Grad)	Clarkston/Pasco
Natural Resource Specialist (Recent Grad)	Dayton

Data current as of February 23, 2024.



Hiring actions in progress *(continued)*

POSITION	LOCATION
Natural Resource Specialist (Recent Grad)	Pasco
Natural Resource Specialist (Recent Grad)	Pomeroy
Natural Resource Specialist (Recent Grad)	Ritzville
Natural Resource Specialist (Recent Grad)	Walla Walla
Program Support Assistant	Davenport/Ritzville
Program Support Assistant	Ephrata
Program Support Assistant	Yakima
Public Affairs Specialist	Spokane SO
Public Affairs Specialist (Recent Grad)	Spokane SO
Rangeland Mgmt Specialist	Davenport
Rangeland Mgmt Specialist	Ritzville
RCPP Coordinator	Ephrata Ellensburg Wenatchee Yakima
Realty Specialist	Spokane SO
Resource Conservationist	Ephrata
Resource Conservationist	Spokane Valley
Soil Conservation Technician	Davenport
Soil Conservation Technician	Pomeroy
Soil Conservation Technician	Republic
Soil Conservation Technician	Waterville
Soil Conservationist	Puyallup
Soil Conservationist	Ritzville
Soil Conservationist	Walla Walla
Soil Conservationist	Waterville
Soil Conservationist	Waterville
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Colfax
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Lake Stevens
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Okanogan
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Olympia
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Pasco
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Pullman PMC
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Puyallup
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Ritzville
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Vancouver
Soil Conservationist (Pathways)	Yakima
Soil Conservationist (Recent Grad)	Lake Stevens
Soil Conservationist (Recent Grad)	Ritzville
State Environmental Engineer (Design)	Spokane SO

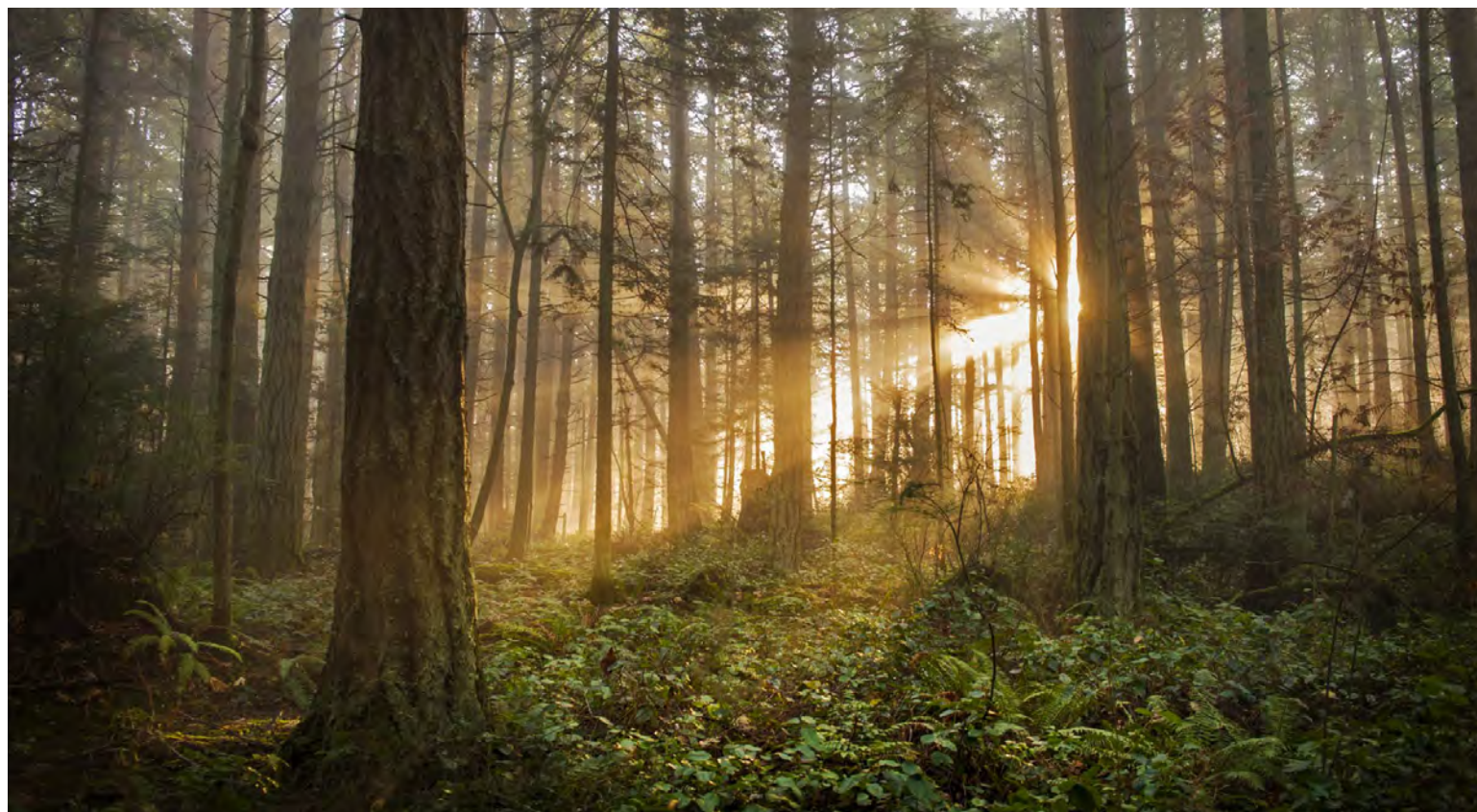
Data current as of February 23, 2024.



FTE Positions Identified to be filled via Agreements with Partners

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

Data current as of February 23, 2024.



FTE Positions Identified to be filled via Contracts

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

Data current as of February 23, 2024.





Partnerships

The STAC

What is the STAC?

The State Technical Advisory Committee, known as the STAC, is an advisory group composed of Washington agricultural producers and conservation leaders, with a purpose of assisting USDA by making recommendations relating to the implementation and technical aspects of natural resource conservation activities and programs.

Responsibilities of the STAC

- ♦ Provide information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA on conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation activities and programs, including application and funding criteria, recommended practices, and program payment percentages.
- ♦ Identify emerging natural resource concerns and program needs.
- ♦ Recommend conservation practice standards and specifications.
- ♦ Recommend State and national program policy based on resource data.
- ♦ Review activities of the local working groups to ensure State priorities are being addressed locally.
- ♦ Make recommendations to the State Conservationist on requests and recommendations from LWGs.
- ♦ Assist NRCS with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.
- ♦ Washington's STAC has three standing subcommittees, for Wildlife, Easements, and Soil Health. These committees meet on an as needed basis and report to

Conservation Commission Meeting

the full STAC. Other subcommittees can be established as needed.

STAC Membership

Each State Technical Committee will be composed of agricultural producers, owners and operators of nonindustrial private forest land, and other professionals who represent a variety of interests and disciplines in the soil, water, wetlands, plant, and wildlife sciences.

Each State Technical Committee should include representatives from the following:

- ♦ NRCS
- ♦ Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- ♦ FSA State Committee
- ♦ U.S. Forest Service
- ♦ National Institute of Food and Agriculture (formerly the Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service)
- ♦ Tribes
- ♦ Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- ♦ State departments and agencies within the State, including the following:
 - Agricultural agency
 - Fish and wildlife agency
 - Forestry agency
 - Soil and water conservation agency
 - Water resources agency
- ♦ Agricultural producers representing the variety of crops and livestock or poultry raised within the State
- ♦ Owners of nonindustrial private forest land

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- ♦ Nonprofit organizations (as defined under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986) that demonstrate conservation expertise and experience working with agricultural producers in the State
- ♦ Agribusiness
- ♦ Other Federal agencies and persons knowledgeable about economic and environmental impacts of conservation techniques and programs as determined by the State Conservationist.

STAC Business

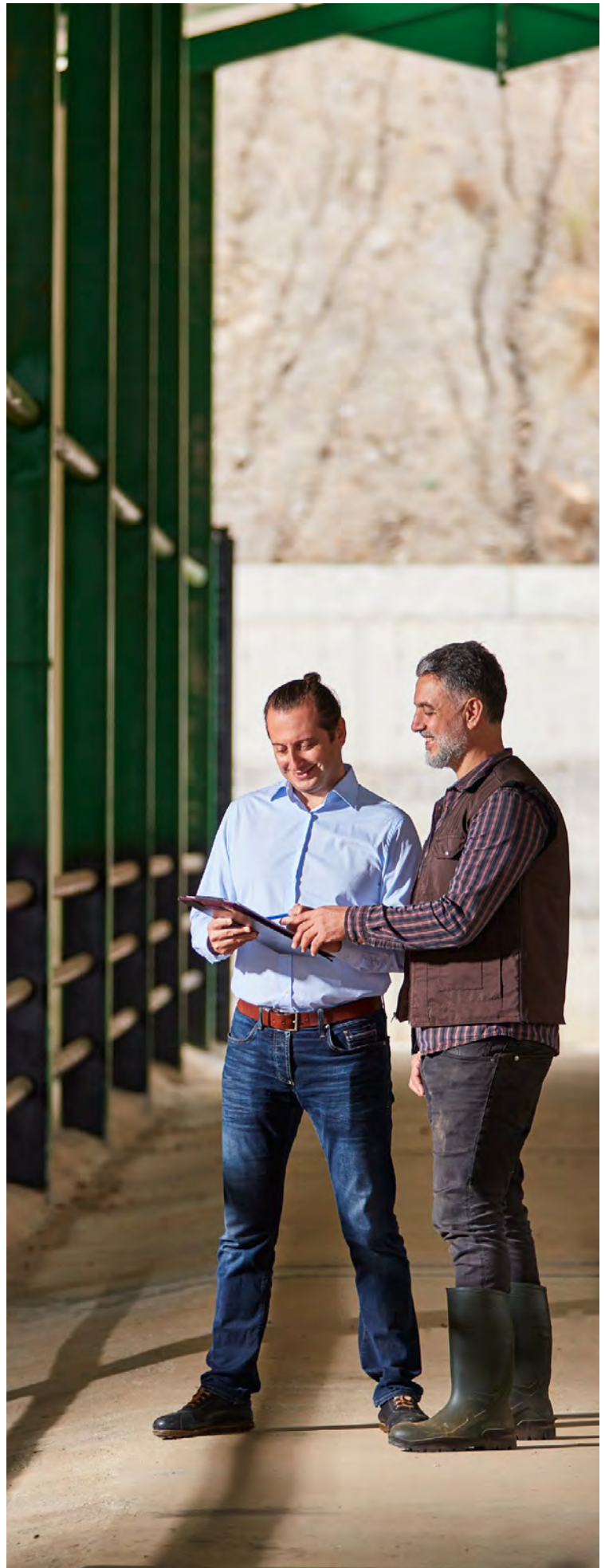
On usual years the STAC convenes quarterly with two meetings being held face to face, rotating around the state; and the other two meetings are held remotely, on an alternating basis. Meetings are posted early in the calendar year to maximize participation. Additionally, meeting notices go out at least a month in advance of each meeting along with requests for any agenda topics for consideration. Once developed agendas are sent out to the STAC membership two weeks prior to the meeting along with meeting materials, so partners can prepare in advance. We also have relevant partner presentations on conservation topics as the agenda permits. The last three meetings for 2024 will be:

- ♦ April 25th (scheduled remote)
- ♦ August 8th (scheduled in-person with hybrid option, location to be determined)
- ♦ November 7th (scheduled remote)

The STAC also holds various sub-committees who work behind the scenes and report out to STAC periodically. STAC sub committees include: Easements, Wildlife, and Soil Health; most of these committees have not met in a while but they will all be revisited soon and updates will be provided. We previously held a committee on the Conservation Application Ranking Tool (CART) but they had fulfilled their objectives in helping with development of the new tool and will disband. At the last STAC meeting, it was determined that we will convene a new sub committee to investigate methods to improve participation rates in our EQIP riparian buffer program. While the riparian buffer program did consume all of the \$725,000 in program funding made available, we are interested in exploring other methods of increasing program enrollment interest across the state.

If you or your organization would like to become members of the STAC please send an email to nick.vira@usda.gov citing your interests and qualifications.

To learn more about the STAC click this link: [Washington State Technical Advisory Committee | Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) or contact [Nick Vira](#).



Local Working Groups underway

Local Work Groups (LWGs) are responsible for conducting community outreach in advance of the meeting and identifying conservation needs and objectives at the meeting, such as the LWG EQIP fund pool data. This year, LWGs may also recommend new conservation practices needed, recommend priority watersheds for National Water Quality Initiative Program (NWQI) future enrollment consideration, or propose local initiatives. Also, this is the second year that NRCS is accepting Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) project proposals from LWGs. IRA project proposals are intended to fill local conservation needs that are not getting adequately addressed by current program with existing funding levels. Project proposals can use either or both CSP or EQIP practices and funding, but must align with one of the overarching goals of the IRA, which are:

- ◆ Soil Health
- ◆ Nitrogen Management
- ◆ Livestock, Grazing, and Pasture
- ◆ Energy, Combustion, and Electricity Efficiency
- ◆ Agroforestry, Forestry, and Upland Wildlife Habitat

In October of 2023, NRCS hosted LWG chairs at this years' local work group kickoff meeting and provided both a refresher of the process as well as new updates. Additionally, LWG chairs and designees were invited to attend an informal Q&A session in mid March and another session was hosted that invited Tribes to participate, both were intended to answer questions about potential IRA project proposals. This year individual Tribes may submit IRA project proposals independent of the LWG submission process.



In fiscal year 2024 NRCS awarded over \$4 million in additional funding to LWG and Tribal project funding pools. Individual contracts were funded as noted in the table below.

Some LWGs are already meeting, and all will meet before May 10, 2024, with IRA project proposals due on May 24, 2024. For a list of LWG meeting dates, click here: [Washington Local Working Groups | Natural Resources Conservation Service](#).

PROJECT	APPLICATIONS	CONTRACTS	FUNDS OBLIGATED
Colville Tribal Forestry	3	1	\$73,065
Snake River Team Nutrient	40	3	\$528,894
Snake River Team Forestry	8	5	\$602,178
North Central Team Forestry	6	2	\$129,586
North Central Team Non Conventional	5	3	\$10,500
North Central Team Grazing	4	4	Funded from different fund pool.
North Central Team oil Health	19	2	\$986,106
North Central Team Wildlife	1	1	\$230,000
Southwest Team Forestry	8	8	\$416,238
Puget Sound Team Forestry	16	4	\$77,082

Note: This is just a current snapshot of obligations as of the end of February 2024. Funds are still being obligated through the end of the fiscal year.

Variances for Raised Beds in Washington

By Robert D. Evans

NRCS-WA State Resource Conservationist

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. — While working in California as a Soil Conservationist, I had the privilege to work with a disabled veteran client, a medically retired Navy SEAL, who was severely physically limited as a result of substantial injuries he sustained in the line of duty. My relationships with our clients had always been important to me, to best serve them I wanted to learn about them, their families, their goals, and their aspirations. His life's story was especially impactful, telling me (what he could) about his active duty and the difficult years that followed as he readjusted to civilian life and the challenges he faced. Keeping himself busy was very important and as he is a highly motivated entrepreneur and advocate for veterans. He and his family bought a ranch and were interested in agricultural production. I walked him through our programs, and he was especially keen on getting a high tunnel. However, the conservation practice standard did not allow for us to utilize raised beds or benches that he was able to utilize.

I strongly believe in equity, inclusion, and the healing that agriculture can offer. This dilemma has greatly bothered me over the years, it troubled me that our practice standard did not allow us to plan the high tunnel to his needed specifications. As State Resource Conservationist, my team recently took the opportunity to right this situation and it's my honor to say that NRCS-WA's requested variance has been approved by our National Headquarters. It is my hope that other states can utilize this approved variance to better assist our clients.

NRCS National Headquarters has approved two variance requests from NRCS-WA regarding height limitations for raised beds to support clients who have limited mobility, thus making agriculture more accessible and inclusive for all. These impacted practices are High Tunnel Systems (CPS 325) and Raised Beds (ICPS 812). CPS 325 has allowed for raised beds to be installed, however they were limited to a maximum of one foot in height. Similarly, ICPS 812 allowed for a maximum height of 24 inches (unless installed in a High Tunnel System). The variances for these two practices now allow for a maximum height of 48 inches and a low forward reach of 15 inches; these changes will substantially benefit accessibility for clients with limited mobility.



Additionally, the ICPS 812 variance also allows for raised beds to be planned on soils with limiting physical properties, whereas it was previously only allowed on contaminated soils. As Rebecca Anderson Bellanca stated in our variance request, "Many in situ soils in Washington are unsuitable for production due to dense continental or alpine glacial till deposits and/or near-surface bedrock. Soils formed in recent glacial deposits or residuum have a number of limiting physical properties that can be prohibitive to production. Rooting zones in soils formed in glacial deposits can have a root restrictive layer such as dense till and/or aquic or saturated conditions from high water tables. Coarse-textured skeletal glacial soils also commonly have high quantities of rock fragments near the surface which can limit available water holding capacity as well as ability to perform tillage operations. Due to the underlying bedrock throughout much of Washington, other soils may have limited rooting depth due to lithic contacts within the rooting zone. Certain areas of the state also have salinity or caliche layers which affect plant growth. These limiting soil properties diminish plant production and create a need for implementation of Raised Beds on sites with these soil properties."

This is just one of many examples of how NRCS-WA is looking to update our practices to better serve producers in our state. We seek to eliminate as many barriers as possible throughout the state, in order to better affect conservation, and make it inclusive to our diverse population. If you are aware of limitations within our practice standards that you feel would help us in this venture, please share them with your local working group or send them to me directly (robert.d.evans@usda.gov).



Engineering

Here to help!

By Travis Godeaux

NRCS-WA Acting State Conservation Engineer

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. — Hello Washington, let me introduce myself. My name is Travis Godeaux and I will be assisting NRCS in your state for the next few months as the State Conservation Engineer. I have worked with NRCS since 2003 in California, Oregon and now Oklahoma and I have volunteered to temporarily fill the vacancy left by Larry Johnson for a period of 120 days (until early June) or until we can hire a new Washington State Conservation Engineer; if that can be done before my time is up. Although I really enjoy working in the field with producers, I also like learning new things and when Roylene Comes At Night sent out a request for engineers to apply for a detail to this position with the ability to work remotely, I thought it would be a good experience for me while at the same time providing a service to Washington.

In mid-February I visited Spokane for one week and met the state office engineering staff and the leadership team. I can already see that NRCS-Washington is involved in a wide variety of projects and has many active partners and a great team of employees to work with. NRCS-Washington is implementing many ambitious goals and so we need to keep making continual progress.

Although I will not be able to work with you all face to face over the next few months, my goal for this detail is to help Washington through this transition period while adding any value I can to your processes. Although I didn't personally know Larry, I remember communicating by email with him about 15 years ago when I was working in California and he seemed both thoughtful and intelligent. I can't help but think



that he was a big part of why things seem to be running so well with NRCS-Washington right now. I have high hopes that your next State Conservation Engineer will be able to leave such a lasting impact. In the meantime, let's keep moving forward.



Programs

RCPP, what has it provided to Washington State?

By Keith Griswold
NRCS-WA ASTC for Programs

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. — With the passing of the 2018 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) went from just a funding source to other known programs (EQIP, CSP) to its own program. Washington partners have taken advantage of this and is one of the top states in requests and approved projects.

Over the last six years, RCPP projects have brought \$97,004,035 of funds to Washington state, let alone the partners contributions too. RCPP is becoming a standard program used in Washington State and where possible, NRCS sees increasing the RCPP program to meet our partners and natural resource manager needs.

The awarded projects in Washington in the current Farm Bill are listed below. Note: PPA is a Programmatic Partnership Agreement with NRCS.

Whatcom County Working Lands Conserving Watersheds

Protect working lands within identified priority watersheds in Whatcom County to help to stabilize the critical land base needed to maintain a long-term commercially significant agriculture industry.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
1680	4/10/2020	\$1,310,000	\$1,912,500	\$265,000	3

Poop Smart Clark

Reduction of sediment, nutrient, and bacteria runoff into waterways in Clark County.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
1877	4/10/2020	\$1,400,000	\$1,420,052	\$406,649	6

WRIA 1 Salmon Recovery and Water Quality 2.0

Fish passage, particularly T&E species passage and habitat restoration.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
2243	8/6/2020	\$1,400,000	\$1,375,000	\$712,769	6

Nooksack Watershed Restoration

Large scale habitat restoration for T&E and culturally important fish species in areas identify by the Nooksack and Lummi Tribes as priority.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
2382	4/21/2021	\$4,827,100	\$4,980,129	\$0	0

Fuel Break & Forest Resilience Partnership

The goal is to increase forest resilience to wildfire, pest damage, drought and disease to improve fish and wildlife habitat.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
2344	4/21/2021	\$2,795,992	\$2,795,992	\$59,275	6

Palouse River Watershed {WRIA 34} Implementation Partnership

The goals of the Palouse River Watershed RCPP are to implement best management practices that address resource concerns associated with water quality, soil health, and at-risk wildlife habitat within the Palouse Watershed.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
2128	10/31/2019	\$5,500,000	\$8,087,453	\$2,011,151	6

Middle Columbia Steel head Partnership

Accelerate the recovery of steel head and other aquatic species on the Yakama reservation and ceded lands. Project is in collaboration with the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
2326	4/21/2021	\$6,781,670	\$9,312,050	\$2,026,914	4

Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program Lateral 80.6 and 84.7 On-Farm Project

This project is part of the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program (OGWRP). The goal of this RCPP is to replace groundwater irrigation with Columbia River surface water, through funding the on-farm component for 11, 180 acres (12 producers) in the areas known as 80.6 and 84.7.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
2843	8/12/2022	\$6,000,000	\$8,323,227	\$0	0

Whatcom County Conservation Easement Program

The primary goal of this project is to protect farmland, forestland, and important ecological areas in Whatcom County.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
2725	8/12/2025	\$1,175,325	\$1,217,200	\$0	0

Upper Yakima River Water Supply and Fish Habitat Improvements

Integrated conservation and restoration of watersheds in the Upper Yakima River in Central Washington through irrigation efficiency, habitat restoration and water quality improvement. This project tiers to the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
3149	11/21/2023	\$17,805,000	\$4,062,500	No PPA Yet	0

Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program EL 86.4 On-Farm Project

This project is part of the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program (OGWRP). Project goal is to replace groundwater irrigation, for the on-farm component with Columbia River surface water for 5,426 acres (12 participants).

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
2952	11/21/2023	\$13,448,816	\$13,448,816	No PPA Yet	0

Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program EL 80.6 Landowner Extension Mainline

This project is part of the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program (OGWRP). Project goal is replace groundwater irrigation with Columbia River surface water, for the on-farm and mainline extension project component impacting for 5,222 acres (2 participants) in the areas known as the 80.6 lateral.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
3084	11/21/2023	\$12,709,016	\$12,709,016	No PPA Yet	0

Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program EL 84.7 Landowner Extension Mainline

This project is part of the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program (OGWRP). Project goal is replace groundwater irrigation with Columbia River surface water, for the on-farm and mainline extension project component impacting for 7,138 acres (3 participants) in the areas known as the LE 84.7.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
3136	11/21/2023	\$15,828,616	\$15,828,616	No PPA Yet	0

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

This project is an AFA pay for performance that encourages producers to use a feed additive that may reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cattle. The additive is not FDA approved and so project partnership agreement will wait for that milestone to occur.

ID	DATE	NRCS \$	PARTNER \$	FA OBLIGATED	CONTRACTS
3048	11/21/2023	\$6,022,500	\$6,022,500	No PPA Yet	0



Outreach & Communications

Rebuilding a lost culture

By Nate Gallahan

NRCS-WA State Public Affairs Specialist

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. — Before I start typing these updates I go back and read the ones I wrote last time. In so doing, I realize that a lot of what we had going on is still going on. It's all about capacity building by hiring and training staff to best support field staff in building trust relationships with producers across the state. The latest news on this front we had someone accept a temporary job offer to work on my team as a new Public Affairs Specialist! I look forward to introducing them in the next update.

Instead of talking about capacity building, I want to share with all of you some thoughts on how we're approaching this business of conservation. NRCS has traditionally spent quite a bit of its energy on outputs. In other words, there's drastic infrastructure supporting conservation plans, conservation practices, contracts, contract systems, engineering, and the list goes on and on. All of this is geared to supporting producers in whatever capacity they voluntarily agree too.

What NRCS has not been that successful in, since at least the turn of this century, is concentrating on the inputs. I talk with some of the veteran conservationists, and they relish in telling me stories about how NRCS used to do this or that type of outreach. Back then what they lacked in actual financially advantageous programs for producers, they made

up for in technical support based on relationship building. I guess 20+ years ago that infrastructure was stripped from NRCS as I imagine there were probably some folks out there who thought others could advocate for conservation better than we could and for much less funding.

Fast forward to today, and I'm working hard to bridge those two worlds. I take responsibility for the inputs to this agency. In other words, I base my level of success on how many applications NRCS receives throughout the year. To maximize the number of applications we receive, producers across the state need to know who we are and understand we provide locally-led, voluntary, non-regulatory, science and incentives-based conservation – and then trust us enough to apply for our programs. We do that through a comprehensive and effective Outreach and Communications Strategy, and my team and I are blessed to have an exceptionally supportive boss.

The key here is that my team and I fully appreciate that the bread and butter of relationship building happens in the field, it's our responsibility to best support them ... to empower them ... and to advocate for the time and resources they need to be successful at it. We're doing well so far, and I cannot wait for that moment, that will come in a few years, where we will be sitting back and reflecting on how NRCS-Washington was able to come together and maximize this once-in-a-generation opportunity the Inflation Reduction Act is presenting us.



NRCS-WA News

NRCS-WA announces 2nd signup for FY24 ACEP-ALE

Published Feb. 9, 2024

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. – USDA's Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) is announcing a second application period for the Agricultural Conservation Easements Program – Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE). While applications for ACEP-ALE are taken on a continuous basis, the deadline to be considered for Fiscal Year 2024 second funding is March 11, 2024. NRCS Washington has over one million dollars remaining from our FY24 ACEP-ALE allocation, and intends to retain those funds in Washington state for farmland preservation. ([Read More](#))



NRCS-WA announces application batching period for EQIP WaterSmart EL86.4 Priority Area

Published Feb. 7, 2024

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Washington today set the application batching deadline for WaterSmart Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) program deadlines to March 12, 2024 ... ([Read More](#))



NRCS-WA announces dates, locations of Local Working Group meetings

Published Jan. 30, 2024

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Washington (NRCS-WA) has set the dates, times, and locations for all Local Working Group meetings occurring in 2024.



The Natural Resources Conservation Service is a federal agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. They help farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners help their land through completely voluntary, non-regulatory, incentive-and-science based programs. ([Read More](#))

Clark Conservation District to start accepting RCPP Poop Smart Clark applications

Published Jan. 25, 2024

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 ... ([Read More](#))



Conservation partners to target salmon habitat on the Middle Fork Nooksack River

Published Jan. 23, 2024

BELLINGHAM, Wash. – The Lummi Indian Business Council is working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service and partners through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to provide financial and technical assistance for landowners and producers to improve salmon habitat in the Middle Fork and South Fork of the Nooksack River in the northern Puget Sound area ... ([Read more](#))



FY24 Organic Transition Initiative batching period now open

Published Jan. 19, 2024

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Washington (NRCS-WA) is now accepting applications for the Organic Transition Initiative.



The Organic Transition Initiative is a USDA initiative that provides financial assistance (FA) and technical assistance (TA) for conservation practices that support organic production. While NRCS accepts applications year-round, eligible applications received by Jan. 19, 2024 will be batched then ranked for consideration of FY24 funding ... ([Read more](#))

NRCS-WA implements Act Now policy to quickly assist producers

Published Dec. 12, 2023

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. – The Natural Resources Conservation Service in Washington (NRCS-WA) is now using the new Act Now policy to deliver conservation contracting faster.



Act Now allows NRCS to quickly approve and obligate a ranked application in a designated ranking pool when an eligible application meets or ... ([Read more](#))





National News

Three Key Ways NRCS Supports Double Wins for Wildlife and Working Lands Conservation

Published March 3, 2024

Yesterday was World Wildlife Day. To celebrate, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Terry Cosby shares three key ways NRCS supports farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners in delivering win-win voluntary conservation solutions for wildlife and working lands every day of the year ... ([Read more](#))



Biden-Harris Administration Makes Record Investment in Private Lands Conservation As Part of Investing in America Agenda

Published Feb. 13, 2024

In fiscal year 2023, USDA supported more than 45,000 conservation contracts, more than any year in the 89-year history of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), totaling over \$2.8 billion in financial assistance to producers for conservation efforts. NRCS also released updated state-by-state data showing where investments went in FY2023 for resources provided under both the Farm Bill and Inflation Reduction Act ... ([Read more](#))



USDA Launches New Working Lands Climate Corps to Train Future Conservation and Climate Leaders

Published Feb. 13, 2024

USDA today announced a new effort to train the next generation of conservation and climate leaders. As part of President Biden's historic American Climate Corps initiative, the Working Lands Climate Corps will provide technical training and career pathway opportunities for young people, helping them deliver economic benefits through climate-smart agriculture solutions for farmers and ranchers across the country, now and in the future ... ([Read more](#))

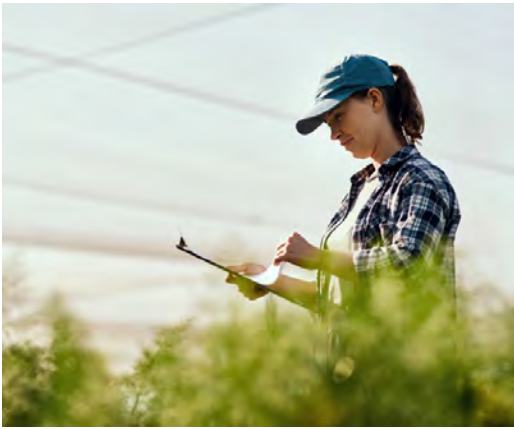


USDA Celebrates 10 Years of Climate Hubs and Their Role in Climate Solutions

Published Feb. 5, 2024

Today marks 10 years since the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) created its Climate Hubs, and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack is highlighting how these regional climate centers have helped position farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, and communities to address the threats of climate change ... ([Read More](#))







January/February 2024

Since time immemorial, the tribes of the Pacific Northwest have stewarded the fish and wildlife resources in what is now known as Washington state. In the mid-19th century, many tribes signed treaties with the U.S. government, ceding hundreds of thousands of acres of land to allow for the peaceful settlement of the territory. In the treaties, the tribes reserved the right of fishing at usual and accustomed areas—a right central to their culture and traditions, to their very identity as Indians.

Unfortunately, since signing the treaties there were years of terrible atrocities committed against the tribes by the government, including not honoring the treaties—the Supreme Law of the Land under the U.S. Constitution—as tribes pursued their off-reservation fishing rights.

The predecessor agencies of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington Department of Fisheries and the Washington Department of Game, fought, persecuted, and acted abhorrently toward the treaty tribes as they exercised their off-reservation treaty fishing right—an embarrassing and shameful chapter of my agency's otherwise proud and rich legacy.

In 1974, a landmark ruling by Judge Boldt in the *U.S. v Washington* case changed that trajectory in an impactful and positive way. The decision established tribal governments as co-managers of Washington fisheries and ensured that 50% of the harvestable surplus is available to treaty tribes. The years that followed continued to be difficult, but ultimately, the co-managers came together to create a new process to establish sustainable fishing seasons.

Today, the tribes are leaders in salmon recovery and fisheries science. The partnerships and strong alliances that have emerged from the profound, landmark Boldt decision are reinforced every day as we work toward our shared goal of recovering salmon and ensuring healthy and robust salmon populations are available for sustainable harvest for all generations to come.

March kicks off the North of Falcon salmon season setting process, with our first hybrid meeting in Olympia on March 1. Stay tuned for [North of Falcon updates at this webpage](#). More information on salmon and steelhead co-management is also [available on this webpage](#).

The Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission produced a great documentary summarizing the Boldt Decision. We will have an internal hybrid all-staff viewing and panel discussion on March 29, 2024, in Olympia. More information about that internal viewing opportunity will be sent to you soon.



Kelly Susewind, Director



Director Susewind speaking on a panel with tribal leaders and elders as part of NWIFC's U.S. vs. WA (also known as the Boldt Decision) 50th anniversary celebration in early February.

Topics in this message include:

- **Updates on WDFW's 25-year Strategic Plan**
 - **National survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation**
 - **Annual North of Falcon salmon season-setting process gets underway**
 - **Public comment period underway on proposed wolf status change**
 - **Coastal commercial crab season underway, 2022-23 season valued at more than \$64 million**
 - **Hells Canyon bighorn sheep test positive for lethal bacteria**
 - **North Puget Sound and Coastal steelhead fisheries balance conservation and opportunity**
 - **Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative strategy**
 - **Cases of mistaken crab identity underscore request to report and release suspected European green crabs**
 - **Bird and wildlife enthusiasts: catch up on our latest blog posts**
-



Updates on WDFW's 25-year Strategic Plan

This winter, we passed the three-year mark for our [25-year Strategic Plan](#), which outlines a forward-thinking vision for the future of fish and wildlife conservation through 2045. To provide an update on how this plan is being implemented, we recently [published a blog post](#) highlighting major milestones to proactively address conservation challenges, engage communities through recreation and stewardship, deliver science that informs Washington's most pressing fish and wildlife questions, and model operational and environmental excellence.



National survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation

In January, we released participation and spending data about fishing, hunting, and wildlife associated recreation in Washington in 2022. The data, collected during a [national survey](#) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, documented the number of hunters, anglers, wildlife watchers, and related outdoor recreationists in Washington and collected demographic information about participants. The survey also quantified consumer spending related to these activities and how much time participants spent hunting, fishing, watching wildlife, or participating in other wildlife-related recreation activities in 2022. Survey results showed that approximately 290,000 people went hunting, 1.2 million people went fishing, and 6.2 million people watched wildlife in Washington in 2022. Refer to our [news release](#) for more information.



Annual North of Falcon salmon season-setting process gets underway

We know Washington anglers look forward to salmon fishing seasons each year, with many planning trips well in advance. WDFW is committed to providing sustainable fishing opportunities balanced with salmon conservation needs, and we are continually working to improve fisheries management in the interest of salmon, recreational anglers, the commercial fleet, and treaty tribes. WDFW hosted a virtual meeting on Jan. 30 to discuss a range of topics related to recreational salmon fisheries and provide valuable insights to the challenges of managing mixed-stock salmon fisheries in areas where certain stocks are Endangered Species Act listed. On

March 1, the annual salmon season-setting and co-management process known as North of Falcon will formally kickoff with a hybrid meeting to unveil the 2024-25 salmon forecasts. Learn more [in our news release](#) and on our [North of Falcon webpage](#). The road to salmon recovery is an upstream battle. WDFW remains dedicated toward rebuilding the state's wild salmon runs and restoring the vital habitat and clean water that sustains them, while also managing sustainable and science-based fishing seasons.



Public comment period underway on proposed wolf status change

WDFW is seeking public input on a rule making proposal to reclassify Washington's gray wolves from state endangered to sensitive and is [asking for public input](#) on the topic. Based on 14 years of data and trends on Washington's wolf population as well as a population model developed at the University of Washington (UW), WDFW staff recommend reclassifying wolves from state endangered to sensitive. State endangered is defined as "seriously threatened with extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range within the state", while sensitive is defined as "vulnerable or declining and likely to become endangered or threatened in a significant portion of its range within the state without cooperative management or removal of threats." More information and how to provide input through May 6 is [available in our news release](#). Earlier in January, [WDFW responded](#) to Gov. Inslee granting an appeal to a rule-making petition on wolf-livestock regulations. And in February, we [issued a statement](#) on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's gray wolf federal status review announcement. We also recently [published a blog post](#) encouraging people to take extra precautions with dogs in wolf country.



Coastal commercial crab season underway, 2022-23 season valued at more than \$64 million

Washington's coastal Dungeness crab commercial season opened with a reduced pot limit on Feb. 1. The coastal Dungeness crab industry is one of the most important commercial fisheries in the state, particularly for coastal communities and economies. According to a recent [WDFW report](#), the value of state crab landings during the 2022-23 season was \$64.6 million. This is the second-highest total value recorded in the past 10 years,

surpassed only by the previous season high of \$88.2 million in 2021-22. More information is available in our recent [news release](#) and on our [commercial fishing webpages](#). WDFW also worked to help replace buoy tags that belonged to WDFW-registered gear and were lost in a recent fire at the Port of Ilwaco.



Hells Canyon bighorn sheep test positive for lethal bacteria

We are working with our partners at the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to monitor and address a disease outbreak following a pneumonia detection in the Northern Hells Canyon bighorn sheep population in December 2023. This is one of several pneumonia outbreaks in [bighorn sheep](#) that have occurred over the past century in the Hells Canyon area. The disease is confirmed in Washington, Idaho, and Oregon and potentially affected bighorn sheep populations are located along the Snake River and tributaries in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. To report dead or sick bighorn sheep in Washington, use [WDFW's reporting tool](#). Refer to [our news release](#) for more information. In other bighorn news, in the Yakima Canyon and Cleman Mountain areas of Central Washington, we recently captured animals and fitted them with GPS collars to learn more about how groups of sheep interact with each other and their habitat. More information is available [in this news release](#).



North Puget Sound and Coastal steelhead fisheries balance conservation and opportunity

The steelhead, a sea-going rainbow trout that can exceed 30 pounds, is the Washington State Fish and an icon of the Pacific Northwest that has been a source of important cultural and economic benefits throughout the region's history. Across Western Washington, we've been working to balance steelhead fishing with conservation efforts. Catch and release fishing for wild steelhead [opened Feb. 3 on the Skagit and Sauk rivers](#) under a popular and carefully regulated fishery that is part of a 10-year management plan approved in 2023. On the Olympic Peninsula, for the first time in three years, steelhead anglers are allowed to fish from a floating device on the lower and middle sections of the Hoh River on certain days of the week. As detailed [in a recent blog post](#), these special rules are part of a one-season study to determine the

impacts of fishing from a floating device on wild steelhead to better inform future rulemaking and conservation actions. Learn more about steelhead management and conservation [on our webpage](#).



Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative strategy

Alongside the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC), in January we released our draft [Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative \(WSRRI\) Long-term Strategy](#). Following historic wildfires in 2020 that burned more than 600,000 acres of [shrubsteppe habitat](#) in our state, the Washington Legislature directed WDFW, SCC, and DNR to take immediate action to address the impacts of the fires and provided funding to restore shrubsteppe habitat, support at-risk shrubsteppe wildlife species, and support working lands that are vital for maintaining these habitats and species. The Legislature also directed the agencies to collaboratively produce a long-term strategy for proactively addressing threats facing this landscape. More information about the draft report is available on our [website](#). Following robust public review, we anticipate a final draft will be available later this spring.



Cases of mistaken crab identity underscore request to report and release suspected European green crabs

In February, our Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) unit received a report from a concerned member of the public who claimed to have collected nine invasive European green crabs from a Hood Canal beach. Upon reviewing their photos, we quickly determined these were in fact helmet crabs, a common native species unlawful to kill or retain. While we appreciate their concern about invasive species, the reporting party was reminded to photograph and report suspected European green crabs using the form at wdfw.wa.gov/greencrab, leaving the crab in question where it was found. Unfortunately, misidentified crab reports are common in the Puget Sound Region, where invasive European green crabs remain rare in most areas. Incidents like this are one reason why WDFW has not yet opened recreational harvest for European green crabs in Washington. Other reasons include restrictions on

access to private tidelands and shellfish beds, and concerns about bycatch of protected fish and shellfish, especially if traps are exposed during low tide. [Read more in our blog post.](#)



Bird and wildlife enthusiasts: catch up on our latest blog posts

In January, we published a series of blogs sharing the stories of our recent Wildlife Program efforts, including:

- [Brant geese](#): a favorite among both birders and hunters in Western Washington. Visitors from the high arctic, these sea geese spend the winter in coastal and Puget Sound estuaries, and are renowned for their unique vocalizations, striking plumage, and as table fare due to their diet of eelgrass and other aquatic vegetation.
- A [moose monitoring effort](#) in WDFW's Eastern Region in northeast Washington involves capturing and collaring cow moose via helicopter. The GPS radio collars will allow biologists to assess annual survival rates of the species in the study area and provide information about how moose use the landscape. Additionally, Department staff will collect samples from the captured moose to estimate pregnancy rates and to evaluate them for disease and parasites, like ticks. Twenty-eight moose were captured. Additional capture efforts will take place next winter.
- A partnership with nonprofit Home Range Wildlife Research to [capture lynx in western Okanogan County](#). These valuable study animals are providing important information that will help WDFW and land management agencies understand how lynx are using the fire-impacted landscape across a gradient of fire scars of different ages. Results will inform forest and fire management strategies to help maintain adequate lynx habitat in the face of growing wildlife risk.

Director's Bulletins are also published [on WDFW's Medium blog](#) and archived on the Director's [webpage](#).



Washington Association of Conservation Districts



March 2024 Partner Report

ADVOCACY

As we write this on March 7th the compromise budgets are in, and they provide an additional:

- \$3.5M CTA funding in the Operating Budget for conservation districts.
- 2 FTEs for the Washington State Commission.
- \$500K was provided for Klickitat Fire Recovery.

Pending approval by the governor this short legislative session is going in the win column for WACD and conservation districts.

BOARD MEETINGS

- March 26 – 27, 2024: SCC All Districts Meeting
- April 15, 2024: WACD Business Meeting
- May 16, 2024: SCC Regular Meeting
- May 20, 2024: WACD Business Meeting
- May 29 – 30, 2024: WACD Spring Legislative Meeting

WACD RESOLUTIONS APPROVED AT NACD

- WACD submitted five resolutions to the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting in February. Thanks to the hard work of our National Director, Doug Rushton, all five were adopted by NACD with some minor modifications. The final resolution language will be available soon on the NACD website:
 - Low or interest-free loans for equipment purchases. (Palouse CD)
 - Carbon conservation stewardship program. (Palouse CD)
 - Communication about fuel breaks in CRP. (Walla Walla CD)
 - FSA contract communications and payment policies. (Columbia CD)
 - Cancelling of FSA contracts. (Whitman CD)

OPERATIONS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

- WACD staff have spent a significant amount of time this fiscal year reviewing and updating WACD's policy manuals. The Supervisor Policy Manual as well as the Financial Policies and Procedures Manual have both been updated and approved by the WACD Board. Those documents are available [here](#). Staff hope to have the final policy manual, the Personnel Manual, updated before the end of the fiscal year.
- Planning for the 2024 Annual Conference is underway. If there is a topic you would like to see us cover, please reach out to Ryan Baye – rbaye@wadistricts.org.
- Save the Date – WACD's Spring Legislative Workshop will be held at the Hal Homes Center in Ellensburg, WA on May 29th and 30th. This will be an opportunity for CDs to discuss legislative priorities, sustainable funding options, and the status of WACD resolutions.

PLANT MATERIALS CENTER

- As of 2/29/24 the total sales at the PMC were \$1,540,714. While that still lags from last year's recording setting pace of \$1,615,464 for the same date last year it is \$87,310 more than reported on February 8th of this year which is more than usual this late in the sales season.
- The PMC completed its harvest of bare root seedlings on March 6th although there are still some live stakes to harvest. Over 14 weeks, minus 1 week due to frozen ground, over 1.65 million plants were harvested, processed, and stored.
- With harvest over the attention turns to field cleanup. The crew has gone out to get everything ready for another growing season. Transplanting the plugs for plug-1 production follows, then putting the fields that will be fallow this summer into the fallow rotation, followed by spring seed planting.
- We still have plants looking for their forever homes. Please check out the PMC's availability list on our website at: <http://www.wacdpmc.org> and pass it along to those interested.

NACD SPRING FLY-IN

- While many of us are enjoying the fellowship of our conservation community in Shelton, WA there is a small team of intrepid Conservation Partnership representatives meeting with Congressional leaders to educate them about the great work being done in Washington State. Thank you to NRCS's Roylene Comes at Night, SCC's James Thompson, WACD's Ryan Baye, and NACD's Michael Crowder for making the trip.
- For more information on the NACD Spring Fly-In visit NACD's website: <https://www.nacdnet.org/news-and-events/spring-fly-in/>

Updates from CTD:

- CTD is hosting 3 NFPA - Assessing Structure Ignition Potential for Wildfire sessions in March – in Mt Vernon, Wenatchee, and Spokane. Course attendees will include CD staff, as well as some partner staff from DNR and local FD or county staff.
- CTD is working with WADE for the 2024 conference; registration is now open! CTD will be providing a virtual option via Zoom for those who can't attend in person, as well as providing on-site support for the tracks.
- An Irrigation Water Management & Planning training was held this month via webinar, presented by Jon Culp, SCC and Harold Crose, Columbia Basin CD. The webinar will be posted on the CTD website and YouTube channel, and on the SCC IEGP page. Several follow up trainings are in discussion/development.
- The FY25 Training Needs Inventory (TNI) development is in progress, aiming for an early May release.
- Continued coordination with NRCS partners on training opportunities for district staff.
- CTD FY25 Annual Plan of Work and Budget drafting underway.

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!

CTD Contact Information

For more information on CTD activities, please contact:

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Program Manager

Ryan Williams, CTD Co-Chair

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