



Washington Association of Conservation Districts

June 26, 2023

Dear Association Members:

Your state association recorded some tremendous achievements over the fiscal year from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024. Among them:

- More than 1.84 million native plants were provided for various restoration and conservation projects.
- Over \$55 million provided for new conservation programs, bringing the State Conservation Commission up to \$97 million in operating funds for the biennium.
- A well-attended, interesting, and informative WACD annual conference and business meeting, like we used to have. In 2023, we secured a bevy of partners who provided financial support for the conference, helping us build a better conference experience for you.
- Strong, healthy partnerships with key entities, including the State Conservation Commission, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington Association of District Employees, and the Washington Conservation Society.
- Committees have continued to work on vital issues, from access to water for livestock to how to share resources to squeeze the most benefit out of your district's dollars.
- Throughout the year, we maintained a regular flow of information to members and partners.

Interestingly, the utility of WACD is not just in what we did but also in what we didn't do. We did not give up the fight for rational reforms to conservation district election law. We did not roll over when voluntary conservation was attacked. We did not stop progressing on the topics identified by members as most important. We did not stop listening to our members and partners.

Operating WACD is a challenge because our revenue stream is relatively flat. As a 501(c)(6) nonprofit entity, we are generally not eligible for grants. WACD functions more like a Chamber of Commerce, working to make business conditions better for member conservation districts. Our published mission puts this in context:

WACD serves as the collective voice of conservation districts to help them achieve their purposes.

WACD survives on three sources of funds: the sale of native plant materials, dues from members, and occasional contracts with other parties. Even when our advocacy work succeeds beyond expectations, WACD's benefit from that work is in helping conservation districts have the resources they need to thrive. WACD doesn't directly benefit from advocating for our members. As our members and partners continue to work with us to strengthen the conservation delivery system in Washington State, WACD is focused on current and future needs of members, working to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

One of those challenges is the availability of restoration-grade native plants. As more projects are funded, demand outstrips supply. And unfortunately, no one can make trees grow faster. While the WACD Plant Materials Center operations in Bow are physically limited, we are working with some conservation districts in exploring new partnerships with the nursery to meet the needs of members. Your patronage of the premier native plant nursery in Washington State helps WACD provide more and better service to your conservation district.

Your district's dues are a cornerstone of the work WACD does with, and for, conservation districts. Without your support, we would be unable to grow native plants throughout the year. We would be unable to actively and persistently promote the voluntary conservation ethos with legislators and agencies. We would be unable to meet with conservation districts to hear their ideas and understand their concerns.

A less obvious aspect of WACD's financial health is the WACD annual conference. The cost for a venue of sufficient size and quality to serve our conservation community well is shockingly high. The more people who attend the annual conference, the more WACD can cover the cost of this event. We lost money on the conference over the past few years but in 2023, we lost less than in prior years. The trend is reversing. When you attend, you help WACD avoid using resources to cover conference costs. You also get to hear great speakers on important topics, build relationships, and network on issues and opportunities.

Lastly, I'm excited to share that we continue to move toward a business model that is more clearly focused on services to members. You know about WACD's advocacy on behalf of conservation districts. You might know that WACD provides email addresses for people in member districts when requested. Over the next few months, WACD will be rolling out a one-hour-free legal consultation service with an experienced group of attorneys who understand many of the things you do. The Board of Directors has set aside \$10,000 for the legal consultation service.

One way to consider the value of what you receive from WACD is to postulate what conditions would be like without WACD. The Conservation Commission might have been gutted a decade ago if it wasn't for WACD. You might have an entirely different supervisor election process but for WACD. You would not be reaping bumper harvests of funds from the Legislature without WACD. These are a few examples of the critical work WACD does on your behalf.

The value proposition of being a WACD dues paying member is excellent. That, combined with the commitment of everyone on WACD's Board of Directors and staff for conservation district success, makes us proud and honored to do this work for you. Please do help your district by purchasing native plant materials from the WACD Plant Materials Center. Please do attend the WACD annual conference this fall. Please do remit your annual dues so WACD can continue to provide services you need.

I hope your conservation district will continue to be a member of WACD in good standing. By remitting your annual dues to WACD, your districts helps us further advocate for a voluntary, incentive-based approach to natural resource conservation in our state.

Thank you for your continued support,



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