



# Washington Association of Conservation Districts

## Annual Work Plan: FY 2024 (7/1/23 – 6/30/24)

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## Background

### Who are we?

The Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) is a 501c6 nonprofit trade organization, created in 1942 to improve business conditions for member conservation districts.

WACD supports conservation districts in their work with government, partner organizations, businesses, private landowners and working lands managers to implement best management practices, to utilize innovative equipment and materials, to provide technical assistance, and to develop expertise to address resource issues.

WACD, through the work of its leadership, professional staff, and its members, provides support to conservation districts in the areas of technical capacity development, leadership training, government relations, strategic planning, governance, conservation funding, legislation, and information sharing. WACD's initiatives allow conservation districts to use their collective strengths to accomplish what cannot be done individually.

WACD's operating structure is geographically distributed. Our two primary locations are the Executive Office in Olympia, WA and the Plant Materials Center in Bow, WA. Conversely, WACD Board Officers and Directors (O&D) come from all parts of Washington State, with two director positions for each of six area associations of conservation districts.

In general, WACD's style is to meet people where they are rather than expect them to come to our primary locations. However, once a year, area associations meet, and traditionally, the WACD annual conference and business meeting is an in-person event at a location that varies every few years. An important purpose of these gatherings is to build community as members jointly seek resolution on key issues and opportunities.

## **Mission and Vision**

### **Mission**

Washington Association of Conservation Districts serves as the collective voice of conservation districts to help them achieve their purposes.

### **Vision**

WACD aspires to fully support conservation districts in their implementation of locally developed conservation programs.

## **Guiding Principles**

WACD has adopted ten guiding principles:

1. We exist to advocate for, and support, member conservation districts.
2. We serve people with dignity and respect, acting with integrity and operating with transparency and accountability to all.
3. We continually seek to become more capable in serving members, including maintaining financial strength, enhancing board capacity, and improving staff capacity.
4. We value and recognize our people for excellence in performance, including teamwork, innovation, timely completion of tasks, and support of others.
5. Our responses to conservation issues are founded on proven methodologies and science.
6. We form and support strategic partnerships to maximize our effectiveness and to reduce duplication of effort.
7. We seek to conserve natural resources in the way we operate our organization.
8. We believe in, and uphold, the practice of locally-led, voluntary, incentive-based conservation.
9. Private lands – and those who steward them – provide unique and valuable conservation of renewable natural resources to be used today and by future generations.

10. Because natural resources cross jurisdictional boundaries and ownerships, all lands – and the people and entities that manage them – are important in conserving renewable natural resources.

## Officers and Directors

### Officers

Name	Office	Conservation District
Mike Mumford	President	Pend Oreille (Northeast Area)
Amy McKay	Vice President	Whitman (Southeast Area)
Barbara Bailey	Secretary	Underwood (South Central Area)
Dave Fenn	Treasurer	Lewis (Southwest Area)
Doug Rushton	National Director	Thurston (Southwest Area)
Jeanette Dorner	Past President	Pierce (Northwest Area)

### Directors

Name	Position	Conservation District
Alan Chapman	Northwest Area Director	Whatcom
vacant	Northwest Area Director	
Lisa Zaborac	Southwest Area Director	Grays Harbor
Jerry Kolke	Southwest Area Director	Clark
John McLean	North Central Area Director	Foster Creek
John Preston	North Central Area Director	Grant County
Jack Clark	South Central Area Director	Benton
vacant	South Central Area Director	
Jeff Schibel	Northeast Area Director	Lincoln County
John Floyd	Northeast Area Director	Pend Oreille
Mary Collins	Southeast Area Director	Palouse
vacant	Southeast Area Director	
Cindy Pierce	WADE President	Skagit (Northwest Area)

## Staff

WACD employs eight full-time, year-round staff in two locations. The Executive Office operation is in Olympia, Washington and the Plant Materials Center operation is in Bow, Washington. One executive director provides day-to-day leadership, direction, and supervision.

## Staff

Scope	Title	Name
All Operations	Executive Director	Tom Salzer
Executive Office/Advocacy	Director of Legislative and Member Services	Ryan Baye
Plant Materials Center	Director of Nursery Operations	Jim Brown
	Assistant Nursery Manager	John Knox
	Financial Accounting/Human Resources Admin	Lori McLaughlin
	Sales Manager	Jacque Gauthier
	Farm Operations Supervisor	Oscar Arias Garcia
	Crew Supervisor	Maria Del Carmen Rivera

## Annual Work Plan Structure

The content of this annual work plan is built around a simple three-part structure: **Program, Activity, and Measure**, abbreviated as **PAMs**. Programs are the larger areas of focus, and each program has several key activities. Each activity has measures to help evaluate whether adequate progress is being achieved.

# Work Plan

## A – Advocacy and Legislative Engagement

This is a core member service area operated through the Executive Office. WACD advocates for the interests of Washington State’s 45-member conservation districts. WACD board members and staff testify before the Washington State Legislature, submit letters and comments on proposed rules and legislation, and regularly meet with lawmakers and agencies to advance policies beneficial to voluntary conservation.

WACD collaborates directly with member districts throughout the year to help them connect and communicate with legislators. Each spring, WACD coordinates a Legislative Day to help districts convey important messages to state legislators. This event helps conservation districts advocate for policies that benefit them directly and educate decision-makers on the ins and outs of district work.

Advocacy and Legislative Engagement efforts are more intensively focused while the Legislature is in session (January – March in a short session and January – April in a long session). This work picks up again in June and continues through September as WACD coordinates fall meetings of area associations and WACD’s members.

### Program A: Advocacy and Legislative Engagement

**Activity A.1 – In-Session Engagement.** Coordinate in-session engagement of member conservation districts to support WACD priority conservation policy and funding outcomes. Coordinate messaging and priorities with partners.

- **Measure A.1.a** – Number of members engaged in Legislative Day. Timely communication with members, partners, and board to facilitate engagement on key issues, as they arise. Communication methods meet the needs of stakeholders.
- **Measure A.1.b** – Sufficient meetings held with partners to achieve substantial coordination and leverage messaging.

**Activity A.2 – Out-of-session Engagement.** WACD board and staff support members in building strong relationships with their local legislators.

- **Measure A.2.a** – Aid districts each year in establishing and strengthening relationships with legislators on one to two priority initiatives. Support growth of relationships with legislators. WACD will seek to co-host at least one conservation district tour and will explore the possibility of sponsoring an annual legislator’s tour day with conservation districts in FY 24.
- **Measure A.2.b** – Work to identify and secure opportunities to fund community engagement activities, and to support education/outreach staff in conservation districts, to achieve key elements of the WACD DEI Action Plan.
- **Measure A.2.c** – Encourage members to develop a platform on conservation district supervisor elections for 2024 that leverages achievements from prior legislative sessions.

## B – Other Member Services

The Washington Association of Conservation Districts provides other services to members and partners, including:

- Coordination and support of area association business meetings;
- Interactive communications and engagement activities;
- Education and trainings;
- Coordination of WACD committee work; and
- Email accounts for members when requested.

### Program B: Other Member Services

**Activity B.1 – Association business meetings coordination and support.** Facilitate statewide coordinated impact through the formal resolution process and associated network building of business meeting cycle. Activities include supporting area association’s annual meetings and coordination of the annual WACD meeting. This work reaches peak activity from September to December each year.

- **Measure B.1.a** – Area meetings are held annually (at least one in each of the six areas) with WACD support, as needed.
- **Measure B.1.b** – WACD annual conference and business meetings are coordinated and held. The meetings include association business and offer leadership, training, and networking opportunities for conservation district board members.

**Activity B.2 – Interactive communication and engagement.** WACD maintains a variety of tools to strengthen member engagement and public engagement, including website, blog, e-mail/ newsletters, member visits/ meetings, press releases, interviews with media, and other communications.

- **Measure B.2.a** – Members and partners understand and value WACD's work. Members see that their input is valued and heard in WACD's work.

**Activity B.3 – WACD Committee work.** The WACD President oversees both permanent and special committees that provide guidance, oversight, and direction to the Board and the organization, and directs staff as needed to accomplish committee work.

- **Measure B.3.a** – Committees have clear direction, provide useful guidance for board business, and members see service as adding a valuable contribution to WACD's work. Map out a reporting calendar with each committee to help keep membership informed on committee progress throughout the year.

**Activity B.4 – Support and training.** This work involves providing key member support and professional training to strengthen conservation district effectiveness across the state. This work includes Board-directed priorities and opportunities such as participating in the Building Better initiative for district managers/staff.

- **Measure B.4.a** – Compile and make available to interested conservation districts a list of resources and best practices for equity, community engagement, and outreach with underrepresented communities. This work includes developing a central repository of resources, tools, and best practices. WACD will seek support in this work from the State Office of Equity.
- **Measure B.4.b** – Feedback from participants show the value of support and trainings provided.

## C – Partnerships

In addition to direct member services, WACD focuses on building and strengthening partnerships to support and leverage WACD’s ability to serve as the voice of Washington State’s 45 conservation districts and to increase the collective impact of member conservation districts.

WACD works closely with traditional conservation partners, including the Washington State Conservation Commission, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Washington Association of District Employees, the National Association of Conservation Districts, and others to maintain and strengthen our collective impact in addressing shared conservation goals.

WACD also works to build and strengthen partnerships with other entities in support of member conservation district goals and priorities, including tribal relations, work with state and federal agencies, and other non-governmental organizations.

### Program C: Partnerships

**Activity C.1 – Traditional conservation partnerships.** Maintain and strengthen traditional conservation partnerships, including w WSCC, NRCS, WADE, NACD, and others to increase the collective impact of member conservation districts.

- **Measure C.1.a** – Identify and work on at least one partnership initiative annually that focuses collective efforts to increase WACD’s impact on shared goals. In FY23 and FY24, the focus will be on the Farm Bill.

**Activity C.2 – Expanded partnerships.** Build and strengthen partnerships with other entities in support of member conservation district goals and priorities, including Tribal relations. Work with state and federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations.

- **Measure C.2.a** – Schedule engagement with other entities to increase partnership opportunities.

## D – Administration

WACD's administrative activities are focused on sound and sustainable business and management practices, so WACD's member services can sustain and strengthen their impact on the mission.

### Program D: Administration

**Activity D.1 – Board governance.** Support Board operations and development, focus on board roles and responsibilities.

- **Measure D.1.a** – Board members are clear on their duties and appreciate their contributions and impact. The board operates using sound governance practices. Board meetings are effective and focus on themes including strategy, policy, oversight, and delegation.
- **Measure D.1.b** – Board will review active resolutions, adopt a prioritized list, and authorize resources necessary to implement resolutions.

**Activity D.2 – Planning and financial management.** WACD follows sound business and financial management practices, including aligning with WACD strategies and increasing transparency and trust.

- **Measure D.2.a** – Work with the Board to develop an annual work plan and budget, and report progress, as directed. Explore a more systematic way of tracking and reporting progress for FY24. Manage work and budget according to planned strategies and goals, and work with the Board to address challenges and opportunities as they emerge.

**Activity D.3 – Policies, agreements, and contracts.** Ensure WACD complies with written commitments and upholds WACD Guiding Principles in WACD business operations.

**Activity D.4 – Human resources.** Staff are clear about their role, responsibilities, and annual goals. They understand WACD employee policies. Staff see opportunities for learning and growth.

- **Measure D.3.a** – Updated job descriptions for all staff in FY24.



## E – Plant Materials Center

The WACD Plant Materials Center, established in 1993, is operated by the Washington Association of Conservation Districts through a long-term lease with the Skagit Conservation District. WACD is a 501(c)(6) non-profit organization. The mission of the WACD Plant Materials Center is to grow high quality conservation plants and provide customer service for the benefit of Natural Resources throughout the state of Washington, and beyond. The PMC is a 60-acre conservation-grade bareroot nursery, located in Skagit County, WA, produces more than 80 species of quality 1 and 2-year-old conservation grade seedlings and cuttings--over 1.5 million plants annually. Our plants are propagated from source-identified, wild-collected seeds and are utilized for conservation projects throughout the northwest.

### Program E: Plant Materials Center – Growing

**Activity E.1 – Ground prep for transplants and seeds.** Preparing (plowing, disking, sub-soiling, and cultivating) and maintaining the ground for seed sowing (spring and fall) and transplanting. For fallow fields, apply chicken manure, sow barley seed, and till into soil.

- **Measure E.1.a** – Ground is prepped and plugs and seeds can be planted.

**Activity E.2 – Transplants.** Communicate with staff on planting location and how many plugs are to be planted. Create field maps with species, zones, and bed feet.

- **Measure E.2.a** – Plugs are planted and field maps created.

**Activity E.3 – Seed sow.** Once seed is properly stratified, communicate with staff on planting location, amount of seed/weight and seed zone. Create maps with species, providence, seed collection location, and distance. Create field maps with species, zones, and bed feet.

- **Measure E.3.a** – Seeds planted and maps created.

**Activity E.4 – Growing: Irrigation/Fertilizing/Pest Control.** Place irrigation pipes in the field, check fitting and pressure. Irrigate as needed to ensure proper moisture. Pipes are removed from the field in the fall. Some pipes are left in the field to provide frost protection for non-dormant plants when the expected lows are just below freezing. Applications of chemicals for weed control and fungicides to control rusts, mildews, and blight.

- **Measure E.4.a** – Pipes in place and ground surveyed for proper moisture content. Records are complete.
- **Measure E.4.b** – Fertilizing completed with records.
- **Measure E.4.c** – Pest control completed with records.

**Activity E.5 – Weeding.** All fields are hand weeded numerous times throughout the growing season. Rototilling of wheel tracks and large areas.

- **Measure E.5.a** – Fields are weeded and will be weeded, as necessary.

**Activity E.6 – Gravel Beds.** Bareroot gravel bed plants are heeled-in over the summer in an irrigated bed, and they are ready for fall planting. This method extends the bare rooting planting window, increases scheduling flexibility, reduces costs compared to containerized, and retains all the benefits of bare root planning stock. Recommended for plantings in October.

- **Measure E.6.a** – Plants are sold and shipped in the fall.

## Program F: Plant Materials Center – Processing

**Activity F.1 – Inventory.** Numerous samples of each species are taken - samples are tracked by seed lot, seed zone and location of seed collected. Sizes are then estimated for each species based upon growing location and patterns.

- **Measure F.1.a** – The estimated quantities are then entered into the accounting software to generate estimated plant availability lists.

**Activity F.2 – Harvest.** Harvest begins when the plants are dormant (300 to 400 hours below 40 degrees Fahrenheit). Harvest typically starts in December and ends in March. Once harvested, the plants are kept dormant in a cooler until shipped. Cuttings may be harvested in mid-October.

- **Measure F.2.a** – Plants are harvested based on sales numbers.

**Activity F.3 – Processing.** Once plants are brought to the processing line in the packing shed, they are sorted based on size and counted to bundle amounts. They are sprayed with water to make sure the roots stay moist before they are root pruned at 10". The bundles are then banded together, labeled, and placed in poly lined paper bags. The bags are labeled, recorded on a spreadsheet, and placed on a frame in the cooler.

- **Measure F.3.a** – Plants recorded on a spreadsheet for tracking and placed in the cooler.

**Activity F.4 – Shipping.** Customers may either schedule a time to pick up their plants or have them shipped. Depending on order volume, we use UPS Ground or Oak Harbor Freight.

- **Measure F.4.a** – Plants are picked up or shipped.

## Program G: Plant Materials Center – Maintenance

**Activity G.1 – Maintenance.** Provide maintenance for all equipment, machinery, and document routine maintenance (vehicles, tractors, field cultivator, irrigation pumps, rototiller, lifter, undercutter, transplanter, seed drill and banders). Building maintenance includes servicing the furnace, the cooler, water softener, septic system and other repairs as needed.

- **Measure G.1.a** – Complete maintenance and repairs are necessary. Communicate with Finance Committee on items that will need to be replaced.

## Program H: Plant Materials Center – Sales and Marketing

**Activity H.1 – Services.** Our objective is to produce quality plants and maintain genetic diversity of plants appropriate for the State of Washington. The nursery business is highly competitive and therefore, it is important to maintain exceptional customer service and product knowledge. The Plant Materials Center aims to experience a growth rate of 5% in sales annually.

- **Measure H.1.a** – Providing healthy native plants and cuttings.
- **Measure H.1.b** – Extra services provided for conservation districts include:
  - Priority entering of orders at the beginning of the fiscal year.
  - Custom bundles sizes. Provide additional labels for plant sales and bales of cedar. Free used seedling bags.
  - Preferred shipping dates including Saturday pickups.
  - Outreach to conservation district staff (includes tours, education materials, help with ordering and coordinating shipping with multiply districts to one location)
  - Coordinate with greenhouses to purchase stock not grown at the nursery for district plant sales.
  - Swapping plants between conservation districts after cancelation deadline to avoid restocking fees.

**Activity H.2 – Sales / Marketing.** The PMC differentiates itself from many competitors by producing plants specifically for use in conservation projects. This starts with propagation using source identified seeds. This enables the Plant Materials Center to market plants that are genetically suited for the regions in which they will be planted.

- **Measure H.2.a** – Seed sources are identified. Increased projects are calling for source identified seeds, this will help us increase marketing efforts to conservation districts, government agencies, municipalities, non-profit organizations, foresters, planting contractors, tribes, and nurseries.
- **Measure H.2.b** – Retain customers to generate repeat purchases and make referrals.
- **Measure H.2.c** – Reach out to conservation entities involved in natural resource restoration and management.
- **Measure H.2.d** – Educate staff on future emerging markets for conservation plant materials such as carbon offset, species migration and climate change.
- **Measure H.2.e** – Continue to update and revise information, photos, and videos on the PMC website.
- **Measure H.2.f** – Create a QR code to ensure our customers can access information and plant availability as quickly and efficiently as possible.

# I – Strategic Perspective: Strengths, Weaknesses, Challenges, Growth

## Organization-wide

- **Strengths**
  - Long-term staff provide continuity and expertise.
  - WACD is held in high regard by most members and partners.
  - Advocacy by WACD continues to be effective in garnering support for conservation programs and services.
  - Revenue has been increasing year-over-year for the past few years.
  - Services to members have increased without an increase in member dues.
  - Substantial financial assets assure continuation of WACD services and products during lean times.
- **Weaknesses**
  - With a small number of full-time staff, the loss of one person can significantly interrupt business operations for a time.
  - Infrastructure throughout the organization is old or limited.
- **Challenges**
  - Divisions in perspectives within our conservation community on equity and inclusion potentially affect the entire organization, from the Board of Directors to staff.
  - Production from the existing Plant Materials Center operation is limited to some degree by land, labor, and infrastructure.
- **Growth**
  - Opportunities abound for increasing sales of native plants if limiting factors can be addressed.
  - Diversifying revenue streams may help increase overall revenue and provide additional resiliency to the organization.

## Executive Office

The Executive side of WACD has presented a series of challenges to WACD's Board of Directors and to members for more than a decade. Until 2020, the average tenure for a WACD Executive Director was two years. That is not enough to generate and maintain effective relationships with members, partners, and legislators.

- **Strengths**
  - Proficient, experienced staff.
  - Reputation for transparency and service to members.
  - Staff have invested energy in improving the suite of services available to conservation districts.
  - Staff are productively engaged at state, regional, and national levels.

- **Weaknesses**
  - Only two staff.
  - One staffer is near retirement age.
- **Challenges**
  - Workload over the next few years will outstrip existing staff capacity.
  - Current staff do not have sufficient capacity to seek additional revenue sources.
- **Growth**
  - Increasing services needed by members is a growth opportunity that will help districts be successful and help the Association retain members.
  - Increasing staffing is an opportunity to increase/improve service to members but it requires additional revenue.

## Plant Materials Center

During the past century, seedling production has changed in accordance with technology and new knowledge. Many strategies have been developed to address challenges associated with pests, environmental conditions, and customer demands. Although the underlying concepts for growing seedlings have remained relatively constant, technological advances have enabled nurseries to improve stock quality significantly.

The Plant Materials Center was established to meet the plant needs of the conservation community and has been operating for over 31 years. The PMC continues to face new challenges and develop new strategies with regard to pest management regulations, personnel shortages, demand for conservation species, and climate change.

- **Strengths**
  - The nursery has established itself as the place to get conservation plants that are propagated from source identified seeds. That ensures that the plants sent to customers are genetically suited to the planting site.
  - Most of the staff have been employed at the PMC for 10 to 20 years or more. They are experienced in all aspects of running a bare root conservation nursery.
  - The operation is completely debt free.
  - The nursery has developed reserves sufficient to cover equipment and facilities replacement, and fund operations in the event of downturn in business or crop loss.
- **Weaknesses**
  - Most of the production is speculative and requires 2 to 3 years to plan and produce plants. Estimates of what to grow are based upon historical records. During the time between planning and harvesting the market could change considerably due to government policy and funding, weather events and the economy.
  - The nursery uses wild-collected seeds in propagation to better ensure that its plants are optimally genetically suited for conservation practices in the northwest. The problem is that wild seeds can germinate and grow in unexpected ways, resulting in final numbers significantly differing from planned quantities.

- The nursery business is labor intensive, using seasonal labor during busy periods like harvest. The northwest is experiencing an ag labor shortage. Every year so far, the nursery manages to hire enough seasonal labor, but it is a challenge and can result in a longer harvest and transplanting season.
  - Climate change is affecting the region in many ways, negatively impacting bare root nurseries, and resulting in crop loss. Furthermore, as temperatures increase, the time period for harvest, during winter dormancy, decreases.
  - WACD does not hold title to the facility. That is held by Skagit Conservation District in trust for all Conservation Districts. WACD has a 99-year lease for it for \$1.00 per year. That affects how much the PMC can borrow if needed.
- **Challenges**
    - New and emerging markets for conservation plants will likely occur due to the changing climate and its impacts.
    - Other challenges include labor shortages, government regulation, increased cost for labor and goods and the loss of contract seed collections that provide the majority of seed that the nursery uses.
- **Growth**
    - Growth at the PMC is managed by considering the operational needs to meet customer demands. Measurements in production, sales, and inventory are compared to inform decisions for sustainable PMC growth.
    - The leap from current capacity to the next level will require significant expenditures. The PMC's strategy to grow better is through improving workflow efficiencies.
    - As per the PMC business plan the PMC has been sustaining at least 5% growth annually (it has been closer to 10%) through ongoing increases in efficiency. There are indications that there could be opportunities in the future for more growth than that. The PMC can continue at a 5 to 10% annual growth rate without any major capital investments in capacity.
    - If it were decided to pursue a greater expansion the PMC could require additional cooler space, expansion of the packing shed, more tractors, another lifter, more field totes, an additional processing line and associated equipment, more seasonal labor, and additional full-time staff. That type of capital expansion will require extensive consideration and planning. Until that time the plan is to continue modest growth through gains in efficiency.

## G – Budget

The annual budget will be adopted when this annual plan is adopted, so budget information will be added after adoption.