



Washington Association of Conservation Districts

Annual Work Plan: FY 2026 (7/1/25 – 6/30/26)

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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 the six area association 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's Board of Directors 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
Amy McKay	President	Whitman (Southeast Area)
Jeff Schibel	Vice President	Lincoln County (Northeast Area)
Barbara Bailey	Secretary	Underwood (South Central Area)
Mark Craven	Treasurer	Snohomish (Northwest Area)
Doug Rushton	National Director	Thurston (Southwest Area)
Mike Mumford	Past President	Pend Oreille (Northeast Area)

Directors

Name	Position	Conservation District
Alan Chapman	Northwest Area Director	Whatcom
David Vliet	Northwest Area Director	Kitsap
Heather Smith	Southwest Area Director	Grays Harbor
Bruce McDonald	Southwest Area Director	Lewis
John McLean	North Central Area Director	Foster Creek
John Preston	North Central Area Director	Grant County
vacant	South Central Area Director	
Cindy Reed	South Central Area Director	North Yakima
vacant	Northeast Area Director	
John Floyd	Northeast Area Director	Pend Oreille
Mary Collins	Southeast Area Director	Palouse
vacant	Southeast Area Director	
Chevelle Yeckel	WADE President	Okanogan (North Central 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
	Director of Development and Engagement	Heather Wendt
Plant Materials Center	Director of Nursery Operations	Jim Brown
	Assistant Nursery Manager	John Knox
	Financial Accounting/Human Resources Admin	Lori McLaughlin
	Sales Manager	Jacquie Gauthier
	Farm Operations Supervisor	Oscar Arias Garcia

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 – 35% Staff Time

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.
- **Measure A.1.b** - Communication methods meet the needs of stakeholders and may include a weekly Legislative Newsletter, bill tracking app, and a dedicated website page.
- **Measure A.1.c** – 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 the growth of relationships with legislators. WACD will seek to sponsor or co-sponsor an annual legislator tour virtual or in-person with conservation districts in FY26.
- **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 a greater public understanding and awareness of the value of conservation districts.
- **Measure A.2.c** – Host at least one workshop annually (virtually or in-person) to coordinate with conservation districts on legislative priorities and funding opportunities.

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;
- Interagency job postings;
- Five Things and Funding Opportunities Newsletters;
- “First hour free” legal consultation;
- “First hour free” IT Help Desk,
- Earth Team Volunteer Program Coordination (NRCS Contract) and
- Email accounts for members when requested.

Program B: Other Member Services – 40% Staff Time

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.
- **Measure B.1.c** – Continue updating WACD’s tracking tool showing the status of active resolutions.

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.
- **Measure B.2.b** – Websites are updated regularly.
- **Measure B.2.c** – A bi-monthly Five Things Newsletter and a quarterly Funding Opportunities Newsletter are published.

- **Measure B.2.d** – WACD staff, Officers, and Area Directors attend CD board meetings and annual meetings as often as possible with a goal that every CD has an in-person visit at least once per fiscal year.

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 a clear direction, provide useful guidance for board business, and members see service as adding a valuable contribution to WACD’s work. Provide quarterly reports to the WACD Board at board meetings and annually to the membership at the WACD Annual Meeting.

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 annual WADE training for district managers/staff.

- **Measure B.4.a** – WACD staff recommend training components based on membership feedback and attend/participate in WADE panels as requested.
- **Measure B.4.b** – Seek funding for training opportunities that are outlined in WACD plans and/or through WACD Committee priorities.
- **Measure B.4.c** – Feedback from participants shows the value of support and trainings provided.

Activity B.5 – Workgroup and Committee Participation. Participating in workgroups and on committees allows WACD to stay apprised of issues and opportunities impacting CDs, and to seek additional opportunities to represent CDs.

- **Measure B.5.a** – Current workgroups and committees include NRCS’s State Technical Advisory Committee, Food Policy Forum, WA Envirothon Committee, ECY Ag and Water Quality Committee, Washington Conservation Society, Marine Resource Advisory Committee, Puget Sound Caucus, SCC’s Communication Partnership Group, Farm Waste Advisory Committee, CTD Leadership Team and the Washington State Nursery and Landscape Association.

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 – 15% Staff Time

Activity C.1 – Traditional conservation partnerships. Maintain and strengthen traditional conservation partnerships, including WSCC, NRCS, WADE, NACD, WCS, CTD 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 FY25 the focus will be on leadership development and training opportunities.
- **Measure C.1.b** – WACD representative(s) will participate in the NACD spring Fly-In to educate congressional leaders on Washington State Partnership priorities.
- **Measure C.1.c** – WACD representatives will attend WSCC meetings and provide written and verbal reports.
- **Measure C.1.d** – WACD representatives will participate in bi-weekly Partnership calls with members of WSCC, NRCS, WADE, and NACD.
- **Measure C.1.e** – WACD representatives will participate in the NACD Annual Meeting, NACD Summer Meeting, NACD Pacific Region Meeting, etc.
- **Measure C.1.f** – The WACD Executive Director will participate in the Association of Conservation Executive Directors.

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, including those listed in the table below:

Federal Agencies	State Agencies & Universities	Non-Profits	Tribes & Affiliated Commissions	Commodity Groups & Associations	Businesses
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Washington Department of Health	Washington Conservation Society	Washington State Tribes	Washington Dairy Federation	Springbrook Express
U.S. Forest Service	Washington Department of Ecology	American Farmland Trust	Tribes outside of WA State that have a vested interest in Washington	Washington Cattleman’s Association	KR Creative Strategies
Bureau of Land Management	Washington Department	Nature Conservancy	Northwest Indian Fisheries	WA Cattle Feeders Association	ENVU

	of Fish and Wildlife		Commission (NWIFC)		
Bureau of Reclamation	Washington Department of Agriculture	Ducks Unlimited	Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITCF)	WA Assoc. of Wheat Growers	McGregor Co.
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Washington Department of Natural Resources	Pheasants Forever	Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT)	PNW Direct Seed Association	Enduris EarthScout
U.S. Geological Survey	Pacific Marine Fisheries Commission	Quail Forever		Washington Wine Growers Association	Country Financial Edward Jones
National Park Service	University of Washington	Audubon		Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association	Weyerhaeuser
Bonneville Power Administration	Washington State University	Rocky Mt. Elk Foundation		Washington Farm Bureau	RDO Equipment Co.,
Department of Defense	Central Washington University	Washington Native Plant Society		WA Forest Protection Association	Aspect Consulting
USDA Farm Service Agency		Ag Forestry		Washington Family Farms Association	Rainier Seeds BFI Native Seeds
		Public Utility Districts		PNW Vegetable Association	Odessa Trading Company
		Tilth Alliance		WA State Water Resources Association	Wilbur-Ellis AGPRO
				21 Washington Agricultural Commodity Commissions	Arrowleaf Consulting JTI

				NW Horticultural Council	Plants of the Wild Tapteal Native Plants
					AgWest Farm Credit Banner Bank

D – Operations

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

Program D: Operations – 10% Staff Time

Activity D.1 – Board governance. Support Board operations and development, focusing 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** – The Executive Committee will meet at least once per month and will include Area Directors whose area is the focus at that month's board meeting.
- **Measure D.1.c** – The Board will review active resolutions, adopt a prioritized list, and authorize resources necessary to implement resolutions.

Activity D.2 – Planning. WACD follows sound business 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. Manage work and budget according to planned strategies and goals, and work with the Board to address challenges and opportunities as they emerge.
- **Measure D.2.b** – Work with the Board to develop a strategic plan that addresses long term strategies and goals of the organization.
- **Measure D.2.c** – Work with the Board on the development of a board member succession plan that includes a supervisor engagement strategy.

Activity D.3 – Financial Management. WACD follows its Financial Policy and Procedure Manual which provides the policies and procedures for financial transactions within the business which must be followed by all staff. The Manual provides guidelines the Washington Association of Conservation Districts will use to administer these policies, with the correct procedure to follow.

- **Measure D.3.a** – The Finance Committee will meet at least once per quarter.

- **Measure D.3.b** – Work with staff to review internal controls and ensure that Audit recommendations are fully implemented.
- **Measure D.3.c** – Review technologies for potential additions, deletions, and modifications to support reporting requirements and to ensure the organization's fiscal security.

Activity D.4 – Policies, agreements, and contracts. Ensure WACD complies with written commitments and upholds WACD Guiding Principles in WACD business operations.

Activity D.5 – 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.5.a** – Initiate a benefits survey in FY26.

Activity D.6 – Technology. Ensure the reliability, availability, and performance of IT systems and services to support business operations.

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 bare-root nursery, located in Skagit County, WA, that 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 – 30% Staff Time

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 are created.

Activity E.3 – Seed sow. Once the 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, and check fittings 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 planting stock. Recommended for plantings in October.

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

Program F: Plant Materials Center – Processing – 35% Staff Time

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 on 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 – 5% Staff Time

Activity G.1 – Maintenance. Provide maintenance for all equipment, and 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, the water softener, the septic system, and other repairs as needed.

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

Program H: Plant Materials Center – Sales and Marketing – 30% Staff Time

Activity H.1 – Services. Our objective is to produce quality plants and maintain the 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 bundle 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 multiple 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 the 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 trending upward over the past few years.
 - Services to members have increased without an increase in member dues.
 - Substantial financial assets assure the 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.
 - Cost of operations has increased.
- **Challenges**
 - Divisions in perspectives within our conservation community.
 - Production from the existing Plant Materials Center operation is limited to some degree by land, labor, and infrastructure.
 - Demonstrating the value of services to members.
 - Growing new revenue sources.
- **Growth**
 - Additional staff provide additional services to members.
 - 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

Continuity of leadership and management benefits the membership.

- **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**
 - We need to address resiliency and continuity in staffing.
 - Lack of standardized IT systems and resources contributes to a lack of resiliency.
 - Better succession planning is needed for both the Board and WACD staff.
- **Challenges**
 - With the increased scope of conservation districts in terms of funding, projects, and programs will come the additional need for WACD services.
 - Need to cultivate a pipeline of future Area Directors and Officers.
 - Securing additional revenue sources.
- **Growth**
 - Growth in WACD services helps districts to be successful.
 - Expanding partnerships provides value and new opportunities to our members.

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 short-term 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 on 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 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 costs for labor and goods, and the loss of contract seed collections that provide the majority of seed that the nursery uses.
- District needs for certain species and types of plants are changing.

- **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.
- PMC staff participated in the Plant Materials Taskforce. The Taskforce's recommended strategies were adopted by the WACD Board in November 2024. PMC staff will evaluate the strategies, and develop timelines and budgets for implementation.

G – Budget

The annual budget is based on the work described in this plan.