



Washington Association of Conservation Districts

To: Area Associations of Conservation Districts

From: Tom Salzer, Executive Director

Date: October 9, 2021

Subject: WACD Partner Report to Area Associations

This report summarizes a year of WACD's work into one document.

GENERAL

COVID

WACD has been impacted by COVID since spring 2020, just like our member conservation districts and our partners. COVID complicated our traditional service delivery model, requiring that we quickly implement significant changes with little planning. For the most part, WACD has adapted well as we continued to be responsive to member districts and to stay on mission.

Mission, Vision, Principles

In September 2020, WACD's Board of Directors adopted a strategic plan that contained updated mission and vision statements and the addition of ten guiding principles. WACD's "MVPs" have guided the work of WACD throughout 2021. Find the strategic and annual plans at: <https://hub.wadistricts.org/wacd/plans/>

Mission: *WACD 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.*

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 of 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.*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

WACD's Board of Directors has been fully populated throughout calendar year 2021 except for the recent, unexpected passing of Southeast Area Director Amy Amerein.

REPRESENTATION

WACD maintained a contract with a lobbyist who garnered support for additional conservation district funding. The additional \$2,000,000 added to the Washington State Conservation Commission's base budget equates to an additional \$44,444 per conservation district over two years.

WACD's lobbyist also worked closely with a number of legislators on issues of concern, including equity and elections.

OPERATIONS

Staffing

Staffing has remained relatively stable in calendar year 2021. At the WACD Plant Materials Center, Jacquie Gauthier rejoined staff to serve as sales manager and a new crew leader was hired. At the Olympia office, two full-time employees have been on staff since January 2020.

Accessibility

This topic refers to WACD's office move approximately a year ago to two offices at 1219 11th Avenue SE in Olympia, WA 98501. Parking for visiting members is much more convenient at the new Olympia office location and the offices are easily accessed by those with physical challenges.

Transparency

In response to concerns about lack of transparency in decision making and operations, WACD implemented several changes, including:

- Since June 2020, publication of a weekly newsletter. Find the archive of newsletters at: <https://hub.wadistricts.org/resources/newsletters/>
- Since July 2020, area directors have received regular updates on significant topics to help them in their service to conservation districts in their respective area.
- Beginning in 2021, providing an online information portal called the WACD Hub to serve information needs of members and partners. Find it at: <https://hub.wadistricts.org/>
- Beginning in 2021, the WACD Board of Directors meetings monthly, increasing the level of engagement by board members and presenting more opportunities for members to be heard.
- Recently, the WACD Board chose to change area director reports to focus primarily on a single area at each Board meeting. With 12 meetings a year, that presents two opportunities a year for an area to share more information and have more interaction with the Board.

FINANCE

Budget

Costs have risen for WACD so our budget has become more of a concern. While the WACD Plant Materials Center posted record sales, their operating costs also increased. We saw an

unprecedented amount of gain in investments that were reduced somewhat by recent drops in equity markets. We had planned for a change in staffing in WACD's Olympia office that did not materialize; retaining staff increases our capacity but also affects our budget.

In response to feedback about the level of WACD annual dues, the Board authorized a one-time credit of \$400 per district for 2021 dues. Assuming that all conservation districts paid dues, this represents an \$18,000 reduction in WACD's revenue from dues.

Accountability

In the realm of financial accountability, WACD has made several changes in operations, including:

- Signature authority for large transactions now requires two signatures, one of which must be the President, Treasurer, or Executive Director.
- The Executive Director now has access to investment account reports. Any changes in investments must be approved in writing by the President, Treasurer, or Executive Director.
- A Certified Public Accountant was retained to assist in operational questions about accounting. WACD kept the previous CPA who has been performing audits and reviews, thus separating the audit function from the day-to-day advisory function.

EQUITY

We saw continued interest in issues related to equity, expressed in the form of two resolutions adopted by members in 2020 and in ongoing work by legislators. The National Association of Conservation Districts adopted a policy statement on diversity, equity, and inclusivity in June 2020.

WACD formed the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with representation from all areas of Washington State. WACD retained professional facilitators to help the CDEI address items in Resolution 2020-05 and Resolution 2020-06. Find the CDEI recommendations at: <https://hub.wadistricts.org/wacd/committees/cdei/>

ELECTIONS

Similarly, WACD has continued to field inquiries from legislators about conservation district elections. The Washington State Conservation Commission adopted a motion at the end of calendar year 2020 calling for a joint committee. Subsequently, WSCC and WACD formed the Joint Committee on Elections with representation from all areas of Washington State. Recommendations were presented to, and approved by, the Washington State Conservation Commission in September 2021. Find those recommendations at: <https://hub.wadistricts.org/wacd/committees/jce/>