



5-Year Plan (2015 to 2020) Spokane Conservation District

For More Information Contact: Vicki Carter at 509 535 7274, or email: Vicki-carter@sccd.org



Organization of the Spokane Conservation District (SCD)

A political subdivision of the State of Washington – authorities, powers and structure contained in RCW 89.08.

The Spokane County Conservation District was formed in 1973 through the consolidation of the Southwest Spokane, North Spokane, Central Spokane and Latah-Rock Creek Districts. SCD is governed by a Board of Supervisors who serve voluntarily to establish the overall direction and priorities for District programs. Supervisors are local residents, serving in three elected positions and two positions which are appointed by the Washington State Conservation Commission. All five positions serve three year terms.

Function of the Spokane Conservation District

To make available technical, financial and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land manager with conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources.

Who We Serve & Why

The SCD works in partnership with individuals, landowners, businesses and government to protect soil and water resources, expand options for agriculture production, promote sustainable forestry practices, and protect and enhance wildlife habitat throughout the urban and rural areas of the Spokane region.

Purpose of This Plan

The purpose of this long-range plan is to guide the work of the SCD over the next five years. This is intended to be a dynamic plan, which will continue to evolve as necessary to ensure the organization remains effective and responds to changing needs. Development of the plan began with a series of work-sessions among staff and the Board of Supervisors in 2010 and has been updated annually. The group assessed the resource problems, took inventory of the available staff assets and funding, and established actions and priorities for the years ahead. Annual planning sessions are held to solicit input from the public. Staff compile the comments received, incorporating them as appropriate into the plan. The next major update will take place in 2020 with a resource inventory and input from stakeholders.

The detailed goals and strategies expressed in the long-range plan are based on the following principles of the District.

Mission of the Spokane Conservation District

The mission of the District is to promote the sustainable use of natural resources in Spokane County. To that end, the following objectives guide that process:

- Coordinate the resources required to develop and implement effective solutions
- Through education, provide the skills to make informed choices
- Influence policy to sustain natural resources
- Assist land users in the planning and implementation of Best Management Practices (BMP's)
- Provide and support an environment that encourages teamwork, creativity, resourcefulness and personal growth of our staff
- Continually evaluate workload and match to available resources

Vision of the Spokane Conservation District

To help protect, conserve and enhance natural resources for the betterment of our community and future generations.

Values of the Spokane Conservation District

The concept behind conservation districts is that local people know best how to identify and address conservation problems in their area. The emphasis for the SCD is on educating land owners, land users and resource managers to use their land and resources sustainably and to encourage voluntary cooperation to achieve conservation of our natural resources.

Natural Resource Priorities, Measures of Success and Goals

The Spokane Conservation District Board of Supervisors adopted a governance structure that defines our goals as results. Through policy work by the Board (which is referred to as governance culture) and operational work by the staff (which is referred to as operational expectations), the constituents we serve are benefactors of our work. The results are the foundation for each department as they prioritize workloads and funding.

As a *result* of our efforts, the citizens of Spokane County will:

Priority Goal - *Result*

- **1. Practice sustainable stewardship and conservation, protecting natural resources.**

Measure of Success

Citizens and policy makers of Spokane County will understand the relationship between human activity and environmental degradation. Consequently, they voluntarily engage in best management practices to conserve and protect what they have.

Priority Goal - *Result*

- **2. Utilize the District as their local source of natural resource management assistance**

Measure of Success

Citizens contact and use the Spokane County Conservation District as the agency for information and support on local natural resource issues.

Priority Goal - *Result*

- **3. Understand the purposes and benefits of conservation practices and policies resulting in informed decisions regarding natural resources.**

Measure of Success

Citizens are educated about the need for protecting and conserving our natural resources and are able to make informed choices about environmental policies and stewardship.

Priority Goal - *Result*

- **4. Implement conservation plans and systems resulting in sustainable natural resources**

Measure of Success

Citizens will adopt, promote and implement new and existing natural resources management practices.

Trends Impacting Natural Resources in the Spokane Conservation District

- ***Urbanization & Fuel Loading***

The general trend of population movement from the urban areas to the urban/rural interface is continuing at an accelerated rate. One of the more significant problems created by this trend is the number of homes being constructed in areas with little or no defensible space against wildfire. A perfect example of the danger presented by that trend is the Valley View Fire that burned approximately 1100 acres of land covered with native trees and shrubs. Unfortunately, 11 of the 41 homes within the burn area were destroyed. The northern boundary of the burn area was just over one mile from a major business area and transportation corridor. While no lives were lost in that fire, the potential for catastrophic fire with loss of property and lives is increasing as more people move into the urban/rural interface.

Spokane County is estimated to have nearly a half million acres in forested land primed for wildfire. The SCD continues to prioritize fuel reduction projects and firewise programs to address this resource concern.

- ***Population Growth & Land Use Change***

A general increase in population continues to place more pressure on the natural resources and the ability of local jurisdictions to provide adequate services while protecting environmentally sensitive areas. Increased demand for water and energy will necessitate new policies, water conservation strategies and education, along with the development of technology and infrastructure to support alternative energy sources. Wind, solar, and biomass generated power along with alternative liquid fuels are promising emerging technologies.

There is a growing trend of small acreage parcels (1-80 acres) in Spokane County. Farm ground is being converted and developed. That in alone causes concern, but there is also pressure to provide information, education, and technical services/assistance to small acreage landowners.

- ***Economics***

It is anticipated that the long-term trend for the local economy is steady. There have been some impacts to natural resource conservation funding in the State of Washington since 2009, but those impacts have been carefully monitored and our budgeted expenditures tightened wherever possible. We have not had to reduce our staffing or make any adjustments that would have a seriously negative impact on District programs or our operational efficiency. FY13-15 brought some new grant funding opportunities that could have a very positive impact on our ability to put conservation on the ground, especially serving water quality and quantity in the Hangman Watershed.

Our direct seed loan program continues to serve as an example of a successful revolving fund program. Funds were awarded from WA DOE to provide on-site septic system repair and replacements under the same type of program. We also received funds to loan to landowners under a cost-share program to help them install best management practices for livestock and land.

Priority Actions

The following is a summary of the priority actions to be carried out as part of the SCD long-range plan:

- Increase public participation in natural resource conservation efforts
- Reduce soil erosion through increased applications of conservation tillage and direct seeding technology
- Expand low interest loan program regionally, addressing impacts to water quality in shared watersheds
- Implement loan program for on-site septic repairs and replacement in targeted watersheds
- Explore consumer lending ideas for water quality improvement projects and programs
- Provide cost-share program to landowners for BMP implementation
- Reduce loss of property and lives to wildfire through implementation of the County Wildfire Protection Plan, Fire Wise Assessments, and Fuel Loading Reduction projects
- Protect water quality and quantity through comprehensive watershed management planning and implementation including water conservation efforts, establishment of riparian buffers, stream bank stabilization and water resources education
- Expand small acreages services and programs to include rental or custom operations
- Increase urban forestry canopy in City of Spokane and track growth
- Expand outreach efforts to increase recognition of the District and its' programs
- Develop community partnership and establish a conservation model farm
- Seek legislative approval for county legislative authorities to set special assessment rates according to need

District Operations

▪ **Infrastructure**

SCD will continually evaluate workloads to match available resources and make appropriate adjustments in staffing as needed. Our 2014-16 staffing levels will be reviewed and determination of additional staff will be made based on programming and funding.

SCD will continue to provide and support an environment that encourages teamwork, creativity, resourcefulness and personal growth of our staff. This will include appropriate training and support along with encouragement of staff to participate on boards, councils, committees and outside organizations that will enhance their professional and personal skills.

The physical infrastructure of the District will be continually monitored and upgraded as necessary to insure that it provides a safe and productive atmosphere for the staff to carry on the day to day operations of the District. It is a policy and value of SCD to incorporate sustainable practices into the day to day operations of the District facility. This will include going paperless to the extent that we can which will include discontinuing the use of paper and plastic food and beverage service products.

We will continue the process of evaluating the functionality of the current facility to determine if a future site will be necessary to carry on the mission of the District. The current facility is situated on property owned by Spokane County. A new lease on the property was negotiated in 2012 and was extended to 2042.

Information – Education

▪ **Communications**

The communication functions of SCD are vital to maintaining our partnerships with the local jurisdictions and citizens of Spokane County. The methods of communication are varied and will continue to evolve as new opportunities and technologies present themselves. For dissemination of generic information about District programs and projects, we plan to continue to utilize a quarterly newsletter but more emphasis will be placed on specific branding of the District including logos and standardization of outreach materials. We will also expand our use of websites, Facebook, targeted blogs and other electronic publications.

Maintaining good working relationships with the local media is an important element of our communication strategy. We will continue to utilize those media sources to inform and educate the citizens of Spokane County about the activities of the District and how those activities will affect them.

▪ **Education**

An important element within our communications strategy is providing environmental education to K-12 students and adults. SCD partners with the Franklin Conservation District to bring “Wheat Week”, “Water on Wheels” and “Trout in the Classroom” to Spokane County schools. Our long-range plan includes the addition of a permanent Environmental Education Coordinator to continue providing natural resource education to Spokane County schools as well as adult education through workshops, conferences and publications. SCD will continue to coordinate with the Northwest Natural Resources Institute and participate in “Farm Fair”, “Water Festival”, “Model Forest” and an annual teacher’s workshop. The District forestry department will continue to work with schools on special event plantings such as “Earth Day” and “Arbor Day” celebrations. Many other youth and adult projects and programs will continue to be coordinated in conjunction with the WSU Cooperative Extension and the City of Spokane.

▪ **Policy & Government Relations**

It is a priority for the Spokane Conservation District to establish and maintain effective governmental relations to promote conservation related policies. In cooperation with the Washington State Conservation Commission, the Washington Association of Conservation Districts, and other conservation districts, we will continue to closely monitor legislation that would affect how natural resources are utilized and the conservation measures being applied along with how such legislation would affect the industries reliant on those natural resources. Establishing and maintaining good working relationships with the legislators in the 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th, and 9th legislative districts and legislative leadership is vital if we are to maintain our capacity to effectively influence policy that will sustain natural resources.

When necessary, SCD staff may write, promote and advocate for legislation that address specific issues affecting the sustainability of our natural resources. We engage in frequent contact with legislators by phone, email and in person as well as providing testimony as needed on legislation being debated during legislative sessions. One on one communication with elected officials, community leaders and our agency and corporate partners will continue to provide that important personal link as we prioritize and address current and future resource conservation needs.

The Spokane County Board of Commissioners is a key link to the continued financial well being of the District. The Special Assessment that provides discretionary funding for the District was

first authorized by that Board in 1990 and must be re-authorized every ten years. The next reauthorization will occur in 2014, taking effect in 2015.

Production Agriculture

▪ ***State Revolving Fund***

The production agriculture department will continue to offer the State Revolving Fund Low Interest Loan Program to agricultural producers for the purchase of conservation tillage equipment with special emphasis placed on moving to true no-till operations and ultra-low disturbance drills. Currently, that program has been expanded to include 18 districts in 14 counties in Eastern Washington. We have recently expanded the program into four Northern Idaho Districts and will begin treating watersheds with Direct Seed that impact multiple counties in the Eastern Washington. We will also explore the possibility of taking that program into NE Oregon with a potential of serving at least two districts through a partnership with the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association. We have a goal of increasing the total number of acres being direct seeded from the current 60% to 90% by 2020.

▪ ***Small Farm Planning***

Through a cooperative effort with WSU Extension, an annual Small Farms Conference will occur in the Fall of each year. This annual event will feature seminars on a variety of topics important to people wanting to start farming or need additional information to make their operation more efficient and profitable. This event will be the cornerstone of our Small Acreage Farms Program within the District. It is expected that our certified planners will write farm plans and provide technical assistance. The SCD soils lab has become an integral part of this program area, offering basic soil testing to landowners.

Water Resources

Water resource issues in Spokane County are escalating. SCD Water Resources will focus on facilitating and participating in relevant water quality and quantity projects. We will coordinate with local and regional stakeholders and continue to concentrate on the major watersheds in Spokane County; Spokane River, Hangman Creek, and the Little Spokane River. All three watersheds are actively involved in watershed planning and non-point source pollution control measures. Over the next five years, it is anticipated that each watershed will employ strategies to reduce various pollutants, increase water conservation efforts, and continue monitoring (flow, nutrients). The Water Resources Program will also continue leading a bi-state effort in the Hangman Creek Watershed to increase direct seed tillage operations and address livestock issues.

▪ ***Shorelines***

Lake shoreline and aquatic habitat in Spokane County is being degraded and impacted at an alarming rate. The Water Resources Program will continue to develop and coordinate habitat projects to address this issue. We harvest and purchase trees and shrubs annually for restoration and enhancement of shorelines. An increase of shoreline naturalization projects are expected to occur on local lakes. On Eloika Lake, the Water Resources Program will coordinate a 5-year project to manage aquatic weeds.

▪ ***Water Quality and Quantity***

Spokane County surface and ground water resources are under pressure from population growth and varying land uses. The Water Resources Program will continue to participate and implement watershed planning recommendations, promote water conservation and employ Best Management Practices to protect and improve water quality. We will assist in conducting

a 5-year direct seed mentoring and livestock improvement program in the Hangman Creek Watershed.

- ***Gauging and Monitoring***

The Water Resources Program will continue to maintain and operate stream flow gauging stations in the Little Spokane River and Hangman Creek watersheds. These stations provide excellent data to develop flow trends and can be utilized for pollutant monitoring in the future. In addition, the SCD will be monitoring long-term ground water wells in the Hangman Creek Basin. This information will be important to determine any current and future land use/development and aquifer levels.

- ***Barrier Evaluations***

The Water Resources Program is spearheading an effort to develop a regional fish barrier inventory in north eastern Washington State. This effort is being coordinated with many different tribal and governmental agencies across the region. If funded, the project will be vital for identifying barriers, prioritizing basins and funding future projects.

- ***Technical Assistance***

Additionally, the Water Resources Program will continue to be the liaison of the private landowner through providing technical assistance and educational materials (eg. Xeriscaping, conservation). We will promote the use of Best Management Practices in order to conserve and protect the natural resources in the County.

- ***Consumer Loans***

SCD will offer low-interest loans to landowners for the purpose of replacing or repairing failing septic systems within tributaries to major water bodies. Additionally, low-interest loans will be made available to landowners through our Livestock and Land program to implement water quality BMP's.

Soil Science

Although the soils in Spokane County have not changed, there have been significant changes in technology, land use, and a need for soils information.

- ***Soil Survey***

In 1998, the SCD partnered with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services to update the Spokane County soil survey. Prior to this project, the last update to the soil survey for Spokane County occurred in 1968. At that time the field data was collected in the late 1950's and early 1960 when the focus of the soil survey was centered on interpretations for agricultural land use.

Since the last soil survey update many technological advances have taken place. This new technology was incorporated into the methods and procedures in the update with an emphasis not only on agriculture but urban and forestry, along with other uses. Currently, the only valid and up-to-date soils information can be found on Web Soil Survey Site <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/> The SCD soil scientist will have the responsibility of marketing the new soil survey, providing site specific soils interpretations, and providing soil technical assistance to staff certified planners writing farm plans. SCD will also conduct workshops on how to use the soil survey.

- **Soils Lab**

SCD soil department launched a soils testing laboratory within the District facility. The lab provides basic soils tests for small acreage farmers and urban landowners and will be an important element of a small acreage farm program. The lab will be staffed by the soil scientist and volunteers from the WSU Extension Master Gardeners Program and students from the Spokane Community College Natural Resources Program. Presentations will be conducted on “How to take Soil Samples”, “Interpreting Soil Sample Results”, and “Nutrient Management.”

Forestry

- **Wildfire Risk Assessments**

Implementation of the County Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is a top priority of the District Forestry Department. In cooperation with the fire districts and local jurisdictions, District foresters will continue to provide FireWise risk assessments and organize and conduct hazard fuels reduction operations throughout the County. Spokane County has been classified as the County most at risk for wild fire in Washington State. With more than 350,000 acres of non-industrial private forest lands in the County, the potential for loss of life and property is high. With the urban/rural interface constantly encroaching on historically rural areas, hazard fuels reduction programs are imperative. The District will continue to seek new partnerships and funding opportunities to defray the expenses of hazard fuels reduction programs.

- **Energy Conservation**

SCD, in partnership with the Avista Corporation, has implemented an energy saving tree planting program. Avista is paying for trees that the District is planting on the southwest side of homes in the Spokane area. The purpose of the project is to provide shade during the hot summer months to reduce temperatures and energy consumption. The goal is to plant 100 trees per year. Over the next five years, the program will be extended to other communities in the County. This project is slated to be on-going for several years.

- **Tree City USA**

District foresters will continue to assist the communities in the County with their efforts to qualify for Tree City USA status. As a part of that process, they are organizing Arbor Day and Earth Day plantings at schools and in towns throughout the County. The goal over the next five years is to assist every community that desires a Tree City USA designation to achieve that goal. Once a community has reached Tree City USA status the Conservation District will continue to help the community expand its tree program through planting projects, assistance with tree inventories, and management plans.

- **Education**

In addition to providing landowner and K-12 educational opportunities the Forestry Department serves as the Regional Education Coordinator (REC) for the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture. As the REC the District coordinates training opportunities for regional arborists that allow them to increase their knowledge of proper tree care practices.

- **Tree Sales**

SCD's Tree Sale Program first began in 1970. The primary purpose was to provide low cost trees and shrubs for re-forestation and wildlife habitat plantings. The scope of the sale has changed over the years with the primary emphasis now being placed on providing native and drought tolerant plants for urban and rural landscaping. We will continue to provide plant materials for reforestation and conservation applications with the seed being sourced locally

through our seed collection program. In addition to our Spring tree sale, we have implemented a Fall sale for reforestation species in large quantities.