

# KEY MESSAGES FOR CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

**UPDATED: JUNE 2015**

# INTRODUCTION

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## What are key messages?

The best key messages are clear, concise statements that communicate the unique value conservation districts bring to their target audiences. They are not slogans, empty phrases, or vision/mission statements.

In this document, key messages are presented as answers to three questions:

1. [What are conservation districts?](#)
2. [What do conservation districts do?](#)
3. [Why are conservation districts important?](#)

Each key message is numbered and presented in **bold**, followed by a series of bulleted statements, called “proof points.” **Proof points** are statements that verify or demonstrate a key message. Districts are welcome to draft their own, unique “proof points” to use with key messages.

## What is the purpose of key messages?

Key messages will unify the way conservation districts are presented by the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and the districts themselves. They will correct misperceptions about conservation districts, and help build a positive image and reputation among target audiences.

## How / when do I use them?

We recommend using these key messages when describing or introducing conservation districts . Some suggested uses for key messages include:

- **Marketing materials**, including websites, brochures, fact sheets, presentations, and business cards. An assessment of conservation district websites in 2014 revealed that the SCC and districts are using different language to describe conservation districts. There’s an opportunity to unify and amplify our voices if we integrate shared key messaging into marketing materials.
- **Grant funding applications.** Funders require that applicants provide an introduction to who they are and what they do.
- **Personal communication / “elevator speech.”** Use key messages as building blocks for your “elevator speech.” Use 2-3 key messages as the first couple lines, and then add a statement that’s unique about your district and/or relevant to the individual(s) you’re talking to. (e.g. *Random Conservation District is a trusted local partner helping people care for natural resources. We offer a range of free, voluntary services tailored to the needs of our community. For forest landowners, we offer on-site help with wildfire prevention, disease management, and habitat enhancement.*)

## **Tone and Style**

Conservation districts will use key messages when communicating with various audiences through multiple channels. Audiences include clients, partners, funders, legislators and others. Channels include websites, printed materials, presentations, email, in-person conversations and the like. Depending on the audience and/or channel, the general style adopted by a district may be formal or informal. Written communication tends to be formal, while the spoken word is typically more relaxed.

The tone (written and spoken) should be friendly and helpful. A positive, upbeat approach will be more favorably received. Unambiguous language will ensure clear understanding. Every effort should be made to avoid jargon, acronyms and “internal speak.”

## **Relevance**

Not all of the key messages presented here will be appropriate for every district. Districts vary greatly in their communities served, number of staff, local attitudes and needs, and other characteristics. Districts should select and use those messages that are suitable for their own circumstances. You are welcome to tailor a message to your unique situation.

## OTHER KEY MESSAGE FAQs...

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### **Are we required to use key messages?**

No. Key messages are an optional tool available for you to use.

### **Do we have to use key messages word-for-word?**

No. Without altering the meaning of the key message, feel free to revise key messages to better match the personality of your district. However, try to avoid changes that lead to long, complicated, or confusing messages.

### **Do we have to use every key message, or can we pick and choose?**

Pick-and-choose. Select one or a few key messages that are appropriate for your target audience and objective.

### **My district has developed some key messages that are working well — can I add them to the marketing toolkit so they can be shared with others?**

Yes, absolutely! Please forward all key message recommendations to Laura Johnson, Communications Coordinator at the Washington State Conservation Commission.

### **Who do I contact with questions?**

Contact Laura Johnson, Communications Coordinator at the Washington State Conservation Commission.

# KEY MESSAGE 1: *What are conservation districts?*

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## *Key Message 1-A*

**Conservation districts are trusted partners helping people care for Washington's natural resources.**

### *Proof Points:*

- Conservation districts are non-regulatory agencies that do not enforce compliance or impose penalties, but instead offer recommendations and advice.
- Conservation districts are voluntary, providing services at the request of and in collaboration with those that receive the benefits: Washington landowners.
- For more than 75 years, conservation districts have worked side-by-side with landowners to help them use their lands responsibly and knowledgeably.

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## *Key Message 1-B*

**Conservation districts are local people who have a personal investment and interest in improving the quality of life in their communities.**

### *Proof Points:*

- Because they live where they work, conservation district staff have deep, first-hand knowledge of the issues and challenges faced by landowners.
- Every one of Washington's 39 counties is represented by at least one district.
- Each conservation district is run by a voluntary board of supervisors: five individuals who live and work in the local community, three of whom are elected by their peers.

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## *Key Message 1-C*

**Conservation districts are non-regulatory, boots-on-the-ground providers of natural resources expertise, knowledge, education, and dedication.**

*Proof Points:*

- + The people who work for conservation districts do so because of their passion for maintaining Washington's natural resources.
  - + District staff offer landowners undergraduate and graduate degree knowledge in relevant fields such as soil resource management, conservation biology, forest and ecological engineering and others.
  - + Conservation district staff spend most of their time in the field, bringing hands-on expertise and problem-solving skills to landowners.
  - + Districts serve as a clearinghouse of information collected through their broad network of agencies, organizations, colleagues, vendors, partners, etc.
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## KEY MESSAGE 2: *What do conservation districts do?*

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### *Key Message 2-A*

**Conservation districts work collaboratively to help people responsibly and efficiently manage their land and associated natural resources.**

#### *Proof Points:*

- + Landowners request assistance from conservation districts; services are not required or forced upon them.
- + District staff assess landowner needs on an individual basis, make recommendations and, as feasible, implement and fund appropriate solutions.
- + Districts provide confidential counsel to landowners without any risk of repercussions.
- + Many of the best management practices recommended by conservation district staff maintain natural resources while decreasing landowner operating costs.

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### *Key Message 2-B*

**Conservation districts offer a range of voluntary services and programs tailored to the needs of local communities.**

#### *Proof Points:*

- + Services are provided by district staff free of charge; financial assistance and cost sharing help landowners reduce their financial outlay for many projects.
- + Farmers and ranchers benefit from farm plans, nutrient management and other programs that support agricultural endeavors.
- + Landowners with forested acreage are assisted by wildfire prevention, disease management and habitat enhancement programs.
- + Programs that facilitate effective stormwater management (such as storm drain marking and yard care) are available for suburban communities.

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*Key Message 2-C*

**Conservation districts provide essential services  
for natural disaster preparedness, response and recovery.**

*Proof Points:*

- + Conservation districts help landowners mitigate the effects of natural disasters with preparedness programs for wildfires, floods and soil erosion.
- + Following the Oso landslide, the local conservation district helped impacted farmers by serving as a donation site for livestock supplies.
- + Following the Carlton Complex Fire , the local conservation district set up assistance processes to help landowners restore grazing lands, repair fences and irrigation systems, replant trees, and control erosion.

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*Key Message 2-D*

**Conservation districts use education and public outreach  
to foster natural resources stewardship.**

*Proof Points:*

- + Districts offer free workshops, classes and demonstrations to teach landowners best management practices.
- + Newsletters with locally-focused articles and conservation tips are regularly published and distributed free of cost.
- + Conservation districts participate in local festivals, fairs, farmers markets and other public events, offering educational handouts and information about landowner services.
- + Schools have ready, free access to programs, lessons, speakers and other tools provided by districts to teach children about being responsible stewards of the land.
- + Forty-one of Washington's 45 conservation districts have websites; most provide educational content.

## KEY MESSAGE 3: *Why are conservation districts important?*

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### *Key Message 3-A*

**Conservation districts empower people to care for natural resources through their own land management decisions.**

#### *Proof Points:*

- + Those who live and work on the land are uniquely qualified to develop effective solutions.
  - + Personal ownership of responsible, knowledgeable land management practices facilitates sustainability.
  - + Helping people to help themselves is a proven behavior change model.
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### *Key Message 3-B*

**Conservation districts foster relationships with local, state, federal, and tribal decision-makers, leading to more effective, feasible natural resource policies.**

#### *Proof Points:*

- + Districts leverage the Washington State Conservation Commission's relationships with legislators to ensure the voices of landowners are heard.
  - + Legislative tours are regularly hosted by conservation districts, enabling lawmakers to see and hear firsthand how policies are affecting landowners.
  - + Districts provide on-the-ground feedback on proposed and existing policies to the SCC, which coordinates with decision-makers to find improved solutions.
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### *Key Message 3-C*

**Conservation districts proactively build relationships with other agencies, enhancing the value of services and programs provided by all.**

*Proof Points:*

- + Districts deliver cost effective solutions by finding state and federal match dollars for local funds.
  - + Agencies are able to efficiently collaborate through an extensive network.
  - + Land users and others leverage the “one stop shopping” trait of conservation districts to quickly get answers and resolve issues.
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*Key Message 3-D*

**Conservation districts affect both Washington’s  
statewide economy and the lives of individual residents.**

*Proof Points:*

- + Reduced water pollution supports economic growth in the fishing and shellfish industries.
- + Enhanced soil quality and reduced soil erosion support the state’s \$35 billion food and agriculture industry, which employs 160,000 and contributes 11 percent to the state’s economy.
- + Improved water quality means utilities spend less on treating water, leading to lower water bills for customers.
- + Reduced water pollution helps maintain the quality of life for Washingtonians who value outdoor beauty and recreation.