



5-Year Plan (2011 to 2016)

Whidbey Island Conservation District

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Organization of the Whidbey Island Conservation District

A political subdivision of the State of Washington – authorities, powers and structure contained in RCW 89.08. The Whidbey Island Conservation District (WICD) was organized as a subdivision of state government in June 1967. Only the Whidbey Island portion of Island County was included due to the geographic remoteness of Whidbey from the rest of the county, Camano, Ben Ure, Strawberry, and Smith Islands. Camano Island had previously and successfully petitioned to become part of Snohomish Conservation District in 1961. Whidbey Island encompasses a land area of 172 square miles off the coast of Northwest Washington State at the junction of Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Georgia Strait. Whidbey Island is the largest island in Puget Sound.

Function of the Whidbey Island 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 Do We Serve & Why

- Landowners, land operators, general public, government entities, and local interest groups to promote a conservation ethic and resolve natural resource issues within the district.

Mission of the Whidbey Island Conservation District

- The Whidbey Island Conservation District serves the people of Whidbey Island in conserving and protecting natural resources through technical and financial assistance as well as educational outreach to provide a healthy environment for present and future generations.

Vision of the Whidbey Island Conservation District

- Promoting an environment in balance that protects Whidbey Island's unique natural resources and surrounding waters.

Values of the Whidbey Island Conservation District

- Educate and provide technical assistance to Island residents in managing their lands while protecting natural resources.
- Impact the community, in a positive way, through conservation efforts.
- Act as a liaison between Island residents and other government agencies.
- Lead the community as the primary source of information for conservation of natural resources.
- Assist Island residents on a non regulatory basis.

Natural Resource Priorities and Goals

Due to the long, narrow nature of Whidbey Island, virtually every land management practice, urban and rural, affects the surrounding waters of Puget Sound. The Puget Sound Partnership was formed to restore and protect Puget Sound through a community effort of citizens, tribes, scientists and governments. WICD and our work on the ground work providing technical education and outreach to Whidbey Island residents and landowners will continue to positively impact Puget Sound.

Human population and land use directly affect natural resource conditions on Whidbey Island. Island County is the second smallest county in Washington State yet it has one of the fastest growing population in the state. Residential development encompasses much of the shoreline and is expanding into rural and forested areas. Agriculture has been an important historical land use on Whidbey Island. While there are fewer large farms, over 500 acres in size, there are a high percentage of farms 10-50 acres in size and an even a larger percentage of small farms from 1-10 acres in size. Forested land owners require ongoing conservation plans, education and outreach, and technical assistance. Many smaller landowners on Whidbey Island are new to land resource management.

The increase in population and related development on Whidbey Island and Puget Sound as a whole is driving the need for changes in management of stormwater. Low Impact Development education and outreach as well as technical assistance in the use of LID practices to residents and technicians are a priority of WICD. In 1982, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US-EPA) designated Island County with "Sole Source Aquifer" status. This special status is granted when more than 50% of the county population relies on an aquifer system as their principal source for drinking water, and when contamination of the source would create a significant hazard to public health. Increased onsite stormwater infiltration will enhance aquifer recharge while protecting the waters of Puget Sound.

Nitrates are a recognized contaminant of concern in Island County. A 1997 study conducted by the Island County Health Department (ICHD) identified nitrate sources and their extent. This study found agricultural practices to be the largest contributors of elevated nitrate concentrations. Best Management Practices (BMPs) for agricultural nutrients are necessary to protect the sole source aquifers as well as surface water in Island County from contamination, particularly in areas where surface water percolates too rapidly for adequate filtering.

Natural Resource Priorities and Goals to achieve by 2015

1) Protection of natural resources using best management practices while enhancing the economic viability of farming and forestry.

Improve and protect water quality and critical areas

Farms

- Provide technical assistance and/or farm plans to at least 20 commercial and noncommercial farm owners and managers annually using NRCS Best Management Practices to protect and enhance water quality while maintaining productive farms. CARA mapping for critical aquifer recharge zones is considered when prioritizing requests for technical assistance.

- Assist at least 30 livestock owners annually with education as well as one on one technical advice on issues such as groundwater and surface water protection, and soil conservation issues.
- Assist Island County in providing education and outreach to comply with the Growth Management Critical Areas Ordinance.
- Assist Island County in providing custom farm management plans and technical assistance for farmers as required by the GMA Critical Areas Ordinance for existing and ongoing agriculture when the ordinance is implemented.
- Provide public outreach and education to youth and the general public on the value of farms and farming for resource protection. Conduct an annual farm tour with up to 20 farms open to the public on one weekend every fall. Coordinate, publicize, and provide public education for event. Best Management Practices implemented on these farms will be highlighted.
- Work in collaboration with local and regional partners to increase the economic viability of agriculture on Whidbey Island as a tool to preserve open space.
- Promote and support Farmland Preservation efforts.
- Partner with local entities to advance the use of reclaimed waste and stormwater for irrigation and other beneficial uses.

Forestry

- Provide technical assistance to 10 - 15 forest owners annually including at least 10 with a full forest management conservation plan.
- Collaborate with DNR, Regional Conservation Districts, Washington State University and Island County to increase technical assistance to Whidbey forest landowners to encourage maintaining healthy and productive forest lands.
- Educate forest landowners about forest management and its affect on near shore habitat and critical areas.
- WICD is committed to having on staff a part time forest conservation planner to assist landowners.

Soil erosion prevention

- Provide assistance to landowners to identify soil types.
- Work with NRCS to educate landowners on how to access and use the updated electronic NRCS Web Soil Survey.
- Provide education and outreach for proper soil erosion protection, sediment control and management of agricultural soils.

2) Reduce the human impacts on Whidbey Island's natural resources as well as the waters of Puget Sound that surround the Island.

Stormwater management and low impact development

- Assist towns, cities and the county with public education, promotion, coordination and advancement of low impact development programs.
- Assist technicians such as dirt movers, landscapers, engineers, maintenance providers and contractors with education and resources for Low Impact Development. Hold at least three workshops annually.
- Assist ten to twenty individual landowners annually with implementation of stormwater management techniques to address existing stormwater concerns.
- Assist five to ten landowners and developers annually with implementation of LID techniques for new development.

Water conservation

- Assist home owners with resources for water conservation practices such as collection and reuse of onsite water with cisterns and rain barrels.

- Present home water conservation information to home owners at a minimum of one workshop per year.
- Promote annual district native plant sale to encourage water conservation in landscapes.

Improve and protect water quality

- Educate homeowners on how their individual actions on their home sites affect ground water and surface water.
- Educate and provide technical assistance to homeowners and developers for onsite water infiltration techniques.
- Collaborate with Island County Health and cities on water quality outreach and education.
- Use WICD's Living Responsibly in Your Community booklet as content for workshops.
- Work with Island County on identification and action plans to address water quality concerns in residential areas due to septic, stormwater and other issues.
- Collaborate on at least one water quality improvement grant opportunity annually with partners.
- Use Island County CARA mapping for identification of priority work areas.
- Provide water quality and water quantity outreach and education to youth. Encourage students to use District as a resource for school projects on conservation topics.

Habitat conservation and protection

- Provide homeowners with land stewardship materials and education for habit conservation. Align with Island County Rural Stewardship plan.
- Educate and provide homeowners with information about the importance of near shore habitat and how human actions affect the near shore.
- Work in collaboration with partners on at least one project per year to improve and restore fish habitat.
- Include habitat protection in low impact development, farm and forest planning and education.
- Provide technical outreach and education to land and homeowners on bluff stabilization and erosion control.

3) Protect groundwater resources and aquifer recharge areas.

- Through the above listed programs to encourage proper stormwater management, water conservation practices and improvement and protection of water quality; groundwater resources and aquifer recharge areas will likewise be improved.

Critical Geographic Areas

- Stormwater runoff that impacts near shore habitat
- Highly susceptible critical aquifer recharge zones
- Maxwellton, Glendale, Cultus, Crescent, and Lone Lake watersheds
- Agricultural lands/pasture lands
- Woodland/ forest management

Information – Education Priorities and Goals

- The WCD website will continue to be used as an attractive, up-to-date and efficient central point of information for all WICD programs.

- Information will appear on a routine basis in Whidbey Island news publications highlighting WICD work and landowner opportunities (present and ongoing).
- The District will use the special assessment to deliver local educational programs to address local conservation needs.
- WICD will hold an annual open house to recognize conservation partners, present landowner conservation awards and present budget information.
- District will work to expand educational programs to youth audiences.

District Operations Priorities, Goals

- Maintain and continue to train technical and support staff adequate to implement the long range plan (present and ongoing).
- Maintain the ongoing excellence of the financial management of the district (present and ongoing).
- Continue to secure grant funding from federal, state and local sources for targeted local projects both independently and in collaboration with partners (present and ongoing).

Staffing Needs

- District Manager
- 1 – 2 Farm/Forest Conservation Planners
- 1 – 2 Natural Resource Planners for stormwater, LID and habitat conservation work
- 1 part time administrative assistant (including accounting)
- Professional Engineer (NW Cluster)
- Part time program and public information staff

Trends Impacting Conservation in the Whidbey Island Conservation District geographic area

- Increasing population and the accompanying pressure of increased development.
- Increased water quality / quantity / surface water management concerns.
- Lack common ground between interest groups on Whidbey Island.
- Limited technical support and local support infrastructure for farmers.
- The impact of the economic downturn on Island County government to provide services to residents and landowners.

Strategies to Address Trends

- District to take lead role in development of partnerships, program coordination and facilitation around conservation topics and issues.
- Collaborative grant development and funding with partners
- Strategic public outreach and education
- Landowner technical assistance for rural and urban landowners and residents
- Monitoring and adaptive management

Key Decision Makers/Partners

- Board of Island County Commissioners

- Island County Assessor
- Island County Economic Development Council
- Island County Farm Bureau
- Island County Public Works Department
- Island County Planning & Community Development Department
- Island County Health Department
- Island County Noxious Weed Control Board
- Island County Parks
- South Whidbey Parks and Recreation District
- Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) and Econet
- Washington State Legislators
- Washington State Conservation Commission
- Washington Association of Conservation Districts
- National Association of Conservation Districts
- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Island, Skagit , San Juan Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- Congressional Delegation
- State and Federal Agencies including Department of Ecology, Environmental Protection Agency and others.
- Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC)
- Whidbey Camano Land Trust (WCLT)
- Water Resources Advisory Committee, WIRA 6 (WRAC)
- City of Oak Harbor
- City of Langley
- Town of Coupeville
- Port Districts of Whidbey
- Diking Districts of Whidbey
- Salmon Technical Advisory Group (TAG)
- Northwest Agricultural Business Center
- Island County WSU Extension
- News media including Whidbey News Times, South Whidbey Record, Whidbey Examiner, The Marketplace, and Capital Press
- Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve
- Whidbey Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Group
- Sustainable Whidbey Coalition
- Orca Network
- Transition Whidbey
- Greenbank Farm
- Pacific Rim Institute
- Whidbey Watershed Stewards
- Whidbey Camano Tourism
- U.S. Navy Facilities Command

