



TALKING POINTS: VOLUNTARY CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

These talking points were developed at the request of conservation districts and are designed to help districts provide clear, unified messaging about voluntary / incentive conservation programs. Please feel free to tailor messages to better suit your district.

Voluntary / incentive programs engage private landowners as partners in stewardship.

- With over half the land base of Washington in private ownership, private landowners are a crucial partner in conservation.
- Incentives spark eager landowner participation, rather than triggering disputes and conflict.
- Following positive experiences with these programs, many landowners become spokespeople for conservation, generating positive social pressure to practice resource stewardship.

Voluntary / incentive programs are farm-friendly, which is good for the economy and the environment.*

- The food and agriculture industry represents 13 percent of our state economy (\$49 billion) and employs over 160,000 people. (<http://agr.wa.gov/aginwa/>)
- Some conservation practices are cost-prohibitive for the average farmer — small farms account for the majority of Washington agriculture, and nearly 85 percent of farms have sales under \$100,000. (<https://pubs.wsu.edu/DisplayImage.aspx?ProductID=15562&size=original>)
- Incentives provide a business opportunity, rather than a business risk, during a time when farms are already under threat — over the last 30 years, Washington lost over 1 million acres of farmland. (<http://198.57.168.160/~wccofp/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2015-Final-Indicators-Report.pdf>, p 6)
- Farmers are involved in voluntary conservation planning and implementation, ensuring that solutions keep their operation in business and take care of the environment.
- Farmland provides habitat and migration corridors for wildlife, as opposed to habitat loss and segregation that occurs with development.
- Healthy topsoil and vegetation help protect water quality by filtering pollutants from surface and ground water.

Voluntary / incentive programs are effective.

- In 2015, the US Fish and Wildlife Service determined that ESA-listing of Greater Sage-grouse is not warranted, largely due to voluntary conservation efforts implemented by federal, state, and private landowners. (<https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/historic-conservation-campaign-protects-greater-sage-grouse>)
- Over 1,200 acres of shellfish harvest area has been upgraded in Dungeness Bay as a result of a coordinated, voluntary effort to identify and correct sources of water pollution. (<http://www.sequimgazette.com/news/335177631.html> - Clallam CD lead partner in this effort)

* While this message refers to farming in general, conservation districts are encouraged to tailor the language / figures to best reflect the producers and operators in your area (e.g. shellfish growers, forest landowners, ranchers, etc).

- Summer water temperatures in the salmon-bearing Tucannon River dropped 10 degrees F following an extensive voluntary effort to restore streamside areas. (<http://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/CREP-Effectiveness-Monitoring-report-2013.pdf>, p 30 – Columbia CD lead partner in this effort)

Voluntary / incentive programs are fair and practical.

- The landscapes and land uses across Washington are too diverse for a “one-size-fits-all” solution to natural resource management.
- With the diversity of land uses in our state, all having some environmental impact, it’s hard to enforce regulations equitably — voluntary programs offer landowners the opportunity to help craft fair solutions.
- Landowners work with technicians to design voluntary projects, resulting in solutions that are based on scientific data and the landowners’ exclusive, detailed knowledge of the local landscape.
- Voluntary programs provide an opportunity for landowners to learn about and comply with natural resource regulations in a positive way.

Voluntary / incentive programs are cost-effective.

- You can track how much voluntary / incentive programs cost — with regulation, there are many indirect costs, such as legal fees or lost jobs, which are nearly impossible to quantify.
- Landowners contribute to project costs, making public dollars go farther and getting the landowner invested in the long-term success of the project.
- The voluntary approach provides an opportunity to build a positive working relationship with people, rather than launching into conflict and costly legal battles (e.g. GMA).