



5-Year Plan (FY2018 to 2023) Spokane Conservation District

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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. In 2011, the name was changed to Spokane Conservation District.

SCD is governed by a Board of Supervisors who voluntarily serves 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, of various sources, 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, community organizations and government to: promote regenerative soil health practices; conserve and protect water resources; expand options for agriculture production, food security, and integration into our food system; promote sustainable forestry practices and post natural disaster assistance; 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 SCD 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. Resource issues and available staff assets and funding are assessed to aide in the priority actions for the years ahead. 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 knowledge 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

Conservation districts were founded on a locally-led process and a belief that our local landowners and land users best know how to identify and address conservation problems in their area. The emphasis for the SCD is on educating and providing technical assistance to landowners, 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, referred to as governance culture, and operational work by the staff, 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 be able to conserve our natural resources using sustainable stewardship, best management practices, and;

Priority Goal - *Result*

- **1. Utilize SCD as their local source of natural resource management assistance.**

Measure of Success

Citizens and policy makers will use SCD for information and support on local natural resource issues understand the relationship between human activity and environmental impact. As a result, they voluntarily engage in best management practices to conserve and protect what is available today, leaving our future generations healthier soil, cleaner water, and sufficient wildlife habitat.

Priority Goal - *Result*

- **2. Make informed decisions regarding the use of our natural resources and policies in conservation and agriculture, etc.**

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*

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

Measure of Success

Citizens will adopt, promote and implement new and existing management practices to conserve, protect, and/or enhance our natural resources.

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

Accelerated development has also resulted in storm water drainage and storage concerns. Identifying practical areas for storage and protection of natural drainage is a priority for SCD.

- ***Population Growth***

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 and water storage strategies and education, along with the development and infrastructure to support emerging technologies.

- ***Land Use Change***

There is a growing trend of small acreage parcels (1-20 acres) in Spokane County. Farm ground is being converted and developed at an unsustainable pace. There is a need to provide information, education, and technical services/assistance to small acreage landowners.

The recent Hirst decision has had an impact on the continued development of small acreage properties as it relates to water rights.

- ***Economics***

There have been significant impacts to natural resource conservation funding in the State of Washington over the last several bienniums. SCD has budgeted expenditures downward and continually looks for partnerships and other funding source availability.

SCD's 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.

- ***Agricultural Regulation***

The agricultural and livestock industries in eastern Washington Counties, including Spokane, are feeling the ever increasing pressure of regulatory enforcement and public scrutiny. These new pressures have powerful implications for potentially increasing the costs for production and raising the concerns of local producers. The agricultural sector was once largely exempt from the full force of regulatory oversight. Environmental groups and government agencies are now viewing them as an industry in need of tighter control to improve habitat and water quality.

Runoff from agricultural fields and livestock facilities, including sediment, fertilizer, manure, and pesticides are often implicated as the primary contributor on non-point source pollution. Since it

is extremely difficult to identify specific sources, regulators are using a broad brush approach to rules and the “potential” to pollute to address the issue. Producers receiving letters are mandated or encouraged to utilize specific land uses and/or best management practices aimed at reducing runoff (e.g. riparian buffers, direct seeding practices).

▪ **Soil Health**

Soil Health is an integrated approach to soil testing using chemical and biological soil test data and represents the next step in soil testing for the future. In conjunction with direct seed, no-till Farm operations, and cover cropping to minimize soil erosion, soil structure degradation, and loss of soil moisture. The changes will increase soil biological activity, increase organic matter, decrease soil moisture by evapo-transportation, and along with new testing procedures like the Haney and Slovic tests to measure not only the current soil status, but microbial activity of the soil.

▪ **Climate Change**

As our region experiences the effect of climate change with extreme weather events and record breaking temperatures, it will become increasingly important to plan for climate change in our natural resource planning. We continue to identify what effects this has on a local level and take action to help safeguard our valuable resources.

We can expect to see an overall change in our ecosystems; within our forests there is potential for an increase in wildfires, insect outbreaks, and tree diseases. Also noted is the significant change in the distribution of species throughout the region. Most concerning is the expansion of non-native species.

Climate pattern change has presented water related challenges. Changes include the timing of stream flow due to early snowmelt. This may also reduce the supply of water for many competing demands such as residential water use, irrigation, and electricity production. Low summer flows will result in rising temperatures in our cold water bodies, Native fish will experience increases in diseases and mortality, and algal blooms will become more frequent.

From an agricultural perspective it may become even more important to remain adaptive and focus on more climate resilient technologies and the management, availability and timing of water. Conservation practices already adopted by the SCD provide a good start to dealing with future climatic issues. We will need to continue to evaluate potential impact and coordinate our natural resource response accordingly.

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
- Expand outreach efforts to increase recognition of SCD and our programs
- Improve soil health through and implementation of cover cropping, direct seeding technology and regenerative soil health practices
- Provide low interest loan program(s) regionally, addressing impacts to water quality in shared watersheds
- Administer and continue to offer consumer lending programs and provide cost-share funding, loans and technical assistance 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
- Improve water quality and quantity through comprehensive watershed and drought management planning and implementation
- Expand services and programs to small acreage landowners
- Increase urban forestry canopy in Spokane County and track growth
- Develop community partnerships and operate a conservation model farm or Veterans learning farm
- Seek continued funding options/mechanisms to deliver SCD programs and services through work with county officials and community organizations toward farm land preservation and easements
- Invite local governments and community organizations to develop a conservation park or campus providing the space for education and demonstration sites within an urban setting

District Operations

▪ **Infrastructure**

The physical infrastructure of SCD has reached capacity. SCD is in the process of planning and developing a 50-acre conservation campus which will be home to the administrative and technical 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 as well as any long-term infrastructure.

▪ **Personnel**

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. SCD will continually evaluate workloads to match available resources and make appropriate adjustments in staffing as needed. Our 2018-23 staffing levels will be reviewed and determination of staff will be made based on programming and funding.

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 revised format of newsletter with emphasis placed on specific branding of the District including logos and standardization of outreach materials. We will also expand our use of websites, Facebook, targeted e-blasts and other electronic publications in cooperation with WA Conservation Commission.

Maintaining good working relationships with the local media is an important element of our communication strategy. We will utilize media sources through a local media firm to inform and educate the citizens of Spokane County about the activities of the District and how those activities may 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” to Spokane County schools. Our long-range plan includes providing natural resource education to Spokane County schools as well as adult education through workshops, conferences and publications. The SCD will continue to have a presence at community events and bring program information to organizations requesting presentations. We will also continue to provide and develop educational classes and programs; like the annual Backyard Conservation Stewardship Program, Tree School, and the Small Farms Conference. Many other youth and adult projects and programs will continue in conjunction with the WSU Extension and the City and County of Spokane and other local agencies and organizations.

- **Policy & Government Relations**

It is a priority for SCD 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 affects 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.

SCD will write, promote and advocate for legislation that addresses 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 last reauthorization occurred in 2014, taking effect until 2025. SCD staff will be evaluating a new rates and charges system to possibly replace the assessment.

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 15 counties in Eastern Washington and four North Idaho districts. 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 Acreage Program***

Through a cooperative effort with WSCC and WSU Extension, an annual Farm and Food Expo 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 Program within SCD and will feature our Vets on the Farm program. It is expected that our certified planners will write farm plans, stewardship plans and provide technical assistance to small acreage landowners as a result of the annual conference. The expo will also introduce Veterans to agriculture and conservation related careers. Ongoing workshops and educational/demonstration opportunities will be developed and offered to the public and targeted to Veterans and other socially-disadvantaged sectors. A new urban agriculture program will be established to assist and educate landowners in urban food deserts and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. The SCD soils lab has become an integral part of this program area offering basic soil testing to landowners.

Water Resources

Pressures on water resources in Spokane County are escalating. SCD Water Resources will focus on facilitating and participating in relevant water quality and quantity projects. Using the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), SCD 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 provide assistance and educational workshops regarding livestock management.

- ***Shorelines***

Lake shoreline and aquatic habitat in Spokane County continues to be degraded and impacted. 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-going work includes Newman Lake, Hangman Creek, the Spokane River, and Lake Spokane.

- ***Water Quality and Quantity***

Spokane County surface and ground water resources are under pressure from population growth and varying land uses. The Water Resources department 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 facilitate and coordinate the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) over the next 5-years and implement thousands of acres of conservation, direct seed practices and livestock improvement projects within Spokane County.

- ***Monitoring***

SCD will continue to monitor long-term ground water wells in the Hangman Creek Basin and West Plains. This information will be important to determine any current and future land use/development and aquifer levels. Through the RCPP, SCD will also use Edge of the Field

monitoring practices and drone technology to attempt to gain better data and demonstrate the progress of the programs being applied on the ground.

- **Barrier Evaluations**

SCD will continue to implement fish barrier corrections and to spearhead a large 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 and will be vital for identifying barriers, prioritizing basins and funding future projects.

- **Technical Assistance**

The Water Resources department will continue to be the liaison of the private landowner through providing technical assistance and educational opportunities. We will promote the use of Best Management Practices and adaptive management in order to conserve and protect the natural resources in the County.

Additionally, SCD will partner with Spokane County in the newly adopted Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) in order to address the County's Critical Area Ordinance and the economic viability of agriculture. SCD will serve as the lead entity and work with a facilitator and local work group to establish the program which will be presented to a technical committee for approval in 2018.

- **Consumer Loans**

SCD will offer low-interest loans to landowners for the purpose of replacing or repairing failing septic systems, or connecting to sewer systems within tributaries to major water bodies.

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 SCD Forestry Department. In cooperation with the fire districts and local jurisdictions, SCD 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.

▪ ***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, SCD will continue to help 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. SCD will continue to provide plant materials for reforestation and conservation applications with the seed being sourced locally through our seed collection program.