



Washington Association of Conservation Districts

To: WACD Members
From: Tom Salzer, Executive Director
Date: June 26, 2022
Subject: WACD dues and you

Dear Members:

Thank you for supporting your statewide association of conservation districts. This year WACD celebrates 80 years of working with and for conservation districts. Every Washington State conservation district is a member, and at present, 44 of 45 conservation districts are districts in good standing. I applaud you for the great work accomplished in addressing conservation and serving your local communities.

WACD is providing unprecedented transparency to members and partners at a time when state and national issues are overwhelming many of our people. These issues range from far-reaching human health and equity issues to more local conservation district concerns around water, habitat, and elections. This mix of issues large and small, national and local, often collides at the local level, creating challenges in reaching people where they are. Those challenges are also opportunities that many conservation districts are embracing.

WACD keeps members informed through regular newsletters, postings on the WACD Hub website, and through attendance at conservation district meetings and conversations with hundreds of conservation district supervisors and employees. With such transparency comes awareness. WACD has heard some pointed criticism along the way and I appreciate the crucial comments. Your thoughts and concerns help WACD to become more aware, and your suggestions help improve how WACD operates in service to member conservation districts.

This is a great place to point out that WACD is a 501(c)(6) nonprofit organization. WACD is, essentially, a business league like a Chamber of Commerce, existing to make business conditions better for its members. When issues threaten to make business conditions worse for members, WACD may work on those issues, even if these issues do not seem directly related to the conservation of natural resources.

One example of how WACD acts as a business league is the sudden loss of email service this year for more than 100 people in conservation districts. That could have affected the easy flow of information and interrupted the important conservation work of many districts. It would have directly affected professional conservation district staff who utilize federal systems because their

identity for authentication is tied to their email address. Accordingly, WACD stepped in with a way to transition email service in a way that minimized disruption.

Similarly, the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) may also affect how WACD's members deliver conservation programs and services. While these issues may not directly translate to impacts on natural resources, they may affect how a district is able to garner support and reach users of those resources. DEI, like email, may affect the operating conditions of many conservation districts. DEI may not of interest by all conservation districts but WACD's membership have voted two years in a row for WACD to focus resources on this set of topics.

July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022

WACD had a tremendous year (July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022) because of your support. The WACD Plant Materials Center set records for gross sales. WACD's annual conference and business meeting were presented with more accessibility than ever before. On the advocacy front, WACD helped to capture a windfall of nearly \$29 million in support for voluntary conservation programs.

Additional highlights are included below. As you review this information, I think you'll agree that WACD has remained strongly focused on serving our members within the framework of our MVPs: our [mission, vision, and principles](#).

WACD Operations

- Last July, the [Plant Materials Center was reporting a record sales year](#). This month, we know they have set [another sales record](#) in their ongoing quest to provide quality conservation-grade native plants for your projects.
- WACD's annual conference and business meeting was successful in providing information and facilitating robust decision making. We published an [easy guide to the conference](#) to help folks who were new to this event. We provided [annual meeting information in one place](#). [New officers were elected](#). Several [important resolutions were adopted](#) by voting members along with business brought from the floor.
- WACD adopted it's second [annual work plan](#) this month.

Advocacy

- To help members during the 2022 legislative session, WACD's lobbyist, Brynn Brady, provided [useful information on engaging with legislators](#). WACD published our [2022 legislative priorities](#). During session, we maintained a daily [status update on key legislation](#).
- WACD supported the work of the [Joint Committee on Elections](#). The JCE's recommendations emerged in House Bill 1652 with strong support, but that support stumbled when a more draconian conservation district elections bill (House Bill 1910) was introduced. [WACD opposed House Bill 1910](#) and [presented testimony](#). While neither

of these bills passed, [we expect this topic to come up again](#). WACD continues to support the JCE's recommendations.

- A [mandatory riparian buffer bill](#) (Senate Bill 5727) captured [a lot of attention](#). The version of this legislation that found the strongest support was House Bill 1838. During testimony on House Bill 1838, [WACD presented legislators with an opportunity](#) to provide more support for voluntary conservation programs. Through the work of WACD's lobbyist and staff, and from strong work by partners, the [Legislature responded](#) with about [\\$29 million](#) in support of such programs. That is an unprecedented achievement in a short session.

Email service

A free email service that had been managed by the Washington State Conservation Commission was ended by Google and the Commission chose to discontinue directly supporting email service for conservation districts. [WACD stepped in with a solution](#) to help districts avoid having to change email addresses.

DEI

In 2020, WACD responded very thoughtfully to the diversity, equity, and inclusion topics that were capturing the nation's attention. While [NACD quickly adopted policy language](#), WACD chose to move more slowly, waiting to hear ideas from conservation districts in the form of resolutions. Two such resolutions were adopted by majority vote at the 2020 WACD annual business meeting.

WACD's President then formed the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to draft policy language for the membership to consider, and to arrive at an action plan. The CDEI did excellent work, producing a [policy and action plan](#) that were later adopted. It is important to recognize that the policy language affects how WACD operates; it does not tell any conservation district what to believe or what to do.

WACD stumbled on this journey. The meaning of consensus was not clear to all participants and that has resulted in some confusion. The CDEI was expected to have one additional meeting but when it appeared we had consensus, we canceled that meeting. This situation is a teachable moment for all of us, one that WACD regrets but is learning from.

WACD also missed the part about bringing the draft policy and action plan back to the membership for approval. The [Board of Directors approved the policy and plan](#) before bringing these documents to the membership. Once this mistake was recognized, WACD officers and a few conservation districts simultaneously arrived at ways to make sure this matter could be brought to the floor for a vote by members. This was another teachable moment for us, demonstrating that we are all human and subject to making mistakes, even while all persons are trying to do their very best. In this case, the process worked: members expressed their

dissatisfaction by voting to reconsider the Board of Director's vote. Deliberations on the committee's recommendations then took place, which were ultimately adopted on a voice vote.

WACD began [implementing the policy and action plan](#) in calendar year 2022.

Dues

In 2021, the WACD Board of Directors approved a dues credit for each conservation district of \$400, effectively reducing dues by about 10%. Even though WACD's costs continue to rise, the Board has approved the same credit for 2022 dues.

Dues from member conservation districts do not cover the full cost of operating WACD. Functionally, WACD operates as two divisions: the Plant Materials Center in Bow and the Executive Office in Olympia. In simplest terms, the PMC works to provide quality native plants for conservation purposes, and in the process, generating revenue to support all of WACD. The Executive Office works to deliver services to members, including representation on important issues.

On the Executive Office side of the house, WACD depends on dues, grants, annual conference registrations, and sponsorships. Each of these fund sources is important, but the generated funds are still not enough to cover our full operating costs. For several years WACD has dedicated \$75,000 in revenue from the Plant Materials Center to supplement Executive Office operations.

July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023

Annual conference

Last week, the WACD Board of Directors approved holding an in-person annual conference and business meeting in Wenatchee. A virtual option will be offered. We remained concerned about COVID-19 but we also recognize that by now, most of our community has some resistance. We have been apart for a long time so an in-person event in the center of Washington will, I believe, be very welcome.

Advocacy

We have already started conversations with our lobbyist and with Conservation Commission representatives about the legislative challenges and opportunities our community may face in 2023. We are watchful on the issue of conservation district elections and continue to believe that local choice on how to elect conservation district supervisors is an important component of any solution. We continue to support the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Elections.

Concern exists in our community about the substantial funding provided by the Legislature for voluntary conservation. Some have expressed their feeling that voluntary conservation is being set up for failure because it could be incredibly difficult to utilize all the funds awarded. I don't believe this is the case. The final few days of a legislative session runs at a frenzied pace as the

end approaches. There really isn't sufficient time to build a conspiracy against voluntary conservation or focus on anything else besides getting a budget past the finish line. This doesn't mean that there are not any dragons to be wary of, though, so we remain vigilant as we talk to legislators, their staff, agency partners, and other interested parties.

Partnerships

WACD is focusing additional energy on existing and new partnerships. This much-needed work comes about because COVID restrictions have made it more difficult to nurture relationships. WACD works very well with the State Conservation Commission and with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. These two entities help conservation districts thrive.

We have opportunities to strengthen other relationships and to establish new ones. I believe that this work will be a strong focus in 2022 and 2023.

Services

Just as WACD stepped in to help with the conservation district email situation, there are other services that would be helpful to conservation districts. WACD staff are working on some ideas that have come to us from member districts. We will take a serious look at opportunities to provide a resource that would improve the ability of conservation districts to find needed resources and to deliver programs and services.

Committees

WACD's committees are growing! Committees are another way that members can provide guidance to WACD and advance the interests of conservation districts. Committees also provide a way for future leaders to become familiar with a wider conservation community.

The new [Committees page on the Hub website](#) shows the standing (evergreen) groups, temporary groups, and inactive groups. Currently, we have several committees and groups actively working on member needs:

- The [Harmful Algal Blooms Work Group](#) is gathering information and preparing a report to deliver to WACD's membership this fall.
- The [Investment Policy Task Force](#) just delivered recommendations to the WACD Board of Directors. Those recommendations help to guide how WACD will make and manage invested funds. The Board adopted the recommendations last week.
- The [Livestock Task Force](#) is just getting started. We expect to hear a report on their work later this year.

Standing/evergreen committees are also active, including the [Executive Committee](#), [Finance Committee](#), and [Tribal Relations Committee](#). The newest standing committee is the [Sustainable Funding Committee](#) and that group is just getting off the ground.

How you can help

There are several ways you can help advance conservation district interests through WACD and we invite you to do so.

Engage and participate. [Subscribe to our regular newsletter](#). Attend [WACD Board meetings and work sessions](#). Build your relationship with your [two Area Directors](#).

Coordinate. If you have legislative needs or issues with an agency, let WACD know. The more we can work in concert with you, the more effective your work may be. [Keep us posted!](#)

Buy from the PMC. Your purchase of native plants from the WACD Plant Materials Center also helps WACD operate and provide services. If you don't need plants, perhaps one of your partners does. Every purchase helps.

Find partners and sponsors. If you know of a group that may be an ally in our work to support conservation districts, introduce us. The broader base of support we have, the better we'll do in advancing the needs of conservation districts. For companies and groups you work with that have a strong interest in conservation, consider seeking their support for the [WACD annual conference](#) (or for the [WADE annual conference](#), or for the [Washington Conservation Society](#)). Every bit of support helps to provide better content for your conservation district and offsets costs.

Thank you

Thank you to our member districts for your effective engagement with legislators. Your work impacts conservation districts across the state. We greatly appreciate that while you are working on gaining support for your work, you are also supporting the statewide initiatives as adopted by WACD members through your resolutions. Our lobbyist is very effective but the real magic is provided by you when you build relationships with your legislators and make them partners in your commitment to conservation. Job well done!

We have had some difficult moments over the past 12 months but through discomfort we also learn and grow. Your honest, sincere feedback is helpful and appreciated, and even more so when you include your ideas on how WACD can continue to become better at hearing and serving your needs.

Always yours for conservation,



Tom Salzer, Executive Director

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