



5-Year Plan (2017 to 2022) Thurston Conservation District

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I. Organizational Information

Organization of the Thurston Conservation District

- A political subdivision of the State of Washington – authorities, powers and structure contained in [Chapter 89.08 RCW](#).
- The Thurston Conservation District was formed in 1948, and is one of 45 conservation districts in Washington State. Districts have no regulatory authority.
- District boundaries include all of Thurston County, with exception of those areas that fall within the pre-1948 city boundaries of Yelm, Tenino and Rainier.
- The Thurston Conservation District is building on a long tradition of meeting today's challenges with expanding programs and opportunities to assist residents in protecting the land and its resources.

Function of the Thurston 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 We Serve & Why

The Thurston Conservation District collaborates in diverse partnerships with individuals, landowners, businesses, non-profit organizations, local government, state government, and tribes to protect soil, water, and air resources, expand options for agriculture production, promote sustainable forestry practices, and protect and enhance wildlife habitat throughout the urban and rural areas of Thurston County.

Mission of the Thurston Conservation District

Thurston Conservation District, a non-regulatory agency, strives to conserve and sustain the beneficial use and protection of local natural resources through partnerships with the County's rural, agricultural, and urban communities, as well as local, state, federal and tribal agencies.

Vision of the Thurston Conservation District

Thurston County has healthier soils, water, air, and ecosystems, while supporting human interaction with these resources. Thurston Conservation District is the leader in community based regeneration of natural resources and provides services to support economically viable working lands throughout the District. The District is recognized as the independent and trusted agency of choice that implements stewardship in Thurston County and beyond in partnership with individuals, other conservation districts, relevant agencies, and organizations.

Values of the Thurston Conservation District

1. We serve our community with accuracy, professionalism, and sensitivity. We value diverse opinions and strive to listen; to meet people where they are, rather than imposing our views upon them.
2. We value and honor the public's trust and their investment in our work and will strive diligently to preserve that partnership.
3. We strive to be respectful of all community members and their lifestyle choices.
4. We serve as the information hub to translate regulations and best available science to landowners through education and implementation.
5. We serve as a conduit for the voice of the community to policy officials on natural resource issues.
6. We encourage innovation in our practices and ideas and will support our staff and community in implementing them.
7. We advocate and collaborate for working lands activities that promote regenerative resource management, economic viability, and are based on best available science.
8. We provide value for public funding via measurable benefits to natural resources and communities, responsive and efficient systems and transparent governance.

Natural Resource Data & Information:

- [Thurston County](#) is located on the southern end of the Puget Sound in Western Washington, referred to as the South Sound. It covers 774 square miles, of which 722 square miles is land and 52 square miles of water.
- Thurston County is the seventh smallest county in the state, but the sixth most populous with 349.4 persons per square mile (269,851 persons county-wide, according to the [July 2014 census](#)).
- Major watersheds include: Black River, Budd/Deschutes, Chehalis River, Eld Inlet, Henderson Inlet, Nisqually River, Skookumchuck River, Totten Inlet and West Capitol Forest.
- [In 2012, there were 1,336 farms operating in Thurston County, encompassing a total of 76,638 acres.](#) The number of farms is increasing, while farm size has decreased over the last 15 years.
- [Since the mid-1950s, when Thurston County was primarily farmland, the County has lost over 75 percent of its working agricultural lands. Though the land area dedicated to agricultural activities has been steadily eroding, agricultural production is still of significant importance to the County's economy.](#)
- [Between 1992 and 2011, large-scale changes detectable from satellite imagery indicated that over 8,000 acres of land were converted to low, medium or high-density developed land covers.](#)
- [While forests still cover over 40% of the county's area, forested land covers declined by over 42,000 acres between 1992 and 2011 due to logging, development, and other factors.](#)
- [The Henderson and Budd/Deschutes watersheds have the most impervious surfaces](#)
- [The total market value of agricultural production in Thurston County is about \\$118 million from 1,288 farms, with crops accounting for approximately 42% of the total and livestock and poultry the remaining 58% \(U.S. Census of Agriculture\). These figures are greater than that of all adjacent counties.](#)
- The Nisqually, Deschutes, Black River, and Chehalis river systems (including tributaries) have significant water quality issues, that have resulted in several segments being listed on the [303\(d\) list](#). Water quality issues include temperature, dissolved oxygen, bacteria (such as fecal coliform), fine sediment, and pH.
- Many of the County's lakes and river systems (including tributaries) also have the presence of invasive plant species, lack adequate large woody debris (and recruitment), as in stream flow issues, all of which are noted on the [303\(d\) list](#).

- Reduced salmon populations have been affected by several factors in the South Sound (which includes Thurston County). Factors include: degraded habitat, and land use. [Watershed Recovery Plans](#) have been developed to address these issues.

Criteria for Selecting Conservation Priorities:

1. Documented research, reports; local knowledge or data indicating specific resource needs or concerns
 2. Impact on the long term sustainability of working lands
 3. Ability to assist landowners and managers with regulatory compliance
 4. Opportunities to partner and leverage resources (including funding) to address multiple resource concerns
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II. Priority Natural Resource Conservation Needs, Geographic Areas, Measures of Success and Goals

Overall district priorities are:

- To support an agricultural community that is profitable and viable
- Assisting stewards of working lands to be good stewards of the natural resources
- To assist land managers/owners (regardless of property size) in the implementation of management practices that address water quality/quantity, soil health, maintenance and restoration of natural habitats
- To educate the public in the importance of maintaining the health and productivity of our natural resources
- To cooperate with a diverse group of partners (e.g. individuals, tribes, NGOs, and agencies) that value natural resources, to work together in addressing common goals and desired outcomes

Water Quality and Quantity

As a valuable and vital resource, water quality and quantity impact every sector of life. We will continue to provide education and technical assistance to all landowners and managers within our district that aims to inform and mitigate individual's impact to water quality and quantity. We strive for clean drinking water, the upgrade of 303(d) listed stream segments, Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), and commercial shellfish harvesting areas. In addition to implementing Best Management Practices and green infrastructure to reduce storm water, we provide active and on-going education to our most sensitive shellfish producing areas: the Henderson and Nisqually Shellfish Protection Districts.

Measure of Success: Improved shoreline conditions

Goal: By 2022, 50 shoreline landowners will have improved shoreline conditions to support water quality and quantity.

Measure of Success: Protected and restored marine and freshwater habitat that improves healthy and harvestable salmon populations

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will continue to host the Lead Entity program and successfully lead the facilitation of the science-based, citizen led annual grant process.

Goal: By 2022, 2 miles of riverine/marine conditions will be restored to achieve functionality.

Measure of Success: Increased water use efficiencies on landowner's properties.

Goal: By 2020, 20 landowners will implement water use efficiencies.

Measure of Success: Upgraded shellfish beds

Goal: By 2021, Thurston Conservation District will use the success from the Henderson watershed to restore or upgrade 75 acres of shellfish beds.

Protect and Restore Ecosystems

Thurston Conservation District recognizes the quantity and diversity of critical ecosystems within our region and strives to protect intact habitat, while working to restore degraded areas. Thurston County is home to state and federally listed endangered species, prairie ecosystems, vital marine and estuarine habitat, forestland, sensitive riparian areas and shellfish beds. Education is the first step to resource conservation on private lands and the district will continue to engage the community to raise awareness of the vital roles our critical ecosystems and their processes play. We will also continue to coordinate financial resources and facilitate ecosystem recovery from the local level.

Measure of Success: Increase in ecosystems protection

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will facilitate the protection of 1,000 acres (e.g. acquisitions and easements etc.).

Measure of Success: Increased enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program ([CREP](#))

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will increase riparian buffers through enrollment of 200 acres in the CREP.

Measure of Success: Increased number of culvert and barrier removal projects and habitat restored

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will engage in 2 culvert or barrier removal projects opening up a minimum of 3 miles of habitat.

Measure of Success: Increase in restored degraded habitat

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will restore 100 acres of degraded habitat.

Producer Support and Preservation of Working Lands

In an effort to continue to support the preservation of working lands, Thurston Conservation District will continue offering technical assistance and conservation planning services to landowners and managers. We are the technical provider for the Voluntary Stewardship Program. In addition, we will work to educate new and beginning managers of working lands. We assist small and large producers and commercial and non-commercial operations. We will continue to work with existing landowners to implement Best Management Practices and assist in planning for their future and beyond retirement. We will continue to partner with key organizations and individuals to provide quality technical, financial and educational resources. We promote regenerative agriculture, encouraging conservation of natural resources, and economic viability of the operation.

Measure of Success: Successful development and implementation of the Voluntary Stewardship Program

Goal: By 2018, the Thurston Conservation District will be implementing the Voluntary Stewardship Program in Thurston County.

Measure of Success: Creation of a district-held conservation easement

Goal: By 2019, farmland at risk of being lost will be preserved through at least one (1) district-held conservation easement.

Measure of Success: Increase in forest health

Goal: By 2018, one (1) forest health plan will be developed.

Measure of Success: Increase in Producers served

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will have served 2000 producers- including beginning, experienced, and retiring producers and across commercial and non-commercial operations.

Rural and Urban Land Stewardship

Thurston Conservation District recognizes the diversity within our community and has adapted to meet the needs of our urban and rural settings. Through technical assistance and education, we work to foster stewardship of natural resources from all individuals in our community. Thurston Conservation District strives to be the go-to resource for landowners or managers concerning all natural resource conservation issues on their land.

Measure of Success: Increased number of conservation plans developed

Goal: By 2022, the Thurston Conservation District will develop 250 conservation plans (Conservation Plans/CREP plans/forestry plans).

Measure of Success: Best management practices recommended

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will recommend 900 Best Management Practices.

Goal: Follow up contact will be done with 100% of those who received recommendations.

Measure of Success: Best Management practices implemented

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will implement 60% of recommended Best Management Practices;

Goal: By 2022, follow up will be done with 100% of those who implement.

Measure of Success: Workshops, community meetings, and field trips hosted

Goal: By 2022, the Thurston Conservation District will host 100 workshops/classes, 30 community meetings and 30 field trips for rural and urban residents of Thurston County.

Measure of Success: Invasive species managed

Goal: By 2022, 100 acres of invasive (non-native) species treated (plants and animals).

Measure of Success: Green infrastructure and Low Impact Development practices implemented

Goal: By 2022, implement 25 green infrastructure and Low Impact Development practices.

Measure of Success: Increase conservation stewardship of urban households

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will increase outreach and program delivery to 500 households in urban communities.

Local Food Production and Consumption

By increasing engagement in the local food system, Thurston Conservation District is supporting working lands, rural economic development, reduction of pollution caused by product transportation, equitable access to healthy local food, and the economic viability of our agricultural community and geographic region.

Measure of Success: Number of food-producing gardens

Goal: By 2021, the Thurston Conservation District will work to increase the number of (or improve existing) commercial producers, backyard & community gardens by 100.

Measure of Success: Increase local consumption for locally produced food

Goal: By 2020, Thurston Conservation District will have successfully partnered with the local community to statistically see the market for local food increase by 10%.

Measure of Success: Accessibility of healthy local food

Goal: By 2020, Thurston Conservation District will have successfully partnered with local organizations to increase food accessibility for vulnerable populations in our community by 10%.

Measure of Success: Inventory and use of equipment rentals

Goal: By 2021, the Thurston Conservation District will increase the use of current equipment rental by 20% and increase the equipment rental inventory by 20%.

Climate Change Adaptability

To help producers and landowners adapt to the changing climate, we continue to engage in and relay the best available science. We seek to support our community in proactive climate change adaptation measures such as flood and fire prevention, suitable crops, and pest and plant disease control. We are committed to work with our community to conserve our natural resources in response to climate change. In addition, we strive as an organization to demonstrate sustainable practices daily in our work and office culture.

Measure of Success: Firewise projects implemented

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will implement three (3) Firewise projects.

Measure of Success: Landowners practicing Firewise

Goal: By 2020, Thurston Conservation District will assist five (5) landowners with Firewise.

Measure of Success: Water use efficiencies recommendations included in conservation plans

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will have ten (10) conservation plans that include water use efficiencies.

Measure of Success: Workshops and forums hosted

Goal: By 2019, Thurston Conservation District will host six (6) workshops and one (1) community forum addressing climate change adaptations for local producers and residents.

Measure of Success: Implemented climate change adaptability practices

Goal: By 2022, work with 25 landowners to implement climate change adaptability practices.

Measure of Success: Energy efficiencies plans

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will have five (5) plans that address energy efficiencies.

Measure of Success: Thurston Conservation District organization sustainability plan

Goal: By 2019, Thurston Conservation District will create & begin implementation a Thurston Conservation District Organization Sustainability Plan.

III. Operations: Information / Education Priorities and District Operations, Measures of Success, and Goals

Community Outreach and Engagement

It is of foundational importance to the Thurston Conservation District to engage the community in active conservation and the regenerative use of natural resources. Through volunteer projects and participation in district programs and services, we seek to facilitate a strong relationship with landowners and managers in our area. By increasing our presence and continuously adapting to meet the communities' needs, the Thurston Conservation District can provide effective conservation programs.

Measure of Success: Number of volunteers

Goal: By 2020, Thurston Conservation District will increase volunteer participation by 25%.

Measure of Success: Community organizations reached

Goal: By 2018, increase outreach to 10 new community organizations to raise awareness of the Thurston Conservation District and the services that are offered.

Measure of Success: Outreach materials revised

Goal: By 2018, 100% of Thurston Conservation District outreach materials will be revised to ensure the use of consistent and professional branding, materials, and communications.

Measure of Success: Elected officials reached

Goal: By 2017, Thurston Conservation District will conduct outreach to all elected officials representing Thurston County to increase recognition of conservation districts as local resources for conservation on private lands.

Adult and Youth Conservation Education

The Thurston Conservation District seeks to provide in-depth natural resource education to both youth and adults. Education is the first step to conservation. In collaboration with our partners, we provide workshops, on-site tours, training courses and other events that target raised awareness of our priority natural resources.

Measure of Success: Number of people following up on education opportunities by using services (e.g. attends a soil management workshop and then requests a soil test)

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will have increased the number of people using district services as a result of participating in an educational program by 25%.

Measure of Success: Area involved in [Clear Choices for Clean Water](#) program

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will expand the Clear Choices for Clean Water program across the county in order to positively affect water quality.

Measure of Success: Participation in environmental education

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will have increased the number of people participating in environmental educational programming to 5000.

Measure of Success: Creation of successional planning course

Goal: By 2018, Thurston Conservation District will create and implement a successional planning course to support the transition of knowledge between generations and land stewards.

Measure of Success: Implementation of [South Sound GREEN's](#) Vision for the Future

Goal: By 2022, Thurston Conservation District will implement South Sound GREEN's 2016-2020 Vision for the Future and continue to improve access to environmental education for local teachers and students.

District Operations

As an organization, Thurston Conservation District believes in operating in an honorable and transparent manner. We leverage funding from multiple sources to increase our conservation impact on the ground. We pride ourselves on accountable financial processes, diligent and wise use of public and private dollars, and clean audits. In addition, we will continue to find sustainable avenues to grow as an organization and increase our positive impact in Thurston County.

Measure of Success: Establishment of a long-term local funding mechanism

Goal: By 2017, consider alternatives to assessment such as rates and charges.

Measure of Success: All cities in Thurston County are included in the district boundaries

Goal: Cities of Yelm, Tenino and Rainer are incorporated into the district's boundaries.

Measure of Success: Increased funding level to meet demand and support programs

Goal: By 2022, increase funding by 50% to support programs and delivery.

Measure of Success: Permanent district controlled office/facility

Goal: By 2019, district will have re-located to a new facility.

Measure of Success: Increase in staff capacity to meet demand

Goal: By 2022, increase staff capacity by 25% to meet program and population needs

Measure of Success: Increase in staff and board participation in skill building opportunities

Goal: By 2018, each staff and board member will participate in annual professional development and skill building opportunities.

Measure of Success: High degree of accountability

Goal: By 2022, the Thurston Conservation District has demonstrated consistent accountability and responsibility for public funds.

Goal: By 2017, achieve and maintain at least a compliance level of accountability per the State Conservation Commission.

Measure of Success: Increased recognition of District by Thurston County residents

Goal: By 2022, District has reached 100,000 Thurston County residents.

Measure of Success: Implementation of internal program geared at continued growth of Thurston Conservation District.

Goal: By 2022, District has implemented “All Rising Together” to improve internal organizational culture

Staffing Needs (Including existing and future positions)

- 4 full-time natural resource planner positions
 - 2 habitat technical positions
 - 2 AmeriCorps positions
 - South Sound GREEN Coordinator
 - Administrative Assistant
 - 2 Ed/Outreach positions
 - 2 shared resource positions with WSU Extension and Thurston County
 - 1 full-time finance/HR director
 - 1 Deputy Director
 - 1 Executive Director
 - Engineering staff
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GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS

Best Available Science: The most defensible and reliable peer reviewed data available at the time of reference. Most typically that data is determined through research studies through land grant universities.

303(d) list: Water quality-limited water bodies (ocean waters, estuaries, lakes, and streams) that fall short of state surface water quality standards and are not expected to improve within the next two years. Section 303(d) of the federal Clean Water Act requires Washington State to periodically prepare a list of all surface waters in the state for which beneficial uses of the water (e.g. for drinking, recreation, aquatic habitat, and industrial uses) are impaired by pollutants.

Best Management Practices (BMPs): Physical, structural, or operational practices that, when used singularly or in combination, prevent or reduce pollutant discharges.

Regenerative: The processes that restore, renew or revitalize their own sources of energy and materials, creating sustainable systems that integrate the needs of society with the integrity of nature.

Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL): A TMDL is a pollution budget and includes a calculation of the maximum amount of a pollutant that can occur in a waterbody and allocates the necessary reductions to one or more pollutant sources.

Conservation Plans: A voluntary process to improve natural resource management on private property, which includes exploration of management challenges and objectives, an inventory of natural resources on the property and a list of recommended alternatives to solve production and natural resources issues.

All Rising Together: A District plan (to be developed with board and staff input, and to be approved by the board) to help retain highly skilled staff and invested, knowledgeable board members. This includes competitive salaries for staff, health and wellness programs for staff, allocated funding for

professional develop for board and staff, annual performance reviews for staff and board (with input from others outside the organization), and annual retreats for board and staff.

Economically Viable Working Lands: Land that is utilized for agricultural production (including forestry) that are sustainable in terms of investing financial resources into the operations.

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