



Thurston
Conservation
District



ANNUAL REPORT

2023

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The mission of Thurston Conservation District is to educate and assist the citizens of Thurston County in the management of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations, inspiring voluntary, incentive-based conservation practices.



Message from Leadership



As Chair of the Board of Supervisors, I am delighted to report that the state of your conservation district is strong. As you will see in this annual report, over the past year we have been engaged in diverse range of projects, ranging from a multi-year, multi-million-dollar restoration project on the Skookumchuck River – the largest conservation project in our history – to supporting small urban residents interested in producing their own food. All of this work has been made possible by an engaged Board, strong leadership by our Executive Director, and most importantly a talented and committed staff of conservation professionals.

Our work continues to be shaped by the priorities identified in our Five Year Strategic Plan, and made possible by catalyzing partnerships with a wide range of tradition and non-traditional partners. We have leveraged our local Rates and Charges funding through additional local, state and national contracts and grants, allowing us to have increasingly

greater impacts.

Over the past year we continued to connect directly with our community through our annual native plant sale, the Harvest Festival, a planned Growers Conference focused on climate change, and dozens of workshops and educational events. We have expanded our focus on urban agriculture through an innovative partnership with the City of Olympia to build community gardens and connect landowners with potential farmers through the Farm My Yard and South Sound Farm Link programs. Our Soil Health program has helped even more people become better stewards of their land, and we've directly engaged thousands of students in conservation through field trips, workshops, and on the ground activities.

At the same time, we've been focused service to our community, we've strengthened our management and fiscal systems, including transitioning to a new financial institution that is more aligned with our goals and mission. In addition, while continuing to make progress towards our dream of a regional Conservation and Educational Center, we planned for a 2024 relocation our office to a new location that is more easily accessible to the community, and better meets the needs of our growing organization.

I continue to be honored to serve our community, and to work with such a creative and talented group of individuals. I'm proud of what we have collectively accomplished and confident of even more success in the coming year.

- TJ Johnson, Board Chair



This year has brought a lot of new and exciting changes to Thurston Conservation District – from growing our organization to meet the needs of our growing community, to diversifying our programming and developing new partnerships, to moving closer to our dream of creating a community Conservation and Education Center. The Thurston Conservation District board and staff have been busy working hard to make a difference in our community!

Thurston Conservation District aims to increase community resiliency in the face of climate change. One exciting accomplishment this year is our work to create fire resilient communities to reduce the risk of devastating impacts of wildfire to people and property. To support this we've hired Thurston CD's first-ever Stewardship Forester, secured grant funding to support our local fire authorities, coordinated regional fire preparedness planning, and we're excited to help existing partners fill gaps in community wildfire preparedness.

TCD is the go-to organization for community members who need help with land management. We accomplish this through a wide variety of programs and services that fit our community's unique land management needs and act as a hub to connect residents with partner organizations for collaborative conservation on the ground.

We are so grateful for a community with a strong voice to guide our work, for the tireless dedication of our volunteer board, and for the expertise and unrelenting passion of our staff that make Thurston Conservation District a truly impactful organization, serving this beautiful place we call home.

- Sarah Moorehead, Executive Director

Recognition of Partners

American Farmland Trust	Natural Waters Design, LLC	Thurston Climate Action Team
Anchor QEA	Nisqually Community Garden	Thurston County
Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge	Nisqually Indian Tribe	Thurston County Ag Advisory Committee
Blue Coast Engineering	Nisqually Reach Nature Center	Thurston County Environmental Health
Bounty for Families	Nisqually River Council	Thurston County Fairgrounds
Capitol Land Trust	Nisqually River Education Project	Thurston County Farm Bureau
Center for Natural Lands Management	Nisqually Stream Stewards	Thurston County Master Gardeners
Chehalis Basin Partnership	NOAA Bay Watershed Education and Training	Thurston EcoNet
Chehalis Basin Education Consortium	North Thurston Public Schools	Thurston Economic Development Council
City of Lacey	Northwest Ag Business Center	Thurston Regional Planning Council
City of Olympia	Northwest Youth Corps	Timberland Regional Libraries
City of Tenino	NOVA Middle School	Trout Unlimited
City of Tumwater	Office of the Chehalis Basin	Tumwater School District
City of Yelm	Olympia Coalition for Ecosystems Preservation	US Department of Agriculture
Community Farmland Trust	Olympia School District	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis	Pacific Education Institute	Veterans Conservation Corps
Creekside Conservancy	Pacific Shellfish Institute	WA Association of Conservation Districts
Dawkins Charitable Trust	Partners for Fish & Wildlife (USFW)	WA Conservation Corps
Department of Defense	Pierce Conservation District	WA Conservation Society
Ecostudies Institute	Pierce County	WA Department of Ecology
Farm Service Agency	Puget Sound Conservation District Caucus	WA Department of Health
Grays Harbor Conservation District	Puget Sound Estuarium	WA Department of Veterans Affairs
Green Diamond Resource Company	Puget Sound Partnership	WA Federation of State Employees
Griffin School District	Puget Sound Restoration Fund	WA State Conservation Commission
GRuB	QWG Applied Geology, LLC	WA State Department of Natural Resources
JBLM Sentinel Landscape Partnership	Rainier School District	Washington Farmland Trust
Joint Base Lewis McChord	Resilient Veterans	Waterfall Engineering, LLC
Lewis Conservation District	Sentinel Landscape Partnership	WET Science Center
Mason Conservation District	South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group	WSDA
National Association of Conservation Districts	Squaxin Island Tribe	WSU Extension Thurston County
Native Plant Salvage	Taylor Shellfish	Yelm Community Schools
Natural Resources Conservation Service	The Evergreen State College	
Natural Systems Design		

Thurston Conservation District serves community members who reside on the Indigenous Lands of the Nisqually, Squaxin, and Chehalis Peoples. We give thanks for their Indigenous knowledge and leadership in our shared work of stewarding this place for present and future generations.

2023 Community Award Recipients



DOUG RUSHTON CONSERVATION LEGACY AWARD

Erica Guttman

Erica embodies conservation ethics in all her work as an educator, advocate, and life-long native plant and natural resource conservation enthusiast. She is a founder of the Native Plant Salvage Foundation and her work on rain gardens, stormwater management, and hedgerows have impacted the entire Puget Sound region. Erica demonstrates this dedication through active partnerships and on-the-ground work. We're grateful for Erica's work in our community and partnership.



PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

Jesse Ratcliff, Ratcliff Farm

Jesse has gone above and beyond in his implementation and execution of Best Management Practices on his land and for his cattle operation. This has included the installation of a watering facility and exclusion fencing through the Voluntary Stewardship Program. He has always been an advocate for working the land in a cost-effective and environmentally friendly way.



LAND STEWARD OF THE YEAR

Muhammad Ayub, Dancing Goats and Singing Chickens Farm

Dr. Muhammad Ayub has dedicated his life to learning and teaching others the importance of natural resources and agriculture through the cultivation of his working-learning farm in Yelm. He and his family provide space for veterans and underserved community members to have the opportunity to contribute to the local agricultural economy while honing life skills.



LAND STEWARD OF THE YEAR

The Townsend Family

Inspired by their daughter Margaret's passion for environmental stewardship, Kathryn and Patrick patiently worked for 3 years with TCD to design and - in 2023 - to realize their restoration project on Zangle Cove. They removed over 150 feet of bulkhead from the marine shoreline, as well as numerous tires and other debris. They are excited to share their property as a demonstration site for education/tours, so that others can see this example of marine shoreline stewardship.



EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

Heidi Yerrington

Heidi has inspired numerous classrooms of fifth grade students to work towards a healthier and more sustainable environment. She creates a fun and exciting atmosphere for students to find their passions in science, conservation, and art. Heidi's participation in South Sound GREEN as a NTPS teacher was helpful in developing and implementing the district-wide Watershed Explorers program for all 5th grade students, who now participate in Water Quality Monitoring annually.



PARTNER OF THE YEAR

Ashley Arai, Thurston County

Ashley listens, seeks to understand, and then uses her brilliant skillset to be a strong advocate for voluntary stewardship and the expansion of agriculture in our community. Without Ashley, Thurston County residents would not have the new opportunities provided for agriculture through updated ordinances that celebrate the efforts of land stewards.



VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Aimee Richardson, Creekside Conservancy

Aimee has demonstrated again and again her dedication to conservation goals. Between pursuing multiple funding sources to secure property acquisition in Cozy Valley, Tenino and organizing an educational fundraiser event for the Creekside Conservancy, Aimee has a long history of championing conservation in the Scatter Creek watershed! Aimee also actively connects the Conservancy with TCD and our programs and educational opportunities.



STUDENT LEADER OF THE YEAR

Tina Wagner, The Evergreen State College

Tina brings an excitement and enthusiasm to her work and studies that is contagious. Her ability to see complex connections between social and environmental issues makes her a strong advocate and leader for regenerative agriculture, local food production, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Tina worked with TCD as an intern and volunteer during the completion of her Masters of Environmental Studies at Evergreen in 2023.



**NATURAL
RESOURCE
PRIORITIES, GOALS,
& ACTIONS IN
2023**

Climate Change Adaptation & Mitigation

2023 Highlights

16

Workshops held to help farmers adapt to climate change

47

Households supported with a Wildfire Ready Neighbors home risk assessment and recommendations

3

[Sustainable Farms and Fields](#) projects were funded to support on-the-ground climate change mitigation and adaptation. These included equipment purchases, pollinator education, and installation of hedgerow and agroforestry practices.



The Wildfire Ready Neighbor's program offers free home risk assessments with tailored plans for how to make your home and surrounding area fire ready.



Attendees at a hands-on workshop about hedgerows learned about proper planting techniques and assisted in the completion of a hedgerow project.

To help farmers, growers, and all community members understand and adapt to the changing climate, we continue to engage in and communicate the best available science through education and technical assistance services.

We support our community in proactive climate change adaptation such as flood and fire prevention, drought mitigations, crop and plant adaptations, and alternative pest and plant disease control.

We are committed to working with our community to conserve and protect our natural resources in response to climate change. This is integrated into all our programming. In addition, we strive to demonstrate sustainable practices in our work and office culture.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

TCD GETS A NO-TILL DRILL

In 2023, Thurston Conservation District added a much-requested no-till drill to our equipment rental program. No-till drills are a kind of seeding equipment that works by cutting through plant residue and soil, placing the seed at the depth set by the operator, and then pressing the soil back over the seed for good soil to seed contact. This method of seeding, as opposed to tilling up the soil and spreading seed, allows for increased soil carbon retention, minimal disruption to the soil microbiome, reduced soil erosion, and increased germination rates.

Our drill was purchased with funding from the Washington State program [Sustainable Farms and Fields](#), which aims to fund projects that are quantitatively reducing carbon and supporting climate change adaptations and mitigations on the ground. We also conducted a cooperator survey in order to choose the correct size and scale of equipment to purchase. A demonstration of the drill was held in May 2023 at Nelson Ranch in Tenino.



Drill demo attendees listen to the equipment expert share how to hook up and operate the equipment for best results.



Our current drill is 10 feet wide with an 8 foot working width. Renters need a 1-inch pin hitch and a 7-way blade or 7-way round electrical hookup to transport the drill. The drill is operated by a tractor with at least 45 horsepower and one hydraulic port. Find rental information on our website www.thurstoncd.com.

The no-till drill we purchased specifically includes a seed box that is equipped to drill in native seed in order to be used for prairie restoration projects as well as supporting pasture seeding.

Local Food Production & 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 processing and transportation, equitable access to healthy local food, and the economic viability of our agricultural community and region. Locally produced food connects people to the land, improves our region's food security, creates more informed land stewards, and fosters support for resource conservation, the agricultural community, and farmland preservation.

2023 Highlights

3

New community gardens planned in collaboration with the City of Olympia, GRuB, and the South Sound YMCA. Learn more on page 10!

76

Rentals of our Poultry Processing Equipment. Additional funding was also secured to expand the equipment to include a third mobile unit.

4

Workshops focused on backyard food production and home gardening offered



WSU SNAP Educators taught a class on preserving and using food scraps, like apple peel chips and carrot top pesto, during TCD's Harvest Festival



(Above) TCD stayed connected to the Yelm Community Garden through workshops. Pictured, a hands-on workshop on how to use and terminate cover crops in raised bed gardens. (Left) Collaboration with WSU Extension, Ecostudies Institute, NRCS, and Partners for Fish & Wildlife continued to support the SW WA Grazing Association. Pictured, a workshop at Broadfield Farms on ecological grazing.



PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CITY OF OLYMPIA TO SUPPORT URBAN AGRICULTURE

In 2023, Thurston Conservation District entered into an agreement with the City of Olympia to support greater access to urban agriculture. This partnership focused on three main areas: 1) support for community gardens, 2) support for urban growers through review of City codes, and 3) preservation of farmland and access to growing space. Through this agreement, TCD planned for new community gardens to be built in 2024 and supported existing community gardens. In particular, we were able to bring the Olympia Community Court Garden back on-line to serve Community Court clients and surrounding community members. This included revamping beds, building compost bins, and getting ready for irrigation and propagation infrastructure. Before, during, and after pictures below.



Our work also included the creation of an urban land-matching program, similar to our South Sound FarmLink program, called Farm My Yard. Folks with available open/vacant lots, large yards, or other available growing spaces can be matched with those seeking urban growing space for personal or commercial use. Learn how to register your available space or sign up as a land seeker on our website. This work will continue through an expanded partnership with the City of Olympia in 2024.

Producer Support & Preservation of Working Lands

2023 Highlights

15

New farmers supported with resources, information, and farmland access assistance

488

Best Management Practices recommended via 207 site visits with community members

7

Forest Management Plans developed for community members and their working forests



To continue to support the preservation of working lands, TCD offers technical assistance and conservation planning services to community members. We work to educate new and beginning stewards of working lands, assist small and large producers and commercial and non-commercial operations, and help land stewards meet their goals by using Best Management Practices.

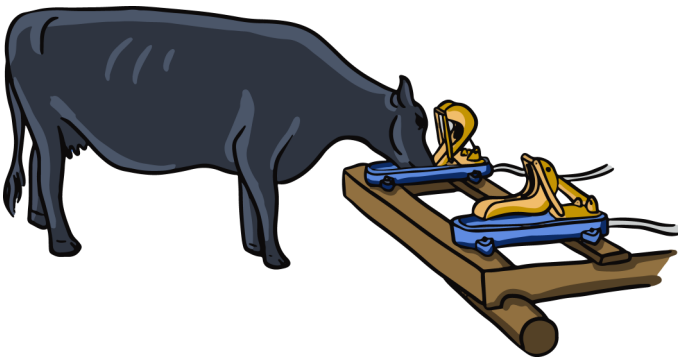


(Top) A luncheon, featuring the American Farmland Trust, was held for realtors to learn about farmland loss and how they can support their clients in buying and selling farmland in a way that benefits the preservation of working lands. (Below) Installation of a stock watering facility helped a local cattle farm control mud, preserve water quality, and improve their operation. (Right) TCD's capacity to support working forests increased through education for small forest landowners.

This work is done in partnership with key organizations and individuals to provide quality technical, financial, and educational resources. This work helps promote regenerative agriculture and sustainable forestry while encouraging the conservation of natural resources, the and economic viability of our local farming and conservation operations.

SERVICE HIGHLIGHT

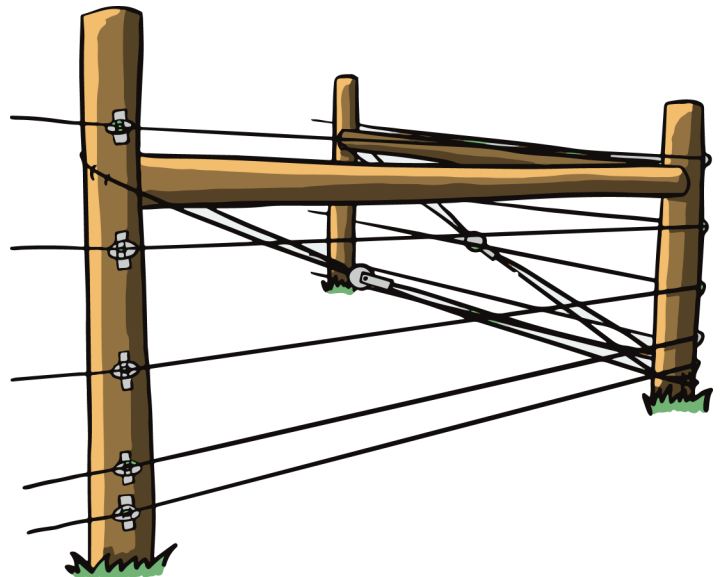
TCD SUPPORTS COMMUNITY MEMBERS THROUGH REGULATORY PROCESSES SUCH AS INSPECTIONS, REFERRALS & PERMITTING



One of the unique ways that Thurston Conservation District supports our community is through the process of working with our local regulatory partners. As a non-regulatory agency, Thurston CD's staff don't report or enforce any regulations. If community members are contacted by a regulatory

body with concerns about practices, we can help! They get the opportunity to be referred to work with TCD to solve natural resource concerns, gain access to supportive planning and funding, and ultimately solve and improve any concerns while helping the landowner meet their goals. In addition to this way of working with referral cases, Thurston CD staff support our cooperators with procuring necessary permits for projects related to our work together and can be on-hand to support on-farm inspections for certifications such as dairy nutrient management.

This component of our work, while sometimes complicated and inclusive of many partners, is a core tenant of how we help support voluntary conservation in our community. It is vital that not only our community members, but our partner organizations, know we can offer this support so that everyone feels heard and helped. By taking landowner privacy seriously, we're able to be a trusted partner that can facilitate long-lasting improvements for the health and wellbeing of our whole community!



Protect & Restore Ecosystems

We recognize the quantity and diversity of critical ecosystems within our county and all the ways we collectively can impact these ecosystems. This helps direct our work that is focused on protecting intact habitats, while also working to restore degraded areas. Thurston County is home to state and federally-listed endangered species, prairie ecosystems, vital marine and estuarine habitats, forestland, sensitive riparian areas, and shellfish beds. Education is the first step to resource conservation on private lands and the District does this through workshops and one-on-one work with community members. We also support this work through the coordination of financial resources and we help facilitate ecosystem recovery projects at the local level.



TCD's Habitat Field Crew worked on restoration projects throughout our watersheds in marine and freshwater settings. Together they cleared invasives, worked on maintenance of established projects, installed new riparian buffers, and supported ecosystem restoration.

2023 Highlights

100+

Acres of invasive species treated— a metric that's been growing every year!

166

Community members helped with habitat restoration technical assistance—over three times our 2023 goal!

66

Shoreline homeowners supported to improve shoreline habitat—220% of our 2023 goal and this included the removal of 2 bulkheads.



We found fun and creative ways to share the benefits of native plants and other habitat restoration tools through our social media outreach. Learn more about our two annual plant sales on pg. 14.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

TCD NOW OFFERS TWO NATIVE PLANT SALES EACH YEAR



TCD's annual spring Native Plant Festival & Sale is a well known and loved community event! The goal of this occasion is to create an opportunity for community members to purchase native plants at an affordable price. It also serves as an educational opportunity for residents to learn about the benefits of including native plants in their landscape to benefit wildlife and improve how our ecosystem functions.

To serve our growing community and support another ecologically and culturally significant landscape, TCD has expanded our reach by offering a second annual plant sale. Our Fall Native Bulb & Seed Sale's focus is to get species that thrive in our historical South Sound prairie systems, into the hands of home-growers. This historical prairie range encompasses much of Thurston County and many of our local soil types are well suited for these species. We offer plant species like common and large camas (*Camassia spp.*), chocolate lily (*Fritillaria affinis*), Menzies' Larkspur (*Delphinium menziesii*), and many more! We are thrilled to empower our local stewards to incorporate these important species in their own landscapes and looking into the future we hope to continue expanding our plant sale offerings to support our precious ecosystems and the communities that reside on them.

Pre-orders for the Fall Bulb and Seed Sale begin in August each year and spring sale pre-orders open in October each year. Find more info at www.store.thurstoncd.com.



TCD Staff, Taylor Sherrow and Mara Healy, help customers pick up their pre-ordered bulbs and seeds at our Annual Harvest Festival.

Soil Conservation & Health



As our climate changes and we experience more periods of drought, our soil needs and growing practices change. Promoting things like cover crop and educating farmers and gardeners on how to use cover crops in all scales is increasingly important to help with building organic matter, retaining soil moisture, and increasing yields. Pictured is a before and after of a rye and vetch cover crop mix in a raised bed. The after shows the cover crop terminated and ready to be top dressed for planting.

Soils are one of our living and life-giving natural resources, and much of our work is in support of local soil health. As world population and food production demands rise, keeping our soil healthy and productive is of paramount importance. By farming using soil health principles and systems that include no-till, cover cropping, and diverse rotations, more and more farmers are actually increasing their soil's organic matter and improving microbial activity. As a result, farmers are sequestering more carbon, increasing water infiltration, and improving wildlife and pollinator habitat—all while harvesting better profits and often better yields.

In 2023 we offered more soil tests than ever, increased access to nutrient spreader equipment, and did extensive education on no-till and carbon sequestration practices for our community.

2023 Highlights

139

Community members received soil analysis recommendations for over **220** different soil tests and a wide range of crops

23

Rentals of soil amending equipment

Read about our No-Till Drill on page 8

Increased staff capacity and efficiency for processing soil test results to support more community members in 2024 and beyond



TCD's manure spreaders serve the range in size of farms in Thurston County. Our smaller spreader, pictured, can be effectively towed with a riding lawn mower while our larger capacity spreader requires more horse power.

SERVICE HIGHLIGHT

WE CAN HELP TEST MORE THAN JUST YOUR SOIL



Did you know that Thurston Conservation District can support you in testing more than just your garden soil? Sometimes a different kind of test will be more useful for answering your questions or you're looking for information on your manure, compost, or hay and forage. Our testing facilitation and interpretation services can help!

In addition to our Basic and Comprehensive soil tests, we offer:

POST-CONSTRUCTION TESTING

A Post-construction Permit Test is recommended if you need to know your organic matter content and cation exchange capacity (C.E.C) for a final permit approval with Thurston County. This test is similar to the basic soil test but does not include nitrogen.

PLANT NUTRIENT ANALYSIS

A plant nutrient analysis allows you to test the green matter from a plant. These are especially useful for perennial plants and are often used by people looking to amend their orchards by testing plant tissues like leaves.

MANURE & COMPOST ANALYSIS

A manure or compost analysis allows tells you about the nutrient content of your compost and manure prior to spreading or adding it to your garden. This is a great pairing with a soil test so you can know if what you're adding to your soil will help meet your soil deficiencies and by how much. We can also test your purchased manure or compost.

MANURE LAGOON WATER ANALYSIS

Similar to a manure test, this test will tell you about the content of your manure lagoon water prior to spreading. This test is a requirement for dairy operations as a part of maintaining your Dairy Nutrient Management Plan.

HAY & FEED ANALYSIS

A hay or feed analysis test will tell you about the nutrient content of your feed. This is vital for ensuring you're properly feeding and supplementing your livestock. If you cut your own hay or purchase local hay, this is a great idea to get a picture of the protein and dry-matter content of your feed.

Find submission guidelines and more information on our website!

www.thurstoncd.com/working-lands/soil-testing/

Water Quality & Quantity

Within Thurston County's 774 square miles are nine different watersheds. These often invisible geographic landmarks impact where water moves and how it ultimately reaches the Puget Sound and Pacific Ocean or goes back into our aquifers. Water quality and quantity impact every sector of life here. Education and technical assistance to all community members is aimed at informing and mitigating each person's impact on water quality and quantity. We strive for clean and plentiful drinking water for all, restoration of polluted streams and rivers, and upgrades to commercial and recreational shellfish harvesting areas. This work is done through the implementation of water quality enhancement projects, green stormwater infrastructure, and innovative and adaptive technologies in irrigation and water management.



2023 Highlights

53

Shoreline homeowners received guidance and education on Best Management Practices for supporting healthy shellfish growing areas

Learn about a bulkhead removal project on page 18

13

Best Management Practices to reduce nutrient runoff implemented

250

Residents given guidance on water conservation



In 2023, 13 water quality enhancing projects for local farmers were completed. TCD reimburses cooperators for 90% of the cost of a project. (Top right) A livestock watering facility supports rotational grazing and livestock management; (Lower left) A manure storage facility and heavy use area for hogs; (Lower center) A three-bin composting facility with heavy use gravel area in front for a horse owner; (Lower right) Mid-construction on a heavy-use animal containment area to facilitate a local ranch in humanely and safely containing their stock prior to processing. These projects help protect water quality while improving the function and day-to-day chores for the farmers. These projects were funded through the [Voluntary Stewardship Program](#).

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

BULKHEAD REMOVAL COMPLETED ON ZANGLE COVE



In 2023, we completed a multi-year project on Zangle Cove to remove an unnecessary and failing bulkhead. This project was part of our Shore Friendly Thurston program. The Zangle Cove site had 200 feet of armor and tires located on a marine shoreline. The adjacent upland was dominated by invasive weeds. Tires placed in the beach and slope provided access but also a source of pollution. Unnecessary bulkheads like this impact the marine ecosystem, coastal processes, and residents living on the shoreline. Armor reduces salmon and forage fish habitat, makes beach access difficult, and stops natural coastal processes that maintain Puget Sound beaches and nearshore habitat.

The restoration project removed 200 feet of marine shoreline armor, tires, and weeds and replaced lost sediment using a barge (pictured below). Construction also included a custom engineered staircase that can raise and lower to support access to the beach. In the future, additional upland re-planting of the bluff will increase the long term stability of this site and create more nearshore habitat.

This project expanded critical marine shoreline habitat for salmon, forage fish, and bird species, enabled coastal processes such as erosion and sediment movement to continue, and restored the marine riparian area with native trees and shrubs to benefit wildlife, water quality, temperature, and to provide food to the nearshore ecosystem.

To learn more about Shore Friendly Thurston, visit our website and listen to a *Conservation Staters* podcast episode with the landowners of this restoration project ([Ep. XX](#)).





EDUCATION PRIORITIES & GOALS IN 2023

Community Outreach & Engagement

It is of foundational importance to the Thurston Conservation District to engage the community in active conservation and the use of natural resources. Through volunteer projects, workshops, tours, hands-on learning opportunities, print and multi-media resources, and social media outreach, we seek to facilitate a strong relationship with community members in our area. It's our goal to help everyone see themselves in the work we do and make connections with our community to increase accessibility of natural resources and their conservation. This area of our work is constantly adapting and heavily influenced by the feedback and requests we get from our community.



(Top) 103 volunteers participated in this year's Orca Recovery Day event. In 2023 we again partnered with the City of Olympia to support restoration at Squaxin Park. (Bottom) Volunteers of all ages joined us for a sunny MLK Day restoration project on the Deschutes River to improve riparian habitat for a private landowner. (Right) Increased outreach team staff capacity meant we were able to table and attend more events in 2023 than ever before!

2023 Highlights

Increased Spanish language resources through translation of handouts and inclusion of bilingual resources at tabling events

5

Field-tours of conservation projects for local elected officials were held. These are opportunities to advocate for voluntary conservation programs and services in our community

738

Volunteers engaged, resulting in **1,674+** hours of community service benefitting conservation in our community



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

ANOTHER YEAR OF CONSERVATION STARTERS



Conservation Starters, TCD's podcast, filled another year with educational, inspiring, and thoughtful stories and discussions from and about our local community. In its second year, our podcast has a total of 3,587 downloads with listeners tuning in from all 7 continents! During this year's episodes, we had a series of inspiring conversations with local farmers and community members dedicated to stewarding their landscapes. We shared in riveting discussions with several area experts who broke down complex environmental issues and shared tangible ways our community can create impactful differences. We learned all the tools we should keep in our toolbox (regular podcast listeners will appreciate this!). We even shared a few good laughs together! A big thank you to our community for being a part of this exciting project, we hope you will continue to listen along as we welcome more exciting guests and have more intriguing and heartwarming conversations in 2024.

Top 2023 Conservation Starters Episodes:

- ***Farm on!*** An episode all about the importance of farmland preservation.
- ***Grazing for the Good of Prairies*** A breakdown of how our local ranchers are supporting healthy South Sound Prairie systems while supporting our local agriculture economy.
- ***A Changing Climate & a Resilient Community*** A conversation about how our changing climate is impacting Thurston County communities.



TCD staff Nora and podcast host Kiana recording a podcast episode about building connections with our community.

These and all recorded episodes are available on all major streaming platforms and at www.conservationstarters.com

Adult & Youth Conservation Education

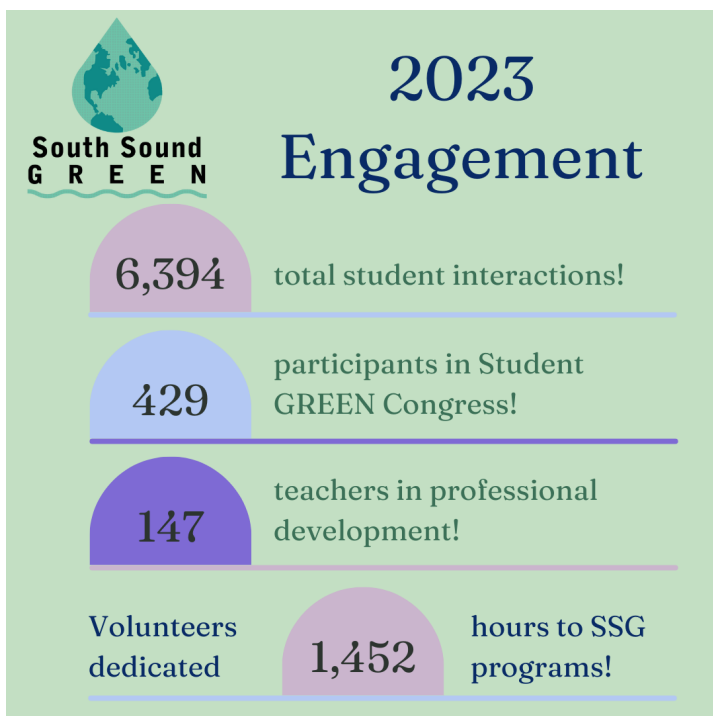
We believe education is the first step to conservation. This is reflected in the diversity of programming we support for adults and youth of all ages. We offer workshops, on-site tours, in-depth training courses, hands-on service learning opportunities, and virtual events to help individuals become stewards of our shared natural resources and to learn how to meet their own goals. By supporting learners of all ages, we work to instill a lifelong ethic of stewardship. We also strive to inform Thurston Co. community members about training and education opportunities by acting as a hub of information about natural resources and related topics. Our education team works extensively with community



(Above) Elementary students learned about the connection between terrestrial bluffs and salmon habitat on a field trip to the Nisqually Bluffs. (Left) In-field and on-farm settings continue to be some of our richest learning spaces—here SW WA Grazing Association members tour a local dairy to learn about grazing.



2023 Highlights



62

Educational events, workshops, field trips, tours, and classroom lessons held

4,015 +

People reached via virtual and in-person community events

53

Teens engaged in volunteer & natural resource career events through our [Teens in Thurston](#) program. In its 3rd year, this program is exceeding our attendance goal by 500%!

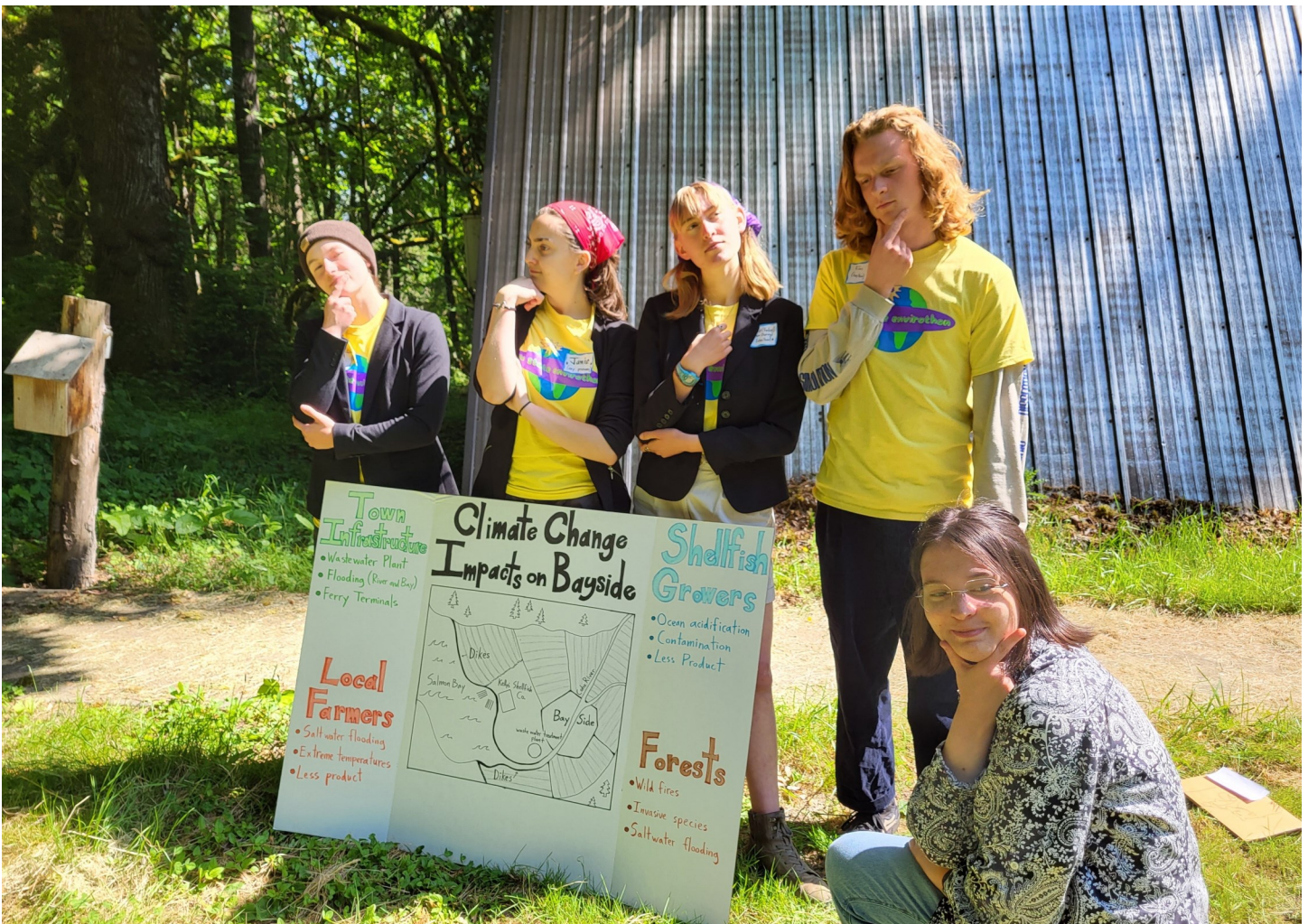


PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

AVANTI HIGH SCHOOL PLACES 3RD IN WASHINGTON STATE ENVIROTHON COMPETITION

Every year Thurston Conservation District, in collaboration with neighboring conservation districts, hosts the South Puget Sound Regional Envirothon competition. This North American event is an opportunity for high school students to compete in teams of five to demonstrate their knowledge in soil, forestry, aquatics, wildlife, and a current environmental issue topic.

On April 19th, 2023, high school students from around the Puget Sound region convened at Squaxin Park in Olympia to test their knowledge. Students participated in written and hands-on exams and even prepared and presented to a panel of judges on the current issue topic, wastes to resources. The winning team from each County had the opportunity to compete at the State Level. Our winning Thurston County team, Avanti High School, attended the State Competition at Sound View Camp in Longbranch, WA where they placed third out of all the teams in Washington State! This exciting event is not only a fun team competition, but also a way for our youth to learn more about various environmental topics. We are sending a huge congratulations to Avanti High School and all the teams that competed and look forward to supporting more of our next generation of conservation leaders at the 2024 Envirothon event and for years to come!



Avanti's winning team poses with the poster they made for their oral presentation at the State Envirothon competition.



**DISTRICT
OPERATIONS 2023
HIGHLIGHTS**

CONSERVATION & EDUCATION CENTER

FEASIBILITY STUDY UPDATE

In 2023, Thurston Conservation District (TCD) commissioned Heartland LLC, a real estate consulting firm, to conduct a feasibility study to learn if it would be realistic and appropriate for TCD to purchase land and develop our own Conservation and Education Center (CEC) in Thurston County. The consultants produced a report considering zoning, parcel, and development cost data. This is a summary of their findings.

TCD envisions a *Conservation Hub* campus on an at least 10-acre property that will house TCD's offices; indoor and outdoor education and event spaces; vehicle and farm equipment shops and storage; plant propagation holding beds and cold storage; outdoor demonstration areas; parking; and leasable office space for partners. The District hopes to purchase the property for the CEC in 2024.

TCD plans a Conservation and Education Center that is not only an office building but is also a destination for families and students. Our vision for the CEC is a place where adults and youth can come to be inspired by TCD's work to preserve and restore natural resources and learn how they can also take steps to preserve our waters, air, soil, and habitats.

WE CAN DO IT! IT'S BEEN DONE BEFORE

We found many examples of conservation education centers around the US. The feasibility study consultants researched four of them, including two conservation and education centers run by conservation districts in the Pacific Northwest. The motivation for these conservation districts to own and develop their own center is the same as TCD's motivation – a stable permanent home to better serve the community, the reclamation of a brownfield property or the preservation of a property from development, and the long-term savings and other benefits that come from land ownership.

THURSTON COUNTY IS A GREAT PLACE FOR A CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION CENTER

A Conservation and Education Center site will require specific location and physical characteristics. TCD has project sites all around the county and community members from all corners of Thurston County use our popular services. TCD staff and renters transport heavy equipment in and out of our office site; and school buses of students benefit from TCD's K-12 programs.

These considerations impact the chosen site and its surrounding roads. The plan is for the CEC to offer demonstrations of Best Management Practices (BMPs), so ideally the property will have physical characteristics like streams, wetlands, arable land, and/or woodlands to do this.

The consultants developed tools that TCD can use to identify suitable properties in Thurston County for the CEC. As part of this process, the consultants communicated with Thurston County and each of the eight city jurisdictions to identify the land use types permitted for a CEC. In those conversations, **the consultants learned that the County and all Cities support the development of a CEC in their jurisdictions.**

The consultants conducted a GIS-based parcel study where they searched for properties between 10 and 15 acres that allow for community center land use and that can support a 14,000-square-foot structure. Site physical characteristics like developed or vacant, or sites that include a wetland, fish-bearing stream, or a tree-canopy greater than 3 acres were also considered. Those sites identified were not categorized as being available or not, just that they exist within our community.

Continued on next page

CONSERVATION & EDUCATION CENTER

FEASIBILITY STUDY UPDATE

Continued

WE CAN'T DO IT ALONE

The consultants heard a common theme from existing conservation centers. All the centers expressed the importance of community engagement and the need for the District to build a community of partners who share a commitment to the development of a Conservation and Education Center. The centers researched for the feasibility study enlisted partners to support visioning, planning, design, funding, and property development – including volunteers who helped with tree planting, site clean-up, and restoration work. We look forward to continuing to engage you in this process!

THE PRICE TAG

When considering the costs of developing a Conservation and Education Center, the feasibility study consultants provided a cost analysis which included the land cost, site development, and building costs of three strawman sites in Thurston County. The land costs of the 3 strawman sites studied varied from \$0.8M to \$1.6M. Variation was based on the site's proximity to Olympia, existing structures, existing services, and usable land area. Site development costs ranged from \$6.7M to \$8.5M depending on existing services and usable land area. The building costs for new built-for-purpose buildings for each of the 3 sites were estimated at \$23.43M. The building costs to renovate existing structures varied from \$15.9M to \$27.6M depending on the size and purpose of the existing structures. Total project costs ranged from \$24.0M to \$36.0M. Notably, the land costs were on average only 4% of the total cost of the projects.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In 2024, TCD Staff and Board will continue to collaborate with partners to seek both funding/financing and physically available properties that align with the work done in the feasibility study. Our Board has formed a CEC sub-committee and we will continue to update the community on our search and progress. Please stay tuned and follow along for more information at our website:

www.thurstoncd.com.



INCREASED STAFFING CAPACITY

We welcomed several new staff to our team in 2023. Across our departments, we were able to hire additional positions to increase our capacity to help community members, address critical issues, and support on-going and planned projects. You can learn about all our staff on our [website](#).

Meet our 2023 Hires



**SOPHIA BARASHKOFF,
SHE/HER**

Administrative Assistant



KIRSTEN HILL, SHE/HER

Special Projects Specialist



BRIGETTE VAUGHN, SHE/HER

Accounting Coordinator



JOEY BURGESS, HE/HIM

Habitat Restoration Specialist



TINA WAGNER, SHE/HER

Community Agriculture
Programs Coordinator



ARIEL CURTIS, SHE/HER

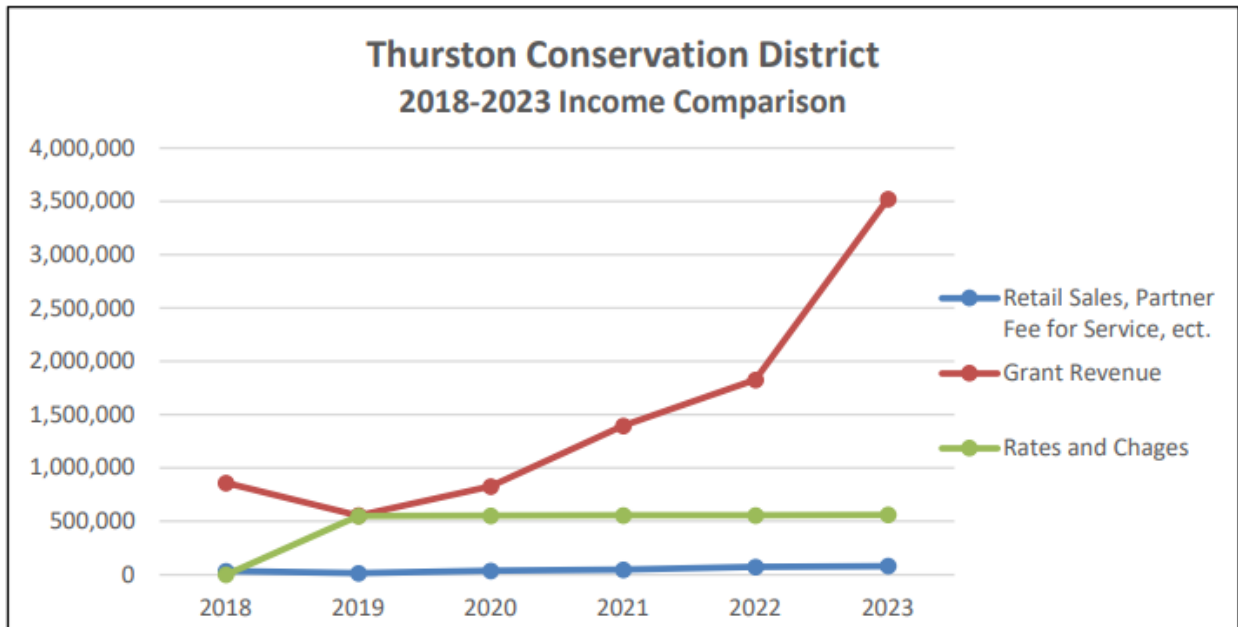
South Sound GREEN
Water Quality Educator

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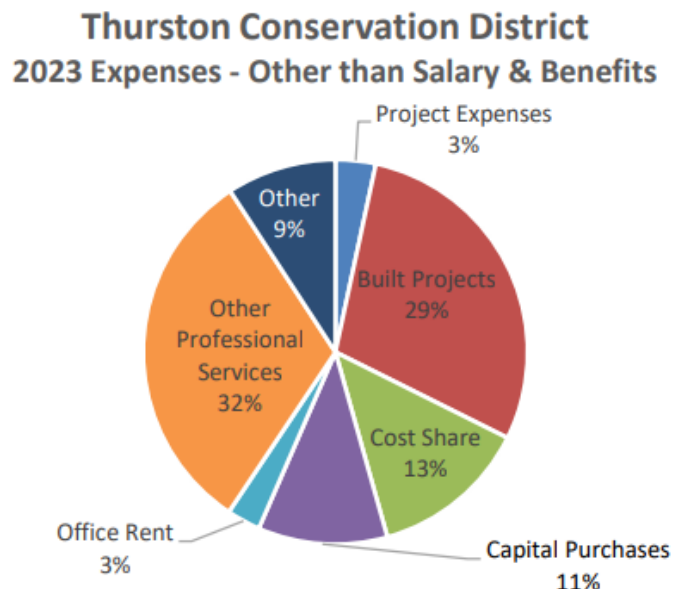
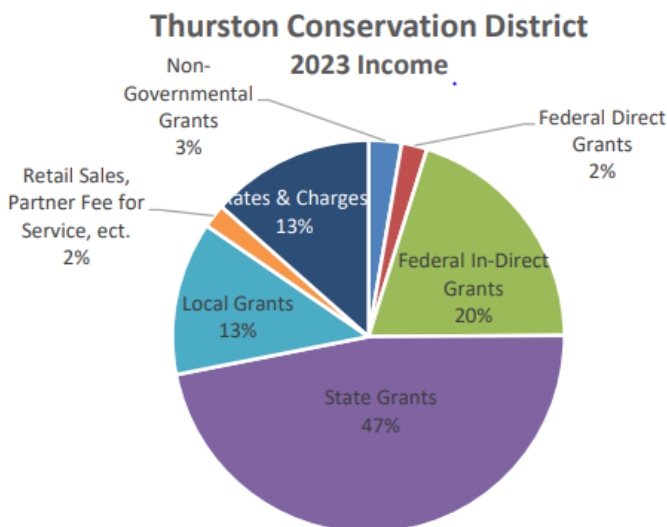
2023 Budget Review

PUTTING CONSERVATION DOLLARS ON THE GROUND

As in 2022, our annual budget has continued to grow dramatically. We saw a 69% increase in revenue in 2023 and managed a budget of \$4.1 Million dollars. The below graph shows the growth in our budget since 2018. This increase in grant revenue illustrates the effectiveness of our staff in applying for competitive grants, managing large grants, and translating that into on-the-ground services, cost-share, and project implementation.



Curious where those grants and other forms of income come from? Check out the left hand pie chart break down of 2023 income sources. In 2023, we successfully applied for and brought in \$3.5 million dollars in grant revenue that translates to direct services for our community. The chart on the right shows that over 50% of our expenses translated into on-the-ground and physical purchases that support our community members. Cost Share, Built Projects, Project Expenses and Capital Purchases are all categories that are tangible supports for natural resource conservation in Thurston County. Of our 2023 expenses, 72% of non-salary expenses were for on-the-ground built projects—a 20% increase from 2022.



Board of Supervisors



Helen Wheatley
Vice Chair

Elected Position #1
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TJ Johnson
Board Chair

Elected Position #2
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David Iyall

Board Auditor
Elected Position #3
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Doug Rushton
Board Member

Appointed Position #1
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Betsie DeWreede
Board Member

Appointed Position #2
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2023 Habitat Crew Members
Donalyn Johanns, Jim Dyson, Gloria Ferguson, Sydney Flemister, James Leifer, Erika Macs, Kadin Woolever, Leah Greenland, Erin Phillips, and James Gudgeon

2023 Interns & AmeriCorps
Ariel Curtis (South Sound GREEN Watershed Educator Americorps), Laura Reuche (Education & Outreach Intern), and Alex Zinck (South Sound GREEN Intern)





Thurston Conservation District

Serving for

75 Years

www.thurstoncd.com
Since 1948

