Strategic Plan
Hood River Soil and Water Conservation District

Mission, Vision and Values

Mission
The Hood River Soil & Water Conservation District’s mission is to provide educational, technical and financial assistance to our community for the protection, conservation and restoration of natural resources.

The Hood River Soil & Water Conservation District will:
- Assess watershed conditions, identify local problems and develop local solutions,
- Provide technical assistance to landowners and managers,
- Increase the public’s knowledge of and involvement in conservation issues and solutions, and
- Work with any and all partners to protect soil and water.

Vision
The Hood River Soil & Water Conservation District’s vision is a healthy, sustainable environment supporting a viable community.

The Hood River Soil & Water Conservation District is an organization that:
- Is recognized as the key provider of conservation services,
- Is a critical partner in educating the public, individuals and groups about natural resource issues and solutions,
- Is approachable, knowledgeable and respected; a sought-after consultant to individuals and groups on implementing conservation practices,
- Has sufficient personnel who are trained and equipped to handle the workload,
- Has a strong agricultural component,
- Identifies resource concerns and facilitates solutions to them,
- Accesses various funding sources,
- Provides assistance to developers so as to prevent future resource problems,
- Is a pragmatic local voice for federal and state programs, and
- Works cooperatively with landowners, stakeholders, and other agencies to get results.

Core Values
The Hood River Soil & Water Conservation District values:
- A voluntary, collaborative, local, non-regulatory approach to solving problems,
- The importance of a healthy environment to the economy of our area,
- Open space and other environmental benefits provided by agriculture and forest landowners,
- Respect for the property rights, confidentiality, decisions and experience of all landowners/clients,
- Community partnerships and the resources/expertise made available through these collaborative relationships,
- Education as a means to promote environmental stewardship,
- Helpful, courteous, prompt customer service,
- Communication with the public and within the office,
• Well-trained staff committed to leadership and professionalism,
• Conservation as a part of our daily operation, and
• Fiscal responsibility with public funds.

Long-term Outcomes
The following are the long-term outcomes that the Hood River Soil & Water Conservation District hopes to help achieve as we utilize the goals and strategies outlined in this plan.

Natural Resource Outcomes
• **Water is conserved:** Water is actively being conserved in the Hood River Watershed to balance the needs of healthy, native fish and wildlife populations, an economically viable farming community, and other water users.
  o **SWCD Niche:** Working with farmers and irrigation districts on agricultural land to reduce water use, increase efficiencies, reduce erosion, and minimize potential for runoff.
  o **How:** Irrigation water management training, on-farm irrigation system upgrades, irrigation district infrastructure upgrades (conveyance systems, telemetry, flow meters, flow regulators, etc.), irrigation technology, etc.
  o **Leads to:** Increased stream flows, healthy fish populations, reduced energy use, reduced controversy, and increased savings of water, labor, and money
  o **Objective:** Reduce the quantity of water diverted from surface waters for irrigation by 5% over 5 years through system improvements and the implementation of BMPs.
  o **Measurable Indicators:** Quantity of water conserved through system improvements (on and off farm) with which the SWCD was involved.
  o **Our Partners:** ODA, OSU Extension Service, irrigation districts, NRCS, CTWS, OWEB, HRWG
  o **Our Programs:** OWEB small grants, IWM training, canal to pipeline projects, groundwater monitoring, CIS development with NRCS, landowner and irrigation district technical assistance

• **Land management practices enhance and development practices protect water quality:** Instream temperatures, nutrients, sediment, pesticides, and other pollutants are all reduced in the surface waters of the Hood River Watershed due to the implementation of conservation practices.
  o **SWCD Niche:** Working with agricultural land managers and the development sector to increase awareness and implementation of best practices related to soil and water conservation.
  o **How:** Provide training and facilitate outreach to motivate land managers to implement best management practices regarding pesticide application, erosion prevention, nutrient management, and riparian planting, etc. Explore options to provide outreach and education to the realtors and the development community.
  o **Leads to:** Cleaner water which helps maintain healthy fish and wildlife populations, healthy soil, better farm outcomes, profit, and human health.
  o **Objective:** Assist a minimum of 15 land managers per year to implement conservation practices on the land they manage and review relevant county development permits with potential impacts to soil and water.
  o **Measurable Indicators:** Number of contacts made with agricultural landowners to improve land management practices. Number of development permits reviewed.
  o **Our Partners:** ODA, OSU Extension Service, Hood River County, NRCS, CTWS, OWEB, HRWG
**Our Programs:** OWEB small grants, PSP program coordination and monitoring, Odell SIA/focus area projects, agricultural landowner water quality TA, review of county building permits, and realtor/contractor education or training.

- **Native species are abundant and healthy:** *Native, diverse plant and animal communities are being actively restored and fostered in the Hood River Watershed and new infestations of invasive species, including plants, fish and wildlife are effectively being prevented from becoming established.*
  - **SWCD Niche:** Enhance diverse native plant communities and restore, riparian and upland habitats supporting the health of fish and wildlife populations.
  - **How:** Reduce and remove invasive species, prevent new infestations, supply native plants, undertake riparian planting, etc.
  - **Leads to:** An abundance of native species, recovering native fish populations, and healthy riparian areas
  - **Objective:** Continue to work towards an increased area of natives planted and an overall reduction in the number of new weed infestations each year.
  - **Measurable Indicators:** Number of native plants distributed, feet/ acres of riparian areas vegetated, and habitat enhancement projects implemented

- **Our Partners:** CWMA, ODA, OSU Extension Service, NRCS, OSWB, County, CTWS, USFS, OWEB, HRWG

- **Our Programs:** Plant sale, OWEB small grants, Garlic Mustard Abatement project, noxious weed work - CWMA participation, riparian planting projects, etc.

**Social Outcomes**

- **The community embraces a stewardship ethic:** *The community recognizes and accepts responsibility to care for the land and water.*
  - **SWCD Niche:** Working with agricultural land managers and the rural residential development sector to cultivate a stewardship ethic.
  - **How:** Outreach and education, signage identifying SWCD’s projects and boundaries, technical assistance and trainings to agricultural community, interaction with real estate and development community, site visits with landowners, commenting on land use permits, and other means
  - **Leads to:** Water conservation, improved water quality, reduced invasive species, community well-being, increased awareness of SWCD mission, reduced controversy, reduced costs, sustainable profit, and viable communities now and for future generations
  - **Objective:** Continue to develop new outreach tools and seek out new audiences to expand the reach of our messaging each year.
  - **Measurable Indicators:** Number of contacts in databases (Mailchimp eNews and Access DB Annual Report recipients)

- **Our Partners:** OSU Extension Service, Gorge Ag Professionals, Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Hood River News, Gorge Grown, Gorge Ecology Institute, HRVPRD, OWEB, CTWS, and HRWG

- **Our Programs:** Landowner TA – general, website and social media, Master Naturalist support, County fair display, eNews, Annual Report, workshops/presentations, IWM training

- **Farmers remain in farming:** *Farmers have the resources, information, and support they need to maintain viable businesses and utilize natural resources sustainably.*
o **SWCD Niche:** Developing relationships with farmers and supporting them to remain viable by adapting their land management practices to the changing world, including climate change and development pressures.

o **How:** Providing services needed to sustain farming and conserve natural resources including irrigation management, BMPs for pesticides, improving soil health, connections with local resources and funding, and other activities

o **Leads to:** Viable communities, local food production, a conservation ethic, and an enhanced local economy

o **Objective:** Develop and maintain deep, long-lasting, quality relationships with key partners and growers in the local agricultural community.

o **Measurable Indicator:** Number of repeat contacts/involvement in SWCD programs by core growers in the valley.

o **Our Partners:** OSU Extension Service, FSA, NRCS, ODA, Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers, Irrigation Districts, HRWG, Gorge Grown, Farm Bureau

o **Our Programs:** IWM Training, supporting partner programs, soil health programs
Goals and Priority Strategies

The following goals and priority strategies are the means through which the SWCD will implement the programs designed to meet the objectives outlined above.

Goal 1 ~ Staffing: The HRSWCD is well staffed to meet its strategic needs, retaining high quality staff with diverse skill sets.

Strategy 1: Augment existing staff capacity and diversity through training, hiring and/or contracting outside expertise (GIS, community outreach, bookkeeping, Spanish-speaker).

  Sub-strategy: Partner with other organizations to share employees.

  Sub-strategy: Utilize seasonal employment opportunities and internships.

Strategy 2: Restructure job descriptions and assigned duties to better align staff skills and interests with organizational needs.

Strategy 3: Enhance staff benefits including compensation, a stronger benefit package, professional development opportunities, and flexible schedules that maintain a positive work-life balance.

Goal 2 ~ Funding: The HRSWCD is supported by a diverse array of funding sources that ensure organizational sustainability and allow it to actively pursue the mission.

Strategy 1: Develop a funding plan to include funding security assessment, project cost benefit analysis, capacity expansion plan, etc.

  Sub-strategy: Review and evaluate funding strategies that are legal for the District and the Watershed Group (ie: endowments, memberships, etc.).

Strategy 2: Diversify funding sources to include sponsored programs, fee-for-service work, donor campaigns, and other revenue sources.

  Sub-strategy: Write more grants that include administrative and/or personnel costs for the SWCD.

  Sub-strategy: Explore and utilize viable ecological markets (carbon storage, water banking, etc.) to monetize ecosystem services.

Strategy 3: Identify ways to reduce current costs (rent reductions, sublease the attic space, etc.).

Other Strategies

- Scale back workload to better align with current funding capacity.
- Develop relationships with organizations that can fund internships (RARE, universities, AmeriCorps, etc.).
- Secure a tax base.
Goal 3 ~ Partnerships and Collaboration: The Hood River Soil & Water District actively identifies opportunities to enhance our partnerships so that we can share resources, support collaborative approaches, and accomplish more.

**Strategy 1:** Clarify SWCD’s role with our various partners (Extension, Tribes, irrigation districts, etc.).

*Sub-strategy:* Clarify the meaningful distinction(s) between the Watershed Group and the District.

**Strategy 2:** Identify opportunities for partner organizations to share and/or combine services (i.e. GIS coordinator, social media coordinator, outreach coordinator) and resources (truck, computer software licenses, room, administrative support).

**Strategy 3:** Partner with other entities to secure a tax base and/or other funding.

**Strategy 4:** Develop stronger relationships with regional agencies and government.

*Sub-Strategy:* Enhance communication and build stronger relationships with the City and County.

**Other Strategies**
- Develop a volunteer and/or internship program.
- Identify “functional” gaps where things aren’t being done and develop partnerships to address these needs.

Goal 4 ~ Outreach and Education: Engage Hood River County residents and landowners in understanding and valuing the SWCD’s mission in protecting, conserving, and restoring natural resources.

**Strategy 1:** Develop a brand and marketing platform to communicate our core messages consistently to key audiences.

**Strategy 2:** Develop targeted outreach strategies for specific sectors of the community (youth (FFA, 4H), Latino, landowners, etc.).

**Strategy 3:** Develop and utilize a social media presence to engage and educate the public.

**Strategy 4:** Use advertising to raise awareness of the SWCD.

*Sub-strategy:* Signage (at completed projects; at District Boundaries).

Goal 5 ~ Strategic Approaches: The SWCD proactively identifies and responds to priority and emerging needs and opportunities.

**Strategy 1:** Recruit new Board and Associate Board members.
**Strategy 2:** Solicit more input from the ag community to identify priority and emerging needs.

**Sub-strategy:** Hold listening sessions to better understand community needs.

**Strategy 3:** Identify long-term outcomes to which the SWCD is committed.

**Strategy 4:** Approach community groups to spark conversations to identify emerging needs.

**Sub-strategy:** Communicate regularly with partnering agencies.

**Sub-strategy:** Attend existing community meetings to have a dialogue and identify issues of use to that community such as the Rockford Grange, Gorge Grown, Gorge Owned Business community, etc.

**Additional Strategies:**
- Review and utilize currently available monitoring data to identify emerging needs and opportunities.
- Use trainings, conferences and affiliations with state-wide entities to better identify emerging issues and needs.
Strategy Implementation Timeline
For a more detailed outline, please see Appendix D

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<td>Identify &amp; Implement Opportunities for Resource Sharing</td>
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