



WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

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WACD Tribal Outreach Task Force Report March 25, 2014

Background:

The *Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD)* has, for many years, endeavored to improve communication and cultural exchange with our state's tribal nation members sharing similar interests in natural resources conservation. WACD began a new initiative to focus our tribal outreach work during the 2012 WACD Annual Meeting, by hosting a *tribal listening session*. Our national affiliate, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), President Earl Garber, NRCS State Conservationist Roylene Rides at the Door, and WACD leadership participated in a session with tribal representatives from the Yakama, Cowlitz, Colville, Quinault and Squaxin Island tribes, to hear their thoughts about mutual concerns and opportunities for building understanding and working together.

Following the listening session, WACD recognized that it needed to establish a team to help WACD develop partnership opportunities among tribes and conservation districts emphasizing communication and common interests.

WACD understands that tribes have a long history in contributing to natural resources protection and restoration, and that this experience must be appreciated and recognized in forging partnerships.

Task Force Appointment:

In July, 2013, then-WACD President David Guenther appointed a *Tribal Outreach Task Force* to coordinate and accelerate this outreach and partnership-building process. Today, the task force is comprised of eleven volunteer members:

- Tanna Engdahl, Task Force Chair, and Cowlitz Nation representative
- Lynn Engdahl (Clark CD) conservation district supervisor with tribal partnership experience
- Michael Crowder (Benton CD), WACD National Director
- Monte Marti (Snohomish CD) and Terry Holloway (Pend Oreille CD), conservation district employees with tribal technical exchange experience (also Kathy Whalen, WADE President)
- Robin Slate, NRCS tribal liaison
- Jackie Richter, Colville Tribal Conservation District
- Michael Stamon, Quinault Nation
- Larry Davis (Whatcom CD), Washington State Conservation Commission
- David Guenther, WACD Past-President

Others who support task force activities include NRCS State Conservationist Roylene Rides-at-the-Door, State Conservation Commission Chair Jim Peters and Executive Director Mark Clark, and WACD Executive Director David Vogel and Administrative Coordinator Deb Gregory. Representatives from NACD continue their interest in our proceedings and may participate on occasion.

The purpose of the task force is to assist WACD in developing and implementing an outreach strategy to Washington's twenty-nine tribes, to increase opportunities for communication and collaboration between conservation districts and tribes on conservation issues, and to coordinate the contributions and input by task force-represented organizations in that effort. The goal is to build working partnerships.

The task force began a two-year term, beginning with its organizational teleconference held July 2, 2013. WACD has assigned to the task force the following activities:

- Recommend to WACD joint training and educational opportunities for tribal and conservation district partners, to educate one another about communicating and working together.
- Recommend to WACD opportunities for improving conservation program implementation, with tribes and conservation districts working in partnership.
- Advise WACD in the proper channels for communicating opportunities for joint conservation district and tribal involvement and cooperation on conservation issues.
- Assist WACD in making the proper connections along such communication channels, and in facilitating collaboration.
- Determine other actions needed to build relationships, explore collaboration opportunities, and to further support the objectives of the task force.

The task force is working to assist in building relationships at two levels:

1. **Technical collaboration** – continue to build partnerships **at the field level** involving tribal and conservation districts' technical staff (e.g., field projects, training, funding strategies, employee orientation training, technical advisory committees).
2. **Leadership partnership-building** – Establish communication and understanding **at a higher level**, between tribal leaders, elders, council members or other appropriate tribal representatives and local conservation district board supervisors (e.g., WACD Annual Meeting, tribal meetings/events, educational opportunities, new supervisor orientation, local board meetings, supervisor leadership training, local working groups).

The timeline for task force activities is based in part on scheduled WACD and partner annual conferences and training opportunities, but will also depend on our building momentum and following opportunities as they unfold. The task force will set its schedule based on a flexible and patient approach, to take advantage of collaboration and partnership-building opportunities as they are developed. The task force may establish milestones to serve as goals as needed.

Accomplishments

The task force began its work by designing a tribal issues **general session** at the 2013 WACD Annual Meeting, involving again NACD and NRCS leadership, together with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Washington State Governor Jay Inslee's Office of Indian Affairs. This general session was devoted to emphasizing the importance of conservation district-tribal partnerships, and recognizing opportunities. This general session was followed by a **breakout session** that celebrated two successful examples of district-tribal partnerships, and that served as a "how to" discussion about establishing contacts, messaging, and follow-through in making partnership opportunities between tribes and conservation districts work.

In 2014, the task force continued its work following the WACD Annual Meeting by **corresponding with each individual tribe**, to invite each tribe to join with WACD in the task force's effort to build partnerships. Task Force members Tanna and Lynn Engdahl plan visits with local conservation districts and tribes, to deliver our invitation together with a personal message to tribal leaders. Our WACD invitation is also being used by local conservation districts to assist in their local outreach to tribes, and to support tribal partnerships already in place locally.

The task force has also assisted the Washington Association of District Employees (WADE) in planning a curriculum for WADE's June, 2014 conservation district **employee training conference**. This annual training conference provides an opportunity to continue to include training about "how to" bring together successful tribal and conservation district partnerships. This year's program will also include training on the importance of native plants and on collaborative methods to protect and restore native plant communities. Task Force Chair Tanna Engdahl has visited the Snoqualmie Tribe's Traditional Knowledge Trail and Rain Garden. The Tribe's Ethnobotanist will be the presenter for the WADE native plant session.

Recently, Washington's Conservation Partnership has experienced a number of controversial policy debates about the role of voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs, and the tools needed to achieve protection and restoration of Washington's water quality and wildlife habitat. Several of Washington's tribes have been outspoken on these policy issues (e.g., buffers). The **Tribal Outreach Task Force** does not wish to become entangled in these policy matters; the task force simply wishes to advocate for and promote opportunities for conservation districts and tribes to work together locally to address shared resource concerns. Task force members recognize that **outreach and communication are critical** to resolving differences of opinion or experience as conservation districts and tribes work to address shared natural resource concerns. Therefore, the task force has accelerated efforts to establish communication individually **with all tribes**, to build understanding and to help support strengthening of the partnerships needed.

Conservation districts and tribes share many concerns about water quality, fish habitat and long-term viability of our natural resources. They also share a commitment to **locally-led actions** to protect and manage natural resources. WACD's Tribal

Outreach Task Force is one method that can be employed to bring together our 45 conservation districts and 29 tribes, and to **work for a solution at the local level** to these often vexing problems. WACD is encouraged by the energy and enthusiasm expressed by task force volunteers and our tribal contacts, and we look forward to building better relationships and partnerships with our very important partners in the tribal community.

Everywhere the task force turns, we find examples of **outstanding conservation work that tribes conduct** through their own programs - or in partnership with conservation districts and others. Washington State Governor Jay Inslee's Office of Indian Affairs reports just a few examples, including efforts to restore aquatic ecosystems (Nisqually Tribe, Skokomish Tribe), restore stream connections for fish migration (culvert replacement) and spawning habitat (Quinault Tribe), support or operate fish hatcheries (Colville Tribe, Stillaguamish Tribe, Spokane Tribe, Suquamish Tribe). Tribes are also active in projects to clean up marine debris (Quinault Tribe), restore large woody debris habitat to streams and rivers (Quinault Tribe), turn livestock waste into electricity supplies (Tulalip Tribe), conduct water quality monitoring, manage timber (Yakama Tribe), restore cultural aspects of natural resource systems (Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe), and to educate tribal members about natural resources management (Swinomish Tribe). These examples illustrate the good conservation work being done by tribes and of the **scope of opportunities** available for partnering.

WACD wants our decision-makers at every level to be aware of this important outreach and partnership-building initiative and its potential to advance our shared conservation goals. And we appreciate everyone's support as we work to reach out to our tribal partners in conservation. Also, WACD and the Tribal Outreach Task Force welcome questions and ideas where we might be of help in bringing people together to put conservation on the ground.