



Benton Soil and Water
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Five Year Strategic Plan
2015-2020

May 4, 2015

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Message from the Board Chair and Executive Director

On behalf of the Staff and Board of Directors of the Benton Soil and Water Conservation District, we proudly present our Five Year Strategic Plan for 2015-2020.

This Plan is based on the input of community leaders, partner organizations, citizens, and our staff and Board, whose combined knowledge and expertise resulted in three well-defined goals that will guide our program development, communications strategy, and capacity building over the next five years and well into the future. Our Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles will help us engage Benton County residents in the conservation and stewardship of our natural resources in a way that is responsible, respectful, and relevant. The Plan articulates how we will collaborate with partners and stakeholders so that we may all contribute to a healthy environment, robust agricultural economy, and vibrant community.

Benton County encompasses the fertile farm fields of the Willamette Valley, rare habitats such as oak savannas and woodlands, and many other important landscapes that provide essential ecological functions. We are fortunate to be located in such a naturally diverse and productive landscape. Our Strategic Plan focuses on the challenges of protecting and improving water quality, soil health, fish and wildlife habitat, and helping working lands be more productive, all in the face of changing demographics, climate, and funding availability.

We deeply appreciate the fundamental support of the residents and taxpayers of Benton County. With this strong base of support and the cooperation of our partner organizations, the Benton Soil and Water Conservation District is well poised for continued success in our future endeavors.

This Strategic Plan, which focuses on improved communications, adaptive program offerings, and innovative approaches to capacity building, will guide us as we engage and inspire the people of Benton County to care for our precious lands and waters.

Clifford Hall, Chair, Board of Directors

Holly Crosson, Executive Director

Introduction

BACKGROUND

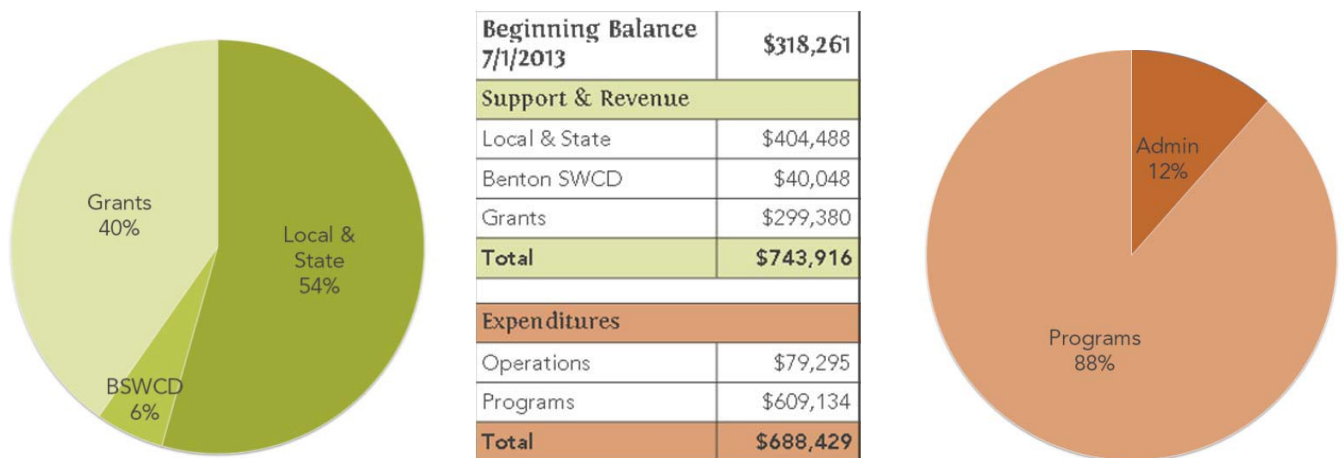
Benton SWCD is one of 45 conservation districts in Oregon. Conservation districts are Special Districts like school districts or fire districts. Conservation districts are not non-profit organizations (501 (c) 3), but are tax exempt. Donations to Benton SWCD are tax-deductible. Conservation districts are classified as municipal corporations, and though they are a form of local government, have no regulatory authority. Conservation districts are, however, required to follow many of the same laws that govern state agencies. Legislation governing conservation districts can be found in Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) 568.210 to 568.890 and ORS 568.900 to 568.933.

Benton SWCD must comply with a number of additional requirements to operate legally and be eligible for grant funds administered by the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA). These include submitting an annual work plan and scope of work, long range plan (five year strategic plan), annual report, annual audit, and having an annual meeting open to the public.

The District was organized under the Oregon Soil and Water District Law ORS 568.210-780. The Certificate of Organization creating the Benton SWCD was issued December 28, 1956. This created an elected body of volunteer directors and cooperators that provided local input to voluntary federal conservation programs. In November 2004, Benton County voters granted a permanent property tax rate limit to the Benton SWCD (effective July 1, 2005), making the District a public taxing entity and enabling us to increase staffing levels and expand program offerings. Currently, the county tax levy provides 37% of the District’s annual budget. See Figure 1 for a summary of our 2013-14 fiscal year.

The Benton SWCD employs six full time staff. Work occurs under the supervision of an Executive Director who reports to the Board of Directors. Other positions include an Office Manager, Resource Conservationist, Soil Health Coordinator, Communications/Youth Education/Invasives Program Coordinator, and Willamette River Restoration Coordinator.

Figure 1. Fiscal Year 2013-2014 Financial Summary



GOVERNANCE

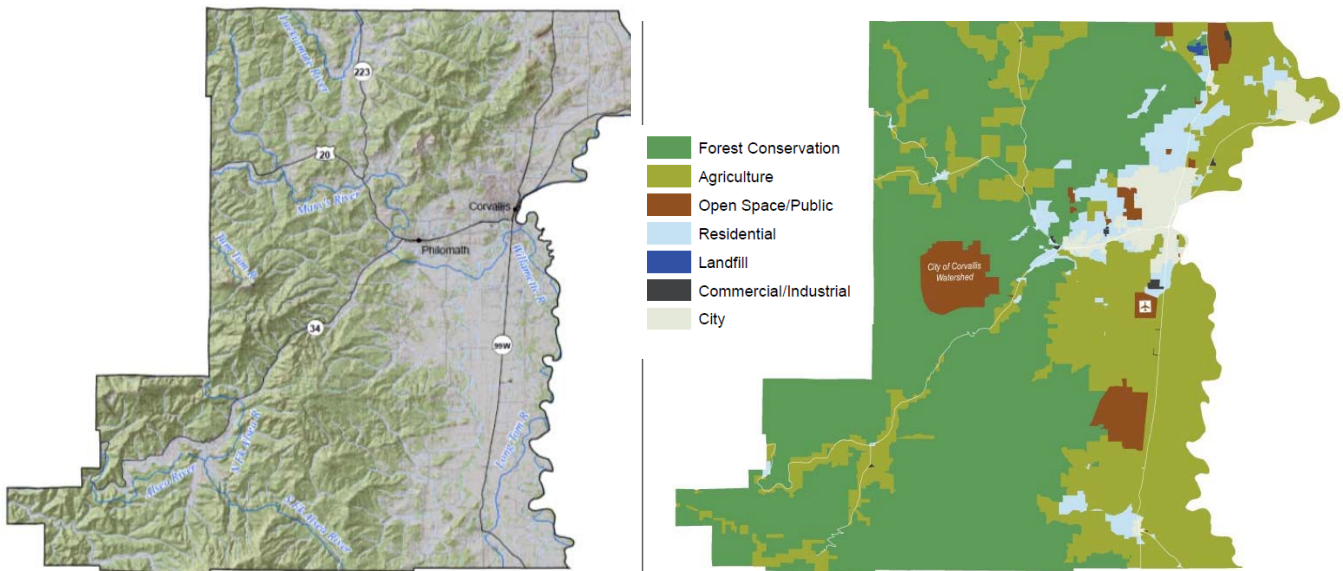
Directors and Associates

A board of seven directors governs the District. Directors are elected by Benton County voters at the November General Election, which is held during even-numbered years. Five of the seven positions are classified as zone positions and must meet the zone requirements and terms of office as specified in ORS 568.560 as follows: "Zone Directors must own or manage 10 or more acres of land in the district, be involved in the active management of that property, reside within the boundaries of the district, and be a registered voter." The other two Director positions are at-large. To qualify for an at-large position a person must be a registered voter who resides in Benton County. No land ownership or management requirements are needed for an at-large position.

Associate Directors are non-voting members of the District Board. They are appointed by the Directors to serve as advisors and representatives. Associate directorship offers a way to educate potential Directors, broaden community input to the District, and expand District programs.

BENTON COUNTY TOPOGRAPHY

Figure 2. Maps of Benton County



Approximately 15,000 years ago the great ice dam of Missoula Lake thawed and refroze repeatedly, causing 2,000 years of cataclysmic floods throughout what is now known as the Columbia River Gorge and the Willamette Valley. Those flooding events deposited rich sediments, making the Willamette Valley the most fertile and productive area in Oregon. The Willamette Valley is Oregon's largest watershed and home to about 70% of Oregon's population. Benton County is nestled in the heart of the Willamette Valley, about 40 miles southwest of the capital city of Salem and 45 miles northwest of the city of Eugene. Benton County is bounded on the north by Polk County, on the south by Lane County, on the west by Lincoln County, and on the east by the Willamette River, which separates it from Linn County. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the county has a total area of 679 square miles, of which 676 square miles is land and 3 square miles (0.37%) is water.

More than ten watersheds are found within the boundaries of Benton County, with the Marys River covering the largest area, followed by the Luckiamute and Alsea Watersheds. The Marys River flows from the Coast Range Mountains in a southeasterly direction before joining the Willamette at the City of Corvallis. The majority of the Luckiamute River flows through Polk County, with about a third of the watershed located in northern Benton County. The Alsea River, which flows west to the ocean, is geographically separated from the rest of the county by the Coast Range. In the southern portion of the county, the Long Tom River flows into the Willamette.

No account of topography would be complete without a mention of Marys Peak. Just southwest of Philomath, Marys Peak is the highest mountain in the Coast Range. At 4,097 feet, it ranks eleventh in the state for prominence. Marys Peak has been designated as a Scenic Botanical Area because of its alpine meadows, Noble fir forest vegetation, and noteworthy scenery. From the summit, one can glimpse the Pacific Ocean, Willamette Valley, and several Cascade peaks.

Summary of Key Elements & Initiatives

The development of the Benton Soil & Water Conservation District Five Year Strategic Plan comes at a time of significant transformation for conservation organizations in the State of Oregon. We face fundamental shifts in the most prominent conservation issues and the funding mechanisms available to support our work. Urbanization of the Valley and a changing climate are increasing pressures on limited natural resources such as water and wildlife habitat. We must adapt our messages and programs to address concomitant changes in conservation concerns.

Because of Benton SWCD's long history in Benton County and the funding provided by our tax base, our conservation partners look to Benton SWCD to play a significant role in making a better tomorrow for Benton County residents. Shifts in the funding priorities of granting agencies and increasingly competitive grant opportunities require that we pursue innovative funding strategies. This changing landscape, combined with the strategic direction defined by the Five Year Plan, will lead to stronger collaborations with partner organizations.

At the core, we remain committed to inspirational leadership, exceptional service and accountability. In addition, we will more formally evaluate the quality of our programs and services to ensure that what we offer continues to meet the needs of a changing populace across Benton County. We envision providing services that encourage people to value and enhance resilient habitats from the floodplains of the Willamette River to the mountains and valleys of the Coast Range. These actions will result in measurable ecological and social outcomes that provide lasting benefits to Benton County residents and the environment in which we live.

With the best interests of future generations in mind, Benton Soil & Water Conservation District will be adaptive to stakeholder needs while remaining true to our strengths and values. Specifically, we will continue to responsibly manage our assets, build upon our reputation for community leadership, and continue to offer programs that meet the conservation needs of our stakeholders. Our plan plays to the strengths of our most valuable assets: our talented and knowledgeable employees and Directors who will play an integral role in shaping Benton SWCD's future.

Our planning process brought to light several challenges that Benton SWCD will rise to meet as we evolve over the next five years. Our role as a clearinghouse for conservation information will require increased communication efforts with targeted messages for different audiences in order to help those audiences find the assistance they need. As we receive input from stakeholders, we will use that data to inform our programmatic offerings. To continue to offer high quality programs, we will need financial stability that will require the pursuit of innovative funding strategies. Financial security will also ensure that our staff continues to have access to secure and up-to-date Information Technology.

In the next five years, Benton SWCD will direct efforts in three key areas:

1. We will continue to develop and deliver programs that address stakeholder expressed needs as well as natural resource issues. We will engage Benton County residents in assessing their needs and design our programs based upon a variety of interactive stakeholder needs assessments and evaluations. We will continue our crucial role in facilitating and strengthening partnerships that promote conservation and restoration on public and private lands.
2. We will cultivate a compelling vision of how engagement with Benton SWCD will improve Benton County residents' quality of life. We will develop and implement a marketing and

communication plan based on sound research and current methodologies. This plan will help us inform Benton County residents of the services available to them.

3. We will strengthen Benton SWCD's capacity by responsibly managing our financial and human resources. We will increase our ability to serve our constituents by developing diverse and innovative funding strategies and by maintaining a knowledgeable and dedicated Board and staff.

Our mission permeates every step of our path: to engage Benton County residents in the conservation and stewardship of natural resources for current and future generations. With this plan, we embrace our leadership role in the protection of healthy land and water.

Mission Statement

Engage Benton County residents in the conservation and stewardship of natural resources for current and future generations.

Vision of the Future

We envision a future where the Benton Soil and Water Conservation District's services encourage people to value and enhance the resiliency and function of land and water from the floodplains of the Willamette River to the mountains and valleys of the Coast Range.

Guiding Principles

Inspirational Leadership

Benton Soil & Water Conservation District leads by example and works with landowners to implement the resource conservation practices that we promote. We enthusiastically engage the public in the protection of natural resources, which makes our community a healthy and economically viable place to live. We are committed to excellence in all aspects of our organization and support the success of our stakeholders and partners.

Exceptional Service

We have a talented and highly trained workforce. Our employees are our most valuable asset and we are dedicated to attracting, retaining and supporting quality employees. We foster positive and fruitful relationships with partners and stakeholders on relevant issues.

Accountability

We ensure sound management and transparency with finances, operations, and programs through annual audits, publicly available documents, and program modifications based on stakeholder feedback.

Integrity

We are respectful, honest and subscribe to and demonstrate high ethical standards. We value different points of view, embrace diversity and do not discriminate.

Responsiveness

We provide the best available options for natural resource management while being mindful of changing stakeholder needs. We seek continuous improvement. We evaluate our programs regularly so that we can address the current and upcoming conservation needs of our community.

Internal Assessment

ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTHS

Responsible Fiscal Management

The Benton SWCD maintains a balanced budget and manages its financial resources responsibly in accordance with Oregon budget law. Our tax base provides leverage for grant funding and supports valuable partnerships.

Strong Community Focus

Over the years, Benton SWCD has developed a proud record of leadership on a wide array of conservation and natural resource concerns. Whether it is protecting the Willamette Valley's precious farmland from the forces of erosion or helping to secure habitat for wild salmon in the Alsea River, Benton SWCD uses its strengths in technical assistance, education and outreach, and administrative capacity to accomplish the challenging work of making a better tomorrow for all Benton County residents. We strive to reach all types of people, ranging from grass seed farmers to elementary school students. Benton SWCD's outreach program raises awareness of its services in the community and fosters stakeholder engagement. For example, the annual Native Plant Sale is a widely known and popular program for both urban and rural constituents.

Productive Partnerships

Benton SWCD is instrumental in the creation and coordination of key local and regional partnerships. Partnerships enable Benton SWCD to fulfil its mission more effectively. We have leadership roles in the Cooperative Weed Management Area, Soil Quality Project, and Willamette Mainstem Cooperative. The Benton SWCD collaborates with partners including Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Parks & Recreation Department, Oregon State University, OSU Extension Service, Greenbelt Land Trust, and local watershed councils to implement on-the-ground restoration projects and raise awareness about conservation practices. We also have a long-standing partnership and Intergovernmental Agreement with Benton County Public Works that provides benefits to both organizations and enables us to work on common natural resource issues.

Successful Program Delivery and Project Implementation

We develop projects and programs that inspire public participation in restoration efforts. Programs such as the Soil Quality Program, the Habitat Restoration Program, and the Water Quality and Land Management Program engage our community in the protection and conservation of land and water in Benton County. We will continue to develop new programs that address community interests and pressing conservation issues. Program descriptions are included in the Appendices.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES

Limited Public Recognition

Benton SWCD must increase its visibility throughout the community. We need to identify target audiences in our county and determine how we can best serve those stakeholders and familiarize them with our mission and programs. We must publicize our successes and increase awareness of our services. Our goal is to be known as a clearinghouse for conservation information in our community and to connect people with the resources they need to address their concerns.

Lack of Robust Funding Strategies

We are grateful to Benton County tax payers for the funding we receive each year. However, in order to provide necessary services, we need to procure more stable sources of funding. Financial stability will require adopting a mixture of innovative and diversified funding strategies. We will explore various funding options such as social enterprise models, corporate sponsorship, and solicitation of gifts and donations.

Absence of Strategic Direction

Prior to this effort, Benton SWCD did not have a formal strategic plan. Our wide-ranging programs were developed to meet perceived community and conservation needs, but lacked an overarching structure and unifying vision. This Five Year Strategic Plan will guide our program development and offerings. Based on the Plan's three goals and community needs assessments, we will adjust program offerings and measure our progress through stakeholder feedback and evaluation.

Unclear Expectations for Board Engagement

The collective knowledge and experience of the Benton SWCD Board of Directors is one of our greatest assets. More clearly defined expectations for these highly talented individuals will increase the ability of the district to reach its goals. One of the most important roles for a Director is to promote the District within the community. We will encourage Directors to attend community events on behalf of Benton SWCD and provide them with succinct talking points to share at these events.

Under-developed Administrative and Technology Infrastructure

In the ten years since Benton SWCD secured a tax base, our staff and associated support infrastructure have increased substantially. To ensure that record keeping, database management, and information technology are adequate, we must invest in keeping these systems up to date and secure.

Inaccurate Public Perception

Benton SWCD is a non-regulatory entity, yet the public often confuses us with regulatory agencies. We need to better inform our stakeholders so they understand our role in providing technical assistance and educational services.

External Assessment

GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY TRENDS

Environmental Regulations

Federal, state and local governments impose environmental regulations. The Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, Benton County Habitat Conservation Plan and other legislation inform Benton SWCD programs and operations.

Funding Directives

Limited state and federal funding is available for implementing conservation projects. The Oregon Department of Agriculture oversees all Soil and Water Conservation Districts and has various mandates that districts must follow. Oregon Department of Agriculture pays for conservation assistance staff time and mandates outreach and technical assistance to a targeted area. Changes in legislation could impact SWCD funding.

Land Use Impacts

The projected trend of increasing urban development will impact habitat and water quality. Benton SWCD will need to devote more resources to address these impacts. However, we will continue to address conservation issues in rural and natural areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS

Climate Change Will Impact Water, Soil, and Habitat Quality

Global climate change may increase the rate of people moving into the Willamette Valley from areas impacted by drought and other environmental conditions. This projected population increase, coupled with changes in our natural environment, may lead to impaired soil, water, and wildlife habitat conditions. Benton SWCD will offer programs that conserve soil and water resources, support the preservation of high quality habitats, and enhance degraded lands and waters.

ECONOMIC TRENDS

External Pressure to Share Resources with Partners

External pressures from conservation funders, notably Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, are leading Benton SWCD to leverage resources and work much more closely with our non-profit partners. The conservation community must strengthen current collaborations and build new partnerships to improve our efficiency and competitive advantage for funding opportunities. This important step may cause fundamental shifts in organizational structure but should result in streamlined spending and more effective conservation efforts.

Limited and Unpredictable Core Funding Sources

Support from Oregon Department of Agriculture and our county tax base have provided core funding for the District. Together, these two sources currently account for approximately half of our

annual income. However, future allocations are uncertain and may decrease. Grant awards, another significant part of our income, are increasingly difficult to secure, partially because Benton SWCD is not a 501(c)3 organization. To maintain our services and retain staff, we must diversify our funding strategies and explore innovative approaches to secure reliable long-term funding.

The Changing Face of Willamette Valley Agriculture

Traditional agricultural operations are getting bigger, and although small market farms are becoming more common, entry level farmers are increasingly unable to obtain land and the finances needed to operate. Large land holding corporations are purchasing land in the Willamette Valley. Regardless of who owns the land or what commodity is produced, Benton SWCD will continue to provide technical and financial assistance to support conservation practices and sustainable agricultural systems. Our aim is to promote a vibrant natural resource base in Benton County for the use of present and future generations, and we will work with the full range of land managers to achieve this goal.

Strategic Goals

GOAL 1: DELIVER PROGRAMS

Address stakeholder needs and natural resource issues.

Program outcomes will enhance natural resource values, inspire partnerships, and engage residents through technical, financial and educational assistance. Programs are designed based on stakeholder needs assessments and evaluations. We will continue to grow our crucial role in facilitating partnerships that promote conservation and restoration on public and private lands.

Strategies

- 1) Conduct a needs assessment and determine natural resource program priorities in rural and urban areas.
 - a) Develop programs based on data presented in the [Natural Resources Conservation Service Strategic Plan for Conservation in Benton County, 2015](#).
 - b) Convene partners and conduct partner program inventory to identify niche.
 - c) Define and prioritize natural resource issues that can be addressed by Benton SWCD.
 - d) Allocate resources (staff) to highest identified priorities.
- 2) Develop programs that address driving forces and needs of audiences identified in Goal 2.
- 3) Develop and deliver adult and youth education programs that inspire natural resource stewardship.
 - a) Work with partners to deliver youth and adult education, and provide hands-on service learning.
 - b) Enhance education component of annual Benton SWCD Native Plant Sale.
 - c) Conduct series of site tours and workshops for urban and rural residents to demonstrate conservation practices.
- 4) Lead on-the-ground conservation/restoration programs and provide technical and financial assistance for conservation that improves water quality, soil health and habitat value.
 - a) Create tools to raise awareness of assistance options.
 - b) Work with partners to promote and deliver technical and financial assistance opportunities for conservation.
 - c) Partner with Oregon State University, United States Geological Survey, Linn-Benton Community College and others to conduct research and monitor conservation efforts.
 - d) Create model landscapes on high habitat value lands in partnership with landowners.
 - e) Share results of restoration efforts.
- 5) Serve as a natural resources information clearinghouse to boost collective impact.
 - a) Convene, inspire and lead organizations and agencies to collaborate.
 - b) Serve as an initial point of contact for stakeholders with natural resource concerns.
- 6) Implement adaptive programs.
 - a) Define and implement metrics to track program impacts.
 - b) Refine programs based on evaluations.

GOAL 2: SPREAD OUR MESSAGE

Improve public awareness of, participation in, and perception of the District, our mission and programs.

We will cultivate a compelling vision of how engagement with Benton SWCD will improve Benton County residents' quality of life. We will develop and implement a marketing and communication plan based on sound research and current methodologies. The plan will ensure that stakeholders know what our services are and how to access them.

Strategies

- 1) Define driving forces, goals and objectives.
 - a) Driving forces are the underlying problems we want to address, such as water quality.
 - b) Goals are general statements that express the broad focus of our effort.
 - c) Objectives are developed to achieve our goals.
- 2) Identify and define our audiences.
 - a) Identify existing Benton SWCD audiences and hold meetings with them to determine potential future needs and how to spread the message to their neighbors and colleagues.
 - b) Identify potential new audiences in both rural and urban areas.
 - c) Identify underserved populations that can benefit from Benton SWCD services.
 - d) Analyze the ways in which different audiences interact with natural resources and develop communication tools that address the needs of each group.
 - e) Hold listening sessions in different locations around the county.
 - f) Develop oral, written and media surveys to determine stakeholder needs. Identify and use which type of survey is most effective with each different audience.
- 3) Create the message.
 - a) Tailor messages to appeal to identified audiences.
 - b) Test the message for each audience with a few members of each identified audience before releasing it to the public.
 - c) Reevaluate and improve each message regularly based upon its success with each audience.
- 4) Develop marketing and communication tools (package the message).
 - a) Define publicity tasks and timeline.
 - b) Create marketing tools that brand Benton SWCD and deliver consistent message about services available.
 - c) Develop and distribute "products" that get our name and logo into the community (i.e. hats, t-shirts, clothes, weed tools, etc.).
 - d) Create shared files of templates to tell our story.
- 5) Distribute the message using a variety of media outlets.
 - a) Replace "Entering Benton SWCD" signs on roadsides.
 - b) Write impact stories for the newspaper, newsletter and website to increase awareness.
 - c) Invite city, county, state and federal leaders to outreach events.
 - d) Convey successes to local media outlets (i.e. TV, newspaper).
 - e) Consider writing articles for partner newsletters.
- 6) Evaluate effectiveness of outreach campaign by surveying stakeholder community.
 - a) Use constant, iterative evaluation methods to understand the success of each outreach campaign.
 - b) Develop adaptive methods to resolve unsuccessful attempts to reach stakeholders.

GOAL 3: STRENGTHEN OUR CAPACITY

Responsibly manage Benton SWCD's financial and human resources.

We will continue to acquire and retain a knowledgeable, dedicated, and team-oriented Board and staff. We will develop diverse and innovative funding strategies to achieve our goals. Responsible operations and fiscal management will ensure accountability and transparency as we serve our constituents.

Strategies

- 1) Comply with Oregon laws and requirements that govern SWCDs.
 - a) Follow public meeting law.
 - b) Retain records according to public records law.
 - c) Abide by government ethics law.
 - d) Develop and oversee contracts according to Local Contract Review Board rules and procedures.
 - e) Meet state budget law requirements.
 - f) Comply with Oregon Department of Agriculture requirements.
 - g) Comply with Special Districts Association of Oregon/Special Districts Insurance Services requirements.
- 2) Develop the Benton SWCD team.
 - a) Encourage Board engagement with staff and stakeholders.
 - b) Support Board and staff education and training.
 - c) Define Board and staff committees.
 - d) Facilitate Board/associate recruitment based on organizational needs.
 - e) Recruit volunteers and interns to support projects and programs.
- 3) Enhance operations and fiscal administration.
 - a) Conduct annual review/revision of five year strategic plan.
 - b) Incorporate results of Oregon Department of Agriculture operational review of district.
 - c) Work with auditor to improve internal controls.
 - d) Address human resources needs.
 - e) Review and update district employee and fiscal policies.
 - f) Investigate the feasibility of collocating and sharing resources/services with partner organizations to increase efficiency and economize financially.
- 4) Increase funding through grants.
 - a) Identify grant opportunities to implement the strategic plan.
 - b) Provide grant-writing training for staff.
 - c) Hire regional grant writer for multiple organizations.
- 5) Explore innovative funding approaches.
 - a) Explore development of a social enterprise to support the district, or a fee for service program.
 - b) Possibly sell or rent products or equipment.
 - c) Explore development of a sister 501(c)3 organization (such as a Friends of Benton SWCD group) to fundraise for special projects.
 - d) Investigate whether or not a building or service center would increase Benton SWCD's ability to provide services.
 - e) Explore bond measure to purchase or construct a building for service center.
 - f) Identify potential corporate sponsors.
 - g) Solicit assistance from local businesses/corporations that share our vision and goals.

- 6) Revise gifts and donations program.
 - a) Revise policy and process to accept and solicit donations of gifts, endowments, legacies, or real estate.
 - b) Determine feasibility of hiring or contracting with a development director.
 - c) Raise awareness that donations to SWCDs are tax-deductible.
- 7) Assess land acquisition and conservation easement opportunities.
 - a) Define the conditions under which the Benton SWCD could or would own land or easements.
 - b) Develop criteria to assess feasibility and appropriateness of acquiring land and easements.

GOAL 4: DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI)

Apply an equity lens to all BSWCD policies, practices, procedures, and programs. Identify and remove barriers to access and provide opportunities for all members of our community to engage in conservation and stewardship of natural resources.

Census data shows that demographics of Oregon, and Benton County, are changing. The make-up of the mid-Valley – where 15% (and growing) of our communities are people of color, and that proportion is predicted to continue to increase. Successful conservation efforts and DEI are inextricably linked. Without the active involvement of diverse community members, the conservation movement will lose relevance and influence.

As our community grows more diverse, our organizational composition and programs must change as well. The 'business case' for DEI reveals that organizations ultimately have reduced risk, streamlined program costs, and greater community buy-in and respect when they establish systems of inclusion through the organization. For BSWCD to remain relevant, garner broader support for conservation, and be as successful as possible in meeting our mission while applying the Guiding Principles, we must be culturally responsive. To adequately address the significant challenges facing natural resource conservation, will take the inclusion of underrepresented voices, the development of new ideas, and forward-facing commitment to change.

Strategies

- 1) **Assess our current DEI status.** assess internal operations, programs, and governance through an equity lens. This review is a critical step in creating diverse and inclusive organizations that are focused on developing action-oriented plans to address the systemic issues related to the environmental movement's legacy of exclusion.
 - a) Hire contractor to conduct an equity audit.
 - b) Review organizational materials.
 - c) Interview staff and board.
 - d) Contractor will summarize findings in a report.
- 2) **Research demographics of our community.** We need data to determine who we are serving, not serving, or not adequately serving, in Benton County. An analysis of our region's residents will help us identify gaps in our outreach and organizational composition.
 - a) Compile available demographic data.
 - b) Assess program participation.
 - c) Analyze service areas and constituents served.
 - d) Identify service gaps.
 - e) Compile findings in a report.
- 3) **Expand Our Understanding.** Through interviews and focus groups we seek to learn how we are perceived and what role our programs may/may not play in community members' lives. Understanding the community's needs and barriers to participation will help us create equity action plans to dismantle any barriers and adjust our communications and services.
 - a) All board and staff will attend DEI trainings (for example, Race and the Environmental Movement, Power and Privilege, Implicit Bias,...).
 - b) Conduct focus groups and listening sessions with a diversity of community members.
 - c) Compile community feedback in a report.
- 4) **Create a DEI Action Plan.** Through interviews and focus groups we will learn how we are perceived by diverse constituents, and what role our programs may/may not play in their lives. Understanding the community's needs and barriers to participation will help us overcome service gaps, adjust communications, and create equity action plans.
 - a) Evaluate existing policies to identify any systemic barriers to inclusion.

- b) Create an organizational equity statement and policy.
- c) Set DEI benchmarks and develop a corresponding communications strategy.
- d) Revise organizational policies to support DEI goals.

5) Openly share our process.

- a) Serve as a resource, knowing that we are imperfect, will make mistakes, the DEI journey is ongoing, and the path may be tortuous.
- b) Share strategies and implementation with partners, regional conservation organizations, and any interested community members.
- c) Remain internally and externally accountable to our commitment to DEI.

Appendices

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

District Operations

Summary

District operations encompass the fiscal management, administrative functions, facilities management, and human resources oversight of the organization.

Goal

The goal of District Operations is to carry out our financial and legal responsibilities according to Oregon law. Benton SWCD will assure accountable fiscal management, efficient program administration, and sound practices implemented by Directors, employees and volunteers.

Components

General Management

The District's Executive Director works with the Board of Directors and staff to develop and implement the District's mission, vision, strategic plan, annual work plan and annual budget. The Executive Director helps to ensure the following responsibilities are also met.

- Abide by Oregon state laws required for Soil and Water Conservation Districts.
- Review Annual Work Plan and Five Year Strategic Plan quarterly; submit updates annually.
- Hold monthly Board meetings (Board Chair runs the meetings).
- Produce financial reports.
- Mitigate risk through appropriate insurance policies.
- Manage Human Resources.
 - Recruit employees.
 - Conduct job performance evaluations.
 - Make salary recommendations.
 - Manage employee benefits and training program.
 - Supervise staff and oversee District programs.
- Develop and implement administrative processes and personnel policies.
- Develop the budget each fiscal year and present it to the Budget Committee.
- Seek operational and programmatic funding.
- Ensure server, computer equipment and software is up-to-date and secure.
- Manage facilities.
- Develop community relationships and be an ambassador for the District.
- Provide legislative testimony on bills affecting Benton SWCD.

Financial

The District's Board of Directors is charged with monitoring the financial status of the organization and thus has the following financial responsibilities:

- Adopt a budget each fiscal year (July 1 through June 30).

- Serve on Benton SWCD’s Budget Committee.
- Develop and implement internal control and fiscal management policies.
- Review and approve the Treasurer’s Report at monthly board meetings.
- Engage auditor annually and ensure approved audit is submitted to the Secretary of State.
- Regularly review and provide oversight for District financial status and activities.
- Ensure public funds are expended in a lawful manner.

Potential Areas of Improvement

- In FY 2015-2016 Benton SWCD will hire a consultant to propose improvements to the current job classification system and related salary schedules.
- Benton SWCD will work with our auditor to improve internal controls.
- The Employee Handbook will be revised and updated.
- In FY 2015-2016 a new database (Confluence) will be developed and installed.

Objectives

- Maintain funding from Oregon Department of Agriculture.
Actions: submit annual work plan, updates on five year strategic plan, Scope of Work, and financial documents before June 30; submit quarterly reports.
- Develop annual budget according to local budget law.
Actions: present budget and budget message at committee meeting in April; hold budget hearing and enact resolutions to adopt budget in June; submit tax certification to tax assessor by July 15; submit budget documents to County Clerk by September 30; file municipal audit with Secretary of State and ODA by December 31.
- Support Benton SWCD Board of Directors.
Actions: develop agenda for and facilitate 12 Board meetings a year; write and distribute minutes; facilitate training for new Directors within four months of when they are sworn in; recruit Directors as needed; produce monthly Board packets (financial statements, staff report and other supporting materials).
- Empower Benton SWCD staff to work enthusiastically, effectively, and safely.
Actions: Complete semi-monthly payroll and direct deposit employee payroll checks; hold safety meetings 12 times a year; provide adequate information technology infrastructure; provide staff with professional development opportunities.

Funding Sources

Benton County property tax levy, Oregon Department of Agriculture SWCD Program, Benton County Public Works Department, Native Plant Sale, Fee for Service, Grants (Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Meyer Memorial Trust, Oregon State Weed Board, and others), and fundraising.

Partnerships and Recent Collaborations

- Oregon Department of Agriculture - SWCD Program
- Oregon SWCDs
- Special Districts Association of Oregon
- Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
- Oregon Conservation Education and Assistance Network

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Communications Program

Program Summary

The Communications Program uses a variety of media formats to share the story of Benton SWCD with the various target audiences we have identified.

Goal

The goal of the Communications Program is to establish Benton SWCD as the Natural Resources information hub in Benton County, and share natural resources conservation information using up-to-date technologies and social media platforms. We will use multiple media formats to reach target audiences and increase participation in our programs. Another goal is to convey the accomplishments and character of Benton SWCD to existing and potential funders.

Program Components

The Benton Soil & Water Conservation District is committed to improving recognition of our services and conservation messages with the use of appropriate media.

- **Website** with info for target audiences.
- **Blog** with new posts added weekly on conservation topics.
- **On-line databases** to share info about native and invasive plants relevant to Benton County.
- **Calendar** to share Benton SWCD and partner events, accessible on website
- **E-mail lists** for educators, weed spotters, job searchers, those interested in conservation, CWMA, etc.
- **Facebook, Linked In, Google Plus-** share conservation topics and articles and upcoming events.
- **E-news** – distributed once every other month, highlights 4 blog posts, upcoming events, ways to connect with Benton SWCD.
- **Newsletters-** twice per year- annual report and NPS issues.
- **Outreach Materials** – brochures, flyers, handouts that promote Benton SWCD services
- **Display Board** to be used at tabling events
- **Banners** promotion of NPS, Benton SWCD
- **Tabling at community events** staff in branded clothing or with display board
- **Workshops and Tours** such as the Urban Creek Tour
- **Conferences**–attend and present as Benton SWCD representatives, promote Benton SWCD
 - programs & services
- **Promotional materials-** pens, hats, shirts, stickers, work gloves
- **Branded Gear** – staff and board nametags, vests or jackets, t-shirts
- **Newspaper articles, advertisements** – develop and maintain consistent relationship with newspaper.
- **Radio-** explore opportunities to promote Benton SWCD via radio
- **Benton SWCD Style Guide**–should be used to format any publications/media that Benton SWCD produces to keep a consistent identity- consistent branding will help with increased recognition
- **Benton SWCD Logo and Tagline**–must get our brand in our constituents’ hands/sight

- **Other Opportunities** will be dealt with as they arise and commitment will be made based on the availability of Benton SWCD staff and the project's fit with District work plans. (Does it help us meet our mission, goals, and objectives? Do we have the capacity to take it on?)

Target Audience

Benton County residents, Benton SWCD partners and stakeholders, existing and potential funders and donors.

Communication Methods

Conventional and innovative media formats including workshops, talks, web, email, brochures, guides, newspaper, banners, and any new methods that we can sustain.

Potential Areas of Growth

- Develop policies about how we will promote the District to standardize messaging (for example, all presentations should be created using PowerPoint template; make sure Benton SWCD logo is on all outreach materials like t-shirts for creek tour, etc.).
- Develop a tagline.
- Explore opportunities to promote Benton SWCD.
- Develop expectations for public speaking – create a PowerPoint slide and brief statement that staff and Board members use to introduce Benton SWCD.

Associated Natural Resource Concerns

- We will send the message that Benton SWCD will help stakeholders address their natural resource concerns, including water conservation, soil health, and other issues we address through our programs and services.

Program Objectives

- Use social media to distribute information about Benton SWCD and our programs.
Actions: 24 blog posts per year; 6 e-newsletters per year; 60 Facebook posts per year; Increase Facebook friends by 10% per year; increase blog views by 10% per year.
- Use the website in order to provide the most current information.
Actions: Maintain and update the website and online databases; maintain accurate links to listservs on website; post events to calendar.
- Reach out to audiences using conventional methods.
Actions: Distribute hard copy newsletter twice a year; post meeting and other announcements in newspaper and local magazines; get at least one article about SWCD or local efforts in the paper per year.
- Communicate with audiences in person.
Actions: attend at least two tabling events per year, respond to email and telephone inquiries, offer presentations, tours and workshops; conduct at least 50 site visits per year; represent Benton SWCD at a minimum of six community events per year.
- Increase recognition of Benton SWCD by target audiences.
Actions: Benton SWCD staff and Board will wear official name tags and branded gear (hats, etc.) at community events; branded items will be distributed to constituents; publications and presentations will be created based on format outlined in Benton SWCD style guide.
- Improve program offerings.

- **Actions:** create short and mid-term evaluation tools (i.e.- Survey Monkey) and put into place.

Funding Sources

Benton SWCD Community Conservation Fund, Benton SWCD General Fund, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Meyer Memorial Trust, Oregon State Weed Board grants

Evaluation

Informal program evaluation by program partners at the end of each activity to inform the next year's program; evaluation sheets given to participants, collected and reviewed post-event.

Partnerships & Recent Collaborations

- OSU Extension Service, Benton County
- Greenbelt Land Trust
- Marys River Watershed Council
- Corvallis Sustainability Coalition
- Luckiamute Watershed Council
- City of Albany
- Calapooia Watershed Council
- Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
- City of Corvallis
- Benton County

Habitat Restoration Program

Program Summary

Increase wildlife habitat on private and public lands by providing technical and funding assistance. Technical assistance provides analysis of site, recommendations of site preparation methods including invasive weed control methods and site appropriate native plants. Restoration planning includes securing funding opportunities and identifying local sources of plants and contractors.

Goal

Increase awareness of the importance of providing wildlife habitat on private and public lands by controlling invasive weeds and planting native plant species appropriate for site, improving wetland hydrology, and reducing competing vegetation in oak savanna-woodland habitats. Work with urban and rural landowners to certify their properties for the National Wildlife Habitat Certification Program.

Program Components

Program work provides technical assistance for restoration of riparian forest buffers, wetland and upland prairies, oak savannas and oak woodland management for improving wildlife habitat. Assist landowners to identify costs and write grants to fund the implementation of restoration practices. Work to secure funding through Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board grants, federal farm programs and other opportunities. As project manager, Benton SWCD oversees project implementation, provides fiscal management, and writes project reports.

Target Audience

Rural and urban land managers

Communication Methods

Workshops, presentations, web pages, blog posts, emails, brochures, guides, targeted mailings, site visits, and reports

Potential Areas of Growth

- Work with landowners who want to improve their property for wildlife and pollinator habitat. Assist landowners to become a Certified Wildlife Habitat Property through the National Wildlife Foundation.
- Opportunities exist to incorporate wildlife habitat on the agricultural landscape, most likely on marginal pasture or edges of croplands. Promote agroforestry as a viable option for additional income and crop diversity on marginal lands.

Associated Natural Resource Concerns

- Loss of rare and declining habitat and species
- Loss of bio-diversity
- Habitat fragmentation
- Noxious and invasive plant species encroachment
- Lack of riparian buffers along streams
- Inadequate food, water, shelter and space for wildlife
- Endangered species recovery issues

Program Objectives

- Provide technical assistance for restoration of native habitats in Benton County.
Actions: hold at least three workshops and/or tours per year; provide at least 50 on-site consultations per year.
- Facilitate and provide funding for conservation practices.
Actions: enroll at least four landowners for programs per year; secure at least three grants for implementation per year; implement at least 20 acres of wildlife habitat improvements per year; implement at least two miles of stream buffers per year.
- Improve program offerings.
Actions: create short and mid-term evaluation tools (including Survey Monkey) and put into place.

Funding Sources

Federal Farm Programs, (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Small and Restoration Grants, Benton SWCD Conservation Incentive Program, Meyer Memorial Trust

Evaluation Methods

Informal program evaluation by program partners at the end of each activity to inform the next year's program; evaluation sheet given to participants, collected and reviewed post-event.

Partnerships & Recent Collaborations

- **Benton County**
 - Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Department
 - Benton County Riparian Protection Program Advisory Committee
- **City of Corvallis**
- **Corvallis Sustainability Coalition** Natural Areas Action Team
- **Greenbelt Land Trust** Property Management Plans Team
- **Willamette Riparian Workgroup**
 - Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**
 - Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program
- **U.S. Geological Survey** –Willamette Geomorphic Mapping Study
- **Oregon State University**
 - OSU students develop Wildlife Habitat Management Plans on rural lands
 - Fisheries and Wildlife Department
 - Horticulture Department: Oak Creek Center for Urban Horticulture
 - College of Forestry
 - Animal Sciences Department
 - OSU Extension Service: Forestry and Natural Resources
- **Oregon Parks and Recreation Department**
- **U. S. Department of Agriculture Farm Services Agency /Natural Resources Conservation Service**
 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program Local Working Group

- Upper Willamette Regional Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Partnership Project
- **Local Landowners**

Invasive Species Program

Program Summary

We use a variety of formats to share information about invasive species identification and management. We coordinate efforts to manage invasive species present in low concentrations and in priority habitats.

Goal

Improve invasive species management in Benton County; protect priority habitats and native species from invasive species impacts.

Program Components

The Benton Soil & Water Conservation District is committed to improving the management of invasive species in Benton County by using and helping other land managers make use of Integrated Pest Management practices.

- **Benton County Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA)** – coordination of CWMA, participation on Action Teams, write and submit grants on behalf of CWMA, develop projects, manages projects, and promotes CWMA efforts.
- **Teen Weed Spotters** – train and provide students with technical knowledge and skills, provide opportunities for Teen Weed Spotters to share knowledge with public (youth and adult audiences).
- **Weed Spotters Workshops/ trainings** to train volunteers in weed ID and removal, to maintain and develop a volunteer force for weed pulls.
- **Willamette Mainstem Cooperative (WMC)** – Benton SWCD coordinates this collaborative group that works to improve stewardship across all landownerships on the mainstem of the Willamette River from Corvallis to Albany. (See WMC Program Description.)
- **Conservation Site Visits** - Provide technical assistance on site preparation methods including invasive weed control methods and plans. See Habitat Restoration Program Description.
- **Weed Profile database** lists descriptions and links to treatment recommendations for BC CWMA listed species.
- **Invasive Species Webpages** with basic invasive species information and links for Benton
 - County CWMA, Identification guides, Weed Spotters & Teen Weed Spotters, etc.
- **Benton County Public Works (BCPW)-Benton SWCD Intergovernmental Agreement** –
 - provide technical assistance to BCPW related to vegetation management program.
- **Neighborhood Meetings, Club Talks** – provide weed talks and in-depth neighborhood meetings.
- **Internships** – for higher education students to gain career-building experience under the supervision of Benton SWCD staff.
- **Creation of Outreach Materials** – brochures for target weeds/audiences, more extensive guides as needed
- **Volunteer Weed Pulls** held periodically throughout the year.
- **OregonInvasivesHotline Reports Recipient** Benton SWCD receives, verifies and shares hotline reports within Benton County.

- **Participation in other collaborative efforts and groups** – Benton SWCD participates to varying degrees in a number of groups such as Willamette Aquatic Invasives Network and Willamette Stewardship Team- Albany Reach (WSTAR)
- **Neighborhood Captains** is a volunteer program that we offer coordination and support of for neighborhoods. It is a way for neighbors to share natural resource information in a peer-to-peer format, and to bring concerns to the attention of public authorities (City, County, etc.).
- **Other opportunities** will be dealt with as they arise and commitment will be made based on the availability of Benton SWCD staff and the project’s fit with District strategic plan goals.

Target Audience

All Benton County residents including recreationists, farmers, foresters, public land managers, utilities employees, students and educators.

Communication Methods

Workshops, talks, web, email, brochures, guides

Potential Areas of Growth

- Develop and implement (fund) an EDRR strategy
- Establish County-wide Invasives Week
- Grow the Let’s Pull Together Event

Associated Natural Resource Concerns

- Degradation of native habitats
- Decline in native plant and animal species
- Loss of biodiversity

Program Objectives

- Facilitate the sharing of information among land managers.
Actions: Schedule and host at least two CWMA and two WMC meetings a year; share information with land managers via CWMA and WMC mailing lists.
- Raise awareness about invasive species identification and management.
Actions: Hold at least two workshops per year; train at least 12 adults per year; train at least 12 students per year; coordinate at least two weed pull events per year.
- Create and provide invasive species identification and management information.
Actions: Maintain current information about invasive species via the online database; create and revise weed guides; offer current information via presentations.
- Improve program offerings.
Actions: create short and mid-term evaluation tools (including Survey Monkey) and put into place.

Funding Sources

Community Conservation Fund, General Fund, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Meyer Memorial Trust, Oregon State Weed Board, Bonneville Power Administration.

Evaluation

Informal program evaluation by program partners at the end of each activity to inform the next year's program; evaluation sheets given to participants, collected and reviewed post-event.

Partnerships & Recent Collaborations

- **OSU Extension Service Benton County 4-H-** Teen Weed Spotters, Educator Workshops
- **Cooperative Weed Management Area** members and friends
- **Oregon Invasive Species Council-** Education and Outreach Committee
- **Willamette Mainstem Cooperative-** aquatic weed grants & outreach
- **Greenbelt Land Trust** – jointly held trainings
- **Willamette Stewardship Team – Albany Reach–** Neighborhood Captains
- **Calapooia Watershed Council**
- **Monroe High School** – Teen Weed Spotters
- **City of Albany Parks and Recreation and Public Works Departments**

Native Plant Sale (NPS) Program

Program Summary

We encourage the use of native plants through formal presentations and the sale of low-cost native plant seedlings for urban and rural landscapes, educational plantings and restoration projects.

Goal

To encourage the use of native plants for erosion control, riparian restoration, landscape vegetation, windbreaks, invasive weed management, and wildlife and pollinator habitat enhancement. To increase the public's appreciation for native plants in urban, rural and working landscapes, and raise awareness on associated benefits including reduced use of water, fertilizer and pesticides. Furthermore, the Native Plant Sale allows Benton SWCD to interact with a diverse constituent base from urban and rural residents, and public and private sectors.

Program Components

The Benton Soil & Water Conservation District is committed to the promotion of native plants in conservation practices and as alternatives to exotic plants.

- Provide low-cost native plant seedlings to public and for restoration projects
- Major outreach event of the year
- Sale proceeds contribute funds to on-ground conservation programs and educational activities.

Target Audience

Benton County residents and other land managers within the same geographic region.

Communication Methods

Street banner, media/advertising, Horizons newsletter, website, printed brochures, native plant lecture (mid-January), blogs, volunteer recruitment, partners' newsletters.

Potential Areas of Growth

New plant species, marketing, stakeholder demographic analysis, needs assessment, survey past stakeholders, demonstration gardens with partner organizations to: promote native plants, showcase water gardens, highlight habitats, and address site-specific characteristics (soil, light, etc.). Create year-round native plant sale intern position, put link on plant sale page to design blog, host native plant tours and explore other venue options. Investigate the sale as a social enterprise.

Associated Natural Resource Concerns

- Erosion control
- Invasive plant alternatives
- Habitat restoration
- Reduce demands on water resources
- Environmental quality

Native Plant Sale Objectives

- Coordinate Native Plant Sale.
Actions: manage plant inventory; monitor stakeholder orders; oversee publicity; facilitate the two-day sale annually; engage at least 200 stakeholders and 30 volunteers in the sale and distribution of native plants; offer an educational discount; generate positive net annual income.
- Promote use of native plants.
Actions: Host at least two native plant presentations for the public per year; publish at least two blog posts per year; write grants for demo gardens; work with partners for garden construction.
- Improve program offerings.
Actions: create short and mid-term evaluation tools (including Survey Monkey) and put into place.

Funding Sources

Benton SWCD General Fund and plant sales fund the event.

Evaluation Methods

Stakeholder database analysis, net profit amount, order form survey, survey past stakeholders and volunteers.

Partnerships & Recent Collaborations

- **Eichler Hay Co.**
- **Native Plant Nurseries**
 - Brooks Tree Farm, Inc.
 - Champoeg Nursery, Inc.
 - Native Grounds Nursery
 - Oak Point Nursery
 - Sevenoaks Native Nursery
 - Willamette Gardens
- **Volunteers** – numerous volunteers have supported this event for decades. Sometimes this event serves as an OSU student service learning activity for several courses.
- **Local Landscape Designers** – donate garden designs to inspire native plantings.
<http://www.bentonswcd.org/native-plants-landscaping/>
- **OSU Faculty**
 - Crop & Soil Science Department
 - Geography Department
 - Horticulture Department
 - Emeritus faculty
- **Gardening Groups**
- Evening Garden Club – purchases some remaining inventory.

Soil Quality Project (SQP)

Program Summary

We offer soil health education for Benton County citizens and students and soil assessments for land managers.

Goal

To raise soil health awareness and provide in-field and laboratory physical, biological, and chemical soil assessments that encourage informed management decisions to improve soil function, lower production costs, and reduce environmental impacts.

Program Components

The Soil Quality Project provides education and assessments to encourage stakeholders to make informed management decisions that improve soil function.

- Provide soil quality assessment service and reports to land managers.
- Develop a database to manage SQP assessment results.
- Connect land owners with NRCS and other agencies' technical and financial opportunities that promote and support the conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources.
- Serve as an Oregon State University (OSU) Crop and Soil Science (CSS) Department affiliate faculty member. Maintain and supervise the SQP Lab on campus. Recruit and train OSU students to participate in activities including but not limited to: soil sample collection and processing, SQP lab assessments, and SQP report generation and delivery.
- Envision, design and implement soil science education and outreach efforts to benefit Benton County youth and adults, and Oregon agricultural professionals. This includes workshops that integrate soil health with enticing, pertinent topics, such as but not limited to: economics, irrigation water management, livestock and forage, forestry, cover crops, compost, profitability, fertility, organic matter, specialty crops, permaculture, reduced tillage, organic production, soil biology, disease suppression, biochar, biosolids, research and soil tests.
- Work with OSU Small Farms Program to maintain the Soil Quality Network (SQN) Map and website.

Target Audience

Benton County is the focus. The SQP has state-wide impact. The SQN Map has a global audience.

Communication Methods

Website, printed brochures, presentations, blogs, publications, SQN Map, workshops, K-12 and college education.

Potential Areas of Growth

Plan and support research-quality field trials/demonstrations based on soil health principles and practices, including but not limited to cover crop, residue management, reduced tillage, crop rotation, and organic amendments. Conduct Benton County needs assessment. Survey/interview past cooperators. Secure funds for soil health-related on-ground work, supplies, travel and project

management wages/benefits. Convene OSU researchers and other agricultural professionals for expert technical support.

Associated Natural Resource Concerns

Optimal soil function is the cornerstone of sustainable agriculture, yet continued soil degradation prevails. Soil function is the foundation of water quality, habitat health, and the cost-effective agricultural systems needed to provide food, fiber and income, now and in the future.

Program Objectives

- Encourage informed management decisions that build soil health.
Actions: Provide at least three soil quality assessments and reports per year to land managers.
- Raise awareness about soil health.
Actions: Deliver at least one soil education event per year to adults and/or youth through workshops, field days, course work and hands-on demonstrations; work with at least one OSU student and faculty per year.
- Share soil health information with relevant audiences.
Actions: write at least two articles, publications, and/or blog posts per year; increase Soil Quality Network Map participants by 10% per year.
- Improve program offerings.
Actions: create short and mid-term evaluation tools (including Survey Monkey) and put into place.

Funding Sources

Benton SWCD Community Conservation Program, Benton SWCD General Fund, explore other funding opportunities such as fee for service options.

Evaluation Methods

Educational event registration, farmer feedback during SQP report delivery, partnership documentation, research data analysis, workshop questionnaires (effective template in place), OSU student feedback, and farmer interviews.

Partnerships & Recent Collaborations

- **Benton County Landowners**
- **Benton County Farm Bureau**
- **Natural Resources Conservation Service**
- **OSU Extension Service, Benton County- Small Farms Program**
- **OSU Faculty**
Crop and Soil Science Department
Integrated Plant Protection Center
- **OSU Students**
- **SWCD Partners**
Clackamas, Wasco, Clatsop, Josephine, Polk, Tualatin, and Umatilla counties.

Water Quality and Land Management Program

Program Summary

The Water Quality and Land Management Program addresses land management impacts to surface and ground water quality. Some of the concerns we address include: mud and manure, drainage, irrigation, rural and urban storm water quality, and in-stream issues.

Goal

Maintain clean drinking water and healthy riverine ecosystems by conducting site assessments to identify natural resource concerns and providing technical assistance for Benton County residents to better manage land.

Program Components

Benton Soil & Water Conservation District is committed to improving and protecting water quality by helping residents manage their land in ways that reduce negative impacts to surface and groundwater quality. We do this in the following ways:

- **Committee and Workgroup Participation** – Benton SWCD participates in state and local water quality advisory committees and workgroups.
Agricultural Water Quality – Benton SWCD works as a non-regulatory entity with Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) in response to agricultural water quality complaints or concerns. We work with landowners and operators to reduce their impact on water quality through mutually beneficial solutions to both landowners and the land. Benton SWCD serves as the Local Management Agency for the Agricultural Water Quality Management Areas in Benton County. We visit sites with ODA for compliance of rules and work with landowners to comply through our Technical Assistance and funding opportunities.
Groundwater Management Area (GWMA)-Benton SWCD serves on the Agricultural Action Committee to address agriculture’s impact on nitrates in the GWMA. Represent Benton SWCD by attending meetings with GWMA local steering committee. Work with partner agency (or directly with landowners through grants) to obtain funding to direct federal program dollars to implement conservation practices such as water conservation, irrigation efficiency, cover crops, buffers which reduce nitrate leaching.
- **Conservation Technical Assistance** provided by email, phone, office walk-ins and on-site visits.
- **Conservation Planning** - Conduct conservation planning for landowners by assessing the condition of the natural resources and recommend conservation practices using the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service 9-step Conservation Planning methodology. Assist landowners to identify objectives, assess resources, develop alternative actions, and develop a timeline for implementation of resource management systems. Identify practices to improve the management of the following land uses: forestry, agro-forestry (including buffers), woodlands, pasture, natural areas, cropland, urban, (including weed control) to reduce impacts to the natural resources.
- **Grant Writing Assistance** - Assist landowners to identify project costs and writing grants to fund the implementation of conservation practices. As project manager, Benton SWCD oversees project implementation, provides fiscal management and writes project reports.

- **Water Quality and Land Management Events**, such as tours, workshops, and presentations.
- **Create Water Quality and Land Management Materials**, such as webpages and blog posts.
- **Technical and Financial Assistance focused in Jackson-Frazier Focus Area.**

Target Audience

Rural and urban landowners, land managers and residents.

Communication Methods

Workshops, presentations, web, email, brochures, guides, field visits, office walk-ins, phone calls

Potential Areas of Growth

- **Crop Diversification** – Diversification in agriculture will change the landscape in the future. Farmers see the need to provide cover crops and pollinator habitat. Market forces will most likely drive diversification of crops. There are opportunities to incorporate berries, fruits or nuts within current cropping systems (irrigation pivot corners, field borders). Implementation of agroforestry in the landscape is a strong possibility with farmers seeking more diversity in their production.
- **Water Conservation** – Some well water users in Benton Co. have low volume wells which fluctuate in volume seasonally. Education efforts are needed to help landowners conserve water on their properties, implement irrigation water management to improve efficiency and/or, methods for collection of rainwater for irrigation or gray water use. The general population needs information on their global water imprint and water conservation in general. Some techniques could include rainwater harvesting, water conservation educational brochures.
- **Rural and Urban Stormwater Quality** – Assist Benton County residents by providing technical assistance and educational efforts to inform rural and urban residents’ methods of protecting water quality in roadside ditches and streams. Some techniques could include rainwater gardens, filter strips, buffers.
- **Incorporate Outreach Strategy and Needs Assessment.**

Associated Natural Resource Concerns

- Animal (domestic and wildlife)
- Soil (quality and erosion)
- Water quality and quantity
- Plant management (native and invasive)
- Air quality
- Economic
- Energy
- Social
- Climate change

Program Objectives

- Educate Benton County residents to wisely manage resources through technical assistance.
Actions: reach at least 100 landowners/ year by telephone, email or office calls; conduct at

least 50 site visits; participate in/present at least two workshops, tours, or demonstrations per year.

- Provide information on funding sources through grants and programs.
Actions: provide incentives to implement conservation practices; secure funding for at least three conservation projects per year; enroll at least three federal farm program participants; implement at least five conservation projects per year.
- Collaborate with partners to address water quality and land management concerns.
Actions: serve on at least two technical advisory committees; partner with at least two partner agencies to implement regional/public conservation projects.
- Improve program offerings.
Actions: create short and mid-term evaluation tools (including Survey Monkey) and put into place.

Funding Sources

Oregon Department of Agriculture Technical/Local Management Area funds, Benton SWCD General Fund and Conservation Incentive Program Fund, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board grants, USDA Federal Farm Programs.

Evaluation Methods

Survey partners and landowners after services are provided; use surrogate measures such as reporting stream miles planted.

Partnerships & Recent Collaborations

- **Agricultural Water Quality Program**
Oregon Department of Agriculture; Polk, Upper Willamette and Lincoln SWCDs; and a local advisory committee that consists of local landowners and stakeholders.
- **Jackson-Frazier Creeks Focus Area**
Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts leadership
- **Ground Water Management Area**
Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Linn SWCD, Upper Willamette SWCD, Oregon Department of Agriculture, US Environmental Protection Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service
- **USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service**
Local Working Group
- **OSU Extension Service**
Small Farms
Forestry and Natural Resources
- **Greenbelt Land Trust**
- **Benton County Public Works**

Willamette Mainstem Cooperative (WMC)

Program Summary

The Willamette Mainstem Cooperative (WMC) is a group of landowners, organizations, and volunteers working together to improve stewardship across all landownerships on the mainstem of the Willamette River from Corvallis to Albany. The Benton SWCD serves in a leadership role to facilitate the activities of the WMC through a Steering Committee.

Goal

To promote, facilitate, and improve long-term stewardship of Willamette River resources through the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders.

Program Components

The WMC works to improve the ecological health of the Willamette River by increasing awareness of river resource issues, conducting research assessments and sharing results, and implementing habitat restoration. The following program components support this work:

- **Willamette River Invasive Plant Survey and Habitat Assessment** – This was a two-year assessment of invasive plants and high quality habitat on the Willamette River mainstem from Corvallis to Albany, conducted in 2012-2013. This survey covered 2,500 acres of riparian lands, and included mapping of priority invasive plants and high quality habitats. The final report summarizes these findings and includes management recommendations. It can be found on the [Benton SWCD website](#).
- **Partnership Network** – WMC partners promote, facilitate, and share long-term stewardship of natural resources along the Willamette River, through the collaborative efforts of individual landowners, volunteers, and interested organizations.
 - **Community Events** – Outreach events that support the goals and mission of this program include workshops for weed identification and management, presentations at conferences, and stakeholder meetings for information sharing and planning.
 - **Outreach Materials** – Provide aquatic weed identification guides, handouts with weed control information, WMC webpage with meeting minutes, agendas, reports and other information, PowerPoint presentations, posters, and landowner reports for sharing survey results.
- **Invasive Plant Management** – Secure funding and apply integrated techniques to control priority invasive plants on the Willamette River. Efforts span from volunteer weed pulls to technical methods implemented by contracted experts.
- **Monitoring** – Occurs on project sites before and after weed control occurs to determine success, site changes and non-target impacts and future management needs.

Target Audiences

Landowners along the Willamette River from Corvallis to Albany, land managers (public and private), river recreationists, and volunteers.

Communication Methods

Workshops, trainings, meetings, website, email, letters, brochures, posters, presentations, and guides.

Potential Areas of Growth

- **Enhance Effectiveness Monitoring** – Develop a monitoring program for existing and future projects to determine effectiveness of habitat restoration activities. The parameters will include changes to water quality, non-target species impacts and habitat utilization by different wildlife species. Possible partners for monitoring include: Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - Fisheries, Oregon State University, U. S. Department of Agriculture - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Western Invasives Network, and Portland State University.
- **Expand Partnership Network** – Expand the partnership network through collaboration and communication with other groups and stakeholders who have a shared interest in protecting Willamette River resources. This can be accomplished through community events, learning tours, sharing of data and outreach materials, and increased communication through meetings, phone calls, emails and other mediums.
- **Develop and Implement Strategic Plan** – Develop a five to seven year Strategic Action Plan for the WMC program. The elements of this plan will include the following for the Corvallis Albany reach of the Willamette River: long-term planning for sustainable funding, invasive plant management, and protection and enhancement of high quality habitats.

Associated Natural Resource Concerns

Minimize invasive species impacts to riverine ecosystem. Water quality concerns include dissolved oxygen, turbidity, temperature, nutrients, pH and other parameters.

Program Objectives

- Prioritize species focus based on invasive plant population size and habitat impacts.
Action: Develop a list of priority invasive plant species utilizing existing data and documents.
- Protect high quality habitats through control and containment of target invasive plants.
Actions: Manage and control target invasives using the most recent and effective techniques; prioritize weed control in areas where high quality habitat has been identified in the WMC designated service area; and treat at least 400 acres for priority invasives by 2018.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to raise awareness and address weed control priorities.
Actions: Annually hold at least four stakeholder meetings; implement at least two workshops; and organize at least four volunteer events on the river.
- Plan for the short and long-term management of aquatic and terrestrial invasives.
Action: Develop a plan for long-term management, maintenance and monitoring of target invasives and high quality habitats.
- Monitor post-treatment site changes for impacts, success, and future management needs.
Action: Implement monitoring protocols for aquatic and terrestrial sites to determine impacts of invasives management activities through observation and measurement of change in water quality parameters (DO, sedimentation, temp, etc.), non-target impacts (native species), and habitat recovery (increased utilization by native species & reduction of invasive species).
- Improve program offerings.
Actions: Create short and mid-term evaluation tools (including Survey Monkey) and put into place.

Funding Sources

- **Meyer Memorial Trust** – Willamette River Initiative
Currently have a two-year grant (2014-2016) for continued coordination of the WMC and management target invasives through planning, outreach and control activities.
- **Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board** – Willamette Special Investment Partnership
Currently have a three-year grant (2014-2017) for management of target invasives through planning, outreach and control activities.
- **Oregon Department of Agriculture** – Oregon State Weed Board
Application for continuation of 2014 OSWB grant funded project to conduct outreach and control activities concerning invasive water primrose (*Ludwigia hexapetala*) in the Willamette River system.
- **Bonneville Power Administration** – Habitat Technical Team
One-year contract starting in June 2015 for *Ludwigia* control work on the mainstem Willamette.
- **Potential Funding Sources**
National Fish and Wildlife Federation – Pulling Together program; Natural Resource Conservation Service – Environmental Quality Incentive Program, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, and others; Oregon State University – students for monitoring study; Audubon Society; Ducks Unlimited; Private donors or cost-share.

Evaluation Methods

Determine outreach effectiveness through surveys, interviews and other means. Photo monitoring at set points before and after treatments; aerial photo analysis; monitoring and tracking native and non-native plant and animal species composition changes. Pre and post treatment water quality assessments: temperature, pH, nutrients, turbidity and dissolved oxygen.

Partnerships & Recent Collaborations

- **WMC Steering Committee**
Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon State University Extension Service, Kenagy Family Farms Inc., Linn Soil and Water Conservation District, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, Greenbelt Land Trust, Calapooia Watershed Council
- **WMC Stakeholder Group**
Local Farmers, Willamette Riverkeeper, City of Albany Parks & Recreation Department, City of Corvallis Parks and Recreation Department, Stahlbush Island Farms Inc., Willamette Spirit Journeys, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs
- **Other Partners**
Benton County Parks & Recreation Department, Carex Working Group, City of Eugene, Integrated Resource Management, Long Tom Watershed Council, Luckiamute Watershed Council, McKenzie River Trust, North and South Santiam Watershed Councils, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, Portland State University, Stan and Louise Snyder, Upper Willamette Cooperative Weed Management, Upper Willamette Partnership, Western Invasives Network, Willamette Aquatic Invasives Network, Willamette River landowners, Willamette Stewardship Team-Albany Reach

Youth Education Program

Program Summary

We offer curricular materials, tools & supplies, grants, internships, and educational sessions for students and educators in Benton County.

Goal

Students and educators we serve gain improved understanding of natural resource topics and become better equipped to make informed land management decisions now and in the future. Specific topics include watershed and habitat concepts, appreciation for the natural world and the human connection, basic and soil science concepts, and soil-water interactions.

Program Components

The Benton Soil & Water Conservation District is committed to serving the youth and educators of Benton County. To this end, we participate in and offer a variety of programs, including:

- **Conservation Education Grants** for formal and non-formal educators working in Benton County.
- **Summer Ag Institute Scholarships** for educators working in Benton County to attend Session 1 of the Summer Ag Institute.
- **Natural Resources Internships** for our education audiences to gain career-building experience under the supervision of Benton SWCD staff.
- **Making Ripples Newsletter, Webpage and Mailing List** to inform educators of opportunities and lesson ideas.
- **Educator Workshops/Trainings** - will participate and/or help fund these “train the trainer” type events with partner organizations (such as OSU Extension).
- **Student Mentoring** - when approached by students for mentoring on senior projects or other projects, will accept on a case-by-case basis.
- **Teen Weed Spotters** - in partnership with OSU Extension 4-H, working with youth of Benton County on weed inventorying, control and awareness campaigns. We offer four school year field trips followed by four summer work days. Students who attend all four school year field trips are eligible to apply to participate in the summer work days, for which they will receive a stipend.
- **Participation in Field Trip Educational Days** - Must serve youth in Benton County. The programs we assist are Salmon Watch (4 days in field - fall) and Forest Camp (1 day in field - spring).
- **Loan of Equipment** - such as the soil tunnel, infiltration equipment, curriculum guides, etc.
- **Other Opportunities** - about four per year (generally one per season). Commitment will be made based on Benton SWCD capacity and the project’s fit with District work plans. Offer a set number of activity options (soil lessons, soil tunnel, soil painting, other).

Target Audience

All Benton County pre-K through 12th grade students, higher education students, formal and non-formal educators.

Communication Methods

School visits, field trips, mailing list, meetings & workshops.

Potential Areas of Growth

- We plan to bring Teen Weed Spotters to a wider audience and hope to provide small stipends to trained TWS for community service.
- Explore stronger role in Salmon Watch or other large scale event.
- Explore involvement in [maker movement](#).

Associate Natural Resource Concerns

- Native and invasive plant identification
- Watershed concepts & connectivity
- Soil basics, soil quality practices
- Wildlife & habitat types
- Soil-water interactions
- Science inquiry

Program Objectives

- Improve Benton County youth's understanding of natural resources topics.
Actions: Reach at least 100 students/year through field days, community service events, and classroom presentations.
- Develop natural resources management skills in youth.
Actions: Train at least ten Teen Weed Spotters per year.
- Encourage educators to teach natural resources information.
Actions: produce one Making Ripples newsletter per year linked to an educational workshop topic; offer grants for natural resources education; offer educator scholarship; loan out educational materials.
- Improve program offerings.
Actions: create short and mid-term evaluation tools (including Survey Monkey) and put into place.

Funding Sources

Community Conservation Fund, General Fund, explore other funding opportunities such as fee for service options.

Evaluation

Informal program evaluation by program partners at the end of each activity to inform the next year's program; evaluation sheets given to participants, collected and reviewed post-event.

Partnerships & Recent Collaborations

- **OSU Extension Service, Benton County 4-H-** Teen Weed Spotters, Educator Workshops
- **Marys River Watershed Council-**Salmon Watch, Evergreen field day,
- **Audubon-** Salmon Watch training
- **OSU Sea Grant/ Stream Webs-** Salmon Watch
- **Institute for Applied Ecology** – Evergreen Field Days, equipment loan

- **Greenbelt Land Trust** – field events
- **Calapooia Watershed Council** – student field days
- **City of Albany** – student field days
- **Monroe High School** – Teen Weed Spotters
- **Ag in the Classroom** – Summer Ag Institute scholarships