

2021

Conservation Accountability & Performance Program

January 2021 Commission Meeting

Administrative Requirements and Performance Measures for the Responsible Operation of a Washington State Conservation District.

Description

The Conservation Accountability and Performance Program (CAPP) is a combined mandatory and voluntary accountability and performance program for Washington conservation districts.

Authority

RCW 89.08.070 authorizes and directs the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) to assist and guide local conservation districts across the state in the implementation of natural resource conservation programs. To accomplish this, the Commission has established guidelines and controls to govern the conservation districts' use of state funds, property, and services.

Purpose & Background

The purpose is to improve the accountability and performance of each of the 45 conservation districts in the State of Washington. The basic philosophy is to always be looking for ways to improve programs and services, increase efficiency, and offer support to willing landowners and others.

Accountability Requirements

The accountability requirements checklist is comprised of statutorily required functions and activities that conservation districts must perform. Not meeting all legal accountability requirements may require the district board to meet with the Commission, the development of a performance improvement action plan, and follow-up assistance from Commission staff. Noncompliance may affect Commission funding eligibility.

Performance Standards

Standards are for districts' use to evaluate how well they are doing by assessing themselves against a specified list of voluntary performance standards. The Commission's goal is to help each district reach the highest possible level of performance. The focus is on interactive visits and learning experiences to help each participating district determine where it can improve its operation to get closer to where it wants to be as a highly functional organization. The Performance Standards checklist (2 through 8) is voluntary and for district internal use.

Commission Assistance

The Commission members and staff will assist and guide local conservation districts by:

- Providing transparent accountability requirements and performance standards;
 - Providing on-going feedback to improve district performance;
 - Providing assistance to enhance public confidence in conservation districts' abilities to provide effective and efficient delivery of programs and services;
 - Ensuring that assistance is available to help districts achieve annual and long-range goals in an effective, efficient, economic, and ethical manner;
 - Providing assistance for district oversight of responsible management and stewardship of public funds;
 - Providing assistance and training to ensure that conservation district elections are open to public, as well as conducted according to the RCW and WAC.
 - Center for Technical Development (CTD) to help build technical capacity;
 - Assisting districts with engaging the public in identifying and measuring desired outcomes; and
 - Allocating resources to districts in accordance with demonstrated conservation district needs and available funding.
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Process Timeline:

January – March - The CAPP Accountability and Performance standards are sent to districts in the 1st quarter to be utilized in an optional self-evaluation early in the calendar year. The accountability section (Standard 1) of the checklist is required, and the performance section (Standards 2-8) is voluntary. Districts are encouraged to develop an action plan to follow-up on any capacity building activities that are identified.

April – June - An interim report of CAPP status will be prepared by staff for the May Commission meeting. Regional managers and other Commission staff, as needed, will continue work with districts on accountability and performance elements needing attention or improvement.

July - Annual CAPP report is prepared for the July Commission meeting. Commission members review the report and take action on recommendations from Commission staff. The Commission may, at their discretion, reduce or withhold funding to a district not in-compliance with all Standard 1 accountability requirements.

August – December - Commission regional managers, in consultation with applicable Commission staff, will continue working with districts to implement an action plan to address deficiencies under Standard 1 mandatory accountability requirements.

STANDARD 1

Compliance with Laws (required standard)

Conservation Districts must fulfill their legal requirements as Political Subdivisions of the State of Washington and comply with all laws and the Washington Administrative Code. This evaluation is based on the best available information at the time it is conducted. **Date Evaluation Conducted:**

	Compliance with Laws and Requirements	Citation (link to RCW or WAC)	Yes	No
1.	Annual report of accomplishments was submitted on time, in the prescribed format to the Commission.	RCW 89.08.070 (11)		
2.	District Long Range Plan submitted on time & meeting RCW and Commission requirements.	RCW 89.08.220 (7)		
3.	District Annual Work Plan submitted on time & meeting RCW and Commission requirements.	RCW 89.08.220 (7)		
4.	The District has made a demonstrated effort to address their top resource needs identified in their Long Range Plan.	RCW 89.08.220 (7)		
5.	Upon request, District contracts and agreements have been submitted to the Commission	RCW 89.08.210		
6.	Supervisor elections & appointments are conducted according to RCW and WAC requirements. At least one District representative (ideally Elections Supervisor) has completed mandatory Elections Training provided by the Commission.	RCW 89.08.190 & 89.08.200 WAC 135-110		
7.	Annual financial reporting to State Auditor's Office completed correctly and on time.	RCW 89.08.210		
8.	All State Auditor identified issues (during SAO audits) have been resolved to the extent possible.	RCW 89.08.070 (12)		
9.	Open Public Meetings Act is followed including executive sessions.	RCW 42.30		
10.	State Public Records Act is followed.	RCW 42.56		
11.	All Board Supervisors and Public Records Officers are current on the required Open Public Meetings and Public Records Act Training.	RCW 42.30.210 & RCW 42.56.150		
12.	Keeping public informed of Conservation District activities.	RCW 89.08.220 (13)		
13.	State Ethics laws for public officials are being followed.	RCW 42.20 & 42.23		
14.	District in compliance with terms of Commission/District Master Agreement.	RCW 89.08.070 (5)		
15.	Demonstrated diligence in complying with state and federal statutes such as: contracting, employment/labor laws, etc., through adoption of up-to-date policies, training, and use of available resources such as MRSC and Enduris.	Various		

Standard 1 Ideas for Improvement:

STANDARD 2

Natural Resource Conservation

Conservation districts address natural resource concerns with landowners and land managers using incentive-based technical, financial, and educational assistance at the request of the landowner or manager.

Best Practices

A. Prioritizing Resource Concerns

Prioritizes which natural resource concerns to engage in based on community input and support, resource data, importance at state and regional levels, relevance, other groups working on the issue, magnitude of the issue, research conducted on issue, and appropriate role for the district.

B. Addressing Known Resource Concerns with Landowners

District actively provides contact and assistance to landowners (may not yet be a customer or cooperator) with known, high priority resource issues or in geographic areas of significant resource concern.

C. Services for Customers/Cooperators

District builds services and programs based on the needs of customers/cooperators for their conservation work along with the natural resource needs of the region. District actively engages customers/cooperators for their input on services and programs needed.

D. Quantifies Impact

District quantifies, in some method, its impact on the local natural resources by obtaining and/or maintaining quantifiable data on local impacts, maintains quantifiable cumulative impacts of district programs/work, and reports cumulative impacts to funders and other partners.

E. Technical Capacity

District has documented access to technical capacity to provide timely and efficient planning and implementation assistance for land owners to maintain conservation on the ground with reliable and consistent quality. For example, has certified technical employees, has access to at least one conservation planner, and participates in CTD data collection and certification programs.

F. Research & Technology Integrated

District integrates research and science into program development and implementation including connection with academic professionals; district offers to assist in advancing scientific research on emerging issues.

Standard 2 Ideas for Improvement

STANDARD 3

Board Governance & Policies

Conservation district boards govern and conduct the affairs of the organization to provide conservation services and programs for land owners within their district.

Best Practices

A. Board Roles & Responsibilities

Individual board members are informed of and understand their role and their responsibilities as local government board members and as representatives of a division of local government of Washington State, including their legal and fiduciary duties.

B. Board Governance & Leadership

Board of supervisors actively governs the district by demonstrating leadership in conservation stewardship as well as instilling an ethic and culture of constant improvement. Board has a written policy / procedure for supervisors and associate supervisors. Board leads budget development, strategic planning & implementation. The board leads and directs outreach efforts to engage the public who live in the district to serve on the board and to build partnerships with the District on natural resource conservation efforts.

C. Supervisor Participation, Vacancy Filling, Quorum

District board holds board meetings attended by a quorum of supervisors who have chosen a chair, actively pursues filling vacant supervisor positions, promotes the development of future board supervisors through community engagement and outreach, and have meetings rescheduled or cancelled due to lack of a quorum.

D. Board Effectiveness and Development

District board collectively does a self-assessment of overall board effectiveness, membership, and actively seeks board and supervisor development activities. Works with the Commission to develop needed and/or new supervisor and board development activities.

E. Effective Board Meetings

Regularly held and effective board meetings with well thought out agendas, minutes, active participation by supervisors and public (if present). Regular meetings ideally are less than 3 hours except under special circumstances. Board meetings should be held at least monthly with time and location advertised in local media and other conspicuous public locations. Meeting materials are distributed several days in advance to contribute to an effective meeting. There is a time and opportunity for public input at each board meeting. Meetings are not cancelled, except in special/extreme circumstances due to a lack of quorum. Staff input is sought by the board as needed or directed by the board. Board meetings are conducted in

accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act and with respect, tact, and professionalism to all who attend.

F. Legal Questions

District always utilizes proper legal counsel for legal questions and/or needs (Enduris, WSCC, MRSC, and/or an attorney). The District has a policy for when legal counsel is to be used, how it is to be used, and how the board engages the services of legal counsel.

G. District Operations Policies

Current district operations policies are reviewed and updated annually. When operations policy issues arise, the district utilizes needed expertise to address those issues and craft policies as needed.

Standard 3 Ideas for Improvement

STANDARD 4

Fiscal Oversight

Conservation district supervisors are ultimately responsible for the fiscal oversight for their conservation district and conducting the business affairs in a lawful, ethical and responsible manner.

Best Practices

A. Leveraging Financial & Other Resources

District is leveraging, or can demonstrate it has tried to leverage all their funding with other resources from other districts and local, state, federal, non-governmental or private partners.

B. Financial Reporting & Vouchering

All financial reporting and vouchering to the WSCC and other funders is on time, complete, accurate, and complies with funders' financial policies and grants procedures.

C. Use of Allocated Funding

District has utilized WSCC and all allocated public funding in a timely manner, or has notified the funder at least three months before the end of the fiscal year that funding allocations for that fiscal year cannot be utilized, allowing for funding to potentially be used by another district.

D. Funding & Budgeting

District has adopted & followed a budget that maintains cash reserves to meet financial commitments.

E. Internal Financial Controls

District has excellent internal controls and policies that it follows to safeguard public funds. District has maintained clean internal and state audits for a minimum of two (2) audit cycles. District seeks out and utilizes good examples of effective internal controls and policies.

Standard 4 Ideas for Improvement

STANDARD 5

Human Resources

Conservation districts have skilled personnel to carry out their programs, whether volunteers, paid staff and/or consultants/contractors and have a governing board of five supervisors that actively govern the human resources policies of the district.

Best Practices

A. Delegated Authority

Any delegation of responsibilities (authority) to a district manager, or equivalent is clearly set out in writing, is consistent with board approval requirements of the WSCC, and commensurate with the experience of the board and manager, within the scope of the job description of the manager, and acknowledged by both the manager and board chair in writing.

B. Training

The district has an appropriate training policy and plan for all supervisors & staff. Staff and supervisors are actively participating in annual training opportunities (WACD, WADE, WSCC, Enduris, NRCS, etc.). The training policy includes actively pursuing opportunities for cross-training.

C. Performance Evaluations

Board members assure that performance evaluations are conducted for each staff member annually, and directly evaluate performance of the lead staff (manager, executive, director).

D. Personnel Policies & Procedures

Board members have developed and shared personnel policies and procedures with each employee.

Standard 5 Ideas for Improvement

STANDARD 6

Planning

Conservation districts build their long range and annual plans to address high priority resource concerns using public and partner input.

Best Practices

A. Public & Stakeholders Input for Program & Plan Development

Input is sought from public and stakeholders in program development, during annual and long range plan development, public and stakeholder input is gathered, and solicited before annual work plan and long range plan are approved by the board. At a minimum, one open public meeting in the community shall be held to seek input from the public and stakeholders.

B. Annual Work Plan

Annual Work Plan addresses the specific natural resource concerns in a prioritized manner as approved by the board of supervisors. The district board actively pursues implementation of activities to meet the goals of the annual plan.

C. Regular Review and Use of Annual and Long Range Plans

Meeting agendas are built with reference to annual and long range plan priorities and actions. Board members and staff regularly review and refer to annual and long range plans.

Standard 6 Ideas for Improvement

STANDARD 7

Partnering

Conservation districts partner with organizations and agencies in the delivery of conservation programs and projects.

Best Practices

A. Partnering with Public, Private, Tribal, and Nonprofit Partners

Demonstrated ability to work and coordinate with current and potential partners to identify and target areas for natural resource conservation and improvement, projects, opportunities for sharing funding, and workforce resources.

B. Partnering with Other Conservation Districts

Demonstrated ability to work and coordinate with other conservation districts to identify and target areas for natural resource conservation and improvement, projects, opportunities for sharing funding, and workforce resources.

C. Working Relationships with Elected Officials & Tribal Governments

District supervisors and staff have regular contact including meetings and tours, with elected officials and staff in cities, counties, state legislature, tribal government, and congress to provide information on conservation projects and services.

D. Participation in Affiliated Organizations

District supervisors and staff actively participate in affiliated organizations' events, committees, elected positions, and activities (e.g., WACD, WADE, WCS, and NACD), including payment of annual membership.

E. Working Relationships with Conservation Commission

District supervisors and staff provide open and constructive feedback to the WSCC, and actively bring up and work to resolve in a timely manner any issues.

Standard 7 Ideas for Improvement

STANDARD 8

Public Outreach & Education

Conservation districts provide conservation information and education to a wide variety of audiences.

Best Practices

A. Public Outreach

District has a public outreach plan (in Annual and-or Long Range Plan plan) including regularly publishing and distributing information regarding district activities, as demonstrated by: press releases, newsletters, social media presence, district tours of projects, and distribution of information to partners, diverse stakeholders, and funders.

B. Youth Education

District has a youth education program assisting school teachers and administrators, including classroom and field activities that have a clear connection with school programs, the education requirements of the school district, and its related natural resource educational impact.

C. District Physical Location

Has a physical location that provides regular, weekday office hours for public access, information, and services. Office hours are clearly posted at office location and on district website. District has signage visible from a public right of way adjacent to the district office.

D. Annual Report of Accomplishments

Annual report of accomplishments includes outstanding examples of conservation work completed, compared to what the district planned to do or needs to do.

Standard 8 Ideas for Improvement

District Capacity Building Ideas, Actions & Record of Exceptional Activities

STANDARD 2 - Natural Resource Conservation

STANDARD 3 - Board Governance & Policies

STANDARD 4 - Fiscal Oversight

STANDARD 5 - Human Resources

STANDARD 6 - Planning

STANDARD 7 - Partnering

STANDARD 8 - Public Outreach & Education