STATE OF WASHINGTON
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
PO Box 47721 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7721 • (360) 407-6200 • FAX (360) 407-6215

September 13, 2023

TO: David Schumacher, Director
Office of Financial Management

FROM: Kirk Robinson, Interim Executive Director
Washington State Conservation Commission

SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2024 Supplemental Capital Budget Request

The state of Washington faces multiple natural resource challenges, including salmon and orca recovery, climate and drought resiliency, shellfish recovery, and forest health protection. The Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) implements vital incentive-based programs that provide for the construction of conservation projects to achieve effective, multi-benefit solutions for our most pressing natural resource issues and create jobs and drive economic activity.

SCC is requesting capital funds to continue the following programs that empower landowners and conservation districts in every corner of our state to implement vital conservation projects.

I. **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) State Matching Funds - $3,000,000**
This amount covers the state portion of the dollar match needed to bring millions of Farm Bill dollars to Washington for RCPP projects. These projects unite multiple partners in solving natural resource issues. SCC has been designated as the agency to coordinate the pass-through dollars that require a state capital match for RCPP projects. RCPP projects create jobs and make measurable progress on urgent issues, including water quality, fish and wildlife habitat restoration, drinking and irrigation water supply, forest health and wildfire resiliency, and farmland preservation. With the increase in federal funds investment in the RCPP, several new RCPP projects are forming statewide that have approached SCC for state match funding if they successfully get an RCPP award from USDA NRCS.

Sincerely,

Kirk Robinson
Interim Executive Director

cc: Sarah Groth, Director of Accounting and Budget

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TO: David Schumacher, Director
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FROM: Kirk Robinson, Interim Executive Director
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SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2024 Supplemental Operating Budget Request

Private landowners own over 50% of the land in our state. If we don't engage them broadly with conservationefforts, we cannot make significant progress toward sustaining healthy natural resources and Washington-grown food and products.

For over 75 years, the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) has worked with conservation districts and other partners to engage landowners and communities in every corner of our state with actions that help provide Washingtonians with healthy water, air, habitat, soil, and food. We do this by utilizing innovative strategies based on principles of social science and behavior change. But there always are more people requesting services than we have the capacity to provide, and there always are more communities — including traditionally underserved communities — that we want to serve.

The following two fiscal year 2024 Supplemental Operating Budget Requests make it possible for the SCC, conservation districts, and our partners to engage people more broadly with actions that sustain healthy natural resources and support our food system, which benefits us all.

I. **Conservation Technical Assistance - $10,000,000**
To achieve sustainable natural resources and farmland, Washington must engage more residents and landowners in conservation efforts. The estimated biennial need for this important work is over $24 million — we request $10 million. These services require staff time and funding, and current Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funding only allows a small percentage of landowners to receive the assistance they need to achieve resource stewardship goals. This proposed increase will enable conservation districts to reach a broader cross-section of their communities and build voluntary partnerships with far more residents than is currently possible.

As community engagement grows, districts will be better able to provide the expertise needed to design more farm-friendly projects and other projects that protect and enhance healthy water, air, and land for all. Conservation districts are trusted, non-regulatory, community-based entities uniquely positioned to develop relationships and provide appropriate site-specific expertise. This could include conservation and farm

planning, nutrient management, habitat restoration, urban agriculture and conservation, soil health, local food systems resiliency, range management, or other types of specialized expertise.

II. SCC Resource Needs (Full Time Equivalent or FTEs) - $600,000

SCC is requesting to raise our FTE count by six FTE's. In the 2023-25 Budget, the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) received an increase of approximately 44% in our operating funding and an increase of approximately 50% in capital funding. This funding has created more granting and programming opportunities for Washington's conservation districts, but it has also increased the workload of the current agency staff. Therefore, SCC is seeking six additional full-time employees (FTEs) to help manage the increased workload, ensure accountability of public funds, and to better serve Washington's conservation districts, counties, and citizens.

Sincerely,



Kirk Robinson
Interim Executive Director

cc: Sarah Groth, Director of Accounting and Budget

Washington State Conservation Commission

CONSERVATION DISTRICTS OF WASHINGTON STATE
your window to healthy lands

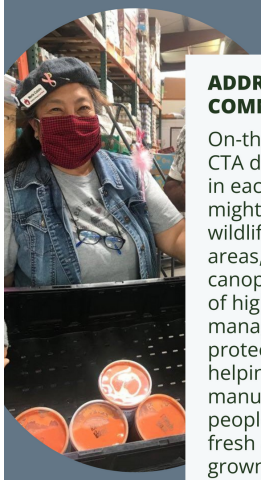
2024 SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET REQUEST

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Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

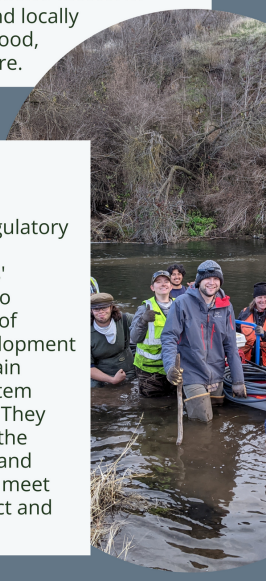
CORE COMPONENTS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

WHAT WILL CTA DOLLARS DO?



ADDRESS LOCAL COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

On-the-ground work using CTA dollars looks different in each community. Projects might include creating wildlife habitat in urban areas, increasing tree canopy to mitigate impacts of high temperatures, managing stormwater to protect salmon and orcas, helping farmers manage manure properly, giving people better access to fresh and locally grown food, and more.



BUILD DISTRICT CAPACITY

Communities and regulatory agencies rely on conservation districts' technical assistance to weather the impacts of climate change, development pressures, supply chain disruptions, food system resiliency, and more. They cannot keep up with the demand for services and need core funding to meet obligations and attract and retain qualified staff.



INCREASE ENGAGEMENT

Build community awareness and engagement with priority natural resource issues through events like annual Orca Recovery Day activities, which get diverse community members involved with hands-on conservation work.

Funding requested: $10 million

This request supports the foundation of all conservation districts' engagement with their community— Conservation Technical Assistance. CTA is crucial for conservation districts to further develop long-term, trusted relationships to empower even more people to become better stewards of our natural resources and increase sustainable farming.

Quick numbers

Well over 3,000
landowners have requested site visits.

More than 1,000
farm plans need to be written, including 100+ for dairy nutrient management.

70%
of conservation districts are interested in launching or expanding services that improve agricultural viability, preserve farmland, and/or expand markets.

50%
of conservation districts would like to launch or expand services that support farmers markets and food access and/or assist with food system infrastructure.

Leveraging of funds: For every dollar SCC provides, districts leverage $3.41 in local, state, and federal funding. (2021)

CONSERVATION STARTS WITH...

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

WORK THAT REQUIRES FUNDING FROM THIS STATE BUDGET REQUEST



1 EMPOWER PEOPLE

Conservation districts serve as responsive, local hubs of information. They connect people to voluntary actions they can take to conserve resources

2 WRITE CONSERVATION PLANS

Staff work with landowners to write conservation plans for their property, which are required to apply for most state and federal grant programs.





3 DEVELOP PROJECTS

Work with willing landowners and land managers to develop both single landowner and larger scale conservation projects.

4 ASSIST WITH PERMITS

Many projects require permits and cultural resource surveys. Conservation districts often coordinate these logistics.





5 APPLY FOR FUNDING

Districts assist landowners with completing applications for project funding, when needed.

BREAK GROUND ON CONSERVATION PROJECT!





: Rachel Little, Benton Conservation District

Testimonials

I want to do the right thing because it benefits natural resources as well as my own agricultural operation. Without voluntary conservation services and programs, I would not have had the opportunity to maintain the baseline and work towards improvements on my land.

- Jack Field, Yakima County cattleman

The district receives a broad spectrum of requests that align with our mission but can't always be addressed or funded. CTA funding meets the essential needs of districts by providing flexibility for staff to be better trained, improved and consistent service for residents, and allows projects to be implemented quickly and efficiently. The need for this funding is crucial now more than ever with the high volume of requests that continues to grow year-to-year.

- Okanogan Conservation District

CONTACTS

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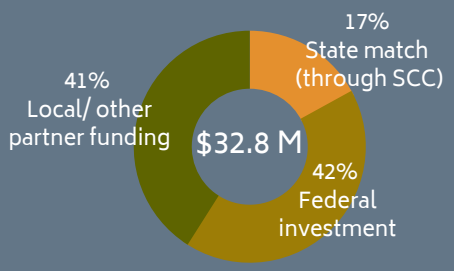
Washington State Conservation Commission

2024 SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET REQUEST

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RCPP Matching Funds

A magnet for leveraged funds



State match represents 17% of the five-year budgets for 7 RCPP projects. The remaining 83% (contingent on state match) from other federal partner contributions.



Leverage of 5 to 1

On average, every dollar of RCPP state match will leverage $5 in federal and other partner contributions.



Putting Washington to Work

For each RCPP, multiple projects are constructed. Over the length of the project, the seven ongoing projects alone will generate over 1,000 jobs.

Funding requested: $3 million

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program or RCPP is a Farm Bill program that awards federal funding to projects where multiple partners invest in cooperative action to solve natural resource issues in targeted areas. Grant awards require match, and the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) has been designated to pass-through state capital matching funds for successful RCPP recipients.

Why this can't wait

- RCPP is an efficient way for federal, state, tribal, and local partners to coordinate efforts and make landscape-scale improvements on urgent issues, including soil health, salmon and orca recovery, farmland preservation, drought resilience, and forest health.
- With the unprecedented investment of Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds into RCPP, the opportunity to leverage these federal funds must not be missed.
- Partners of seven RCPP projects in Washington have already committed millions of federal and local funding to support their work. But they need state match to secure those commitments and make their budgets whole.
- Many of these five-year projects have been in progress for years and landowners have signed contracts to work with partners on actions that meet their goals. Without a state match, the project contracts won't be met, jeopardizing trust.

What does RCPP look like on the ground?



Installing fish-friendly screens on irrigation intakes.



Upgrading irrigation systems to more efficient sprinkler systems.



Removing fish barriers and replacing them with bridges that allow fish access.

RCPP Projects in Washington

Ongoing Projects

1 Palouse River Implementation Partnership WRIA 34

- **Lead partner:** Palouse Conservation District
- **Project:** Engaging agricultural producers (through incentives) to implement the Palouse River Watershed Management Plan. Thus improving water quality and soil health, and reducing regulatory action.

2 Middle Columbia Steelhead Partnership

- **Lead partners:** Kittitas County Conservation District and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
- **Projects:** Accelerating the recovery of the threatened Mid-Columbia steelhead by targeting high-priority watersheds, which produce more that 50% of the wild steelhead in the Yakima River Basin.

3 Puyallup Watershed Partnership

- **Lead partner:** Pierce Conservation District
- **Project:** Working to permanently conserve 1,000 acres of prime farmland and assist landowners with restoration activities that enhance salmon habitat and preserve the economic and ecosystem benefits that farmland provides.

4 Southwest Washington Small Foreset Lands Conservation Partnership

- **Lead partner:** Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- **Project:** Assisting small forest landowners with forest stewardship plans that improve habitat, protect water quality, improve forest resiliency and keep working forests working.

5 Poop Smart Clark Program

- **Lead partner:** Clark Conservation District
- **Project:** Connecting landowners with the tools they need to drive social change, adopt better management practices and correct sources of sediment, nutrient and bacteria runoff in Clark County.

6 Fuel Break & Forestry Resiliency Partnership

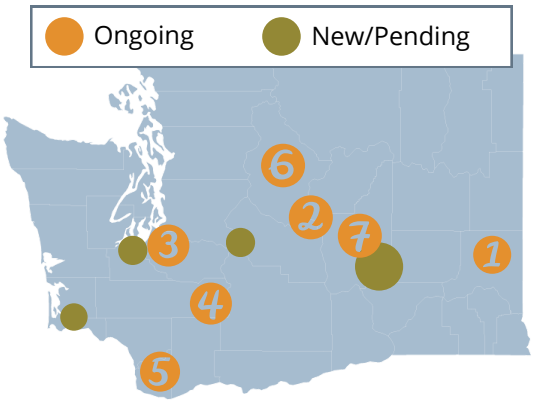
- **Lead partner:** Cascadia Conservation District
- **Project:** Increasing the scope and scale of wildfire risk reduction and wildlife enhancement projects in areas identified by DNR, US Forest Service, local utilities and fire districts as critical for restoring forest health and improving response to wildfire.

7 Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program

- **Lead partner:** Columbia Basin Conservation District
- **Project:** Conserving 33,000 acre-feet of groundwater in the rapidly declining Odessa Aquifer each year through implementing on-farm irrigation systems that replace groundwater irrigation with Columbia River surface water.

RCPP projects that receive state match through SCC stretch across Washington improving natural resource conditions and generating over a thousand jobs for our communities.

Project Locations



Accomplishments



With assistance from Palouse River RCPP partners, farmers have started using soil-friendly conservation tillage on 80 square miles of land — that's an area almost the size of Seattle!

Testimonial



"I signed up for the reduced minimum tillage program to basically try to establish into a more no-till program for future years to maintain soil and organic matter. working the partners was easy... I'm hoping to see benefits like higher organic matter, which then may allow water to absorb into the ground and not run off, and to build up that long-term organic matter to hopefully see increased yields."

- Ryan Kile, Whitman County farmer
Commenting on his experience with the Palouse-Rock Lake Conservation District as part of the Palouse River Watershed RCPP.

Washington State Conservation Commission

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