



5-Year Plan (2022 to 2026) Foster Creek Conservation District

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Organization of the Foster Creek Conservation District

A political subdivision of the State of Washington – authorities, powers and structure contained in RCW 89.08.

The Foster Creek Conservation District (FCCD) is located in north central Washington and encompasses approximately 622,520 acres in the northern half of rural Douglas County. Created in 1942, FCCD is one of 45 Districts in the state and is mandated to develop and administer voluntary, non-regulatory programs to conserve natural resources. Governed by a board of five volunteer supervisors from the local community, FCCD currently employs a full-time professional team of six staff who identify and provide assistance for local and regional conservation problems and manage a variety of grant funded programs to help guide these voluntary local solutions.

Function of the Foster Creek Conservation District

To provide technical and financial resources to land managers, up-to-date educational resources to inform local communities and relevant assistance to benefit agricultural viability, hand-in-hand with the conservation of soil, water and related natural resources.

Mission of the Foster Creek Conservation District

Serving the community through quality technical assistance for natural resource stewardship.

- To protect natural resources, enhance sustainable, profitable agriculture, and improve the quality of life in Douglas County; by encouraging good land stewardship through education, incentives, and quality technical assistance. Protecting individual and private property rights and building strong coalitions with other groups, including but not limited to, government assistance as a valid conservation partner to agriculture by providing quality, intelligent, technical assistance to cooperators and partners.

Vision of the Foster Creek Conservation District

FCCD is recognized as a reliable, trustworthy source of technical and financial assistance and a significant education resource for local land managers and communities, and as a valuable, professional partner to local, state and federal authorities for collaborative implementation of on-the-ground stewardship activities in the region.

Values of the Foster Creek Conservation District

- Reliable, honest, transparent, respectful, resourceful and fiscally responsible
- Locally led, economically sustainable resource conservation
- Trusted partner for landowners and other local, state and federal agencies
- Providing realistic voluntary/non-regulatory solutions for local problems
- Science-based solutions, up-to-date ideas and innovative approaches
- Sustainable stewardship
- An up-to-date and accurate educational resource

Natural Resource Priorities, Measures of Success and Goals:

Priorities are established by the five member FCCD Board of Supervisors, based on their local knowledge and experience, in conjunction with FCCD staff, who work directly with landowners and managers, partner agencies and others.

FCCD currently has four main programmatic priorities, all of which are fundamentally linked to some extent:

1. Soil Health

Douglas County is dependent on agriculture and northern Douglas County has over 350,000 acres in dryland cereal crops despite low precipitation (6-11"/year). Multiple soil units per field make agricultural management challenging. Erosion prone soils, organic content and water holding capacity are some of the regional concerns.

There is a proven relationship between farm viability and soil and water quality. Over the previous five years, FCCD provided support and resources to producers transitioning from conventional tillage to reduced till/no-till practices. Many producers converted to direct seed systems are now experimenting with additional BMPs, seeking additional sustainable dryland farming practices that will improve soil health and crop yields.

Over the next five years, FCCD plans to expand its soil sampling program as well as its range of assistance programs, including on-farm trials and market research. The information FCCD obtains through analysis of soil samples is integral as it helps inform a producer's management decisions and supports recommendations for the implementation of a suite of agricultural BMPs relevant to improving sustainability and resilience, at a time when unpredictable climatic influences are becoming a real concern. FCCD also plans to expand its education and outreach program to develop a well-rounded program that encompasses all regional agricultural activities, from large broad-acre operations to orchards and small farms. The long-term goal is to support sustainable, regenerative farming practices in the region and economic viability for land managers while also improving outcomes for the land and wildlife.

GOALS:

- Expand the range of FCCD's soil health assistance programs.
- Source ongoing cost-share funding to help producers continue to transition into direct seeding.
- Incorporate the establishment of on-farm trials for new crops, crop rotations and/or cover crops.
- Source funding for agricultural market research.
- Establish more soil sampling locations to expand the current soil monitoring program.
- Broaden outreach to demonstrate regenerative agriculture, such as incorporating grazing into direct seed systems.
- Research rangeland health and find resources to assist ranchers establish and/or maintain healthy rangeland.
- Build FCCD's network of Soil Health partners to create a platform that producers can participate in and benefit from.
- Facilitate a network of agricultural entities that regularly communicate and work together to benefit agriculture in the region.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS:

- 25 Dryland agricultural producers are assisted with implementing a variety of soil health BMPs.
- Farm trials are established and ongoing, with at least 10 producers participating.
- A rangeland health program is developed and underway, with at least 4 participants.
- Annual soil monitoring is increased from 29 to 60 participant fields.

- Soil sampling data is analyzed and reported to land managers, and the information directly informs at least 10 individual management decisions.
- At least 3 x soil health workshops or meetings are held each year.

2. Water Quality

Foster Creek is the main water body in northern Douglas County and joins the Columbia River at Bridgeport. The Foster Creek Watershed is a very arid ecosystem, highly vulnerable to even small changes in climatic conditions and land use. The creek currently has WA. Department of Ecology 303(d) listings for water quality impairments of temperature, dissolved oxygen, and pH. This priority watershed sits within WRIA 50 and FCCD has been collecting water quality data off creeks and tributaries in this area since 2017. Between 2018 to 2021, monitoring was conducted at 22 sites with more than 568,810 measurements taken, providing valuable information to guide watershed planning decisions, assist the design of stream restoration projects and assess changes to water quality over time. The monitoring data will help FCCD develop projects to improve water quality, stream flow, stream shade and riparian buffers, leading to the re-establishment of fully functional stream systems and more resilient watersheds better able to survive catastrophic events such as drought and wildfire.

GOALS:

- Continue FCCD's current water quality monitoring program.
- Continue to address multiple 303(d) listings for water quality impairments for temperature, dissolved oxygen, and pH on Foster Creek through various riparian restoration projects, outreach and education.
- Add at least one new watershed or sub-watershed to the current monitoring regime and expand monitoring to include streamflow and sediment load parameters.
- Resurrect FCCD's discontinued well monitoring program, and expand the program currently being funded by WSU.
- Update the WRIA 50 watershed plan, including mapping sections of streams impacted by erosion.
- Develop a full-scale watershed restoration plan for Foster Creek.
- Resume WQ monitoring on Jameson Lake and engage a professional consultant to recommend appropriate options for controlling algae blooms in the lake.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS:

- Foster Creek and its' tributaries are compliant with the water quality standards set by Washington State Law.
- Water quality results are connected to in-stream and on-the-ground riparian restoration activities.
- One new stream restoration project on Foster Creek is completed, three new sites are planned and implementation of at least one new project is underway.
- The WRIA 50 watershed plan update is completed.
- Well monitoring is resumed throughout the county.
- A lake water enhancement project for Jameson Lake is planned and funding obtained to start implementing at least one of the algae bloom control methods recommended by the consultant.

3. Fire Recovery

Historically, the shrub-steppe habitat of Douglas County evolved with fire. However, since 2018, northern Douglas County has experienced two major fast-moving wildfires – the 2018 Grass Valley fire that burned approximately 77,000 acres in eight hours, and the 2020 Pearl Hill fire that burned over 230,000 acres in approximately 36 hours, destroying miles of fencing, a number of homes and other structures. While researching fire recovery information FCCD discovered that, although information on forest fires is readily available, there is very little information specifically relating to fire in shrub-steppe. With a grant received through FEMA for the Grass Valley fire, FCCD commenced a project to research and develop a series of education modules relevant to the region. The project aims to improve awareness and knowledge of fire hazards and fire behavior, provide information to help mitigate the risk of loss due to wildfires, and planning assistance to help landowners create defensible spaces on their properties. A second FEMA grant provided

funding for on the ground assistance, specifically post-fire weed control and re-seeding efforts. As fire is likely to remain a high regional priority in the future FCCD hopes to continue developing this important program to keep the information current.

GOALS:

- Source funds to continue FCCD's fire recovery program and help update Douglas County's Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), in conjunction with the WA DNR.
- The fire related learning modules for students and adults are completed and actively used as a teaching tool.
- Create an up-to-date in-house database of landowner information and fire related resources to facilitate fire recovery planning and funding opportunities.
- Expand fire recovery engagement and available fire mitigation and/or recovery assistance options for landowners.
- Collaborate and regularly communicate with other local agencies to improve regional fire recovery efforts and information.
- Improve FCCD's website to make it a more interactive outreach tool that includes fire information.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS:

- FCCD conducts at least one fire related workshop or training session for local communities, schools, landowners, or agencies each year, with at least 30 participants each event.
- 100 individual site-based plans are completed for landowners to assist with fire recovery, fire mitigation and/or the implementation of relevant BMPs.
- 50 landowners have taken action to reduce fire risk on their properties.
- Actions by these landowners increases their combined defensible space acreage by 20%.

4 Technical Assistance

Technical Assistance (TA) is a broad heading that encompasses multiple programs and projects, including the Douglas County Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP), WSCC Implementation activities and many of the smaller grants and contracts FCCD receives in any given year. Current TA programs include a number of weed mapping and control projects, post fire site assessments, Home Ignition Zone assessments, a riparian restoration project and writing Douglas County Multiple Species General Conservation Plans.

FCCD is the lead agency for the VSP, an important over-arching program implemented across the whole of Douglas County as an alternative to the regulatory approach of WA's Growth Management Act. The program aims to protect and enhance critical areas while maintaining and improving the long-term viability of agriculture. Program activities encompass a variety of planning, project design and implementation activities approved by the VSP Work Group.

In the past, FCCD has been contracted for weed mapping and control work by both the BLM and TNC. FCCD has also completed several Task Orders for the NRCS, assisting with farm planning and contract reviews across Douglas County. It is hoped that all these activities continue.

GOALS:

- Improve and expand upon VSP messaging and landowner participation.
- Continue to build relationships with and provide technical assistance to private landowners and land managers within the county.
- Develop a successful orchard outreach program.
- Develop plans for orchard related projects and have implementation underway at two local orchards.
- Create an outreach plan with information relevant to ranchers wanting to improve rangeland health.
- Source additional funding to help expand range research in Douglas County and help producers maintain healthy herds and rangelands.
- Source cost-share funding to help install fence options that are wildlife friendly and fire-resistant.

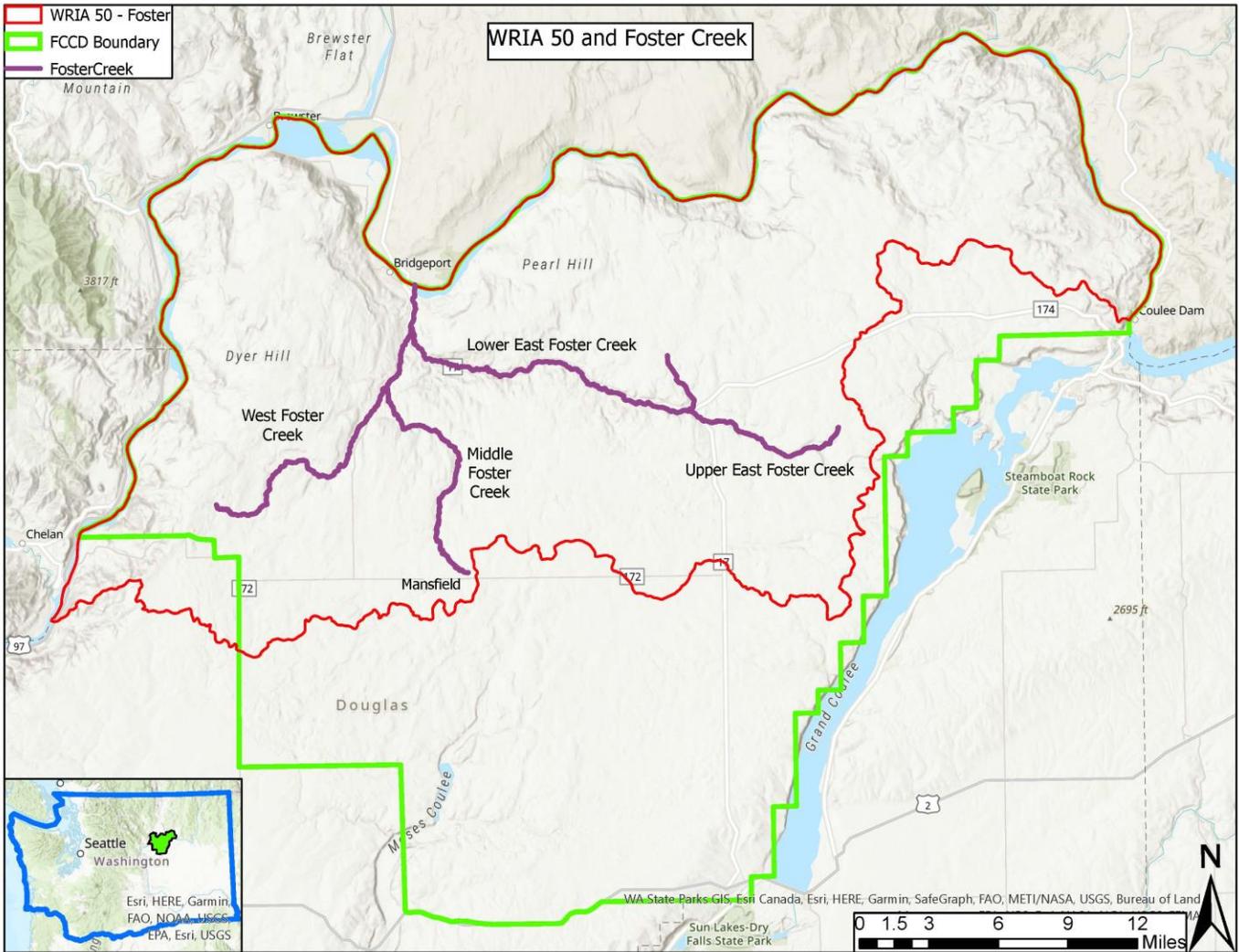
- All FCCD staff are trained and provide planning assistance to NRCS through Task Orders.
- Source funding to maintain an ongoing weed mapping and control program.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS:

- A minimum of 200 VSP checklists are filled out and returned to FCCD's VSP Coordinator.
- 2 Orchard projects are planned and implemented.
- At least 400 farm plans or reviews are completed through NRCS Task Orders.
- At least 100 cooperators are given appropriate technical assistance to enroll in, continue with or implement a relevant conservation practice through NRCS, WSCC or other funding sources.
- At least 10 MSGCP plans completed for Incidental Take Permits approved by the USFWS.
- Weed mapping is completed across 2,000 acres.
- Five landowners are assisted by appropriate weed control implemented at sites identified in the mapping process.

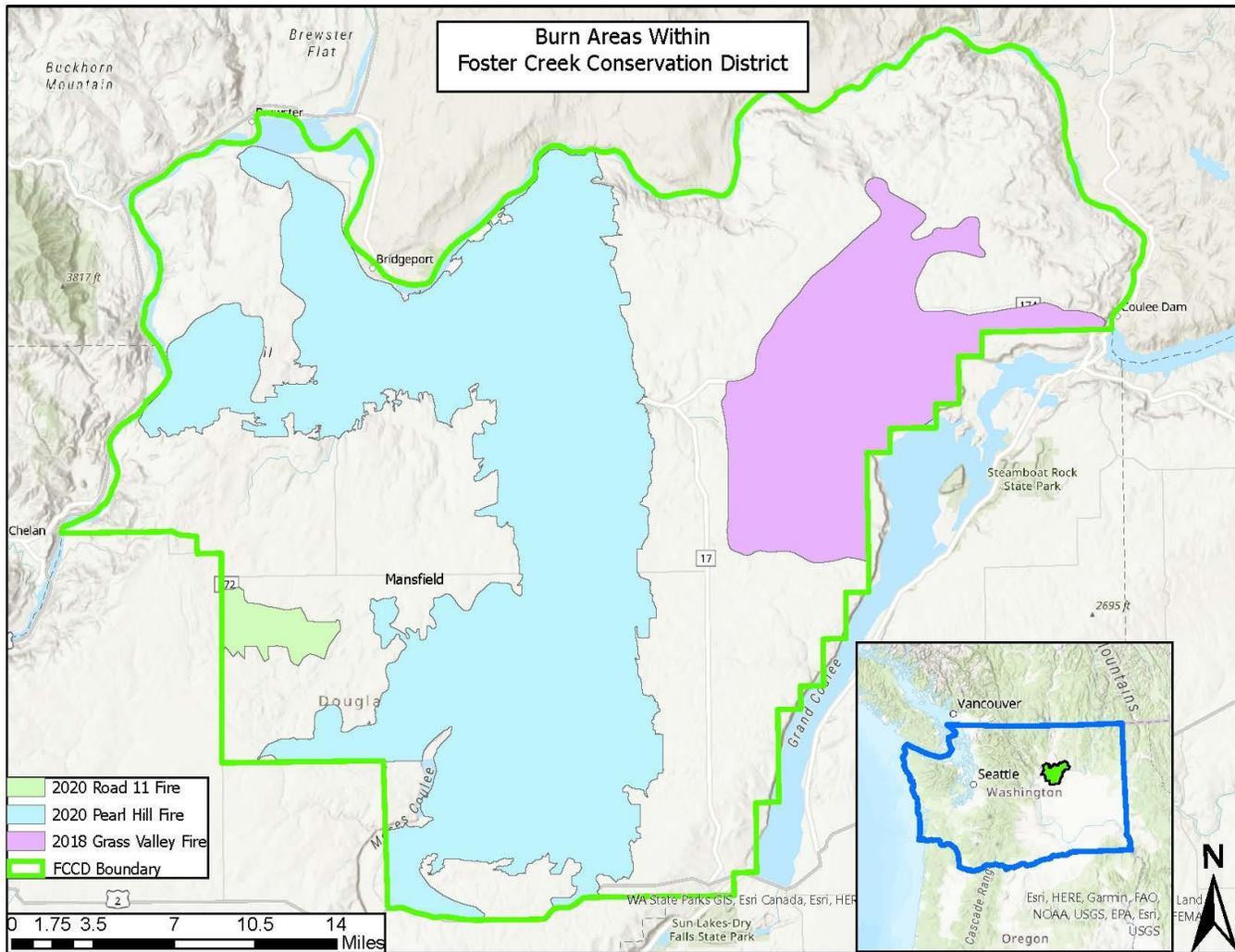
Critical Geographic Areas:

1. WRIA 50 and Foster Creek Watershed



Wildfire Recovery

- Grass Valley fire – approximately 77,000 acres (2018)
- Road 11 fire – approximately 11,000 acres (2020)
- Pearl Hill fire – approximately 234,000 acres (2020)



Information – Education Priorities, Measures of Success, and Goals:

Douglas County is a low population area (< 50,000); therefore, engagement options are limited, and pose sometimes unique challenges. Partnership opportunities are of key importance for FCCD and provide a way to augment E & O opportunities on a more regional basis. District staff organize and /or participate in a wide range of curricula throughout each year with popular ongoing programs that include Salmon in the Classroom, Kids in the Creek and Envirothon. FCCD continues to build its quarterly newsletter distribution and social media platforms.

GOALS:

- Increase awareness of and promote the district’s mission, services, and programs, including VSP and MSGCP.
- Update FCCD’s over-arching Education and Outreach Plan annually to reflect requirements for current programs and identified community needs.
- Build upon FCCD’s communication and collaboration network with regional agencies and commodity groups to keep information current and natural resource messaging consistent within the County.

- Establish contacts within local schools and schools supporting organizations to develop natural resources education programs that also fulfil grade criteria.
- Establish an internship program, or a regular volunteer activity that involves the local community.
- Design a system to better track outreach in a useful way for both FCCD and VSP.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS:

- Hold one VSP event each year to promote the program and connect with Douglas County residents.
- Hold at least one annual workshop or event for each of FCCD's key programs.
- Produce and distribute four newsletters each year, with at least four articles in each newsletter.
- Newsletter mailing list is increased to include the whole county.
- Website updated, story map is active and current, social media audience up by 50% since 2022.
- Two community volunteer activities volunteers are organized each year.

District Operations, Priorities, Measures of Success, and Goals:

One of FCCD's main priorities is to provide a healthy working environment with a positive culture that promotes and supports individual goals, collaborative teamwork, productivity, resiliency and flexibility.

GOALS:

- Look for secure funding opportunities to maintain and grow district operations, continue working on high priority activities and give the district an ability to support professional development for staff.
- Keep informed on resource related policies and practices.
- Hire a part-time payroll/bookkeeping assistant.
- Provide regular FCCD and VSP updates to Douglas County Commissioners.
- Update FCCD's policy manual.
- Become a key source of technical advice on conservation-based solutions for natural resource issues within the region.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS:

- All district and staff needs are met.
- Operational oversight, administration and financial management are effective, and no issues are noted in SOA audits.
- Service requests are tracked, and increase by 50%
- Grant funding is from diverse sources – State, federal and local/private sources.
- Key programs are funded and ongoing, with each employee fully funded by at least one major grant.
- The District is financially stable and in a position where it is possible to consider moving to facilities better suited to staff and programmatic needs, easier for public access and with room for equipment storage.

Trends Impacting Conservation in the Foster Creek Conservation District

- More severe drought conditions are predicted. This has the potential to impact soil health, crop yields – dryland crops and orchards, range health, livestock and wildlife.
- Wildfires are expected to increase in frequency and ferocity across the county, detrimentally impacting wildlife and wildlife habitat, farming viability, and community safety.
- Fewer young people are taking up farming. Family farms with no successors are being sold, purchased by and absorbed into larger or corporate operations.

- The new equipment needed to transition farming practices from conventional to direct seed systems is very expensive and cost prohibitive for some.
- The cost of a common herbicide predicted to increase significantly, the high volume of herbicide required when implementing no-till systems and herbicide resistant weeds are all becoming local concerns.

Strategies, Services & Products to Address Trends

- FCCD staff will continue to communicate and work with producers, local communities and other local agencies to ensure assistance programs that address the needs identified within the District are found, adapted or developed, as necessary.
- FCCD will assess both its short and long-term plans on a regular basis to ensure programmatic focus is relevant to developing concerns.
- FCCD staff will continue to apply for funding from multiple sources

Natural Resource Data:

Information regularly referred to includes:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/douglascountywashington,WA/PST045219>

<http://wagenweb.org/douglas/towns.html>

<https://ecology.wa.gov/>

<https://waecy.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=996e6b21ae394cc3a3b63c6da0c3aa0a>

<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/startpage>

<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/1203316.pdf>

<https://www.usda.gov/>

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Washington/cp53017.pdf

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home/>

Staffing Needs

The current team of six comprises the District Manager, two Natural Resource Specialists, two Natural Resource Technicians and the VSP Coordinator. The District Manger provides programmatic oversight, administration and financial management. Individual staff are each responsible for specific projects or actions within high priority activities identified above, but they also help each other out as necessary, based on seasonal fluctuations of workloads.

- The current number of staff is appropriate for the available funding and workload.
- The lack of additional office space would make it challenging to add new full-time employees at the current location.
- Staff level is contingent on future successful grant applications and funded partnership agreements that continue key programs.
- Additional help may be required for some projects during the summer months. If the need is determined, part-time seasonal staff may be hired and office accommodation will be temporarily adapted, if necessary.

Annual Budget Needs

To meet the District's needs over the next five years, it is expected that approximately \$400,000 - \$500,000 would be needed each year to cover staff payroll and benefits, and district operations costs such as rent, communications, advertising, travel, training, some supplies and equipment, and other expenses necessary to deliver the District's program.

It is estimated an additional \$300,000 – \$500,000 will be required each year to cover cost-share and other project expenses related to implementing district programs.

Key Decision Makers

- The Foster Creek Conservation District Board of Supervisors determines the district's overall vision, direction and scope of programs.
- The District Manager works closely with the Board of Supervisors to ensure all grant applications and subsequent program implementation correspond to this vision and that district staff are implementing planned work efficiently and effectively.
- Private landowners or land managers are key decision makers, and their management decisions have the potential to impact natural resources on their individual properties.
- Other decision makers who can affect regulations governing land management and resources and sources to establish and maintain technical and financial assistance programs in Northern Douglas County include but are not limited to Douglas County Commissioners, USDA-NRCS, FSA, USFWS, WDFW, USFWS, WA Dept of Ecology.

Benchmarks, Timeline, & Actions:

1. Strategic Priority: SOIL HEALTH

Benchmark	Timeline	12 Month Actions
25 x dryland producers implement new soil health BMPs	2022 – 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Source funding to continue direct seed program. - Source funding to initiate new on-farm crop trials. program – new crops, crop rotations and/or cover crops. - At least 5 new producers are enrolled in and assisted by these programs each year.
Participation in the soil monitoring program is increased by 50%		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Source funding to continue the soil monitoring program. - 5 new producers enrolled in the program each year: 60 participant fields by end of 2026. - Soil sampling reports are provided to participants annually. - 2 producers implement a new BMP each year based on their soils report information. - Soil health workshops are held annually.
A new rangeland health program is developed and implemented		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Source funding to develop this new program. - Plan and implement the program. - At least 4 ranchers enrolled in the program by 2026.

2. Strategic Priority: WATER QUALITY

Benchmark	Timeline	12 Month Actions
FCDD's water quality monitoring program is ongoing	2022 – 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Source funding to maintain this program - WQ analysis indicates Foster Creek's 303d listing are moving towards being compliant with WA standards. - WQ results can be linked to on-the-ground and riparian restoration activities

Strategic Priority: Water Quality - ctd

Well monitoring program is reintroduced		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Source funding to reintroduce the program. - Work with WSU to expand upon their current program.
Three new restoration projects are developed for the Foster Creek watershed		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Source funding to plan and implement 3 new projects - 3 plans completed by 2024. - 1 new project implemented by 2026
A new WQ program is developed for Jameson Lake		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Source funding to hire a specialist lake management consultant. - Source funding to reintroduce lake WQ monitoring. - WQ monitoring is underway on the lake. - 1 x algae control activity is being implemented.

Strategic Priority: FIRE RECOVERY

Benchmark	Timeline	12 Month Actions
Fire recovery assistance program is active and ongoing	2022 – 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Source fund to continue the fire recovery program - Teaching modules are completed and 1 training workshop for at least 30 participants is held annually.
Defensible space acreage in Northern Douglas County is increased by 20%		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 100 landowners are assisted with HIZ or ISP plans; 20 new plans are completed each year. - 10 landowners take fire risk mitigation actions on their properties each year.

Strategic Priority: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Benchmark	Timeline	12 Month Actions
VSP profile is increased across Douglas County	2022 – 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VSP messaging is updated and 50 new landowners are contacted each year - 50 new anonymous checklists are submitted each year.
2 Orchard projects are planned		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VSP outreach to local orchards is completed. - 2 orchard projects are planned and underway or implemented.
Ongoing Task Order contacts with NRCS		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All staff have received NRCS farm planning training. - At least 100 reviews/plans completed for NRCS each year and 100 cooperators are able to enroll in programs or implement conservation practices.
Technical assistance is provided to 100 cooperators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FCCD staff engage with 20 landowners each year.

Strategic Priority: Technical Assistance - ctd

10 x MSGCP plans completed		- 2 MSGCP plans are completed each year and landowners obtain incidental take permits from USFWS
2,000 new acres are mapped for weed control		- Source funding to continue weed control mapping and control efforts. - At least 400 acres mapped each year. - Weed control efforts commence for at least one new landowner each year.

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assisting land managers with their conservation choices**

