

King Conservation District – Moving Forward

Why did the Washington state legislature create the King Conservation District and is the District still relevant today?

- The legislature had the foresight to create the King Conservation District over six decades ago as a non-regulatory state agency that would work directly with private landowners to care for the land and resources. Today, the District continues to fill a vital role in stewardship – helping farmers and other landowners *voluntarily* preserve and enhance our natural resources through cost-sharing, education and technical assistance that ensures the high quality of life King County residents' treasure.

Today, with escalating budget challenges impacting the County's capacity to serve the rural areas coupled with increasing regulatory demands on landowners for environmental fixes, the support and services of the District are ever more critical not only to the rural residents, farmers and foresters, but equally critical to rural and urban cities that are coping with surface water, shoreline, local food and other issues.

The District serves a unique purpose: engage the private sector in preserving and enhancing our natural environment across the region. The District accomplishes this by helping private landowners learn how to best care for the land and resources. This voluntary engagement compliments the regulatory aspects of other government entities. Given that private land is more than 60% of the whole, and given the budget challenges ahead, the District's mission and mandate are increasingly important.

The District's role as a non-regulatory conservation entity is a critical piece in the region's natural resource mosaic. Its ability to work cooperatively with landowners using only "carrots" compliments the regulatory landscape's "sticks" and puts the District in a position of trust with landowners that promotes innovation and commitment.

Why is this assessment funding managed by the Conservation District?

- The special assessment was prompted by the legislature's intent to structure conservation dedicated funding that would withstand the multiple pressures plaguing political jurisdictions over time. The funding structured to support conservation district works allows activities *across jurisdictional boundaries* and so better addresses regional needs.

District funds raised at the local level can be spent throughout the District regardless of the source, unlike individual jurisdictional funds. This fiscal flexibility allows the District to partner and leverage in ways that are difficult if not impossible for individual jurisdictions and enables the District to be an effective resource in improving environmental quality in the rural areas that in turn protects city properties.

Hasn't the federal and state government dedicated significant resources to environmental improvements?

- Federal and even State resources for natural resource protection are drying up. Increasingly it is expected that this mandate will fall on the shoulders of local governments. Those agencies with the vision, foresight, and opportunity to adequately fund regional and cross-jurisdictional environmental efforts will be well-positioned to meet the expectations of their citizenry moving into a future of diminished external financial support. We are truly fortunate here in King County: A legacy of high expectations for conservation has laid the foundation for future commitment to the regional environment. There is a strong baseline here with the current established system that is supported by the constituents – this is a relatively unique advantage that we all feel responsible for protecting and enhancing.

Why is the District changing the system of funding and the process for dispersing grant funding?

- Given the recent lawsuits regarding the assessment, the District can no longer postpone prioritizing its mission and must change its funding system and grant program to minimize the risk of challenges. To that end, the District has proposed the adoption of a rates and charges system and the discontinuation of pre-allocation of funds to potential grantees. The District remains committed to its collaboration and partnerships with both jurisdictions and WRIAs and regional NGOs. To this end the District has been working with its Advisory Committee and the SCA to revamp the grant process to expand participation of District stakeholders.

Why hasn't the District proposed a revenue neutral budget?

- In fact, the District's proposed budget is *beyond* revenue-neutral. For the last twelve years, the District has *operated* on a fixed revenue stream that is *below* the optimal amount for its operations and programs and services.
- The assessment level has remained a constant, nominal amount of \$10/parcel since 2006. Under the new rates and charges system, the budget to adequately fund both its core programs and services and assist its partners in landowner stewardship activities is even *less* per parcel.
- At this modest charge per parcel, we would have a consistent source of funding for resource conservation across the region both for the District's core programs, for those existing programs partners have been able to implement through the District grant funding and for new needs that are emerging because of funding shortfalls.

The District's mandate is to engage the private sector in conservation stewardship individually and collectively. This mission compliments and augments the regulatory programs. The District has been able to accomplish its mandate through its partnerships with cities, communities, NGOs and other conservation districts and agencies, as well as with its direct core programs.



King Conservation District



KING COUNTY COUNCIL DISTRICT 1

Councilmember Bob Ferguson

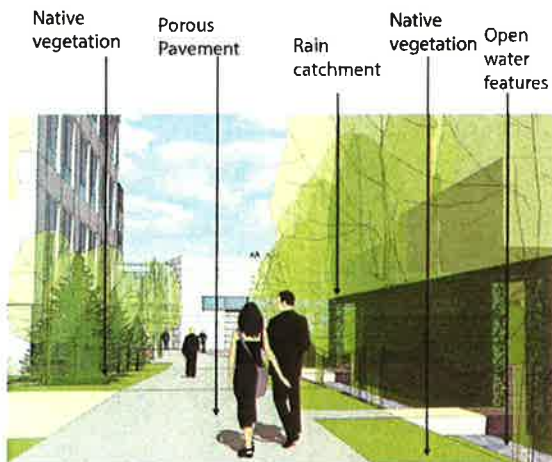
A few ways King Conservation District supports on-the-ground work:

- 85% of our funding supports **urban and rural** conservation partnerships
- The annual assessment serves as match to **leverage** other funding
- Assessment funds cross boundaries and fund programs **county-wide**
- This funding covers costs and activities that many **other sources cannot**
- The **stability** of assessment funding has allowed multi-year projects

Do You Know?

Over the last 3 years
approximately
\$400,000
assessment dollars
were spent in
District 1

Two examples of King CD at work in your district...



Shoreline City Hall

Through our grants program, the King CD contributed nearly **\$200,000** to the design and construction of Shoreline's new city hall building. Sustainable features include green roofs with native vegetation, energy efficient solar panels and rainwater catchment. The best management practices implemented will reduce surface water runoff, reduce impervious surfaces and use native vegetation throughout the landscape.

City of Kenmore, Swamp Creek Restoration

King CD provided **\$100,000** of grant funding to improve 1.3 miles of shoreline habitat at the confluence of Swamp Creek and the Sammamish River. With the help of local volunteers, invasive plants were removed along with garbage and debris. A stewardship plan was then implemented for planting, monitoring and maintenance of plants.



Area cleared of blackberry, ivy and garbage on Earth Day 2010 by volunteers.