

ANNUAL REPORT

2020



Thurston
Conservation
District





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The mission of Thurston Conservation District is to educate and assist the citizens of Thurston County in the management of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations, inspiring voluntary, incentive-based conservation practices.

Recognition of Partners

Thank you to the many partners who have made our work possible, more impactful, and more fun during 2020!

Thurston County	Nisqually Community Garden
City of Lacey	Olympia Coalition for Ecosystems Preservation
City of Olympia	National Association of Conservation Districts
City of Tumwater	WA State Conservation Commission
City of Yelm	WA Association of Conservation Districts
City of Rainier	Mason Conservation District
City of Tenino	Pierce Conservation District
Nisqually Indian Tribe	Lewis Conservation District
Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis	Grays Harbor Conservation District
Squaxin Island Tribe	Natural Resource Conservation Service
NOVA Middle School	United States Department of Agriculture
North Thurston Public Schools	WA State Department of Agriculture
Olympia School District	WA Department of Fish and Wildlife
Tumwater School District	Green Diamond Resource Company
Griffin School District	Farm Service Agency
Rainier School District	Thurston County Farm Bureau
Olympia Waldorf School	Thurston Regional Planning Council
Yelm Community Schools	Community Farmland Trust
The Evergreen State College	Timberland Regional Libraries
Capitol Land Trust	Thurston County Fairgrounds
Puget Sound Estuarium	Thurston Economic Development Council
Pacific Shellfish Institute	Thurston ECONet
Pacific Education Institute	Thurston County Ag Advisory Committee
Puget Sound Restoration Fund	WA Conservation Corps
Puget Sound Partnership	WA Department of Ecology
South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group	WA Department of Health
Native Plant Salvage	WA State Department of Natural Resources
Nisqually River Education Project	Puget Sound Conservation District Caucus
Nisqually River Council	Northwest Youth Corps
Chehalis Basin Education Consortium	Dawkins Charitable Trust
Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge	NOAA Bay Watershed Education and Training
Nisqually Reach Nature Center	Taylor Shellfish
Nisqually Stream Stewards	Trout Unlimited
WET Science Center	WA Conservation Society
Thurston County Environmental Health	QWG Applied Geology, LLC
Bounty for Families	Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program (ESRP)
GRuB	Creekside Conservancy (Heernett Foundation)
WSU Extension Thurston County	GeoEngineers Inc.
Thurston County Master Gardeners	Northwest Hydraulic Consultants, Inc.

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2918 Ferguson St. SW Suite A, Tumwater WA, 98512

A red tractor with a black roll-over protection structure is pulling a red trailer filled with brown mulch. The tractor is positioned on the left side of the frame, and the trailer extends towards the right. The background shows a grassy field with a line of trees and a cloudy sky. The text is overlaid in the center-right of the image.

**NATURAL
RESOURCE
PRIORITIES,
GOALS, &
ACTIONS IN
2020**

Climate Change Adaptation & Mitigation

Thurston Conservation District staff weave climate change adaptation and mitigation information based on best available science into all of our technical assistance and education offerings. Specifically in 2020, our staff placed an emphasis on water conservation education, forest management practices, adaptation and planning for natural disasters, and practices related to support of beneficial insects and pollinators in people's gardens, yards, and on farms. Our goal is to help our community understand and adapt to the changing climate. We are committed to working with our community to conserve and protect our natural resources in response to climate change. As an organization, we strive to implement climate adaptive and beneficial practices into our office culture and environment.



Close up of a "beetle-bank" vegetated pathway at Calliope Farm.

2020 highlights

2

Landowners impacted by wildfire given direct assistance to restore pastures and working lands

94

Active cooperators involved in Chehalis Basin flood mitigation work

12

Fewer reams of paper used through conversion of materials to digital format— that's a whole tree!



Screen caption of a presentation about irrigation efficiencies in home gardens

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR FIRE IMPACTED LANDS

Wildfire has become an increasing threat to our county and state in recent years. The past five years have seen the largest two wildfires in Thurston County since available DNR wildfire records began in 1970.

Both the 384-acre Scatter Creek Fire of 2017 and the 268-acre Mima-Bordeaux fire in September 2020 occurred during windy weather and spread rapidly in areas of preserved prairies and working grasslands. In both events, many community members were impacted, including those who rely on grazing grasslands for their livestock.



District staff walk a pasture impacted by the Mima-Bordeaux Fire

In a joint visit, Thurston CD and NRCS staff were able to provide in-field assistance to those impacted by the Mima-Bordeaux fire, providing guidance on post-fire management of their pastures, touching on areas such as species survival, forage species selection, and native plant options. In follow-up with those we assisted, we learned that our guidance was shared with neighbors and others impacted by the fire.

TCD staff continues to offer technical guidance to making homes and properties Firewise and how to restore things like pasture lands.



Local Food Production & Consumption

2020 offered some unique challenges for the local food economy. The COVID-19 pandemic changed markets drastically by reducing whole-sale accounts for many farmers and increasing direct sales. Thurston Conservation District worked to support farmers and consumers through this time with increased education about home food production, collaboration on community food spaces, and increasing connections between producers and consumers. Check out the article on page 8 to learn more about the Farmers Basket project.

2020 highlights
5

Workshops held focused on home gardening

53

Farms listed in Farmers Basket buyer's guide created in response to COVID-19

4,902

Views of the Farmer's Basket buyer's guide webpage in 2020



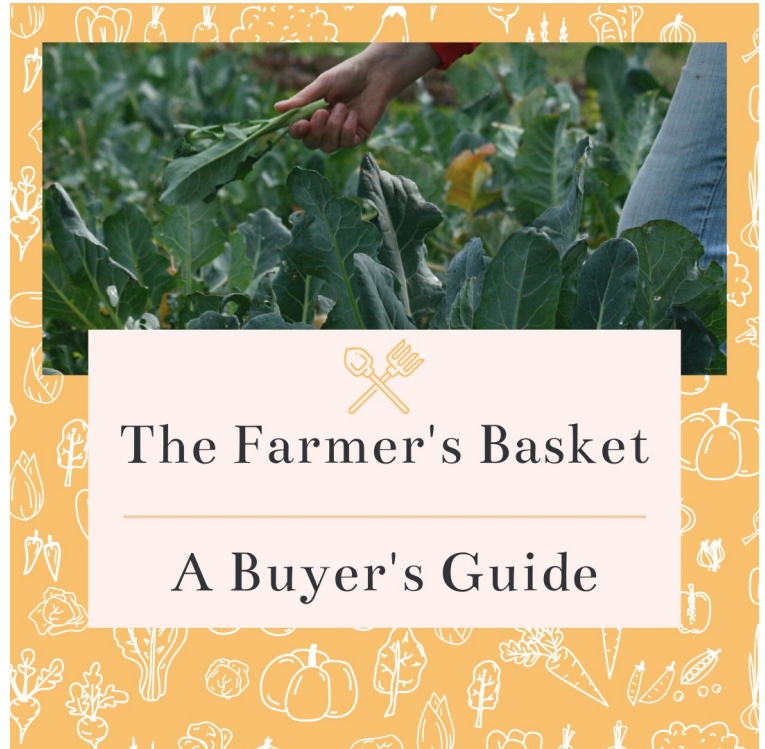
Collaboration on Yelm Community Garden began in partnership with Bounty for Families, City of Yelm, GRuB, Nisqually Indian Tribe, and Yelm Community Schools

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

THE FARMERS' BASKET

In April 2020, in response to COVID-19, Thurston Conservation District created a buying resource guide for local residents who might be interested in supporting local farms through direct purchase or retail opportunities – [The Farmer's Basket](#). This resource was created, in collaboration with WSU Extension, Thurston EDC, and the Community Farm Land Trust, in response to our community seeking a way to support local food production in the changing market conditions during the COVID-19 crisis and the stay-at-home order in spring 2020. Many of our local farms shared that they had been negatively impacted by changes in their wholesale and direct-sales

revenue streams due to restaurants and farmers markets closing. A high degree of uncertainty caused many farmers to create new ways for customers to reach them, such as new Community Supported Agriculture shares, farm stands, and other creative partnerships. The Farmer's Basket, updated and maintained in 2021, contains categories for produce, meat, eggs and dairy, and value added products.



Dairy cows in their pasture at a local farm



Microgreens growing at Ellis Creek Farm

Producer Support & Preservation of Working Lands



District Engineer, Katrinka Hibler, inspects the wall of a newly constructed waste storage facility with the landowner

Thurston Conservation District continued offering technical assistance and conservation planning services to community members throughout 2020. Our Board and Staff were quick to develop and put into place guidelines for contactless and physically distant site visits so that one-on-one assistance and planning could continue throughout the year. We saw a huge increase in participation in the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP), for which we are the technical provider. The VSP is an alternative approach for counties to meet critical areas ordinance goals on private lands while maintaining agricultural viability, and we saw a lot of enrollment and completed Individual Stewardship Plans make their way into cooperator's hands.

Through technical assistance, planning, and education we've been able to promote and support the application of Best Management Practices and the preservation of our region's

2020 highlights

66

Agricultural producers received technical support

113

Individuals rented small farm equipment 138 times

20

Individual Stewardship Plans written for Voluntary Stewardship Program Participants



Voluntary Stewardship Program participation sign

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

POULTRY EQUIPMENT MADE MORE AVAILABLE

An exciting change that came to Thurston CD in 2020 was the addition of trailers to house and transport our two Featherman poultry processing units for at-home poultry slaughter and processing. Each unit, pictured right, includes a stand, cones and catch basin, scalding tank and dunking arm, and plucker. This bulky equipment is rented out on average 18 times per month during peak season, and the loading and unloading process has long been a hassle for renters and District Staff. When COVID-19 forced our office to close our doors to the public, we knew it was a high priority to continue offering this rental service and that the



current method of rental wasn't feasible for public safety. As our Board Member Betsie DeWreede put it: "When the pandemic happened, it seemed impossible that people wouldn't be able to get the equipment. People had ordered birds well in advance, and they really count on it. There was a high need." In fact, there was an increased need for this service, as nationally more people were raising their own meat birds because they had more time at home and were concerned about supply chain disruption and meat-packing plant closures.

Betsie had long thought that the addition of trailers would be a good thing and advocated for that as a Board Supervisor – other Conservation Districts use them for their poultry equipment rentals and they offer an easier way of picking up and dropping off the equipment. While a renter must have a vehicle with a trailer ball-hitch, they no longer need to have a truck or vehicle that the equipment will fit in. Now just one person can pick up or drop off the trailer. This change in transportation mode coincided nicely with the changes we made to the equipment rental process due to COVID-19. We quickly pivoted to offering renter-to-renter hand-offs that could occur entirely outdoors or contactless. The ability to offer this continuity in our equipment rental program was incredibly important to Board and Staff alike.

The success of this transition is shown best through the following customer testimonial we received:

This year renting was a bit different. The equipment came in a nice enclosed trailer. We just had to hook on and go! The staff were more than willing to support with scheduling and they worked hard to accommodate the farmers during COVID while minimizing the exposure of the community by having the trailer picked up at the previous renters and dropped off at the next renters home. They also put in place a sanitizing regimen for each user before passing on the equipment. We are grateful for the employees who manage the equipment and understand the amount of work that goes into this program. We personally have made connections in the community expanding our farm to farm networking and it has opened our eyes to the kindness of the farmers across our great county.

COVID-19 upended so many parts of our lives and has undoubtedly caused so much grief and difficulty for our community. Out of this bad situation, we were able to do some good. Thurston CD Board and Staff are incredibly proud and pleased to have been able to support our community in this tangible way. The team approach between

Protect & Restore Ecosystems



Staff offered direct assistance through site visits with community members. Pictured here is a shoreline staff met with the landowner to consult on.

We recognize the quantity and diversity of critical ecosystems within our region and strive to protect intact habitat, while working to restore degraded areas. Thurston County is home to state and federally listed endangered species, prairie ecosystems, vital marine and estuarine habitat, forestland, sensitive riparian areas and shellfish beds. Education is the first step to resource conservation on private and community lands, and through one-on-one assistance such as site visits and community events such as the Annual Orca Recovery Day we have been able to connect our community with financial and educational resources to facilitate ecosystem recovery.

2020 highlights

3

Forest Stewardship Plans
written for forest landowners

16

Shoreline landowners provided direct
assistance through Shore Friendly
Thurston program

8,815

Native plants sold at
Annual Native Plant Festival & Sale



TCD staff celebrate together at the end of the Native Plant Festival & Sale in February, 2020.



"I loved being a part of Orca Recovery Day to help my children make the connection between the parks we trek through and the impact plants and people have on water quality. It was a great day of learning, adventure, hard work, and a lot of fun!" - Marguerite

Soil Conservation & Health

2020 highlights

95

Soil sample analysis recommendation reports written for community members

Adapted to new COVID-19 safe equipment rental and soil testing procedures to keep critical food and farm support services open throughout the pandemic!

14

Different crop varieties cultivated locally supported through technical assistance and soil analysis, including olives, fruit trees and hemp!



TCD Staff often take a soil sample for testing and interpretation as a part of their site visits. This gives them an opportunity to conduct some visual observations of the soils as well .



Red flowering clover cover crop flourishes in a home garden. Cover crops are frequently recommended as a best practice for conserving soil, increasing organic matter, and supporting pollinators.

Soil health is one of the building blocks of productive and responsible land stewardship. Our Soil Health Program is designed to support all growers, from backyard gardeners and community garden sites to large-scale farming operations, in the intentional conservation of healthy soil through regular soil testing and accurate nutrient application.

In 2020 we continued to offer our soil testing and interpretative services, despite needing to close our offices due to COVID-19. We gave feedback for a wide variety of crops to assist growers in maximizing the potential of their gardens, yards, and production areas.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

YOUTUBE VIDEOS SHOWCASE

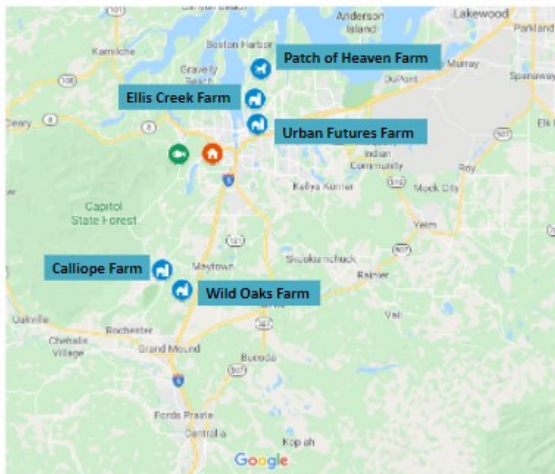
PRODUCER SUCCESS

In 2020, our staff culminated work on a research and education grant focused on soil health practices. As a part of that culmination, we created a series of [YouTube videos](#) highlighting the work that participating farmers had been doing for the past several years. These YouTube videos were featured in a virtual 'farm tour' event where each participant was introduced and attendees got to watch the videos and learn more about the soil health practices put into action at each site.



What We're Going to Cover Today

- What is soil health?
- Virtual Farm Tour!
- Share information and resources for how to implement different practices
- Open up the floor for questions after each visit!



Video profiles included different scales of vegetable farms, orchard production of cider apples, and track paddock success for horses. Check out our YouTube channel to see the profile videos!

Pictured here, Patch of Heaven Farm (top), Slide capture from virtual farm tour showing all participating farms locations (left), Ellis Creek Farm (bottom left), and Wild Oaks Farm (bottom right).



Water Quality & Quantity

Thurston Conservation District works to include the preservation and improvement of water quality and quantity in all aspects of our work, from our educational programming to the projects and technical assistance we partner with community members on. We strive for clean drinking water, the upgrade of 303(d) listed stream segments, meeting Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) pollution reduction targets, and upgrades to commercial and recreational shellfish harvesting areas. This focus is of upmost importance because it impacts everyone in our community. Through the implementation of Best Management Practices and green infrastructure to reduce or treat stormwater, we provide active and on-going education to all of the watersheds in Thurston County.



Native plants all lined up and ready to plant. These plants were installed with the help of the WA Conservation Corps

2020 highlights

22

Acres planted in native plants to filter runoff and improve water quality

28

Best Management Practices implemented to improve water quality, including: waste storage facilities, heavy use areas, filtration strips, gutters, conservation cover and more

5

Irrigation Management Plans developed for producers to support production and conserve water



A completed waste storage facility designed and built to assist with the safe storage and composting of manure. Capturing and covering of the manure decreases excess nutrient runoff.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

OVER 7,000 PLANTS INSTALLED AT THE SKOOKUMCHUCK EARLY ACTION REACH



Thurston Conservation District (TCD) began a restoration project that will restore more than 2,600 ft. of shoreline and over 74 acres of land along the Skookumchuck River over the next five years.

The restoration project is one of several large projects as part of the Chehalis Basin Strategy's Aquatic Species Restoration Plan (ASRP). The ASRP is a comprehensive plan that aims to restore the Chehalis River Basin for salmon and other aquatic species and reduce flood-related damage to surrounding communities. Restoration efforts include engineered log jams and reconnection of off-stream channels and floodplain facilitated by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, a conservation easement through Capitol Land Trust, and large-scale planting coordinated by Thurston Conservation District.

In the fall and winter of 2020, TCD began on-the-ground restoration work at the Skookumchuck River site. With the assistance from talented AmeriCorps Washington Conservation Corps field crews, we were able to plant over 7,000 trees and shrubs. Plantings include the creation of prairie oak habitat in a former hay field (pictured above) and riparian plantings of live stakes to support in-stream-flow and reduce river temperature to support salmon habitat.

Thanks to our partnership with incredible landowners, TCD and our community partners will continue this momentous work over the course of the next five years.





**EDUCATION
PRIORITIES &
GOALS IN
2020**

Community Outreach & Engagement



Local teachers volunteered to film virtual presentations on how to take water testing samples for virtual programming offered by South Sound GREEN

Through direct outreach, story telling, volunteer and hands-on events, and one-on-one partnerships with community members we're able to support the active conservation and regenerative use of natural resources. Engagement is a foundation to the important work of the Thurston Conservation District. As a community-driven organization, we rely on all members of our community to share their needs, challenges and innovative solutions to managing our shared natural resources. We are committed to creating many pathways for conversation and feedback with residents in our area to help inform priorities within our organization and guide the work we do in our community. From volunteers, to stakeholder groups, to community-driven planning processes, we are here to help our community achieve individual and broader conservation goals.

2020 highlights

25 %

Growth in monthly
newsletter subscriptions

386

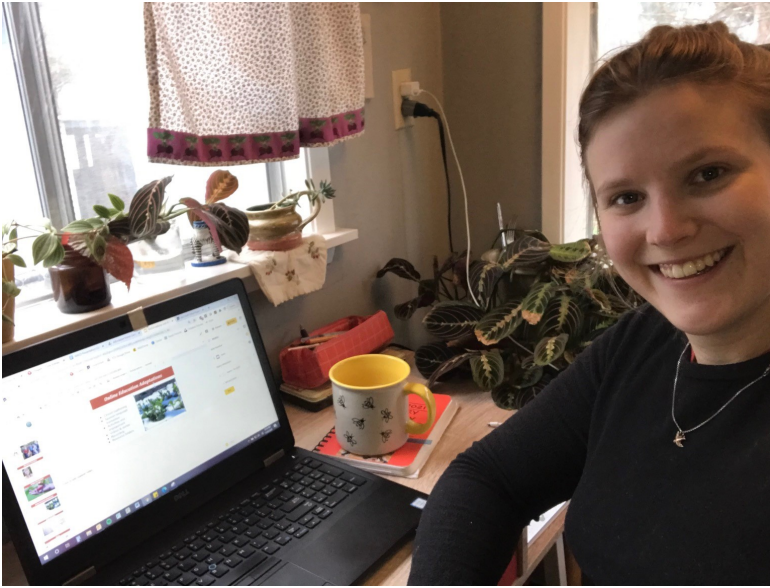
Volunteers engaged

Offered closed captioning and Spanish language translation for majority of virtual workshops to increase accessibility. Read more about adaptations on the next page!

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS ADAPT TO VIRTUAL PLATFORMS



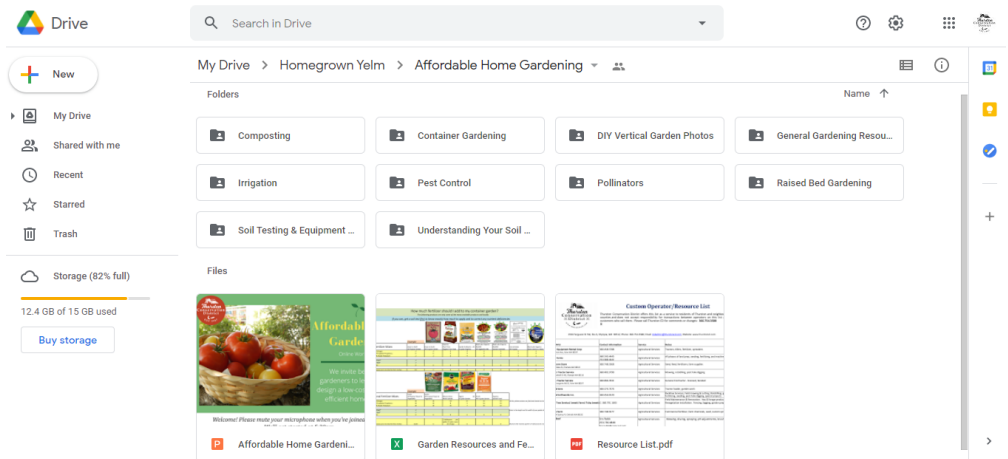
Education & Outreach Specialist, Nora White, has set up her home office space to teach and lead workshops virtually

Thurston Conservation District's Education and Outreach staff made lots of adaptations in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of these was to transition our workshops and programming to a virtual setting. We pivoted to do this within a few weeks of beginning to work from home and successfully offered 13 virtual workshops in 2020.

Staff found that virtual workshops, while offering additional challenges because we can no longer interact with our audience in the same way, also offered some exciting new options. Among these was the ability to offer both closed captioning and Spanish language translation of most of our workshops. We also found that we could reduce paper usage by

creating a virtual resource folder that participants could use during and after the workshop. In fact, going paperless has meant that we can offer more and longer handouts and resources for interested workshop participants.

We also discovered that by hosting workshops online we could create a resource that can be used over and over. Each of our online workshops has been recorded and that live recording, transcript, and the resource folder are hosted on our website. If you're interested in checking out any of our past workshops on topics such as Affordable



Screenshot of resource folder for the Affordable Home Garden workshop

Home Gardening, Mud, Manure, and Compost Management in Urban Yards, Pasture Management, Heavy Use Areas, Natural Weed Control, and more you can find all of those linked on our [website](#).

The ability to create these lasting resources and also increase accessibility of our workshops has been a huge silver lining to 2020. We have had great virtual turn-out and made wonderful connections through our workshops as we work to make them fun, engaging, and participatory. Check out our calendar to register for more fun virtual workshops in 2021!

Adult & Youth Conservation Education

2020 highlights

25

Educational events offered

1,681+

Community members educated
through workshops and events

4,283

Students engaged in water quality
monitoring and salmon dissection field
trips through South Sound GREEN



In early 2020, high school students at Rainier High School participate in salmon dissections



Volunteers helped to package and sort native plants during our 2020 Sale and Festival event

Education is the first step to resource conservation on private lands and communal lands,. The District successfully continued to engage the community to raise awareness of the vital role we individually play in ensuring local ecosystems are aloud to flourish and perform their important functions. Through workshops, volunteer opportunities, and hands-on experiences for students and adults alike, Thurston CD has offered learning opportunities. Much of this successful education has been in partnership with local organizations, schools, and inspired community members.

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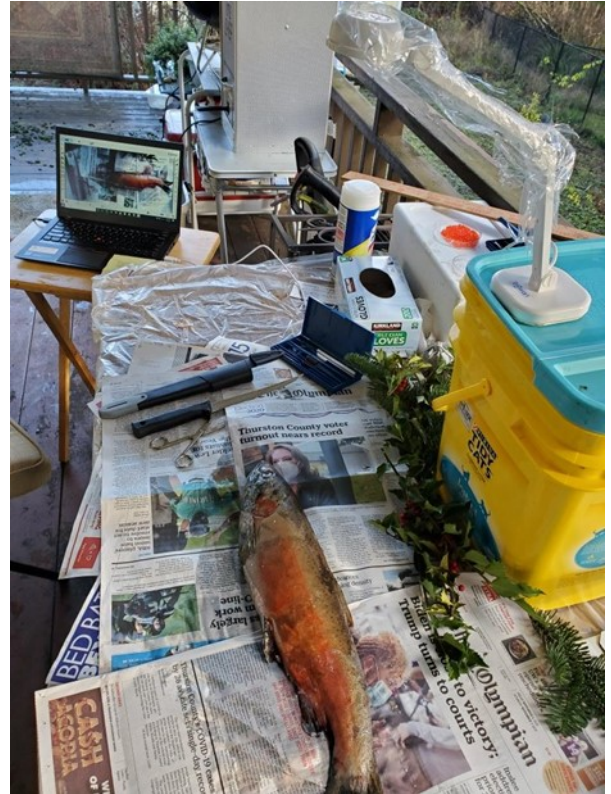
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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

SOUTH SOUND GREEN ADAPTS TO 2020 CHALLENGES

Hello from South Sound GREEN (SSG)! We are a program housed at Thurston Conservation District who's mission is connecting community and schools for watershed protection. We work with municipalities and schools in Thurston County that are in watersheds that drain directly to the Puget Sound. We have two dedicated staff members—Stephanie Bishop and Sam Nadell.

While 2020 was certainly not the year we were expecting to have, it was one that allowed us to explore new avenues of reaching students in Thurston County. In December 2020, we hosted multiple virtual salmon dissections, with classes both familiar with and brand new to SSG programs. These virtual sessions, filled with plenty of “oohs” and “ewws” alike from students, were just as successful as our popular virtual salmon field trips from McLane Creek and our Digital McLane Creek Chum Salmon journal. In a month where SSG programs are usually limited, we were thrilled to be able to provide a variety of live experiences for students from their homes – and without the smell of salmon! And for people who were unable to attend any of our virtual sessions, you can find videos of each [on our website!](#)



Stephanie's at-home virtual salmon dissection set-up for class presentations



Komachin Middle School teachers joined

Looking ahead, we cannot wait to get back into classrooms once it is safe to do so. Until then, we will continue leading virtual programs and expanding our catalogue of digital resources. We also worked hard in 2020 to plan for the 2021 Student GREEN Congress! Every year, South Sound GREEN Congress is an opportunity for hundreds of local students to gather at Evergreen State College to present their water quality data to their peers and participate in environmental-based workshops. Last March was the first Congress we needed to cancel in almost 30 years(!). We're pleased to have found creative ways to plan for a virtual student conference so we don't have to cancel in 2021. We could not be more excited to have students share water quality data and brainstorm ideas about ways to improve the health of their watersheds.



**DISTRICT
OPERATIONS
IN 2020**

District Operations

As an organization, Thurston Conservation District operates in a transparent and ethical manner. We leverage funding from multiple sources to increase our conservation impact on the ground. We pride ourselves in accountable financial processes, diligent and wise use of public and private dollars, and clean audits. Our operational successes in 2020 have included a growth in revenue, increased staffing capacity, and state-wide recognition of both our staff individually and collectively for the impactful work we've been able to do.



Executive Director, Sarah Moorehead, was recognized with the 2020 President's Service Award at the 2020 Washington Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting



Staff, Board Members, and volunteers worked together to make the 2020 Native Plant Festival a success

2020 highlights

43%

Increase in grant revenue from \$587,909 to
\$1,369,397

\$333,789

Invested back into the local economy
through our commitment to purchasing from
local businesses!

\$10,000

Committed to the future development of a
Conservation and Education Center for our
local community!

In 2020, we revamped our hiring and job
recruitment process and materials to
ensure an inclusivity and accessibility in our
commitment to a diverse workforce!

DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT

We are excited to share that we were recognized as the 2020 Southwest Area Conservation District of the Year by the Washington State Conservation Commission!

"The District has built an excellent staff and an accomplished board that is well-respected by the community. Having secured rates and charges funding, Thurston CD has developed a wide range of programs and services to meet the needs of the vibrant and diverse communities and landscapes they serve.

Their programming ranges from traditional farm planning and cost share, technical service provision under the Voluntary Stewardship Program, and habitat restoration of multiple types, to green storm water infrastructure, conservation education, and technical assistance. Their online technical assistance has become wildly popular, and they are taking on climate adaptation and working land preservation. As the pandemic disrupted traditional markets and food systems, they worked with producers to connect them with consumers in new ways. They developed and shared rigorous safety protocols so that they could continue to offer their poultry processor safely. They work with and support their fellow districts, build and strengthen partnerships, and prove themselves to cooperators and constituents every day."

We appreciate the kind words from the Washington State Conservation Commission and look forward to continuing to serve our community in the years to come.

2020

SOUTHWEST AREA CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF THE YEAR

Presented by the Washington
State Conservation Commission



2020 Budget

INCOME

Unrestricted Income

Rates and Charges	\$551,475
Overhead	\$100,761
WSCC Implementation	\$53,204
District Services	\$26,208

Unrestricted Income Total \$731,647

Restricted Income

Grants	\$1,369,397
Program Allocations	\$104,305

Restricted Income Total \$1,473,702

EXPENSE

Unrestricted Expense

Salaries, Benefits & Staff Time	\$305,248
Facility, Vehicles and Maintenance	\$124,640
Program Allocations	\$104,305
Savings	\$75,000
Professional Services	\$68,119
Supplies	\$28,500
Insurance and Banking	\$16,836
Conferences, Trainings & Travel	\$9,000

Unrestricted Expense Total \$731,647

Restricted Expense

Salaries & Benefits	\$611,646
Cost Share	\$298,358
Construction	\$246,064
Goods & Services	\$203,721
Overhead	\$98,288
Travel	\$15,624

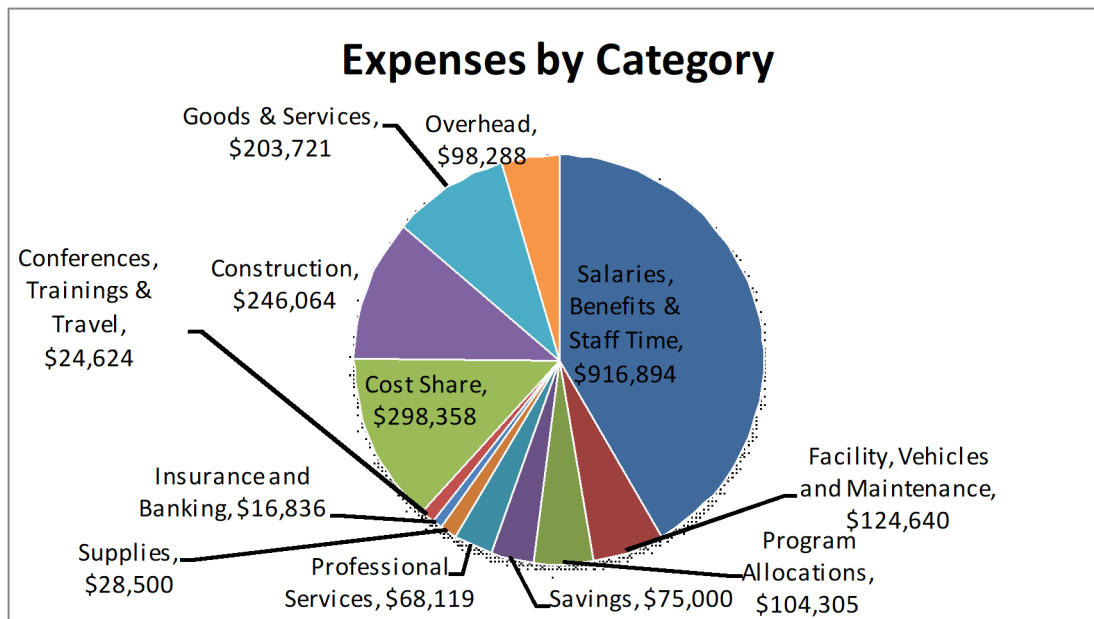
Restricted Expense Total \$1,473,702

TOTAL INCOME

\$2,205,349

TOTAL EXPENSE

\$2,205,349



Board of Supervisors



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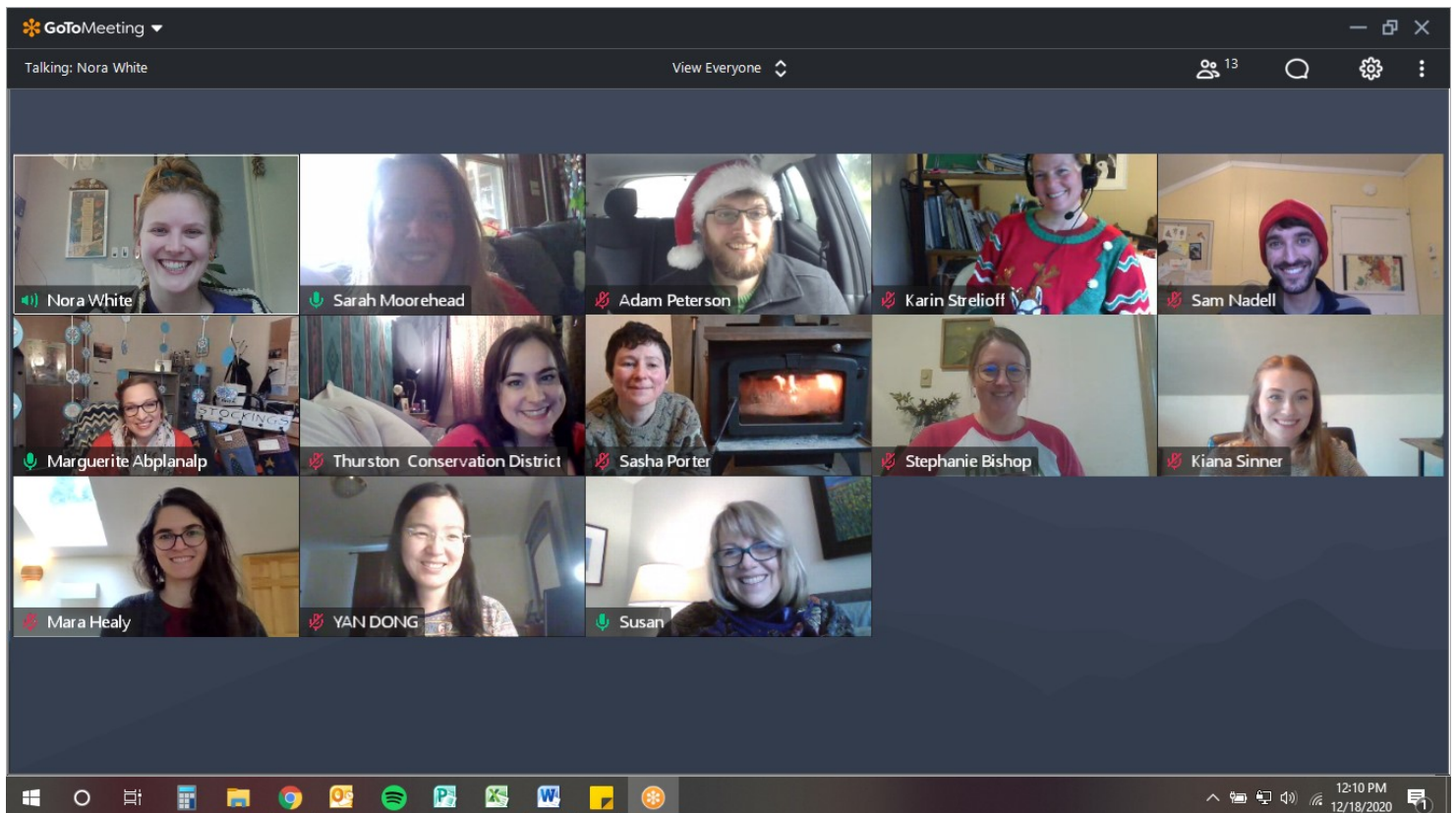
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*Thank you, for a great
2020!*



**Thurston
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EST 1947



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