Background

In 2013, the Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) began an initiative to improve outreach and partnership development between conservation districts and Washington’s 29 federally-recognized tribes. This initiative emerged from a listening session held in 2012 involving WACD, our national affiliate, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC). Four Washington tribal representatives were offered scholarships to attend and discuss conservation programs and services in Washington from a tribal perspective. In all, six Washington tribes (Quinault Tribe, Yakama Nation, Colville Confederated Tribes, Swinomish Tribe, Squaxin Tribe, and Cowlitz Tribe) participated in the 2012 listening session.

As a result of this opening dialogue, WACD established a Tribal Outreach Task Force, consisting of volunteer conservation district supervisors, district staff, our NRCS and WSCC partner representatives, WACD leadership, and three tribal representatives from the listening session. WACD appointed Tanna Engdahl, an associate supervisor from Clark Conservation District and a Cowlitz Tribe elder (an attendee at our listening session), to chair the task force. The task force identified training of conservation district supervisors about tribal partnerships as a key effort among task force work items to be done.

In 2014, WACD entered into a contribution agreement with NRCS, to cooperate in training conservation district supervisors about tribal outreach and partnership building. The work plan for the Tribal Outreach Task Force included designing and conducting further training events.
Therefore, under the NRCS agreement, the following task was included for WACD:

**Conduct Tribal-Conservation District Training Meeting – Tribes and Conservation Districts – Working Together**

**WACD will:**

a) Conduct pre-conference survey of conservation district supervisors to gauge their understanding of training objectives.

b) Use survey results to “calibrate” the training program to what conservation district supervisors need, and to determine the proper level (basic-to-advanced) of training to be provided. Work with NRCS to adapt course curriculum, as mutually agreed, from the National Employee Development Center curriculum, modified to meet the specific needs of the audience. Curriculum will cover issues relevant to how conservation districts and tribes can collaborate to apply NRCS and other conservation programs on tribal lands and other lands, and overcoming barriers to successful partnerships.

c) Develop and deliver a 2-3 day training meeting:
   i. Provide logistics and venues, materials, instructor and speaker arrangements;
   ii. Conduct outreach to tribal representatives to participate;
   iii. Conduct student enrollment, registration and evaluation; and,
   iv. Coordinate with NRCS to select and procure speakers.

WACD also has in place in 2014-15 an agreement with WSCC involving training and engagement of conservation district supervisors. These agreements together set the stage for a cooperative planning effort by the task force and partnership to design a unique training opportunity for conservation districts.

The Tribal Partnership Training Seminar was planned and conducted under guidance of the Tribal Outreach Task Force, and in close cooperation with NRCS. The seminar was held April 28-29, 2015 at Suquamish, WA, hosted by the Suquamish Tribe at Kiana Lodge - a venue selected for its tribal affiliation and its secluded and reflective location.
Training Seminar Program

The seminar was designed as a brief variant of NRCS tribal training for federal employees. The task force evaluated which objectives from the federal training (a 5-day event) could be included in a much shorter training event for conservation districts. The task force held a planning session at the 2014 WACD Annual Conference, to solicit input from conservation district supervisors about training design and planning. WACD also surveyed conservation districts in late 2014 and early 2015 to obtain training design input from supervisors not attending the annual conference.

The session and survey results indicated that supervisors demanded a one- or, at most, two-day program – especially because of the time of year offered, during busy spring season for many district supervisors and their agricultural producer customers. Also, supervisors identified "basic information" about tribes, treaties, governance, tribal lands and other topics as a priority for the training curriculum.

The task force decided on a one and one-half day session design, with a full day (including an evening after-dinner program) of presentations and discussions about key "basic" information topics, followed by a half-day workshop for more "nuts and bolts" mentoring on partnership-building. First day presentations and panel discussions focused on the following topics* (see complete agenda included as Attachment A):

- Why partnerships matter
- Mutual objectives; mutual respect
- Building trust
- Anticipated benefits of partnering between tribes and conservation districts
- Tribal treaties; tribal sovereignty
- US Government trust responsibilities
- Tribal land status
- Time as a factor in tribal engagement
- Success stories in partnership

The second day was scheduled to serve as a breakout type of exercise, where attendees receive mentoring about how to establish partnerships, building on successful examples brought forward by presenters and attendees themselves – a more mechanistic approach.

* Note – The task force recognized that many of these topics cannot be covered in detail in a short training event. The presentations were designed to convey basic concepts, in order to allow attendees to grasp some basic tenets that would help them understand what their partnerships must be based on in order to succeed.
**Day One - Speakers and Presenters**

First of all, the task force sought tribal speakers and presenters. If attendees were going to learn something about how to engage tribes, they had better hear about it from someone who is a tribal member, and/or who knows something about working in a tribal environment. Speakers and presenters were solicited who could convey the proper information (in the brief format required), and who could articulate the perspective of their own tribe and their own experience (their own story, if you will). Planners believed that such a personal tribal and/or individual story would produce the most effect with listeners.

Speakers/presenters included:

- Tanna Engdahl, Cowlitz Tribe (Tribal Outreach Task Force Chair)
- Greig Arnold, Makah Tribe Council Vice-Chair
- Phil Harju, Cowlitz Tribe General Council Vice-Chair
- Roylene Rides at the Door, NRCS State Conservationist
- Christine Woodward, Samish Tribe Natural Resources Director
- Cindy Spiry, Snoqualmie Tribe (joined by Sara Hemphill, King Conservation District)
- Tom Curley, Suquamish Tribe Geographic Information Systems Manager
- Robin Slate, NRCS Tribal Liaison (event moderator)

Further, attendees received a special welcome to Kiana Lodge and Suquamish by Barbara Lawrence, of Suquamish Tribe. Barbara also shared some fine tribal storytelling during the event’s after-dinner program. The after-dinner program also featured a presentation by Tom Curley about one example of the natural resources protection and restoration projects successfully undertaken by Suquamish Tribe.

During this full first day, attendees heard about the role that treaties between tribes and the United States government have played (and continue to play) in the lives and activities of tribes in Washington State, and in the work of federal government agencies, such as NRCS. Presenters outlined how important it is to recognize the rights that tribes have always had – and have retained in treaty negotiations – when considering or proposing collaborative conservation partnerships. To correct a frequent misunderstanding, for example, presenters clarified that treaties do not confer any rights to tribes. Rather, tribes simply reaffirmed as part of treaty negotiations the rights they had always enjoyed, and those they wished to retain. These treaty rights play an important role in how tribes approach natural resource issues and the tribes’ potential role in conservation and co-management responsibilities for natural resources.

Attendees heard about court actions, such as the Boldt decision, which outlines treaty rights in harvesting fish, and the relationship of that court action to tribes’ role(s) in protecting and managing the fishery and water resources that support such fishing rights. Presenters also described US government trust responsibilities to tribes, as well as the unique character of tribal land ownership and how complex changes have occurred over time.
Together, presenters described how all of these form the background or landscape upon which partnerships must be grounded, and presenters’ information helped attendees to grasp some basic tenets about tribal rights, sovereignty, tribal lands, resources co-management, and historical aspects – all of which will help attendees start their partnership efforts with a better understanding and a new perspective.

**Day Two - Workshop**

Day two’s workshop was set about according to the program design, with attendees self-selecting into groups, each with a tribal presenter or representative among the group. However, day two did not go strictly according to plan. This fact, indeed, is a reflection of the first day’s effect on attendees – an effect that couldn’t be staged or directed. Attendees had, the day before, listened to and closely followed tribal presenters’ telling their personal stories – personal stories about their tribe’s history, difficulties, accomplishments, and how they have taken care of themselves and their land and water. This story-telling process continued through all the first day (including the after-dinner program), and set the stage for a very unique next morning’s workshop.

One very important lesson learned intuitively during the seminar is that *time* is much less a master to the tribes, and that one must be prepared to be flexible in engaging tribes with one’s own agenda and timeframe. The manner in which presenters (and our moderator) guided attendees through discussion carried over this practice to the second day.

Attendees were invited to introduce themselves individually, and to “tell their own story” of sorts. What followed was nothing short of inspiring, with attendees expressing their own life history, their passions, their trauma, their love for caring for the land, and their compelling interest in working together in conservation. During these individual stories, some key points emerged that planners had hoped to develop in breakout session. These points were emphasized in personal stories about how attendees relate to their local tribes, their local communities, their families, and to one another. Closing points were captured in workshop easel notes summarized by attendees at the closing of the session.

For a formal closing of the seminar, Makah elder Greig Arnold performed a tribal song, and Roylene Rides at the Door gave a blessing to attendees – both continuing the close, personal effect of the seminar.

Many attendees found this short seminar very informative and quite moving and energizing. Some very good information had been conveyed in a very short period of time, outside a formal note-taking or lesson-type setting. Attendees learned by simply listening.
That is not to say that the seminar did not provide a wealth of information. The task force provided in attendees' packets more than a dozen reference texts to support the presentations (see complete reference list included as Attachment B). These reference documents contained information about Washington tribes, treaties with Washington tribes, tribal and Indian land status, government trust responsibilities and executive orders, traditional tribal ecological knowledge, indigenous stewardship methods, tribal leadership styles, and several other detailed NRCS training documents or excerpts.

Attendees were provided worksheets to complete and submit on their own time. These were to collect additional information that would be helpful in sharing the more mechanistic matters in partnership development - comparing how districts have successfully set up partnerships with tribes, how barriers have been overcome, what communication pathways have worked well (or not), examples of shared natural resource issues (projects), support requirements of the district by support agencies and organizations, and key lessons learned.

Attendees

Attachment C lists attendees and their affiliations. Many of those attending the day-one presentations and discussions stayed over for the day two workshop. Attendees included conservation district supervisors, district technical and management staff, WACD leadership and staff, WSCC Commissioners and staff, NRCS management and staff, and tribal presenters and participants. Nineteen (of 45 total statewide) conservation districts participated in the training seminar. Tribal participants (speakers, presenters, and attendees) included representatives of seven tribes – Suquamish Tribe, Makah Tribe, Cowlitz Tribe, Samish Tribe, Snoqualmie Tribe, Quinault Tribe, and Tulalip Tribe.

Conclusions/Work Products

As a work product of the training seminar, based on easel notes and task force input, a number of conclusions can be reported. These were conveyed in a very personal and intuitive manner during seminar discussions, and were reinforced as take-home messages for attendees. First, there are several points of advice that presenters and speakers provided for attendees that relate to how conservation district supervisors and staff should engage a tribe.

1. A district's first engagement with a tribe should be sought via personal contact, face to face, perhaps with introduction (e.g., by someone who knows someone). This could be facilitated through local technical staff (such as tribal natural resource field technicians or directors), or through Tribal Outreach Task Force or NRCS liaisons with special contacts. Writing letters or emails to tribal officials may not, alone, get you a response (at first), as tribal officials' attention is focused in dealing with many critical tribal health, safety and welfare issues, natural resources being only one of these.
2. **Mutual respect** is a key to partnerships of any kind. This is true of partnership-building with tribes, to be sure. Showing respect takes many forms, and one form is that districts should become somewhat knowledgeable about their local tribe(s) with whom they wish to engage. This includes different tribal protocols and governance structures, as well as knowing something about the tribe’s history.

3. We are all taught that **patience** is a virtue. However, this seems an especially important factor when considering a tribal perspective of **time**, as mentioned earlier, and in **building trust**. Districts should recognize that part of the relationship-building is to acknowledge the tribe’s timeline. No rush to agreement is likely to occur when engaging a tribe. Unfortunately, today’s conservation programs are money-chasers, and all projects include (usually short) timelines for action or obligation. So the key in engaging tribes appears to be to reach out **very early** in a process for planning conservation work. One example raised during the seminar is that districts invite tribes to participate in a district’s **long-range planning** process. Start early and keep at it.

4. District officials should be ready and willing to **share personal information** about themselves, including or emphasizing shared goals about care of the land. Be prepared (and don’t be reluctant) to **extend yourself** in personal contact. Help the tribe better understand who you are and why they should trust you or wish to partner with the district. Tribes will appreciate the work districts do with landowners and land managers, and the volunteer status and motivation of conservation district supervisors. Share these enthusiastically.

5. Districts should be patient but **persistent**. Presenters advised attendees not to give up too easily at any first barrier to establishing contact or a partnership. Trust takes time to build, and requires extended communication.

6. It is helpful to think of some simple considerations when planning meetings or events as part of tribal engagement, and when dealing with logistics. For example something as simple as serving food (this is no less important in all conservation collaboration settings it seems). Be prepared to serve some form of refreshments. Make sure your funding source(s) will cover expenses for food.

7. Districts should view **websites** for local tribes for news of upcoming events that offer opportunities to visit, participate, and engage (natural resources field tours, youth education). **Youth education** can be a very important point of engagement; look for opportunities to invite the local tribe(s)’ tribal youth/school to participate in events such as Envirothon, youth camps and similar district education events, or to involve district supervisors and staff in tribal education events. Look for volunteer opportunities to work together, and to get to know one another.
8. Offer **announcements** of resources fairs, native plant sales, field conservation tours and youth education events for publication in tribal newsletters, and **invite** tribal participation. (For example, WACD and WSCC have offered a news brief about this training seminar for inclusion in the Suquamish Tribe’s newsletter.) Tribes need to become aware of who conservation districts are and what they do.

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Second, presenters and/or task force attendees indicated that a number of follow-up actions are needed by WACD, the task force itself, and districts, including:

1. WACD/task force should continue close communication with the **Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs** (GOIA). This includes tapping into the Governor’s Centennial Accord subcommittees (working in conjunction with WSCC), taking advantage of GOIA-sponsored Government to Government Training opportunities, tracking the GOIA website for updates on tribal news and upcoming events, and informing GOIA about progress of the WACD Tribal Outreach Task Force.

2. WACD/districts should become acquainted with all state agency **tribal liaisons** (designee), and with state cultural and historical preservation officers.

3. Referencing WACD’s recently-adopted task force work plan and status report (please refer to documents listing in Attachment B), a number of task force work items relate to these conclusions and recommendations:
   - Continue to promote like training at conferences (WACD, WADE) and special venues.
   - Develop improved conservation district supervisor orientation (WSCC) training on aspects relating to tribal partnerships.
   - Secure tribal venues for WACD training events to engage tribal leaders and tribal natural resources managers.
   - Create a clear understanding about why these partnerships matter.
   - Highlight and celebrate partnership success stories.
   - Incorporate tribal natural resource data-sets in long-range conservation program planning.
   - Cooperate on cultural resources evaluations and timelines.
   - Help set and utilize communications connections.
   - Engage tribal associations.
   - Collaborate on leadership advocacy initiatives and natural resource protection and management advocacy efforts.
**Future Actions**

WACD plans to continue the work of the Tribal Outreach Task Force, and to continue to partner with conservation districts, USDA NRCS, WSCC, and with tribes in developing, promoting and providing training to conservation district supervisors, and those in WACD leadership, on tribal outreach and partnership-building. WACD will work to build on the success of this training seminar, in carrying out tasks under the Tribal Outreach Task Force work plan, and in extending cooperative work under agreements with these partner agencies, as well as other partner organizations (such as NACD).

There is much potential in building these partnerships between conservation districts and tribes; there is much work to be done to help get interested people started, and to help make these partnerships successful. Conservation district supervisors are leaders. WACD believes that one important aspect of leading is to be inclusive, and to reach out to those who care about the land and other natural resources, in an effort to work together. Tribes should be considered natural partners to conservation districts, and share many common values with conservation districts – such as locally-led, where local people have a strong lead role in determining actions to protect and manage natural resources.

WACD is committed to play its role in helping conservation districts and tribes come together to expand the conservation footprint on the land, and to celebrate and build on success.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WACD expresses appreciation to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Washington State Conservation Commission, for their interest, collaboration and financial contributions to this training seminar and to the larger tribal outreach and partnership-building initiative behind it. WACD thanks Tanna Engdahl, Chair, and the volunteer members of the WACD Tribal Outreach Task Force, who served in planning and organizing this training event. WACD also wishes to thank the Suquamish Tribe and Kiana Lodge for hosting our training event, and for providing such an enjoyable welcome and learning atmosphere.

The success of this training seminar rests on the participation of and sharing by tribal representatives. WACD expresses deep appreciation to our tribal participants – from the Makah Tribe, Cowlitz Tribe, Suquamish Tribe, Samish Tribe, Snoqualmie Tribe, Tulalip Tribe, and Quinault Tribe - for sharing such articulate presenters, speakers and attendees as a part of our training program.

WACD wishes to extend a special thank you to Roylene Rides at the Door, NRCS State Conservationist, and Robin Slate, NRCS State Tribal Liaison, for their hard work in the planning and conduct of this training seminar. These two strong conservation partners put their professional experience and their personal stories into this event, and helped to create an extraordinary learning experience for conservation district supervisors and other attendees.
ATTACHMENT A

Tribal Outreach and Partnership Training Seminar

April 28-29, 2015
Kiana Lodge, Poulsbo, Washington

Seminar Agenda

4/28/15 Day One

9:00 Welcome - Suquamish Tribe, Barbara Lawrence, Elder Council Chairwoman

9:10 Introduction: Why partnerships matter. Why do we believe this effort is valued?
- David Vogel, WACD Executive Director
- Tanna Engdahl, Chair, WACD Tribal Outreach Task Force

9:20 Mutual objectives, mutual respect, and building trust – How do our respective traditions to care for the land help us to work together?
- Greig Arnold, Makah Tribal Council Vice Chairman;
- Roylene Rides at the Door, State Conservationist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Break

10:30 Understanding tribal treaties, sovereignty and federal government trust relationships with tribes - Build a basic understanding of the landscape or foundation upon which district/tribal partnerships must be built.
- Phil Harju, Cowlitz Tribe General Council Vice Chairman

Noon LUNCH – How to begin working with a Tribe
- Christine Woodward, Natural Resources Director, Samish Tribe

1:00 What are the existing or anticipated benefits to our working together? How can we, managing natural resources together, become more effective (than we are separately) in benefitting the resources we are working to protect and manage? How can we make these benefits clear to all parties? – All Presenters (Robin Slate, NRCS Tribal Liaison, Moderator)

- Land status
- Government structure
- Time
- Trust responsibility
- Benefits of working with a sovereign nation
- How do tribal members walk in both worlds?
3:15 Conservation districts and tribes working together – Success stories and learning examples, presented by representatives of conservation districts and tribes. Presentations will discuss how to put these partnerships together. How did these successful partnerships overcome barriers?

4:15 Call to Action – Charge attendees to act; reach out to their respective local tribe(s) or conservation district(s).

- Tanna Engdahl, Chair, WACD Tribal Outreach Task Force

4:30 Adjourn for the day

6:00 Dinner and Suquamish Tribe presentation

- Spartina removal project in cooperation with DNR - Tom Curley, Suquamish Tribe
- Suquamish Tribal Stories by Barbara Lawrence, Suquamish Tribe

4/29/15 Day Two – Half Day Workshop

8:00 Reconvene and brief recap lessons learned; purpose of Day Two.

- David Vogel, WACD Executive Director

8:15 What are the needed next steps that you can use to put this new-found knowledge to work in building or sustaining partnerships at your district or tribe?

- All (Robin Slate, NRCS Tribal Liaison, Moderator)

8:30 Mentoring discussion on starting communication on shared natural resource concerns. – All (Robin Slate, NRCS Tribal Liaison, Moderator)

Break out into groups

- Examples of key shared resource issues
- Examples of successful communication pathways
- Examples of how federal and state agencies’ objectives can contribute to local efforts

Key questions of mentors:
1. Why did the district and tribe decide to partner?
2. What were your challenges to getting started?
3. How were these challenges resolved?
4. What is your most effective means of communication in your partnership? What have been the mutual benefits to partnering?
5. What type of support from others was most needed or useful?
6. What are your most important lessons learned?

11:45 Call to Action (repeat) – Charge attendees to act; reach out to their respective local tribe(s) or conservation district(s).

- Tanna Engdahl, Chair, WACD Tribal Outreach Task Force

Closing prayer – Grieg Arnold

Adjourn
ATTACHMENT B
Reference Texts Provided Attendees


2. Washington Tribes (*List, Demographics, Territory, Enrollment*). NRCS Training Materials. (No date listed), 8 pp.


6. Tribal and Indian Land Status. NRCS Training Materials. (No date listed), pp. 3-12.


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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy Cunningham</td>
<td>Asotin County Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sandyacc@cableone.net">sandyacc@cableone.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry Hendrickson</td>
<td>Asotin County Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rosewind@tds.net">rosewind@tds.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Crowder</td>
<td>Benton Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:michaelcrowder@frontier.com">michaelcrowder@frontier.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Rickel</td>
<td>Cascadia Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:MikeR@cascadiacd.org">MikeR@cascadiacd.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger Wristen</td>
<td>Cascadia Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rogerwristen@gmail.com">rogerwristen@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean Longrie</td>
<td>Clark Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:deanpl@aol.com">deanpl@aol.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise Smee</td>
<td>Clark Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dsmee@clarkcd.org">dsmee@clarkcd.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanna Engdahl</td>
<td>Clark Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lynnengd@yahoo.com">lynnengd@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn Engdahl</td>
<td>Clark Conservation District</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Phil Harju</td>
<td>Cowlitz Tribe</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pharju@cowlitz.org">pharju@cowlitz.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia Tenney</td>
<td>Cowlitz Tribe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lloyd Odell</td>
<td>Ferry Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lloyd-odell@conservewa.net">lloyd-odell@conservewa.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dick Ryon</td>
<td>King Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:raryon@comcast.net">raryon@comcast.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max Prinsen</td>
<td>King Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:max.prinsen@shadowhabitat.org">max.prinsen@shadowhabitat.org</a></td>
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<td>Erin Prinsen</td>
<td>King Conservation District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sara Hemphill</td>
<td>King Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sara.hemphill@kingcd.org">sara.hemphill@kingcd.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carin Anderson</td>
<td>Kitsap Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:carin-anderson@conservewa.net">carin-anderson@conservewa.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikki Johanson</td>
<td>Kitsap Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:nikki@wacd.org">nikki@wacd.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Lovely</td>
<td>Kitsap Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jiloverly@embarqmail.com">jiloverly@embarqmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy Garitone</td>
<td>Kitsap Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:joys-garitone@conservewa.net">joys-garitone@conservewa.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Stahl</td>
<td>Kitsap Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:brian-stahl@conservewa.net">brian-stahl@conservewa.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Stromberger</td>
<td>Lincoln County Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:firebird51@aol.com">firebird51@aol.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greig Arnold</td>
<td>Makah Tribal Vice Chairman</td>
<td><a href="mailto:greig.arndold@makah.com">greig.arndold@makah.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>John Bolender</td>
<td>Mason Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jbolender@masoncd.org">jbolender@masoncd.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Mackey</td>
<td>Mason Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dmackey@solar2.us">dmackey@solar2.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Tobin</td>
<td>North Yakima Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mike-tobin@conservewa.net">mike-tobin@conservewa.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roylene Rides at the Door</td>
<td>NRCS State Conservationist</td>
<td><a href="mailto:roylene.rides-at-the-door@wa.usda.gov">roylene.rides-at-the-door@wa.usda.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin Slate</td>
<td>NRCS State Tribal Liaison</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Robin.slate@wa.usda.gov">Robin.slate@wa.usda.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn Mahan</td>
<td>Pierce Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kmahan@piercecountycd.org">kmahan@piercecountycd.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Stamon</td>
<td>Quinault Indian Nation</td>
<td><a href="mailto:MSTAMON@quinalt.org">MSTAMON@quinalt.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine Woodward</td>
<td>Samish Indian Tribe</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cwoodward@samishtribe.nsn.us">cwoodward@samishtribe.nsn.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy Pare</td>
<td>Skagit Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rwpare@seanet.com">rwpare@seanet.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Craven</td>
<td>Snohomish Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:oldhalloween@yahoo.com">oldhalloween@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy Spiry</td>
<td>Snoqualmie Tribe</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cindy@snoqualmietribe.us">cindy@snoqualmietribe.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Curley</td>
<td>Suquamish Tribe</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tcurley@suquamish.nsn.us">tcurley@suquamish.nsn.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Hatch-Winecka</td>
<td>Thurston Conservation District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Amyhw@thurstoncd.com">Amyhw@thurstoncd.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daryl Williams</td>
<td>Tulalip Tribe</td>
<td><a href="mailto:darylwilliams@tulaliptribes-nsn.gov">darylwilliams@tulaliptribes-nsn.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly Clothier</td>
<td>Underwood Conservation District</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon Culp</td>
<td>WA State Conservation Commission</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jculp@scc.wa.gov">jculp@scc.wa.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shana Joy</td>
<td>WA State Conservation Commission</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sjoy@scc.wa.gov">sjoy@scc.wa.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stu Trefry</td>
<td>WA State Conservation Commission</td>
<td><a href="mailto:strefry@scc.wa.gov">strefry@scc.wa.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Baden</td>
<td>WA State Conservation Commission</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mbaden@scc.wa.gov">mbaden@scc.wa.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Eller</td>
<td>WA State Conservation Commission</td>
<td><a href="mailto:beller@scc.wa.gov">beller@scc.wa.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Johnson</td>
<td>WA State Conservation Commission</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ljohnson@scc.wa.gov">ljohnson@scc.wa.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Clark</td>
<td>WA State Conservation Commission</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mclark@scc.wa.gov">mclark@scc.wa.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Shultz</td>
<td>WA State Conservation Commission</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rshultz@scc.wa.gov">rshultz@scc.wa.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Cochrane</td>
<td>WA State Conservation Commission</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bcochrane@scc.wa.gov">bcochrane@scc.wa.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Vogel</td>
<td>WACD</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dvogel@wadistricts.org">dvogel@wadistricts.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori McLaughlin</td>
<td>WACD</td>
<td><a href="mailto:wacd@ncia.com">wacd@ncia.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>