

EMSWCD STRATEGIC PLAN



2023-2027 GOALS

Agriculture and Working Lands – Urban and Rural

Summary

Soil and Water Conservation Districts were created to help farmers protect natural resources. Today, in our diverse district boundaries, some of our working lands are very urban and our services have evolved to respond to those unique needs.

Agricultural practices can result in loss of topsoil and pollution of waterways. EMSWCD partners with local, state, and federal programs where each plays a role in improving conditions on the land and in our local rivers, streams, and wetlands. EMSWCD has the unique role of monitoring water quality in local waterways as well as providing technical and financial assistance to support farmers and other landowners in improving soil and water health on the ground. We should continue to look for ways to leverage our resources and roles in partnership with these other government agencies as well as community-based organizations, indigenous communities, land trusts, and nonprofits. Increasing fluctuations in temperature, rainfall and wildfire caused by climate change are causing increased crises for our farmers and require us to use a lens of climate mitigation and climate resiliency as we plan programming for the future on our Agricultural and Working Lands.

Goals and Strategies

1

Support the economic resilience of farmers and farm businesses.

- a. Assist in building new farm businesses via the Headwaters Farm Business Incubator Program (HIP).
- b. Purchase working farmland conservation easements; provide financial support to current landowners protecting farmland in perpetuity.
- c. Provide technical assistance to implement conservation practices (conservation practices can save farmers money).
- d. Provide financial assistance to implement conservation practices, saving farmers money as an incentive to participate.
- e. *Identify ways to implement alternative easement valuation.

2

Provide new farmers with increased access to land.

- a. Improve affordability by purchasing farm conservation easements.
- b. Assist graduates from the Headwaters Farm Business Incubator program in finding land.
- c. Provide succession planning education and resources for farmers.
- d. *Explore interest in and barriers to Latinx farm workers applying for the Headwaters Farm Business Incubator Program.
- e. *Buy/protect land/properties for community gardens and small farms in urban areas (transfer ownership to local partners).
- f. *Explore ways to provide startup capital for new farm businesses and farmland acquisition (microloans, down-payment assistance, etc.)
- g. *Develop new partnerships for urban farming opportunities (for example NRCS Urban Farm and People's Garden initiatives).

3 Promote conservation practices that support soil and water health.

- a. Provide farmers with technical and financial assistance to help them improve their conservation practices.
- b. Provide in-person opportunities and information for farmers to learn about conservation practices.
- c. *Implement more intensive weed control at Headwaters Farm.
- d. *Partner with farmers who are conducting trials to utilize nutrient management and soil microbes to shift weed populations.



4 Mitigate Climate Impacts.

- a. Stay up to date on emerging conservation practices that better address climate impacts.
- b. Create and promote strong networks for sharing information and best practices (for example: ORCAN).
- c. *Explore how to support “carbon farming.”
- d. *Track the development of accessible, reliable methods to measure carbon sequestration and share with landowners.



5 Through our grant programs, establish school and community gardens and support sustainable and culturally important agriculture practices. Grants should:

- a. Engage residents in improving soil health, fish and wildlife habitat, and water quality.
- b. Increase conservation benefits for communities and populations experiencing disparities in environmental health, environmental education, and natural amenities.
- c. Build resilience to climate change in local communities, including for farmers to mitigate climate change impacts and build momentum for climate change action.
- d. Prepare residents for careers or education in agriculture, natural resources, or related fields by supporting mentorship, youth programs, market access, and skill development.

Natural Spaces – Urban and Rural

Summary

As a soil and water conservation district, we play a critical role in protecting natural spaces that contribute to the quality of life for both urban and rural residents. It is well documented that Black and Indigenous people and Asian Americans were forcibly removed from and denied access to land in Oregon. It is also well-documented that low-income communities lack open spaces in their neighborhoods. By building meaningful relationships and investing in – and with – these communities we can address some of the historic injustices.

Land trusts, and local, regional, state, and federal government partners all have missions that include protecting natural spaces for people and wildlife. EMSWCD has a responsibility to continue working in partnership with these and other organizations to achieve these goals, focusing on strategic investments within our district and prioritizing opportunities where our limited funding for these projects can make a big impact.

Goals and Strategies

1

Improve soil, water, and habitat health.

- a. Partner with other agencies and organizations to purchase conservation easements to protect natural spaces.
- b. Provide financial and technical assistance to improve soil and water health.
- c. Improve fish and wildlife habitat and water quality (Stream Care, weed mitigation, grants, Planting with Partners).
- d. *Explore opportunities to plant native trees on upland rural private properties currently dominated by Himalayan blackberries using the StreamCare model.

2

Increase access to natural spaces for people, especially those who have been most impacted and/or historically excluded.

- a. Provide funding to partners to help protect parks and natural areas (e.g., Nestwood Forest, Nadaka).
- b. *Support public access infrastructure to parks and natural areas (e.g., bathrooms, parking, trash cans, boat launches, swim ladders, remove barriers).





3 Work with partners to create and promote information about how to access natural spaces (COLT's map, Intertwine, Metro, Parks departments, etc.).

a. *Develop strong outreach and communication channels with BIPOC and other marginalized groups.

4 Increase the conservation benefits of parks and natural areas for communities and populations experiencing disparities in environmental health, environmental education, and natural amenities when investing in park and natural area projects.

- a. *Help build resilience to climate change in local communities and mitigate climate change impacts when investing in park and natural area projects.
- b. *Rethink plant choices using the latest research (plantings, Native Plant Sale, PWP, workshops, etc.)
- c. *Foster mutually beneficial relationships with BIPOC and other marginalized groups.

Urban and Built Environment

(Residential, Commercial & Industrial, Community & Public)

Summary

Within EMSWCD, we have a diverse and growing urban population with different resource concerns. Significantly, climate change is causing additional negative impacts in our urban areas, requiring new, innovative approaches related to soil and water health. Black and Indigenous communities and other people of color (BIPOC) have and continue to experience much greater impacts from contaminated water and soil, as well as flooding and fire which are exacerbated by climate change. Soil and water health within the urban and built environment is further impacted by the construction, maintenance, and use of buildings, roads, traditional landscapes (lawns, etc.), and other development. Water quality is compromised by stormwater runoff from these systems, which carries chemicals and sediment into waterways.

Many public, nonprofit, and private partners are working in the urban and built environment through an intricate framework of regulatory and voluntary programs. EMSWCD will continue to leverage our resources, strengths, creativity, and expertise by identifying gaps and providing education, as well as financial and technical assistance to homeowners and institutional landowners (colleges, churches, businesses, landlords, etc.). Grants to nonprofits, schools, and other local community groups help engage residents on the ground at the local and neighborhood scale and make our mission more relevant to the significant number of residents who are not landowners (about half of the population in our district).

Goals and Strategies

1

Promote conservation practices that protect and improve water quality, water conservation, and wildlife habitat.

- a. Improve stormwater management and decrease urban stormwater pollution by reducing impervious surfaces and retaining/treating stormwater on-site.
- b. Reduce the use of synthetic landscaping chemicals and products.
- c. Increase the use of water conservation methods and tools within the urban landscape.
- d. Reduce the area of lawn and ornamental plants that require frequent watering.
- e. Improve and protect wildlife habitat and riparian corridors.
- f. Reduce/remove invasive species.
- g. Increase the number of native plants and areas of green infrastructure within the urban growth boundary.
- h. *Improve fish passage.
- i. *Reduce tire pollution runoff into our waterways.



2

Address climate impacts and reduce the heat island effect.

- a. Support the implementation and maintenance of green infrastructure.
- b. Fund tree planting AND maintenance.
- c. Support landowners replacing lawn and impervious surfaces with trees, native shrubs and ground cover.
- d. *Stay up to date on emerging conservation practices that better address climate impacts.



3

Provide education and assistance to partners, local residents and landowners.

- a. Increase public understanding of water quality, water conservation, and natural habitat conservation concerns, and inspire action to address those concerns.
- b. Create and use accessible and culturally relevant outreach and communication materials.
- c. *Work with and center BIPOC communities and other marginalized groups when developing, implementing, and adapting programs and services.
- d. *Increase EMSWCD engagement with and services to BIPOC communities and other marginalized groups.

4 Expand impact through partnerships and by leveraging financial support and resources.

- a. Provide landowners with financial and technical assistance (to improve water quality, conserve water and improve habitat).
- b. Provide grants for community-led projects.
- c. Work with partners on demonstration projects.
- d. *Identify opportunities within programs to build the conservation capacity of organizations that are led by and/or serving BIPOC communities and other marginalized groups.
- e. *Fund research and planning for new projects and/or new technologies.
- f. *Provide incentives for landscape companies to use more sustainable practices.
- g. *Engage with local, state, tribal, and federal agencies on policy updates related to soil and water health (tracking current efforts; how and if they are being updated).



Sustainable and Equitable Organization

Summary

Advancing our mission of helping people care for land and water includes addressing the Strategic Plan's focus on climate, equity and inclusion in our operations. Over the past several years, EMSWCD has moved our equity commitment into action through individual and collective learning, and program and policy changes. For decades, EMSWCD has fulfilled our mission through our innovative, sustainability practices.

Goals and Strategies

1

Ensure internal systems and processes support effective and equitable operations.

- a. Recruit, train, retain and support a diverse staff.
- b. Increase the knowledge, awareness, and skills of staff to meet equity goals by cooperatively developing learning opportunities, educational programs and activities.
- c. Improve staff communication and conflict management skills through training, feedback and practice.
- d. Prioritize equity in purchasing and contracting.
- e. *Develop and implement EMSWCD standards for accessibility in our events, online and print publications, presentation materials and other outreach and engagement activities.
- f. *Improve our physical spaces so they are accessible and inclusive of different cultures, languages, and abilities.



2

Increase public awareness of important conservation issues and EMSWCD's purpose and mission among key audiences.

- a. *Provide a districtwide resource for all EMSWCD's outreach efforts (Community Outreach and Engagement Team) and increase support for communications and engagement across all program areas.
- b. *Develop and implement a Communications Plan including audience mapping and key messages for the entire organization.
- c. *Create a style guide, web and social media guidelines, and other communications protocols.

3

Ensure that internal systems and purchasing processes utilize principles of sustainability.

- a. Consider carbon footprint, energy performance, waste reduction, product lifespan and end-of-life disposal, as well as impact on natural resources, in purchasing or construction decisions.
- b. Follow the principles of reduce, re-use and recycle (or donate).
- c. Continue the transition to renewable energy for buildings and operations.
- d. Use and recommend more sustainable alternatives to plastic, especially single-use plastic.
- e. Maintain our facilities to conserve water and improve water quality including retaining and treating stormwater on-site and using the safest and most sustainable products.
- f. Encourage the use of bikes, public transportation, and electric fleet vehicles for transportation.