Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District
Proposal for Tax Base 2020

July 15, 2020

A. INTRODUCTION

Why do we need the tax-base?

Stable funding: most of the currently available funding for conservation and restoration comes from lottery dollars, and we simply mustn't leave our environment and our future up to chance.

Local control: local, sustainable funding will ensure long-term protection of our natural resources, our local communities, residents and our farmers and foresters. We don't want to depend on unpredictable outside forces to be able to effectively protect our natural resources.

Economic benefits: funding will contribute to the local economy in two key ways:

1) It will leverage federal and state dollars to support the local 'conservation economy' and create local jobs in restoration & conservation. *The tax dollars – as well as the state and federal dollars – will be spent locally to hire local contractors*.

2) It will also support our local farmers and foresters to invest in innovative approaches and strategies to promote the conservation of soil and water in our working lands. By helping them with advice and incentives to reduce environmental harm, we invest in our future and their valuable contributions to our local economy. We will all save money by fixing problems before they get out of hand.

Multiplier effect: many of the programs we want to fund can be paid for by leveraging grant money available primarily at the federal and the state level. But right now, a lot of that money is left on the table, because we don't have the staff to apply for and administer the grants. By increasing our capacity to design projects and apply for funds will multiply our investment many times over. With increased capacity we can also connect landowners to federal programs and funding at the scale required for more effective soil & water conservation.

By what authority is the *Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District* seeking this revenue?

As a result of the devastation caused by the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, Franklin Delano Roosevelt acted to help states create local Soil Conservation Districts as local democratic mechanisms to improve management practices and ensure local coordination to prevent future environmental disasters.

The enabling legislation for Soil and Water Conservation Districts is broad. *This authority allows Districts to engage fully in resource management programs related to soil, water, flood control, forestry, wildlife, land protection, education, and other natural resource areas.*

The District is the local agent for a host of federal and state laws and regulations. The Federal Clean Water Act (1972), for example, requires the testing of waterways and the listing of those that do not

meet water quality standards. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) does this work in Oregon partly by providing grants to local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Watershed Councils.

Federal and state law allow for "carrot and stick" based enforcement. Various agencies are empowered to levy fines and penalties for infractions of rules ('regulation'). This is the stick. The Soil and Water Conservation Districts, however, are authorized to offer the carrots – to offer incentives to landowners to adopt practices that meet and often exceed legal standards. The 1993 Oregon Agricultural Water Quality Management Act (SB 1010) recognized Soil and Water Conservation Districts as THE mechanism for the "carrot" side enforcement. (Read this pamphlet on SB1010: http://www.polkswcd.com/uploads/5/1/7/5/51756011/oda_sb_1010.pdf)

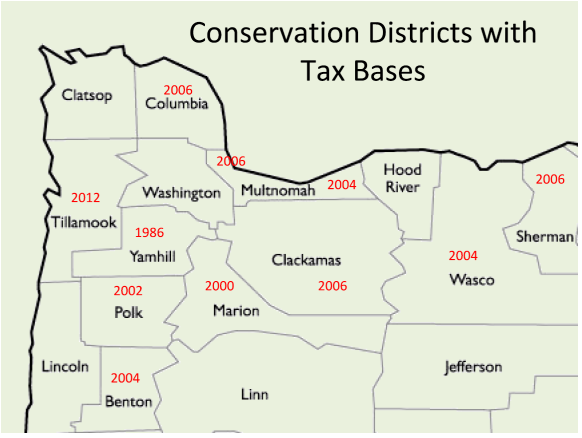
The significance of SB 1010 is that the District should be the clearing house for agricultural, forestry and urban practice that improves land stewardship for the public good. Upping the ratio of carrots to sticks makes everyone happier and reduces the tensions between city and country.

What's special and distinct about the District:

In sum, the District is the only local entity working in *voluntary, non-regulatory* conservation, restoration, and stewardship, which is eligible to go for a tax-base. Because of its history, the District is uniquely positioned among the local conservation organizations to work with farmers, foresters, landowners, and urban residents. The District can leverage federal and state programs and connect those programs to local conservation and restoration work. The District works closely with local farmers and foresters to plan and implement voluntary improvements that often exceed legal requirements; it provides advice and funds to improve local water quality, food production, and forest health. We look forward to expanding our mission into urban areas. And by working with conservation partners and providing them with financial support, we can leverage our funds for maximum effectiveness.

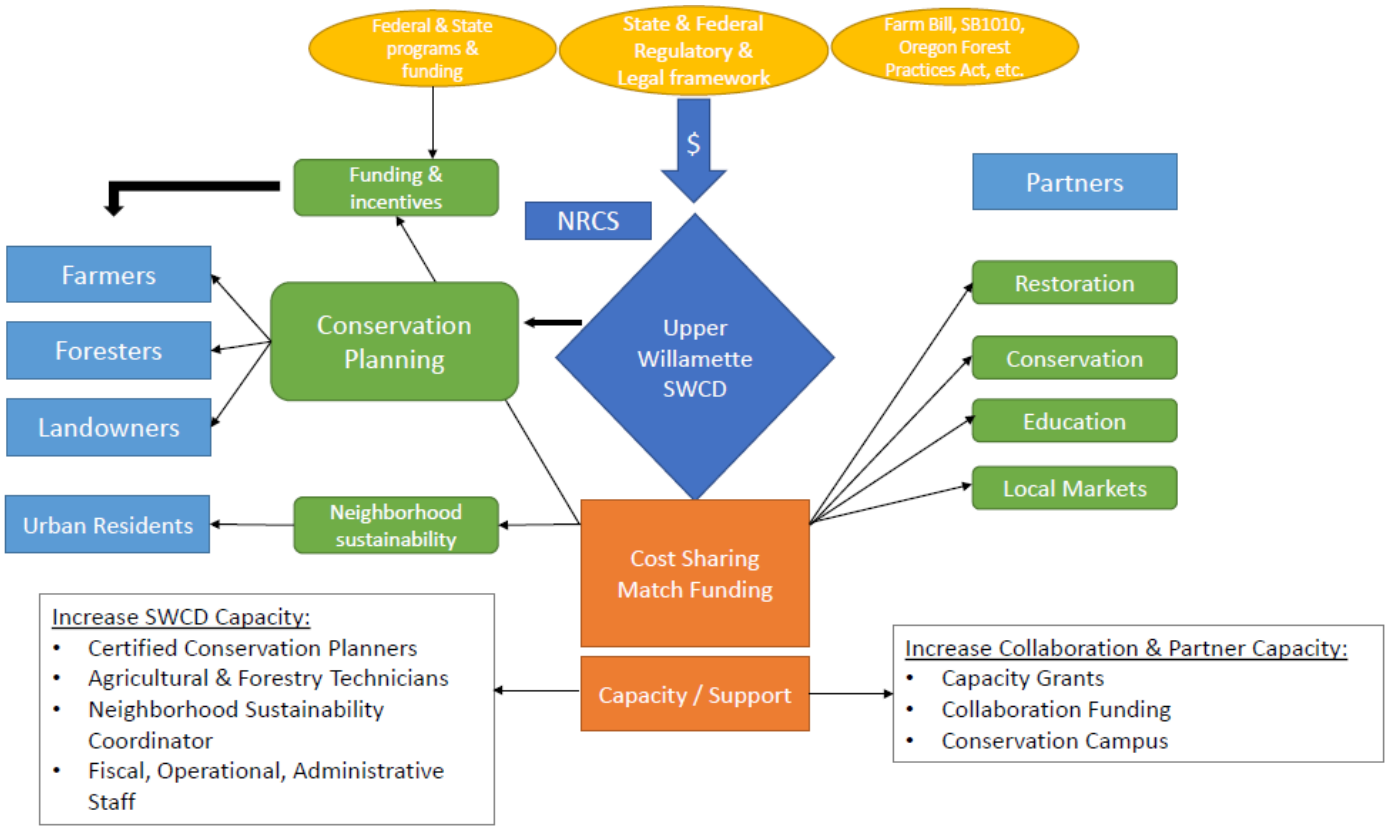
Furthermore, the District is the only entity working over the entire Upper Willamette watershed and is thus uniquely positioned geographically to work across watershed boundaries and the urban-rural divide.

This is not new territory: 13 Oregon Conservation Districts have passed similar tax-base measures to support their important work. In these districts, new, stable funding has been used to increase engagement with local residents and landowners to improve ecological conditions in their districts. These districts have increased their own services and provided support to partner organizations through grants and other collaborative efforts. ERIC- is this true? And can we get a more up to date version of this map? (I think only Tualatin is missing . . .)



Most importantly, the District is a force for the spirit of conservation. We are the "carrot" side of land and water restoration and stewardship. Because our programs are voluntary, we work hard at building trust with the people we deal with. We share their aspirations and passions for the land they steward and

protect. Our relationships grow out of shared values, and as we move from project to project, we and our partners strengthen the conservation culture in the watershed at large.



Revised and simplified diagram (see PPT):

How is the District going to spend the citizens' precious tax dollars wisely and effectively?

The use of the revenue falls into two categories:

1. Right now there is a lot of federal money that is left on the table, because locally we do not have enough professional staff to write and administer grants. This is money that could be doing work in our District, but is not. With a small investment in capacity (staff and staff time at the District and for partners), we can get a lot more money back into Lane County.

2. There are urgent projects in the District that are not being pursued, because they do not fall under the description of existing local, State, and Federal programs. Local tax revenue will allow us local solutions to our local challenges.

We have important and urgent plans in 7 Strategic Areas (for more details, go to section C: Proposals for Future Work):

- Water Quality
- Farms, Food, & Soil (Local Food & Farms)
- Forest Health & Resilience
- Neighborhood Sustainability
- Watershed Restoration & Conservation
- Natural Resource & Environmental Education
- Collaboration

The ideas described in this document are the result of a long, collaborative effort between the SWCD, key partners, and many other local stakeholders, who have provided input and feedback on priorities in the Upper Willamette. These collaborative relationships will continue to be strengthened and formalized, in a manner yet to be determined but which may include participation in the SWCD Board of Directors as an appointed "Associate Director," or the formation of a Budgetary Oversight Committee or Policy Advisory Committee. These committees may facilitate participation from our partners and the community at large. The UWSWCD is committed to creating institutional structures that will provide policy and budgetary advice.

B. CURRENT WORK AT THE DISTRICT

In the past, the District has relied on grant and program funding to maintain its work. From 2000 to 2017 the District's working mainly with the Oregon Department of Agriculture and provided technical assistance to agricultural landowners. The average annual budget was around $150,000.

In the past three years, the District has increased the number of its partners dramatically and doubled its annual budget to around $300,000.

One of the most important recent projects has been the **Strategic Implementation Area (SIA) of Camp Creek**, a tributary of the McKenzie River. Camp Creek adds agricultural pollution to the McKenzie a short distance above the EWEB water intake facility at Hayden Bridge. The first component of this project has been the development and implementation of conservation plans on numerous properties where there were water

quality concerns. The second component is a monitoring plan for Camp Creek. The District shall monitor multiple water quality parameters at five sites on the Creek over a 10 year period, and determine how much of an impact conservation practices on agricultural lands.

The second important recent project has been a collaboration with Pure Water Partners program to **protect water quality in the upper McKenzie River**. The District has worked with dozens of landowners along the McKenzie River and provided them with assessments and plans for protection or restoration of riparian areas. District seeks funding sources to assist landowners and hires local contractors to complete work.

In addition, the District has completed a **strategic plan for water quality in the McKenzie** as part of the NRCS National Water Quality Initiative. This is one of five plans developed across the nation to assess surface water sources for municipal drinking water systems. The plan assesses the conservation needs and determines how federal funding should be spent towards protecting these systems from non-point source contamination, bringing in outside federal funds into our local economy.

The District has recently been approved to conduct a second **strategic plan for the Long Tom River,** a tributary of the Willamette river. This $1,000,000 five-year plan will bring yet further federal funding into our local economy.

The District continues to provide its popular **Soil Sampling Program**. We offer urban residents and small farmers essential information about their soil's fertility. Over the last two years, the District has provided soil analysis for over 150 home gardeners.

Each year the District works with over 250 landowners to provide **technical assistance** concerning water, soil, wildlife habitat, and the management of their farm, ranch, or home property. *This is the backbone of what we do.* And yet, each year, because of a lack of resources, we have a long backlog of requests from landowners requesting assistance.

C. PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE WORK

1. Water Quality

Currently the SWCD is working in many ways and with many partners (e.g., NRCS, PWP) to protect drinking water in the Upper Willamette. These programs are complementary and are coordinated with regional plans (such as the EWEB's Strategic Planning Technical Report for Source Water Protection), but are currently underfunded and lack staff for implementation. Water quality programs cannot be isolated from conservation planning activities carried out with farmers, foresters, and other rural and urban landowners. The District is in a position to ramp up these programs and enhance existing partnerships by including farming, forestry, and urban land uses. Since many of these programs receive additional federal funding, we can capture more federal dollars that would go to other counties and states by modestly increasing our own investment. We can also connect participating landowners with federal programs that provide funding and cost-share.

<u>Concrete Project Examples:</u>

- The District works with Pure Water Partners to **protect our drinking water**. The McKenzie River is the sole source of Eugene's drinking water. Water quality in the McKenzie River is influenced by many factors including agriculture, rural and urban residential properties, forestry practices, dams, and roads.

Due to agricultural and other activities, the water in the river and many of its tributaries (like Camp Creek) has elevated temperatures, excess nutrients and heightened bacteria levels. Since 2018 the District has worked with PWP and over 70 landowners and farmers to restore and protect riparian areas, and has initiated a strategic investment in Camp Creek to divert livestock waste from creeks and prevent streambank erosion.

- Partners: Eugene Water & Electric Board, McKenzie Watershed Council, MWMC, McKenzie River Trust, Cascade Pacific Resource Conservation and Development, US Forest Service, and University of Oregon.
- Costs: Average riparian restoration projects costs are approximately $10,000-15,000/acre for site preparation, plant establishment, and operations/maintenance over a 5-7 years period. Federal programs like CREP are available to farmers and can provide funds to meet these costs. Federal programs typically require a cost share percentage that many landowners are not able to meet. Tax-base funding could provide cost share as an option for qualifying landowners and enable access to increased federal dollars. Cost shares can also be used to leverage grant funds, such as from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and other funders, in order to implement more projects to protect our drinking water.

- The District works to improve **urban water quality** by investing in the Upper Willamette Urban Waters Partnership (UWUWP). Urban runoff has been cited as a primary threat to water quality in the region. The Partnership works with local businesses to install green infrastructure that cleans stormwater before it runs into our streams. The District can provide programmatic support; or by providing cost-share, the District can help to bring in hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to keep urban waters clean.
  - Partners: Cities of Springfield & Eugene, Springfield Utility Board, Eugene Water & Electric Board, Watershed Councils, UO, Willamalane, and Lane County.
  - Average project design and installation cost is around $25,000 with a wide range from $12,000 to $200,000 for big industrial sites.
  - What this looks like in real life: The UWUWP maintains a map highlighting priority areas and identifies key potential sites for stormwater improvement. They reach out to business owners in priority areas to let them know about the need for good runoff management. Once a business is interested, the District works with a landscape architect to design appropriate green stormwater systems, such as rain gardens. The design also works to enhance greenspaces and urban wildlife habitat. Once the design is complete, the UWUWP works with the business owner to provide cost-offsets for installation. The business agrees to maintain their installation.

- Create a more comprehensive approach and dedicated funding for **water quality monitoring**. We currently have no significant data or information about the quality of the water in most of our local streams and rivers. This lack of data makes it difficult to understand exactly what our water quality is like in many areas and to identify priorities for local action. We need to ensure that there is long term monitoring carried out on our waterways in order to understand trends and impacts of our investments in water quality improvements in order to develop effective solutions for protecting our water quality over time.
  - This could be carried out through supporting existing partners already working in water quality monitoring such as local utilities, municipalities, watershed councils, universities and with support from other state actors such as DEQ and ODA.

2. Farm, Food & Soil

The District has a long and successful history of working with farmers on conservation planning and practical solutions to protect soil and water. This work is the core of the District's mission, but it requires increased funding because of the growing number of small producers. Because of its agricultural connections, the District is well positioned to help local food producers to connect with the local food markets by supporting partners, like Willamette Food and Farm Coalition and local farmers markets, who are already doing this important work.

Concrete Project Examples:

- Hire a full-time certified conservation planner to work with local farmers in conservation planning. This person would work closely with the NRCS and with landowners to determine best management practices for their farms, understand current problems and provide potential solutions related to manure management (storage, fencing), soil & sediment runoff, pesticide runoff, riparian planting, irrigation, nutrient management, among other sustainable farming practices. The implementation of these solutions would be jointly funded through cost sharing between the district and landowners to leverage federal and NRCS funds. This is the cornerstone of our work in promoting soil health; it promotes sustainable & regenerative agricultural practices, and contributes to the reduction of water pollution and soil degradation.
    - This would be carried out by the SWCD in partnership with the NRCS
    - Full time Certified Lead Conservation Planner (shared with forestry) & Agricultural Technicians
    - What this looks like in real life: A manure diversion project was implemented to address concerns about runoff from a farmer's livestock operation. The site was surrounded by a large pool and wetlands. Prior to this project, manure produced by the livestock was piled uncovered within 100 feet on the wetland area and trucked offsite twice a year.

      The District helped the farmer to apply for a small grant that would manage the manure and improve water quality. The District installed a composting structure that allows the manure to compost fully before being used in gardens and paddock production. Time required to clean the stable area is reduced and made much easier during the wet, winter months. The farmer no longer has to worry about run-off from her property contaminating the adjacent wetlands.

- Expand **Soil Testing** services to improve **Soil Health**. This is carried out under the umbrella of Conservation Planning activities and will essentially carry on as usual, but with increased funding and staff capacity, as well as cost sharing options to make soil testing available to a wider range of folks.
    - In house, in partnership with NRCS
    - Costs: Soil tests costs $65 apiece
- Provide funding to local partners such as farmers markets and the Willamette Farm & Food Coalition, which has proven successful in the past but lacks consistent resources and other partners to support them in **connecting farmers to local markets**.
    - Partners: Willamette Farm & Food Coalition, Farmers Markets
- Develop a granting program to fund **school and community gardens** and other educational agricultural initiatives. The District will take the lead when it receives requests to support a school or community garden.
    - Partners such as the School Gardening Project, NAACP, Huerto de la Familia, 4H, etc.

3. Forest Health & Resilience

We need to acknowledge the risk that wildfire poses to our urban-wild communities, our lives, our property and our wildlife habitat. Districts can become a stronger player in the carrot side of the Oregon Forest Practices Act by providing conservation planning services to local forest and small woodland owners and connecting them with federal programs and funding. These investments will help foresters and small woodlot owners to implement innovative practices on their lands to improve soil and water health throughout the Upper Willamette basin. For this program we would work closely with the Oregon Department of Forestry to ensure that houses and other structures are protected by fire-safe landscapes, and that investments are made to restore our public and private lands to prevent wildfire risk.

Concrete Examples:

- Hire a forestry technician to work with foresters and small woodlot owners in conservation planning. This technician would work closely with the NRCS and to determine best management practices for their forests & woodlots, understand current problems and provide potential solutions related to nutrient management, pest control & pesticide runoff, soil & sediment runoff, riparian plantings & buffer zones, among other sustainable forestry & agroforestry practices. The implementation of these solutions would be jointly funded through cost sharing between the district and landowners to leverage federal and NRCS funds.
    - In house, in partnership with the NRCS & ODF
- **Reduce Fire Risk** in the Wild-Urban-Interface – This program would be designed in partnership with the ODF to help homeowners create defensible spaces against fire around their houses. The district recognizes that the natural growth of vegetation around houses can get out of hand and the trimming or removal of big trees is daunting task for many homeowners. This program would help create plans for defensible space. Just as in the Neighborhood Sustainability Program (see below), we send out staff members to evaluate the situation and draw up a plan of action and a working budget for a neighborhood or an individual homeowner. We provide lists of contractors, or we contract the work ourselves. We provide cost share for the execution of the work.
    - Partners: ODF, East Lane Forest Protection Association.
- Establish a grant program (or part of restoration program mentioned below) to fund the work of watershed councils, tribes, forest collaboratives, and other partners working to restore healthy landscapes and oak habitats and bring healthy (prescribed) fire back to the landscape (so that we can minimize the risk of catastrophic fire).
    - Partners: watershed councils, tribes, forest collaboratives, and others.

4. Neighborhood Sustainability

The residents of the Upper Willamette are eager to do their part when it comes to sustainable and livable communities. The neighborhood sustainability program would provide an avenue for urban residents to get involved in the SWCD's work and to learn about practices that sustain and conserve our soil and water. This program will be built from the ground up and staffed by a half time position. It will provide returns on that investment through increased civic engagement in urban areas and an increase in our potential future donor base. The program will provide sustainability assessments at the neighborhood level and include making small grants to neighborhood associations or other local organizations to implement the recommendations of the assessments.

Concrete Project Examples

- Part time **Neighborhood Sustainability Program** manager to coordinate the program, work with neighborhoods and homeowners in urban & rural areas
    - Partners: neighborhood associations, community organizations
- Small grants program for implementing Neighborhood Sustainability Program and to **enhance pollinator habitat and urban greenspaces**
    - Partnerships could also include native plant nurseries, the City of Eugene's Bee City & Tree City initiatives, NAACP, Friends of Trees, Beyond Toxics, and many others.

5. Watershed Restoration and Conservation

Twentieth century federal river management focused narrowly on control and exploitation. The benefits in flood prevention and power generation are obvious, but we need to reconnect our rivers with their floodplains and restore river health. Likewise, unsustainable land management has led to a loss of 95% of the original oak habitat that once dominated the Willamette Valley, and this has put many species in danger. The functioning of these ecosystems is crucial to maintaining soil and water health. The local economy and well-being also rely on healthy river systems and uplands for production, recreation, fishing, drinking water, and flood prevention.

Concrete Program Examples:

- Local Watershed Councils and other local conservation partners have well-established programs to work with private landowners and public land-management agencies to develop projects that restore and steward our local lands and waters. However, the planning, funding, and execution of those activities depend on our ability to maintain functioning local organizations (like watershed councils) who are reliant on an unpredictable and never-ending project cycle. By providing capacity funding and partnerships, WCs and other community partners will have more opportunity to perform outreach activities, work with private and public partners to develop restoration and conservation projects, and seek state and federal funding for the implementation of those projects. If we invest in our local partners, it will increase their ability to develop more projects, write more grants, and bring in more federal dollars.
    - Partners: Watershed Councils, McKenzie River Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Friends of Buford Park, Willamette River Keeper, other local conservation organizations
- The District can also provide match funding for local watershed councils to implement large scale river, riparian, and floodplain restoration projects that improve river health, water quality, and habitat to bring back dwindling native fish populations. This could be done through a granting program for watershed restoration projects (It could include the upland/oak projects mentioned above under Forests).
    - Partners: Watershed Councils, McKenzie River Trust, Friends of Buford Park, Willamette River Keepers, and other local organizations carrying out large scale restoration projects

6. Natural Resource and Environmental Education

The Upper Willamette basin is blessed with a wide range of schools and non-governmental organizations that provide natural resource and environmental-based education and job-training programs (LCC). In addition to state-sponsored funding for school and outdoor school (Measure 99), there are a number of local

organizations such as EWEB and SUB that contribute significant resources to environmental education in schools and place-based programs. Despite these investments many local natural resource and environmental education programs struggle for funding continuity. Existing programs run by non-governmental organizations are challenged to maintain programming from one year to the next, and many have had to lay off their educators in recent years due to funding cutbacks. Environmental education and natural resource programs also lack a unifying vision or shared goals that would allow for increased collaboration and leveraging of available resources. The Lane ESD has led initial efforts to increase coordination and relationship development among local environmental education providers over the past several years through the development of STEM-focus group, but collaborative efforts are largely dependent on scarce grant funding. Lane Community College has developed a number of job training programs focused on environmental careers. These programs could benefit greatly from increased connection to and collaboration with high school natural resource programs and environmental education programs.

Concrete Examples:

- The education program would be an entirely grant-based program that looks to provide funding for local educators, existing educational organizations and regional collaboration and coordination among the wide range of partners and school programs.
    - Partners: STEM Beyond Schools, WREN, Watershed Councils, Forests Today and Forever, Whole Earth Nature Institute, Ecology in Classrooms & Outdoors (ECO), Nearby Nature, Partners for Sustainable Schools, Tribes, local schools, and others

7. Collaboration

Conservation work in the Upper Willamette involves many different players, from our cities and utilities to our state and federal program representatives and local conservation nonprofits. Many of these organizations are working towards the same goals, yet many are working in silos. The District can provide a common gathering space, where these organizations can share ideas, work together to solve complex problems and reduce redundancies.

Concrete Program Examples:

- Provide meeting space for conservation organizations working in the Upper Willamette
- Act as a conservation hub and clearinghouse for information, a nexus to connect people and organizations to information, technical expertise, and resources
- Grants could also be made available to increase coordination and collaboration - these would fund collaborative efforts to improve planning, streamlining service provision, data collection, as well as incorporating indigenous perspectives and opportunities for marginalized, at-risk, and communities of color to more fully engage in place-based conservation.
    - Partners: Any coalition, partnership, or collaborative