

Program Engagement Strategy
Puget Sound Conservation Districts
Regional Forestry Pilot Program

July 2021 - November 2022

**A Collaborative Approach to Promoting Forest Stewardship
in Northwest Washington**

In partnership with King, Kitsap, Mason, Pierce, San Juan Islands, Skagit,
Snohomish, Thurston, and Whidbey Island Conservation Districts

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Table of Contents

Part 1: The Purpose of Strategic Engagement

- 1.1 Introduction

Part 2: Our Program

- 2.1 Program Need
- 2.2 Program Goals
- 2.3 Area Forester Model

Part 3: Our Approach

- 3.1 Identifying the Audience
- 3.2 Methods for Engagement
- 3.3 Content Marketing Toolkit

Part 4: Evaluation and Adaptation

- 4.1 Forest Landowner Feedback
- 4.2 Program Review and Assessment
- 4.3 Program Impact Communications

Part 5: Guiding References

Part 1: The Purpose of Strategic Engagement

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of the Program Engagement Strategy is to identify the approaches, tools, and critical messages to increase awareness among non-industrial private forest landowners (NIPF) of the forest stewardship services provided by the Puget Sound Conservation Districts (PSCD) Regional Forestry Pilot Program. Hereafter in this document, the PSCD Regional Forestry Pilot Program will be referred to as the "Pilot Program." This document serves as a roadmap for conservation districts participating in this Pilot Program, providing guidance on the program's goals, approaches, and evaluation. It also outlines implementation details for new conservation district (CD) staff and participating partner organizations and funders.

Part 2: Our Program

2.1 Program Need

The Puget Sound Partnership Action Agenda identifies forests as a primary habitat under threat within the region. One of the biggest threats to the future of forestland is conversion to non-forest uses, often resulting in habitat loss and a reduction in critical environmental services, such as stormwater capture and filtration. Small forest landowners account for 15% of forest acres in Washington state. They have the potential to play a vital role as stewards in maintaining fish and wildlife habitat, reducing stormwater runoff volumes, and providing a renewable resource for sustainable building and construction on their forestlands. By raising awareness of forest stewardship services provided by the PSCDs, we can increase knowledge and the network of connections among these landowners and improve their ability to contribute to the overall ecological health of the Pacific Northwest.

2.2 Program Goals

The Pilot Program aims to employ a regionally-focused, multiple conservation district approach to addressing current and future challenges to Puget Sound forests and barriers for NIPF landowners to understanding and actively managing their forestland. By providing education and technical assistance, the Pilot Program seeks to increase the expertise of NIPF landowners and their understanding of best management practices. As a result, the Pilot Program hopes to help restore forest-related ecosystem functions, improve fish and wildlife habitat, protect water quality, and reduce stormwater runoff. To achieve these goals, we must first reach NIPF landowners and raise awareness that forest stewardship services are available.

With this Program Engagement Strategy, we aim to effectively communicate with NIPF landowners, increasing requests for technical assistance from PSCD Regional Foresters and their organizational partners, and strengthening peer networks of forest landowners in the region.

In response to these landowner requests for assistance, PSCD Regional Foresters will provide stewardship services, technical guidance, and education to landowners that will help the Pilot Program reach its ecological goals.

Within the timeframe of July 1, 2021 to November 1, 2022, the Pilot Program's target is to:

- Reach 95 NIPF landowners in the PSCD region for stewardship planning.
- Provide program enrollment support to 25 NIPF landowners in county-based Open Space Taxation Programs.
- Assist at least 12 NIPF landowners in securing funding for forest best management practices through conservation district cost-share programs and the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

PSCD Regional Foresters aspire to create strong relationships with landowners to encourage long-term management decisions that improve forestland retention, health, and vitality in the Puget Sound region. Through the Pilot Program, the PSCD Regional Forestry team seeks to establish a CD Forest Stewardship Program that extends beyond the grant's timeline and benefits the public for years to come.

2.3 Area Forester Model

PSCD Regional Foresters work within a *cluster model* to provide forest stewardship planning services to nine conservation district areas in the Puget Sound region. A cluster model allows for a single conservation district to house a technical specialist—in this case, a forester—who provides services to multiple CDs that may otherwise be unable to afford to hire foresters themselves. This model allows for services across a wider geographic area and is a more equitable way to support on-the-ground conservation initiatives. The PSCD Regional Foresters meet twice monthly and communicate on all aspects of the Pilot Program. Snohomish Conservation District provides project coordination and fiscal support. PSCD Regional Foresters work with an Outreach and Marketing Team composed of several outreach, education, and communications staff at participating CDs to implement the Program Engagement Strategy utilizing proven outreach and education techniques and products.

Part 3: Our Approach

3.1 Identifying the Audience

3.1.A Engaging our Partners

The first step in our prioritization process was engaging relevant community stakeholders to help identify critical resource and social concerns that could affect priority sub-geography regions. The Regional Forestry team asked experts and partners what they thought was the greatest need within the Puget Sound forestry sector. Our partners answered that development

of forestland to non-forest conditions, noxious or invasive weeds, forests with only one major species, young forests with too many trees, and fish passage barriers were the top resource concerns for our project area.

3.1.B Prioritization Process

The Regional Forestry Team led a geographic prioritization process to identify parcels that would have the most impact on our goals of reducing forestland conversion, improving fish and wildlife habitat, protecting water quality, and reducing stormwater runoff. Based on these priority metrics, the following criteria were selected for analysis within [ArcGIS](#), a software platform that utilizes data-driven mapping styles to gain location intelligence and enhance spatial analysis:

- Tax/land use status
- Forest cover metrics
- Proximity to resource concerns

The Regional Forestry Team identified Geographic Information System (GIS) layers that addressed the three criteria above. These layers were overlaid and evaluated based on region-specific needs and priorities. For example, a data layer was developed that identified landowners who were not enrolled in a County's [Open Space Taxation Program](#), although they could be enrolled. The GIS analysis process focused on creating a list of property parcel identification numbers and mailing address as the "first-tier target audience" of Pilot Program Engagement.

For more information about our priority property identification, including our detailed methods, please see our [ArcGIS Online Story Map on the PSCD's Better Ground Forest Stewardship webpage](#).

3.1.C Core Audience Profiles Overview

According to a 2020 report from the University of Washington College of Environmental and Forest Sciences, [Washington's Small Forest Landowners in 2020](#) are, on average, aged 63.8 years with an average mean annual adjusted gross income of \$115,375. (Washington state's average household income is \$110,680 based on 2020 IPUMS-CPS data.)

The Sustaining Family Forests Initiative's [Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively \(TELE\)](#) research identified four forestland landowner categories: Woodland Retreat Owners, Working the Land, Supplemental Income, and Uninvolved.

Forestland owners in the categories mentioned above have similar or overlapping values and land use objectives. Yet, there are some which remain more strongly affiliated with non-commercial versus commercial, and vice versa. For example, on page 86 in the [United States Department of Agriculture's National Woodland Owner Survey](#), thirteen objectives are listed as being important to forestland owners:

- beauty/scenery

- wildlife habitat
- privacy
- nature/biodiversity
- protect water
- land investment
- legacy
- recreation
- timber production
- raise family
- firewood
- hunting
- non-timber forest products

To assist in focusing the Program Engagement Strategy, these 13 objectives were assigned to two key audiences: Commercial and Non-Commercial Forestland Ownership. The four landowner categories from the TELE research were also assigned to either the Commercial (Working Land and Supplemental Income) and Non-Commercial (Woodland Retreat and Uninvolved) audience. Each audience holds several objectives for their forestland that is of most value to them, including:

- *Commercial Forestland Ownership:* These landowners value maximizing financial benefits of the land and managing the forest for long-term production. If they work on their land themselves, they may emphasize the benefit of timber and non-timber forest products over other ecological services. They are often commercial forest landowners or could own both commercial and non-commercial forestland.
- *Non-Commercial Forestland Ownership:* These types of landowners value wildlife habitat, natural beauty, and recreational enjoyment of their properties predominantly. They are often non-commercial forest landowners but may own commercial forestland and prefer these forest values over economic objectives.

3.1.D Tiering Core Audience

Based upon the geographical, stakeholder, and landowner research performed, we identified four levels of engagement across our core audiences:

- *First-Tier Engagement: Commercial Forestland Ownership*
 - Eligible 5+ acre properties not currently enrolled in an open space tax program
 - Eligible 5+ acre properties, currently enrolled in an open space tax program, wanting to sell
- *Second-Tier Engagement: Non-Commercial Forestland Ownership*
 - Any size acreage primarily forestland-based properties, landowners interested in forest stewardship

- *Third-Tier Engagement: Key Partners in Forestland Real Estate and Land Use*
 - Individual real estate professionals
 - County-based real estate associations
 - County, municipal, and tribal departments (and key staff) involved in open space taxation programs and land use/zoning decision making for forestland
- *Fourth-Tier Engagement: Cultivating Partnerships and Greater Community Impact*
 - Elected officials
 - Tribal agencies
 - Federal agencies
 - State agencies
 - County departments
 - Municipalities
 - Extension
 - Non-profits
 - Private industry associations and professionals

First Tier Engagement: Commercial Forestland Ownership

1.1 Eligible 5+ Acre Properties, Not Currently Enrolled in an Open Space Tax Program

This audience consists of NIPF landowners who are not aware of the tax benefits they may gain with enrolling their eligible five acres or more of land into a Washington Department of Revenue Open Space Taxation program, such as the Designated Forest Land program, Timberland program, Open Space or Current Use Agriculture program, Public Benefits Rating System, or a similar program at the county level.

The Regional Forestry Team has identified this audience based on property data, including the property's proximity to critical areas (wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, frequently flooded areas, and geologically hazardous areas), as well as their proximity to known natural resource concerns.

The [USDA NRCS defines a resource concern](#) as being "an expected degradation of the soil, water, air, plant, or animal resource base to an extent the sustainability or intended use of the resource is impaired." This may include known county or state-level concerns involving water quality, air quality, recent conversion of land cover from forest to non-forest, proximity to urban growth areas, or habitats of local importance.

1.2 Eligible 5+ Acre Properties, Currently Enrolled in an Open Space Tax Program, Wanting to Sell

This audience consists of NIPF landowners that already have their properties enrolled in a Washington Department of Revenue Open Space Taxation program. However, these properties are at risk for being sold and, through the purchase and sale process, may be pulled from a

Washington Department of Revenue Open Space Taxation program since buyers, sellers, and real estate agents are often unaware of the full responsibilities and benefits of these programs. Once removed from an Open Space Taxation program, there's a significant chance that a new property owner will not re-enter it into another program, which may result in more forestland being converted to single-family residential housing and other non-forest uses. Continuing education and support by the Pilot Program's Regional Forestry Team is critical in reaching this audience before a purchase and sale takes place on these types of properties.

Second Tier Engagement: Non-Commercial Forestland Ownership

2.1 Any Size Acreage Primarily Forestland-Based Properties, Landowners Interested in Forest Stewardship

Any NIPF landowner in the nine conservation district service regions interested in receiving educational resources and technical assistance in forest stewardship will be engaged, regardless of acreage size. As mentioned earlier, this audience primarily values wildlife habitat, natural beauty, and recreational enjoyment of their properties more strongly than their forestland production values. With this in mind, content delivery will focus on these core objectives as a primary way to engage this audience.

Third Tier Engagement: Key Partners in Forestland Real Estate and Land Use

3.1 Individual Real Estate Professionals

This audience consists of real estate brokers, real estate agents, and realtors representing sellers or buyers of real estate or real property. Buyers may be interested in open space taxation programs if given the opportunity to learn about them, but real estate professionals often lack the technical expertise or full understanding of the program's purpose. Additionally, land use/zoning considerations for forestland properties may extend beyond the scope of a real estate professional's training. Further education and outreach through the Pilot Program to this essential partner audience will help improve their ability to serve those buying or selling forestland in our region.

3.2 County-Based Real Estate Associations

A real estate association is a trade group made up of those individual agents and brokers who can provide training, lobby the government, produce market research, and operate a Multiple Listing Service (MLS) database for the benefit of its members. Real estate associations often operate on a geographic-based scale. For example, the [Whidbey Island Association of Realtors](#) represents a real estate association that provides information, training, and research for agents and brokers throughout Whidbey Island.

By partnering with this audience to provide education and resources, the Pilot Program can reach many more real estate agents and brokers than through individual contact. As a result, more buyers and sellers of forestland may increase their knowledge of zoning allowances and understanding of the value and incentives for forestland retention through tax programs.

3.3 County, Municipal, and Tribal Departments (and Key Staff) Involved in Open Space Taxation Programs and Land Use / Zoning Decision Making for Forestland

Within each municipality or county, there are departments whose staff are essential in decision making and landowner education about forestland permitted uses and tax incentives for retaining forestland. Tribal governments also have staff who provide landowners with information regarding forest practices and cultural resources. By facilitating professional working relationships within these departments and key staff, the Pilot Program aims to more broadly engage the greater NIPF landowner audience through multiple points of contact.

Fourth Tier Engagement: Cultivating Partnerships and Greater Community Impact

4.1 Cultivating Partnerships and Greater Community Impact

The Pilot Program intends to explore additional ways to engage NIPF landowners by working with these additional partners:

- *Elected Officials:* This audience will primarily be made aware of the education and resources available through the Pilot Program through the [Washington Association of Conservation Districts Legislative Days event](#), held annually.
- *Tribal Agency Partners:* The [Intertribal Timber Council](#)
- *Federal Agency Partners:* [USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Field Offices](#)
- *State Agency Partners:*
 - [Washington State Department of Natural Resources:](#)
 - [Forest Resiliency Division](#), with emphasis on the [Small Forest Landowner Field Office](#)
 - [Forest Practices Division](#)
 - [Wildfire Division](#)
- *Extension Partners:* [Washington State University Extension Forestry](#), local county-based extension offices
- *Non-Profit Partners:* [Washington Tree Farm Program](#), [Northwest Natural Resource Group](#), and [Forterra](#)
- *Private Forestry Associations and Consultants:*
 - [Northwest Natural Resource Group](#)
 - [Society of American Foresters](#)
 - [Association of Consulting Foresters](#)
 - [Pacific Northwest International Society of Arboriculture](#)

Statement of Inclusion

The diversity of NIPF land ownership objectives and environmental attitudes requires a diversified engagement approach. We will include historically underserved audiences and we

intend to prioritize the engagement of socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers as defined [by the USDA NRCS](#). In addition, we intend to engage partners in the tribal community in the development and evaluation of this Pilot Program.

3.2 Methods

3.2.A Guiding Principles

The following four guiding principles provide the compositional structure of the core messages and content marketing of the Program Engagement Strategy for this Pilot Program. Each target audience reached within the Pilot Program will have the design and delivery of their engagement strategy influenced by these four principles.

Principle #1: Key Messages Outline Desired Behavior

Messaging is centered on action and what you want your audience to do as a result of engagement.

Principle #2: Targeted Marketing

Engagement strategies are tailored for unique audiences.

Principle #3: Consumer Driven Content

Engagement content and materials design is influenced by looking first at the content from the target audience's perspective.

Principle #4: Engagement Adaptability

Engagement strategies targeting specific audiences will include a method for gathering feedback to help adapt and refine the engagement strategy over time.

3.2.B Core Message Focus Areas

Stakeholder survey results were analyzed to create core messages for the specified target audiences of this Program Engagement Strategy. Outlined below are three main message focus areas that can be used in content design.

Message Focus Area #1: "Conservation Districts Are Here to Help You"

- Additional supporting messages for this focus area
 - *Our services are free, voluntary, trusted, and non-regulatory.*
 - *Conservation districts are a "one-stop-shop" for your land use needs and goals.*
 - *Contact your local conservation district forester to steward your forest better.*

Message Focus Area #2: "There's Something for Everyone at Conservation Districts"

- Additional supporting messages for this focus area
 - *Forest Stewardship Services for All: We offer educational resources and events, forestry assistance by email and phone, and general support for helping you accomplish your forest stewardship goals.*

- *Forest Stewardship Services for Many: We offer site visits with foresters and forest plan development for forestland owners interested in enrolling or staying enrolled in Open Space Taxation Programs or other similar programs.*
- *Forest Stewardship Services for Some: We offer technical support in applying for financial programs that help you implement forest stewardship best management practices on your land.*

Message Focus Area #3: "Here's How CDs Can Support You as Your Forest's Steward"

- Additional supporting messages for this focus area
 - Topic Area #1: Forest Health and Carbon Messages
 - *Conservation district foresters can help you navigate your forest health concerns on your land, such as dying trees or reforestation issues.*
 - *Are you concerned about what climate change may mean for your forest? Conservation district foresters can help evaluate steps you could take to increase climate resilience on your property.*
 - *Interested in forest carbon sequestration? Talk to your local conservation district forester about current initiatives.*
 - Topic Area #2: Enhancing Forestland Retention Messages
 - *Are you enrolled in a tax incentive program for your forestland, such as the Designated Forest Land program? Is your forest management plan up to date? Reach out to your local conservation district forester for help with your forest management plan.*
 - Topic Area #3: Habitat Improvement Messages
 - *Want more songbirds and pollinators, or other wildlife in your forest? Improve the wildlife value of your land with help from conservation district foresters.*
 - *Foresters can help connect landowners with resources to improve fish passage and replace infrastructure like culverts.*
 - Topic Area #4: Recreation/Aesthetic Values Messages
 - *Conservation district foresters can help you manage your land for increased recreation value by restoring forest growth and enhancing biodiversity.*

3.3 Content Marketing Toolkit

3.3.A Best Practices for the Content Marketing Toolkit by Foresters/Outreach Staff

The Content Marketing Toolkit provides a suite of "consumables" in both print and digital format that are branded to meet the regional needs of the Pilot Program. This toolkit is based on existing knowledge of the top two-tiered target audiences (commercial and non-commercial NIFP landowners) with some consideration of the last two-tiered target audiences (support partners such as real estate professionals). The Pilot Program chose to create an adaptable

Content Marketing Toolkit that can be modified by each CD forester/outreach staff for their respective area. The Outreach and Marketing Team understand that each CD knows their local audience best and would implement aspects of the Content Marketing Toolkit that would be most beneficial.

With this in mind, the six best practices for each CD forester/outreach team are provided below.

- Document your marketing plan and timeline prior to executing it.
- Build communications efficiency and workflow among your team for executing the delivery of each piece of content in the plan. Solicit all team members input in the workflow establishment structure.
- Set accurate expectations for how quickly the execution of each tool for your specific audiences can be accomplished. Start from your finish date and work backward and make sure this is realistic.
- Determine which resources (technology, staff time, expertise) will be needed to execute your marketing plan efficiently within the timeframe.
- Develop a plan for how you'll manage adapting your marketing plan mid-execution if the results are not what you had anticipated and you need to try a different method.
- Determine how you will measure the results of your efforts. For social media and the web, the "reach" is a quantifiable measure. But how about postcard mailers? How will you know what is and isn't working and why?

This information was abbreviated from [an article on Coschedule](#), an all-in-one platform for planning, organizing, and executing all things content marketing.

3.3.B Content Marketing Toolkit Composition

Every tool in the Pilot Program's Toolkit was selected by the Outreach and Marketing Team to enable each CD forester/outreach team to reach a diverse amount of people in their service areas. Having a standard set of tools helps focus the Pilot Program's Engagement Strategy by promoting clear and consistent marketing across all nine CD regions.

The core tenants that influenced the deliverables of the Pilot Program's Content Marketing Toolkit include:

- *Content will be available online, in one location.* The Toolkit will encourage staff to access the tools online to ensure they use the most up-to-date information. Keeping all the tools in one online location will ensure that everyone on the team knows where to find them now and in the future.
- *Content will be created in a digital and printable format.* The team will likely want to print some tools and keep them for easy reference. We will create "foundational templates" for each of the Toolkit deliverables that can be used for digital or print format and can be adapted and tailored for individual CD needs.

Print Tools

- *Three 1-page factsheets (Created in [Canva](#) for use and tailoring by each CD.)*
 - Factsheet #1: Programs and Services Available for Forest Landowners
 - Factsheet #2: Introduction on Tips for How to Steward Your Forest
 - Factsheet #3: Understanding Your Forest Real Estate
- *One 5x7 postcard (Created in [Canva](#) for use and tailoring by each CD.)*
 - This postcard template will emphasize a blend of both Key Message #2 and Key Message #3, emphasizing Topic Areas #2 and #3 to address both the core values of commercial and non-commercial NIPF landownership.
- *One 11x17 seasonal forest stewardship calendar (Created in [Canva](#) for use and tailoring by each CD.)*
 - This calendar will showcase the top five tips in each season for commercial and non-commercial NIPF landowners, with external links to supporting tools and resources.

Digital Tools

- *"Shareables" libraries*
 - Photo library
 - Vector image library
- *12-month "Tree Talk" social media campaign messaging and graphics (Created in [Canva](#) for use and tailoring by each CD.)*
 - We will create engaging posts and targeted marketing to encourage landowners to sign up for free site visits.
- *[Forest Stewardship Website](#) Pages on Better Ground*
 - The Better Ground Forest Stewardship website pages will be an externally-facing overview of the Pilot Program. These pages will provide target audiences with information on technical services, financial incentive programs, upcoming events, and educational resources.
 - The pages will include an intake form that NIPF landowners can complete to submit requests for assistance from their Area Forester. Once a form is submitted, the website project lead will assign a planner to conduct the site visit.

Part 4: Evaluation and Adaptation

4.1 Forest Landowner Feedback

PSCD Regional Foresters have developed a tool to receive feedback from clients on the effectiveness of our forestry services and to gauge the success of our messaging. After a site visit with a forester, clients can be sent a link where they will have the opportunity to answer the following series of questions:

- Which elements of your conservation district service experience stood out to you and why?
- Of the service you received, what was most valuable to you and least valuable to you?
- In which subject areas do you still have questions, if any?
- Did the timing and response rate of our staff effectively address your concerns in the needed time frame? If not, how could the timing have been improved?

These questions were designed to prompt participants to give detailed responses and testimonials rather than simplistic answers. The responses to these questions will be used to inform the trajectory of the Pilot Program and can be used in promotional materials on the Pilot Program's effectiveness.

4.2 Program Review and Assessment

An overarching goal of this Pilot Program is to create program longevity. To reach this goal, we must create a system to analyze our successes and opportunities for improvement and adapt as necessary. We have created a structure for interval review and discussion through Regional Forester team meetings that occur virtually every two weeks. At these meetings, we continue to share tools, best practices, and challenges in need of more attention.

Additionally, the post-service feedback described in the previous section will be compiled quarterly and brought to these meetings for further discussion. Trends in landowner responses will be reviewed and action plans will be developed to address these trends.

4.3 Program Impact Communications

As part of the scope of work for this grant, we are tasked with promoting an expansion of the pilot model by engaging with legislators and critical stakeholders. Testimonials from clients will be posted on the PSCD website (www.BetterGround.org) and PSCD Better Ground social media. They will also be used in printed materials that will be distributed to legislators and regional stakeholders. In addition to testimonials, communication materials will include the following measures of success:

- Number of landowners engaged
- Number of acres affected
- Number of forest stewardship plans written
- Number of landowners receiving cost-share through the program
- Number of acres impacted through forest stewardship services

This communications work will raise awareness about the education and technical assistance available to NIPF landowners. As a result, the Pilot Program will increase this audience's ability to help restore forest-related ecosystem functions, improve fish and wildlife habitat, protect water quality, and reduce stormwater runoff.

5.0 Guiding References

Several documents were reviewed in developing this program engagement strategy. The references below exemplify effective outreach program development by partner organizations in natural resource topic areas.

- [Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively \(TELE\) Engagement Guide](#)
- [Penn State Extension "Peer-to-Peer" Learning Experience](#)
- [Social Marketing How-To Guide for Shore Friendly Campaign Implementers](#)
- [Northwest Straits Foundation Shoreline Armoring Reduction Program Outreach and Communications Plan](#)
- [Sound Transit Public Participation Plan](#)
- [WRIA 8 Communications and Outreach Framework](#)
- [Pierce Conservation District's Shore Friendly Outreach Program](#)
- [Washington's Small Forest Landowners in 2020](#)