

PLANNING

Long-range and annual plans provide direction for conservation district programs for the coming year(s). During the planning process, in addition to the plan, is useful to district supervisors and their staff as it provides a mechanism for supervisors to identify key resource concerns in the district, determine the necessary actions to address those concerns, and establish district goals. Involve the public in identifying local resource concerns and implementing solutions. The complete plan is an ideal way to inform the public and local government of the district's focus and activities for the coming the coming year(s).

Planning Process: Sequential Steps

The actual planning process is just as important as the final product. A series of planning steps is suggested to get your district started. The steps may be modified, as necessary, to develop an effective planning process for your district. While district employees may facilitate or coordinate development of the plan, it is the supervisors' ideas that should make up the plan.

There are many benefits to planning. Activities aren't left up to chance. Often, supervisors are so busy with the day-to-day operations of the district, as well as their own businesses, that they don't take the time to look ahead. Grant programs require districts to anticipate their projects early in order to meet application deadlines. There is a limited season when landowners are available for educational tours and programs, so districts must plan accordingly.

Planning Steps

Establish a planning committee to coordinate development of the plan. This committee can be comprised of one or more CD supervisors, an NRCS team member, and other individuals/or representatives of agencies/organizations that work closely with the district. There should be no more than five people; three is a good size. CD employees can serve as staff for the committee.

Write a mission statement. Refer to the policy section of the conservation district law (Section 76-15-102, MCA) for information on why CD's were established.

Hold a public meeting (that can be part of the regular district meeting) to which various government agencies, local organizations, and the public are invited to brainstorm and prioritize resource issues and areas of concern that the district should address in the next few years. The public meeting can also include suggestions on how to address the various concerns. A survey form can be used by people unable to attend the public scoping meeting. -Prioritize resource issues the district should address.

- Prepare a draft plan for each resource issue the district decides to address.
- Summarize the district's concern with each resource issue.

- ❑ Identify possible strategies for addressing resource concerns such as holding educational workshops, applying for a grant, establishing a demonstration area, publishing informational materials, encouraging media coverage, etc.
- ❑ Select a strategy taking into consideration district staffing, resources, etc.
- ❑ Identify tasks to be carried out to implement the chosen actions/strategy.
- ❑ Specify staff and board responsibilities and timeframes for completion of each task.
- ❑ Organize the plan into a calendar that identifies tasks, target dates, person(s) responsible, etc.
- ❑ Send your draft plan out for public review to interested agencies, organizations, local groups, and individuals and put a public notice in the newspaper requesting comments on the draft plan.
- ❑ Incorporate public comments into final plan.
- ❑ Disseminate final plan to relevant agencies, organizations, media, and the public. (see distribution section)
- ❑ Implement the plan.
- ❑ Periodically evaluate the plan and update as necessary, based on new information and concerns.
- ❑ Write the annual report at the end of each year to summarize the district's accomplishments.

District supervisors should be directly involved in brainstorming resource issues, prioritizing those issues, and selecting the strategies. The planning committee could be used to organize the public meeting; summarize the suggestions from the public meeting; work with the full board to prioritize resource issues; identify all of the necessary tasks; meet with the full board to assign task responsibilities and approve timeframes; assemble a distribution list for the draft plan and final plan; oversee the evaluation and revision of the plan, if necessary; and oversee the writing of the annual report.

Key Definitions

Mission statement--broad statement of purpose; the district's ultimate reason for existence. This can be taken from the law creating conservation districts in Montana.

Goals--desired outcome for each resource concern.

Strategy/Objective/Actions--specific projects and programs that will help meet the district's stated goals.

Tasks--activities that are necessary to accomplish the strategies selected.

Sample Plan

Mission statement--To promote the proper management of soil and water resources by providing financial, technical, and educational assistance to land users in the district.

Goal Pertaining to Key Resource Issue--To promote the control of non-point sources of water pollution.

Situation--Sediment is the primary nonpoint source pollutant reaching surface waters in the district. The largest contributions of sediment come from new urban construction and poor grazing, cropping, and timber harvest practices. A vigorous information program on best management practices and the effects of heavy sediment loads on the local fishery is needed.

Strategies/Objectives

- ❑ Hold streamside management workshop and field tour.
- ❑ Set up county fair display on sources and management of nonpoint sources of pollution: sediment, nutrients, chemicals, etc.
- ❑ Publish articles in district newsletter.
- ❑ Establish local demonstration area exhibiting proper streamside management.
- ❑ Inform landowners of the economic benefits of using best management practices.
- ❑ Tasks (to accomplish first strategy stated above)
 - Select date for workshop and tour
 - Develop agenda
 - Invite speakers
 - Publicize
 - Make logistical arrangements

Plan Distribution

As mentioned earlier, the plan should inform supervisors and their staff, government agencies, and the public about the district's priorities and programs for the coming year. The publication should be concise, readable, and useful for easy reference.

The plan should be distributed to all agencies, individuals, and organizations that the district works with or would like to inform.

Suggested Distribution List

Chamber of Commerce
City Councils
County Commissioners

County Planning Boards
County Weed Boards
County Extension Agent
County Attorney
County Superintendent
County 4-H Leaders
Grazing and Irrigation Districts
Legislators
Local Conservation and Environmental Groups
Montana Association of Conservation Districts
Public Libraries, School Libraries

Federal Agencies:

Consolidated CFSA Agency--Board and Staff
Bureau of Land Management--District Offices
Natural Resources Conservation Services--Area and District Conservationists
USFS District Ranger Offices

State Agencies:

DNRC Conservation and Resource Development Division
DNRC Water Operations Bureau, Floodplain Section
Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks--Regional Office
Department of State Lands--Regional Office
DHES Water Quality Bureau

Annual vs. Long-Range Planning

The annual plan describes the activities and tasks that the district will accomplish in the coming year. The long-range plan may be less detailed, but identifies issues and actions that span several years. The annual planning session can be a time to review the past year's accomplishments and shortcomings, review progress on the long-range plan, and plan for the coming year. While some tasks may stay the same from year to year, many should change as new projects are taken on by the district.

It is more effective to start from scratch each year, in order to generate new ideas, rather than trying to make over last year's annual plan. The previous year's plan can be used as a check to make sure everything that needs to be included is included.

Annual Reports

Annual reports should summarize the activities of the district for the past year, including whether and how the district implemented the actions selected to address the priority resource issues. The report can also evaluate the effectiveness of the actions and make recommendations for the next year.

The report should also include information on the regular operations of the district, budget, supervisors, committee assignments, staff, etc. Information in list form, with headings, is more readable than narrative text.