



Connecting people to conservation for a sustainable and resilient landscape since 1940

Strategic Plan Report 2021-2026

617 Comstock Road, Suite 1, Berlin VT 05602 | 802-828-4493 X 3178
300 Interstate Corporate Center Suite 200 Williston VT 05401 | 802-288-8155 X 104
www.winooskinrcd.org | info@winooskinrcd.org

Context & Acknowledgements

Welcome! On behalf of Winooski NRC D's Board of Supervisors, I am excited to present our Strategic Plan for the next five years! In 2020, our 80th year in service, I believe this plan represents a bold statement about our value as an organization and our commitment to providing high quality, deeply impactful services to our District for another 80 years.

Three themes emerged while we were working on this plan. The first, manifested by recent events, is the inextricable link between sustainability and racial justice. While we alone cannot address all the racial injustices experienced by people of color within our District, we can take pause to analyze how we have contributed to institutionalized patterns of oppression and how we can work to change that. We must take some time to learn, reflect and explore changes we can make to work towards greater racial equity and commit to growing a more inclusive board, staff, and set of services that are accessible and relevant to all our District residents.

Second, as our global and local climates continue to change, organizations such as Winooski NRC D have an ever-increasing responsibility to be a lead voice that informs our local communities to be better educated citizen scientists. Climate resiliency can no longer be considered a fringe element that belongs to a few progressive organizations. It must become an essential part of our community infrastructure, woven into all aspects of our everyday lives. We recognize climate change as a significant and real threat to our District's natural resources and commit to growing our role in supporting community and individual resiliency under its devastating impacts.

Third and in spite of a variety of environmental issues within the district area that call out for some greater emphasis, focus and prioritization, the District is largely beholden to searching for and securing funding that aligns with state and federal agency priority. In a more perfect circumstance, the District would strive to find a better balance between chasing dollars disbursed by government agencies and working in a few topical areas that have priority and a greater potential for measurable and enduring environmental improvement.

This strategic planning process has helped us streamline and re-align our mission with our legislative charge under 10 V.S.A. Chapter 31 §701 and establish core values we hope will continue to inform our policies, practices and programming. We now have four strategic goals with accompanying objectives and action steps. As Board Chair, it is collective ambition and focus like this that draws me to this work and to this organization. We hope you as our partners and District residents will keep us accountable so we can all continue to connect people to conservation for a sustainable and resilient landscape for us and our future generations.

Rick Hopkins, Board Chair

July, 2020

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Mission, Vision & Core Values

Winooski Natural Resource Conservation District exists in Vermont Statute. Over time, Vermont's Legislature has adapted our charge to ensure that the District's work is responsive to Vermont's unique geography and natural resource issues. We invite readers to learn more about our organization and our history at our website: winooskinrcd.org. Winooski NRCD continues to evolve reflecting our belief in the need to be proactive, collaborative, and innovative.

This belief is reflected and updated in a simplified **Winooski NRCD mission**:

Promoting the wise use, sustainable development, and conservation of our District's natural resources.

This mission is inspired by an integral **vision**, wherein Winooski NRCD is:

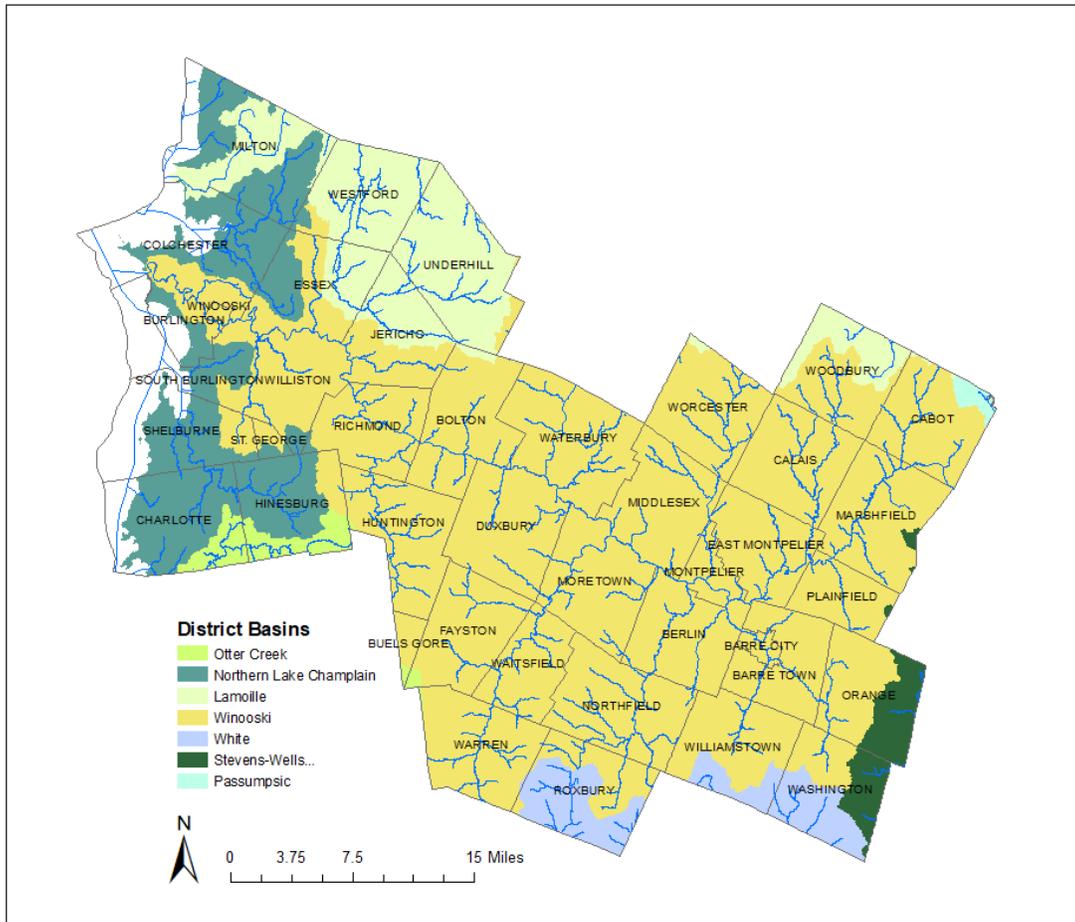
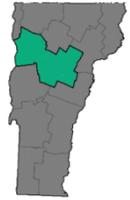
Sought out as a trusted leader to provide education and technical assistance for communities and residents implementing on-the-ground projects for water quality, soil health, forest integrity, and wildlife habitat.

Both mission and vision are underscored by the following **Core Values**:

1. Lands, water, forest and wildlife of the State of Vermont are among the basic assets of the state, and the preservation of these by conservation, development and use is necessary to protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of its people.
2. Locally led, voluntary conservation must be driven by proactive assessment of emerging natural resource conservation needs, rather than by programs.
3. Strong partners and collaborative partnerships are critical to our success in program and service delivery.
4. Environmental sustainability and climate change resilience are integral and co-dependent forces that impact our natural resource conservation needs. Both demand innovative flexibility in program and service design and delivery.
5. It is imperative that our programs, services, and operations maximize inclusivity, racial equity, and diversity both to enrich the value of Winooski NRCD for our residents and to strengthen our organization.

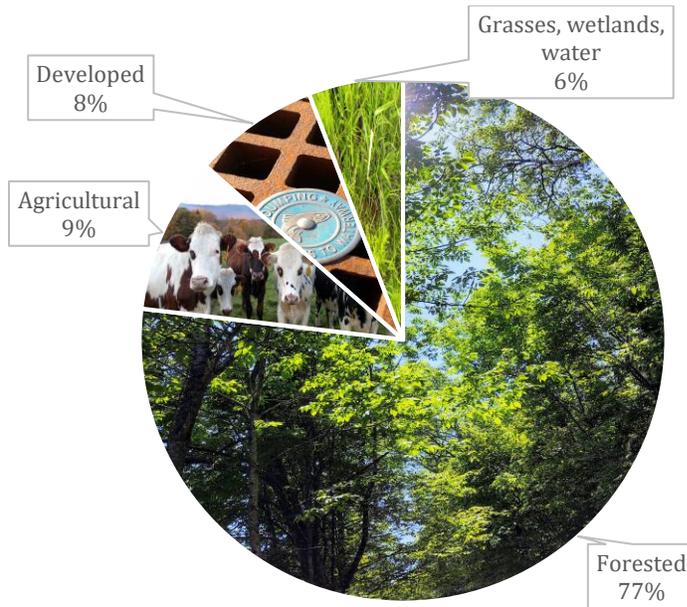
About the Winooski NRC

The Winooski District is defined through political boundaries, encompassing all of Chittenden and Washington counties and three towns in Orange County (Orange, Washington, and Williamstown). Winooski NRC is the largest of 14 NRCs in Vermont with 42 towns and roughly 230,000 residents covering about 1400 square miles. Seven major watershed basins are found within Winooski NRC boundaries but three are most dominant: the Winooski River, and portions of the Lamoille River and Northern Lake Champlain tributaries.



Primary economic activities in the District include agriculture, resource extraction (granite), forestry, manufacturing, tourism, retail, medicine and institutions of higher education including the University of Vermont, Saint Michael's College in Colchester, Champlain College, two branches of the Community College of Vermont in Winooski and Montpelier, a branch of the Vermont Technical College located in Williston, Norwich University in Northfield, and the Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier. Land use as of 2011 for the Winooski Basin, which takes up most of the District area, is 76.8% forested, 9.6% agricultural, 7.7% developed lands, 2.4% grass and shrubland, 3.4% surface waters, rivers lakes, ponds

and wetlands.¹ It is likely the full District has a larger proportion of developed and agricultural lands once the Northern Lake Champlain and Lamoille Basin areas are included.



Board Members and Staff as of June 2020

First Name	Last Name	Position	Title	Term Expiration	Years on Board	Town	Employment
Rick	Hopkins	Supervisor	Chair	2022	3	East Montpelier	Retired- VTDEC
Russ	Barrett	Supervisor		2021	4	Northfield	Retired - VTFPR
Paul	Hartshorn	Supervisor	Secretary	2023	25	Waitsfield	Maple Producer
Jeff	Cueto	Supervisor	Vice-Chair	2020	7	East Montpelier	Retired - VTDEC
Rich	Turner	Supervisor	Treasurer	2020	<1	Williamstown	Forestry and Mental Health
Mike	Raboin	Associate Supervisor		n/a	--	Orange	Retired- VTFPR
Gianna	Petito	District Manager	--	--	--	--	Winooski NRCD
Kristen	Balschunat	Conservation Specialist	--	--	--	--	Winooski NRCD

¹ (2018 TBP for the Winooski)

Our Five-Year Strategic Initiative

Our intense environmental scanning work led to four strategic goals to support our aspiration for Winooski NRCD to be even more nimble and innovative, and to create deeper and more lasting impact as part of a collaborative network of like-minded partners. Following the Board’s sanctioning of the four Strategic Goals, Winooski NRCD’s Leadership Team developed objectives and detailed yet unranked action steps to operationalize the plan in full by December 2026. Leadership assume individual responsibility for completion of strategies on time and to a high standard; Board and volunteers will sponsor and support our efforts for mutual success.

Strategic Goal 1: Identity

By 12/31/26 Winooski NRCD will be recognized as a leader in providing relevant and timely technical assistance and education to our communities and residents to address pressing natural resource needs and implement on-the-ground projects for water quality, soil health, forest integrity, and wildlife habitat.

Since our founding 80 years ago, new partners have joined us in advancing conservation, our District’s demographics have shifted drastically, and climate change has presented new threats radically altering how we interact with our natural environment. With significant changes in partner landscape, resident needs, and emerging natural resource stressors, it behooves Winooski NRCD to be both clear and relevant in our focus and where we add exceptional value to our people and communities.

When successful, Winooski NRCD will be seen by all in our external environment as a highly relevant and valuable resource to be consulted when decisions are being made about land and water.

Objectives and Action Steps

Strategic Goal 1: Identity	<i>By 12/31/26 Winooski NRCD will be recognized as a leader in providing relevant and timely technical assistance and education to our communities and residents to address pressing natural resource needs and implement on-the-ground projects for water quality, soil health, forest integrity, and wildlife habitat.</i>
	1. Learn about the District resident and resource needs and conditions - review census data and land use data, develop service feedback surveys.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

A:

Collect and utilize information on District residents' needs and concerns as well as natural resource conditions to increase relevance of services.

2. Encourage bi-directional communication: define what we need and want to hear from residents. Solicit their questions, project concerns, etc. through media campaigns.
3. Grow participation in needs assessment as key data point for our service development and delivery - connect with conservation commissions, build participation among residents, consistently improve and update questions.
4. Match our services to our District topography - find grants and support to build out technical skills and services in forestry and maple production, predominant land types and uses in WNRCD.
5. Integrate flexibility to meet other emerging resource concerns - develop Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for reviewing feedback and surveys to inform programmatic changes.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

B:

Advance our reputation in and capacity to provide technical assistance and education and outreach

1. Clarify and share our mission, vision, core values, and program strategies with partners and the public, highlighting flagship projects and successes.
2. Build effective communication of what the District is, and what we offer our partners and customers.
3. Focus staff development and grant seeking towards technical assistance and E&O activities and strategies.



1. Develop identity, communications, and projects and services consistently with an eye toward building both sustainability and climate change resilience.

<p>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE C:</p> <p>Embrace natural resource work as climate resiliency work</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Build knowledge on potential NR impacts from climate change and review case studies of resiliency work performed by other conservation districts. 3. Review ongoing climate change research specific to New England area. 4. Identify climate change related work underway or planned within the District boundaries.
<div data-bbox="264 632 453 823" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE D: Audit and adjust our internal practices and programming to expand inclusivity, racial equity, and representation.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participate in statewide NRCD efforts to explore and implement opportunities for institutional change to create greater racial equity. 2. Review protocols, policies, and internal practices to implement identified changes needed. 3. Seek training opportunities for staff and board members about diversity and inclusion (2 trainings per year). 4. Tailor recruitment strategies for board and staff members to fill gaps in diversity including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age, location within district and technical experiences. 5. Actively seek out new partnerships with groups that can help us connect with communities we have not historically served and grow more inclusive programming.

Strategic Goal 2: Partnerships

By 12/31/26 Winooski NRCD residents and partners will be inspired and empowered through collaboration to implement their own on-the-ground conservation activities recognizing our shared resource concerns.

At present, Winooski NRCD works closely with USDA-NRCS, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Council, Vermont Association of Conservation Districts, certain towns and watershed groups. Winooski NRCD seeks to strengthen, improve or create a high-functioning network of partners and capable residents in our District buffered from the impacts of staff change-over within Winooski NRCD.

When successful, we will influence a collaborative and capable culture of innovation and responsiveness to climate impact on natural resources across a network of partners, reflected in our conversations and time investments in impactful work.

Objectives and Action Steps

<p>Strategic Goal 2: Partnerships</p>	<p><i>By 12/31/26 Winooski NRCD residents and partners will be inspired and empowered through collaboration to implement their own on-the-ground conservation activities recognizing our shared resource concerns</i></p>
<div data-bbox="321 1392 505 1541" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE A:</p> <p>Engage in frequent and intentional communication among sector partners.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Host annual or quarterly project check-ins. 2. Share annual work plans as part of Basin Planning. 3. Share our newsletter and sign up for partner newsletters. 4. Attend partner board meetings and invite to WNRCD board meetings or share/read meeting minutes. 5. Schedule informational meetings and calls with “lost” partners to re-ignite conversations and explore new collaboration opportunities.

 <p>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE B:</p> <p>Build strong partners by investing in partner capacity.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide trainings on project implementation and outreach to new potential partners like conservation commissions. 2. Seek out joint grant application opportunities and share staff time in program or project development with other partners. 3. Share Basin Planning funding with relevant watershed groups so they can participate in quarterly coordination meetings where work plans and projects are discussed and prioritized.
 <p>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE C:</p> <p>Foster mutual understanding of complementary roles across partner network.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate potential program growth within the context of “who else is providing this role” and identify complementary roles for WNRCD. 2. Explore drafting MOUs across basin partners to codify roles and linked communications that buffer relationships against staff turnover. 3. Integrate partner strategies into formal communications plan.
 <p>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE D:</p> <p>Develop informed, capable, and engaged part and full-time District residents who want to participate in natural resource conservation.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share feedback and needs assessment as a cycle of story and identity for the District. 2. Use communications messaging to build District identity and pride and a unified concern for shared natural resources across property lines. 3. Develop relevant education and outreach to help residents “help themselves”
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Actively seek grant opportunities and organizational partnerships to allow WNRCD to work with



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE E:
Diversify our networks, find new opportunities for collaboration, and invite new voices to inform our natural resource work.

- communities across racial identities in our District that we have not worked with in the past.
2. Better understand the distribution of people of color and people of different cultures living and working within the Winooski NRCD area.

Strategic Goal 3: Organizational Sustainability

By 12/31/26 Winooski NRCDC will have robust and predictable revenue streams, clear tracking mechanisms, and engaged oversight.

Recognizing the increased competition for limited revenues in all sectors of our economy, Winooski NRCDC has an obligation to be efficient and effective in our use of our human and financial resources.

When successful, we will have the resources to access funding from a variety of sources that we may utilize for collective impact in our District.

Objectives and Action Steps

<p>Strategic Goal 3: Organizational Sustainability</p>	<p><i>By 12/31/26 Winooski NRCDC will have robust and predictable revenue streams, clear tracking mechanisms, and engaged oversight.</i></p>
<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE A:</p> <p>Grow a capable and engaged financial leadership team to monitor and utilize key financial information.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Budget for financial and QuickBooks training for the District Manager and add financial management trainings/guest speakers to board meeting agendas. 2. Recruit a Supervisor with accounting background for additional oversight and assistance to serve as treasurer. 3. Use Board Supervisors to speak with private foundation sources, and potential private donors, and set up new application opportunities for staff to pursue. 4. Identify key metrics of financial health and stress for reporting (e.g. % of time spent on General District work, number of months of reserve cash on hand) and establish trigger points for action. 5. Develop a tracking dashboard and integrate into financial reporting monthly. 6. Track invoices owed and time to payment through QuickBooks. 7. Track and report monthly trends for easier comparisons. 8. Develop list of new metrics to regularly track such as average time and mileage spent per project type.

	<p>9. Annually examine accuracy of billable rates and adjust accordingly.</p>
 <p>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE B: Diversify revenue sources to allow for adaptable and responsive planning and programming, and to allow cash flow to support predictable infrastructure.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrate fundraising goals into new communications plan and explore opportunities through capital campaigning and swag/retail partnerships. 2. Rebuild town relationships and public support for local budget appropriations. 3. Research new private foundation and grant opportunities and schedule informational meetings. 4. Use Board networks to grow public awareness and support for the District through donations and tree sales. 5. Consider sale of existing rental equipment. 6. Consider inter-district no-interest loan – structure paperwork and payback schedule so WNRCD still builds standing assets. 7. Explore the possibility of NICRA to boost allowable indirect.
 <p>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE C: Systematically audit programs and activities for cost-effectiveness and contribution towards existing reserves.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set target for existing reserves and monitor through dashboard. 2. Audit existing fundraising efforts for opportunities to increase net profit. 3. Evaluate shared staffing opportunities and contracting work with other partners. 4. Explore opportunities to use inexpensive/free intern services from all the colleges within the District. 5. Evaluate intentions of unfunded activities and identify alternative means to achieve the same outcomes.

Strategic Goal 4: Impact

By 12/31/26 Winooski NRCD will have built capacity and competency to articulate a compelling story of the impact our work has on our District’s people and places.

Given our broad legislative mandate, we recognize that we have historically not reported our impact in a holistic and meaningful way. As we reflect on this, we see the benefits of representing our influence on the environment both through direct action and through cooperative efforts and shared funding with partners.

When successful, partners and residents in our District will have information that clearly tells a story of the vitality of the organization and the importance of our expert services.

Objectives and Action Steps

<p>Strategic Goal 4: Impact</p>	<p><i>By 12/31/26 Winooski NRCD will have built capacity and competency to articulate a compelling story of the impact our work has on our District’s people and places.</i></p>
 <p>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE A; Develop and implement a formal external communications plan</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define outreach goals to include fundraising goals, fostering a District identity, and bi-directional dialogue. 2. Catalogue existing and needed materials, identify target messaging and avenues/events to reach key audiences. 3. Tap into expertise and intern work power at District universities and colleges to both build plan and implement campaigns.
 <p>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE B:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Specify programmatic objectives and outcomes to monitor. 2. Annually review programmatic progress, provide details in Impact Report, and make adjustments to re-align with current resource priorities.

<p>Define, measure, and publicize programmatic success to raise the profile of our impact</p>	<p>3. Prioritize metrics that consider climate change resiliency, environmental sustainability, and racial equity.</p>
<div data-bbox="324 556 479 703" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="251 714 576 745">STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE C:</p> <p data-bbox="259 787 568 819">Amplify partner voices.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="673 409 1404 472">1. Share newsletters, success stories on existing WNRCD platforms. <li data-bbox="673 493 1404 640">2. Meet with partners to develop shared stories, case studies, and watershed-based successes (e.g. shared Winooski newsletter, joint testimony to legislators, etc.)

Appendix 1. Towns We Serve and Population Estimates

Town	County	Population Estimate for 2020*	Square miles
Barre City	Washington	9291	4
Barre Town	Washington	7602	30.7
Berlin	Washington	2864	36.5
Bolton	Chittenden	1182	42.8
Buel's Gorge	Chittenden	12	5.1
Burlington	Chittenden	42513	15.1
Cabot	Washington	1328	38.5
Calais	Washington	1556	38.6
Charlotte	Chittenden	3839	50.4
Colchester	Chittenden	17357	58.6
Duxbury	Washington	1251	43.1
East Montpelier	Washington	2586	32.1
Essex	Chittenden	21225	39.3
Essex Junction	Chittenden	10395	4.74
Fayston	Washington	1244	36.5
Hinesburg	Chittenden	4529	40.1
Huntington	Chittenden	1864	38.1
Jericho	Chittenden	5055	35.4
Marshfield	Washington	1635	43.4
Middlesex	Washington	1626	39.9
Milton	Chittenden	10845	60.9
Montpelier	Washington	7547	10.3
Moretown	Washington	1800	40.2
Northfield	Washington	6061	43.7
Orange	Orange	1004	39
Plainfield	Washington	1431	21.1
Richmond	Chittenden	4137	32.3
Roxbury	Washington	576	41.8
Shelburne	Chittenden	7728	44.9
South Burlington	Chittenden	18975	29.6
St. George	Chittenden	652	3.6
Underhill	Chittenden	3065	51.4
Waitsfield	Washington	1713	26.9
Warren	Washington	1613	40.1
Washington	Orange	1105	38.9
Waterbury	Washington	6800	49.7
Westford	Chittenden	2184	39.3
Williamstown	Orange	3464	40.3

Williston	Chittenden	9526	30.7
Winooski	Chittenden	7232	1.5
Woodbury	Washington	809	39.1
Worcester	Washington	990	38.8
	TOTAL	237635	1437.04

* https://www.vermont-demographics.com/cities_by_population

* https://www.vermont.gov/towns-and-Cities?field_town_taxonomy_target_id=61#gsc.tab=0

Appendix 2. Report Card Template

Goal/Objective	2022 Update on Progress	2024 Update on Progress
<p>IDENTITY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE A: Collect and utilize information on District residents' needs and concerns as well as natural resource conditions to increase relevance of services.</p>		
<p>IDENTITY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE B: Advance our reputation in and capacity to provide technical assistance and education and outreach</p>		
<p>IDENTITY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE C: Embrace natural resource work as climate resiliency work</p>		
<p>IDENTITY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE D: Audit and adjust our internal practices and programming to expand inclusivity, racial equity, and representation.</p>		
<p>PARTNERSHIPS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE A: Engage in frequent and intentional communication among sector partners.</p>		
<p>PARTNERSHIPS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE B: Build strong partners by investing in partner capacity.</p>		

<p>PARTNERSHIPS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE C: Foster mutual understanding of complementary roles across partner network.</p>		
<p>PARTNERSHIPS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE D: Develop informed, capable, and engaged part and full-time District residents who want to participate in natural resource conservation.</p>		
<p>PARTNERSHIPS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE E: Diversify our networks, find new opportunities for collaboration, and invite new voices to inform our natural resource work.</p>		
<p>SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE A: Grow a capable and engaged financial leadership team to monitor and utilize key financial information.</p>		
<p>SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE B: Diversify revenue sources to allow for adaptable and responsive planning and programming, and to allow cash flow to support predictable infrastructure.</p>		
<p>SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE C: Systematically audit programs and activities for cost-effectiveness and contribution towards existing reserves.</p>		

<p>IMPACT STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE A; Develop and implement a formal external communications plan</p>		
<p>IMPACT STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE B: Define, measure, and publicize programmatic success to raise the profile of our impact</p>		
<p>IMPACT STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE C: Amplify partner voices.</p>		