

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Resiliency. This word describes a year like no other.

Our work in any normal year is about resiliency. Resilient agriculture, resilient habitat, and resilient communities. This past year, resiliency is also an apt word to describe our basic operations. All of us experienced one of the most challenging years of our lives. As a district, we not only made it through, we adapted and improved. We developed new systems, we further diversified our funding, and we developed new ways of working together. We created a more resilient organization and are starting 2021 stronger and healthier than before.

In March last year, just as we were gearing up for our busy season in the field, the world changed and we paused and took a step back. Safety became our priority. Once the Governor gave us the green light to go back into the field, we implemented new protocols to reduce risk and we went to work.

In 2020, we assisted 33 livestock and vegetable farmers in improving the health of their soil, protecting water quality, and increasing economic viability. We planted 32,049 trees and shrubs along 32 acres of streams to increase salmon habitat. We held multiple virtual workshops and events reaching 1,062 residents, and thousands more via social media. We installed 8,360 gallons of rainwater storage, 32 rain gardens and bioswales, and 30 raised beds for community gardens. We donated another 35 raised garden beds to individuals throughout the county.

With all these achievements, one of our most important focal points this past year was food security. We worked with many partners to harvest, transport, and distribute food to those in need. We assisted numerous communities in growing their own food and provided resources to create community gardens dedicated to donating to food banks. We also launched a planning effort in partnership with Forterra and supported by the Community Foundation of Snohomish County to develop a food systems strategy, with special focus on providing for under-served communities of color.

I am proud of our accomplishments over this past year and our team of dedicated natural resource professionals. I am grateful for our many partners who collaborated with us to work towards collective impact and for the residents of this region who stepped up to make improvements on their own land and to help others in our community. I feel fortunate to work in this beautiful place with an abundance of caring individuals. Together, we will continue to serve the people of Snohomish County and Camano Island, to help them reach their goals, and to contribute to making our working lands and our natural environment ever more resilient.

-Linda Lyshall, PhD

YEAR IN NUMBERS

33 farms assisted
32,049 trees, plants and shrubs planted
39 events and webinars
8,360 gallons of rainwater storage installed

21,435 lbs of food donated
65 raised beds feeding our community
19,480 people engaged on social media
112 youth education lessons

WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER .

ORCA RECOVERY DAY DURING COVID-19

What do you do when the world shuts down? You hold a scavenger hunt, of course.

Our local orca population, the Southern Resident Killer Whales, has been on a downward trend for the past 30 years. In 2018, the world watched as Tahlequah carried her dead calf for 17 days, travelling almost 1,000 miles off the Pacific Northwest coast before letting go.

Unfortunately, Tahlequah's calf death was not unique. Many calves are vulnerable and do not survive due to the increased levels of toxics in their bodies from the pollutants discharged into the marine ecosystem. Orcas also rely on their main food source, the endangered Chinook salmon, to survive. Due to habitat loss and climate change, it has become even more difficult for migrating salmon to make the journey home to create new fish and for young fish to survive to adulthood.

In response to their cry for help, Washington conservation districts created Orca Recovery Day in 2018, an intentional day of action to restore habitat, reduce stormwater pollution, and educate the public about things they can do everyday to help one of the most iconic species of the Pacific Northwest.

While last year finally saw the birth of a healthy calf by Tahlequah, there is still much work to be done. To continue spreading awareness and inspire action, we hosted a scavenger hunt in the form of a self-guided tour of restoration projects throughout Snohomish County and on Camano Island.

Each of these projects continue to positively impact our resident orca population in some way, whether by limiting stormwater pollution in the Puget Sound or improving stream habitat for salmon, which in turn helps feed our orcas.

The tour overlapped with some of our local farms to bring awareness to the work done in the agriculture

community for the environment, while also getting in the autumn festive spirit.

Our staff also helped coordinate the regional partner events through the Better Ground website and social media platforms. Better Ground is a collaborative outreach effort of the twelve Puget Sound Conservation Districts that engages regional residents in local environmental stewardship via their own conservation districts. We developed the landing page that directed people to partner events that spanned across Washington and overlapped into British Columbia, Oregon, and Washington D.C.

Through Better Ground, Puget Sound districts and partner organizations used the online EcoChallenge for everyone to participate in Orca Recovery Day in a safe way. Both individuals and teams were able to commit to daily and one-time environmental actions and then see the power of their individual actions as they contributed to a region-wide impact.

We created our own team of staff and community members to record our collective impact. Together, we achieved:

- 680 miles not traveled by car
- 590 pounds of CO2 saved
- 136 plastic bottles not sent to the landfill
- 22 pounds of waste composted
- 340 gallons of water saved

While it wasn't the Orca Recovery Day we've grown used to, that's okay. The restrictions allowed us to explore creative solutions that, in the end, garnered more support and engagement within the community compared to the past years. We look forward to the days where we can gather in-person once more, but this year has shown that we don't have to be together in order to make a difference.



WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER .

STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS, BETTER STORMWATER

Our shared goal, as one of the 12 conservation districts in the Puget Sound region, is to protect our waterways. With the Regional Stormwater Action Team (RSAT) project, we were able to continue this tradition of cooperation with an ongoing network of green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) resources among Puget Sound conservation districts.

Unlike grey infrastructure that relies on culverts, pipes, and underground conveyance, GSI uses the power of nature to absorb, filter, and disperse stormwater. District Engineer Derek Hann worked alongside conservation districts to reach out to homeowners and to assess where to install demonstration gardens.

"I'm hoping we can leverage the work done for RSAT into more partnerships," Hann said. Once he finished designing the rain gardens, our Veterans Conservation Corps crew provided technical assistance to each partner district and installed the gardens.

Out of this collaboration, demonstration rain gardens now filter stormwater throughout Mason, Whatcom, Pierce, King, and Skagit counties. But while our staff helped with the installation and offered advice on cluster projects, we also learned a few things in the process from other districts.

“ RSAT was about building relationships.”
- David Jackson, Community Conservation program manager

"RSAT was about building relationships," David Jackson, Community Conservation program manager, said.

We're happy to say that we received more requests to participate in RSAT than our bandwidth allowed, which could lead to similar efforts in coming years.

This project has contributed to our goal for a healthier Puget Sound through the expansion of green stormwater infrastructure and continues to be supported by a growing network of resources that local districts can share back and forth. We look forward to the work that will be done in the future, and the part that our district will play in the green stormwater infrastructure of tomorrow.



STRIVING FOR FOOD SECURITY IN OUR COUNTY

When we entered the new year in 2020, none of us could have predicted the global pandemic that would create a national food security crisis. With millions more children experiencing hunger than in recent years and nearly 1 in 4 households reporting food insecurity in 2020, our work in urban agriculture is more crucial than ever before.

In response to this crisis, we broadened our partnership efforts with organizations like food banks and non-profits to provide additional support to those in need.

"We have, as an organization, an ability to make other partnering organizations stronger together through our collaboration," Joe Crumbley, Urban Agriculture program coordinator, said.

One of these organizations was the non-profit Farmer Frog, led by Zsafia Pasztor. Farmer Frog works with the EastWest Food Rescue, where crops from Eastern Washington that would otherwise be tilled back to the soil are transported across the mountains and distributed to food banks and families here in the west.

Our Urban Conservation team worked on starter kits to give to organizations that support families with students on the free and reduced lunch program. In addition to seeds, starts, and produce, these starter kits also included educational activities for youth. Meanwhile, our Veterans Conservation Corps crew helped bag and deliver food and seed packets.

WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER .

“With our experience and educational resources, we can help break down barriers in urban agriculture,” said Crumbley.

Throughout the year, Crumbley also helped families gain access to raised garden beds and other resources as interest in home gardening and sustainable living boomed.

On Facebook, our Lawns to Lettuce/Project Harvest group of local gardeners doubled in size and donated thousands of pounds of fresh produce to local food banks. Meanwhile, an online sustainable gardening workshop gathered a global audience that included participants from Costa Rica, Australia, and New Zealand.

While 2020 caused a lot of heartache for the nation and world, it was also the catalyst for many of our neighbors, families, and friends to look into self-sustainability through growing their own food and supporting locally-produced foods. These next few years will be a crucial time for us to encourage and support these interests.

As the world continues to heal from the changes and losses of 2020, our staff will continue to pivot where needed in urban agriculture, and support our communities through a balance of natural resource conservation and local food security.

WE WORK HARD.

SUPPORTING DAIRIES IN THE TIME OF COVID

Farmers don't stop working, and neither do we.

Our partnership with local dairies spans almost 80 years, and our farm planners continue to carry this work forward. With the combined expertise of our farm planners, engineers, dairy operators, and other partners*, we're able to support our dairies by equipping them with resources to manage, improve, and protect their soil, crops, and water.

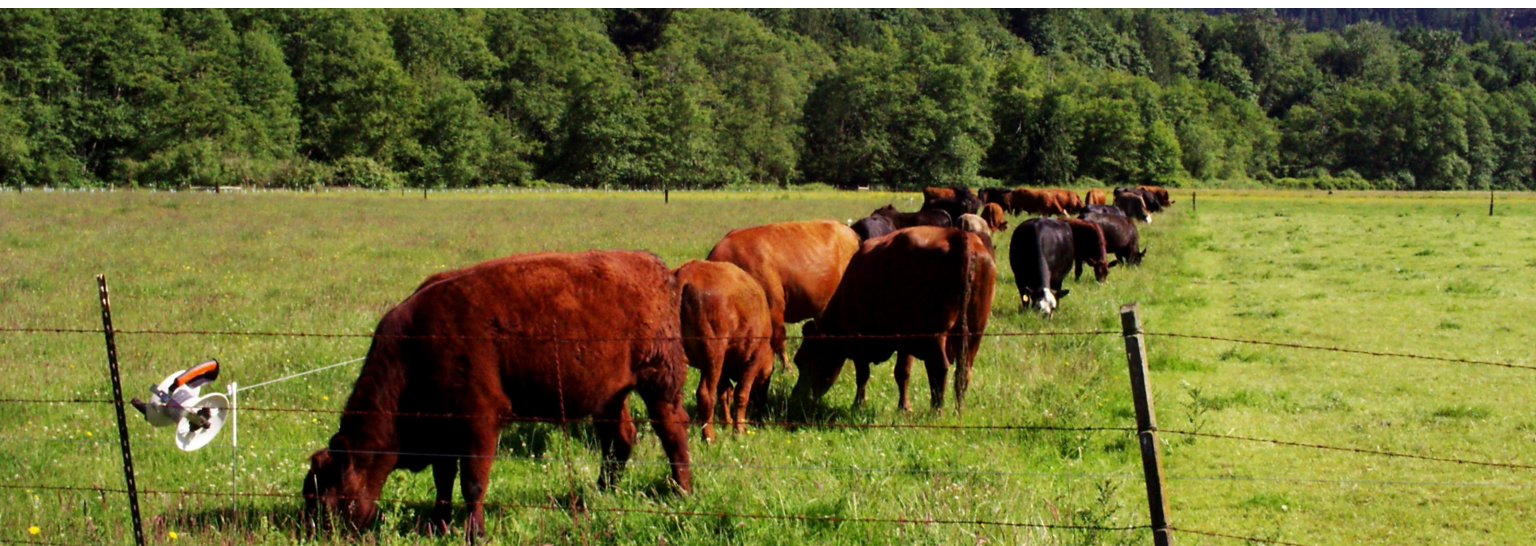
While following nutrient management guidelines, we worked with over 20 dairies and their agriculture partners in their efforts to effectively manage manure to keep our waterways clean, while also growing the crops that feed the cows in ways that protect and nourish the soil.

From manure tunnels and pumps to a screw press separator that helps separate solids and liquids, we partnered with dairies in their efforts to contribute to the

health of our environment, while also repurposing their manure. When possible our staff also found solutions that both met dairy operators' needs and matched with cost share funding opportunities. One dairy was able to acquire and install a pump to effectively transfer manure to crop fields and to the Qualco Energy anaerobic digester, a facility that turns animal waste into renewable energy.

Dairy work for our farm planners goes beyond the cows— it spans the health of the soil, the quality of the feed, and reducing polluted runoff into local waterways.

It takes investment and professional assistance to start new practices. Our farm planners, like those at all conservation districts, work alongside producers to develop solutions that will work best for them and the land and waters around them. Keeping farms viable, soil healthy, and water clean in 2020 was more challenging in some ways, but just as necessary as in years past, and in every year to come.



WE WORK HARD.

RAIN OR SHINE, THERE'S STILL WORK TO BE DONE

Our crews are familiar with turning thorns and brambles into diverse and thriving habitats. What they weren't used to, along with the rest of the world, was a pandemic.

While our crews were put on hold as organizations scrambled to develop protocols for safe working conditions, the earth transitioned from late winter to the late spring blossom.

In our line of work, missing several weeks of a season can make all the difference between a successful restoration and another patch of noxious weeds.

Despite the setback, once our crews were cleared for the field, they hit the ground running.

Our Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) and Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC) crews diligently followed social distancing guidelines and other safety measures to continue serving and restoring our lands. We had to reschedule some plantings, but we still managed to restore and maintain the equivalent of 66 football fields of habitat.

Additionally, we continued our goal of filtering and storing stormwater by installing 16 rain barrels and planting over 30 rain gardens in highly populated urban areas.

FROM DREAM TO PLAN TO REALITY

Patricia Rhinevault knew she wanted horses.

Growing up on a farm, she always had a passion for them. But the 5-acre Camano Island property she and her husband purchased left much to be desired. With plenty of work left to do till they had the new barn, paddocks and pasture they envisioned, their work was cut out for them.

Instead of starting it on their own, they reached out to us first.

This year, we worked with over 65 horse farms, all with different needs. We're here to equip livestock owners with the tools and resources they need, and we also prepare those looking to dive into the farming and livestock-owning communities.

Farm planner Michael Hipp connected with the Rhinevaults and helped them start from the ground up, literally. He conducted a soil test to reveal what was needed to grow healthy pasture grasses, and used LiDAR maps to reveal the areas to avoid building structures upon or near due to soil saturation.

Hipp encouraged them to plant water-loving shrubs and trees in wet areas to help soak up water, and they started with a weeping willow. As they were building the barn, Hipp also suggested where to point the downspout

“A day's work in one area has an impact on a lot more,” said WCC crew member Lily Wirth. She wishes people understood how great their impact is on the environment, good and bad.

As a conservation district, we understand the footprint that one backyard, stream, or parking lot has on the rest of our environment, and that's why we continue to work despite the challenges of circumstances outside of our control.

We salute our crews' dedication and perseverance, and we look forward to seeing the work they accomplish in the future.



so that the water wouldn't collect near the foundation or the paddocks.

“Getting ideas from him was really great for us, and knowing we had support was so nice,” Patricia said.

They also participated in many of our workshops, where they gathered as much information as they could about pastures, emergency preparedness, and horse health issues that can be managed with pasture and mud management. Their favorite, however, was a farm tour led by a previous horse owner we had worked with. Her story was featured in our 2019 Annual Report.

This has been a project five years in the making, but for the Rhinevaults, it's finally paying off. They plan on finally getting their first horse in the spring of 2021. Patricia has a soft spot for Arabians because she grew up with them, but for now, she isn't too picky.

“I just want a horse,” she said with a smile. “This has been a very long time coming.”

It's a privilege to be a part of new beginnings, and we're fortunate to have stories like the Rhinevaults to share with others starting out. Most of the people we work with would say that their farms and livestock ventures are a work in progress, and we're available to help every step of the way.

WE ADAPT.

SCD'S FIRST EVER DRIVE-THRU PLANT SALE

Just a handful of work days left before our 35th Annual Plant Sale, we arrived at a crossroads. Cancel the sale, or adapt?

It was early March. With over 44,300 plants ordered and the world trying to understand the scope of the COVID-19 pandemic, our staff and volunteers hastened to transform 34 years of tradition into something the district has never tried before: a drive-through plant sale.

The sale expanded from a single day to a weekend, and our staff went into overdrive to prepare every order. The Evergreen State Fairgrounds parking lot resembled a traffic cone minefield, and at one point, the average wait was upwards of 45 minutes as cars waited in the makeshift lane.

But the new system worked: native plants were handed off to their owners, and eventually, put into the ground.

One customer wrote on Facebook, "You guys were killing it!! Socially distant, friendly, and competent. To top it off, my plants are healthy and beautiful. Thank you all!"

In a time when businesses and workplaces were shut down, the garden was, and still is, an escape for many. Several months later and well into the pandemic, we challenged our customers to send in photos of their favorite native plants purchased from previous sales. While some plants dated back to a decade ago, some were from this strange, new sale.

Our annual plant sale is more than an opportunity to connect people with crucial, habitat-restoring plants. It's a place for people to gather in community.

Another testimonial we received was from a woman who said, "My sister was moved to tears by how many folks were helping and determined to get those helpful plants in the ground!"

We're proud of our staff, volunteers, and customers for tackling the strangest year of the millennium yet. Change isn't easy, and when it affects our traditions, it can feel like a loss. But with some reframing and perspective, we can see the incredible memory it will make down the road.

“ You guys were killing it!! Socially distant, friendly, and competent. To top it off, my plants are healthy and beautiful. Thank you all!”
- Customer testimonial



CONSERVATION IN A DIGITAL SPACE

Our legacy is intertwined with the connections we've made along the way. Truly, the work of conservation districts is dependent upon the mutual partnerships with everyday people and like-minded organizations. In a year where ordinary interactions were constrained by social distancing and teleworking, we quickly realized that our in-person workshops, a staple of our services, would have to change.

Undeterred by the pandemic, our Outreach team at the district quickly pivoted to online webinars and meetings to stay connected with our audiences and partners. Our experience in online learning has provided yet another way to educate, engage and connect with our residents and partner organizations. By attending and leading digital gatherings, this previously unexplored space has provided opportunities for our staff to experience an explosion of new ideas.



For 2021 and the years to come, we'll take what we've learned and continue exploring this convenient and future-forward medium, though we look forward to meeting in person again. Innovation is an investment in progress, and we're embracing it with both hands.

WE BUILD UP OUR YOUTH .

PLANTING SEEDS FOR THE FUTURE

Tucked down the hill and away from the campus, cloaked in rolling waves of blackberry bushes and reed canary grass, Portage Creek was barely visible. The land that used to be covered by native shrubs and trees had been cleared long ago for farming. Once agricultural practices ended, invasive plants spread like wildfire.

Russ Nuss had a vision, though.

A long-time volunteer and creator of Arlington Christian School's after-school agriculture program, he knew the value of teaching younger generations how to work the land. The opportunity to provide education while restoring Portage Creek and growing food in a sustainable way, all in the same project, was too great to ignore.

When Russ and the school approached us in 2019 about a project to honor the history of agriculture on the land while reviving the natural function of the creek, our staff had some ideas.

Planting forest buffers along Portage Creek is a part of a five year, 40-acre planting plan by the Conservation District to contribute to the overall goal of reforesting 80% of the streamside area of the Stillaguamish River watershed, which provides spawning and rearing habitat to several species of salmon. The creek was in desperate need of a riparian planting, as well as invasive species removal.

That's what our team did— with a twist.

In addition to a system of native plants that would improve the water quality of the creek and benefit the streamside habitat, our Farm Planning and Habitat staff collaborated to harmonize the buffer with a food forest. Unlike a typical riparian buffer, a working buffer combines the benefits of riverbank restoration with agroforestry to create a natural, multi-beneficial system.

The result? Berries, fruits, and nuts, along with rows of native plants that will jumpstart the land into becoming a sustainable, working ecosystem. Walnuts, paw paw, pears, elderberries, and other food-bearing plants will be harvested and enjoyed by the students, and also sold at fundraisers in the future.

Students will see agroforestry in action as the trees and shrubs gradually come into maturity. This is a space that was previously inaccessible to students and staff due to the years of invasive growth, but now there's a different kind of growth breaking from the ground. While these plants grow and mature and create habitat, Arlington Christian will watch and learn, using the project to design classes around habitat protection, restoration, agriculture, and the importance of salmon in our ecosystem.

By working together and supporting our younger generation's education, even the early stages of habitat restoration can be heavy with fruit.

"I would love to see kids be educated by this," Russ said. "There is such an abundance to experiencing life, and nature is our way to experience that abundance."



WE BUILD UP OUR YOUTH .

YOUTH EDUCATION PIVOTS TO ONLINE EARTH DAY

Of everyone impacted by quarantine, children have made one of the largest shifts in their lives. When school buildings closed, students needed to adapt to online learning and social distancing, all while dealing with the stress, and often isolation, that came with a global pandemic.

On the other side, our Youth Education team faced the challenge that many of our nation's educators did when quarantine first hit: How do you turn curriculum meant for a classroom into an online learning format?

Like most other organizations, events and programs had to be cancelled or postponed. But with 2020 being the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, our team pivoted on their original plans and found a way to engage students in a creative, virtual activity.

Students from K-12 were challenged to think of their favorite place and turn it into a drawing, painting, or model made of recycled materials. Then, under the guidance of one of our youth educators, they transformed it into an environmentally friendly site using green building techniques and sustainable landscaping improvements.

Washington Service Corps/AmeriCorps Youth Educator Rosemary Hopson led the challenge with daily videos explaining basic environmental terminology and possible improvements that the students could make to their favorite places to help the Earth.

We received submissions from first graders to highschoolers, all with creative ideas and fun takes on green building and landscaping methods.

"This was 100% her doing. She was obsessed with completing this and doing it her way," Deborah R., one of the parents, said. "We have paint all over our hardwood floors from her- but it was worth it to see her get excited about this project."

In the early stages of COVID-19, this project was a bright spot for our staff and the community, and also gave us the chance to explore other modes of education and outreach for our youth.

The ideas of today will be the innovation of tomorrow. We will continue partnering with educators and parents to foster critical thinking and inspire creative solutions in our future leaders.



WE ARE FUTURE-FOCUSED .

ENGINEERING OUR FUTURE

Through the expertise and passion of our engineers, we are enthusiastically investing in the future of the Puget Sound region. Whether it's improving salmon habitat, promoting agricultural resilience, restoring health to waterways, or transforming urban spaces into natural filters for stormwater pollution, each project is another step toward a healthier space for us all.

Conservation Districts often work together on large-scale or regional projects. Ryan Bartelheimer is an engineer at Snohomish Conservation District but his work spans multiple counties. He works on habitat improvement and agriculture projects and has helped flood control, drainage, and diking districts improve their tide gates and pumps for better fish passage and drainage. One of the many projects he assisted with this year was the restoration of the South Prairie Creek Preserve in Pierce County.

This floodplain, which includes South Prairie Creek and a small tributary known as Silver Springs, is habitat for Chinook salmon, the staple food for the endangered Southern Resident killer whales. Bartelheimer witnessed the

WE ARE FUTURE-FOCUSED .

recreation of a side channel through the floodplain, where thousands of pieces of wood were installed to form complex in-stream habitat structures. He also designed and assisted in the process of building a 36-foot long bridge over Silver Springs Creek, as well as a new domestic well and a well-house.

Engineering Stormwater Solutions, One Rain Garden At A Time

Due to the pandemic, our green stormwater infrastructure construction season was delayed by almost three months— add in the limited amount of hands, and our work was cut out for us.

“It was a dead sprint to get everything done,” Derek Hann, our green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) engineer, said. “But it was good to feel like we did a lot.”

Our team installed 32 rain gardens and bioswales, close to the record of a normal year. In addition to rapidly churning out stormwater management plans for high-traffic areas as well as neighborhood cluster rain gardens, Hann also experimented with permeable pavement for Jefferson Elementary, which was not only successful, but was our first installation of its kind.



We also added another engineer to our team this year, thanks to a grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts. Chuck Gerdes, who joined in November, is working with Snohomish and Skagit Conservation Districts to provide engineering designs needed to implement agricultural best management practices for farmers participating in District services.

We celebrate the work being done all throughout the Puget Sound not only because we're proud of our engineers, but because of the impact it has on the future of our own communities. We need our water and land to be healthy and productive. It's crucial that we continue to protect and nurture natural resources as part of our collective responsibility.



CONTINUING TO RALLY FOR AGRICULTURE RESILIENCE

To help prepare our agriculture community for the future impact, we partnered with local farmers to craft the Agriculture Resilience Plan. We celebrated the completion of the plan in 2019, and this year, we moved on to the groundwork.

Bennett LaFond, our new Agriculture and Floodplains Resilience Project manager, continued the work with our partners to identify prospective projects and funding sources, and compile them into a package to display to potential funders and legislators. Our partners include technical staff from fish, farm, and flood management organizations. Not only do they represent stakeholders across the county, but their different backgrounds work together to develop collaborative solutions for our floodplain.

On our side of the project package, our team has been working with Drainage District 13 to create a plan that will improve both the habitat and drainage conditions for Swans Trail Slough and the nearby farmland. The stream, which connects to Snohomish River, naturally collects drainage from the uplands. Due to changing weather patterns, the drainage infrastructure must be upgraded to withstand future flooding events. Swans

Trail Slough is also a habitat for salmon, which have been noted to enter the agriculture drainage system. Not only is this harmful for the fish, but it can cause permitting issues for the local farmers. Our team has begun developing plans for a separate agricultural drainage system from a flood storage zone that will double as fish habitat. This solution will not only benefit the salmon population, but it will also make maintenance easier for the farmers. As a conservation district, we look forward to putting our skills at work on this multi-benefit project.

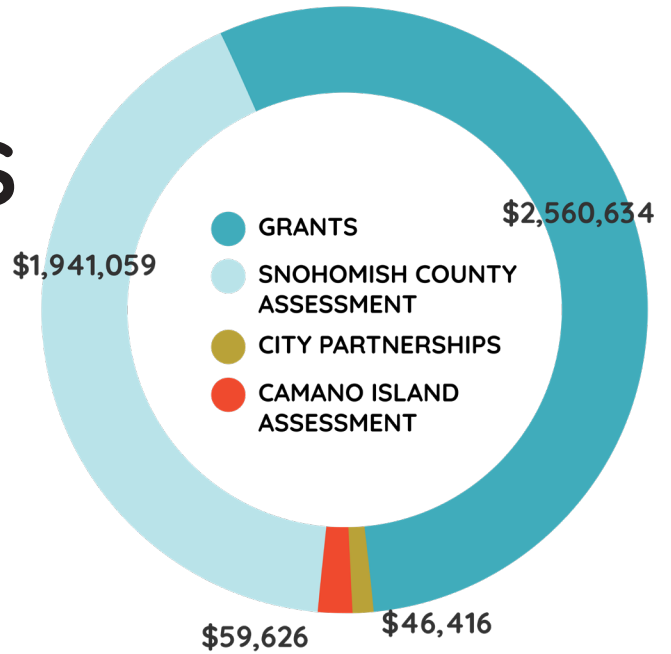
Aside from the project package, we began developing project concepts to attenuate peak stormwater flows in Stanwood, a manure pipeline system to reduce nutrient runoff and decrease fuel consumption related to manure management in Silvana, and a series of combined flood protection and fish habitat multi-benefit projects in the Sultan area.

While 2020 was a year in stasis for many of us, it was also a year of careful and strategic planning. Now, it's time for action. The effects of climate change are already here, and we will continue as a community to preserve, and enhance, our ability to adapt and live sustainably in the Puget Sound region.

2020 FINANCIALS

We continue to leverage this rate funding to secure local and regional grants, and make increased investments in the place we call home.

TOTAL REVENUE = \$4,607,737



PARTNERSHIPS

Cultivating meaningful relationships is the core of our work.

We've always treasured our partnerships, recognizing that our work cannot be done without them. The challenges of 2020 highlighted this truth, and we are more grateful than ever for the enthusiasm of our partners to pool resources and knowledge to accomplish common goals, from helping those who feed our communities to providing education about environmental stewardship to youth when school is virtual.

None of our work could be implemented without the support and engagement of government and tribal staff and elected officials, non-profit organizations, schools and universities, and our citizens and land managers that work with us to make conservation happen on the ground. As non-regulatory agencies, conservation districts hold a unique role. We work hand-in-hand with federal, state, and local agencies to meet requirements and get results through voluntary action.

If you're interested in partnering with us in our mission-driven work or collaborating with us on a project, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact our Outreach team at outreach@snohomishcd.org.

