

Strategic Plan 2025-2029

**Adopted by the Windham County NRCD Board of Supervisors at the 12/10/25 Meeting*

Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community." --- *A Sand County Almanac Aldo Leopold*

Executive Summary by Elise Annes, Momentum Communications

Windham Natural Resource Conservation District (Windham NRCD) hired Momentum Communications in the spring of 2025 to facilitate the strategic planning process and development of a new multi-year strategic plan. The last strategic planning process was completed in 2019. These past several months, the staff and board have invested their time to take stock of where the organization is and then to look ahead and consider the role of the organization in the future. This process was completed in September.

Vermont's Regional Conservation Districts (NRCDs) serve as community-driven leaders, working with landstewards and partners to protect and conserve natural resources through technical, financial, and educational assistance. They provide localized support for issues like water quality, soil health, and forestry, coordinate local resource planning, and connect individuals and communities to state and federal conservation programs and funding opportunities. Windham NRCD staff (and board) are the local face of conservation, providing on-the-ground support and expertise to help Vermonters steward their valuable natural resources.

The staff, board and community surveys, the interviews with stakeholders, and the conversations leading up to this strategic plan point to the high regard that many in the community have for Windham NRCD. It is clear that the work of the organization, and the way in which staff approach the work, are key to the success of the organization by building trust and goodwill through patience, adaptability, and expertise. Windham NRCD is consistently sought out as a trusted leader to provide education and technical assistance for communities and residents implementing on-the-ground projects for invasive species control, water quality, soil health, forest integrity, and the protection of wildlife habitat.

There are generally three goals of a strategic planning process: bringing clarity and alignment on mission, bringing focus to the organizational goals and strategies, and creating alignment between board members and staff based on the thorough process that you engage in, together. There is clear alignment on mission, and the unique role Windham NRCD plays in service to your community. Most of the feedback and discussions were about making sure the organization can keep doing what you are doing so well. The areas where we spent time in establishing new goals and objectives were in the areas of organizational capacity and community engagement. The board and staff reflected on their shared keen interest to fortify the future of the organization, follow through on the responsibility and commitment that Windham NRCD staff have made, and address the evolving needs of the county.

Mission

The mission of the Windham County Natural Resources Conservation District is to engage the community in being good stewards of the natural environment. The organization does this by coordinating technical, financial, and educational resources for land users throughout Windham County.

Strategic Goals

GOAL 1 Provide solutions and resources through on-the-ground technical assistance and education to our community to protect and steward priority natural resources.

GOAL 2 Perform outreach and education and serve as a key partner and collaborator to strengthen the network of partners and our community in our district. We see our role as the local facilitators and strive to provide opportunities to bridge appropriate federal, state, local and private programs and services to meet the resource needs of our district.

GOAL 3 Ensure long-term organizational and financial sustainability founded on strong leadership, good governance and operations, and fiscal responsibility that will retain talented staff and make our work effective and lasting.

GOAL 1 Provide solutions and resources through on-the-ground technical assistance and education to our community to protect and steward priority natural resources.

Objective 1: Prioritize projects that support native plant communities

Minimize the risk of new introductions and reduce the impact of established harmful, introduced species on native ecosystems. Prioritize control efforts based on the introduced species' potential impact, location, and the feasibility of control. Implement control measures using best management practices that follow integrated pest management (IPM) for priority species and sites.

Programs in this area are focused on education, outreach, and removal of harmful, introduced species. The district's efforts include hands-on community events, early detection projects, and support for the regional Southeast Vermont Cooperative Invasive Species Management Association.

Strategy 1: Support the Southeast Vermont Cooperative Invasive Species Management Association (CISMA) by serving as the fiscal sponsor for the association and applying for and managing grants to support CISMA activities.

Strategy 2: Lead county-scale survey, mapping, and removal efforts for new and priority species as part of an early detection, rapid response approach.

Strategy 3: Develop and implement outreach and education to promote native plant communities and prevent the introduction and spread of harmful, introduced species.

Strategy 4: Seek increased funding to support financial assistance to land stewards for management of harmful, introduced species.

Objective 2: Increase the adoption of conservation practices throughout Windham County.

Provide support for and remove barriers to the implementation of conservation practices by land stewards through technical assistance. Priority outcomes include practices that improve soil health, support nutrient management and improve and protect water quality and wildlife habitat.

Strategy 1: Provide outreach, education and technical assistance to support the implementation of conservation practices on working lands, including conservation planning assistance in partnership with USDA NRCS's 9-step planning process to support land stewards' access to state and federal financial and technical assistance programs.

Strategy 2: Provide outreach, education, and technical assistance to stewards of non-working lands to support sustainable management and implementation of conservation practices when appropriate. Support applications for financial assistance for implementation of conservation practices through program navigation services and encourage neighborhood-scale projects and funding applications.

Strategy 3: Work with local, state and federal partners and utilize public input to identify, develop, design and implement projects to restore and protect water quality.

Objective 3: Locally led conservation planning

Windham NRCD works with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) NRCS and community stakeholders to lead local conservation planning. This process involves assessing local needs, developing a plan, securing resources, and implementing solutions.

Strategy 1: Promote the annual resource concern survey using a wide variety of outreach methods, including community events and through partnerships with other groups in order to collect feedback from a representative sample of stakeholders.

Strategy 2: Plan and lead local work group meetings to review survey results, relevant planning documents and to incorporate input from partners and officials with relevant expertise in order to update the natural resource assessment and conservation action plan for Windham County.

Strategy 3: Develop and submit proposals for local fund pools to address priority resource concern issues and gaps in current financial and technical assistance and support the implementation of fund pools that are awarded funding through conservation planning assistance.

GOAL 2 Perform outreach and education and serve as a key partner and collaborator to strengthen the network of partners, land stewards and community members that care about the natural resources in

Windham County.

Objective 1: Play the role of local facilitator and strive to provide opportunities to bridge appropriate federal, state, local and private programs and services to meet the resource needs of our district.

Foster mutual understanding of complementary roles across the partner networks.

Identify high priority areas where Windham NRCD is best positioned to deliver services and prioritize programs in these areas.

Identify lower priority areas where partner organizations are better positioned to deliver services and support partner organizations' efforts in these areas.

Strategy 1: Use the annual work planning and budgeting processes to ensure staff time and district resources are allocated most efficiently to support high priority programs.

Strategy 2: Utilize, promote and lead opportunities for exchange of ideas and coordination of efforts between partner organizations to inform development of grant applications and programming. Examples include regional coordination meetings through Tactical Basin Planning, Southeast meetings of the Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership and ongoing partnerships such as the Birding on the Farm Workshop Series.

Objective 2: Use outreach, education and advocacy to promote the role of the district in Windham County.

Use outreach, education, and advocacy to engage the community in natural resource stewardship. Programs target a range of audiences and aim to improve the general understanding of what the organization does, and why it is important. Connect the work to community priorities.

Strategy 1: Continue and grow the annual plant sale as an opportunity for community members to purchase affordable native plants and also to provide outreach and education regarding natural resources stewardship.

Strategy 2: Participate in high visibility public events throughout the district to raise awareness of district programming and deliver outreach and education. Examples include town fairs, the Herrick's Cove Wildlife Festival, Mount Snow Wildlife Festival and First Friday Gallery Walks in Brattleboro.

Strategy 3: Develop and sell branded apparel, stickers and other merchandise to increase public visibility of the district.

Strategy 4: Utilize social media, website, fliers, email newsletters and other forms of communication to raise awareness of natural resources issues and the role of the district.

GOAL 3 Ensure long-term organizational and financial sustainability founded on strong leadership, good governance and operations, and fiscal responsibility that will make the organization's work effective and lasting.

Objective 1: Sustain Windham NRCD as an organization with strong leadership.

Continue to build a strong and effective board that represents a wide range of skills and community we serve to amplify our impact. Create a system to attract and engage potential future board members that have the skills and expertise to continue the work of Windham NRCD.

Strategy 1: Recruit and engage qualified community members in district work through specific activities and task-specific subcommittees with the goal of developing a deep bench of involved community members who can be elected or appointed to board vacancies as they arise.

Strategy 2: Increase per diem amounts within the constraints of State of Vermont policy to attract and retain qualified board members.

Objective 2: Attract and retain an excellent staff through appropriate compensation, support and training.

Strategy 1: Develop and maintain a supportive and collaborative work culture that allows staff members to grow into outstanding professionals in their respective roles.

Strategy 2: Provide appropriate and adequate compensation to district employees through periodic review of district pay scales and benefit policies and seek to align district compensation with Vermont organizations that perform similar work whenever possible.

Strategy 3: Hire additional staff to meet identified and priority needs when possible.

Objective 3: Strengthen and sustain the financial and other operations of Windham NRCD by looking into a location for the office and improvements to organizational processes, systems and use of technology.

Strategy 1: Explore possibilities for alternative office space including state or county office buildings, leasing or working in partnership with partner organizations to share an office space.

Strategy 2: Develop billable and indirect rates that support the costs of necessary tools and technologies and provide necessary funding for stable operations and cash flow.

Objective 4: Explore ways to increase unrestricted fundraising to allow for strategic flexibility that is aligned with the mission. Flexible funding will also allow the organization to respond quickly to community needs.

Strategy 1: Develop and implement a communications and fundraising plan to develop a network of donors for district fundraising.

Strategy 2: Develop a conservation scholarship program to help educate interested members of the public about conservation careers. Use this program to increase public visibility of the district and attract unrestricted donations.

Strategy 3: Develop a conservation grant program to help private land stewards implement small conservation projects on their land. Use this program to increase public visibility and attract unrestricted donations.