

## **Cumberland County Conservation District Strategic Plan**

Adopted June 23, 2009

### **Strategic Planning process and purpose**

This strategic plan is intended to provide a clear and realistic view of the Cumberland County Conservation District and of its goals as an organization. It is based on an assessment of the organization and the identification of critical natural resources and issues in Cumberland County. Looking ahead five years, the plan develops specific objectives and action steps to achieve each goal. These long-range goals and objectives serve as the basis for the Conservation District's annual plan of work.

The goals of the Conservation District are unlikely to change over time. However, the specific objectives for reaching the goals should be revisited on a regular basis and adjusted to reflect changing conditions in the organization and the community. Thus the implementation of the plan is a critical part of the strategic planning process.

This plan was developed through a series of discussion and exercises involving Conservation district staff, board members and partner organizations, conducted in two sessions, and followed by in-depth discussions with staff. Funding for the strategic plan was provided by the Leadership Development Committee (Building for Tomorrow). Penn State Extension provided facilitation for the planning process and drafted the plan.

### **Organizational Assessment**

#### *Who we are*

The Cumberland County Conservation District is a county-level governmental agency operating under state enabling legislation. A volunteer Board of Directors provides guidance and oversight. Board members are appointed by the County Commissioners and include four farmers, two members from the public and one County Commissioner. The Board also encourages the active participation of its Associate Directors, who have no vote but provide important input for Board consideration.

The Conservation District receives federal, state and county funds. Some of its programs are administered through delegation agreements with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in which the State contracts with the District to administer its programs. The District is also supported by private donations, grants and revenues from fee-based services.

#### *Core values*

The Conservation District is dedicated to the protection of natural resources in Cumberland County, and to the responsible stewardship of natural resources. Although some of its programs are regulatory, the District believes in education before enforcement, and encourages its clients to achieve voluntary compliance with regulations. The District is committed to ensuring a level playing field and uniform enforcement for all persons coming under its jurisdiction. It sets a high standard for timeliness and responsiveness to all clients.

#### *Beneficiaries and Partners*

Stewardship and protection of natural resources benefits every citizen of Cumberland County, as well as future generations. Specific audiences include agricultural producers, the construction and land development industry, municipal governments, watershed organizations, property owners and public and private school students.

The Conservation District maintains partnerships with other state and county agencies, townships and boroughs, public and private schools, and community based environmental organizations. It seeks to broaden its outreach by working with specific professional groups such as the providers of technical services to farmers and consultants in land development.

### **Mission**

The Cumberland County Conservation District is a governmental agency that advocates the stewardship and protection of the natural resources of Cumberland County to sustain and improve the quality of life for its citizens.

### **Goals**

1. Protect and improve water quality and preserve soils within Cumberland County and as a result improve the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
2. Encourage environmental stewardship of Cumberland County's farms.
3. Empower citizens to become environmental stewards and advocates through education and outreach.
4. Maintain the Cumberland County Conservation District as a viable organization and a leader in environmental stewardship.

### **Critical Natural Resource Areas and Issues in Cumberland County**

As part of the planning process, Conservation District staff, board and stakeholders identified critical natural resource areas and issues in Cumberland County. Items on the list were consolidated in to general areas of concern.

- Water quantity and quality are critical concerns, both subsurface and in the creeks that constitute much of the county's surface waters: Conodoguinet, Yellow Breeches, Big Spring, Letort Spring and Mt. Rock Spring. Water recharge areas, floodplains and wetland were also identified as significant factors of concern for water quality in Cumberland County.
- Farmland and open space is a critical natural resource too often threatened by the county's rapid rate of residential development. Soil is both a factor in water quality and a critical natural resource threatened by erosion, stormwater runoff and destabilization
- Special issues of concern include steep slope forested areas and wildlife habitat. The South Mountain landscape is a particularly sensitive and significant area.

This list of critical resources areas and issues was used as the basis for a gap analysis. Participants evaluated each item on the list to identify programs, agencies and organizations addressing it. The analysis confirmed that critical resource issues in the County are all being addressed in some fashion, and that the efforts of the Conservation District are not duplicative of other organizations. The gap analysis also emphasized the need for the Conservation District to continue working in partnership with other agencies and organizations to address critical resource issues.

### **Action Plan – goals and objectives**

*Goal 1. Protect and improve water quality and preserve soils within Cumberland County and as a result improve the Chesapeake Bay watershed.*

Objective: Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation of streams.

- Conduct plan reviews and inspections for all projects requiring Erosion and Sediment Control (E&S) or NPDES permits
- Conduct at least one training session per year on Erosion and Sediment Control (E&S) practices for engineers, contractors, farmers and other client groups
- Investigate all complaints as per the state delegation agreement , and refer to other agencies as appropriate
- Assist municipalities in reducing runoff from dirt and gravel roads through administration of the state program. Provide outreach and technical assistance as needed, and offer training for affected municipalities every three years

Objective: Monitor changes in watersheds and water quality.

- Maintain an inventory of streams and watersheds
- Monitor changes in land uses in watersheds
- Monitor the effectiveness of installed best management practices (BMP's)
- Monitor impaired streams for improvements in water quality

Objective: Clean-up and eliminate illegal dumps.

- Assist with at least 2 cleanups per year
- Work with PA Cleanways to facilitate and coordinate clean-up events
- Assist PA Cleanways in updating the illegal dump survey every five years

Objective: Improve riparian areas.

- Encourage the installation of stormwater best management practices (BMP's) and riparian buffers
- Secure funding to assist property owners with improvements
- Conduct public outreach on stormwater best management practices (BMP's) and improvements to riparian areas

Goal 2. *Encourage environmental stewardship of Cumberland County's farms.*

Objective: Increase the number of implemented agricultural best management practices (BMP's)

- Target farmers who are willing and able to make changes and improvements, in order to focus resources more effectively
- Secure financial assistance and/or provide technical assistance for implementation of BMP's
- Network with partner agencies
- Conduct outreach to agricultural consultants and professionals who can encourage farmers to implement best management practices (BMP's)
- Provide education and outreach at public meetings and farmer field days

Objective: Reduce ag-related nutrient loading in groundwater and surface waters.

- Encourage the agricultural community to develop voluntary nutrient management plans

- Hold at least one outreach event each year to encourage and educate the agricultural community on responsible management of nutrients.
- Inspect concentrated animal operations (CAO's) and voluntary animal operations (VAO's) as required by the state delegation agreement
- Investigate complaints in a timely manner and refer to other agencies as appropriate

Goal 3. *Empower citizens to become environmental stewards and advocates through education and outreach.*

Objective: Education and outreach to schools

- Conduct outreach to schools through presentations, poster contests and other activities such as field trips
- Coordinate the annual Envirothon
- Provide scholarships through fundraising and donations, for students to attend college and summer camp in environmental subjects
- Provide internship opportunities within the organization using grant revenues, for students in environmental disciplines

Objective: Education and outreach to the general public

- Conduct workshops on water conservation, non-point source pollution prevention, stormwater best management practices (BMP's) and related topics
- Communicate a wide variety of information on environmental stewardship by distributing flyers and brochures, a newsletter, an annual report, articles in local media, and web-based information
- Install demonstration stormwater best management practices (BMP's) around county buildings
- Conduct outreach through displays and exhibits at public meetings, festivals, and other opportunities
- Promote interest in water quality by offering water testing for consumers
- Promote tree planting as a best management practice (BMP) through the tree seedling sale

Goal 4. *Maintain the Cumberland County Conservation District as a viable organization and a leader in environmental stewardship.*

Objective: Strive for professional excellence throughout the organization

- Emphasize timeliness and responsiveness as a core value for all Conservation District employees
- Encourage community involvement among staff
- Commit to professional development opportunities for staff and Board members, and identify low-cost sources of training and development
- Encourage and facilitate others interested in environmental stewardship such as watershed organizations
- Continue the effort to co-locate the Conservation District office with partners such as Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Objective: Maintain financial stability.

- Seek ways to make service delivery more efficient and cost-effective by partnering or coordinating services with other organizations and agencies
- Seek new sources of revenue through grants from public agencies and private foundations
- Develop a mechanism that allows the Cumberland County Conservation District to accept and manage donations.

### **Implementation Plan**

In order for this plan to be effective in achieving its goals, it must become a 'living' document that guides the progress of the organization. When considering changes in priorities, or the addition or elimination of programs, or other critical issues, Board members should consult the strategic plan for guidance. They should ask questions such as '*How does this help us achieve our goals as stated in the strategic plan?*', '*Does the proposed action reflect our core values?*' and '*Who are our potential partners in addressing this issue?*'. The following implementation steps will help guide the Board in using the strategic plan:

**Distribution:** The Plan will be distributed to all staff, board members, associate members, and partner organizations. It will be provided to all new staff, board, associates and partners when they join the organization. Revisions to the plan will be distributed to existing members when there are significant changes made to the plan. Copies will be available in print and on the District's web site. The Conservation District's revised mission statement will be posted on its web site and incorporated into publications as applicable.

**Annual plan of work and evaluation:** The Plan will serve as the basis for the annual budget and plan of work submitted to Cumberland County. During this process, the board will review progress on achieving objectives and action steps in the plan, and may amend them to reflect changing priorities.

**Plan revision:** At the beginning of the 5th year of implementation, the board will begin planning for a comprehensive review and revision of the strategic plan, to be adopted by the conclusion of the 5th year.