



Strategic Plan
June 2024

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About Us

The purpose of the Snoqualmie Valley Watershed Improvement District (SVWID) is to give district members a voice, lend a hand, and find solutions. Farmers and rural landowners have long recognized that, depending on the time of year, there is often too much or too little water for productive farming. Drainage requirements are very strict and confusing. Water rights are limited, and water right law is complex.

We're here to help.

Snoqualmie Valley Watershed Improvement District Formation

On December 7, 2015, the SVWID was formed as an irrigation district under RCW Chapter 87.03 by a vote of 94% of the landowners in the district. This represented the culmination of a multi-year effort to find solutions to common water-related problems. Irrigation districts in Washington State date back to statehood in 1889. They have become more common in Western Washington in recent years, with six such districts having been formed in Whatcom County over the last decade. SVWID Formation Ordinance (2015):

<https://svwid.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Legislation-Details-With-Text.pdf>

District Boundaries: It Is Where We Farm

The district boundary roughly follows the King County (KC) Snoqualmie Valley Agricultural Production District (APD) boundary, about 14,000 acres of floodplain, from just below the Snoqualmie Falls north to the county line near Duvall. There are approximately 600 parcels and 300 landowners inside district boundaries. To the east and west of the valley floor, elevations increase dramatically, and a large network of streams and tributaries in these higher elevations naturally drain into the Tolt and Snoqualmie rivers in the heart of the valley. The Snoqualmie River flows predominantly from south to north towards its confluence with the Skykomish and Snohomish Rivers in Snohomish County. The Tolt River joins the Snoqualmie river just south of the city of Carnation. The cities of Carnation and Duvall are also neighbors of the SVWID, with some membership within the Carnation city limits. The King County SVAPD encompasses 14,931 acres.

“The SVAPD is the 2nd largest APD by acreage and contains 35% of King County’s total acreage farmed for food. The 214 operations currently farm on 7,417 acres with an additional 201 acres in farm infrastructure such as homes, barns, other ag buildings, and farm access roads, leaving only 1,060 acres fallow, but farmable in the SVAPD. Within this zone there are 8,668 farmable acres and 6,263 unfarmable acres.”

- [Agricultural Land Resource Strategic Plan Task Force - King County, Washington](#)
King County. May 2023.

Unfarmable acres include steep slopes, forested, existing buffers, wetland, lakes, right of ways, non-ag buildings, recreation, mainstem, oxbow or channel, and roads/miscellaneous.

Although publicly-owned lands are not members in the SVWID, there are many in the region including King County’s Fall City Park, Fall City Natural Area, Carnation Marsh Natural Area, Griffin Creek Natural Area, Tolt River - John MacDonald Park, Chinook Bend Natural Area, Stillwater Natural Area, Duvall Park, McCormick Park, the Dougherty Farmstead, and

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Cherry Valley (376 acres) and Stillwater (456 acres) Wildlife Area Units.

The Snoqualmie Valley APD is within the regulatory floodplain and shoreline of the Snoqualmie River, and habitat to Endangered Species Act Threatened and Endangered Species. Puget Sound Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) are listed as a Threatened Species (1999). Puget Sound Steelhead Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) Distinct Population Segment are listed as a Threatened Species (2007).

Due to the geology and geography of the Snoqualmie Valley, flooding occurs frequently during the rainy season of the year. While this can provide ample water and renewal to agricultural activity in the valley, it often ends up delivering too much water to the region at times outside of the typical growing season.

Drainage Challenges- When the flooding subsides, many fields are left inundated with water for a prolonged period of time. Long-established agricultural ditches and drain tiles, placed in order to efficiently and effectively move water back to streams and tributaries, are now overgrown with invasive plants and sediment. There is a backlog of requests for assistance through the King County Agricultural Drainage Assistance Program (ADAP), and ADAP can address only a subset of a more comprehensive list of drainage complaints. Landowners are seeking clear pathways to drainage solutions that are additive to the existing ADAP program.

In 2018, the SVWID completed the Snoqualmie Valley Drainage Review and Analysis (NHC), with a grant from the King County Flood Control District. This work became the SVWID's Drainage Improvement Program, a systematic approach to drainage based on hydrologically defined planning units. The Analysis ranked the hydrologic planning units based on several sources of "wetness" data. The ranking informs investment of financial resources in drainage improvement projects in the SVWID.

Irrigation Challenges- During the peak growing season, crops, pastures, and livestock need adequate water. While some farmers have rights to pull water from nearby wells, creeks, or rivers, these rights hinge on complex legal agreements that can be confusing, especially when land use needs change or a farm is sold.

We have estimated that of the 8,780 acres of farmed ground, approximately 2,200 acres might have existing surface or ground water irrigation rights. That leaves approximately 6,500 acres of farmland without irrigation rights. Since 2017, the SVWID has offered water rights leases through "marketing windows" as part of a Water Bank program. The program has a capacity of roughly 157-acre feet, which could service an additional 313 acres of farmland.

In 2022, SVWID completed a Comprehensive Study of Small-Scale Water Storage focused on projects to improve management of winter flood flows and late-summer low flows. This research inspired by work of the Fish, Farm, Flood 1.0, will help inform our understanding of the benefits and challenges in this work, and is gaining increased interest as farmers grapple with climate change projections of higher winter precipitation and lower summer rainfall. The SVWID is currently working with others to complete FFF 1.0 deliverables on flood risk reduction and instream flow needs to provide a holistic description of water quantity conditions and projections in the Snoqualmie watershed.

Regional Approach- SVWID's work addressing local irrigation and drainage challenges often requires a regional approach to achieving our strategic goals. To be successful we often need to

look beyond our District boundaries. Our work routinely includes collaboration and engagement with local, State, Federal, and Tribal partners.

Recent SVWID Accomplishments

Since our last strategic plan (2018), the board of commissioners, along with staff, have made great progress on providing valuable services to the District Community. Recent SVWID accomplishments include:

- **Identified, prioritized, and implemented drainage projects using the comprehensive network drainage analysis**, including the SVWID's first large public works project in Basin 56 (Langlois Creek).
- **Established SVWID rosters and processes for procurement**, including professional services, public works, and vendor services.
- **Actively participated with Snoqualmie Valley Agricultural Strategic Plan development**, including supporting buildout of Drainage and Irrigation related goals.
- **Established Water Rights support services**, including water rights assessment, water leases through water bank, early exploration of water storage, and progress on new interruptible water rights.
- **Represented agricultural interests in watershed planning initiatives**, including Fish, Farm, Flood; KC Comprehensive Plan updates; KC Flood Plan; WRIA 7 Streamflow Plan.

The 2018 strategic plan was vital in driving the SVWID's work and success over the past five years. The Commissioners and staff are developing this new strategic plan to extend the SVWID's focus over the next five years and beyond.

Plan Development

This plan will be developed through the following steps:

- Establish strategic planning goals with Executive Director and Board Chair.
- Commissioner and Staff strategic planning workshop.
- Work with staff to draft updated strategic plan, including build out of draft initiatives based on SVWID mission, values, and program needs.
- Present public comment draft to commissioners.
- Development of a survey to solicit input from the greater community and stakeholders.
- Invite partners and members to learn about draft and share insights/recommendations (one-on-one meetings; webinars; surveys, and more).
- Revise plan to incorporate partner and member insights.
- Revised plan is presented to commissioners for adoption.

Mission

Implement water management solutions that steward and conserve farmland for future generations.

Vision

While the vision for the SVWID continues to evolve over time, the core aspects have existed since its inception:

We envision a valley with a thriving and vibrant agriculture community where there is enough water for all who want it, when they want it.

We see a clear path to accomplish drainage projects, and an organized approach to complete them on a basin-wide level.

We see a future where water rights are clearly understood, protected, valued and shared.

We see a future where the voice of the collective speaks clearly and makes changes that benefit the long-term stewardship of farmland in the valley.

SVWID values partnerships and collaboration with the broader community in this work and recognizes other community interests including open space protection, Tribal Treaty Rights, clean water, and a healthy environment.

Values

The values of the SVWID grew out of the initial conversations which eventually formed this organization and were updated for this new plan. Contributors provided a broad perspective based on what they were farming, how they were farming, and what they needed to farm to their highest potential. Empathy for each other, and a spirit of collaboration led to defining common values around which to unite.

We value the individual farmer and the complexity and diversity they bring to the voice of the SVWID.

We value the water that enters the valley and see it as a key resource to achieving the farming goals of the region.

We value farmland as a natural resource to be stewarded for future generations.

We value the power we have as a collective to advocate for the health, prosperity, and longevity of farming in the valley.

We value partnerships and collaboration with the broader community in our work and recognize other community interests including open space protection, Tribal Treaty Rights, clean water, and a healthy environment.

Goals

Guided by the input of the membership, the history and experience of our work in the past 5 years, and the vision to carry it forward, the SVWID will realize the following goals in the next five years:

- **Goal 1: Lead comprehensive approach to solving drainage issues**
- **Goal 2: Actively maintain SVWID water rights for irrigation**
- **Goal 3 (Expanded Initiative): Pursue water supply and storage alternatives for multiple benefits.**
- **Goal 4 (New): Engage members, partners, and other stakeholders in strategic work.**
- **Goal 5: Strengthen and secure the financial and operational functions of the SVWID**

Intended Impact and Theory of Change

SVWID's population of focus, key approaches and activities, and the outcomes for which SVWID holds itself accountable.

WHO and WHERE	HOW				WHAT
	Approaches	Linkages	Essential activities	Contribution to Intended Impact	
300 District members; 13,500 acres from the Snoqualmie River to the King County border	Needs assessment and feasibility studies		Identify current and FUTURE needs; understand member needs	Flood risk reduction	
	On the ground drainage projects water storage/ supply projects	On the ground work builds credibility with policy partners and regulatory agencies	Coordinate projects Secure additional funding to accomplish goals	Drainage improvement Increased water supply for farms	
Farmers, land managers, and landowners in the Snoqualmie Valley	Increase technical expertise to support WID's mission and work		Provide technical and financial assistance to private land owners and managers	Improved access to technical assistance for farmers	Implement water management solutions that steward and conserve farmland for future generations
	Policy change/ regulatory streamlining		Engage with local and regional policy efforts to strengthen WID's mission impacts and support local agriculture	Unblocked funding for impact	
Snoqualmie Valley Agricultural Production District (APD)	Sharing/ collaboration of resources with KCD, KC SWS	Policy change with partners and regulators makes on the ground work easier/ faster	Develop collaborative agreements and work plans with partner agencies	Mutually supportive activities	
	Community outreach/ education		Tell the story about our work (why; what was hard; how it could be better/ different in the future)		

Goal 1: Lead comprehensive approach to solving drainage issues

The SVWID completed a comprehensive network drainage analysis in 2017 that divided the entire 13,500 acres within the SVWID boundaries into 72 hydrologically connected planning units and prioritized sub areas based on drainage needs. This plan guides year to year project planning and implementation to ensure work addresses the highest impact actions.

Initiative 1: Plan and implement drainage maintenance projects.

Actions:

- Work with KC ADAP and King Conservation District (KCD) to identify and coordinate implementation of streamlined ADAP projects.
- Work with King County Flood Control District (FCD) and other partners to plan, fund, and implement non-ADAP projects.
- For non-ADAP projects, document regulatory pathways for pilot projects with partner agencies.
- For non-ADAP projects with riparian buffer implementation component, seek out partnership strategies with Tribes, KCD, and others.
- Support subsurface drainage maintenance projects through technical and/or financial assistance from the SVWID and partners.

Initiative 2: Create and maintain database of drainage infrastructure, maintenance, and monitoring projects in the SVWID.

Actions:

- Update and maintain internal ArcGIS Online (AGOL) data hub for SVWID including existing spatial data layers, field maps data, pdf plans, and photos.
- Develop template existing conditions reports for each basin planning area.
- Develop and maintain a public-facing AGOL data hub for project specific communications to stakeholders.

Initiative 3 (New): Expand beaver management assistance in the SVWID.

Actions

- Assist with creation of Beaver Management on Agricultural Working Lands Program with Snoqualmie Valley Preservation Alliance (SVPA) and others.
- Assist with beaver population studies to inform management guidelines.
- Support beaver relocation from conflict Snoqualmie floodplain locations to the upper watershed to facilitate natural water storage.

Goal 2: Actively maintain SVWID water rights for irrigation

“Every commercial farm has sufficient access to water for irrigation and uses best management practices and technology to manage water usage. Farms keep existing water rights, continue water transfers through SVWID, and increase access to water transfers.”
From Snoqualmie Valley Agricultural Strategic Plan DRAFT May 2023.

Building on the success of creating the first agricultural water bank in the State of Washington, the SVWID will continue to leverage the value of water in the valley to make irrigation water accessible to members who want it. Work will continue to explore interest and options for small scale water storage.

Initiative 1: Maintain and expand the SVWID agricultural water bank services.

Actions:

- Document annual water bank tasks in the SVWID’s Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) manual.
- Conduct member outreach prior to the annual marketing window.
- Maintain and update water bank FAQ’s and application materials on the SVWID website.
- Fund additional hydrologic analysis needed to support water bank transfers without direct surface water diversions from the Snoqualmie River.
- Provide technical and financial assistance for irrigation best management practices and efficiencies, including fish screens and meters by partnering with WDFW, King County Agriculture, Sno Valley Tilth, and KCD.

Initiative 2: Provide support to members with existing water rights.

Actions:

- Proactively communicate with landowners about preservation of water rights.
- Research and review extent and validity of water rights for SVWID landowners as requested.
- Provide technical assistance to landowners about options for preservation of water rights, including application to Ecology’s Trust Water Rights Program.

Goal 3: Pursue water supply and storage alternatives for multiple benefits.

Initiative 1: Advance small-scale water storage options through collection, analysis, and interpretation of high-quality and reliable data.

Actions:

- Apply for water right to divert floodwater for pilot reservoir water storage.

- Investigate and document interactions between surface and groundwater when storing water in the floodplain.
- Investigate and document fish use of water storage infrastructure within the floodplain using eDNA.
- Investigate and document water temperatures for proposed water storage infrastructure in the floodplain.
- Develop operations plan for pilot water storage project within the floodplain considering results from interactions between surface and groundwater, water temperatures, and fish presence/behavior.

Initiative 2 (New): Assess feasibility of alternatives meeting long-term water quantity and quality needs within the SVWID.

Actions:

- Request support for feasibility study to advance pilot, multi-benefit, upland water storage project.
- Request support to assess feasibility of water supply options for SVWID agricultural producers meeting United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule standards.

Goal 4: Engage members, partners, and other stakeholders in strategic work.

Initiative 1: Seek member, partner, and stakeholder input and partnership on strategic plan goals.

Actions:

- Share rough draft plan with members and partners to gather comments and insights and incorporate into final plan.
- Review plan initiatives for opportunities to expand engagement with members, partners and stakeholders especially for where higher levels of collaboration and/or policy work may be required.
- Explicitly map out deeper engagement into initiatives going forward.
- Secure multi-benefit partnerships and long-term funding to increase SVWID and partner program capacity, allowing for expanded drainage and irrigation water projects in the APD.
- Develop and deepen partnerships and support for multi-benefit water storage.

Initiative 2: Represent agricultural interests in watershed planning projects.

Actions:

- Participate in region-wide planning, including Flood Hazard Management Planning, Comprehensive Planning, Sub-Area Planning, Fish, Farm Flood, and more.

- Develop and deepen rapport with local agencies, stakeholders, and Tribes
- Raise awareness of membership issues and concerns
- Pursue agricultural flood risk reduction and water supply study requests for the Tolt Dam relicensing project.
- Pursue King County Farm Fish Flood support for pilot upland water storage site-specific feasibility study.

Goal 5: Strengthen and secure the financial and operational functions of the SVWID

With an executive director and staff, established financial controls, insurance, and a procurement policy, the SVWID is now in the position to plan out a long-term funding strategy. This will require a balance of both operational and financial needs assessment. Additionally, input from the membership, board, staff, and local stakeholders will ensure that the decisions made have a broad base of support.

Initiative 1: Strengthen board operations.

Actions:

- Continue tradition of biennial retreat, with the next retreat planned for 2025.
- Engage commissioners with initiatives through regular board meeting updates and sub-committees.
- Publish adopted strategic plan for membership.
- Develop board operations guidance toolbox for commissioners.

Initiative 2: Promote transparency and engagement through routine communications with SVWID members.

Actions:

- Maintain SVWID website, email list, and mailing list.
- Communicate with SVWID members through a minimum of one annual mailed newsletter generated from the assessor's mailing list.
- Publish legal notices as required by RCW 87.03, Ecology, and others.
- Conduct annual commissioner elections in compliance with RCW 87.03.
- Determine assessment level annually: 1) Estimate general fund needs; 2) conduct required steps; 3) communicate assessment to King County treasury for assessment collection.

Initiative 3: Strengthen SVWID organization capacity.

Actions:

- Update SVWID Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) Manual to include employment position descriptions and systems for annual review and training.
- Transition internal SVWID accounts to the Budgeting, Accounting and Reporting System (BARS) Manual, which directs accounting and reporting standards for local governments in accordance with RCW 43.09.200, to improve Washington State Auditor Annual Reporting requirements.