SCC – CDs Roundtable Meeting

April 9, 2026

Facilitated by Jessica Wilson | Notes by Tami Stubbs
Next Roundtable Meeting: May 14, 2026 – 9:30 AM

Welcome & Roundtable Discussion Topic Introduction

Jessica Wilson, SCC Chief Engagement Officer, welcomed everyone to the April Roundtable meeting and introduced the meeting topics:

- SCC staffing update
- RGP interim funding round update
- SCC commission strategic planning session conversation
- Conservation Technical Assistance strategy and rebranding

SCC Staffing Update: James Thompson

- The new SCC Director of Tribal Affairs position is in the interview stage. There were many quality candidates, and a hiring announcement should be coming in the next few weeks.
- SCC is actively recruiting for the NE Regional Manager position. Please continue to encourage qualified people you know to apply.
- SCC is still working with state HR for approval of the Director of Programs and Director of Regional Managers positions.
- Jean Fike, current Puget Sound Regional Manager, will be leaving SCC to join the Washington Dept. of Agriculture for an exciting new position beginning May 1st. In her new role with WSDA, Jean will be supervising scientists in the Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences Program.
- Recruitment for her position will begin on April 10, and staff will be working to ensure we have no gaps in coverage for the vital services our RMs provide. There were many congratulations and well wishes for Jean—she has been a vital part of the SCC team, and she will be missed!
- Emmett Wild shared that he hopes SCC can bring in strong new team members as staff members transition out, noting concern about the number of recent departures.

Riparian Grant Program Update: Amy Martin and Maggie McKeown

- Amy gave an update on progress for the mid-biennium RGP application cycle. She thanked all who participated in the March 26 workshop for the thoughtful and valuable feedback from 21 CDs. Based on that feedback and subsequent discussions, adjustments were made to the mid-biennium funding round approach.

- A handout was created to outline the upcoming RGP funding opportunity: RGP - Mid-Biennium Funding Opportunity - FY25-27
- Three items in particular were informed by feedback:
    - There was strong support for an application funding limit, and it will be set at $250,000 for one application. One application will be accepted from each CD.
    - The funding allocation across tracks was adjusted to reflect the strong interest in maintenance and implementation in this round.
    - The scoring criteria and weighting have been adjusted, and a summary is included in the handout.
- More information will be shared about the application, scoring criteria, guidance, and the budget template on May 1. Applications will open on May 8.
- Amy and Maggie are very grateful for the time the CDs took to help them develop this funding opportunity!

SCC commission strategic planning session: Commissioner Wade Troutman and Jessica Wilson

- The current SCC strategic plan expires in 2027. It's time to start creating a new one, and the SCC Commission strategic planning session will happen in May in conjunction with the Commission meeting. The strategic planning process will be approached differently from what has been done in the past.
- Commissioner Troutman commented that it's important to him for the SCC strategic plan to reflect what the districts, SCC, and the Commissioners want.
- What is the philosophy, and what are the principles and vision that will guide the strategic plan? SCC continues to face a challenging budget and political climate and needs to be as flexible and nimble as possible. It's the responsibility of the commission to stand behind the SCC staff and provide assurance and guidance for programs. Basic funding must be protected as it's the most important money that districts have. Wade says that RMs "run around with fire extinguishers" - RM service is an example of a benefit to districts that could be memorialized in the strategic plan. Above all, Wade wants SCC to be the best!
- Jessica echoed the goal to be the best. The SCC Commissioners want to hear from the conservation districts about what they think are the priorities to consider in the strategic plan:
    - How do we work together most effectively?
    - What are the conservation priorities?
    - Jennifer Boie: Reiterated the importance of the CDs – SCC – WACD partnerships. She would like to see a process for gathering input from all partners up front, prior to SCC meetings.

- Sarah Moorehead: Wants to see SCC lean into how we can incorporate adaptability and flexibility into our processes. Inflexible policies can lead to missed opportunities to create better products and relationships – she would like to think about ways CDs can utilize programs to the fullest to get conservation on the ground.
- Dave Hedrick: Thank you, Wade - your support for CDs is appreciated! Dave would like to see SCC identify and modify programs that aren't working sooner than the next biennium. The ability to be nimble is needed to deal with issues efficiently.
- Craig Nelson: Added that SCC could utilize CDs as resources earlier and more heavily. CDs have expertise that could be valuable assets when developing policies and programs and advancing priorities.
- Mike Nordin: Would like to see a policy statement on what a CD partner is – what the expectation of a good partner would be. CDs need stable, basic funding for three things: to pay for a bookkeeper, a manager, and a specialist. He would like to see a Supervisor and Commissioner conduct policy to define appropriate behavior and job performance to uphold accountability.
- Craig N: Reminded the group that under RCW 89.08.070, it is the Commission's responsibility to communicate with partners and agencies and share natural resource plans with districts. He believes this function has not been accomplished for the past several years. He would like to see that responsibility brought to the forefront, especially regarding issues that impact districts, such as the new rules passed by the Washington Forest Practices Board. He would like SCC to be held accountable for performing that responsibility.
- Jennifer B: One of the superpowers of CDs is being flexible to meet community needs – she would like to see SCC embrace that in helping CDs perform their work by providing support through funding while allowing districts the flexibility to serve their communities.
- Brand Reed: Suggested SCC build out visual tools to illustrate opportunities for CDs to provide feedback in the strategic planning process. Jessica will think about manageable ways to communicate. Brandy would like tools that are easy to use for CDs; this would also be easier for the SCC team to summarize.
- Sarah M: Requested that the SCC strategic plan be more visionary and intentionally ask broader questions, connecting CD work to major statewide issues, and balancing big-picture goals with detailed information. She noted that past plans felt too narrow and urged a process that highlights how CDs contribute to solving the most important challenges. She emphasized wanting the plan to be impactful, inspiring, and exciting.

- James appreciates the comments from the group and agrees that a new paradigm is needed – maybe "strategy" and "planning" don't belong together as they are two different things. Strategy is who we want to be and can be scary and unknown, whereas planning is more certain and comforting. He looks forward to future discussions on who we want to be.
- Becca Hebron: Would like to see SCC keep the scope larger, while allowing CDs to create the plan for executing the strategy – CDs can be flexible and pivot rapidly.
- Jessica encouraged the group to feel free to give her a call or email with suggestions.

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA): Dani Madrone, Sarah Moorehead, and Jessica Wilson

- Dani Madrone: CTA is the highest priority for CDs – the policy team is working on the right messaging to get in front of legislators to convey the importance of flexible funding for the CDs in their legislative districts. They are working to create talking points for CDs to use when talking to legislators and community members.
- The Program Demand Survey results will help SCC present a clear picture of CD funding needs to the legislature, explaining why CDs exist, the public benefits they provide, and the many essential functions that are currently unfunded, particularly those that could be supported by CTA.
- Because CTA already has strong name recognition and changing the title could imply a new or expanded program during a tight budget, the recommendation is to keep the current name and develop talking points that explain CTA's broader benefits, so legislators and the public understand what their funding supports.
- The next biennium will be difficult due to an existing deficit, with anticipated reductions to the Climate Commitment Act – particularly in the operating budget, making it critical to defend programs and present clear messaging and a unified front across the conservation community.
- Sarah M: Huge appreciation for all Dani does on the hill – she's a Rock Star!
- Sarah asked for help in communicating in a way that makes CTA irresistible to funders by showing its impact and critical nature in communities, why future investment is so important, and demonstrating how CTA is leveraged to bring in more funding to put conservation on the ground.
- Jennifer B: Districts pride themselves on their efficiency and accountability despite being unfunded, and it's important to reinforce that message. A foundation of one finance staff, one manager, and one technical staff is needed—plus essential functions like research, monitoring, education, and outreach—adds up to about five FTE needed for districts to meet basic community expectations now that districts have grown and become more sophisticated.

- Sarah M: With state outdoor education programs reduced, there is a need to show how CTA and districts can continue providing K–12 learning opportunities and how CTA has been essential in filling those funding gaps.
- Craig N: The additional two FTE, as Jennifer suggested, demonstrate how CTA often supports education and outreach—it's hard-to-fund yet strongly expected by communities. His programs have already guided several students into conservation careers, creating better-informed citizens who care about natural resources and clear career pipelines that highlight the long-term impact of CTA funding.
- Zorah Oppenheimer: CTA and implementation funds often end up covering essential administration work and activities like plant sales because districts lack dedicated admin funding – no other state agency would be expected to operate this way. There's a need to maintain CTA's flexibility—rather than turning it into a narrow technical grant—since CTA is what currently keeps doors open and ensures functions like transparent elections in her district.
- Mike N: CTA/Implementation funds are critical to the existence of many CDs – many don't have funding to write grant applications. Some counties don't have a natural resources department – the CD provides that service and those functions; his office is the only agency supporting agriculture, salmon recovery, forestry, etc. in his county. CTA fills gaps in grant funding for vital CD functions. He's more than happy to communicate with legislators – reiterating that without CTA, some CDs don't exist! CD products diminish when there isn't enough CTA, making it more difficult to receive rates and charges from counties. CDs could do so much with more money compared to what some state agencies accomplish with guaranteed funding.
- Sarah M: There is a need to help legislators understand how CTA impacts communities by capturing both the shared benefits across CDs and the unique stories each district brings.
- Brandy R: Echoes all the previous comments. She notes that the argument for CTA is the same argument as for Rates & Charges – that administrative funding is needed, and she believes it's important not to whitewash or water down the fact that administrative costs need to be supported. CDs are thrifty; however, CTA is needed on top of that effort – a modest base of stable funding is critical.
- Heather Wendt: An agenda is coming soon for the WACD legislative meeting at the end of the month. WACD will be working on how to take all the feedback and information they've gathered and showcase it to legislators in the field in the coming year.
- Commissioner Bill Blake: Appreciates all the feedback and learning opportunities today—it helped him gain clarity, and he values hearing about the RCW and how partners should interact and implement the statute. He also supports taking partners on tours and is grateful for all the work the CDs are doing.

- Jessica has noted today's comments, and she is eager to help. She noted that the CD Roundtable Discussion Topic tool (found here: Business Improvement) has worked well for capturing conversation topics. Please continue to add your ideas.
- Craig N shared that the commission's strategy should prioritize multi-biennial contracts.
- Emmett W noted concerns with the Timmons Group [a technology firm] based on his team's experience and requested thorough vetting. Jessica explained that they are the vendor connected to PRISM under an existing RCO contract. She isn't sure yet how that will unfold, and she appreciates Emmett's feedback.
- Jessica thinks they'll be ready to talk about the technology transformation at the May Roundtable meeting. PRISM may be a good starting point for a new platform – SCC could customize its own platform eventually.
- James: SCC is supportive of multi-biennial contracts, and while implementation across biennia is complex and will require careful work, SCC is committed because it is such an important priority. How to encumber money across biennia while following GAAP is just one of the challenges.
- Jessica clarified for the group that the May Roundtable meeting will focus on SCC technology transformation and receiving feedback from CDs. The framework for multi-biennial contracts will be a topic of conversation during the SCC strategic planning session, held in conjunction with the May SCC meeting. The June Roundtable meeting is canceled because of WADE.
- Sarah M: Would appreciate a conversation about multi-biennial contracts with CDs before the July Roundtable meeting, if possible. She would like to see the content that will be discussed at the May SCC strategic planning session, and the ability for CDs to contribute input and help resolve any issues that arise surrounding multi-biennial contracts. Jessica is open to scheduling a conversation prior to the July Roundtable, and she will make sure CDs have information ahead of time so that they can provide valuable input to the discussion.
- Jessica concurred with comments by Zorah and the understanding that there will be a lot of decisions and processes to discuss related to multi-biennial contracts—time is needed to prepare and gather information, and she understands the need for transparency.
- James: People and capacity are needed to create vigorous change. An example is the ombuds group, which has been very productive. It's a challenging political and budget climate; he appreciates the fiscal staff and their ability to turn around vouchers quickly. He urges patience as change is created, particularly in implementing multi-biennial contracts.
- Ryan Williams: Pointed out that multi-biennial contracts aren't a unique approach to capital funding—other agencies already do this, and he recommends that SCC reach out

to them for guidance in developing contracts across biennia. James informed that SCC has reached out to other agencies about how multi-biennial contracts might work.

- Brandy R: Appreciates James sharing the status of work toward multi-biennial contracts; she appreciates that SCC is understaffed and suggested that one strategy might be to roll out the process in phases. One program could be chosen as a pilot to roll out the contracts and learn from that experience. James agreed that it might be a good approach to work out the kinks and build from there.
- Sarah Groth: Reminded that there is a need to work through the master contract, and for longer contracts, a different process may be required in order to remain in compliance, or different language may be needed in the master contract. She cautioned about creating an unintended consequence.
- Jennifer B: Appreciates the increased communication from SCC on organizational development and the staff needed – she feels that communication has improved to help CDs understand all the processes going on. She appreciates hearing what's going on now and laying out what is to come – in short, she appreciates the open communication and reminded that CDs are here to help.
- Jessica appreciates the opportunity to build relationships. Before the May Roundtable, she will work on action items from this meeting. She will be working on creating a graphic timeline to illustrate the strategic planning process and determining how to share it with CDs. She will also be working out the best way to share information with CDs on the status of multi-biennial contracts discussions.
- Jessica appreciates the conversation today, and please feel free to reach out to her via email or phone anytime. Mike Nordin suggested that Jessica visit with CD managers for one-on-one conversations at WADE.
- REMINDERS:
    - The next SCC-CD Roundtable meeting is Thursday, May 14, at 9:30 AM.
    - The June Roundtable is canceled due to WADE.
    - Please use the Roundtable Discussion Topic tool (found here: Business Improvement) to submit topics for the next discussion.