

Long Range Planning

Long range planning provides the foundation of overall conservation district operations. Sometimes referred to as “Vision Setting”, long range planning is generally a ten year future planning process to broadly define the vision for the future. It does not generally include specific planning objectives; however, long range plans define the broad goals of the conservation district for the future.

Long range planning is a process used by a conservation district to create a vision for the future (usually at least five years and no longer than ten years), document those plans, and adopt a plan of action allowing planned movement to more concrete strategic plans that include evaluation of success.

Long range plans focus on a vision for the future, contain broad goals and outcomes, and provide clear philosophy statements that create the foundation of all strategic and annual planning processes.

Long range planning, in and of itself, cannot address all the planning needs of a conservation district. Long range planning is one key component of the planning process each conservation district must complete in order to operate efficiently and effectively.

A Plan for Planning

Long range planning must be much more than an informal discussion about what the conservation district ought to be doing in the years ahead. Good planning has to follow a very orderly and formal process.

You should expect to be involved in at least one significant long-range planning meeting per year. This meeting will write a long-range plan or modify a previously established plan and develop an annual plan of work from the long-range plan.

You should be ready to merge personal goals for the conservation district with the personal goals of the rest of the board team. You should also be ready to work for a consensus with the rest of the planning team about the goals that you will set for the conservation district. An organization must have one set of long-range goals to shoot for.

Who Should be Involved in the Long Range Planning Process?

To be effective, conservation districts should involve a broad spectrum of community representation in their long range planning process. Local conservation leaders, community leaders, educators, agricultural producers, industry leaders, and community citizens at large should be invited to participate. Participation can take many forms:

- The conservation supervisors can plan and carry out a series of long range planning forums within their conservation district. A staff person for the district can take notes of the findings for inclusion in the plan.

- The conservation district can prepare a series of vision statements to which local community citizens and groups can be asked to respond. The written responses can then be used in establishing the long range plan.
- The conservation district can prepare a written survey soliciting input on priority topics for the conservation district for the next ten years. These responses can be used by supervisors in planning.

The Mission Statement - First Step in Long-Range Planning

Your conservation district has a mission that should be in writing, stating clearly the reason the conservation district exists and the vision that the board holds for the future of the conservation district.

The mission is not a fuzzy little piece of philosophy, but a clear statement of where this district wants to go. It states what difference the district will make by its existence.

The mission statement is the cornerstone around which all other planning for the organization takes place.

Elements of a Long Range Plan

- Vision statement- A two- or three-sentence statement that describes the vision of what the conservation district will look like at the end of a ten year period of time. Vision statements are broad and open to interpretation.
- Goals- One or more statements of broad intent to fulfill the vision statement of the conservation district. Goals should always relate to the vision statement.
- General Action Statements (objectives)- Several broad statements under each goal that describe the intended way to achieve a goal.
- Stakeholders- A listing of all constituencies who are affected by the vision and long range plan process. This also identifies the key players who should be involved in the strategic planning activities to come.

The Benefits of long Range Planning

Long range planning encourages conservation districts to look beyond the obstacles of today. Community members, conservation supervisors, conservation district staff, and community leaders have the ability to dream and need to exercise their abilities to create a vision for the future. The long range planning process allows this look beyond today. Some key benefits include:

- The process provides a way to actively involve a large constituency in the planning process. Involving large groups of community members encourages them to learn more about conservation.
- Getting beyond the obstacles of today can free people to look at creative and unusual solutions to conservation issues facing a community now and in the future.
- Long range planning identifies emerging trends and provides a process to address them

before they become critical problems.

- Good long range planning makes strategic planning better. Through review of the “big picture” of conservation assures that strategic planning addresses the most pressing issues facing the conservation district for the next three to five years

A Long-Range Plan is Not Written in Stone

It is a common misconception that a long-range plan once written is locked into place and not changed for the life of the plan. You should consider your conservation district’s long-range plan a flexible and changeable document.

Your written plan should be reviewed at least once a year and modified where necessary. For example, if your plan calls for expansion of your services in three years, but you suddenly find enough revenue to expand in two years, the plan will be modified.

Good Planning Takes Time

The annual long-range planning session will probably include the board, manager, staff and other resource people and last as long as one or even two days.

In that special planning meeting you should be ready to set aside the limitations that you struggle with monthly in your district board meetings. You will be asked to dream about the future of the conservation district and then plan how you will make those dreams reality over the next 2-15 years.

Planning is an exciting and vital board responsibility. Planning makes dreams reality for your conservation district.

The basic elements of a good long-range plan are:

- Do-ability: Actions can be taken to accomplish the plan.
- Flexibility: The plan can be modified over the years.
- Measurability: There are ways to identify accomplishment of the plan.
- Accountability: Completion dates and responsible parties are identified as part of the plan.

Strategic Planning

What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning is a process used by a team to make a concrete plan for the future (usually no longer than five years), document those plans, and adopt a formal method to execute those plans and evaluate their success?

Strategic plans are focused, detailed, and clear about what is to be done, who is/are involved and how, when each step is to be performed, and how the success of the plan will be evaluated.

Why should conservation districts practice strategic planning?

- To be effective, conservation district teams need to be built and developed around a specific purpose or purposes. Developing a strategic plan fosters agreement on what is to be done by the team.
- Between 50% and 70% of all decisions made at meetings are never carried out. A strategic plan provides a written record of decisions made and a plan to implement those decisions. Referring to the plan reminds everyone of what is to be done and how each step fits in the overall plan.
- “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” The process of developing a plan - and the process of carrying out a plan - increase the effectiveness of the conservation district in meeting its responsibilities.

Elements of a Strategic Plan

- Mission Statement- A one-sentence statement of the purpose of the organization (i.e., Why is the team here?). Mission statements are usually broad and open to interpretation.
- Goals- One or more statements of intent to fulfill the mission statement of the organizational unit (i.e., What do we want to do?). Goals should always relate to the mission statement; they should be relevant. Goals should always be attainable within a reasonable time so that they can be measured and evaluated. Goals are often written or updated every year or two.
- Objectives- One or more measurable statements of intent to achieve a goal. For example: “We will increase our district cooperators’ awareness of the need to control water erosion on land sloping 2 to 6 percent.”
- Strategies- One or more specific, measurable statements to define how the objective will be accomplished. For example: “We will develop, implement, and complete plans to establish erosion control systems with ten cooperators on 2,000 acres of land each for the next five years.

Conservation district strategic plans should include the goals of their Hydrologic Unit plans, their Long-Range Plans, and the Statewide Coordinated Natural Resources Conservation Plan.

Conservation District Long-Range Plan

Conservation District

I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving – Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

Organization:
Function: To take available technical, financial and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land manager with conservation of soil, water and related natural resources.
We serve:
Why:
Mission Statement:
Critical Natural Resource Issues:
Critical Geographic areas (attach map):
Statements of Intent (Outcome) for each of the natural resource issues. (Format – by <date> the <natural resource> will <outcome>)

Priority Actions for the next 12 months:

Staffing Needs:

Annual Budget Needs:

Salaries & Benefits: _____

Equipment: _____

Office Supplies: _____

Programs & Cost Share: _____

Rent & Utilities: _____

Other: _____

Total Annual Budget: _____

Key Individuals to Reach for Program Success: