



Make a Difference

By Allison Rinard

Natural Resource Educator, Whidbey Island Conservation District

WINTER ON THE HOMESTEAD

As a new farmer on Whidbey Island, I find the short, dark days of winter to be the perfect opportunity to observe and reflect on the landscape of my acreage. While the hay isn't growing, and I'm not breeding my animals, I have the time to observe and appreciate the natural rhythms of the homestead. I know (and depend on the fact) that the long, abundant, and full to the brim days of summer are lurking right around the corner. This is the perfect time to snuggle up with a good book or attend a virtual training and put some dedicated attention towards future plans.

Did you see a great idea on YouTube or social media? Want to jump at the chance every time you see free ducks or pigs listed? You're not alone! Sometimes those spur of the moment projects lead to problems down the road when you find out the location wasn't ideal or you don't actually have the proper environment for your efforts to thrive. That's where some advance thinking and time spent organizing your ideas on paper can really come in handy.

Even if you don't consider yourself a farmer or commercial producer, any rural property can benefit from developing a management plan. Planning saves you money, conserves natural resources, protects water quality, enhances open space, promotes wildlife habitat, makes your place more attractive and promotes the health and safety of your family, animals and plants.

Tips for Rural Property Planning

Look at what you have: Before developing a plan, look around and make a sketch or take a few notes on your property, noting soil type (look up your soil type at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>), neighboring land uses, topography and water flow.

What are your goals? How do you want your place to look in five years? Do you want to raise livestock? Do you have pasture? Are you interested in landscaping with native plants?

Use the Conservation Concerns Tool at farmers.gov to learn about different types of conservation issues that might impact the productivity or resources on your farm, ranch, or forest.

Check your local Conservation District for more information and resources. Natural resource planners can give you free, non-regulatory advice and even help you develop a farm plan.

What's a farm plan?

A farm plan is a tool developed by you and staff at your local conservation district to help you manage the resources on your land. The plan contains an inventory of your farm or property and outlines actions and a schedule for you to make improvements based on your goals for the property.

Once you decide you want a farm plan, the conservation district planner evaluates your property's natural resources like soil, water, animals, plants and air quality. When possible, they also try to connect landowners with funding to help you implement key improvements.

Help for Whidbey's Small Farms

There are many resources available specific to the needs of small, beginning farmers and what the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) calls "historically underserved producers." The USDA's Census of Agriculture shows Island County hosts one of the largest percentages of historically underserved producers compared to surrounding counties: 97 percent small, 50 percent women, 34 percent beginning, 17 percent veteran and 7 percent minority. These producers are eligible for higher rates of financial assistance from the USDA.

The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) provides farmers, ranchers and forest managers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement "conservation practices." Using these practices can lead to cleaner water and air, healthier soil and better wildlife habitat, all while improving agricultural operations.

Together, NRCS and producers invest in solutions that conserve natural resources for the future while also improving agricultural operations. Staff at Whidbey Island Conservation District can help you navigate applying for cost-share assistance through two NRCS programs: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program is a great entry point for beginning farmers. Participating farmers utilize conservation practices to improve their structures, management, and plantings. NRCS provides reimbursement payments for some costs associated with these practices, as well as personalized technical expertise from their staff.

The Conservation Stewardship Program helps you build on your existing conservation efforts while strengthening your operation. Whether you are looking to improve grazing conditions, increase crop resiliency, or develop wildlife habitat, NRCS planners can design a plan to help you meet those goals. For example, you can look at ways to mitigate the impact of excess water during rainy seasons; reduce greenhouse gas emissions; improve the cover, food, and water available for domestic and wildlife species; or increase energy efficiency.

Head to whidbeycd.org/apply-aglandstewardship for more information on how to get started with these programs and for more awesome tips and resources!



Your Designated Driver ... a Friend for LIFE!

360.914.3250

24/7 Rides • Safe, Friendly & Reliable

www.therocktaxi.com

ALREADY OWN A DUCTLESS HEAT PUMP?
THEY NEED REGULAR MAINTENANCE AND WE DO MAINTENANCE ON ALL MAJOR BRANDS OF DUCTLESS HEAT PUMPS

Island Ductless
heat pumps
Your local experts on ductless heating and cooling
360.321.4252
Islandheatpumps.com

WHIDBEY'S LARGEST SELECTION OF FINE ART SUPPLIES!

Proudly supporting our Military by offering 15% Off custom Framing Every Day

*Cannot be combined with any other offer.

- SHADOWBOX & NEEDLEPOINT FRAMING
- ARCHIVAL & PRESERVATION FRAMING
- CREATIVE CUSTOM DESIGNS
- HUGE SELECTION OF READYMADE MATS & FRAMES
- FINE ART SUPPLIES

"Whidbey's largest selection of Fine Art Supplies!"

GENE'S ART & FRAME SINCE 1967
"If you want your custom framing beautiful, come to Gene's!"
250 SE Pioneer Way • Downtown Oak Harbor • 360-675-3854
www.genesartframing.com
9:30-6 Monday-Friday, 10-5:30 Saturday

WHIDBEY'S LARGEST SELECTION OF FINE ART SUPPLIES!