

KANSAS CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

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# RESOURCE PLANNING WORKBOOK



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## **INTRODUCTION: WHY RESOURCE PLANNING?**

Long-range resource planning is an essential component of good stewardship. To remain operationally viable, organizations must conduct a periodic analysis of the environment in which they function and create a roadmap for navigating that environment efficiently and effectively.

In a time of shrinking budgets and the need for increased accountability by publicly funded entities, it is more important than ever for Kansas conservation districts to create a sound plan aimed at preserving the state's natural resources. Natural resource issues can be most effectively addressed with a locally led resource planning process that is used to develop a multi-year resource management plan. The resource plan identifies actions that the community supports as well as strategies for how they will be accomplished.

Because funding agencies often look for evidence of planning and public support as criteria for funding, the resource plan can then be used to compete for funds to implement solutions. More broadly, individual conservation districts must be able to demonstrate to their county commissioners, as well as state and federal lawmakers, that they continue to be relevant and that they still play a crucial role in maintaining the quality of our soil, water, air, plants, and animals.

This workbook is designed to guide conservation districts in the development of a five-year resource plan that will outline their roles and responsibilities in addressing local conservation issues. The workbook features a **five-step planning process**:

- I. Identify concerns and opportunities.
- II. Determine objectives.
- III. Conduct a resource inventory.
- IV. Formulate possible solutions (action steps).
- V. Make decisions.

**Upon completion of the workbook by conservation districts, Robin Lehman at KACD will use the information provided to draft the five-year resource plan for your district.** You will have an opportunity to make additions or other revisions to the plan draft before it is finalized for adoption by the conservation district's Board of Supervisors.

This resource planning process will yield important data with regard to conservation resources and issues across the state as a whole. By participating, your district can be eligible for a \$200 reduction in your 2013 KACD dues.

## **A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT**

Conservation districts may be facing their greatest challenge: survivability. With reduced government resources and a changing political landscape, districts may need to reinvent themselves. No longer is the “status quo” acceptable behavior. In order to survive, let alone excel, districts will have to be very diligent in the coming years to maintain relevance in this changing environment. Identifying threats and challenges is an essential part of being both responsive and proactive and thus continuing to play a key role in the state’s conservation practices.

Please give critical thought to the following list of challenges and incorporate them into your discussions during plan development.

- Antiquated conservation district law
- Local, state and national movement for less government
- Less revenue available at all levels of government
- Non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) fulfilling conservation needs
- Urban partners becoming more important to survival
- Increasing threat of regulatory programs
- Board member recruitment increasingly more difficult
- Population trends and demographics of county populations
- Considerations of district consolidations
- Contingency plan if your district receives reduced funding
- Loss of identity

## 2012 PLANNING TIMELINE

- On March 6, 7, 8, 14, 15      The long-range resource planning process will kick off at the Spring Area Meetings. A detailed overview of the process will be presented along with an explanation of the tools available to assist conservation districts with their plans.
- By late March, a module will be added to the Division of Conservation's supervisor training modules that will provide detailed assistance and examples to be used in the planning process.
- By April 1      The Five-Year Resource Planning Workbook will be distributed to conservation districts (those that were not picked up at the Spring Area Meetings).
- District supervisors may begin to utilize the supervisor training module to initiate their local planning process.
- By August 1      Completed workbooks should be mailed to Robin Lehman at KACD for development of a draft plan.
- At Fall Area Meetings, time will be designated for discussion of the five-year resource planning process.
- By November 1      Draft plans will be submitted to conservation districts for review.
- KACD Convention will include a block of time for discussing plan drafts with individual districts.
- By December 15      Conservation districts that adopt a final Five-Year Resource Plan by December 15, 2012, will be eligible for a one-time \$200 reduction on their 2013 KACD dues (the remaining amount of regular or maximum club dues must be paid in full).

## **TOOLS TO ASSIST DISTRICTS**

- Supervisor training module with detailed assistance and examples for resource plans.
- Time allotted at the Spring Area Meetings and the Fall Area Meetings for discussion of the resource planning process.
- Resources on KACD website (FAQs, possible discussion forum) to assist planning effort.
- Robin available via email throughout process to respond to questions.
- Time scheduled at KACD Convention to assist individual districts with planning questions.

## **STEPS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS**

### **I. Identify Concerns and Opportunities**

The most valuable aspect of a long-range resource plan in each conservation district is its local focus. It looks at specific conservation challenges in the county as well as opportunities for new partners, new goals, and even potential new funding sources.

Districts should not only look at natural resource concerns and opportunities. Perhaps just as important are some of the human and financial resources in your area that serve as either opportunities to improve program success or constraints to achieving goals.

Districts may want to capitalize on unique opportunities to present themselves, such as hosting a regional or national conference or holding a meeting of key legislative leaders in your community. Also be aware, however, of impending events that could be detrimental to the district.

Remember, two key elements of being “strategic” are maximizing opportunities and minimizing threats.

### **II. Determine Objectives**

Objectives are the desired future conditions. They can be quantitative (expressed in numbers) or qualitative (expressed in words), intended to address the concerns and opportunities identified in Step I. For each resource concern or opportunity, ask the following questions:

- What do we want to happen with this problem/opportunity (in what condition do we want this resource to be)?
- What do we know about this problem/opportunity (what is happening, where is it occurring, how long has it been happening, has the problem intensified, what sources of information about it are available)?
- What do we need to know about this problem/opportunity (what questions do we have that need to be answered in order to solve it, what questions need to be answered in order to implement our solutions)?

### **III. Conduct a Resource Inventory**

Resource inventories are information about current conditions in the county. They detail the condition of soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources, as well as human, financial, and equipment resources. Performing a resource inventory will reveal those that are available and those that are needed in order to successfully meet the identified objectives.

Conducting a resource inventory helps bring about a more effective planning process with improved decision-making and an increased likelihood of plan implementation in the following ways:

- Helps the district identify short-term projects to maintain momentum and build trust and confidence in the planning process.
- Encourages holistic thinking by increasing understanding of watershed functions, land uses, and interactions.
- Provides an opportunity to gather relevant social, cultural, and political information about communities within the district boundaries.
- Initiates public outreach with non-committee members and potential partners.

### **IV. Formulate Possible Solutions (Action Steps)**

Once objectives have been identified and an inventory of resources conducted, the committee should brainstorm and consider alternatives for addressing the concerns. In addition to formulating strategies that will solve the problems and opportunities identified, consideration should be given to their acceptability to local citizens, existing opportunities, and ways to prevent additional problems from occurring.

Strive for different and innovative solutions that could be implemented using *existing financial resources*. Make a preliminary evaluation of the proposed action steps, including an estimate of future conditions if no action is taken. Effects should include estimates of ecological, social, economic, and other consequences of the various alternatives. Determine the effectiveness of the solutions in addressing the concerns, taking advantage of opportunities, and meeting county conservation objectives.

## **V. Make Decisions**

After the first four steps are completed, decisions should be made about which solutions, or action steps, will best address concerns and opportunities, first by maximizing the use of available resources and secondly by solutions that could be implemented if additional resources became available.

As you complete the five steps, think in terms of presenting your five-year resource plan to county commissioners and other lawmakers who are themselves faced with finding solutions and making decisions under current and future budget constraints. Be sure to include what your county conservation district does well and how you can perform your role even better.



# RESOURCE PLANNING WORKSHEETS

(Continue on reverse side of  
worksheets if necessary)

\_\_\_\_\_ **County Conservation District**

**PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**Supervisors:**

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**District Employee(s):**

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**NRCS Personnel:**

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**Other(s):**

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## I. Identify Concerns and Opportunities

*Examples:*

- Decreased funding from county.
- Increasing channelization causing stream bank erosion in urban growth areas.
- Opportunity to collaborate with neighboring counties on programs/events.

1. What are your most significant **natural resource issues** (e.g., changing land use, water quality, threatened and endangered species, flood mitigation, etc.)?

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2. What are your most significant **human resource assets** (e.g., lots of volunteers, good board members, effective leadership, motivated politicians and citizenry, etc.)?

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3. What are your most significant **human resource challenges** (e.g., people too busy to volunteer, no local support from citizens or politicians, conflicting visions of the conservation district, etc.)?

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4. What are some of your **financial opportunities, constraints, or uncertainties** that could either enhance or limit the success and future of the district?

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5. As you look into the future, think about any specific events, programs or sources of funding that could provide an important **opportunity** to enhance your district. Think about conferences, annual meetings, funding programs, celebrations, prominent or influential visitors, etc. List what you could do to take advantage of those opportunities.

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6. There may be important **challenges** that may limit the success of your district in the future, such as budget cuts, upcoming elections with loss of political or financial support, key personnel departures, etc. List these challenges and ways to minimize their impact.

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## II. Determine Objectives

*Examples:*

- Strengthen community relationships.
- Educate the public and political leaders about what the district can and has done for the county.
- Establish a fully sustainable long-term funding plan, including marketing.
- Build organizational capacity to achieve organizational sustainability.
- Clarify and promote the identity of the district.

1. For each of the concerns or opportunities identified in Step I above, what do we want to have happen with this problem/opportunity (in what condition do we want this resource ultimately to be)?

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2. What do we know about this problem/opportunity (what is happening, where is it occurring, how long has it been happening, has the problem intensified, what sources of information about it are available)?

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3. What do we need to know about this problem/opportunity (what questions do we have that need to be answered in order to solve it, what questions need to be answered in order to implement our solutions)?

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4. With a better understanding of the scope of the problems/opportunities our county faces, what are our objectives for addressing them?

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### III. Conduct a Resource Inventory

For this section, districts may want to use a part or all of recently completed needs assessments or inventories. Possible resources would be WRAPS (Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy) Plans and National Resources Inventories (NRI's). Focus should be given to the changing demographics and political environment.

1. Provide a **district description**, including location and physical characteristics (geologic, topography, soils and land classification, and climate).

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2. What are the **economic, sociologic, environmental and cultural features** of your district? (Examples might include regional population trends, economic development, county infrastructure, growth management, changing farming methods, growing farm size, absentee land owners, etc.)

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3. Provide an **evaluation of the natural resources of your district** (a combination of inventory and judgmental features pertaining to the extent and general usage of land, water, fish and wildlife, etc. Examples: growth management, effects of urbanization on stream quality, farmland preservation, land use trends, threatened and endangered species, habitat loss, etc.).

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4. What **conservation measures and actions** have been completed and what practices or programs are needed? (Examples might include conservation plans, land usage and management practices, water management programs such as an Agricultural Water Quality Management Plan or flood control and water resource developments, ground water management, NPS Management Plan, Riparian and Wetland Protection Plan, public information and education, etc.)

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5. Provide an **inventory of available assistance** (type and extent of aid reasonably anticipated – federal, state, and local financial and technical assistance such as cost-share, contributions, state and county aid for operations, grant opportunities, private-sector sponsorship, etc.).

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## IV. Formulate Possible Solutions (Action Steps)

*Examples:*

- Develop a fundraising plan.
- Develop a watershed plan to address stream bank stabilization concerns.
- Develop contingency plans if the district loses operational funding.
- Invite county commissioners and other lawmakers on tours highlighting conservation practices.

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## V. Make Decisions

*Examples:*

- Work with KACD and DOC leadership to develop contingency plans if district receives reduced funding.
- Hold a field day for farmers, civic groups, bankers, county commissioners and other potential partners.
- Hold appreciation dinner for elected officials.

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