



Strategic Plan

February 10, 2022

Introduction / History

The Northwest Clean Air Agency strategic plan is a working document intended to help the agency identify goals, prioritize projects and guide decisions.

Formed in 1967, NWCAA has had many strategic plan iterations over the years. In 2012, the agency's Board of Directors instructed staff to begin work on the latest version. The plan was designed to be updated periodically to adapt it to changing conditions within and affecting our jurisdiction. The agency reviews and, if needed, updates the plan at least every three years.

Plan History (Beginning 2012)

- NWCAA Board adopted strategic plan on Dec. 12, 2013.
- NWCAA Board adopted updated strategic plan on May 12, 2016.
- NWCAA Board adopted updated strategic plan on Oct. 8, 2020.
- NWCAA Board adopted updated strategic plan on Feb. 10, 2022.

Problem Statement

Air pollution causes and contributes to human health issues, reduces quality of life, damages the environment, and is a barrier to economic vitality. Historically, our region has enjoyed some of the best air quality in the country. NWCAA's efforts have contributed significantly to this status quo. In order to maintain and improve our air quality, continuing efforts are needed because good air quality is not self-sustaining.

Agency Mission

We are stewards who preserve, protect and enhance air quality for the benefit of current and future generations in Island, Skagit and Whatcom counties by fostering individual responsibility and assuring regulatory accountability.

Current Contextual Factors Affecting Our Efforts

- Wildfires are becoming more frequent and more intense, resulting in:
 - Worsening air quality in our region, and
 - Increasing threat of a public health emergency, and
 - A need for greater collaboration and cooperation with other entities such as public health agencies, and
 - A need for an enhanced monitoring network to provide the public and partner agencies actionable information on air quality during wildfire smoke events.

- Our efforts are part of a larger collaboration with other entities; establishing and improving relationships are important to our success.
- Climate change is affecting the roles of federal, state, and local governments, requiring coordination and clarity on the roles of each.
- The public is generally unaware of their individual impacts on air quality.
- The public is generally unaware of or misunderstands the role of NWCAA.
- The agency is undergoing a long-term digital transformation – existing workflows are maintained even as new work flows are developed and implemented that better meet the agency needs and public expectations on data and information access.
- COVID-19 is requiring NWCAA to adapt to changes in the work environment while maintaining the existing mission.

Desired Result of Implementing Strategic Plan

Clean air for everyone in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties, and an economy and environment that are enhanced as a result. Specifically,

- The public and the environment are protected from excessive levels of air pollution including pollution from industry, outdoor burning, residential wood stoves, and construction activities,
- NWCAA implements a fair regulatory environment where no business or individual is unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged,
- NWCAA communicates timely, accessible, and actionable air quality information to the public and our partners,
- Individuals make choices and act in the interest of protecting air quality, and
- People seek air quality information from NWCAA recognizing that it is their most reliable, accurate, and available source of that information.

Values We Leverage to Bring About this Result

- Adaptability: We continuously evaluate and strive to improve, adjust to new facts, conditions, laws and regulations. We explore issues and are unafraid of untried solutions or options.
- Accountability: We are fair, transparent, and responsible for our actions and we communicate and define those actions.
- Integrity: Our actions are honest, ethical, fair, rational, and science-based.
- Environmental Justice¹: We seek to address environmental justice issues in air quality within our community.

¹ Defined as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, culture, national origin, income, and educational levels with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of protective environmental laws, regulations, and policies. (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2020, EJ 2020 Glossary)

- Competence: We are skilled, proficient, and equitable in our work and we strive for continual improvement.
- Empathy: We listen, connect, and understand the community and other stakeholders.

Strategies

1) We Will Work to Maintain Clean Air in Our Region

- (a) Issue permit and enforcement decisions that are
 - (i) Complete, and
 - (ii) Concise, and
 - (iii) Defensible, and
 - (iv) Timely in accordance with Federal and State laws.
- (b) Promulgate regulations that are
 - (i) Substantive, and
 - (ii) Fair, and
 - (iii) Appropriate.
- (c) Measure and assess ambient air quality with a network of instruments that
 - (i) Meet applicable federal and state standards, and
 - (ii) Address evolving local and regional needs, and
 - (iii) Provide the public and partner agencies actionable information on air quality during impaired air events.
- (d) Assure facilities and individuals comply with air quality laws and regulations by conducting regular and robust field verifications/inspections, complaint response, and emissions inventory reviews.
- (e) Hold businesses and individuals accountable by addressing and resolving non-compliance issues promptly and fairly.

2) We Will Collaborate with Agencies and Organizations To Achieve Shared Goals

- (a) Maintain and, where necessary, establish mutually beneficial partnerships with local, state, regional agencies/organizations to identify and collaborate on shared goals.
- (b) Clarify roles and needs with partnering agency staff and leadership on new projects and periodically on ongoing work.
- (c) Build communications strategies with our partnering organizations to assure consistent and mutually beneficial messaging.

Agencies/Organizations such as:
 EPA
 National Weather Service
 National Legislators

State Department of Ecology
State Department of Natural Resources
State Department of Health
State Department of Commerce (Planning)
State Legislators
Local Health Departments
Local Fire Departments
Local Planning Departments
Local SEPA Officials
Local Elected Officials
Other Local Clean Air Agencies
Environment and Climate Change Canada
Health Canada
B.C. Ministry of Environment
Metro Vancouver
Frazier Valley Regional District
Opportunity Council
Sustainable Connections
Local Active Environmental Organizations
Local Active Business Organizations
Universities in Washington

3) We Engage with the Community and Build Awareness of NWCAA and Influence Individual Actions that Affect Air Quality

- (a) Effectively communicate to and engage with the public so people know who we are and what we do, and to come to us first for air quality information.
- (b) Act as a convener of information on climate change and act as a resource, as requested, for governments within our jurisdiction.
- (c) Implement an overall communications plan for the agency with identified audiences, specific messages, measurable outcomes, and a multimedia implementation strategy.
- (d) Provide public access to agency air quality information and records.
- (e) Communicate and inspire actions that reduce air emissions from homes, facilities and transportation through our programs, outreach and grant opportunities.
- (f) Inspire awareness and reductions in outdoor burning and wood heating impacts, with a special focus on helping Columbia Valley area residents create and implement a long-term strategy for reducing smoke pollution.
- (g) Facilitate prompt and complete responses to requests for public records and demonstrate transparency.
- (h) Provide improved processes for regulated businesses to interact with the agency.
- (i) Provide online submission of permit applications and reporting.
- (j) Provide tools for public to be more knowledgeable of air quality.
- (k) Provide compliance assistance tools for small business.

- (l) Provide "How to" information for public comments and participation.

Resources and Assets

1) NWCAA Attracts and Retains Superior Employees

- (a) Help employees be as healthy as they can by providing comprehensive medical benefits, a vibrant employee wellness program, and similar efforts that promote health improvement.
- (b) Assure pay and benefits are competitive with other employers for comparable positions by maintaining employee compensation slightly above market average.
- (c) Annually adjust compensation using an index that reflects changes in the local economy.
- (d) Provide training that meets or exceeds that needed for position descriptions and work assignments.
- (e) Foster and demonstrate an atmosphere of continual improvement, striving for excellence.
- (f) Regularly review position descriptions to ensure they address current needs.
- (g) Assure employees perform job tasks described in their job descriptions and accomplish relevant goals.

2) NWCAA is Financially Stable

- (a) Account for financial resources and safeguard agency assets
 - (i) Conduct annual internal review of compliance with agency purchasing, asset tracking, and money handling policies.
 - (ii) Every other year, conduct a physical inventory of capital equipment and attractive assets.
 - (iii) Implement audit recommendations as appropriate.
- (b) Maintain adequate financial reserves
 - (i) Review reserve account balances annually and maintain equal to or greater than Board-established reserve targets.
 - (ii) Review reserve targets no less frequently than every 5 years and consider adjusting if needed for financial stability.
- (c) Ensure that fee-based programs are self-sustaining
 - (i) Conduct an annual review of fee based programs for self-sufficiency based on fees. Implement efficiency gains as part of continual improvement for all programs with particular focus on those that are not self-sustaining. When necessary, propose fee adjustments to the Board to achieve or maintain self-sufficiency.
- (d) Obtain and maintain current and reliable equipment and systems

- (i) Assure that the current ambient monitoring network structure and staffing is meeting current needs for data collection and air shed management.
 - (ii) Maintain ambient monitoring equipment inventory adequate to assure stable operation of the network.
 - (iii) Assure that agency network systems, hardware, and software are meeting current and projected needs.
- (e) Assure agency record assets are protected and maintained in a digital system to facilitate operational efficiency and meet current information governance expectations.