INTRODUCTION

The Washington Conservation Voters (WCV) 2017-2020 Strategic Plan took place over the course of arguably some of the most consequential years in American history. This timeframe was bookended by the election of Donald Trump in 2016, his unprecedented attacks on democratic institutions and environmental protections, and then in 2020, by a global pandemic, long-overdue racial reckoning, and attempts to undermine the outcome of our national elections.

As an organization committed to societal change, this has been a time of intense advocacy and deep reflection. Given the scale of our environmental challenges and the limited timeline in which we are working, WCV knew we had to go much deeper into the political process than our historic role of getting candidates elected. We helped to elect Governor Inslee twice, but his climate policies faced continuous uphill battles in the legislature — especially in the Senate. Meanwhile, local governments were making critical decisions that would either lock our state and region to reliance on fossil fuels or help drive a clean energy future.

WCV determined that to create the political conditions that would support climate action and a more just, equitable and sustainable world, we needed to build political power over multiple election cycles at the local and state level, especially in key areas of our state. This meant looking at the entire election cycle from recruiting candidates, getting campaigns launched and working throughout the campaign, to supporting elected officials while in office.

We launched a candidate recruitment program and expanded our field team to engage activists and support campaigns. We created the Evergreen Future campaign to connect candidates with strong environmental policy and hold them accountable to its vision. We worked with partners to defend democratic institutions, make voting more accessible, and engage more people in the electoral process.

These efforts resulted in major gains for Washington’s environment. With new legislative leaders, we have secured some of the most progressive and equitable climate policies in the nation. We have stopped every attempt by Big Oil and Big Coal to expand their footprint in our state. We increased funding for environmental programs and fought to bring an equitable approach to those investments. We expanded voting justice in our state, and more people — especially those who were not voting consistently — voted.

During this plan, WCV continued to become a more anti-racist organization. We grew our analysis and understanding of the ties between systemic racism and environmental degradation. We acknowledge that our 35 years of advocacy have left many impacted people and communities behind. Our position and power as a historically white-dominant organization necessitated that we apply an intersectional racial justice lens to our framework for change. We made significant shifts in our internal organizational practices and our external advocacy and political work. This will continue to be a focus in our next strategic framework.

WCV also deepened our partnership with Washington Environmental Council. The transformational successes achieved during this plan relied on the strategic use of our complementary 501(c)3 and 501(c)4 tools, investment in significant organizational growth and capacity building, and the leadership of our two organizations under a single CEO with shared staff and two boards of directors who work closely together.

We are proud of our work under this plan and how well it has set us up for the future. Learning from the past four years, we developed a vision for where WCV and our work need to take us, which we share in the final section of the report. We are grateful for the support of the donors, foundations, activists, board members, volunteers, and staff who have helped us navigate this tumultuous and exciting time.
ELECTIONS

Elections have consequences — it matters who is at the table at every level of government. Over the last four years, WCV has built and strengthened environmental majorities from the state legislature to local City and County Councils, Port Commissions, and Public Utility Districts.

As we launched the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan, state-level environmental progress had been consistently blocked by a Senate split evenly between Republicans and Democrats. In 2017, we had a key opportunity to create a slim environmental majority with a special election in the Senate. WCV invested in building the largest field program focused on a legislative district in our history, and successfully elected Manka Dhingra. We refined our methods to build on that success, and expanded environmental majorities in the legislature even further in 2018 by electing the largest class of environmental champions in a decade. Then we broke through the Senate log jam with key wins in 2020.

Combined, these gains brought the most consequential environmental legislation in a generation — 100% Clean Electricity, the Climate Commitment Act, a statewide Clean Fuel Standard, and more (see pg 11). These policies were spurred by the massive local grassroots momentum for climate action we built through organizing for I-1631, a 2018 ballot measure which set the bar for equitable climate policy.

Unique to WCV, we don’t stop at electing environmental champions to the state legislature. We know the implementation of state laws and many other key environmental decisions happen at the local level, and we need environmental majorities there to ensure clean air and clean water for all communities. We engage in a variety of local races, including City and County Councils, Port Commissions, and Public Utility Districts. Our geographic focus over the past four years directly ties to our policy goals - we targeted our local investments heavily in communities on the front lines of fossil fuel expansion, including Vancouver, Tacoma, and Whatcom County. Notable highlights include:

- Winning the most expensive Port races in state history in Vancouver (2015 and 2017) and blocking Tesoro Savage, the largest proposed oil export terminal in the country (2018)
- Investing in local and state races in Tacoma year after year, building a base of environmental activists, and ultimately flipping a key Senate seat (2020)
- Safeguarding the environmental majority on the Whatcom County Council (2017, 2019) and then electing an environmental champion as Whatcom County Executive (2019), which led to enacting the nation’s first permanent fossil fuel ban in a refinery community (2021)
Our electoral efforts during this Plan were grounded in breakthrough work with the **Our Votes Count** coalition. Our Votes Count built on the research conducted by our sister 501(c)3 organization Washington Environmental Council and Community Action Network on which strategies most effectively turned out infrequent voters. We took the lessons learned from this published, nonpartisan research, and applied them to specific candidates we were working to elect. Building out a broad electoral coalition and using these strategies allowed us to **communicate effectively with infrequent voters** who were aligned with us on the issues, and not being targeted by other campaign efforts. Turning out this set of voters delivered the margin of victory in many key races. We have refined this work and grown the coalition, and our tactics are now used in progressive electoral campaigns across Washington.

One key goal of our Strategic Plan was to **anchor ourselves more deeply in communities** where we work. Too often, political work is transactional: a political group shows up for one election cycle then leaves, abandoning the knowledge gained and relationships built during their time in the community. We recognized that to build a strong, durable movement, we needed to remain active and engaged in communities even after a campaign goal has been met. We shifted our organizing model and have worked to develop meaningful, long-term relationships with candidates we elect and those who help elect them. This effort has paid off — we **have built a strong and engaged base of activists** that turn out for events and hearings, support Get Out The Vote activities, and work with us to address community environmental concerns.

**“We expanded environmental majorities in 2018 and broke through the Senate log jam in 2020.”**

In addition to our direct electoral work, **WCV endorses many candidates for office across the state.** As one of the only political organizations in Washington focused specifically on environmental progress, our endorsement carries substantial weight. In the past four years, we have worked to make our endorsement process even more robust. We invested in staff capacity, increasing the number of endorsements we make by over fifty percent. However, at the start of this Plan, WCV still focused on backing candidates we deemed likely to win, disproportionately favoring white candidates entrenched in traditional political systems. We re-designed our endorsement questionnaire with a racial equity lens, and worked with community members to make the process more accessible. By expanding our criteria to include environmental justice, **we are better set up to endorse candidates who represent overburdened communities** and will serve the needs of those most impacted by pollution and climate change.

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- **Nov 2017:** Manka Dhingra elected flipping state Senate, and Don Orange elected flipping Vancouver Port Commission
- **Jan 2018:** Tesoro Savage mega-terminal defeated in Vancouver
- **April-Nov 2018:** Built statewide grassroots momentum for climate action through I-1631
- **Nov 2018:** Elected largest class of environmental champions in over a decade to legislature: 7 House seats and 3 Senate seats
- **Jan-April 2019:** Passed 100% Clean Electricity, suite of orca bills, oil transportation safety
- **Nov 2019:** Elected Satpal Sidhu to Whatcom County Executive
- **2020:** Evergreen Future launched, strengthened environmental majorities further in legislature: 3 House seats and 1 Senate seat
- **2021:** Passed Climate Commitment Act, Low Carbon Fuel Standard, HEAL Act, permanent ban on new fossil fuel infrastructure in Whatcom County
Our expanded field staff, strategy, and systems enabled broader and deeper engagement with activists and built the momentum needed to secure big wins and strengthen the environmental movement overall.

- Our expanded team of four field organizers led by a Field Director helped us evolve citizen engagement to a holistic, year-round approach that includes legislative and electoral activities. We now offer a variety of engagement opportunities on state and local issues, and multiple pathways for activists to engage at the level best suited to them, from digital actions, to doorbell days, to Lobby Day, and other options. We also provide training and support for people to become movement leaders.

- During this Plan, WCV invested heavily in organizing in several key geographies to build political power: Vancouver and Clark County, Tacoma and Pierce County, East King County, and Whatcom County. We shifted away from “parachuting” into districts during major statewide races toward building a consistent presence in those communities. By staying engaged during local election years and growing our base of supporters for climate action during I-1631, we have been able to shift the balance of power in these areas and build strong environmental majorities not only in the state House and Senate, but also in City and County Councils, Port Commissions, and Public Utility Districts.

“We have shifted the balance of power in key geographies.”

- 2018 was a huge year for our grassroots climate organizing efforts as we grew our supporter base for climate action in Washington alongside I-1631. Our field team engaged thousands of activists, volunteers, and members to build momentum for equitable clean energy in our state.

- Together with partners, WCV relaunched Environmental Lobby Day during this Strategic Plan. In 2019 and 2020, this event drew a record 500+ people from 48 of 49 legislative districts. We mobilized more than 100 activists who came out for public hearings in Olympia and spoke in support of climate action at 13 legislative town halls around the state.

- We used a variety of new organizing tools and technology for more effective grassroots mobilization, including investing in new texting and phone systems to reach more people. We utilized data-driven strategies to determine which messages, messengers, and modes of contact are most effective for activating low frequency voters or issue-specific activists. During the pandemic, we successfully leveraged virtual organizing strategies to engage a growing grassroots base.

3,548 volunteers
241 canvasses, phone banks and text banks
44,500 doors knocked
86,500 calls made
108,000 texts sent
155 in-person events with 13,500 attendees
33 public hearings
25 online workshops and trainings
Over 370,000 actions taken by members and supporters

Over 370,000 actions taken by members and supporters

- WCV is investing organizational resources in helping build the next generation of environmental leaders. We run a paid field organizing internship program for young people to engage in environmental changemaking and develop concrete skills to support their career development. We also work to amplify the energy of the youth climate movement, partnering with groups such as Our Climate, the Sunrise Movement, and Fridays for the Future, where WCV organizers serve as mentors and provide capacity so that young people can lead the way.

40 field interns trained from 2017-2020
CANDIDATE RECRUITMENT

At the start of this Strategic Plan, candidate cultivation and recruitment in the progressive community was miles behind our opposition. Our opposition has invested in long-term cultivation and candidate recruitment at all levels of government, which has resulted in substantial electoral gains.

- WCV now has a year-round candidate recruitment program that maintains a list of potential candidates for state and local offices. Each year, we recruit, train, and guide a select number of candidates through the campaign process.

- In 2018 we launched I CAN Run For Office, piloting methods to recruit, train, and support candidates.

- We invested in the creation of a tool called Marriage Hero to track potential candidates across various digital organizing platforms. It syncs information from our member database with data in the voter file and allows us to track people interested in running for office.

- We started supporting candidates earlier in the election cycle — often even before they have publicly announced — to help build buzz in the political community. Depending on the race and the needs of the candidate, we help with everything from deciding when to announce and launch campaigns, helping candidates understand and message environmental policy, to how best to allocate their time and resources.

- Public Utility District (PUD) races have been an important place for this kind of investment. These races fly under the radar, but PUDs make critical decisions about power supply and could advance clean energy solutions. We focused on Snohomish, Whatcom, and Clark County after exploring opportunities in every PUD in the state and holding extensive conversations with clean energy partners.

Candidate recruitment requires significant time and resources, which is one reason it remains a challenge for the progressive community. It can take 12-18 months — or longer — to cultivate a candidate, determine the right race, and begin the ground work. For the most part, candidates who were recruited earlier ran stronger campaigns because they had time to build a strong foundation.
Even with electoral gains in 2017 and 2018, Governor Inslee’s climate policies were still stalled in the legislature. After the second year in a row that Clean Fuels passed the House but not the Senate, we took a deep look at our political, advocacy, and electoral work to determine how we could better hold Democratic majorities in both the House and Senate accountable to advance bold climate and environmental action. After a decade of a split legislature, we needed to change how we approached accountability to support strong leaders. As a result, WCV launched our Evergreen Future campaign in 2020.

Evergreen Future is a four-year road map to address the biggest threats to our home, now and in the future. It is designed to push candidates and elected officials across Washington to support the bold environmental action we need to meet our biggest challenges — climate change, racial justice, salmon extinction, and family-wage jobs that make a strong quality of life possible. The campaign platform includes four pillars: Ensuring Environmental Justice and Public Health, Acting on Climate, Clean Water and Healthy Forests, and Holding Corporate Polluters Accountable.

In 2020, WCV worked closely with trusted policy experts and political allies from environmental groups, labor, Tribes, and communities of color to develop the policy pillars. We did extensive outreach to legislative leaders, the Governor and his staff, and candidates running for office to explain the campaign and the policy platform. We incorporated the Evergreen Future platform in our endorsement process. We engaged with political donors and encouraged them to talk with candidates about the platform when making political donations.

Additionally, WCV worked with candidates on the campaign trail who wanted to embrace specific aspects of the Evergreen Future platform. We developed messaging guides tailored to candidates’ interests and districts. As a result, during the 2020 election cycle, candidates were more specific about policies they wanted to champion, like the clean fuel standard, environmental justice, and salmon recovery. This reinforced their commitment to the policies and platform, gave them credibility with the environmental base, and generated enthusiasm among campaign volunteers.

In 2020, nearly 100 candidates for state legislature signed onto the Evergreen Future platform and a majority of these candidates were elected to office. In 2021, with a strong contingent of Evergreen Future champions, Washington made historic policy gains. The legislature passed the Climate Commitment Act, the Low Carbon Fuel Standard, the HEAL Act, and many other significant policies. This cohort of new legislators was one of the most representative in history, which ensured the approach to environmental priorities was stronger than ever before.

“Evergreen Future is designed to push candidates and elected officials across Washington to support bold environmental action.”

Washington state is now a national leader on climate, environmental justice, and voting rights. There is more work to do, but we are confident in our elected state leaders to act boldly for environmental progress in the coming years.
**DEMOCRACY**

We cannot achieve environmental justice without an equitable democracy. Many of the same forces that undermine democracy also perpetuate environmental harm. Furthermore, we know that when more people participate in our democracy, environmental policies tend to win. WCV works to ensure a strong and healthy democracy by engaging in voting access and justice work, campaign finance reform, the Census, and the redistricting process. We work in partnership with a range of diverse organizations and coalitions, using our historical and political power to elevate these far-reaching issues with impacts reaching into the future.

We have made great strides to improve voting access in Washington state. In 2018, we helped pass voter pre-registration for 16 and 17 year olds. In 2019, we helped pass a law that ended prison gerrymandering, which directly impacts the 2021 redistricting process.

Our work to strengthen our democracy goes beyond voting access. We worked to ensure that campaigns for Ports followed the same campaign disclosure laws as other races in order to stop the influence of unlimited money in local races. We also invested resources in building community engagement in the 2021 redistricting process, especially in central and Eastern Washington. We are advocating to reunify certain districts where the tribal vote has been split, and we are helping advance the conversation to create a new majority-minority district in eastern Washington.

“When more people participate in our democracy, the environment wins.”

**RACIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

Our position and power as a historically white-dominant organization necessitates that we apply an intersectional, racial justice lens to our framework for change.

- WCV created our first Racial Equity Action Plan in 2017, followed by a more comprehensive plan for 2018-2020 which laid out goals for advancing racial equity in four areas: human resources, organizational culture, coalitions and partnerships, and member education and outreach.

- Some results of this internal work include: a radically revamped hiring process with more fair, accessible, and anti-bias practices; changing our unpaid internships to paid internships; racial caucusing; uplifting forms of communication, knowledge, and expression not prioritized by whiteness; co-founding a roundtable to support anti-racist learning and community building among historically white-dominant organizations; educating our members on connections between environmental and racial justice; and leveraging our platform to amplify needs and calls to action from communities most impacted by pollution and climate change.

- WCV’s Board adopted a racial equity plan for 2019-2020 that aligns with WCV’s equity goals. With a new recruitment and on-boarding process, the Board has increased its racial diversity and has also begun racial caucusing.
WCV is analyzing how we spend our organizational resources and working to increase investments in communities of color. For example, we signed onto the Political Consultants of Color pledge in 2020, committing to increase political spending with consultants of color among progressive organizations. We have driven some initial coalition investments in consultants of color, and will continue to work to actualize the demands of this pledge in the coming years.

Externally, we are working to build racial equity into environmental policies and systems at all levels of government, and transforming the historically white-dominant environmental community to be more equitable. Many policies that we and other mainstream environmentalists have advocated were not effective solutions for the people most impacted by pollution and climate change — namely, communities of color and low-income people.

During this plan, we built relationships with organizations led by communities of color and frontline communities to develop and advocate stronger, more durable policy. These include Front & Centered and their member organizations, the WA Black Lives Matter Alliance, the Movement 4 Black Lives, and Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians. We have also made strides in our understanding of Tribal sovereignty and how to directly engage with Tribal Nations — this will be a major focus of our work in the years to come.

WCV also worked to evolve our coalition advocacy to be more racially and economically equitable. Each year, we bring together a broad range of environmental interests under the umbrella of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC), and use our collective power to advance a joint set of legislative priorities. In the last two years, WCV has led efforts to better center equity in the EPC including changes to criteria for legislative priorities and new evaluation questions to assess whether a proposed priority authentically centers impacted communities in partnership with community leaders. We have garnered increased support for the Partnership Agenda which primarily addresses equity and justice-focused legislative priorities of partner organizations outside the EPC.

Our Strategic Plan included a goal of being a trusted ally for Tribal Nations and communities of color — this is an ongoing, generational effort to shift environmental advocacy to center the needs and voices of the most impacted people in developing and advocating solutions. There are a number of Tribal and community of color partners who do trust us, but we know that trust must be continually earned. We are moving into our next phase of work with a firm commitment to uphold Tribal sovereignty, and to prioritize Black leadership in the environmental movement.
BUILDING OUR ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

WCV has built a strong foundation to support our work. We have strategically invested in our financial health, communications, and robust data systems during this Plan. These investments multiply our impact.

Financial Health
- Through diversified revenue streams, we grew our base of financial support and surpassed our 2020 Q4 budget goal of $925,000 in 2018 — two years early.
- WCV’s Action Fund is a Political Action Committee (PAC) that raises funds to support political campaigns each year. During this Plan, we have raised from $233,000 up to nearly $900,000 on an annual basis for the PAC, depending on the needs of that particular election cycle.

Communications
- WCV’s robust communications team has transformed the tools and strategies we use to tell our organizational story. Four years ago, our social media presence was virtually non-existent. Now, we have a dynamic, engaged presence on social media and have built a broad platform for action, improved our credibility, and reached new audiences, nearly doubling our email list.

Data & Systems
- We have made huge technological strides in the past four years. We upgraded and streamlined our fundraising, organizing, communications, and engagement tools. By integrating our systems we have improved member engagement and outreach.
- The Voter Activation Network integration is particularly innovative. We are one of few organizations nationwide with this integration, allowing us to match and sync data from the voter file to member profiles in Salesforce. This has been instrumental for our organizing and voter engagement work.

2017: $672 K
2020: $1.2 M
- Grants +597%
- Individual Giving +67%
- Events -34%

2017: $763 K
2020: $1.2 M
- Program +96%
- Fundraising -25%
- Administrative +30%
CONCLUDING WORDS

Our accomplishments and learnings over the past four years have led us to develop a new mission and vision for WCV, which are laid out in our Strategic Framework 2021-2025. We have a responsibility to center communities overburdened by environmental harm. We will continue to mobilize the public, elect champions for the environment, and hold those leaders accountable for bold, equitable action in order to advance environmental progress and justice. For the next five years, we are strategically focusing on Collaboration & Partnerships, Finances & Funding, Environmental and Racial Justice, Health & Unity, and Environmental Progress. These pillars will guide our fight for Washington’s communities and the land, air, and water that sustain us.

POLICY WINS AND FUNDING SECURED

CLIMATE AND CLEAN ENERGY
- 2018 Secured $80M for clean energy projects, building efficiency upgrades, and weatherization
- 2019 100% Clean Electricity
- 2019 Appliance efficiency
- 2019 Clean Buildings
- (commercial buildings statewide)
- 2019 Secured $340M in the state capital budget for environmental and climate projects
- 2020 Updated state GHG emission targets with new Climate Pollution Limits
- 2020 SEPA rulemaking on GHG emissions
- 2020 WSDOT budget proviso on Transportation For All
- 2021 Low Carbon Fuel Standard
- 2021 Climate Commitment Act
- 2021 HEAL Act

FOSSIL FUEL
Coal
- 2016 Gateway Pacific coal export terminal (Cherry Point, Bellingham, WA) defeated
- 2017 and 2018 Permits denied for Millennium Bulk Terminals (Longview, WA) and legal appeals denied
- 2019 Coal export facility at Fraser Surrey Docks (British Columbia) defeated

Oil
- 2016 Strengthened oil spill prevention law
- 2016 Whatcom County established moratorium on new fossil fuel projects
- 2016 Established ban on bulk oil terminals in Vancouver
- 2016 Shell Oil terminal (Anacortes, WA) defeated
- 2016 Waterside Energy refinery (Longview, WA) defeated
- 2016 U.S. Development Group oil terminal (Hoquiam, WA) defeated
- 2017 Westway Terminal Company’s proposed oil facility retrofit (Hoquiam, WA) defeated

PUGET SOUND
- 2018 No Discharge Zone established
- 2018 Intervened in federal lawsuit against EPA to protect No Discharge Zone
- 2018 Secured $24M for Stormwater Financial Assistance Program investments
- 2018 Racial equity and environmental justice criteria added to Model Toxics Control Act (MTCA) Public Participation Grants
- 2019 MTCA funding stabilized and increased

VOTING JUSTICE
- 2018 Automatic Voter Registration
- 2018 Same-day registration
- 2018 Pre-registration for 16 and 17 year olds
- 2019 Statewide Prepaid Postage
- 2019 Native American Voting Rights Act
- 2019 Ending Prison Gerrymandering
- 2019 Requiring Notification of Voting Right when being released from prison
- 2021 Restoring voting rights to formerly incarcerated people