



Initiative for
Rural Innovation
& Stewardship

Strategic Plan 2010 – 2012

Initiative for Rural Innovation & Stewardship
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The IRIS Opportunity

We live in a complex world with an uncertain future.

There are some who react by shrinking — into fear, distrust, narrow self-interest.

But most people want more. They want to create a bright future — for themselves, their families, *and* their communities. They want to be good stewards of their environment ... to contribute to vibrant community life ... to participate in a flourishing economy.

They want to make a positive difference in the world around them.

Yet all too often they don't know where to start or what to do.

That's where IRIS comes in. We offer forward-thinking people in North Central Washington what it takes to make their voices heard above the noise:

1. **Knowledge** of our region and our proud history of successful stewardship and community achievement that we carry forward.
2. **Confidence and optimism** fundamental to growth, change, and an expansive sense of possibility.
3. **Positive community dialogue** that starts with gratitude for the contributions of our neighbors and moves toward shared possibilities for the future.

We want everyone in North Central Washington to *know* that this corner of the world is where they can roll up their sleeves, dig in, and shape the future they desire.

This level of capacity-building and community-building takes real commitment, sustained over time. That's why this business plan is designed to make IRIS a sustainable organization that:

- Incorporates the success factors we've gleaned from healthy organizations in our region.
- Is founded on a culture of mutual respect and ownership that honors the contributions of our supporters.
- Stays connected with the community we serve – to be responsive to changes and influences that can affect our work.
- Has solid, sustainable financial support from a variety of sources.
- Provides a model of community-building that can be replicated in other parts of our state, nation and world.

We welcome you to this quest for a vibrant future for North Central Washington — and beyond. On behalf of the IRIS team, thank you.

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IRIS Executive Summary

IRIS supports vibrant, healthy, sustainable rural communities in North Central Washington by building knowledge, confidence, and positive community dialogue. Our successful programs foster cooperative solutions to complex issues by connecting people, place and possibility:

- *Workshops and Forums*, such as the annual North Central Washington Community Success Summit, showcase community successes and fuel collaboration around shared goals.
- *Place-Based Educational Programs* actively engage people in gathering and sharing success stories about the lands, life and culture of the region. Participants gather oral histories, track seasonal patterns on the land, and use photo-monitoring to assess landscape change.
- *Topical Assessments* information to be used to clarify priorities, strengthen collaboration, and spur action. The NCW Regional Food Coalition and the Healthy Lands Roundtable are examples of this approach.

Building community to strengthen good stewardship and sustainability

Sustainability is a natural outcome of good stewardship -- individuals, families, and organizations working together to assure the future health of our environment, communities and economy; learning from the past; and innovating in the face of change.

IRIS serves as hub for a community learning network that promotes successful stewardship and sustainability by helping to inspire, integrate and grow innovative ideas and projects.

Success stories are the key to community-building

Gathering, preserving and creating stories is central to the IRIS approach and is used as a community-building strategy across all IRIS programs and activities.

Stories of past stewardship successes show the connection between people and the land — and link together the past, the present, and the future.

Sharing those success stories develops gratitude for the contributions of our neighbors, joy in human inventiveness, and an expansive sense of possibility. This focus on success frees our imaginations and leads to the confidence and optimism that are fundamental to growth and change. We become more creative — better able to invent the future and take action, both individually and collectively.

A proven organization ready to take on a larger role

IRIS is a lean organization, designed to scale staff levels up or down as needed to take advantage of new opportunities. Current staff includes a coordinator, web manager, and outreach specialist supplemented by program-specific contractors. A board and an advisory group guide the work of IRIS.

Today we are building on our proven programs and working toward the organizational sustainability that will enable IRIS to serve this region over the long term and become recognized as a replicable model for fostering sustainable rural communities.

Mission, Vision & Principles

Mission

Our mission is to foster sustainable rural communities by connecting people, place and possibility. We believe that thriving communities in a healthy environment create success.

Vision

We strive to build a community in which all voices can be heard and all contributions to lasting stewardship are honored. We see a vibrant community that appreciates the connections between the past, present and future in this place and that innovates and adapts to change as it creates its own story of sustainability.

Principles

Supporting Stewardship

The vitality of rural communities depends upon good stewardship of our farms, ranches, and wildlands and the economic, environmental, and community benefits that they provide.

Innovation

We encourage original and creative thinking by working with others to advance projects that build community. Our organizational structure is grassroots in nature and adaptive to change.

Commitment to Diverse Rural Communities

Our work is shaped by the diverse communities in which we work and is responsive to individual and shared needs of all people including those of future generations.

Diverse and Effective Partnerships

Broad and far-reaching partnerships, based on mutual benefit and trust, are essential to achieving our mission. Our partners range from individuals to large public and private organizations.

Commitment to the Future

We are committed to developing sustainable farms, ranches, and natural areas capable of meeting the needs of the present while leaving equal or better opportunities for the future.

Achievements

For an overview, see Table 1.

The Role of IRIS

IRIS functions as a member of the greater North Central Washington community working in partnerships with the non-profit and public benefit organizations that we serve. Our board and advisory group members represent the Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan and northern Grant county region.

Our mission of fostering sustainable rural communities by integrating economic, community and environmental values drives us to work with a diverse array of partners that range from arts and history organizations to those focused on the economy and environment of our region (Table 2).

We are a grassroots organization that seeks to complement the work of others by promoting cooperation and successful stewardship. Our focus on story, and on engaging the community in the gathering and telling stories of stewardship success sets IRIS apart from other regional organizations. We strive to serve as a model for leadership, collaboration and action that can be replicated elsewhere.

Program

IRIS provides a range of programs and services that build knowledge, confidence, and positive community dialog needed to build sustainable communities. Our services are designed to facilitate success at a variety of scales from individual landowners, businesses and organizations to agencies, associations and communities. Revenue for the services outlined below is generated through a combination of grants, donations, sponsorships, fee-for-services and product sales (Table 2).

Convening Workshops and Forums

IRIS functions as a catalyst for collaboration by organizing workshops, lectures and forums that bring people together to learn about new ideas and approaches and to develop strategies that integrate economic, community and environmental stewardship. Examples include:

- *NCW Community Success Summit* – An annual event designed to celebrate successes, build confidence, and foster community collaboration around shared stewardship goals.
- *NCW Regional Food Coalition* – IRIS convenes this group quarterly to help develop a cohesive strategic plan for strengthening food security across the region.
- *NCW Healthy Lands Roundtable* – An informal learning network convened annually to increase awareness and collaboration around biodiversity stewardship efforts.

Providing Place-Based Educational Programs

IRIS develops and provides integrated educational programs that engage citizens in discovering, appreciating, and caring for the lands and people of this region. Together these programs are designed to provide replicable modes for building a constituency for stewardship by providing opportunities for citizens to move from passive to active roles. IRIS educational opportunities bridge the gap between land managers and citizens, complement and amplify existing interpretive programs, and provide time saving information, technology and tools that support land stewardship. Current programs include:

- *Gathering Our Voice* – Brings the people of North Central Washington together to gather and share stories from the past that can be used to create our future. Volunteers and partner staff conduct interviews about successful stewardship practices.
- *Witnessing Change* – Provides a tool for landowners to engage citizens in learning more about their land management objectives and for citizens to contribute to telling the story of landscape change through the use of designated trails linked to a web-based photo-monitoring program.
- *Connecting With Nature* – Engages citizens in learning more about the plants, animals, and natural systems of North Central Washington by tracking patterns and indicators through the seasons via a website linked to a quarterly column in [The Wenatchee World](#).

Assessments that Enable Innovative Stewardship

IRIS gathers, analyzes and shares existing information needed to clarify priorities and advance collaboration among landowners, local communities and regional partners with similar and overlapping needs and interests. Examples include:

- *Habitat Farming Enterprise Program Feasibility Study* – This study assessed the feasibility of building a program for paying farmers to grow riparian habitat instead of tree fruit in high priority salmon recovery areas of North Central Washington. This study is published on the IRIS website.
- *NCW Biodiversity Council* – A pilot project that involved working with planners to adapt a statewide map of biodiversity priorities to a regional level so it could be used to guide land conservation, agriculture and economic development across the region. Final report and maps are available on the IRIS website.
- *NCW Regional Food System Baseline Assessment* – Gathered information about the direct market sector for use in building shared strategies for increasing food security in the region. This report is published on the IRIS website.

IRIS Action Plan 2010 – 2012

Where we want to be in three years and why

Goal 1

Implement a financial plan that energizes and supports the work of our staff, board members, advisors and partners. By 2020, we will be a proven model for building community which means securing a stable fiscal foundation over the next three years.

The strategies:

- Transition from start-up executive committee to working board and advisory group.
- Develop a marketing plan for products and services.
- Increase the capacity of IRIS to gather and share information that fosters sustainability throughout the region.
- Achieve an income spread of 9% sponsors and gifts, 29% earned income including partner contributions, and 62% grants.

Goal 2

Facilitate a regional learning network that fosters sustainable rural communities by connecting people, place and possibility. We want to build community at regional to local scales in interdisciplinary ways that reveal new opportunities.

The strategies:

- Organize the NCW Community Success Summit and supplement to showcase success and fuel collaboration.
- Use *Gathering Our Voice* to grow the network of story gatherers and story tellers that help to describe the region and create inspired stories for the future.
- Develop *Witnessing Change* and *Connecting With Nature* as part of a Stewardship Cooperative that engages citizens in discovering and appreciating our lands.
- Enable innovative stewardship by supporting basic research and training needed to clarify priorities and strengthen collaboration.

Goal 3

Share models for engaging communities in telling and creating their own stories of sustainability outside of North Central Washington. We want to see even more vital communities engaged in amplifying success as a tool for building sustainability.

The strategies:

- Share lessons learned by creating best practices handbook for place-based educational programs
- Offer consulting and training programs across Washington

Principals and Oversight

The Principals of IRIS

Staff

Nancy Warner, IRIS Coordinator, has a BA in biology from the University of Colorado, and master's degrees in biology/ecology and American studies from Utah State University. Before joining IRIS in 2008, Nancy worked 18 years with The Nature Conservancy building and managing community-based conservation and restoration programs in California, Colorado and North Central Washington. Nancy serves on the board of the NCW Audubon Society.

Cheryl Dawes, IRIS Web Manager, has a BS in Geological Sciences from the University of Washington and a Graduate Certificate in Science Communications from the University of California, Santa Cruz. In addition to 10 years in university public relations work, Cheryl has a strong background in website and publication design and production. She serves on the board of the Woods House Conservatory of Music.

Kristi Roberts, is an AmeriCorps volunteer who serves as the IRIS Outreach Specialist in 2010. With a degree in history and anthropology from Clemson University, Kristi supports the volunteers and partner organizations engaged in the *Gathering Our Voice* program and coordinate a regional photo drive for the Foodways and Byways project.

Board

John Thoren, IRIS Board President grew up on a ranch in eastern Douglas County before beginning his 42-year career in commercial banking. A Vice President and Relationship Manager with KeyBank's AgriBusiness Group, John earned a bachelor's degree in agriculture and a master's degree in agricultural economics from Washington State University. In addition to IRIS, John serves on the advisory board for the Washington Water Project.

Lisa Pelly, IRIS Board Vice-President is active in statewide efforts to address the enhancement and protection of fish and wildlife habitat and water resources on private and public lands. She serves as the Director of Trout Unlimited's Washington Water Project designing and completing multiple projects to enhance instream flows. Lisa attended the University of California at San Diego and the University of Washington.

Rufus Woods, IRIS Board Treasurer is the third generation editor and publisher of The Wenatchee World, seasoned in every aspect of newspaper operations. Rufus earned a BA from the University of Puget Sound and an MBA from the Tuck School at Dartmouth College. In addition to IRIS, Rufus volunteers time to the Washington Special Olympics and the YMCA.

Julie Morgan, IRIS Board Member, earned bachelor's degrees in community and environmental planning, and comparative religion at the University of Washington, and a Master of Science degree in natural resource management at Central Washington University. Julie has worked throughout the state of Washington on issues related to the recovery of ESA-listed salmon and steelhead, and is currently the Executive Director for the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery

Board, where she oversees the development and implementation of a wide variety of salmon recovery related initiatives.

Mike Rickel, IRIS Board member grew up in Omak, WA, Wenatchee Valley College and Central Washington University, graduating with a degree in Biology. He has worked with the US Forest Service, Wenatchee National Forest conducting field studies throughout the Lake Wenatchee, Leavenworth, Entiat and Lake Chelan Ranger Districts. He has also worked for Parametrix Consulting in Wenatchee primarily planning and implementing biological mitigation designed to offset impacts from large construction projects. In late 1998 he began working for what is now known as the Cascadia Conservation District.

Marilynn Lynn, IRIS Board member has co-operated her family organic farm in Bridgeport since 1991 and has served as a board member for Tilth Producers of Washington, Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network, and WSDA Organic Food Program. Marilynn worked several years with the Foster Creek Conservation District coordinating and facilitating the watershed planning effort in Douglas County, facilitating the Douglas County Regional Shoreline Master Program Update, and serving as the Bridgeport Community Librarian. She is committed to the possibility of a sustainable future based on the appreciation of diversity, willingness to collaborate, and trust and respect for others.

Table 1. IRIS Achievements

- 2003 Convened the Washington Family Farm Summit and published white paper and proceedings summarizing strategies for action.
- 2004 Awarded \$20,000 grant from the Washington Biodiversity Council to conduct the Healthy Lands Initiative, one of two pilot projects in the state selected to inform the statewide strategy.
- 2005 Completed first IRIS Strategic Plan for 2005-2007.
- 2006 Completed Habitat Farming Enterprise Program Feasibility Study contract with Chelan County.
- 2006 Convened Healthy Lands Initiative Forum as part of Washington Biodiversity Council pilot project.
- 2007 Revised IRIS Strategic Plan for 2008-2010.
- 2008 Awarded 3-year \$150,000 grant from the Icicle Fund for operating support.
- 2008 Received \$46,000 planning grant from the Icicle Fund to conduct first phase of the *Gathering Our Voice* project, Homegrown Ski Areas of North Central Washington.
- 2008 Awarded \$50,000 pilot project grant from the Washington Biodiversity Council to begin implementing priority actions in the Washington Biodiversity Conservation Strategy including development of the *Witnessing Change* photo-monitoring program.
- 2009 Completed \$50,000 contract with Chelan County to develop Habitat Farming Enterprise Program Economic Remuneration Model.
- 2009 Received 3-year \$150,000 project grant from the Icicle Fund for *Gathering Our Voice*.
- 2009 Completed North Central Washington Regional Food System Assessment.
- 2009 Completed NCW Biodiversity Council pilot project.
- 2009 Convened the first North Central Washington Community Success Summit including release of the 28-page supplement of success stories and the DVD, *Sustaining Success. Stewardship Stories from NCW*.
- 2010 Launched *Gathering Our Voice* project, Foodways & Byways of North Central Washington.
- 2010 Secured non-profit status from IRS.

Table 2. IRIS Program, Customers and Value to Customers

Program	Customers	Value to Customers
<p>NCW Community Success Summit <i>Fueling community collaboration</i></p>	<p>Conservation organizations Social services organizations Business community Schools Landowners & managers Citizens of all ages</p>	<p>Recognize organizational success Highlight leadership Strengthen partnerships Forge new connections Fuel collaboration</p>
<p>More than 50 citizens gathered at the 2009 Summit to share their own successes, learn about others, and shape shared goals for the region. 5,000 copies of the NCW Community Success Summit supplement featuring 25 success stories were distributed across the region increasing knowledge and excitement about our collective potential. Revenue was generated through a combination of registration fees, financial contributions from 10 sponsors, and in-kind donations.</p>		
<p>Healthy Lands Roundtable <i>Coordinating biodiversity priorities, sharing best practices</i></p>	<p>Land owners & managers Land trusts Conservation groups Conservation districts Citizens</p>	<p>Increase awareness of successes and challenges Enhance collaboration Develop shared priorities Clarified messages to public</p>
<p>Twenty eight organizations sent representatives to the first Roundtable in January 2010 where new connections and opportunities for collaboration surfaced. IRIS staff time supported by general operations grant in 2010. Future roundtables will be supported by partner contributions and grants.</p>		
<p>NCW Food Coalition <i>Increasing the food grown & consumed here</i></p>	<p>Farmers Local food groups Educational groups Conservation districts Economic development groups</p>	<p>Develop shared priorities Improve communication with constituencies Build support for implementing shared strategies</p>
<p>Using a shared leadership model, 60 people from around the region have participated in four quarterly meetings to date resulting in a one-page overview. Start-up supported by general operations grant. Continued work to be supported by grants and donations directed at implementing priority strategies.</p>		
<p>Gathering Our Voice <i>Using past successes to shape the future</i></p>	<p>Museums & arts groups Land trusts Centers for arts and nature Schools Businesses Landowners</p>	<p>Provide historical context for current management Highlight stewardship successes Increase volunteerism Provide training in</p>

Program	Customers	Value to Customers
	Citizens of all ages	methods Build community across sectors
<p>GOV, cont'd. More than 150 interviews have been gathered by volunteers and partner organization staff and archived in local museums to date. Two DVDs have been produced and sold throughout the region; <u>Homegrown Ski Areas of NCW</u>, and <u>Sustaining Success, Stewardship Stories from NCW</u>. A third, <u>Foodways & Byways</u> is currently in production. Fifteen organizations, including eight museums and the regional library, have participated in the project to date with revenue and in-kind contributions from private and public grants, donations from businesses, community organizations, and individuals.</p>		
<p>Witnessing Change <i>Citizen based photo-monitoring</i></p>	<p>Public landowners such as parks, wildlife areas, nature centers, USFS, DNR, NPS Private landowners including preserves, farms, ranches, forests Community organizations, schools, clubs Business organizations Citizens of all ages</p>	<p>Build constituency for stewardship Opportunities for citizens to be active participants in learning network Time-saving information, technology and tools for landowners Opportunities for landowners to network with others around shared challenges and successes Increased volunteerism Training in photo-monitoring</p>
<p>Website developed and used to support the first three photo-monitoring trails designed to monitor public use, riparian restoration, and forest fuel reduction. Firm costs needed to develop the longer-term business plan for the program currently under development with four additional landowners. Revenue for initial website development provided by a grant from the Washington Biodiversity Council and in-kind contributions from landowners. Revenue for phase two business plan development to be provided by grants, fee-for-services, landowner contributions, trail sponsors, and in-kind contributions. See www.witnessingchange.org</p>		
<p>Connecting With Nature <i>Tracking seasonal patterns and indicators</i></p>	<p>Non-profit nature groups Scientists Landowners & managers Educators Families</p>	<p>Access to information and opportunities for on-the-ground learning Opportunities to network with others</p>
<p>IRIS developed the <i>Connecting With Nature</i> website to invite reader inquiry through a series of eight quarterly columns printed in <u>The Wenatchee World</u> in 2009-2010. Three additional columnists from partner organizations, including NCW Audubon and the Native Plant Society, will contribute columns, articles and observations to the program beginning in 2011. Revenue for initial program development provided by an operating</p>		

Program	Customers	Value to Customers
grant. Revenue for expanded program to be provided by grants and sponsors.		
<i>Habitat Farming</i> <i>Paying farmers to grow habitat</i>	Tree fruit growers Salmon recovery groups Conservation groups Economic development groups Scientists	Keeping good farmers on the ground Balances economics of farming with economics of conservation Builds rural communities
Working with an advisory group of tree fruit growers, IRIS used this 2006 study to build interest and understanding in the program potential and support for next steps. Revenue for habitat farming program development to date has been provided by the Washington Biodiversity Council, Chelan County and additional partner contributions.		
<i>NCW Biodiversity Council</i> <i>Developing shared landscape priorities</i>	Land Use Planners Conservation groups Agriculture groups Economic development groups	Shared data set Regional approach Tool for constituency building Tool for shared visioning and strategy development
Process conducted in 2009 clarified the need to provide training in the use and interpretation of biodiversity information for local planners and a framework for building community support. Revenue for the pilot project was provided by the Washington Biodiversity Council.		
<i>NCW Regional Food System Assessment</i> <i>Learning more about direct market success</i>	Farmers Regional food system groups Education and marketing groups Consumers	Shared recommendations for action Documented knowledge that will grow Resource directory Literature review highlighting successful models Better understanding of needs
IRIS convened a regional team to conduct this 2009 assessment and make recommendations for action. In 2009 the NCW Community Success Summit requested that IRIS act on the recommendation of convening the NCW Regional Food Coalition to develop a shared strategy. Grants for implementing the top priority of the food security strategy will be sought by members of the Coalition in 2011.		