

Initiative for Rural Innovation & Stewardship

2008-2010 Strategic Plan

“Connecting people to facilitate positive change”



The mission of the Initiative for Rural Innovation & Stewardship is to advance the development of sustainable rural communities and natural resource-based economies by facilitating research, education, and development projects that effect positive change within the agriculture and natural resource sectors.

INTRODUCTION BY THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

On behalf of the Initiative for Rural Innovation & Stewardship (IRIS), a standing committee of the North Central Washington Resource Conservation & Development Council (NCW RC&D), it is my honor to present our 2008-10 Strategic Plan. This plan is the written public report that highlights the current and completed activities of the organization and sets forth three new strategic issues and goals. Developed by the IRIS Committee, this document will be presented to and approved by the Board of Directors of the NCW RC&D and shared widely with partners throughout the region and state.

The plan builds on the intensive work of the committee, staff, and community leaders that went into the 2005-2007 Strategic Plan and outlines actions we will take to advance three strategies:

Strengthening our internal organizational capacity to be more effective in setting direction, raising funds and achieving IRIS goals

Facilitating the development of a regional information hub related to family farms, ranches, forests and natural resource-based industries.

Building on past and current initiatives and advancing a balanced portfolio of programs that complement and bridge economic development, agriculture, and land conservation efforts in the region.

We believe that these strategies will position IRIS to effectively respond to and meet the needs of the diverse people and communities we serve in North Central Washington and beyond.

We remain committed to our vision of the Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship. Thank you for your support and your interest in the programs of IRIS.

Sincerely,

John Thoren, Chairperson
Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship
October 2007

Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

The mission of the Initiative for Rural Innovation & Stewardship is to advance the development of sustainable rural communities and natural resource-based economies by facilitating research, education, and development projects that effect positive change within the agriculture and natural resource sectors.

Vision

Research

IRIS works to identify and advance methodologies and appropriate technologies that support natural resource-based enterprises and that enable the next generation to manage resources in a sustainable manner. We strive to ensure relevance and applicability by supporting, catalyzing and facilitating place-based research that arises from landowner, local community, and regional partner needs. As an example, IRIS facilitates the development of family farm practices that are energy efficient, ecologically sound, economically viable and adaptive to economic, social and environmental change.

Education

IRIS provides a range of educational opportunities from structured courses, programs and workshops to facilitated collaborative learning networks that focus on such topics as sustainable and diversified natural resource-based economies, interpreting the larger context of outside socio-political issues, building social capital, and recognizing shared values and respect for innovative approaches to common problems. We assist people who seek to address the real short-term and long-term challenges associated with agriculture and natural resource sectors in the 21st century. IRIS educational opportunities cultivate individuals and citizens as well as knowledge of place and technologies.

Community Development

IRIS supports socially responsible development of strong, diverse agriculture and natural resource-based economies through programs and projects that strengthen rural landscapes and communities. This includes family farms, forests, and ranches as well as recreational areas, natural areas and associated enterprises. IRIS can function as a neutral convener for groups and communities engaging in cooperative problem solving. Our projects enhance volunteerism, multi-generational and ethnic involvement, and recognition of the need to cross traditional socially- and culturally defined boundaries between urban and rural and producer and environmental sectors of society. We seek to build leadership, pride and ownership in shared and innovative outcomes and to complement other regional and national efforts. IRIS strives to serve as a model for leadership, collaboration, and action.

Organization

Leaders at Wenatchee Valley College and the community formed IRIS in 2002 to address the social, environmental and economic challenges facing rural Washington State and its associated family-based

farms, ranches, forests and natural resource-based industries. The decline of Washington State's agriculture and natural resource-based economies and communities reflects that of agriculture and rural communities across the nation.

The concept and work of IRIS is predicated on the ideals that the vitality of rural communities, robust family-based agricultural and natural resource based sectors, and the sustainable use and stewardship of our natural assets are critical for a healthy and secure nation. The work of IRIS is also predicated upon the notion that broad and far-reaching partnerships are necessary to achieve these goals. Therefore, IRIS seeks to facilitate effective partnerships among research, education, environmental, advocacy, non-governmental, governmental, business and development entities and to bring together the generally narrow focus, limited resources and particular mandates of each partner to create the synergy needed to actualize the vision of 21st century resource utilization.

IRIS is a self-supporting, vibrant and adaptive community-based organization that is open to all. In late 2006, both IRIS and the leadership of the North Central Washington Resource, Conservation & Development Council voted to move the operations of IRIS to the NCW RC&D as both groups saw opportunities for synergism. The NCW RC&D Council provides administrative support to IRIS and serves as the fiscal agent.

A three-person IRIS Executive Committee leads the operation and management of IRIS in conjunction with a larger operating committee that includes specific project/initiative leads. IRIS responds to the needs of rural agricultural and natural resource-based communities and helps address those needs through integrated research, development and education programs and projects. IRIS functions as a member of the greater North Central Washington community and beyond to state and national levels as appropriate and needed. Project ideas can be presented to the Executive Committee and larger operating committee at any time. These ideas are evaluated according to existing priorities, capacity and the following guiding principles:

Innovation

We encourage original and creative thinking and work with individuals and partners to advance projects that balance research, education and community development goals. Our organizational structure is grassroots in nature and adaptive to change.

Commitment to 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.

Supporting Family Farms, Forests and Ranches

The strength and vitality of rural communities is linked to that of family farms, forests, and ranches and the economic, environmental, and community benefits that they provide.

Diverse and Effective Partnerships

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

Commitment to the Future

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

2008-2010 Strategic Plan

This document will set the strategic tone and direction for Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship (IRIS) over the next two years. IRIS engages in strategic planning to ensure it will be positioned to respond to the diverse and unique needs of the region.

Program/Project Focus

IRIS advances projects that are applied in nature and that address immediate needs. All programs have all three components but for each program the components are weighted differently.

Education: To address vocational, technical, and professional needs through specialized short courses, workshops, seminars, and conferences that address issues of importance to the community and that advance sustainable farming, forestry and ranching, natural resource-based industry and rural communities.

Research: IRIS initiates and supports research that is responsive and reflective of the regional needs and avoids duplicating the work of others. Examples include conducting surveys and gathering and synthesizing information on habitat farming systems that other entities are not equipped or motivated to address.

Community Development: IRIS promotes socially responsible human and community development needed to improve conditions and create sustainable rural communities, e.g., helping organizations plan, organize, and facilitate meetings, supporting business research, and other related activities.

Program Activities

Current IRIS projects include:

Education

- Hosting workshops and seminars including grassbanking, and habitat farming
- Producing educational programs that link to broader initiatives such as “The Nature of North Central Washington,” and “10 Reasons to Buy Your Food From Regional Family Farms” (www.ncwrcd.org – see IRIS Committee)
- Creating the Healthy Lands Initiative, a pilot project of Washington Biodiversity Council (www.washingtonbiodiversity.gov)

Research

- Gathering oral histories on effective food production, processing, and land stewardship methods
- Surveying Latino views of agriculture, careers, and education

- Summarizing existing incentive programs and conservation initiatives in NCW that can be used to balance the needs of biodiversity and agriculture

Community Development

- Working with the Washington Biodiversity Council to implement recommendations from the Healthy Lands Initiative
- Developing economic remuneration model for habitat farming in the Entiat River watershed
- Helping to secure funding for regional composting facilities

Completed projects include: (partial list)

Education

- Drought management seminars with Washington State Department of Ecology
- Washington State Family Farm Summit with more than 17 sponsors and 300 participants across the state
- Adaptation of Latino agriculture workforce programs curricula for the grape production industry with State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Research

- Habitat farming feasibility analysis with Chelan County
- Specialty mushroom production on apple wood chips from orchard removal with Washington State Department of Ecology
- Alternate weed control in high-density orchards with Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission and the Washington State University's Center for Sustaining Agriculture.

Community Development

- Healthy Lands Initiative, pilot project of the Washington Biodiversity Council
- Gathering Latino views of agriculture, careers, and education
- Building a Vision Conference

Current and Future Regional Opportunities

Economy

Help secure the land base needed to keep good farmers, ranchers, and foresters on the ground as land values skyrocket and development pressures increase. Foster and develop opportunities for adding value through agricultural and natural resource-based product development and marketing. Help position innovators and entrepreneurs to build a foundation for success through cooperative leadership, information gathering, and specific training. Continue to advance a strong regionally based agri-food system.

Community

Bridge gaps in skills, culture, ethnicity, age, and perspectives needed to develop the expertise, leadership, and other social capital required to cooperatively address the opportunities and challenges that meet the IRIS mission, e.g., changing ethnicity, generational changes in rural areas, urban/rural perspectives, local/regional thinking, etc.

Environment

Show how integrating environmental values can further the goals of agriculture and natural resource management through innovation and stewardship, e.g., diversified energy production, providing ecosystem services, recreation and tourism, decreased and/or different inputs, recognition of common values between rural-urban and environmental-producer stakeholders.

2008 – 2010 Key Strategic Issues, Goals and Objectives

Overview of the Strategic Plan and the Strategic Action Plan

The Strategic Action Plan is the “work plan” adopted and implemented by the IRIS Committee to facilitate and track progress on strategic goals and objectives. The Action Plan is an internal management tool that outlines specific action steps, assigns responsibilities and identifies the criteria for measuring progress. The Executive Committee will regularly review and monitor progress with the Action Plan, at least quarterly.

Note: Those listed as “Leaders” in the following work plan will assume responsibility for managing the completion of the “Key Activity,” including recruiting additional staff and committee members to assist as needed.

STRATEGIC ISSUE #1: Strengthen and develop our internal organizational capacity to be more effective in setting direction, raising funds and achieving IRIS goals

GOAL: IRIS will have initiated activities to build internal capacity related to committee and staff development, improving group processes and communication, and increasing financial stability.

Objectives	Key Activities	Leaders(s)	Completion Date	Results
1a. Explore a variety of approaches for making decisions about new project opportunities.	Review & update decision-making criteria used to assess incoming project opportunities			Decision-making matrix
1b. Expand IRIS Committee to include state, regional, and local representatives needed to link current IRIS projects to other organizations and individuals as needed to build understanding and support for IRIS and to further the development of strategic partnerships.	Develop reliable procedure for linking committee members to meetings via conference phone.	Nancy, Jay	December, 2007	Procedures and phone number in place to enable consistent use by remote members.
	Secure funding as needed.	Nancy		Funding to cover costs for one year.
	Work as a Committee to identify key people needed and a work plan to guide their recruitment.	John		2-3 members who operate at regional/ state scales

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<p>1c. Expand and enrich communication and marketing materials</p>	<p>Finish populating the IRIS web site including the addition of a clear and compelling IRIS fact sheet</p> <p>Prepare to publish an IRIS annual report for 2008.</p> <p>Create a landing page for “The Nature of NCW” that helps people engage at multiple levels with multiple partners.</p>	<p>Nancy, Denise Kincaid</p> <p>Executive Committee</p> <p>Nancy, website designer</p>	<p>November, 2007</p> <p>October - January</p> <p>May, 2008</p>	<p>Web site provides basic information about IRIS, current projects and initiatives, and links to partner sites.</p> <p>Report posted on IRIS website</p>
<p>1d. Secure staff position(s) dedicated to IRIS.</p>	<p>Work with RC&D to explore potential for hiring additional staff dedicated to IRIS.</p> <p>Develop a 2-year capacity-building grant to support hiring of IRIS staff person that complements the relationship with RC&D.</p> <p>Develop position description, post, recruit and hire at least 0.5FTE position.</p>	<p>Executive Committee</p> <p>Nancy, Bob</p>	<p>January, 2009</p> <p>March, 2008</p>	<p>Preferred option for recruiting staff position.</p> <p>Staff in place and funded for first two years.</p>

Strategic Issue #2: Facilitate the development of a regional information hub related to family farms, ranches, forests and natural resource-based industries.

GOAL: IRIS will be facilitating the integration of education and outreach programs across the region that complement the efforts of the WSU regional learning center, agricultural and conservation groups, NCW RC&D, Wenatchee Valley College, and others.

Objectives	Key Activities	Leader(s)	Completion Date	Results
2a. Develop shared understanding and strategy for effectively linking outreach programs and events that bring the agricultural, land conservation and economic development communities together.	Bring partners together to conduct strategic plan for integrating field-related outreach programs.	Nancy, Marilynn	February, 2008	Game plan – who does what and what IRIS role is in the mix.
2b. Share information by creating an on-line directory of resources and activities	Provide mission and summary of activities for each participating NCW organization	Nancy, Admin Asst	April, 2008	Web-based directory
	Provide regional calendar of events.	Nancy, Admin Asst,	April, 2008	Web-based calendar on IRIS, RC&D and EDD websites
	Create funding directory organized by source, eligible projects and time frames.	Jay, Nancy	Winter, 2008	Web-based directory

STRATEGIC ISSUE #3: Build on past and current initiatives to develop a balanced portfolio of projects and programs that complement and bridge economic development, agriculture, and land conservation efforts in the region.

GOAL: IRIS will implement integrated programs that advance the organization and balance education, community development and research goals at local to regional scales.

Objective	Key Activities	Leaders(s)	Completion Date	Results
3a. Healthy Lands Initiative:	Submit proposal and scope of work to Washington Biodiversity Council to establish NCW as a demonstration site for the second phase of a pilot project.	Executive Committee, Jay	March-June, 2008	Funding secured and second phase of pilot project launched
3b. Develop farmland preservation program in conjunction with local counties and partners.	Meet with counties and land trusts to determine interest and to coordinate action.	John, Bob, Lisa	February, 2008	Agreement on approach
3c. Habitat Farming: Complete phase two and submit proposal for phase three implementation if feasible.	Build awareness of the HFEP concept, explore successes, and apply lessons learned to the developing program.	Kirk, Denise, Nancy, Sarah	October, 2008 – January, 2009	Criteria, talking points, slide program, workshop
	Develop a business model for calculating remuneration rates for program participation.	Six-Mile Consulting	December, 2008	Scope of work, model, expert review
	Develop work plans, budgets, and contract templates needed to implement recommendations.	IRIS Director, HFEP Advisory Group	Winter, 2009	Farm restoration plan, contract template
	Submit final report.	IRIS Director, Exec Committee	December, 2008	Final report

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2c. Integrate and combine education and public outreach efforts	Host combined field tours and conferences for landowners, NGO's and agencies.	Nancy	April – October, 2008	At least six events
	Provides tools to attendees to use at home, for example a list of incentives.	Nancy, Sarah Gage	January - May, 2008	
	Provide presentations during commodity group meetings.	All	Spring, 2008	
	Host farm appreciation days.			

3d. Composting: Secure funding and support needed to implement and replicate Entiat composting program in at least one other community by 2010.	Secure matching grant for Entiat project.	Exec Committee, Wendell Black, Bob Whitehall	June, 2008	
	Scope opportunities for replicating in nearby communities.		June, 2009	
3e. Gathering Place: Launch second phase of regional oral history project.	Submit grant for equipment acquisition and training workshops.	Nancy, Kathleen	November – March, 2008	12 skilled interviewers using compatible and complementary equipment and protocols produce 48 oral histories around at least three areas of NCW.

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<p>3f. Reprint the <i>10 Reasons to Buy Your Food From Regional Family Farms</i> booklet with an expanded list of partners.</p>	<p>Edit and and reprint pamphlet. Develop distribution plan that links to other IRIS actions.</p>	<p>Kent, Kirk, Fred Berman (WSDA)</p>	<p>January, 2008</p>	<p>100,000 copies distributed across the state</p>
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Elements of the Strategic Action Plan:

Strategic Issues – These are the most important challenges for the organization to address during the term of the strategic plan. Often phrased as “How can we “

Goals – Outcome statements that will be the focus of activity over the strategic planning timeframe (2 years), as developed in the Strategic Plan

Objectives – A precise, measurable result that supports achievement of the goal, as developed in the Strategic Plan

Key Activities – What we need to do to accomplish the objective

Leader(s) – Individual or individuals who will take the lead in organizing the staff and resources to get the job done, and track and report progress

Completion Date – The target date for completion of each activity

Results– Reports, policies, surveys, written plans, data collected and other results that can verify that the activity is completed