



# Washington County Watershed Alliance (WCWA) Strategic Plan

A WATERSHED MOMENT  
2023-2028





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This strategic plan was developed on behalf of the Washington County Watershed Alliance by Earth Integration with generous support of the Washington County Community Foundation. The executive leadership team of the WCWA worked diligently with facilitation by Kimberlie Gridley of Earth Integration from September 2022 through July 2023 to complete this project. This strategic plan serves as a roadmap to guide the WCWA towards a significant increase in organizational capacity and sustainability in the next five years (2023-2028.)

By the end of 2024 much of the groundwork for continued organizational growth and expansion will have been completed.

Top priority actions to address through 2024 include:

1. Clarifying the Alliance structure through bylaws updates, committees' establishment, and expansion of the Alliance geographical focus.
2. Maintaining board accountability through development of an annual recurring board meeting calendar and board member orientation manual.
3. Strengthening member associations by clarifying the definition of 'member watershed association' and relationship to WCWA, updating member watershed association MOUs, and the bylaws Template.
4. Expanding the Watershed Assessment and Monitoring Program through development of a comprehensive WCWA Monitoring Plan, additional macro invertebrate sampling sites, and physical stream assessment throughout the watershed.
5. Hiring and managing staff through development of a personnel committee, Staff/Volunteer Manual, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for managing staff.
6. Increasing volunteer opportunities through expansion of the WCWA service area to include entire watersheds (regardless of county or state.) Expanding online presence to include active projects and 'calendar or events.'
7. Increasing fundraising and visibility efforts by organizing a fundraising event with a goal of \$5000 profit.
8. Instituting the utilizing grant administrative fees to offset the cost of organizational and grant administration by WCWA.
9. Pursuing additional capacity building funds through grant application.
10. Exploring opportunities for a fee-for-service income stream.
11. Publishing and distributing programmatic marketing materials.
12. Increasing WCWA independent management of administrative tasks and reducing reliance on administrative support from the Washington County Conservation District.

# ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

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A watershed moment is an event marking a unique or important historical change of course or one on which important developments depend. This Washington County Watershed Alliance (WCWA) Strategic Plan is truly a watershed moment for the organization. The growth and survival of the WCWA depends on the ability of the organization to act on the goals outlined in this plan. A vital change of course is needed currently to ensure the long-term viability of the WCWA. This shift will take courage, perseverance, and a commitment to the overarching vision of growing the organization from a volunteer and in-kind supported culture to a staff supported non-profit. There is a dire need among the member watershed associations to recognize the level of organizational and financial support necessary to implement any on-the-ground education and environmental enhancement projects. If the WCWA and the member associations are unable to meet the challenge of this transformative growth, the organization will inevitably cease to exist, thus creating a domino effect whereby the member watershed associations will no longer have a fiduciary agent, a grant manager, nor the ability to apply for non-profit specific project or program funds.

Through implementation of the goals and actions outlined in this strategic plan the WCWA and the member watershed associations can look forward to a thriving organization making a measurable impact in the health and enhancement of the watershed resources in Washington County, PA.

## ***Our Mission***

Through a watershed based approach, the WCWA will provide a collaborative framework to support the efforts of all local watershed associations; encourage responsible utilization of air, land, and water resources; support sound agricultural activities, encourage sustainable land use and the protection and preservation of agricultural lands; and promote the protection, preservation and enhancement of the county's natural resources, biodiversity and ecological health for the benefit of current and future generations.

## ***Our Vision***

We envision strong watershed associations throughout Washington County, PA focusing on land, water, and habitat improvement of degraded areas. We envision supporting our member watershed associations through prioritization and planning, fund acquisition and management, and organizational training and technical assistance. We envision a fully funded WCWA with an annual budget of \$100,000 - \$250,000 and two to three full-time staff. We envision a dedicated and diverse board of directors sharing the values of a science-backed and service-based leadership and business model.

## ***Our Objectives***

- To improve the overall health of the watersheds in Washington County, PA.
- To support and sustain functional watershed associations throughout Washington County, PA.
- To fund, hire, and sustain executive director and administrative support positions.

# STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE

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The Washington County Watershed Alliance (WCWA) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, comprised of representatives from member watershed associations in Washington County, PA, a representative from the Washington County Conservation District and three at-large members. The WCWA has served the residents and land and water resources of Washington County since 1998. Over the last 25 years, the WCWA has completed many on-the-ground projects and offered fiduciary assistance and grant management to member watershed associations. Organizational growth has occurred slowly, due to the volunteer driven culture of the organization. In 2022, our operating expenses total \$19,506.08. Of this total, 75% (\$14,660) came from the Washington County Conservation District in the form of in-kind staff support for day-to-day non-profit operations. More information about WCWA can be found on its website: [www.wcwalliance.org](http://www.wcwalliance.org).

## **About the Strategic Plan**

This strategic plan is a roadmap to guide the leadership of the WCWA towards growth and expansion over the next 5 years, with a focus on benefiting Washington County watershed resources and local communities. The prior 2012 Strategic Plan, and abbreviated strategic planning effort in 2018, were identified as needing to be revisited by the WCWA board leadership. The Washington County Community Foundation (WCCF) offered generous support for the development of the current Strategic Plan. This strategic plan clearly defines core strategic goals and a vision for the future of the organization. The long-term benefit of increasing organizational capacity will be realized through our collective impact to the environmental health of our local watersheds, the residents of Washington County, and our downstream neighbors. Implementation of this strategic plan will lead to on-the-ground environmental improvement projects as well as an increase in educational and participatory opportunities.

The WCWA executive leadership team worked closely with Earth Integration in the development of this strategic plan. Throughout the planning process, the team assessed organizational strengths and weaknesses and worked diligently to develop a plan that will strengthen the organization. Members, watershed associations, and external stakeholders were solicited for their input to ensure the plan benefits the WCWA and our member watershed associations. The planning process began in earnest in September of 2022 and has culminated with this plan to be approved at the August 2023 WCWA Board of Directors meeting.

## **Our Current Position**

### **Strengths**

- ~Over two decades of watershed outreach, education, and project experience
- ~Sole 501c3 watershed organization in Washington County, PA
- ~Dedicated volunteer board and member watershed associations.

### **Weaknesses**

- ~Long standing dependency upon WCCD for administrative support.
- ~Not recognized as a distinct organization.
- ~Very low annual budget
- ~No staff to carry out day-to-day operations

### **Opportunities**

- ~Expanding membership and geographical reach outside of county boundaries
- ~Pursuing grants funding through agencies and foundations to expand capacity.
- ~Harness the momentum of the strategic planning process to grow the organization

### **Threats**

- ~Loss of administrative support from the WCCD
- ~Competition for funding
- ~Loss of leadership at the board level

# STRATEGIC GOALS

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The WCWA executive leadership team identified five primary strategic goals for this strategic planning period (2023-2028.)

Our core strategic goals include:

- Creating functional governance through board leadership
- Expanding sustainable program offerings
- Increasing organizational capacity to support administrative and program staff.
- Diversifying funding sources
- Increasing our visibility through branding



# FUNCTIONAL GOVERNANCE

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## **We will create functional governance to establish a solid operational foundation for the WCWA board and membership.**

Over the last 25 years of operations, the governance of the WCWA has shifted through changing leadership, updated bylaws, and the needs of member watershed groups. Several clarifications need to be addressed in the bylaws and updates need to be made to several organizational documents (MOUs, policies, procedures, etc.)

Highlights from the strategic action plan

### Bylaws updates

- Adjust board reorganization timeline to align with elections of at-large board members.

### Policies and Procedures

- Create, vet, and distribute organizational Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with the membership.
- Update and approve Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between member watershed associations and the WCWA.
- Clarify and decide on the WCWA organizational and geographical jurisdiction.

### Definitions

- Clarify what constitutes a member watershed association.
- Clarify the relationship between WCWA and member watershed associations.

# SUSTAINABLE PROGRAMMING

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**We will expand our established programs and develop new sustainable programs.**

Sustainably funded and operational programming will lead to success of the WCWA. A lack of sustainable program funding in the past several years have limited organizational growth. WCWA seeks to differentiate itself from other local and regional environmental non-profits by identifying and focusing on necessary gaps in programming. In addition, raising the awareness of the local community regarding environmental threats and opportunities will increase involvement in our watershed programs.

## *Highlights from the strategic action plan*

- Raise awareness of watershed health through outreach and marketing
  - Design and install watershed-based street signs, including QR codes with watershed information.
  - Develop story maps of River Conservation plans and watershed details.
  - Create and distribute watershed-based mini documentaries.
- Expand watershed monitoring countywide.
- Establish a riparian buffer planting program.
- Clarify and decide on the level of WCWA involvement in county cleanup efforts.



# ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

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## **We will increase our organizational capacity to support administrative and program staff.**

For over a decade, the WCWA has operated through generous in-kind support from the Washington County Conservation District (WCCD). With recent changes in staff succession, the institutional knowledge and level of support has been reduced. To be able to continue offering fiduciary services to member watershed associations, it is necessary for the WCWA to find funds to support administrative and program staff.

### *Highlights from the strategic action plan*

- Engage board and watershed association members in organizational governance.
- Expand watershed association membership.
- Expand the WCWA service area and when appropriate establish new member watershed associations.
- Create, fund, and staff a position for day-to-day operations.
- Develop an operation manual with standard operating procedures (SOPs.)



# DIVERSE FUNDING

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## **We will diversify our income and funding streams.**

Historically, the day-to-day operations of the WCWA have been funded and managed by in-kind staff support from the WCCD. Due to shifts in priority responsibilities and staff succession, the WCCD is no longer able to offer the same level of operational support. Survival of the WCWA will rely on our ability to manage the non-profit and fund our programs through alternative sources.

### *Highlights in the strategic plan*

- Coordinate fundraising opportunities (i.e., Farm-to-Table Soiree, Know your Watershed Guided Kayaking Trip, Wine and Watershed tour, etc.)
- Solicit donations large and small.
  - Sponsorships from corporations
  - Individual donors
  - Forest and farmland preservation
- Increase memberships through establishment of new watershed groups and/or expansion of service area.
- Pursue grant awards for capacity building, organizational and program development.
- Explore fee-for-service opportunities.
- Explore investment potential (i.e., endowments and real estate)

# VISIBILITY

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## **We will increase our visibility through branding and networking.**

The WCWA is widely unrecognized as a distinct organization. This invisibility stems from two separate and coinciding dynamics.

1. The WCWA has largely been managed and operated by a WCCD staff member over the past decade. This has led to confusion in the public's perception of WCWA. At best, WCWA is viewed as a program of the WCCD. Generally, there is little to no recognition that WCWA is a distinct entity with independent non-profit status.
2. WCWA is the only 501(c)3 recognized watershed-based non-profit headquartered in Washington County. The WCWA acts as a fiduciary agent to each of the member watershed associations in the county and has limited programming apart from member watershed association programs. In addition, the fiduciary and organizational management that the WCWA bears has not been compensated as the WCCD has been offering in-kind support for several years. This has led to an invisibility of the WCWA as a separate and umbrella organization for the watershed associations.

### *Highlights in the strategic plan*

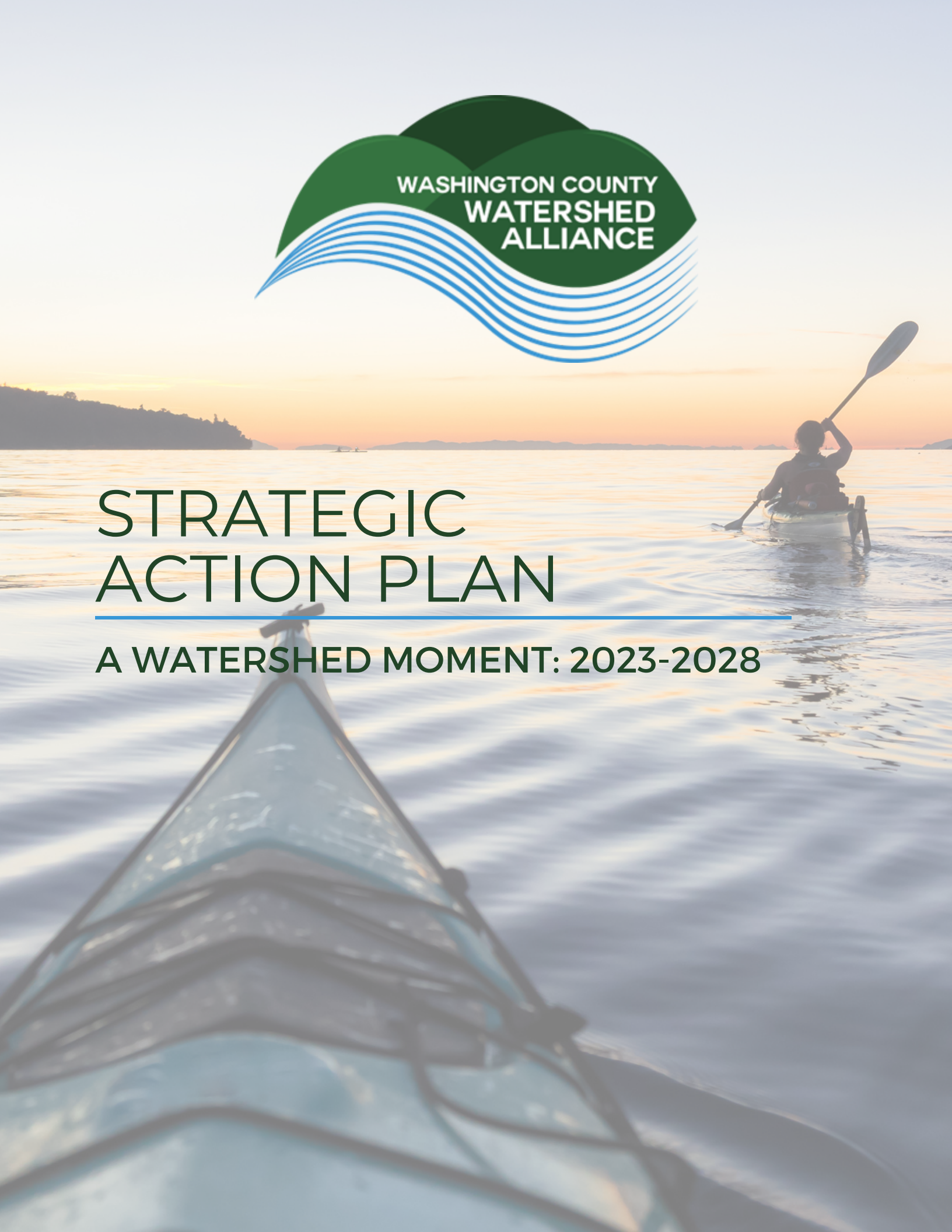
- Establish partnerships with well-known organizations such as the tourism agency.
- Become administratively independent, reducing the WCWA reliance on administrative support from the WCCD. Focus on collaboration while creating the distinction between the WCWA and WCCD.
- Establish a physical location that can be referenced and recognized. Begin with a P.O. Box address and telecommunications.
- Develop 'Elevator Pitch' for board members.
- Offer events, programming, and meetings that target specific audiences.



# STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

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A WATERSHED MOMENT: 2023-2028





**Washington County Watershed Alliance Strategic Action Plan: 2023-2028**

**Strategy 1 - Improve Functionality of Governance**

| <b>Goal</b>                              | <b>Actions</b>  | <b>Timeline</b>   | <b>Budget</b>                        |
|--|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Clarify Alliance Structure</b>        | Review & Clarify WCWA Area of Organization  | Summer 2023   | N/A                                  |
|  | Review WCWA Purpose through Bylaw Goals   | Summer 2023   | N/A                                  |
|  | Establish Alliance Committees as functional cross-organization bodies that are capable of carrying out the committees purpose for the Alliance                                    | Summer 2023   | N/A                                  |
| <b>Maintain Board accountability</b>     | Create written priority actions in alignment with the WCWA mission  | Annually  | Volunteer or Staff salary            |
|  | Develop Annual Calendar for board meetings to meet all organizational requirements throughout the year  | Fall 2023   | N/A                                  |
|  | Develop a legal counsel relationship  | Ongoing   | N/A                                  |
|  | Update Bylaws to eliminate inconsistencies, clarify uncertainties, and reflect modern nonprofit policies  | Spring 2024   | Dependent upon pro bono legal review |
|  | Develop Board Member Orientation Manual and Actively Recruit new board members  | January 2024/ Annual Review updates complete 2 months before annual meeting (March) | N/A                                  |
| <b>Strengthen Watershed Associations</b> | Maintain Alliance's 501(c)(3) status in good standing   | Current and Ongoing   | Volunteer or Staff salary            |
|  | Continue offering services needed across all Associations, (i.e. maintain website, track and organize membership, manage funds, write grants, provide technical assistance, etc.) | Current and Ongoing   | Volunteer or Staff salary            |
|  | Define 'Watershed Association', Review and Clarify Alliance & Association Relationship, and Update Association MOUs as necessary  | Fall 2023   | Volunteer or Staff salary            |
|  | Update Association Bylaw Template   | Fall 2023   | Volunteer or Staff salary            |
|  | Renew MOUs with member watershed associations every 2 years   | Biannually in January   | Volunteer or Staff salary            |

Washington County Watershed Alliance Strategic Action Plan: 2023-2028

**Strategy 2 - Expand Sustainable Programming**

| <b>Goal</b>  | <b>Actions</b>   | <b>Timeline</b>  | <b>Budget</b>   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <i>Raise awareness about our Watersheds through marketing and outreach</i> | Create Events that Connect People to their Watersheds (ie Riparian Buffer Planting, Canoe Races, Clean-ups, etc.)    | <i>Ongoing</i>   | \$500/event   |
|  | Design and establish watershed identifying street signs with QR codes linking to site specific watershed information | <i>2024 (Pilot)</i>  | \$2,000   |
|  | Create online story map for each of our member watersheds  | <i>Fall 2025</i>   | \$5,000   |
|  | Document existing stream conditions via kayak 360 camera.  | <i>2026 (Pilot)</i>  | \$5000/year   |
|  | Create and distribute a watershed-based mini documentary series  | <i>2026</i>  | \$25,000  |
| <i>Expand watershed assessment and monitoring countywide</i>               | Develop Comprehensive Alliance Monitoring Plan and Update Every 5 Years  | <i>2024 and ongoing</i>  | Volunteer or Staff salary                             |
|  | Complete physical assessment of all stream miles in Washington County  | <i>20 miles annually</i>   | Volunteer or Staff salary                             |
|  | Establish real-time continuous monitoring sites within each member watershed   | <i>10+ by 2025</i>   | Equipment - \$1000/site and Volunteer or Staff Salary |
|  | Complete point sampling at 3 sites within each member watershed  | <i>Annually, 10 macro-invertebrate sites throughout the county in 2024</i> | \$200/year and Volunteer or staff salary              |

**Strategy 3 - Grow Organizational Capacity**

| <b>Goal</b>                               | <b>Actions</b>  | <b>Timeline</b>                  | <b>Budget</b>                               |
|---|---|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Hire and manage staff</i>              | Convene a personnel committee   | <i>Fall 2023</i>                 | Volunteer                                   |
|   | Develop staff/volunteer policies (i.e., employee and volunteer manuals)                   | 2024                             | Volunteer                                   |
|   | Develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for managing staff and volunteers            | 2024                             | Volunteer                                   |
|   | Hire short term consultants as necessary  | 2024                             | \$2,000-\$5,000                             |
|   | Establish steady and secure funding for executive director                                | 2028                             | \$60,000 (Full Time Employee (FTE) minimum) |
| <i>Increasing Volunteer Opportunities</i> | Establish an annual training calendar and list of topics of interest                      | <i>Ongoing beginning in 2024</i> | Volunteer                                   |
|   | Develop and maintain online information about active projects and volunteer opportunities | <i>Ongoing beginning in 2024</i> | Volunteer                                   |
|   | Expand membership to entire area of each Watershed  | 2024                             | N/A   |



Washington County Watershed Alliance Strategic Action Plan: 2023-2028

**Strategy 4 - Diversify Funding Sources**

| <b><i>Goal</i></b>  | <b><i>Actions</i></b>  | <b><i>Timeline</i></b>     | <b><i>Budget</i></b>      |
|---|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b><i>Increase fundraising efforts</i></b>  | Plan and execute 1-2 fundraisers annually to raise a total of \$10,000   | 2024                       | \$500/event               |
| <b><i>Implement sponsorship program</i></b>   | Partner with sponsoring companies to raise a total of \$10,000 annually  | 2025                       | \$250/year                |
| <b><i>Utilize administrative fees</i></b>   | Include administrative fees with grant management for member watershed associations to support \$15,000 for labor costs. | 2024                       | N/A                       |
| <b><i>Receive funding from agencies and foundations</i></b>                                     | Pursue capacity building funds to raise \$10,000-\$20,000 for necessary organizational capacity improvements.            | Fall 2023 and as available | Volunteer                 |
| <b><i>Explore Services that help fulfill our mission that we can also earn income from.</i></b> | Invasive Species Management, MS4 Support, etc.   | 2024                       | Volunteer or Staff salary |

**Washington County Watershed Alliance Strategic Action Plan: 2023-2028**

**Strategy 5 - Increase Visibility and Branding**

| <b><i>Goal</i></b>  | <b><i>Actions</i></b>  | <b><i>Timeline</i></b>   | <b><i>Budget</i></b>                               |
|---|--|--------------------------|--|
| <b><i>Enhance organizational marketing and communications</i></b>                               | <b>Publish and distribute an annual report</b>   | <i>Annually in March</i> | Volunteer or Staff salary, \$250/year for printing |
|   | <b>Publish and distribute brochures, reports, etc that support membership drives, corporate sponsorships, and fundraisers.</b> | <i>2023 and Ongoing</i>  | Volunteer or Staff salary, \$250/year for printing |
| <b><i>Foster Successful Partnerships</i></b>  | <b>Develop relationships with local municipal officials, educational institutions, other nonprofits, and funders</b>           | <i>Ongoing</i>           | Volunteer or Staff Salary                          |
| <b><i>Identify and grow our standing in the Watershed Organization network.</i></b>             | <b>Seek out and maintain memberships to over-arching organizations, (ie. ORBA, POWR, River Network)</b>                        | <i>Ongoing</i>           | \$100 annually                                     |
| <b><i>Transform the WCWA and WCCD relationship to encourage organizational independence</i></b> | <b>Reduce reliance on WCCD staff administrative support</b>  | <i>2024</i>              | Volunteer or Staff Salary                          |
|   | <b>Transfer mailing address and phone</b>  | <i>2024</i>              | \$100  |