

# The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition

## Operations Manual

Developed by the Core Group of the  
Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition  
In preparation for the  
Ninth Annual Policy Meeting

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this document is to serve as a tool for new coalition members and a reference for existing members. As the coalition grows we want to codify coalition background and protocol in one place to make it easier for new members to navigate the RVCC. The RVCC is a flexible and constantly evolving coalition and this will be a living document.



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# ORIENTATION

## Mission

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is comprised of western rural and local, regional, and national organizations that have joined together to promote balanced conservation-based approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the rural West. We are committed to finding and promoting policy solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and well being of rural communities.

## Our Vision

The protection, management, and utilization of nature's resources have provided the basis for every human civilization known to history. Even a consumer and technology-based society must recognize this interdependence and the necessity for balancing our human accounts with nature's own budget. Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is dedicated to taking up this challenge; to representing the interests of the people and landscapes of the American West in both the policy and practical arenas; to passing on a deeper connection between our region's bounties and beauty, and our responsibilities for their sustainability; to building a legacy of opportunity and understanding for our children and their children; and to uniting and including all those who join with us in subscribing to these core beliefs:

### **INTERDEPENDENCE:**

The health of our rural communities and landscapes are very much inter-related. Restoration of the environment must occur in social symbiosis with the re-vitalization of rural communities.

### **RESILIENCE AND DIVERSITY:**

Resilience and diversity are the key components that provide for both ecosystem productivity and economic well-being.

### **POWER-SHARING:**

Collaborative decision-making, investigation, assessment, action, and monitoring are vital to all vibrant and democratic systems of resources management and stewardship.

### **COOPERATIVE PROCESSES:**

Real cooperation is inclusive and based on mutual benefits, and on respect for the strengths, differences and interests that the involved parties bring together.

### **SUSTAINABILITY:**

Long-term resource security is more dependent on re-investment in the associated ecosystems and rural economies than on the profits generated by their production.

### **OUR REGION:**

The natural resources, recreation opportunities and cultural attributes of the West make a significant contribution to the Nation as a whole.

*Above all, we believe that the future of our region, our country, and our world will depend on how well we are able to manage for the protection and productivity of our landscapes, and on what we leave behind for the generations who will come after us in these places.*

## **Who We Are**

The RVCC prides itself on being a “We” movement that seeks common ground between diverse interests. The coalition is currently comprised of more than 70 nonprofit, public, and private organizations. Our partners include rural community advocates, regional and national conservation organizations, environmentalists, business owners, federal and state land managers, researchers, county and state government, and foundations.

## **Goals**

The RVCC focuses on policy issues that affect rural communities, public lands management, and the continuation of a natural resource-based economy in the West. The central task of the RVCC is to advocate for political reforms that protect, restore, and manage natural resources. In doing so, the RVCC places a priority on ensuring that rural voices and viewpoints are represented in natural resource policies.

In addition to the activities and actions of the RVCC, the coalition maintains several core goals for the outcomes of its work:

1. Seek and develop ecologically responsible and economically equitable solutions to the systemic problems that inhibit the restoration and maintenance of forests across the west;
2. Increase support among decision makers for federal funding of restoration and maintenance of public lands and rural economic development;
3. Advance legislative ideas and influence legislation proposed by others;
4. Strengthen the voices of rural leaders, both non-elected and elected, within conservation and economic development policy; and
5. Inform the media of our priority issues and the potential benefits of the solutions we offer.

## **What We Do**

This work of the RVCC is accomplished through multiple activities, including:

- Annual Policy Meeting
- Western Week in Washington
- Working Groups

Other tools the RVCC uses to disseminate its messages include:

- Issue papers
- Testimony
- Public comments
- Sign-on letters
- Opinion editorials

## Why the RVCC is Unique

The RVCC is a multi-issue, multi-state coalition of organizations working together to address both short and long-term policy barriers. Therefore the RVCC:

- Is as interested in changing what the national policy dialogue is about, as it is in actually changing federal policies.
- Is committed to working together collaboratively, and in a way that allows for it to move forward and achieve its goals and objectives.
- Is committed to promoting long-term durable solutions and to making good things happen on the land and in rural communities.
- Adapts its processes and positions as it learns and shares with others, within and from outside of the coalition.
- Believes that change happens in many ways—incrementally, systematically, and through overhauling broken systems and **is committed to seeking change in all of these dimensions.**

## History

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition began in 2001 as a way for community forestry groups across the Pacific Northwest to come together and address policy-related issues of mutual concern. This meeting set the foundation for future Annual Policy Meetings. In subsequent years, the regional focus of the group has broadened to include other areas of the West and the coalition has grown to include participants from the ranching community in an effort to broaden the discussion on issues like restoration.

The first Annual Policy Meeting was catalyzed by several factors:

1. A sense that there were many groups who shared values and objectives;
2. Increasing frustration over national policy issues and our limited ability to access related discussions; and
3. A hope that by working together we could more effectively influence national policy.

## **COALITION STRUCTURE**

The RVCC employs an ad-hoc organizing structure with few formalities. Organizations and individuals engage and participate in the RVCC through working groups and attendance at the Annual Policy Meeting, various field tours, and trips to Washington, D.C. There are no membership, electoral, or voting requirements in our decision-making process, and participating organizations speak for themselves. Rather than selecting a single organization to formally speak for the coalition, we opt to collaborate and support each other to develop a collective and unified voice.

## **Sustainable Northwest**

Sustainable Northwest (SNW) is the convening organization for the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition through its policy program. SNW is dedicated to building the capacity of partner organizations to participate in national policy discussions, development, and education, as well as media outreach. As convener, SNW distributes information on policy developments, coordinates the working groups, works with individual partner organizations on various policy issues, raises funds to support the activities of partners, plans and organizes all coalition activities, and connects partners with the media. SNW was largely responsible for the establishment of the RVCC when the Policy Program hosted the first policy meeting in Portland, Oregon in 2001. SNW maintains a policy list serve and serves as a “central hub” for issue paper development and working group communications.

## **RVCC Core Group**

The RVCC Core Group is the leadership of the Coalition. The majority of Core Group members chair a working group. Sustainable Northwest asks participants in the RVCC who show commitment and leadership to the coalition, as well as expertise in a certain issue area, to participate on the Core Group. Sustainable Northwest does its utmost to ensure that the Core Group is a diverse group that is representative of the Coalition. Organizations on the Core Group represent local, regional, and national groups from California, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington D.C.

In order from their admission, the following organizations make up the Core Group:

- American Forests ([www.americanforests.org](http://www.americanforests.org)) (RVCC Core Group since 2001)
- Ecosystem Workforce Program ([ewp.uoregon.edu](http://ewp.uoregon.edu)) (RVCC Core Group since 2001)
- Northwest Connections ([www.northwestconnections.org](http://www.northwestconnections.org)) (RVCC Core Group since 2001)
- Sustainable Northwest ([www.sustainablenorthwest.org](http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org)) (RVCC Core Group since 2001)
- Wallowa Resources ([www.wallowaresources.org](http://www.wallowaresources.org)) (RVCC Core Group since 2001)
- Watershed Research and Training Center ([www.thewatershedcenter.com](http://www.thewatershedcenter.com)) (RVCC Core Group since 2001)
- Forest Guild ([www.forestguild.org](http://www.forestguild.org)) (RVCC Core Group since 2003)
- Siuslaw Institute ([www.siuslawinstitute.org](http://www.siuslawinstitute.org)) (RVCC Core Group since 2008)
- National Rural Assembly ([www.ruralassembly.org](http://www.ruralassembly.org)) (RVCC Core Group since 2009)
- Restore Montana ([www.wildlandscpr.org/montana-watershed-restoration](http://www.wildlandscpr.org/montana-watershed-restoration)) (RVCC Core Group since 2009)

## ***Core Group Function***

- Plan and facilitate Annual Policy Meeting, working groups, meetings, media work, and other activities.
- Meet annually to discuss strategic direction for the coalition and identify cross-cutting challenges and opportunities faced by RVCC working groups.
- Participate in monthly Core Group conference calls.

- Make strategic decisions for the RVCC enabling the coalition to respond quickly to new policy developments.
- Play a leadership role at the Annual Policy Meeting and the Western Week in Washington.
- Promote the RVCC to outside audiences and help to fundraise for the coalition.
- Core Group members also tend to be working group chairs and/or long-term leaders that coordinate actions between working groups.

## **Working Groups**

Working groups are developed at the Annual Policy Meeting (APM) after the collective identification of priority policy issues for the year ahead are decided. Meeting participants self-select which working groups they would like to join. Participating in a working group provides the opportunity to work with others in RVCC who are concerned about a particular issue and are interested in taking coordinated action to solve that issue at the local and national level. We encourage everyone to join at least one working group, however, we caution people about joining too many groups as the operative word is—WORK.

### ***Working Group Function***

- The function of working groups are to hold regular monthly conference calls throughout the year and provide the main venue to carry out the strategies developed collaboratively at the APM.
- Working groups communicate and disseminate their policy recommendations by:
  - Writing issue papers
  - Giving congressional testimony
  - Writing sign-on letters
  - Commenting on federal budgets, legislation, proposed rules and regulations, as well as administrative policy initiatives
- Respond to congressional requests, interest group dialogues, etc.

### ***Working Group Participation***

There are many ways to participate in the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition involving different levels of commitment and contribution. Individuals unable to guarantee a significant time commitment are free to join groups as an “FYI” member so they can stay informed about the working group’s actions, but not participate directly in the working group throughout the year. Below is a description of the responsibilities of the different working group participants:

### ***Working Group Chair Responsibilities***

- Actively initiate, participate, and/or lead conference calls.
- Make sure someone takes notes during conference calls and that notes are distributed within 5 business days of the call.

- Act as primary drafter, editor, and/or synthesizer of issue papers and other written materials.
- Work with group to accomplish the goals of the work plan.
- Contribute to the preparations and follow-up for the Western Week in Washington.
- Attend the Annual Policy Meeting and Western Week in Washington.
- Take a leadership role by providing perspective, ideas and information to the working group from local or other interest groups that you work with.
- Communicate the work, goals and recommendations of the working group to others.

### ***Working Group Participant Responsibilities***

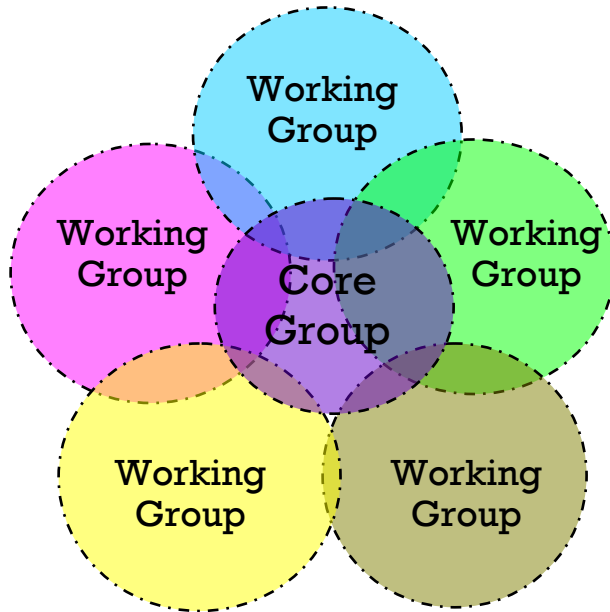
- Work collaboratively
- Participate in conference calls as consistently as possible.
- Respond to inquiries from the chairs, providing perspective, ideas and information in a timely manner.
- Initiate and raise ideas and offer to take leadership on projects you are interested in pursuing related to the goals of the working group.
- Attend the Annual Policy Meeting and Western Week in Washington as possible.
- Share local experiences with your working group and communicate the work, goals and recommendations of the working group to others.

### ***FYI Participant Responsibilities***

- Stay informed of working group activities.
- Provide perspective, ideas, and information.
- Attend the Annual Policy Meeting.
- Communicate the work, goals and recommendations of the working group to others.

## Current RVCC Working Groups

The names and objectives of the RVCC working groups are subject to change over time. A complete description of the current RVCC working groups can be found at the following web page: <http://sustainablenorthwest.org/rvcc/policy-priorities/rvcc-priorities>



## RVCC EVENTS

For a calendar of RVCC events please see APPENDIX A.

### Annual Policy Meeting

The Annual Policy Meeting (APM) is a working meeting at which participants work together to define priority policy issues, messages and solutions. It is typically held over a three day period near Portland, Oregon. The meeting results in new or revived working groups with specific strategies and activities for the months leading up to the Western Week in Washington trips and the coming year.

## ***Meeting Structure***

The APM is designed to be a working meeting. Each day includes full group meetings, relevant presentations, and small group break-out sessions. On the first day participants focus on issue development. On the second day the focus shifts to the development of messages and solutions. The small working groups use a synthesis of results from the pre-meeting survey (described below), existing issue papers, and related materials to develop ideas, solutions, and recommendations. The full group is informed of developments made in all of the break-out sessions at the end of each day during brief reports from each group. Near the end of the meeting, participants have the opportunity to sign up for working groups. On the last day of the meeting the working groups meet for the first time to design work plans and schedules for the coming year.

## ***Pre-Meeting Survey***

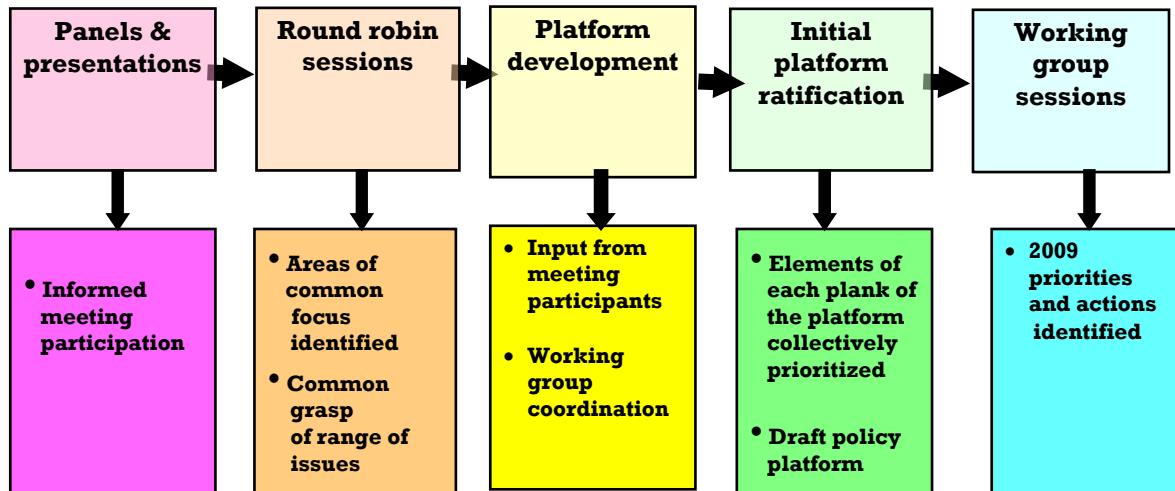
The Pre-Meeting Survey or “homework” is a critical aspect of preparing for the Annual Policy Meeting and gauging the key concerns and priorities among organizations participating in RVCC. Each year, all meeting participants complete this online survey in advance of the meeting. Sustainable Northwest and Core Group members synthesize the survey responses and send it out to all participants prior to the meeting. The synthesis is designed to provide meeting participants with a way to jumpstart discussions, hopefully move beyond initial brainstorming, and maximize the valuable and limited time we have together. It also gives individuals who are unable to attend the meeting an opportunity to shape the RVCC platform. While all of the policy issues brought up by meeting participants are significant, it is important to prioritize those best suited for collective action. When reviewing the synthesis, participants are asked to consider which issues and messages are best suited for the development of a collective platform that can be put into a plan of action for the year.

## ***Meeting Products***

The meeting will result in:

- A better understanding of the common ground among our organizations on key issues;
- A platform of policy priorities that we will collectively advance in the national policy arena;
- A suite of working group draft work plans that lay out activities that will be implemented throughout the year to further our policy platform. The work plans draw on the strengths of our collective organizations, and provide a variety of leadership opportunities; and
- A set of key messages related to our policy priorities to be used in communicating with Congress, the media, the agencies, the Administration and interest groups.

## Meeting Process



## Western Week in Washington

Western Week in Washington (WWiW) trips provide RVCC participants with an opportunity to travel to Washington D.C. to convey our shared messages and solutions. The trips are usually held in early spring and summer and focus on appropriations bills and other policy priorities. These extremely busy trips include meetings with members of Congress and their staff, agency personnel, and interest groups. The WWiW trips are primarily coordinated by SNW, with help from several partner organizations who work together to plan and implement the week. The majority of WWiW participants pay their own way to Washington, D.C. but SNW raises limited funds to pay for materials and for financial aid to cover travel, lodging, meals, and other incidental expenses.

### WWiW Participant Expectations

- Attend meetings with congressional staff, agency representatives, and interest groups to advocate for RVCC policy recommendations using RVCC issue papers.
- All participants' respective organizations are expected to sign on to the issue papers that they will be discussing in D.C.

## State Delegation and Decision-Maker Visits

Each year the RVCC seeks to conduct comprehensive education and outreach to the congressional delegations and regional offices that serve the participants of the Coalition. The RVCC also coordinates briefings and meetings with key leadership in the U.S. Forest Service's regional offices. Often these state-level efforts are scheduled to coincide with Western Week in Washington, so that those who cannot travel to D.C. can reinforce messages and help to magnify the impact of the RVCC. However, state-level outreach can occur whenever a group of RVCC

participants would like to coordinate it. Sustainable Northwest may provide support in terms of printed materials, assistance in setting up meetings or briefings, and limited financial assistance to defray the costs of travel and lodging if it is needed.

## **Funding**

Sustainable Northwest raises funds to support the infrastructure and activities of the RVCC. However, the costs associated with convening the coalition, maintaining and managing working groups, creating and distributing written materials, maintaining the content on the web page, and travel to meet with decision-makers far exceed the amount of money Sustainable Northwest is able to raise. Several members of the Core Group work in coordination with Sustainable Northwest to raise their own funds to support their participation in RVCC activities. Some Core Group members, notably the Watershed Research and Training Center, have raised general support funds to support the operations and participation of RVCC groups in all activities.

Over the years the following foundations have supported the development, activities, or some aspect of the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition:

- Surdna Foundation
- Ford Foundation
- Flintridge Foundation
- Compton Foundation
- Liz Claiborne Art Ortenberg Foundation
- Brainerd Foundation
- The National Rural Assembly through their Kellogg Foundation grant
- The RVCC also periodically receives small donations from individuals, which it generally targets towards scholarships for the Annual Policy Meeting or Western Week in Washington.

In some cases, Sustainable Northwest is able to provide small subcontracts to defray the costs of working group chairs who take on significant leadership and work loads to accomplish the work of the coalition; rarely do these subcontracts fully cover the costs incurred by these organizations. In 2009, there has been well over \$100,000 donated through in-kind support from the organizations participating on the RVCC Core Group. In other cases, some Core Group organizations have taken leadership roles in raising funds to support not only their own participation in RVCC events, but coalition activities as a whole.

The following organizations have provided financial support:

- The Watershed Research and Training Center
- American Forests
- The Ecosystem Workforce Program at the University of Oregon
- Resource Innovations

There is no requirement to raise funds to be on the Core Group, as there is no guarantee of available funds to assist participation. Each situation is handled on a case by case basis.

## **Financial Aid**

In certain circumstances, Sustainable Northwest is able to provide individuals with financial aid to attend and participate in RVCC events. The financial aid may be applied to costs such as travel, lodging, and meals. Financial aid may not however, be used to pay for an individual's time and participation at an event. Financial aid allotments are handled on a case by case basis, and there is no guarantee that they may be awarded.

## **ISSUE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Issue Papers**

The primary purpose of an issue paper is to explain the RVCC perspective on a problem and introduce proposed solutions. Issue papers are the primary communication materials of the RVCC and are distributed throughout the year at meetings with interest groups, congressional staff, agencies, the media, and others. RVCC issue papers have proven extremely effective throughout the years. To access RVCC issue papers online visit:

<http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/quick-links/resources/rvcc-issue-papers>

Below are the most recent issue papers produced by the RVCC:

Sustainable Rural Development

*Transition Proposal for a New Administration and Congress*

Investment in Natural and Social Assets

*2010 Appropriations Issue Paper*

Green Jobs, Green Infrastructure and Green Markets

*Rural Green Jobs Issue Paper*

*Economic Stimulus Proposal*

Climate Change

*Climate Change Issue Paper*

Integrated Woody Biomass

*Thermal Energy uses of Woody Biomass Issue Paper*

*Woody Biomass Issue Paper*

Fair and Accessible Federal Contracting and Labor Practices

*Stewardship End-Result Contracting Issue Paper*

*Workforce and Labor Issue Paper*

Public Lands Restoration and Community Stewardship  
*Building Community Capacity Issue Paper*  
*Collaboration Issue Paper*

Working Landscapes and Stewardship  
*Private Lands Issue Paper*

### ***Issue Paper Development***

The ideas presented in issue papers are generally based on priorities identified during the Annual Policy Meeting (APM). The content of each paper is written, revised, vetted, edited, formatted, and finalized through a working group or other collaborative effort. Generally, working groups have a chair(s) who takes on the role of primary drafter, consolidator of comments, facilitator, and reminder of key dates. The primary “authors” of the issue papers are listed as resources at the end of each paper. As these papers reflect the integration of the discussions at the APM, they are not authored in the traditional sense and are not designed for academic publication. If a working group identifies a need and the desire to develop an issue paper, whether or not it has been discussed at the APM, they are free to do so. They are also responsible for the collaborative writing of the paper, the sign-on process, and for working with Sustainable Northwest to finalize the paper. Sustainable Northwest serves as the “hub” of issue paper production. It coordinates the writing, editing and formatting of the papers, and handles the sign-on process and issue paper distribution.

Development Steps:

1. APM pre-meeting survey results reveal current matters and subjects for discussion.
2. APM discussions address subject matter that is relevant to the RVCC community.
3. Working Group conferences apply APM discussions to their respective areas of focus.
4. Document construction occurs in each working group.
5. Completed issue paper.

### ***Sign-on Process***

Once an issue paper is drafted, discussed and edited through a working group, it is sent out to the larger RVCC network for sign-on. All partner organizations and interested parties then have an opportunity to read the document and decide whether or not to sign-on to the paper. All supporting organizations are listed in the final document. It is okay for an organization to elect to sign-on to one RVCC paper and not another. RVCC participants and individuals outside of the coalition can sign-on to the letters and issue papers.

## Sign-on Steps:

1. Content is agreed to by the working group drafting its issue paper.
2. The working group sends its issue paper to SNW: SNW edits the papers and formats them in a uniform template.
3. SNW sends out requests to RVCC organizations for sign-on.
4. Groups sign-on: Organizations sign-on to issue papers. Organizations are also permitted to sign-on to selected papers but are not required to sign-on to all papers. This allows organizations to participate in certain issue areas even if they do not agree with the full spectrum of RVCC issues.
5. Distribution of issue paper in venues such as WWiW.

For a more complete description of issue paper development and an issue paper template please see the *RVCC Tool Box*.

## Background Papers

Background papers are used as a way to educate organizations within RVCC about a particular issue. They are effective in building a common understanding of definitions, context and explain why the issue may be of importance to RVCC. Background papers are not intended to make policy recommendations, though they may provide support to issue papers developed in the future. Background papers are generally circulated internally within RVCC, though they may be used by administrative and legislative audiences seeking to gain a better understanding of the issues.

## Sign-on Letters

Sign-on letters are an effective tool when a working group needs to respond quickly to a piece of draft legislation or a request for support from a staffer, without waiting to include their recommendations in an issue paper. Much like issue papers, sign-on letters are circulated on the RVCC list serve. Unlike the RVCC issue papers, sign-on letters do not have the RVCC banner and are signed by individual organizations; it is not permitted to sign onto something as the “Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition.” RVCC participants and individuals outside of the coalition can sign-on to the letters and issue papers.

## Testimony and Public Comments

Some of the most effective and unique methods RVCC members employ to advance its agenda are official testimonies and public comments. Since the conception of the RVCC, members of its collective organizations have provided critical testimony for congressional hearings on federal legislation and programs. Testimony and comments provide beneficial information to U.S. legislators and can have a direct impact on the legislation produced by congressional committees. For a complete list and text of public testimonies and comments

delivered by RVCC members, please visit the SNW resource page at:  
<http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/quick-links/resources/Testimony/>.

## **RVCC Policy Platform**

The RVCC 2009 Policy Platform contains the RVCC's legislative, administrative, and Presidential policy priorities. The platform is made up of a number of issue area "planks" that are combined to reflect the breadth of issues we work on.

### ***RVCC Policy Platform Development***

The Policy Platform is developed during the Annual Policy Meeting using information from our existing issue papers, the pre-meeting survey results, and ideas generated during APM working sessions. After the APM, working groups finalize their "planks" of the platform.

### ***How the RVCC Policy Platform is Used***

The Policy Platform is a public document that guides our work. It is used to prioritize RVCC work in the coming year, and as a cohesive way of expressing our policy interests to decision-makers and other organizations.

### ***Difference Between the RVCC Policy Platform and Issue Papers***

The Policy Platform combines in one place the main policy issues the RVCC will focus on in the coming year based on each issue area and related RVCC issue papers. Issue papers focus specifically on one topic or issue area, and are a comprehensive exploration of its challenges and our proposed solutions.

### ***RVCC Policy Platform Changes***

The Policy Platform will change over time. While the basic tenants of what the RVCC believes in and works for will stay the same, each year, it will re-evaluate the specific policy priorities in the platform and modify them at the Annual Policy Meeting and through the development of new issue papers or modifications of existing papers.

### ***How to Support the RVCC Policy Platform***

Everyone who attends the APM or participates in a working group in the months following the APM has an opportunity to shape the content of the platform. Once it is finalized, everyone in the RVCC network is given the option of signing on in support of it. If you decide to sign on, your organization's name will be listed on the document. If you decide not to sign on, you are still welcome to participate in the RVCC and sign on to individual issue papers, rather than the whole platform.

**APPENDIX A.**

**RVCC Calendar of Events**

January	February	March
<p><b>WWiW invitations</b> Invite RVCC individuals to participate in WWiW and begin planning strategy for the event.</p> <p>Pull together the working groups appropriations asks.</p>	<p><b>Appropriations trip to Washington D.C.</b></p>	<p><b>Issue Paper production and sign-on</b> Issue papers are finalized and circulated on the policy list serve for sign-on by the coalition.</p>
April	May	June
<p><b>Western Week in Washington</b> Convey shared messages and solutions directly to members of congress, their staff, and interest groups. Focus on appropriations bills and policy priorities</p>	<p><b>Delegation and decision maker visits</b></p>	<p><b>Core Group Retreat</b> Evaluate the coalition’s effectiveness and develop an overarching strategy for the coming year. Create a rough work plan and schedule for the working groups.</p>
July	August	September
	<p><b>Annual Policy Meeting Recruitment</b> Determine which groups and individuals to invite to the APM and start to recruit participants and speakers.</p>	
October	November	December
<p><b>APM pre-meeting survey synthesis</b> Gather ideas and opinions prior to the APM to help shape the Coalition’s platform and identify common ground before the meeting.</p>		<p><b>Annual Policy Meeting</b> Develop the Coalition’s policy platform for the coming year. Develop working group work plans and a strategy to advance RVCC policy asks.</p>

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Below are some of the most commonly asked questions with regards to the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition. This section serves the purpose of providing brief answers to these questions. Each subject is further delineated and explained in the manual.

### **What is the RVCC?**

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is comprised of western rural and local, regional, and national organizations that have joined together to promote balanced conservation-based approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the rural West. It is committed to finding and promoting policy solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and well being of rural communities.

### **How does RVCC membership work?**

The RVCC employs an ad-hoc organizing structure with few formalities. There are no membership or financial contributions necessary to participate in the Coalition. Participating organizations speak for themselves and may choose to support the collective voice of the group.

### **What are the requirements to participate in the RVCC?**

Although there are no official requirements to participate in the RVCC, participants are expected to:

- Attend the Annual Policy Meeting
- Participate in working groups
- Attend Western Week in Washington
- Develop, sign-on to, and support the content of RVCC publications
- Advance the policy priorities of the RVCC

### **How does the RVCC make decisions?**

The RVCC Core Group makes strategic decisions on process and overarching tactics

and tone of the Coalition. Sustainable Northwest manages the Coalition and makes decisions that relate to operations, fundraising, financial aid awards, events, and other activities necessary to sustain the Coalition. However, there are no membership, electoral, or voting requirements in our decision-making process, and participating organizations speak for themselves. We opt to collaborate and support each other to develop a collective and unified voice. That being said, participants may not always agree with the consensus developed by the Coalition, and are free to respond in their own manner.

### **Who represents RVCC?**

Sustainable Northwest acts as the convening organization for the Coalition through its policy program and manages the bulk of RVCC related activities. SNW is dedicated to building the capacity of partner organizations to participate in national policy discussions, development, education, as well as media outreach. The RVCC Core Group, comprised of a variety of organizations, makes strategic decisions and works to maximize coordination between the working groups that drive RVCC issues and positions. That said, there is no single formal voice or figurehead that speaks on behalf of the whole RVCC. Working groups develop issue papers collaboratively and individual organizations choose which issue papers to support or not. RVCC strives to maintain a decentralized and informal structure in which each organization speaks for itself. Other organizations and individuals may also take a greater role in

coordinating and organizing the actions of the RVCC in coordination with Sustainable Northwest and the RVCC Core Group.

**What is the RVCC Core Group?**

The Core Group is largely comprised of the working group chairs and some organizations that have provided strategic advice or partnership to the coalition. Sustainable Northwest serves as the Chair of the Core Group.

**How does someone become a working group Chair or join the Core Group?**

This is a relatively organic process. However, in general Sustainable Northwest consults with existing working group chairs about emerging leaders in their working groups, and when additional leadership or

new issues arise that necessitate adding expertise, geographic, or other diversity to the Core Group, Sustainable Northwest in consultation with existing Core Group members, invites organization to join.

**How are the activities of the RVCC paid for?**

Generally, RVCC participants are expected to finance their own way to RVCC events. However, in some cases Sustainable Northwest and other RVCC organizations are able to supply limited funding to alleviate the costs of participants' attendance. Sustainable Northwest also conducts the majority of fundraising for RVCC activities. The RVCC has also received funding over the years from various foundations and individual donors.

## **NOTES**

## How to Get Involved?

To join a working group contact Alaina Pomeroy, [apomeroy@sustainablenorthwest.org](mailto:apomeroy@sustainablenorthwest.org) with the following information:

- The name of the working group you would like to join.
- Your contact information (telephone number and email address)
- Your membership preference (full member or FYI member of the group)

## More Information?

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is a collaborative initiative coordinated by Sustainable Northwest. [www.sustainablenorthwest.org/rvcc](http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/rvcc)



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