Washington Native Seed Coalition

April 9th Discussion Group Synthesis - Washington Native Seed Strategy Goals and Objectives

On April 9th, WNSC members participated in discussion groups with each one focused on one of the Washington Native Seed Strategy goals. Coalition members were asked to share their thoughts on the proposed objectives and think about how they relate to their work with native seed, how they could be improved, and if any new objectives should be considered. This document is a synthesis of discussion notes from each group, categorizing their comments into shared themes and linking them to similar or relevant objectives in other goals.

These comments, along with comments from other meetings, interviews, and working groups, will be taken into consideration when drafting the Washington Native Seed Strategy.

Discussion on Goal 1: Identify Seed Needs, and Ensure Reliable Availability of Ecologically Appropriate Seed

- **Objective 1.1**: Build collaboration on regional and state levels to identify native seed capacity and needs
    - **Information sharing system**– Coalition members expressed a need for a centralized information sharing system to connect the native seed community and address current communication gaps (*see objectives 2.2, 2.3, 3.2, 4.1,* .
        - Primarily, there is a disconnect between seed producers and purchasers that often creates roadblocks in getting seed on the ground. In the past, producers have been unsure of demand, while purchasers are unsure of supply. Coalition members propose implementing centralized, continuously updated, multi-agency/org lists of:
            1) Purchaser's seed needs (species, number, time needed) that can inform production, and guarantee payment for this production
            2) Producer's available seed (species, number, time available), to inform that purchasers are not designing restoration projects that are impossible to implement
    - **Conduct a spatial analysis**– Develop a seed production strategy by visualizing & analyzing seed producers, ecotypes, seed zones, high priority restoration areas, etc. within and between the highly varied ecoregions in our state. This analysis could optimize seed procurement and can be used as an outreach tool to communicate seed needs to potential funders, stakeholders, and new coalition members.
    - **Create more accessible/achievable seed standards**– Have conversations with growers about what standards (% germ, % non-target content, AOSCA cert, etc.)

are truly critical, and how we can explore flexibility in those standards to make them more achievable for growers.

- **Objective 1.2:** Expand seed storage capacity
  - **Identify seed storage for both pre & post processing**– The coalition has questions about what a statewide seed storage framework would look like: what seed processing resources are available? Where are the facilities located? Will unprocessed seed be stored separately from processed seed? Of the processors that currently exist, who specializes in processing what, and what is their capacity for both processing and storage?
  - **Create regional storage collectives**– Physical locations for seed storage in each region of the state, shared by many organizations, would expand everyone's capacity for storing seed. The coalition proposed sharing information on the accessibility of these storage locations on information sharing systems, and requiring a nominal fee from users for upkeep costs. This may be accomplished by creating a list of agencies who can pay for having seed stored.
    - Ex: Boise seed warehouse is a regional hub for BLM

- **Objective 1.3:** Expand seed production capacity
  - **Get growers on board**– To scale up Washington's production of native seed, we need to support growers so that they have confidence in market stability and are willing to take on and/or expand their native seed production. Coalition members suggest that this could be accomplished through working with small growers to provide them with a foundation of native seed to experiment with transitioning to growing natives, with no obligation for the grower. Having this diversified production distributed among many small growers would build in resilience and mitigate risk for both growers and purchasers of native seed.

- **Objective 1.4:** Expand seed collection capacity
  - **Build an equitable work force**– Get more boots-on-the-ground folks to collect wild native seed. If they are seasonal crew members, have a solid training program in place, with strategies and guidelines that are consistent across agencies.

- **Objective 1.5:** Increase capacity to support implementation of the Strategy
  - **Collaborate with the tree seed market–** The existing tree seed market has overlapping needs and resources with the emerging native seed market, and there may be opportunities for connection and collaboration there. The coalition is interested in pursuing conversations with point people in the Washington tree seed market to gain advice on building a seed strategy and identify opportunities for mutual support.

- **PROPOSED OBJECTIVE 1.6:** Create funding resilience

    - **Mutual ‘Pot’**– Grant funding cycles often do not line up with work plans. Further, the current instability of federal funding necessitates a ‘pot’ of funding that sits outside boom-and-bust funding cycles that the entire WNSC community can utilize.

Discussion on Goal 2: Identify Research Needs and Facilitate Research to Address Gaps in Native Seed Production and Use

- **Objective 2.1:** Create a research plan and identify knowledge gaps
    - **Compile existing knowledge**– Coalition members mentioned multiple existing seed production & collection guides, including BLM seeds of success, CNLM’s Violet Prairie Wild Collection Seed Manual, and propagation guides from NRCS, UW, and USDA RNGR. In creating a research plan, it would be helpful to use these, and other sources, to compile all existing knowledge on the Information Sharing System (see *Objective 1.1*).

- **Objective 2.2:** Conduct research to improve seed use techniques
  PROPOSED WORDING CHANGE: Members expressed wanting more clarity on the meaning of ‘seed use’ in this objective; proposed change:

  ‘Conduct research to better understand, and improve upon, seed germination and survivability on managed landscapes’

  Create a list of native plant characteristics– There is a need to pool knowledge and resources on Washington’s native species, including information like phenology, root structure, growth habit, production issues, and germination rate. This information will help users of native seed make more informed decisions about the specific seed they choose to use in different contexts and increase success of native seed deployment on our diverse landscapes. A good place to start gathering information for this may be commercial native plant nurseries (Plant Materials Center?). Again, this list would live on the Information Sharing System (see *Objective 1.1*).

- **Objective 2.3:** Conduct research to improve seed production techniques
    - **Increase collaboration in research across agencies–** Seed producers are currently conducting their own experiments and research where they can, but capacity of these operations is often low and inhibits ability to collect detailed information. Seed producers could be communicating with each other to identify shared research interests and pool resources, funding, and labor to expand research capacity and answer questions more effectively.
        - **PROPOSED ACTION:** Create a ‘Collaborative Research’ discussion board page on the Information Sharing System where folks can share what research they are working on, what help they need, and share their contact information for others who are interested in that research to connect and collaborate *(see Objective 1.1)*.

    - **Develop understanding of plant phenologies and characteristics–** Currently, agencies like the USDA are conducting experiments in which populations of plants are grown, selected for various characteristics, and harvested based on those characteristics. Coalition members have interest in expanding this research to better understand the behavior of selected genetics.
        - Example: Conduct a field experiment in which germination rate of seedlings is counted within research squares. Repeat experiments in both fall and spring to determine which season yields higher germination.

Discussion on Goal 3: Develop and Leverage Resources that Enable Land Managers and Seed Producers to Make Timely and Informed Decisions

- **Objective 3.1:** Create guidance for ecologically appropriate seed selection
    - **Compile existing knowledge on seed zones & phenology–** The coalition expresses the need for a framework to inform seed selection, drawing from existing provisional seed zones, but taking into account projected phenological and climatic changes. A framework could help determine how climate change will affect species range, and therefore the extent of area in which deploying a certain species on the landscape is 'appropriate'. There is also interest in compiling information on using adjacent phenology to support genetic variation in genetically depressed populations.

- **Objective 3.2:** Compile, update, and develop resources for native seed planning, production, and use
    - **Develop producer's guide–** Create an interactive map on Information Sharing System to help producers visualize the geographic range of the species they grow and potential customer market (see *Objective 1.1)*.
    - **Develop land manager's guide–** Create a database on Information Sharing System with seed that's available for land managers (see *Objective 1.1*).
    - **Develop grower's resource–** Create a discussion board on Information Sharing System for growers to share their trial and error techniques for seed production, as well as any other questions and ideas (see *Objective 1.1*).
    - **Conduct an outreach effort with small Washington Farmers–** There are currently not enough seed producers in Washington to accommodate native seed demand. Recruiting existing small farms to diversify their operations by including the production of native seed would be a win-win for both the seed community and farmers. To accomplish this, the coalition could provide educational materials for these farmers about why native seed is important, best growing practices, and a guarantee that their seed will be bought (see *Objectives 4.1, 4.2*).

- **Objective 3.3:** Develop coordinated seed procurement approaches that encourage market stability
    - **Create reliable producers of seed across and within regions–** Build on momentum gained from farmer outreach and forge working land easements with

farmers to specialize in producing the native seeds of their region (see *Objective 4.1, 4.2*). Provide farmers with seed needs list (see *Objective 1.1, 3.2*) specific to their ecoregion to ensure that they grow appropriate seed that is guaranteed to be bought by coalition members.
    - **Bring more strains of source identified seed into the market–** While increased seed production by farmers is needed, maintaining a diverse genetic pool is also a priority. Using equitable labor gained through *Objective 1.4*'s action item to build an equitable work force for native seed collection, workers across the state could wild collect seed from specific areas, for use in restoration projects of the same ecotypes.

Discussion on Goal 4: Develop and implement strategies for internal and external communication and funding strategy implementation

- **Objective 4.1:** Develop and implement structure for ongoing internal coordination and communications
    - **Create and implement a plan for building the Information Sharing System–** Each proposed goal of the Washington Native Seed Strategy requires information sharing; from databases, to maps, to discussion boards on a variety of topics. Given the intended scope of this project, it is imperative to have a coordinated framework and plan for building out these systems that is agreed upon by the coalition.
    - **Continue quarterly WNSC newsletter–** The quarterly newsletter currently provides information about past and upcoming WNSC meetings, member news, updates, and opportunities for connection and collaboration. So far, it has been well received by coalition members and will continue to be released at its anticipated schedule.

- **Objective 4.2:** Develop external communications, education, and outreach
    - **Strengthen the farmer–seed community relationship–** Take advantage of resources such as conservation district volunteer coordinators and agricultural liaisons to connect with farmers and facilitate landowner outreach meetings on the topic of seed production (see *Objectives 3.2, 3.3*).
    - **Create a WNSS website–** Create a public- facing website with information about WNSC's development of a Washington Native Seed Strategy that community members, land managers, conservationists, scholars, and farmers alike can easily access and engage with. This webpage could include a link to the internal Information Sharing System, or a button to sign up for the WNSC newsletter, or include an option to send an email to the seed coordinator to get connected and learn more.
    - **Create WNSC social media accounts–** For WNSC coalition members and partners to stay up-to-date on meetings, news, and the status of the seed strategy, as well as to provide an approachable explanation of our work to folks from all walks of life.

- **Prioritize community presence–** Continue participation at community events such as Prairie Appreciation Day, conferences, landowner and townhall meetings, etc. **PROPOSED ACTION**: Appoint WNSC members as community liaisons to represent the coalition at community events and meetings.

- **Objective 4.3:** Report progress, recognize achievements, and revise Strategy
  - **Create a reporting and revising schedule–** To maintain momentum and establish clear expectations agreed upon by all the partners, coalition members should establish a framework for reporting progress (Monthly? Quarterly? Annually?), the manner in which it will be reported (Email? Newsletter? Its own page on Information Sharing System?), and a framework for revisions to the strategy (yearly revisions? Proposed revisions welcome at any time, with a vote? etc.).