



STATE OF WASHINGTON
CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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October 2022

TO: Conservation District Supervisors
FROM: Christopher Pettit, Executive Director
SUBJECT: SCC Information Materials – 2022 WACD Area Meeting Report

As the new Executive Director of the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC), I have eagerly awaited the opportunity to travel to each unique area of the state to connect with the talented supervisors and conservation district staff that provide locally led leadership. This leadership allows the conservation family to achieve our shared conservation goals while continuing to ensure agricultural viability across the state.

I wanted to extend my gratitude to each of you and your staff for the hospitality, guidance, and warm welcome that has been provided to me in my first year in the position and in Washington state.

Conservation districts do exceptional work as the local experts and leaders in implementing the conservation programs and projects established by our state legislature and funded through SCC. Together, we continue to demonstrate the vital outcomes provided in meeting the natural resource needs of the state through voluntary incentive-based programs and projects.

Please find attached informational materials prepared by SCC staff that provide additional detail on our programs and policy-based activities.

It is only through collaboration with the conservation districts, state agency partners, local governments, land trusts, and other stakeholders that we are able to achieve significant gains toward meeting the conservation and natural resource challenges of the state. It will be a pleasure to see everyone in person (with a few exceptions), and the SCC staff looks forward to continuing our successful partnerships moving forward.

Sincerely,

Christopher Pettit

Legislative Outlook

The Legislature will convene for the 2023 Legislative Session on Monday, Jan. 9. This will be a long, 105-day session ending in late April. The primary focus of the session will be the passage of the 2023-25 operating and capital budgets.

Other issues of interest likely to come up include salmon recovery, conservation district elections, rates and charges, stock water and other water issues, the Growth Management Act, and climate change, among others.

For the past two years, the Legislature has met in remote sessions. This year will likely be in-person, however, they will likely retain elements of the remote committee participation. Over the past two years, the Legislature became proficient in the use of remote access for committee testimony.

Legislators like the ability of individuals from across the state to testify without the need for lengthy travel. This would be good news for conservation districts as it opens the process to your participation.

The character of the legislature will be influenced by the outcome of the Nov. general elections. We will have more information on the impact the election may have on the session at the WACD annual meeting.

WSCC staff will continue coordination with WACD staff over the course of the Legislative Session, and will continue to share information with conservation districts on legislation and budget items as they come up.



Salmon Recovery Discussions

This past session, the legislature passed several budget provisos providing funding and direction on different aspects of salmon recovery. Each of these provisos has its own focus and timelines for the work product.

But each has an impact on the work of conservation districts and SCC. SCC is tracking each of these processes and will send out the final reports.

Coordination of Stakeholders on Riparian Recommendations – Governor’s Office

The process is facilitated by an independent entity to develop recommendations on proposed changes in policy and spending priorities to improve riparian habitat to ensure salmon and steelhead recovery.

The recommendations must include:

- Ideas for improvements to land use planning and development that ensure the protection and recovery of salmon;
- Standards to protect areas adjacent to streams and rivers;
- Standards to restore areas adjacent to streams and rivers;
- Financial incentives for landowners to protect and restore streamside habitat;
- Recommendations to improve salmon recovery program coordination among state agencies;
- Recommendations for additional changes when voluntary measures and financial incentives do not achieve streamside protection and restoration.
- Preliminary recommendations shall be submitted to the legislature and governor by Oct. 1, 2022, with a final report by Nov. 1, 2022.
- The office of the governor may contract for an independent facilitator. The contract is exempt from the competitive procurement requirements in chapter 39.26 RCW.

Evaluate the Effectiveness of Voluntary Incentive Programs and of Regulatory Programs – Office of Financial Management

Evaluate the effectiveness, utilization, and outcomes of the voluntary incentive programs for landowners and of existing regulatory programs responsible for protecting and restoring areas along streams and rivers toward achieving a science-based standard for a fully functioning riparian ecosystem.

To accomplish the evaluation, the office must:

- Contract with an independent entity for the analysis. The contract is exempt from the competitive procurement requirements in chapter 39.26 RCW; and
- Assist agencies with funding and advice to gather and provide the data necessary for the analysis.

A preliminary report is due to the governor and legislative committees by Sep. 1 to inform the recommendations for a final report that is due Dec. 1, 2022.

Convene the Natural Resources Sub-Cabinet – Governor’s Salmon Recovery Office

Task is to develop a biennial statewide work priorities with a recommended budget for salmon recovery that aligns with tribal priorities and regional salmon recovery plans. The office shall submit the biennial implementation plan to the governor’s office and the office of financial management no later than Oct. 31, 2022.

Net Ecological Gain (NEG) – WDFW

The department must submit a report to the legislature that assesses how to incorporate a net ecological gain standard into state land use, development, and environmental laws and rules to achieve a goal of better statewide performance on endangered species recovery and ecological health.

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Voluntary Stewardship

The VSP is an alternative approach for counties to meet their Growth Management Act (GMA) requirements for critical areas protection. Counties were given the opportunity to opt into VSP, and 27 were elected to do so.

Although the VSP statute identifies the county as the lead organization for VSP, the county may identify a workgroup lead to implement the day-to-day aspects of the program. Many counties have delegated conservation districts to be the workgroup lead.

By the end of 2021, all VSP counties completed their work plans and completed their first 5-year report on progress. VSP work groups continue to implement their work plans, based on input received from the Commission on the 5-year report.

SCC staff continues to provide technical assistance to the VSP jurisdictions in this implementation.

In the 2022 Legislative Session, funding was provided in the capital budget for the Commission to make available to VSP jurisdictions grant funding for projects implementing the local VSP work plan.

SCC received \$3 million and guidelines have been developed and the application process is now open for VSP project proposals. Information on how to apply can be found at our website.

<https://www.scc.wa.gov/vsp/overview>

Irrigation Efficiencies

The IEGP was created in 2001 out of a desire by private landowners and environmental groups to cooperatively restore in-stream flows for endangered salmonid populations within the state's 16 critical basins. Conservation districts within those basins were identified as the most effective method for delivering this complex program.

Since its inception, participating conservation districts have included: Asotin County, Cascadia (Chelan County), Clallam, Columbia, Kittitas County, North Yakima, Okanogan, Pomeroy (Garfield County), South Yakima, Underwood, Walla Walla County, Whatcom.

Grants issued through the IEGP fund conservation district technicians who provide assistance to landowners and water purveyors by assessing potential water savings projects along with the design, development, and administration of each project.

Technicians also write irrigation water management plans for project recipients to ensure wise management of the new practices.

Monitoring is also a key element to ensuring success. Once projects are developed and determined eligible, the landowner may apply to the conservation district for financial assistance for project implementation.

Each project must have valid water rights and produce a biological improvement to the stream benefiting salmon.

Stock Water

In 2021, Ecology proposed a change to POL-1025 to clarify that any diversion of surface water for stock water purposes requires a water right or claim, and if no water right exists, one must be obtained by the landowner. This action created uncertainty about the legal use of surface water for existing and future livestock operations across the state.

Conservation districts have been working with stock producers to fence off surface water to improve water quality conditions and establishing legal certainty for both instream and out-of-stream users became important to many districts and their constituents.

SCC staff is working with the WACD Livestock taskforce and other stakeholders on the Commission's directives from the Dec. 2021 meeting where the Commission passed a motion with the following elements:

1. **SCC offers to convene a stakeholder group** to discuss how stock water could be provided in a manner consistent with state law, but still meet the needs of the landowner. *Ecology and SCC staff mutually agreed not to pursue a stakeholder group and other legislators and stakeholders are meeting. SCC staff will engage with the WACD Livestock Taskforce for district input.*
2. **Examine existing instream flow rules** to determine whether they include an exemption for stock water use. *In Progress*
3. **Examine existing adjudicated watersheds** to determine if they include a non-diversionary stock water reserve. *List complete; analysis is in progress*
4. **Explore possible statutory changes** for legislative consideration to allow for a de-minimus use for stock water. *In Progress*
5. **Allow for a phased implementation** of the new policy. *Completed by Ecology*

We are working on multiple fronts to address concerns and identify a path or paths forward in order to help districts continue to enhance both water quality and water quantity goals at the local level.

1. **Stakeholders** – SCC staff will meet with key stakeholders to gather input and perspective on the stock water issue and its impacts.
2. **Instream Flow Rule Exemption** - Ecology has been working on a list of WRIA rules that include an exemption for stock water. Note that this exemption is to the rule, not water law. A right is still required, but the basin isn't closed to new stock water rights as long as they pass the four-part test in RCW 90.03.290:
 - a. The water will be put to "beneficial use", the water is available, there is no impairment to existing water rights, and it is not detrimental to the public interest. There is some trepidation around how the Hirst Decision might impact this option if it were to go to the courts.
3. **Adjudications** - Ecology has provided a list of basin and sub-basin adjudications with a reserve for non-diversionary stock water. These would provide a path forward for exclusionary fencing projects with off-stream watering. Ecology is working on further fleshing out the variations in allowance and language in each adjudication as there is no standard language consistent in all of them.

SCC staff will continue to engage with the WACD Livestock Water committee. Also, SCC staff will present to the Commission the results of the work on stock water and any recommendations at the Dec. 2022 Commission meeting.

Food Policy Forum

The Washington State Food Policy Forum (Forum) was created through a Legislative budget proviso in 2016 and charged with making meaningful recommendations for improving the food system in Washington. The Forum is co-convened by the Conservation Commission, the Office of Farmland Preservation, and the State Department of Agriculture. In 2020, the Legislature passed a bill establishing the Forum in the Commission's statute.

The purpose of the Forum is to advance the following food system goals:

- Increase the availability of Washington-grown foods throughout the state, including by increasing direct marketing and other regional supply chains sales and consumption of Washington-grown foods.
- Expand and promote programs that bring healthy and nutritious Washington-grown foods to Washington residents, including increased public and private purchasing of Washington food products for schools, adult care programs, and other publicly funded food programs.
- Identify ways to improve coordination and communication among city, county, regional, and state food policy entities and communication between these entities and state agencies.
- Reduce food insecurity and hunger in the state.
- Identify current rules and regulations impeding the viability of small and mid-scale agriculture.
- Identify new policies that would improve the viability of small and mid-scale agriculture.
- Examine ways to encourage the retention of an adequate number of farmers for small and mid-scale farms, meet the educational needs for the next generation of farmers, and provide for the continued economic viability of Washington food production, processing, and distribution in the state.

In addition to the goals identified in the Forum's statute, Forum members have identified additional goals regarding how the Forum could identify opportunities to address equity and the impacts of climate change in the state's food system.

The Forum has produced three reports with recommendations on various aspects of the food system. More recently, the Forum has organized into three work groups to address specific issues and opportunities:

State Marketing and Branding – Exploring the potential for branding and marketing of food products grown in Washington by producers of all farm sizes.

Land Use – Identifying recommendations for land use changes to preserve working farmland, address water needs, and limit the impacts of growth on existing agricultural operations.

Farm Bill 2023 – Examine impacts and benefits of the current federal Farm Bill on Washington and identify opportunities for changes to the next iteration of the Farm Bill in 2023 that will benefit Washington State.

In the past two years, the Commission has been able to offer food system grants to conservation districts. We anticipate offering grants again this year.

Salmon Riparian Funding

In the 2022 supplemental operating budget, the Legislature provided \$10 million to the Commission for salmon riparian restoration grants to conservation districts.

The funding was available with the start of the current fiscal year, Jul. 1. Since that time, more than \$6.8 million has been committed to conservation district project implementation, outreach, and project planning activities.

By the numbers (as of Oct. 5, 2022):

- Total Implementation Projects: **49**
- Total \$ of Projects: **\$4,426,167**
- Total Outreach, Project Planning and Design: **16**
- Total \$ of Outreach: **\$1,516,042**
- Total Project Planning and Design: **6**
- Total \$ of Project Planning: **\$937,590**
- Total Cultural Resources: **2**
- Total \$ Cultural Resources: **\$33,285**

Funds will be available until the account is exhausted. Because these are operating funds, all work must be completed by June 30, 2023.

The salmon riparian funding is one-time funding. SCC has requested \$10 million in new capital funding to continue the salmon riparian program, as well as \$3 million in operating for salmon recovery activities more appropriate for the operating budget.



Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

What is the need?



3,284

site visits with
landowners
needed.



902

farm plans need to
be written, including
100+ for dairy
nutrient
management.



70%

of conservation
districts are
interested in
launching or
expanding services
that improve
agricultural viability,
preserve farmland,
and/or expand
markets.



50%

of conservation
districts would like
to launch or expand
services that support
farmers markets and
food access and/or
assist with food
system
infrastructure.

Proposal

Funding requested: \$10 million

This request funds the foundation of all conservation projects-technical assistance. Conservation Technical Assistance is crucial for conservation districts to conduct the relationship-building, partner coordination, permitting, and other logistics required before breaking ground on a project. It also allows districts to make progress on the growing demand for services related to food security, responding to regulator referrals and helping farmers better manage livestock waste.

Why this can't wait

- Over 50% of land in our state is privately owned. We must engage landowners and land managers broadly with conservation if we hope to meet Washington's goals for water quality, habitat and sustainable agriculture.
- Conservation districts (CDs) can't keep up with the demand for their services as our state population surges at the eight-fastest rate in the nation. Our state is growing in diversity and this funding provides culturally appropriate materials in multiple languages.
- Regulatory agencies rely on conservation technical assistance and some districts lack the funding to provide this crucial service.
- CDs need CTA funding to help our farmers and food system weather the impacts of climate change, development pressures and supply chain disruptions-helping make the local food system more secure and local food more accessible.

Leveraging of Funds



\$3.41

For every dollar SCC provides, CDs leverages \$3.41 in local, state and federal funding.

What is the need for CTA dollars?



Giving more people access to fresh, locally grown food, such as by launching virtual farmers markets and hosting farm stands.

"I want to do the right thing because it benefits natural resources as well as my own agricultural operation. Without voluntary conservation services and programs, I would not have had the opportunity to maintain the baseline and work towards improvements on my land."

- Jack field, Yakima County cattleman



Building agreement and developing site-specific plans before a conservation project can succeed.



Helping farmers manage manure properly is a critical service conservation districts provide. Water quality, shellfish harvest, human, animal and soil health all benefit



Building community awareness and engagement with the priority natural resource issues, such as by hosting annual Orca Recovery Day events.

Technical Assistance provided by conservation districts

(work that requires funding from this state budget request)



GROUND BREAKS ON A CONSERVATION PROJECT

APPLYING FOR FUNDING

Districts assist landowners with completing applications for project funding, when needed.

ASSISTING WITH PERMITS

Many projects require permits and cultural resource surveys. Conservation districts often coordinate these logistics.

DEVELOPING PROJECTS

Work with willing landowners and land managers to develop both single landowner and larger scale conservation projects.

DEVELOPING CONSERVATION PLANS

Staff work with landowners to write conservation plans for their property, which are required to apply for most state and federal grant programs.

EMPOWERING PEOPLE

Conservation districts serve as responsive, local hubs of information. They connect people to voluntary actions they can take to conserve resources and potential funding sources

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

Conservation district staff make several one-on-one site visits to landowners. They take the time to listen and understand each person's unique goals.



CONTACT

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Farmland Protection & Land Access (FPLA)

1 Timely

FPLA has an open and rolling application process. Projects that come through FarmPAI may apply to FPLA at any time, rather than waiting for a set application period.

2 Efficient

The program acts swiftly to get a successful easement application under contract within a matter of months, allowing partners to preserve farmland that's at immediate risk of development.

3 Accessible

FPLA doesn't require matching funds to secure an easement. Removing this potential financial barrier makes preserving and purchasing farmland more obtainable.

4 Flexible

The program will accept applications for farms of all sizes, including small farms that are more typical around urban areas and may be more attractive to next generation farmers.

5 Equitable

Once the easement is purchased and the farm is ready to sell at its agricultural value, priority will be given to buyers who represent historically underserved and/or young and beginning farmers and ranchers.

Proposal

Funding requested: \$4 million

This request will keep high-quality agricultural land in production and facilitate land access to historically underserved farmers and ranchers. The Farmland Protection and Land Access (FPLA) program will enable conservation entities to purchase agricultural conservation easements on land secured through the Washington State Housing Finance Commission's new Farmland Protection and Affordability Investment Program (FarmPAI).

Recognizing the value of this innovative program model, \$2 million in supplemental capital budget funding was provided via proviso in the last legislative session. Less than a month into the program, 50% of the funding had already been allocated and there is strong demand for the remaining funding. This request is to create a sustaining program that can be truly effective in protecting farmland and making land access more equitable.

Why this can't wait

- New farmland affordability tools, like FPLA, are necessary to increase agricultural land access and opportunities.
- Washington's farmland is at risk. USDA Census of Agriculture data shows we lost 640,000 acres of farmland between 2002-17.
- The bulk of Washington farmers are at or near retirement age. More than 70% of retiring farmers do not have a successor.
- Cost of land is the #1 barrier for young, beginning and multi-generation farmers in starting or expanding their farm business.
- COVID-19 market trends are dramatically increasing the cost of farmland; some areas report increase of 20-50% year-over-year. High land prices limit farm business expansions and prevent the creation of new ones.
- FPLA fills a gap in a multi-partner effort to conserve farmland and facilitate land access to the next generation farmers and ranchers.

Why is FPLA part of WA's preservation strategy?

Case study

Pierce County lost a 70-acre farm to development because there wasn't a timely, efficient and accessible strategy available to protect it.

Washington Farmland Trust tried to preserve the farm, but they were unable to respond opportunistically. They were constrained by public grant timelines and couldn't compete with offers from developers.

The farm was sold to a developer who constructed 16 homes on the property, forever losing prime agricultural land and wildlife habitat.

FPLA could have helped

FPLA has the flexibility required to meet the needs of underserved farmers.

Existing easement programs prioritize large blocks of commercial farmland. Washington Farmland trust has heard from underserved/beginning farmers who depend on smaller peri-urban farms, but those farms aren't competitive in existing easement programs that are often unaffordable without the financing/affordability tools the FarmPAI/FPLA process offers.

Working together we can...



BUY

An agricultural landowner will sell their property at full value to a land trust who makes the purchase using funds from the Washington State Housing Finance Commission's Farmland Protection and Affordability Investment (FarmPAI) low-interest loan program.



PROTECT

The land trust will apply to FPLA (through OFP) to secure an agricultural conservation easement for the property. Easements add a restriction on development/subdivision to the property title, permanently conserving agricultural/ecological assets and making the land more affordable.



SELL

The land trust will sell the property at its agricultural value. Priority will be given to buyers who represent historically underserved and/or new and beginning farmers and ranchers. The land trust will then repay the original FarmPAI loan.

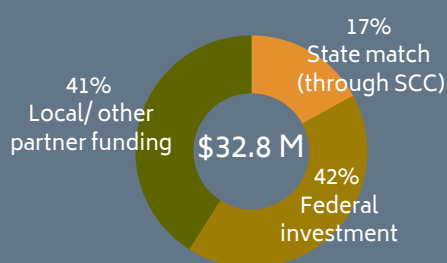
CONTACTS

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RCPP Matching Funds

A magnet for leveraged funds

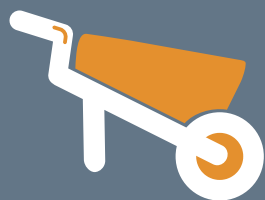


State match represents 17% of the five-year budgets for 5 RCPP projects. The remaining 83% (contingent on state match) from other federal partner contributions.



Leverage of 5 to 1

On average, every dollar of RCPP state match will leverage \$5 in federal and other partner contributions.



Putting Washington to Work

For each RCPP, multiple projects are constructed. Over the length of the project, these five projects will generate over 1,000 jobs.

Proposal

Funding requested: \$3 million

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program or RCPP is a Farm Bill program that awards federal funding to projects where multiple partners invest in cooperative action to solve natural resource issues in targeted areas. Grant awards require match, and the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) has been designated to pass-through state capital matching funds for successful RCPP recipients.

Why this can't wait

- RCPP is an efficient way for federal, state, tribal and local partners to coordinate efforts and make landscape-scale improvements on urgent issues, including soil health, salmon and orca recovery, farmland preservation, drought resilience and forest health.
- Partners of five RCPP projects in Washington have already committed millions of federal and local funding to support their work. But they need state match to secure those commitments and make their budgets whole.
- Many of these five-year projects have been in progress for years and landowners have signed contracts to work with partners on actions that meet their goals. Without a state match, the project contracts won't be met, jeopardizing trust.

What does RCPP look like on the ground?



Installing fish-friendly screens on irrigation intakes.



Upgrading irrigation systems to more efficient sprinkler systems.



Removing fish barriers and replacing them with bridges that allow fish access.

RCPP Projects in Washington

RCPP projects that receive state match through SCC stretch across Washington improving natural resource conditions and generating over a thousand jobs for our communities.

1 Palouse River Implementation Partnership WRIA 34

- **Lead partner:** Palouse Conservation District
- **Project:** Engaging agricultural producers (through incentives) to implement the Palouse River Watershed Management Plan. Thus improving water quality and soil health, and reducing regulatory action.

2 Middle Columbia Steelhead Partnership

- **Lead partners:** Kittitas County Conservation District and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
- **Projects:** Accelerating the recovery of the threatened Mid-Columbia steelhead by targeting high-priority watersheds, which produce more than 50% of the wild steelhead in the Yakima River Basin.

3 Puyallup Watershed Partnership

- **Lead partner:** Pierce Conservation District
- **Project:** Working to permanently conserve 1,000 acres of prime farmland and assist landowners with restoration activities that enhance salmon habitat and preserve the economic and ecosystem benefits that farmland provides.

4 Southwest Washington Small Forest Lands Conservation Partnership

- **Lead partner:** Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- **Project:** Assisting small forest landowners with forest stewardship plans that improve habitat, protect water quality, improve forest resiliency and keep working forests working.

5 Poop Smart Clark Program

- **Lead partner:** Clark Conservation District
- **Project:** Connecting landowners with the tools they need to drive social change, adopt better management practices and correct sources of sediment, nutrient and bacteria runoff in Clark County.

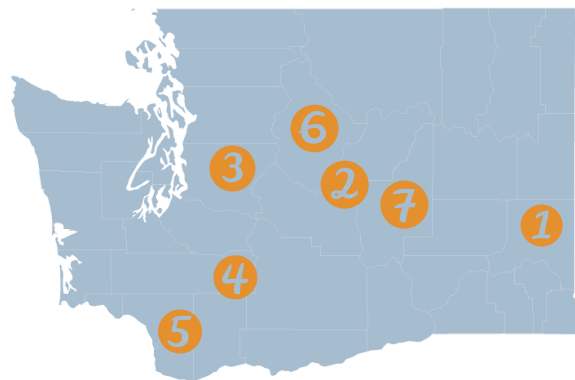
6 Fuel Break & Forestry Resiliency Partnership

- **Lead partner:** Cascadia Conservation District
- **Project:** Increasing the scope and scale of wildfire risk reduction and wildlife enhancement projects in areas identified by DNR, US Forest Service, local utilities and fire districts as critical for restoring forest health and improving response to wildfire.

7 Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program

- **Lead partner:** Columbia Basin Conservation District
- **Project:** Conserving 33,000 acre-feet of groundwater in the rapidly declining Odessa Aquifer each year through implementing on-farm irrigation systems that replace groundwater irrigation with Columbia River surface water.

Project locations



Accomplishments



With assistance from Palouse River RCPP partners, farmers have started using soil-friendly conservation tillage on 80 square miles of land — that's an area almost the size of Seattle!

Testimonial



"I signed up for the reduced minimum tillage program to basically try to establish into a more no-till program for future years to maintain soil and organic matter. Working with the partners was easy... I'm hoping to see benefits like higher organic matter, which then may allow water to absorb into the ground and not run off, and to build up that long-term organic matter to hopefully see increased yields."

- Ryan Kile, Whitman County farmer

Commenting on his experience with the Palouse-Rock Lake Conservation District as part of the Palouse River Watershed RCPP.

CONTACTS

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CD Election Reform

Why change the election process?



Increase Turnout

Participation is usually low and we want more people to have a say.



Improve Accountability

Allow for more community awareness and input into the election process.



Empower Flexibility

One-size-fits all approach doesn't meeting the needs of all CDs and their communities.

Proposal

The Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and the Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) propose a package of reforms to the conservation district (CD) election process. After a thorough and collaborative exploration of election improvements, this proposal represent the best option to meet the needs of CDs and the communities and natural resources, they serve.

Background

- HB 1652 was introduced during the 2022 Legislative Session. However, this bill has not made it through the legislative process.
- By statute, CDs conduct elections to fill volunteers' positions on their boards outside the general election process.
- Unlike most special purpose districts, CDs don't have taxing authority, limiting their election funding.
- Also uniquely, CDs are subject to state oversight provided by SCC, which sets the CD election process, monitors the administration, and verifies/certifies the results.
- As with all processes, changes are needed to create more voter turnout and efficiency. We continue to looking for opportunities for improvement.

Conservation District Supervisors



Each conservation district is governed by a board of **three locally-elected** and **two-state appointed** volunteers called supervisors.

Proposed Election Changes

Our goal: Increase participation in and access to CD elections without causing unintended impacts to communities and CDs' statutory role.

Proposal 1 - Terms and Election Schedule

WHAT

- **Extend CD supervisor term to four years**
- **For the elected positions, hold election every other year during even years**
- **For the two appointed positions, make appointment every other year during odd years.**

WHY

- **Cost savings:** Changing the term from three to four years and holding elections every other year (instead of every year) reduces administration costs.
- **Outreach capacity:** With elections held less often, CDs will have more capacity to double-down on local outreach during election years.
- **Normalizing service terms:** Supervisor terms will be consistent with many other elected offices.

Proposal 2 - SCC Election Process

WHAT

- **CDs host elections during a "Conservation Month" designated by SCC who will run a statewide campaign to promote CD's election opportunities leading up to and during this month.**
- **CDs increase local elections outreach.**

WHY

- **Statewide promotion:** if held within one month, SCC will run a "Conservation Month" marketing campaign to promote elections.
- **Inclusive outreach:** SCC will take steps to reach diverse and underserved communities with the elections marketing strategy.
- **Conservation engagement:** Messaging about CD services will be included to encourage people to join.

Proposal 3 - General Election Option

WHAT

- **By a majority vote of the CD board, any CD may choose to go on the general election ballot rather than follow the SCC election process.**

WHY

- **Flexibility to weigh election costs:** CDs will evaluate the cost of going on the general ballot or if this would cause loss of services that are statutorily required.
- **Voter participation:** CDs that can afford general election expenses will see more ballots cast in their elections.



CONTACT

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Dear CD colleagues:

As a result of the significant conversations taking place around conservation district elections, the Joint Committee on Elections (“committee”) was created by the Washington State Conservation Commission (“SCC”) to bring people together to start a conversation and see what changes could be made. The committee came to the Commission with several recommendations, and those recommendations were added to the legislation that SCC and the Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) worked on during the 2021 legislative cycle. Although that bill did not ultimately pass the Legislature and become law, SCC, in partnership with the committee and WACD has continued to engage in the consideration of options for the next legislative session.

A related committee recommendation was the recommendation to adopt the month of March as “Conservation Month” as part of a broader outreach effort to raise awareness regarding the conservation contributions of conservation districts and their staff.

This outreach effort will be partnered with significant public engagement to highlight the contributions of conservation districts and the importance of district elections to the general public. The Conservation Commissioners officially adopted March as Conservation Month during the Sept. 2022 commission meeting.

What does this mean for conservation districts?

SCC is working with its partners to finalize a statewide marketing campaign to promote March as Conservation Month. In order for each conservation district to get the most out of the outreach efforts and associated advertising to be provided through the SCC, **districts are encouraged to consider holding supervisor elections sometime during the month of March 2023**. SCC is aware that districts are starting to schedule your elections now and wanted to get this vital issue on your radar. You can learn more about [Conservation Month here](#).

Why Conservation Month?

- The dedication of significant outreach and advertising efforts can raise the conservation profile of district programs and promote election awareness. If it can be demonstrated to the public and the legislature that funding and marketing can grow voter turnout while promoting the marked success of district conservation programming, conservation districts should be empowered to continue to pick their own best election times and choose how their community members will vote.
- The initiative aligns with the [SCC 2022-27 Long-Range Strategic Plan](#). In the strategic priority area of “Governance and Accountability,” goal 4 states, “conservation districts operate legally, transparently, accountable and inclusively.” In addition, goal 5 says, “conservation district boards are well-supported to achieve their mission.” We believe that this initiative helps us to meet both of those goals.



Please note: This campaign is something that SCC is looking to fund on an annual basis as long as the rules and regulations regarding conservation district elections remain the same. Should any new regulations come about, we would reevaluate and possibly reallocate the resources.

Thank you for your consideration, and as always, we are here for any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Pettit".

Chris Pettit
SCC Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daryl Williams".

Daryl Williams
SCC Commission Chair



What is Conservation Month?

Conservation Month will take place in March 2023 and will help to promote conservation district elections and provide awareness about conservation districts' work across Washington.

SCC will continue to promote Conservation Month year-after-year — allowing us to leverage the creative work already produced and build upon it in the following years.

Summer 2022

- Find a consultant to help to create creative branding, ads etc.

Fall 2022

- SCC outreach, elections training, and creative firm selected.

October 2022

- Orca day and start to roll out some of the creative work being done.

January 2023

- Start to run ads and drum up interest about Conservation Month.

February 2023

- Continue to promote conservation month and the fact that people should contact their local conservation districts for info. SCC will start to gather election information and advertise it.

March 2023

- Promote the month and activities on social media.

Spring 2023

- Evaluate and start planning for next year.

Questions?



Paige DeChambeau, SCC
Communications Director



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Conservation Month is...

- **Conservation district awareness**

We want to use this opportunity to promote the 45 conservation districts statewide and the work that they do.

- **Election promotion**

Conservation districts are allowed to hold their elections anytime within the first 3 months of the year. The advertising campaign will build up to March as Conservation Month. However, all districts should benefit from the advertising but those who hold their elections in March will benefit the most.

- **A tool to increase turnout**

The ultimate goal of Conservation Month is to create more voter turnout in district elections statewide.

Conservation Month is not...

- **A mandate**

SCC encourages districts to hold their elections in the month of March but all districts are free to hold their elections during the time period allotted and will benefit from the state-wide advertising. Think of it as an incentive!

- **Fully operational**

The 2022-2023 cycle for Conservation Month is a building year. We know many tweaks will need to be made as we continue to roll this out year-after-year. The first year will focus on creating the assets needed that can be used into the future.

