



### CONSERVATION COMMISSION FY 21-23 BUDGET REQUEST – WACD PRIORITIES

	WSCC Request	Governor's Proposal	WACD Request
Conservation Technical Assistance	\$5,000,000	\$0	\$5,000,000
Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)	\$7,725,000	\$6,000,000	\$7,725,000
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) (to leverage federal funds)	\$9,762,000	\$7,000,000	\$9,762,000
<b>Total Requested Funding</b>	<b>\$22,487,000</b>	<b>\$13,000,000</b>	<b>\$22,487,000</b>

#### OPERATING BUDGET PRIORITIES

**Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA).** Technical assistance funding increases participation rates in voluntary conservation programs on the more than 50% of Washington land that is privately owned. CTA ensures conservation districts have the capacity to provide support like financial assistance, engineering project designs, assistance navigating permitting processes, and other services to empower landowners and others to conserve natural resources.

There is an estimated \$29 million need. WACD supports meeting a significant portion of that need. Meanwhile, the backlog of willing participants cannot access district programs. This results in: delaying almost 800 Washington farms needing a farm plans; 350 plus conservation projects waiting on engineering and design services; and more than 2,000 potential restoration sites waiting for consultation and evaluation.

**Wildfire Prevention and Resiliency.** WACD believes conservation districts are an integral component of wildfire prevention and recovery. Fire does not respect political boundaries. Any increase in funding must recognize the role of private landowners in the complex mosaic of vulnerable and affected lands.

#### CAPITAL BUDGET PRIORITIES

**Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).** CREP provides 4:1 leveraging of federal Farm Bill dollars (\$0.80 federal/\$0.20 state). This program is a critical funding mechanism for restoring riparian forested buffers and enhancing salmonid habitat on farmland and ranches. State funding will produce up to 175 new and re-enrolled CREP sites, potentially adding 100 miles of restored riparian area to the 925 miles of stream already enhanced for salmon in Washington State over the last 20 years.

**Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).** RCPP funding restores critical habitat and improves water quality around the state, supporting the work of over 50 partners (federal, state, tribal, local, and private) working on nine separate projects. To maximize federal Farm Bill dollars (\$75 million in total), RCPP projects are contingent on state support through the Conservation Commission. Each dollar of state support leverages \$4 of federal and partner contributions and cumulatively will generate over \$50 million in labor income over the next five years.



## WACD 2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION POLICY PRIORITIES

**Special Purpose District Elections & Accountability.** WACD supports the Conservation Commission's current process of broad stakeholder engagement to ensure transparency, accessibility, and trust in improving conservation district elections. Recognizing cost as a limiting factor is important for these non-partisan elections for volunteer positions.

WACD believes the values of financial transparency and accountability is paramount throughout the structures and practices already in place. Districts must fully comply with the Commission's Conservation Accountability and Performance Program (CAPP) to receive any Commission funds. All conservation districts also submit to outside audits on a schedule set by the State Auditor. This effort has been recognized with the presentation of the State Auditor's Stewardship Award to districts (Snohomish Conservation District, 2016 award recipient) and the State Conservation Commission (2019 award recipient).

**Exempting salmon recovery grants (SB 5220).** WACD supports passage of SB 5220 to exempt salmon recovery grants from business and occupation, sales, and use taxes. The public dollars entrusted to conservation districts should be focused on delivering conservation projects and not diluted with taxes that may not support conservation.

**Rural Broadband Internet Access.** WACD supports increased rural broadband internet and cell phone access, increased infrastructure, and affordability for all working lands and Washington State residents. Natural resource management increasingly requires electronic connectivity, and a digital divide affects economic, educational, and community opportunities.

**Community Forests.** WACD supports the creation of a community forest program with the inclusion of conservation district eligibility and with a working lands philosophy. WACD endorses the goal of fostering equity and inclusion in community forest funding opportunities. The resulting program should be developed to foster local leadership and management in rural communities.

**Restricting Out of Basin Water Rights Transfers.** WACD supports legislation and rulemaking that restricts the transfer of water rights outside of the Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) in which they are originally located. The conversion of agricultural water rights to other uses poses a significant risk to the viability of agriculture and the conservation of natural habitat, particularly in arid areas of Washington State.

**Advocating a Locally Led, Voluntary, Incentive-Based Approach to Natural Resources.** WACD will defend and uphold the principle and practice of locally led, voluntary, incentive-based conservation on private lands, based on proven methodologies, science, and community support.