



Washington Association of Conservation Districts

WACD 2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION POLICY PRIORITIES

Conservation District Elections. WACD supports HB 1652 to update the conservation districts election system. We support the modernization features of the legislation (four-year term of office, elections held every other year) and staying true to the locally-led concept. Adopting the recommendations from the Joint Committee on Elections – a combined effort of the Washington State Conservation Commission and WACD – can increase outreach while maintaining local flexibility, in recognition of the unique duties of these special purpose districts that operate without taxing or regulatory authority.

Salmon Riparian Habitat. WACD supports the goal of salmon recovery and believes it should not be achieved at the expense of the time-tested and effective voluntary conservation delivery system. Conservation districts exist to provide an incentive-based approach to natural resource conservation, but voluntary approaches have been hindered in the absence of the necessary financial commitment to fully succeed in achieving the outcome of improved salmon habitat. Proposals like HB 1838 present an unbalanced solution that undercuts the voluntary approach to conservation. If voluntary conservation programs were adequately funded, we would not need this heavy-handed regulatory approach to salmon recovery. We seek to increase the state's support for voluntary conservation programs like VSP, CREP, or EQIP as part of any salmon recovery proposal.

Technical Assistance in Support of Improved Voluntary Stewardship. WACD supports HB 1631 and recognizes the need to increase conservation districts' ability to assist producers and landowners in increasing energy efficiency and providing information on local, state, and federal funding opportunities to implement practices that help reduce the carbon footprint.

Rangeland Fire Protection District Pilot Project. WACD supports HB 1891 and future legislation that authorizes and supports the creation of rangeland fire protection districts in Washington State to allow those on unprotected lands to have access to the training and equipment necessary for the detection, prevention, or suppression of wildfire.

Agricultural Worker Overtime. WACD supports HB 1750 and other legislation that reinstates the historic agricultural work exemptions from certain overtime standards during periods of harvest.

Stock Water Rights. WACD supports HB 5882 and the need to clarify riparian stock watering rights. Removing the off-channel watering exemption would significantly impair the potential for voluntary water quality and riparian habitat protections. It jeopardizes livestock grazing operations which do not have previously documented water rights.



Washington Association of Conservation Districts

WACD 2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BUDGET PRIORITIES

	WSCC Request	Governor's Proposal	WACD Request
Sustainable Farms and Fields	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000
Conservation Equity & Engagement	\$500,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Riparian Plant Nurseries	\$0	\$1,300,000	\$0
Total Requested Funding	\$2,500,000	\$3,350,000	\$2,050,000

OPERATING BUDGET PRIORITY

Sustainable Farms and Fields (SFF). Despite its creation by the Legislature in 2020, the SFF grant program has yet to be funded. Granting the necessary financial backing would help producers and landowners overcome the financial barriers to adopting more environmentally friendly practices. The urgency of this need comes from the economic disruptions caused by COVID-19 and acknowledgement that the natural resources sector is a vital component to reaching the state's climate goals.

Conservation districts and other public entities would utilize the grant program to increase climate resiliency through increased local agricultural viability. Eligible farming practices would provide an economic benefit to the cooperator while simultaneously achieving environmental improvement. CDs would provide the necessary technical and financial assistance to willing cooperators to adopt site-specific practices.

ONGOING PRINCIPLES

Though not a budget priority in this session, the Washington Association of Conservation Districts continually advocates for support of:

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA). Funding increases landowner participation rates in voluntary conservation programs. CTA ensures conservation districts have the capacity to provide support in the form of financial assistance, engineering project designs, assistance navigating permitting processes, and other services to empower landowners to conserve natural resources.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The CREP program leverages federal Farm Bill dollars (\$0.25 state/\$0.75 federal) and is a critical funding mechanism for restoring riparian buffers and enhancing salmonid habitat on private lands.