

# Proposal for Conservation District Election Reform

The Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and 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 potential election improvements, this proposal represents the best option to meet the needs of CDs and the communities and natural resources they serve.



## Background: CD elections and what makes them different

- ▶ By statute, CDs conduct elections to fill volunteer positions on their boards outside the general elections process.
- ▶ Part of the reason for this is related to cost. Unlike most special purpose districts, CDs don't have taxing authority. This limits their funding for everything from carrying out their statutory duties to covering election costs.
- ▶ Another unique feature of CDs is they are subject to state oversight, which is provided by the SCC.
- ▶ As part of their oversight role, the SCC sets the CD election process, monitors election administration, and verifies/certifies election results.
- ▶ As with any process, changes may be needed over time. The SCC reviews procedures after each election cycle to assess opportunities for improvement.

## Why change the CD election process?



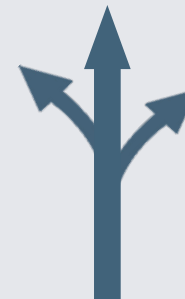
### INCREASE VOTER TURNOUT

Participation in CD elections typically is low. We want more people to have a say in CD leadership.



### IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY

Many are unaware of CDs' locally led structure. This limits community feedback to elected supervisors.



### EMPOWER LOCAL FLEXIBILITY

The one-size-fits-all approach to elections isn't meeting the needs of all CDs and their communities.

## Three-part proposal for CD election reforms

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

### PROPOSAL 1/3: TERMS AND ELECTION SCHEDULE

- ▶ Extend the CD supervisor term to four years.
- ▶ For the three elected supervisor positions, hold elections every other year during even years.
- ▶ For the two appointed supervisor positions, make appointments every other year during odd years.

*Why?*

- ▶ **Cost savings.** Changing the term from three to four years and holding elections every other year (rather than the current every year schedule) reduces election administration costs.
- ▶ **Capacity for outreach.** With elections held less often, CDs will have more capacity to double-down on local outreach during election years to engage more participation.
- ▶ **Normalizing terms of service.** Supervisor terms will be consistent with many other local and state elected officials.

### PROPOSAL 2/3: SCC ELECTION PROCESS

- ▶ CDs host elections during one "Conservation Month" designated by the SCC. SCC will run statewide campaign to promote CDs/ election opportunities leading up to and during this month.
- ▶ CDs increase local elections outreach.

*Why?*

- ▶ **Statewide promotion.** With elections held within one month, rather than the current three-month period, the SCC will run an efficient "Conservation Month" marketing campaign to promote CD elections.
- ▶ **Inclusive outreach.** SCC will take steps to reach diverse and underserved communities as part of the elections marketing strategy.
- ▶ **Engagement with conservation.** Elections marketing will include messaging about CD services and encourage people to take part in conservation.

### PROPOSAL 3/3: GENERAL ELECTION OPTION

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

*Why?*

- ▶ **Flexibility to weigh impacts of election costs.** Districts will evaluate whether they can afford general election costs or if the expense could result in communities losing access to the conservation services they're statutorily required to provide.
- ▶ **Voter participation.** Districts that can afford general election expenses will see more ballots cast in their CD supervisor elections.

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