



Washington Association of Conservation Districts

WACD 2023 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 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 legislation that reinstates the historic agricultural work exemptions from certain overtime standards during periods of harvest.

Stock Water Rights. WACD supports 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.



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WACD 2023 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BUDGET PRIORITIES

| | WSCC Request | Governor's Proposal | WACD Request |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Conservation Technical Assistance | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Natural Resource Investment | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Voluntary Stewardship Program | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Total Requested Funding | | | |

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 wishes to see that at least a fraction of that need is met. This backlog means willing participants cannot access district programs: 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.

CAPITAL BUDGET PRIORITIES

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). CREP leverages federal Farm Bill dollars (\$0.20 state/\$0.80 federal) and 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 enhanced for salmon in Washington State over the last 20 years.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). RCPP funding is used to restore critical habitat and improve water quality around the state, and supports 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.

*Subject to change based on resolutions adopted at the 2022 Annual Meeting