

Conservation District Elections in Washington State: Preliminary Report

The 2023 Washington State Legislature directed WSIPP to conduct a study on the costs of conservation district supervisor elections in Washington under current law and several alternative policies that would place these elections on the general ballot in each county. WSIPP is also tasked with describing the potential non-monetary costs and benefits of these alternative policies. In this preliminary report, we describe the role and history of conservation districts as well as data obtained to date.

Background

Conservation districts (districts) are independent, non-regulatory local government bodies that focus on protecting natural resources by providing voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs and services to landowners. Each district is headed by a five-member board of supervisors, of whom two are appointed by the State Conservation Commission (SCC), and three are elected by residents of the district.

Districts in Washington currently hold supervisor elections under [RCW 89.08](#) rather than [RCW 29A](#), which governs elections for most other elected officials on the general ballot. Districts fund their elections through grants from SCC, other grants, and/or assessments from county auditors.

Progress to Date

We contacted all 45 districts in Washington to request election cost and funding data from recent years. District personnel were sent an informal questionnaire to allow them to comment on how the alternative general ballot policies would impact their districts. We received cost information from 35 districts and questionnaire responses from 29.

The SCC has provided data on the number of ballots cast in each district election from 2019-2024. The Office of the Secretary of State provided data on general election costs by county; we will use these data to estimate the cost to districts of going on the general ballot.

Study Data Obtained to Date

Data	Source	Received/ total
Total election costs/cost per ballot, election funding source	CDs	35/45
Questionnaire responses	CDs	29/45
Ballots cast in CD elections	SCC	45/45
County general ballot election costs	SOS	39/39

Assignment Details

Assigned in 2023 Legislative Session
[ESSB 5187](#), Operating Budget

Full report available on [WSIPP's website](#)

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