

***Agriculture & Ecology Committee***

***HB 1502***

***Brief Description:*** *Revising provisions relating to conservation districts.*

***Sponsors:*** *Representatives G. Chandler, Grant, Schoesler and Mastin.*

***Brief Summary of Bill***

- *Changes definition of and references to district elector from a registered voter to a qualified county elector occupying land in the district.*
- *Changes signature requirements for petitions to create and dissolve conservation districts and to annex territory to a district.*

***Hearing Date:*** *February 9, 2001.*

***Staff:*** *Caroleen Dineen (786-7156).*

***Background:***

*A conservation district is created to conduct activities related to conservation of renewable natural resources. Some conservation district programs and activities include research, surveys, investigations, educational programs, and technical assistance. Conservation districts are assisted and their programs are coordinated by the Conservation Commission, a state agency.*

*A conservation district may be initiated by filing a petition with the Conservation Commission that is signed by 20 percent of the voters occupying land within the affected area. The Conservation Commission is required to hold a hearing on the petition and to enter findings approving or denying the petition. If it determines the conservation district is needed, the Conservation Commission submits the proposal to create the district to a vote of district electors. Upon a majority vote favoring the proposed district, the Conservation Commission must determine the proposed district's practicability, considering factors such as the voters' attitudes, number of eligible voters who voted at the election, size of the majority vote, wealth and income of the land occupiers, probable expense, and other*

*relevant economic factors. If it finds the district is impracticable, the Conservation Commission must deny the petition, an action which precludes a new petition from being filed for the same area within six months.*

*Annexation of territory to an existing district may be initiated by filing a petition with the Conservation Commission that is signed by 20 percent of the voters of the area to be included in the district. The procedure for annexation of territory is the same as for creation of a district. Alternatively, the Conservation Commission may change a district's or districts' boundaries upon the petition of a majority of the voters in the relevant districts or in areas not included within a district. Further, the Conservation Commission has authority to approve the combination of all or parts of districts.*

*After a district has been organized for five years, 20 percent of the district voters may file a petition with the Conservation Commission to dissolve the district. A conservation district is dissolved if a majority of votes cast at an election favor dissolution.*

***Summary of Bill:***

*The definition of a conservation "district elector" is changed from a registered voter residing within the district to a qualified county elector occupying land within the district boundary. References to "voters" and "district electors" are changed to "land occupiers" in statutes relating to creation and dissolution of a conservation district as well as to annexation of territory to a district and combinations of districts.*

*The 20 percent criterion for petition signatures to initiate conservation district creation or dissolution is changed. A petition to create a district may be initiated by filing a petition signed by 25 or more land occupiers within the affected area. A petition to dissolve a district may be initiated by filing a petition signed by 100 land occupiers within the district.*

*The 20 percent criterion for petition signatures to initiate an annexation of territory to a conservation district is eliminated. Petitions for annexation may be filed by land occupiers within the area to be included in the district.*

***Appropriation:*** None.

***Fiscal Note:*** Available.

***Effective Date:*** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.