

***Agriculture & Ecology Committee***

***ESSB 5904***

***Brief Description:*** *Revising procedures for choosing conservation district supervisors.*

***Sponsors:*** *By Senate Committee on Agriculture & International Trade (originally sponsored by Senators Morton and Rasmussen).*

***Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill***

- *Makes provisions for conservation districts to choose to use the conservation district election process or the general election statutes.*
- *Specifies requirements for districts choosing to use the general election statutes.*
- *Creates an alternative appointment method for conservation district supervisors who would otherwise be elected under the general election or conservation district election processes.*

***Hearing Date:*** *3/27/01*

***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. If it determines practicability, the Conservation Commission appoints two district supervisors to serve with the three elected supervisors. One of the two appointed supervisors must be a land owner or farm operator, and two of the three elected supervisors must be land owners or farm operators.*

***Summary of Bill:***

*Conservation districts may choose to use the conservation district chapter election process or the process specified in general election statutes. Conservation districts must choose to use general election procedures in time to provide appropriate prior notice to affected county auditors.*

*Conservation districts choosing to conduct elections according to the general election statutes are still governed by the statutory conservation district provisions not related to election processes. Conservation districts choosing general elections procedures remain solely responsible for the costs of holding elections.*

*At least one district supervisor appointed to a conservation district board of supervisors after the initial appointments must be a land owner or farm operator. In elections subsequent to the initial election, at least two of the three elected supervisors must be land owners or farm operators.*

*As an alternative to general election procedures, a conservation district board of supervisors may by resolution request that the legislative authority of the county or counties in which the district is located appoint district electors to serve as the board's elected supervisors. If requested, the county legislative authority or authorities must appoint persons to serve as elected supervisors' terms expire. The county legislative authority must ensure that at least two of the three supervisors appointed under this method are land owners or farm operators.*

*Candidates and conservation district supervisors in districts choosing to use the general election processes are subject to statutory public disclosure requirements. Conservation district supervisors elected or appointed through other processes are not subject to public disclosure requirements.*

*"Elected supervisor" is defined as a member of a conservation district board of supervisors who is not appointed by the state Conservation Commission and who is elected under either the general election or conservation district process or appointed under the alternative county appointment method.*

***Appropriation: None.***

***Fiscal Note: Not Requested.***

***Effective Date: This bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.***