

---

**Agriculture & Natural  
Resources Committee**

---

**HB 2140**

**Brief Description:** Reaffirming the role of the state conservation commission.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Grant and Linville.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Moves statutes relating to the establishment and operation of the Conservation Commission (Commission) from the conservation districts statutes to the statutory title related to state agencies.
- Adds requirements regarding the operation and duties of the Commission.
- Adds requirements regarding reporting by the conservation districts to the Commission.
- Includes numerous technical revisions, including reorganizing statutory sections and subsections and revising language in existing provisions in Commission statutes and conservation districts statutes as they relate to the Commission.

**Hearing Date:** 3/4/03

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

**Background:**

The Conservation Commission (Commission) is a state agency created in 1939. The Commission's duties include assisting and guiding conservation districts in preparing and implementing resource conservation programs. The Commission provides informational and technical assistance to conservation districts throughout Washington. The Commission also recommends and administers funding, distributes funds to conservation districts, and reviews conservation district budgets and annual reports. In addition, the Commission appoints two of the five supervisors on each conservation district's board of supervisors.

The Commission is governed by a 10-member board. The Governor appoints two members, one of whom must be a land owner or farm operator, who serve four-year terms. Of the

three Commission board members elected by the conservation district supervisors, at least two must be land owners or farm operators. The elected members serve three-year terms. The other five members serve (directly or through appointees) as ex-officio members of the Commission:

- the Director of the Department of Ecology;
- the Director of the Department of Agriculture;
- the Commissioner of Public Lands;
- the President of the Washington Association of Conservation Districts; and
- the Dean of the College of Agriculture at Washington State University.

The Governor's proposed budget for the 2003-2005 biennium proposes eliminating the Commission and consolidating its functions into the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

### **Summary of Bill:**

Statutes relating to the establishment and operation of the Conservation Commission (Commission) are moved from the conservation districts statutes (chapter 89.08 RCW) to the general statutory title related to state agencies (Title 43 RCW). Numerous technical revisions, including reorganizing statutory sections and subsections and revising language in existing provisions, are made to these statutes and to the conservation district statutes as they relate to the Commission.

Several changes related to operation of and duties of the Commission are included. The Office of Financial Management (rather than the Department of Ecology) is authorized to pay travel expenses for Commission members. The Commission is required to establish procedures for making the determination whether a district is warranted and practicable. The Commission also is required to designate the term for which each elected conservation district supervisor is to serve when the conservation district is divided into zones for purposes of elections. Further, the Commission must provide a report to the Legislature at least once every two years regarding grants made to conservation districts.

Provisions are added regarding reporting by the conservation districts to the Commission. The conservation districts must submit to the Commission the name of any person other than the county treasurer who is selected to serve as district treasurer. The district supervisors also are required to inform the Commission of its designation of any area, state, or national association of conservation districts as a coordinating agency. Further, when a conservation district is dissolved, the district supervisors must file with the Commission a copy of the dissolution application that is submitted to the Secretary of State. In addition, districts must submit to the Commission their lists of best management practices for habitat improvement and water quality and quantity enhancement projects. Finally, conservation districts must file with the Commission a copy of the proposed system of assessments that is filed with the county legislative authority.

Legislative intent provisions regarding watershed restoration projects are amended to reference the participation of the Commission and conservation districts in these efforts.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on March 3, 2003.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.