

SENATE BILL REPORT

EHB 2140

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Agriculture, March 27, 2003

Title: An act relating to reaffirming the role of the state conservation commission.

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

Sponsors: Representatives Grant and Linville.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture: 3/25/03, 3/27/03 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Swecker, Chair; Brandland, Vice Chair; Jacobsen, Rasmussen and Sheahan.

Staff: Bob Lee (786-7404)

Background: The Conservation 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 information and technical assistance to local conservation districts. The commission recommends and administers funding, and distributes funds to conservation districts. The State Conservation Commission appoints two of the five supervisors on each local conservation district board.

The commission is governed by a 10 member board. The Governor appoints two members, one of whom must be a landowner or a farm operator. Three members are elected by conservation district supervisors; at least two must be landowners or farm operators. The other five members include: the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Ecology, 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 and implementing legislation for the 2003-2005 biennium proposes replacing the State Conservation Commission with an advisory committee appointed by the Director of Agriculture. The commission would discontinue to be a separate agency and its functions would be transferred to the Department of Agriculture.

Summary of Amended Bill: Statutes relating to the establishment and operation of the Conservation Commission are moved from the conservation district statutes (Chapter 89.08 RCW) to a new chapter in title in Title 43 RCW, where most other state agencies are located. Numerous technical revisions are made to reorganize and update the statutes.

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. Provisions are added regarding reporting by conservation districts to the commission.

In regards to the five members that constitute a local conservation district board, procedures are altered as to how members are appointed and elected.

At the request of the Legislature, the commission must provide a report describing how grant funds are utilized.

Districts must submit lists of best management practices to the commission.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: Technical corrections were made to Section 31(1).

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The Conservation District statutes enacted in 1939 need to be updated and modernized. Letters from a wide spectrum of agricultural and environmental groups support the continuation of the State Conservation Commission to formulate and deliver conservation programs.

Testimony Against: The State Conservation Commission program formulation would be improved if representatives specifically from livestock and crop trade associations were added to the board.

Testified: Jim Jesernig, WA Assn. of Conservation Districts (pro); Jay Gordon, WA State Dairy Federation (pro w/suggestions).