

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1462

As Reported by House Committee On:
Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade

Title: An act relating to funding conservation districts.

Brief Description: Funding conservation districts.

Sponsors: Representatives Linville, Buri, Pettigrew and Chase; by request of Conservation Commission.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade: 2/8/05, 2/11/05 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Allows the Conservation Commission to adopt rules concerning eligibility and distribution of grants to conservation districts.
- Repeals existing statutory formulas governing distribution of grants.
- Requires the Conservation Commission to submit a report to the Legislature on the distribution of grant funds by September 30, 2007.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE & TRADE

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 23 members: Representatives Linville, Chair; Pettigrew, Vice Chair; Kristiansen, Ranking Minority Member; Skinner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Blake, Buri, Chase, Clibborn, Condotta, Dunn, Grant, Haler, Holmquist, Kenney, Kilmer, Kretz, McCoy, Morrell, Newhouse, Quall, Strow, P. Sullivan and Wallace.

Staff: Meg Van Schoorl (786-7105).

Background:

The Conservation Commission (Commission) and 47 Conservation Districts administer a number of programs related to the conservation of natural resources. Under current law, the Commission is authorized to use legislatively-appropriated funds to make grants to conservation districts on the basis of formulas included in the law. Since the inception of the program in 1989, appropriations to the Commission have resulted in annual grants of

approximately \$10,000 to each Conservation District, which must be matched dollar for dollar.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Conservation Commission is given authority to adopt rules concerning eligibility and distribution of grants to Conservation Districts. Existing statutory formulas governing distribution of grants to Conservation Districts are repealed. The Commission must submit a report to the Legislature on the distribution of grant funds to Conservation Districts by September 30, 2007.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The Conservation Commission is required to submit a report to the Legislature on the distribution of grant funds to Conservation Districts by September 30, 2007.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: This bill is the result of longstanding discussions between the Conservation Commission, the Conservation Districts, the Office of Financial Management, and the legislative budget committees. Based on current statute, the Conservation Commission provides about \$1 million annually in equal amounts to each of the state's Conservation Districts for basic operational funding. There is a diversity of districts; some are "haves," some are "have-nots." This bill would allow the Conservation Commission to write guidelines enabling some funds to be provided to those districts that most need financial help. The changes in this bill are tied to an additional \$420,000 in Governor Locke's 05-07 budget request. The additional funding probably would be used to raise the capacity of smaller districts. This bill will allow the Commission to write guidelines for how the additional funds will be provided to districts. The Washington Association of Conservation Districts supports the bill. They are aware of no opposition. The bills will allow for flexibility at the conservation district level. Some districts have plenty of money, but smaller ones, especially those with large government land bases, are constrained in raising assessments. This will help keep Conservation Districts open throughout all parts of the state.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Stu Trefry, Washington Conservation Commission; and Jim Jesernig, Washington Association of Conservation Districts.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.