

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1462

As Passed House:

March 9, 2005

Title: An act relating to funding conservation districts.

Brief Description: Funding conservation districts.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade (originally sponsored by 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];

Appropriations: 3/5/05 [DPS(EDAT)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/9/05, 96-0.

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).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 28 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Fromhold, Vice Chair; Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McDonald, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Bailey, Buri, Clements, Cody, Conway, Darneille, Dunshee, Grant, Haigh, Hinkle, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, McDermott, Miloscia, Pearson, Priest, Schual-Berke, Talcott and Walsh.

Staff: Alicia Paatsch (786-7178).

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.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: (Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade) 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 \$1.2 million biennially 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. 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 For: (Appropriations) There are 48 conservation districts throughout Washington that are located in areas that range from huge counties, such as King, to tiny counties, such as Wahkiakum. There is \$1.2 million in base funding for the administration of these conservation districts and by statute the funds are dispersed evenly, regardless of need, to the districts.

What we have proposed is to change this and give additional funds to those with more need to keep their doors open. Funding the Locke budget is tied to this bill, but the bill shouldn't be here. Conservation Districts are the tie to the local community.

Testimony Against: (Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade) None.

Testimony Against: (Appropriations) None.

Persons Testifying: (Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade) Stu Trefry, Washington Conservation Commission; and Jim Jesernig, Washington Association of Conservation Districts.

Persons Testifying: (Appropriations) Jim Jesernig and John Larson, Washington Association of Conservation Districts.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: (Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade) None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: (Appropriations) None.