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**Agriculture & Natural Resources  
Committee**

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**SSB 5108**

**Brief Description:** Creating the office of farmland preservation.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Agriculture & Rural Economic Development (originally sponsored by Senators Haugen, Rasmussen, Jacobsen, Shin, Spanel, Swecker, Brandland, Hatfield and Parlette).

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Creates the Office of Farmland Preservation in the State Conservation Commission and establishes a Farmland Preservation Task Force.

**Hearing Date:** 3/21/07

**Staff:** Meg Van Schoorl (786-7105).

**Background:**

State Conservation Commission

The State Conservation Commission (Commission) established in Chapter 89.08 RCW is charged with a number of powers and duties related to the conservation of renewable natural resources, including:

- Assisting Conservation District (District) supervisors to carry out powers and programs;
- Keeping them informed about other Districts' activities and experience and facilitating interchange and cooperation;
- Securing cooperation and assistance of public and private agencies with Districts, and reviewing agreements between Districts and other entities;
- Recommending legislative funding for the Commission and Districts, administering associated legal provisions, and advising Districts on conformance with laws and regulations;

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- Distributing funds, property, and services to Districts received from any source, subject to applicable conditions; and
- Coordinating planning, programs, and activities with other agencies involved with conservation of renewable natural resources.

Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (Chapter 89.08.530 and .540 RCW)

In 2002, the Legislature created the Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (Program) to "facilitate the use of federal funds, ease the burdens of local governments launching similar programs at the local level, and help local governments fight the conversion of agricultural lands they have not otherwise protected through their planning processes." The Commission is required to manage the Program, and is authorized to receive and expend public and private gifts, grants, or endowments for the benefit of the Program. An Agricultural Conservation Easements Account (Account) was created in the State Treasury to receive such gifts, grants and endowments, and expenditures from the Account may only be made to purchase easements under the Program. The Commission must report to the Legislature on an ongoing basis regarding potential funding sources and recommendations for changes to existing funding. To date, the Account has not been funded.

**Summary of Bill:**

An Office of Farmland Preservation is created within the State Conservation Commission, with staff support by the Commission. The Farmland Preservation Task Force (Task Force) is also established, staffed by the Commission, and directed to meet at least twice yearly. Members are entitled to travel cost reimbursement. The Task Force terminates on January 1, 2011, and has the following membership provisions:

#	REPRESENTING	APPOINTING AUTHORITY	OTHER REQUIREMENTS
<b>VOTING MEMBERS</b>			
6	Farmer, one from each of six regions delineated by the Commission	Governor, from nominees by recognized agricultural organizations	At least two representatives must be under age 45. At least one must be a commercial livestock producer.
1	State Conservation Commission	Commission Chair	
1	Department of Agriculture	Department Director	
1	Counties in eastern Washington	Washington State Association of Counties	
1	Counties in western Washington	Washington State Association of Counties	

2	Senate - one from each major political caucus	Senate President	
2	House - one from each major political caucus	House Speaker	
1	Governor's office	Governor	
1	Conservation Districts	State Association of Conservation Districts	

**NON-VOTING MEMBERS (PARTICIPATION TO BE REQUESTED)**

1	Federal Natural Resources Conservation Service	State Conservationist	Knowledge of federal agricultural land retention programs and funding sources.
1	Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development	Department Director	Technical Expertise

The Office of Farmland Preservation is authorized to:

- Advise and assist the Commission in implementing the Agricultural Conservation Easements Program.
- Develop recommendations for the funding level of the Agricultural Conservation Easements Account, with guidance from the Task Force.
- Provide an analysis of major factors that have led to past declines in amount and use of agricultural lands and that will likely affect their future retention and viability, with input from the Task Force.
- Develop model programs and tools to retain agricultural land for agricultural production, with guidance from the Farmland Preservation Task Force.
- Provide technical assistance, a grant process and an eligibility certification process for localities developing programs and tools to retain agricultural land for agricultural production.
- Begin to develop a program to assist in transition of farmland and related businesses from one generation to the next, and provide analysis and recommendations for continued program development and implementation.
- Serve as a clearinghouse for incentive programs related to conservation programs and assist agricultural landowners to secure financial assistance to implement conservation easements and other projects.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available on original bill. Requested on substitute bill on March 16, 2007.

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