

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6372

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As of January 27, 2010

**Title:** An act relating to creating a task force to review conservation district functions and operations for the twenty-first century.

**Brief Description:** Creating a task force to review conservation district functions and operations.

**Sponsors:** Senators Jacobsen and Shin.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Agriculture & Rural Economic Development: 1/28/10.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Staff:** Bob Lee (786-7404)

**Background:** A large number of states enacted conservation district statutes following creation of the Soil Conservation Service by Congress in 1935. Washington State enacted the conservation district statute in 1939. The authorities of conservation districts cover a broad array of natural resource areas. Generally, conservation districts are county-wide governmental entities. In some cases the county is divided into more than one conservation district. The board of supervisors of conservation districts consist of five members: three that are elected by local voters; and two that are appointed by the State Conservation Commission.

The Conservation Commission is the state coordinating entity for local conservation districts. The Conservation Commission board consists of the following ten members:

- four representatives of governmental agencies, including the Departments of Ecology, Agriculture, Natural Resources, and the dean of the college of agriculture at Washington State University;
- the president of the Washington Association of Conservation Districts;
- three members elected by the district supervisors at their annual meeting, from three different regions of the state; and
- two members appointed by the Governor.

**Summary of Bill:** A task force is established consisting of the following members:

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- a representative of the state Conservation Commission appointed by its chair;
- a representative of the Puget Sound Partnership appointed by its leadership council;
- up to seven members representing a range of conservation districts, one of whom must be from a county with a population that exceeds 1.5 million people, appointed by the state association representing conservation districts;
- three representatives of statewide agricultural associations, one of whom must represent livestock producers, appointed by the Governor in consultation with the Director of Agriculture;
- two representatives of statewide environmental organizations with ongoing interest and experience in working with conservation districts on projects and activities in the existing altered and built environments and with land trusts, appointed by the Governor;
- two representatives representing the size spectrum of cities, appointed by a statewide association representing city governments;
- two representatives of county governments, one of whom must represent counties with over 500,000 people, appointed by the state association representing county governments; and
- tribal governments must be invited by the Governor to send a representative who is familiar with agriculture and urban concerns to serve on the task force.

The task force is to examine the following:

- the process of selecting conservation district board members;
- how conservation districts are funded, including revenue from conservation district assessments and from state funding sources;
- the current role and mission of conservation districts and whether districts are structured to effectively fulfill their role and mission;
- the jurisdictional area of conservation districts and whether differences between urban and rural areas are being successfully bridged by district programs;
- whether districts are fulfilling the public expectations of the 21st Century;
- what makes natural resource stewardship projects and activities successful; and
- other issues relevant to conservation districts included in the Governor's natural resources reform report, including the conservation incentives service delivery proposal.

The task force must vote to select its chair or co-chairs. The task force must be staffed by a facilitator who has a proven understanding in urban, suburban, and rural culture and values, and has experience in the implementation of successful programs. The facilitator or co-facilitators must be appointed as independent contractors by the Governor in consultation with the act's sponsoring legislators.

A report of the task force's findings and conclusions is to be submitted to the Governor, the House of Representatives, and the Senate by December, 1, 2011.

The act expires on March 1, 2012.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** Yes.

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