

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5766

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As of February 18, 2013

**Title:** An act relating to improving relationships between agricultural producers and state regulatory staff.

**Brief Description:** Improving relationships between agricultural producers and state regulatory staff.

**Sponsors:** Senators Hobbs, Hatfield, Honeyford, Schoesler and Brown.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Agriculture, Water & Rural Economic Development: 2/18/13.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER & RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

**Background:** The State Conservation Commission (Commission) consists of ten members including:

- two members appointed by the Governor – one must be a landowner or operator of a farm;
- three elected members – at least two must be landowners or operators of a farm;
- a representative from the Department of Agriculture (WSDA);
- a representative from the Department of Ecology (DOE);
- a representative appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands;
- the Dean of the College of Agriculture at Washington State University; and
- the president of the association representing conservation districts.

Additionally, the Commission may invite officers of cooperating organizations, state agencies, and federal agencies to serve as advisers.

**Summary of Bill:** The Commission must initiate a state forum that includes persons designated by the directors of state regulatory agencies and persons nominated by state and regional agricultural organizations to:

- design a process to be instituted at the county or regional level on a pilot project basis that provides an opportunity to begin a dialogue that improves communication and mutual understanding and cooperation;

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- design a process for receiving and evaluating complaints to form the basis for possible changes to agency procedures;
- examine and propose revision of existing training provided and procedures followed by field enforcement staff of state regulatory agencies that interact with agricultural producers; and
- examine policy issues that create tensions between state regulatory agencies and agricultural organizations and propose methods to relieve these tensions, including recommending policy changes to the Legislature.

The state forum may request assistance from local conservation districts to host and conduct local forums on a pilot basis to initiate a dialogue between state regulatory staff and agricultural and rural landowners in that county or region. The Commission may provide incentives to those conservation districts that engage in the pilot program. The Commission must seek involvement from at least one district from each side of the Cascade Mountains each year. The commission must consult with legislators to assist in determining which counties may benefit from the establishment of these forums.

WSDA, DOE, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Department of Natural Resources must cooperate with the Commission and participate in the state and local forums.

The Commission must submit a report by December 1, 2017, to the Legislature on the results of the forums and pilot programs, and must also submit any recommendations to further decrease tensions and improve the working relationships and understanding between agricultural landowners and staff assigned to state regulatory agencies.

The act expires on July 1, 2018.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested February 15, 2012.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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