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## State Government Committee

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### HB 1266

**Brief Description:** Creating a task force on elections for irrigation districts.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Buys and Haler.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Brief Summary of Bill</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creates a task force to review statutes relating to irrigation district elections and make recommendations for changes to those statutes.</li></ul>
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**Hearing Date:** 1/22/15

**Staff:** Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

**Background:**

Irrigation Districts – Function and Management.

Irrigation districts provide for the construction, improvement, maintenance, and operation of irrigation systems. Irrigation districts also may provide drainage, domestic water supply, and electric power facilities. Irrigation districts may finance their operations and actions through fees, charges, and assessments, but irrigation districts do not have the authority to impose property taxes.

Elections to Form a District.

Irrigation districts are established through a landowner petition process and subsequent voter approval. A board of three, five, or seven elected directors is responsible for the management of each district. The Board of County Commissioners (Board) defines the boundaries of the proposed district, establishes election precincts, designates a polling place, and appoints the necessary election officers for each precinct. On the second Monday after the election the Board canvasses the returns. Two-thirds of all votes cast must vote in favor of the district in order for it to be formed.

Election of Directors.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

Election of the directors is held on the second Tuesday of December of each year, and the term of each director is for three years. The Board of Election is composed of two judges and one inspector, all appointed by the directors. The board may appoint two clerks. The board is responsible for the counting of votes. The secretary of the board is responsible for certifying and recording the results of the election. Voting is by mail and at precinct polling places.

#### Qualifications of Voters and Directors.

In order to vote for the formation or director of an irrigation district, a person must be 18 years old, a United States citizen, and a resident of the state who holds title to land in the district or proposed district.

#### Allocation of Votes.

In districts of less than 200,000 acres, each elector receives one vote for the first 10 acres owned by the elector, and one additional vote for all acreage over 10 acres. In districts of 200,000 or more acres, each elector receives two votes per every five acres of land owned. In any district where more than 50 percent of the total acreage of the district is owned in individual ownerships of less than five acres, each ownership is allocated two votes, regardless of the size of ownership.

#### **Summary of Bill:**

A task force on irrigation district elections is established. Membership includes four members of the Legislature, the Secretary of State or a designee, and one representative from each of the following:

- the Washington Association of County Auditors;
- the Washington State Water Resources Association;
- the Whatcom County Agricultural District Coalition;
- an irrigation district located east of the crest of the Cascade mountains;
- an irrigation district located west of the crest of the Cascade mountains;
- the Washington State Farm Bureau;
- the Washington State Grange; and
- a federally recognized Indian tribe in Washington, if they choose to participate.

The initial meeting of the task force shall be convened by August 1, 2015, by the prime sponsor of this act, who shall serve as co-chair. The Senate co-chair shall be appointed by the majority leader of the Senate. If the co-chair from the House of Representatives chooses not to serve as co chair, another co-chair may be appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives. The co-chairs shall invite and approve individuals to serve as non-legislative representatives on the task force.

The task force shall review and take testimony on the following issues:

- the irrigation district election process and how it is implemented in the irrigation districts throughout the state;
- the election processes provided by the county auditors;
- election processes using modern technology or from other special purpose districts; and
- other issues that arise from the irrigation district election process that may need modernization or improvement.

The task force shall identify potential changes to improve efficiency, accuracy, integrity, and transparency of the irrigation district election process, and provide a report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by November 15, 2015. The report must identify which recommendations are supported by all of the members of the task force.

Senate Committee Services and the House of Representatives' Office of Program Research shall provide staff to the task force. The task force may contract with additional persons who have specific technical expertise if such expertise is necessary to carry out the duties of the task force.

Members of the task force shall be reimbursed for travel expenses in accordance with statute. The expenses of the task force must be paid jointly by the Senate and the House of Representatives.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

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