

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1426

As Reported by House Committee On:
Local Government

Title: An act relating to cooperation between conservation districts.

Brief Description: Concerning cooperation between conservation districts.

Sponsors: Representatives Ramos, Orcutt, Mead, Walsh, Slatter, Lovick and Leavitt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government: 2/8/19, 2/13/19 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes two or more conservation districts, by agreement, to engage in engineering activities or make available for purposes of the agreement any professional engineering services that may be available to them.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Pollet, Chair; Peterson, Vice Chair; Kraft, Ranking Minority Member; Griffey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Goehner and Senn.

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

Background:

Conservation districts (district) are a type of special purpose district charged with engaging with private landowners in improving natural resources and delivering resource conservation programs and activities to local communities.

Each district is directed by a five-member board of supervisors. Three members are elected locally, at least two of whom must be landowners or operators of a farm. The Washington State Conservation Commission appoints the remaining two members, including at least one landowner or farm operator.

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.

Districts offer a range of voluntary services including but not limited to assistance with: erosion control, habitat restoration, manure management, wildfire prevention/mitigation, stormwater management, forest plans, irrigation efficiency, noxious weed control, fish barrier removals, and livestock stream crossings.

Any two or more districts may engage in joint activities, by agreement, which include planning, financing, constructing, operating, maintaining, and administering any program or project concerned with the conservation of renewable natural resources. The districts may also make available, for purposes of the agreement, funds, property, personnel, equipment, and services available to them.

There are 45 conservation districts in Washington, and all 39 counties in Washington are represented by at least one conservation district.

Summary of Bill:

Two or more conservation districts (districts), by agreement, may engage in joint activities that includes but is not limited to engineering as it relates to conservation of renewable natural resources. Districts are also authorized to make available for purposes of the agreement any professional engineering that may be available to them.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) About 20 years ago, the federal Natural Resource and Conservation Service was told that they were no longer able to provide engineering services to the conservation districts (districts) in Washington. Around the same time, the state engineering board was concerned that some districts were doing engineering without an engineer. As a result, the Legislature provided funding to allow the districts to jointly hire engineers.

For efficiency, districts often share services across boundaries. Although districts have been sharing professional engineering services for quite some time, the State Auditor recently found that the authority to share such services was not authorized in statute. The Washington State Auditor's Office gave the districts a year to come into compliance. Since most districts cannot afford to hire their own engineer, this bill will fix the problem and will allow them to continue sharing the costs of professional engineering services across boundaries.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Ramos, prime sponsor; and Stu Trefry, Washington Conservation Commission.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.