
State Government & Tribal Relations Committee

HB 1652

Brief Description: Concerning conservation district elections.

Sponsors: Representatives Dolan, Lekanoff, Shewmake, Fitzgibbon, Goodman and Tharinger.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Lengthens conservation district board of supervisor terms from three to four years.
- Provides that conservation district elections occur in odd-numbered years.
- Permits conservation districts to choose to hold their elections under Title 29A, the regular election process used for federal, state, and many local offices.

Hearing Date: 1/12/22

Staff: Jason Zolle (786-7124).

Background:

Special purpose districts are local governments formed for a limited purpose that are separate from a county, city, or town government. There are more than 80 types of special purpose districts in Washington, providing services such as fire protection, libraries, water and sewer treatment, and mosquito control.

Conservation Districts.

The State Conservation Commission (SCC) consists of 10 members, two of whom are appointed

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

by the Governor and three of whom are elected by conservation district supervisors. The directors of the departments of Ecology and Agriculture, the Commissioner of Public Lands, the President of the Washington Association of Conservation Districts, and the Dean of the College of Agriculture at Washington State University are ex officio members of the SCC.

Conservation districts are special purpose districts that are organized to promote the conservation of renewable natural resources. A conservation district may be formed when 20 percent of the voters within the proposed district area file a petition with the SCC. A public hearing is then held, and the SCC may call an election if it finds that the public health, safety, and welfare warrant the creation of the district. If a majority of voters support a district, the SCC then determines whether the project is practicable. If so, the district is created.

Board of Supervisors. The board of supervisors of a conservation district is comprised of five members, three of whom are elected to staggered three-year terms. Two of the three elected supervisors must be landowners or operators of a farm. The other two supervisors are appointed by the SCC; one must be a landowner or the operator of a farm.

Voting Rights. The SCC may determine the qualifications necessary to vote. By SCC rule, an individual registered to vote in the county where the district is located and who resides within the conservation district boundaries may vote.

Election Mechanics. For the creation of a district, the SCC sets the date of the election and designates the polling places. For elections to the board of supervisors, the board of supervisors sets the date of the election during the first quarter of the calendar year. To appear on the ballot, a person must file a petition signed by 25 electors.

Title 29A Elections.

Other than some types of special districts and a few other exceptions, local government and special district elections are conducted under Title 29A. Candidates file for office during a filing period in May; a primary is held to narrow the field to two candidates in August; and a general election is held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. General elections for local government candidates are conducted in odd-numbered years, except for counties in which the charter specifies even-year elections. Special elections may be called by a county auditor on one of four days (one in February, one in April, and the date of the August primary or November general election) when the legislative authority so requests.

Ballots are mailed to voters by the county auditor, who largely conducts the elections at the county level, and returned ballots are canvassed by a county canvassing board. Each registered voter is entitled to one vote in the local government races for the jurisdictions in which the voter resides. Elections are overseen by the Office of the Secretary of State. The Public Disclosure Commission oversees campaign finance laws and rules for these elections.

Summary of Bill:

Supervisor terms are lengthened from three to four years. Elections are held every other year in an odd-numbered year, in a month designated by the SCC.

Initial elected and appointed supervisor terms are increased from one, two, or three years to two, three, or four years.

A district board of supervisors may choose to conduct its elections under Title 29A instead, by majority vote after public notice and hearing. However, those districts are still not required to hold a primary, and candidates are not subject to the campaign disclosure and personal financial affairs reporting requirements that apply to other Title 29A elections.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 5, 2022.

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