



February 24, 2014

TO: Conservation District Chairs and Managers
FROM: Ron Shultz, Director of Policy
RE: Conservation District Review of Elections Proviso Report

NOTE: Comment and Review of this report are due by May 19th.

SUMMARY

Responding to the proviso (see language under background) the Commission created a workgroup to develop a report that includes a set of options for conservation district elections. The Commission requested that a part of the report development process include a review and comment period for conservation districts.

Elections Proviso Report Q&A Webinar

Date: March 6, 2014
Time: 10:00 am – 11:00 am
Link: <https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/368312025>

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU

We are very interested in hearing from each conservation district on the following:

1. Review and provide your comments on the Elections Proviso Report (attached). We have added line numbers to make it easier for you to identify where you are recommending changes or have concerns.
2. Review the list of options identified on pages 16 - 17, keeping in mind the criteria identified on pages 14 - 16 and answer the following questions:
 - a. Are these options adequate
 - b. Did we miss any options, if so, please provide your suggested options in your response.
3. What are you as a conservation district willing to do or change with respect to elections? *Please note that responding to this question with “no changes necessary” is an appropriate response. We are really looking to get a feel for how conservation districts view the election process.*

TIMELINE

- Comments from conservation districts are due by COB on May 19, 2014. Please submit them to Megan Finkenbinder at mfinkenbinder@scc.wa.gov. Conservation Districts will have 60 business days to review and comment.

- Commission staff will be holding an all-district webinar (link to register is above) on March 6th to brief attendees on the report and answer any questions.
- Upon receipt of comments from districts, they will be presented to the Elections Proviso Workgroup for review and consideration. The workgroup will then make their recommendations of the proposed final report for the Commission's consideration. If the report as recommended is adopted at the Commission meeting, formal notification will be sent to conservation districts and other affected parties.

BACKGROUND

As you may be aware, the final 2013-15 operating budget for the Conservation Commission included the following proviso:

The conservation commission must evaluate the current system for the election of conservation district board supervisors and recommend improvements to ensure the highest degree of public involvement in these elections. The commission must engage with stakeholder groups and conservation districts to gather a set of options for improvement to district elections, which must include an option aligning district elections with state and local general elections. The commission must submit a report detailing the options to the office of financial management and appropriate committees of the legislature by December 10, 2013.

As indicated, the report was due December 10, but because of the length of the legislative session Commission staff was not sure the proviso would appear in the budget until June 30. This reduced the time available to complete the report by two months. As a result, the report was not completed by the deadline.

Commission staff met with Representative Zack Hudgins, the legislator with particular interest in the proviso and discussed the reasons for the late report and a new deadline. Representative Hudgins understood the need for the extension and agreed to provide more time to complete the report. No new deadline was established. After reviewing the current draft of the report he suggested some additional steps before completing the report for the legislature:

- He asked that we work with other state agency staff who have completed processes where various options were evaluated to find out how they ranked and scored options. He liked the criteria in the draft report but wasn't sure about the process the work group used to score and rank the options.
- He is particularly interested in what conservation districts would offer to do to improve elections. He wanted to provide sufficient time to allow conservation district boards to review and comment on the report before providing it to the legislature.

Attached to this memo is the most recent version of the draft report following a December 13, 2013 meeting of the Election Proviso Work Group. This work group consists of the following members:

- Dave Vogel and Alan Stromberger, WACD
- Lori Augino, State Elections Officer, Washington Secretary of State's Office
- Susan Eidenschink, League of Women Voters
- Craig Nelson, WADE
- Larry Davis, Whatcom Conservation District and State Conservation Commission
- Bill Eller and Megan Finkenbinder, Conservation Commission Staff

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your participation in this very important process.

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Megan Finkenbinder, mfinkenbinder@scc.wa.gov or 360.407.6209