

Washington State Conservation Commission

Good Governance Policy for Conservation Districts

Approved December 2013

The Washington State Conservation Commission assists and guides local conservation districts in the implementation of natural resource conservation programs on private, public and non-government organizations lands across the state. To accomplish this, the Commission has established guidelines and controls to govern the conservation districts' use of state funds, property, and services (RCW. 89.08.070).

In 2009, after reviewing its statutory duties and powers, the Commission created a set of performance standards to determine "Districts in Good Standing." These performance standards have served as guidelines for districts to satisfy Commission accountability requirements. In 2012, in order to improve this evaluation process, the Commission considered comments from districts and from its staff, as well as governance outcomes from applying the new standards. As a result of these considerations, the Commission has adopted the current Good Governance Policy.

The Commission will assist and guide local districts in carrying out programs for resource conservation by:

- (1) Administering transparent performance standards;
- (2) Providing on-going feedback to improve district performance;
- (3) Enhancing public confidence in elected and appointed supervisors governance role as well as in effective and efficient delivery of conservation district programs and services;
- (4) Ensuring that assistance is available to help districts achieve annual and long-range goals in an effective, efficient, economic, and ethical manner;
- (5) Overseeing responsible management and stewardship of public funds;
- (6) Assisting districts to engage the public in identifying and measuring desired outcomes; and
- (7) Allocating resources to districts in accordance with demonstrated conservation needs, available funding, and past performance.

Washington State Conservation Commission
DRAFT Good Governance Process for Conservation Districts
Approved December 2013

The conservation district good governance process is the annual process the Conservation Commission (WSCC) members and staff use to evaluate conservation district operations and effectiveness. The process also describes how the Commission will improve the procedure for the annual evaluation of district performance.

Using the Good Governance Checklist approved by the Commission, the WSCC District Operations Manager coordinates the evaluation of conservation districts. When significant changes are made to the Checklist, a one-year period will be given for districts to adapt to those changes. Assistance with the Good Governance process is available through the Commission's Regional Managers. Upon completion of the Checklist by Commission staff, the WACD Executive Director will be informed of those results. Here is the process and timeline:

January:

- The Good Governance checklist is sent to Districts to be utilized in an optional self-evaluation process in consultation with Regional Manager

March 1 – April 15:

Using the Good Governance Checklist approved by the Commission in July of the previous year, and after consulting with other Commission staff, each WSCC Regional Manager completes his or her Good Governance Checklist for each district in their region for the prior year.

Upon completion of the Checklist, the Washington Association of Conservation District (WACD) Executive Director will be informed of those results. The following apply to the above-described process:

- The WSCC Financial Manager coordinates evaluations of district performance on financial issues.
- The WSCC Election Officer evaluates district performance on district elections. *Note: compliance with WAC 135-110 (Commission election rules) could require that this evaluation be on-going until the first Thursday in May.*
- For issues related to audits and auditing, the evaluation will be made jointly between the Regional Manager, Financial Manager, and the State Auditor liaison.
- For all other issues, unless otherwise designated by the District Operations Manager, the Regional Manager will evaluate.
- Each Regional Manager will ensure the Checklist is completed for each of their districts and placed in a central electronic storage area.
- Each Regional Manager will contact the board chair via telephone and email, informing them about the district's preliminary good governance evaluation.
- Each Regional Manager, in consultation with applicable Commission staff, will immediately begin working with districts to address issues identified on the Good Governance Checklist.

April 15 – First Thursday in May:

- Each Regional Manager, in consultation with applicable Commission staff, continues working with districts to address issues identified on the Good Governance Checklist. Issues addressed and still outstanding prior to the first Thursday in May will be reflected in a written interim report to the Commission.
- Commission District Operations Manager reviews the Good Governance evaluations and begins drafting an interim written report to the Commission.
- The Commission District Operations Manager in writing, will inform each district of what their Good Governance rating will be.

First Thursday in May – May Commission Meeting:

- The WSCC District Operations Manager will provide a written interim Good Governance report to the Commission and Commission staff.
- Prior to the Commission meeting, each of the regionally-elected WACD Commission members will discuss the results of the evaluations with the applicable Regional Manager prior to the regular May Commission meeting.

May WSCC Meeting:

- The WSCC District Operations Manager will provide a written interim Good Governance report to the Commission and Commission staff.

May – July:

- Regional Managers, in consultation with Commission staff, will work with district supervisors and staff to create and implement an action plan to address issues that were identified in the May interim report to the Commission.

July WSCC Meeting:

- Commission receives final Good Governance recommendations from staff
- The Commission approves the Good Governance Checklist that will be used to evaluate district activities for the next fiscal year.
- The Commission reviews/takes action on the recommendation from Commission Staff.
- The Commission decides if financial allocations will be affected. The process/financial significance related to each Good Governance tier rating is:
 - **Tier 1:** District receives full allocation.
 - **Tiers 2, 3 & 4:**
 - Regional Managers, in consultation with Commission staff, will work with district supervisors and staff to create an action plan to address issues.
 - After the Commission designates the initial tier status of the district in May, the district must, by the July or September Commission meeting, develop and receive board and Commission approval of an action plan.

- Commission staff will evaluate the district's ongoing progress on the action plan, and make a recommendation to the Commission on a district's progress at each subsequent Commission meeting until issues are addressed.
- If the Commission determines that the district has complied with all aspects of the action plan, the Commission shall take action to move the district to Tier 1 status.
- If the Commission does not approve the action plan the Commission, at its discretion, may take the following actions:
 - **Tier 2:** The district will remain in Tier 2 status and may receive their Category 1 allocation and 90 percent of their Category 2 allocation until the Commission removes them from Tier 2 status; or
 - **Tier 3:** The district will remain in Tier 3 status and may receive their Category 1 allocation and 75 percent of their Category 2 allocation until the Commission removes them from Tier 3 status; or
 - **Tier 4:** The district will remain in Tier 4 status and may receive 50 percent of Category 1 allocation and 50 percent of their Category 2 allocation until the Commission removes them from Tier 4 status. A Supervisor (preferably the Chair) must attend each Commission meeting (after Commission approval of the action plan) to present their action plan and report on its implementation at each Commission meeting until the Commission takes action to remove that district from Tier 4 status, unless otherwise excused by a Commission motion. The supervisor may ask district staff to attend to help address elements of the action plan.
- Further allocations are dependent on the continued successful implementation of the action plan. Further funding allocations releases will be at the discretion of the Commission.
- By the 4th Thursday in July, all districts will be:
 - Notified in writing of their Tier status and, if necessary, the process/actions needed to address issues identified in the Good Governance Checklist.
 - Sent the Good Governance Checklist on which they will be evaluated for activities occurring in the next fiscal year.
- Through the WSCC Master Application, as a condition of receiving Commission funds in the next fiscal year, each district will agree to operate according to the newly approved Good Governance Checklist.

August 1 – November 1:

- Commission Regional Manager, in consultation with applicable Commission staff, will continue working with districts to implement any not completed action plan to address the issues identified by the Commission.
- Commission Regional Managers will report back to WSCC District Operations Manager on the progress of districts in addressing issues.

September (and subsequent) Commission Meeting(s):

The Commission:

- Receives a report from WSCC District Operations Manager on status of all districts not in Tier 1;
- Reviews, and take action on approved action plans;
- Following the approval and implementation of action plans, the Commission may take further action that could affect a district's financial allocation;
- If the district's Good Governance designation is changed or any other Good Governance action is made by the Commission, the WSCC District Operations Manager will notify the district in writing of that action.
- ***If a Tier 4 conservation district has not shown sufficient progress (as determined by the Commission) in implementing its action plan by the November/December Commission meeting, the Commission may revoke the remainder of that district's allocation.***
- ***Reallocation of revoked funds will be based on criteria set by the Commission.***

NOTE: Outside the above described process, at any point during the year, Commission staff may (by telephone and by email) inform a board chair and district manager of an instance in which they are not in compliance with the Good Governance process.

If that occurs, with the assistance of their Regional Manager, the district will develop and approve an action plan to resolve the issue as soon as possible. If the district does not resolve the issue within 3 months, Commission Staff will revise the good governance evaluation for that district and officially inform the Commission.

Process and Timeline for Annual Review & Improvement and Continuous Improvement of the Conservation District Good Governance Process **Approved December 2013**

Beginning in the fourth quarter of each year the Commission Good Governance Process will be evaluated for possible improvement.

WACD Area Meetings – January Commission Meeting: The WSCC District Operations Manager surveys Commission members, conservation districts, and Commission staff with respect to the Good Governance Process to determine if improvement can be made. The survey process may include informational presentations/discussions at the WACD annual meeting and Conservation Commission meeting.

January Commission Meeting – March Commission Meeting: WSCC District Operations Manager develops and distributes a DRAFT Good Governance Checklist for comment.

March Commission Meeting – May Commission Meeting: Based on comments received, the WSCC District Operations Manager sends a final DRAFT Good Governance Checklist, along with a detailed process/timeline description, to Commission Members for their review and action at the May Commission meeting.