

Washington State Conservation Commission Regular Business Meeting
Lacey, Washington
March 19, 2015

The Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission/WSCC) met in regular session on March 19, 2015, in Lacey, Washington. Chair, Clinton O'Keefe called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Clinton O'Keefe, Chair, East Region
Lynn Brown, Vice Chair, Central Region
Dean Longrie, West Region
Lynn Brown, Central Region
Jim Peters, Member
Lynn Bahrych, Member
Jim Kropf, WSU-Puyallup
Perry Beale, Dept. of Agriculture
Kelly Susewind, Department of Ecology (DOE)
Todd Welker, Department of Natural Resources
Alan Stromberger, President, WA Association
of Conservation Districts (WACD)

COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT

Mark Clark, Executive Director
Debbie Becker, Finance Director
Ray Ledgerwood, District Operations Manager
Ron Shultz, Policy Director
Sarah Groth, Financial Staff
Bill Eller, South Central Regional Manager
Lori Gonzalez, Administrative Assistant
Laura Johnson, Communications & Outreach
Larry Brewer, Southeast Regional Manager
Alicia Johnson, Administrative Staff
Brian Cochrane, CREP Coordinator

PARTNERS AT THE TABLE REPRESENTED AT THIS MEETING

Roylene Rides-at-the Door, State Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Dave Vogel, Executive Director, WACD

GUESTS ATTENDED

Jeremiah George, Squaxin Island Tribe, Phyllis Barney, Attorney General's Office, Cynthia Wilkerson, DFW, David Hall, Thurston CD, Treacy Kreger, Thurston CD, Jim Goche, Thurston CD, Aileen, Thurston County resident, Sherre Copeland, NRCS, Mark Craven, Vice President, WACD, Robin Slate, NRCS, Julie Henning, DFW, and Mr. Buckingham, Thurston CD.

CONSENT AGENDA

Motion by Commissioner Bahrych to approve the January 15, 2015 Meeting Minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Beale. Motion passed.

AGENCY PARTNERSHIP REPORTS

Todd Welker, DNR, reported the department allocated a total of \$138,000 to four conservation districts. DNR received a total of seven proposals. Projects need to be completed and billed to DNR by June 30.

Roylene Rides at the Door, NRCS, reported that Northeast WA was one of the project sites selected out of 15 nationwide for the Chief's Joint Landscape Restoration Partnership. NRCS was awarded \$1.5 million for the projects. NRCS now has a balanced budget coming in. This is a very good thing due to good partnerships, as it has paid off very well. Roylene also reported Technical Note 14 is ready to go live. NRCS staff, Bonda Habets will be meeting with all of their partners before posting.

Lynn Bahrych, member and Chair of the Soil Health Committee, will be meeting with the Washington Environmental Council's (WEC) campaign director to talk about ways the State Conservation Commission (SCC) can coordinate efforts in forest health. Their campaign is focusing on private forest land. The NRCS Joint Chiefs' project

would tie in well. Ms. Bahrych has been working with a convention center in Victoria for an exhibit on forest soil for grades k-12 here in Washington.

Mark Clark, SCC Director reported about his recent trip to Washington, DC with SCC Policy Director, Ron Shultz. They were able to meet with several members of congressional staff. They also met with staff from FSA, NRCS, OMB, NOAA, EPA, Jeremy Peters, CEO and Ted Ramsey of NACD, as well as Sam Ricketts, representative in DC from the WA State Governor's Office, focusing on several issues and highlights of the conservation work being done in our state. It was nice to have WACD and NRCS there to meet jointly in several meetings, representing the Washington partnerships.

Alan Stromberger, WACD, President, announced their Legislative Days scheduled in downtown Olympia the week of March 23. Several districts have made appointments with their legislative members.

Dave Vogel, WACD, Executive Director, also highlighted their trip to Washington, DC and was also accompanied by Tanna Engdahl, WACD member and Tribal representative. This was also the first year the entire partnership was able to go together.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Ron Shultz, SCC Policy Director, provided Commission members with a report on three bills and key legislation directly impacting the SCC at this time.

Food Policy Forum Legislation: SHB 1685: The bill has the Commission and the Executive Director to form a Food Policy Committee. The SCC would create the forum in which state food policy, food related programs, and food related issues can be examined, improved, and better integrated. SCC's estimated cost to staff the forum and conduct this work was submitted at \$100K for the biennium. Testimony was in support of the bill as function and facilitating the process. This bill requires the Forum to make a recommendation to the Legislature, transmitted through the SCC, by October 31, 2016.

Addressing rates and charges for conservation districts SSB: 5322: This bill increases the allowable per parcel amount for King CD would be from 10\$ to \$15; and for Snohomish, Pierce, and Spokane CD, the amount is raised from \$5 to \$10. Two people commented in support, and a Pierce County Senator was opposed to this bill.

Creating demonstration projects for preserving agricultural land and public infrastructure in flood plains. SSB 5347: This bill came up last year and had the SCC in the role as convening a stakeholder group with the departments of Agriculture, Natural Resources, Ecology and Fish and Wildlife, plus local and statewide agricultural organizations, tribes, land conservation organizations, and local government to develop and assess three demonstration projects, one in Whatcom Co., one in Snohomish Co., and the other located in Grays Harbor County.

The SCC fiscal note requests \$166,716 for our agency activities on this legislation.

Manure Legislation: No manure legislation this year, the bill has died. There is a budget proviso for the WSDA to implement a Nutrient Management Program. WSDA is to establish an accreditation program. The department is to identify with other agencies on gaps in the rules and the laws. This group has also been working with Nichole Embertson from Whatcom CD.

POLICY UPDATE

Governor Inslee recently declared a drought. There is a great deal of concern in the Upper Peninsula with less than 10% snowpack. In the supplemental budget there is a request for \$ 1 million for drought response and increases for the next year. A WA SNOTEL map was shown to the Commissioners of the areas that would be seriously affected

due to the low snowpack levels. Mr. Shultz also stated this is probably the most serious prediction in the last 30 years.

SCC staff, Jon Culp and Director Clark participate in Ecology's Water Supply Availability Committee (WSAC) that helps make recommendations on whether water supply conditions are likely to be less than 75 percent of normal. If so, the Emergency Water Executive Committee (EWEC) can then make a hardship call and recommend to the Governor's Office that a drought be declared. The EWEC will be meeting again in April. Recent discussions regarding the Puget Sound area is that they have sufficient capacity to serve citizens in those municipalities.

Farmland Preservation Indicator Report, Josh Giuntoli has worked with Department of Ag, and Laura Johnson, SCC Communications staff on the key messaging pieces within this report. They will continue to work together and the Governor's Office on how we can work together.

Non Point Plan Update: The SCC has been working with WACD in developing informational materials to districts regarding Ecology's update of the state's non point plan. SCC recently held a Webinar with Water Quality staff and the districts. The material provided in the meeting packet has a briefing paper that was developed for CDs. To date, there were five districts that provided comment. Draft plan to be developed this spring. Public comment period to begin and then report will be sent to EPA by the end of June 2015, or loss of federal funding will happen. ECY and SCC continue to work with Dave Vogel of WACD.

Recreation Conservation Partnership Program: There were five areas of the state that were approved for funding. Critical Conservation areas; there were eight proposals submitted total and two from WA were accepted; one proposal in the Yakama and the other in the Palouse, which has seven districts in that area. All of the details on these proposals had to be submitted to the state office by Friday, March 13th including the budget. The Puget Sound proposal, the Commission is the lead along with the Nature Conservancy. Three action areas were identified: Thomas Creek, Skokomish, and the Newaukum watershed. The Newaukum is also a part of the Coordination Investment discussions.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Treacy Kreger, Thurston Conservation District board member provided comment of his concerns regarding the election issues at his district. Mr. Kreager discussed a recent motion approved by the majority of the board at his district board meeting to set forth a letter asking to re-do their election. He has spoken to the County Auditor and states they are willing to work with the district in polling and possibly issuing the absentee ballots from the courthouse.

Director Clark told Mr. Kreger that our elections officer, Bill Eller will provide a thorough report once he has had a chance to review all letters and information received at the May Commission meeting in Ellensburg.

Jim Goche, described himself as a small family farmer and the most junior Thurston Conservation District board member, provided comment on how extremely impressed he is by the work of the conservation districts around the state and gave appreciation to the Conservation Commission. He brought up to Commission members a few items for their consideration in regards to district elections, and hopes for the SCC to take a look and try to reform them.

CONSERVATION DISTRICT ELECTIONS

Bill Eller, SCC Elections Officer provided a brief update on the recent status of the conservation district elections. Last year, SCC had problems with districts complying with the procedures, one specifically, was not getting the necessary information to the Commission on time. This year, Mr. Eller reported the SCC has received all 45 CD's forms on time. 30 districts had their incumbents automatically re-elected. SCC staff have been able to observe six

elections to date. Mr. Eller is still receiving and compiling information for a full report at the May Commission meeting in Ellensburg, Washington.

Mr. Eller provided detailed information for members in their meeting packets regarding four districts who had election issues. Mr. Eller will look into the issues of these elections and will provide a full report for action at the May Commission meeting.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

Mr. Brewer, SCC staff highlighted the significant changes made to the draft Cultural Resources Policy after the Commission directed the districts and other agencies be provided the opportunity to comment. Mr. Brewer reported 11 people submitted comments. All 11 thought the policy was reasonable. Several districts were concerned with the cost for staffing to do the reviews. Districts and others were in agreement for no changes to the flow chart presented.

WSSC will be putting a list together of professional archeologist as a resource.

Motion by Commissioner Brown to approve the Cultural Resource Policy as presented with the suggested edits. Seconded by Commissioner Longrie. Motion passed.

This policy will take effect for practices completed after July 1, 2015.

DRAFT GRANTS PROCEDURE MANUAL

Debbie Becker, SCC Finance Director provided a current draft copy of the Grants Procedure Manual. SCC publishes grant and contract guidelines for conservation districts and partners when funding is received through SCC appropriations. The guidelines are necessary in describing the role of the contract, reimbursable expenses, expected contract compliance, getting paid, as well as a number of other components.

The current set of guidelines for grants and contracts was issued in 07-09. The draft version is a re-organization and re-write of the document for the purposes of addressing updated requirements of SCC, state and federal law, and any new or unique situations impacting conservation districts since the 07-09 version.

Motion by Commissioner Brown to authorize the proposed Grant & Contract Procedure Manual to follow the Commission members adopted Policy on Policies, and be sent to conservation districts for the 45-day review period. All comments and concerns would be presented to Commission members during the May 2015 meeting, with the anticipated adoption date of July 1, 2015. Seconded by Commissioner Longrie. Motion passed.

DISTRICT FUNDING NEEDS

Ms. Becker walked the Board through the data submitted by the conservation districts on what their current needs are as of March 18, 2015. Ms. Becker stated the SCC has about \$400K to distribute now through June 30. The Commission members agreed for the executive committee to work with Ms. Becker on how to distribute the extra funding to the districts by priority need.

ADVANCE PAYMENTS

Ms. Becker provided Commission members a draft Advanced Funding Policy for districts to be able to have cash advances, that would not be more than 50% of their total request.

For all conservation districts requesting an advance under this policy, the following would apply:

- Advances may not exceed 50 percent of the balance of the SCC share of the awarded funds in the grant agreement and may be restricted to less than that amount.

- Advances are not automatically granted. SCC may decline any request it deems necessary to ensure the integrity of the program.
- SCC reserves the right to inspect the conservation district records on any advance, at any time.
- The request for an advance shall be signed by the district manager or chair.

The Commission made the following motion regarding the proposed policy:

Motion by Commissioner Brown to adopt the proposed policy with the executive director deciding each case, effective March 19, 2015. Seconded by Commissioner Welker. Motion passed.

SCC Compensation Rate

SCC staff developed an electronic compensation form to ease effectiveness of processing for both the district and the Commission financial staff.

Financial Report

Ms. Becker walked through the agency budget with Commission members. In the next 90 days, districts have several million dollars to spend. A bar graph was presented showing where the districts currently are in spending; some are considerably under. SCC staff will be carefully watching these districts.

May Strategic Planning Meeting

Director Clark reminded members about the strategic planning session scheduled for our next meeting in May. SCC staff will be conducting sensing interviews with each member, to help guide the direction of the meeting design. Status updates for the strategic areas submitted by members in 2014 will be provided by staff in the upcoming weeks. As the SCC builds on the 2015 strategic areas, having strategic work sessions throughout the year to continuously work on them, could be a consideration. Mr. Clark requested each member to review the current strategic plan on the Conservation Commission's website.

Meeting adjourned at 3:27 p.m.