

September 16, 2021

TO: Conservation Commission Members
Carol Smith, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Mark Craven, Snohomish CD and Chair, Joint Committee on Elections

SUBJECT: Report from the Joint Committee on Elections

Action Item

Informational Item

Summary:

In December 2020, the Commission passed a motion directing the creation of a joint committee with the Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD). The purpose of the committee was to evaluate various possible changes to conservation district elections and report back to the Commission with recommendations. This memo transmits the final report of the Joint Committee on Elections (JCE) with recommendations for the Commission's consideration.

Requested Action (if action item):

Consideration of and action on the recommendations of the JCE.

Staff Contact:

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Background

At the December 2020 regular meeting, the Commission passed a motion to establish a Joint Committee on Elections (JCE):

Motion by Commissioner Dorner for the Commission to create a joint committee with WACD to develop a list of recommendations for action on election reform. The committee should be formed and begin meeting in January 2021 and submit updates to the Commission and WACD board for their regular meetings with a final report and

recommendations to the Commission in September 2021. Seconded by Commissioner Cochran. Motion carries.

After establishing membership, the JCE met for the first time on March 24, and every other week thereafter to consider possible changes to the election process.

The attached document represents the final report of the JCE. The JCE members developed a package of recommended changes consisting of 4 parts for the Commission's consideration. Each recommended change would require a change in statute to implement.

The recommended actions are fully described in the report. Briefly they are:

Part 1: Conduct elections every other year, rather than every year as done currently.

Part 2: Extend supervisor terms (for both appointed and elected) from the current three-year term to a four-year term.

Part 3: Conduct district elections during one Conservation Month.

Part 4: Allow conservation districts the option to go on the general election ballot.

Recommended Action and Options (if action item):

The JCE recommends the Commission consider the proposed solutions as a package with 4 parts. The JCE recommends action on each of the 4 parts.

Next Steps:

If the Commission approves the elements of the JCE recommendations, legislation will be drafted by Commission staff to implement the recommendations. The draft legislation will be reviewed and approved by the Commission before submittal to the legislature. In addition, WSCC staff and WACD staff will coordinate on outreach to legislators on the proposals for conservation district election changes.

Joint Committee on Elections (JCE) Report and Recommendations to the Washington State Conservation Commission



September 2021

*Prepared by Ron Shultz, Laura Meyer, Bill Eller, and
Stephanie Crouch (Washington State Conservation
Commission Staff) on behalf of the JCE*



Executive summary

In 2019, there was increasing awareness in the Legislature and in the general public about the way special purpose districts ran elections, including conservation district elections. During the 2019 Legislative Session, bills were introduced to modify conservation district elections by placing them on the general election ballot. These bills did not pass.

Following the Legislative Session, staff from the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and the Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) met to discuss possible election reforms. The SCC conducted a survey of districts to gather feedback on potential reforms. Results indicated a wide divide in perspectives. At their December 2019 meeting, Commission members committed to continuing to explore election reforms. This exploration continued into 2020, including two all-district webinars to discuss election reforms in the late summer and fall.

At their December 2020 meeting, the Commission was presented with several recommendations with no requested action. The Commission passed a motion to establish a more formal process and committee for the SCC, WACD, and districts to review the election issue and developing recommendations. The SCC and WACD formed the Joint Committee on Elections (JCE) in early 2021, which met through the spring and summer of 2021 to discuss district elections and identify recommended reforms.

After meeting several times and hearing feedback from the larger CD community, the JCE recommends the following four-part proposal for CD election reforms and presents it to the Conservation Commission for consideration at their September 2021 meeting:

Part 1: Conduct elections every other year, rather than every year as done currently.

Part 2: Extend supervisor terms (for both appointed and elected) from the current three-year term to a four-year term.

Part 3: Conduct district elections during one Conservation Month.

Part 4: Allow conservation districts the option to go on the general election ballot.

Background

During the fall of 2019, some legislators became interested in the way special purpose districts' ran their elections following media reports of fiscal improprieties at a diking and drainage district. Conservation districts were caught up in these discussions. Conservation district elections have remained a topic of interest for some state and local elected officials and the media. Also during this time, some conservation districts expressed interest in how district elections could be conducted to increase voter turnout and engagement in district elections.

At their December 2019 meeting, the Commission made a commitment to explore improvements to the election process and conduct outreach to gather input on possible reforms.

The 2020 Legislature introduced bills addressing conservation district elections; however, the bills did not pass.

Formation of the Joint Committee on Elections

Following the 2020 Legislative Session, Commission staff, the Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD), and conservation districts explored possible changes to conservation district elections through meetings, webinars, and a survey. Results of this exploration indicated a divide in perspectives across districts.

A series of CD election options were presented to the Commission at their meeting in December 2020; however, there was no recommendation for any particular option. Commissioners decided to establish a more formal process for the SCC, WACD, and districts to review the election issue and developing recommendations and passed the following motion:

Motion by Commissioner Dorner for the Commission to create a joint committee with WACD to develop a list of recommendations for action on election reform. The committee should be formed and begin meeting in January 2021 and submit updates to the Commission and WACD board for their regular meetings with a final report and recommendations to the Commission in September 2021. Seconded by Commissioner Cochran. Motion carries. Passed December 3, 2020

This motion established the Joint Committee on Elections (JCE).

To assist in the formation of the JCE and to help guide meetings and discussions, a steering committee was formed consisting of leadership and staff from the SCCSCC and WACD. The JCE Steering Committee met every two weeks, at least one week prior to each JCE meeting, to develop the meeting agenda for the JCE meetings.

Members of the JCE

A request for conservation district volunteers was made in March 2021. Leadership from the SCC and WACD agreed the JCE should be comprised of conservation district representatives, one district supervisor and one district staff member, from each WACD area. They also agreed JCE membership would include three SCC staff members and two WACD staff members. The JCE would be chaired by a conservation district representative.

JCE membership included the following:

Chair: Mark Craven, Snohomish CD (supervisor)

NE Region

Mike Mumford, Pend Oreille (supervisor)
Dave Hedrick, Ferry (staff)

SE Region

Audrey Ahmann, Walla Walla (staff)
Larry Cochran, Palouse (supervisor)

NC Region

Craig Nelson, Okanogan (staff)

SC Region

Cindy Reed, North Yakima (supervisor)
Shirley St. John, South Yakima (staff)

NW Region

Joy Garitone, Kitsap (staff)
Kirstin Haugen, King (supervisor)

SW Region

Sue Marshall, Clark (supervisor)
Mike Nordin, Pacific/Grays Harbor (staff)

SCC

Bill Eller, Ron Shultz, Laura Meyer,
Stephanie Crouch (admin support)

WACD

Ryan Baye and Tom Salzer (staff)
Jeanette Dorner (president)

JCE meeting format

The first meeting of the JCE was held on March 24. Subsequent meetings were held every other week beginning on April 14. A total of eight meetings were held to discuss the current conservation district election process and discuss possible changes. Due to COVID restrictions, all meetings were conducted remotely.

Decision-making process

At the first meeting of the JCE ground rules were developed and a decision-making process agreed to. The JCE agreed to a consensus approach to decisions of the group. It was agreed that consensus would mean a composite of the following: agree; agree with reservations; some concerns but can live with it. Outside of consensus there would be a position of fundamentally object, and no consent. It was agreed the JCE would track concerns identified with the options that move forward. And it was agreed one person could block a proposal if they do not consent.

JCE exploration and assessment of CD elections

At their first meeting on March 24, the JCE discussed and developed their scope of work to meet the directive of the Commission's motion. The JCE reviewed work that's been done in previous years to improve the conservation district supervisor election process. Briefly, this included:

- 1939: Enabling statute – RCW 89.08
 - 70 years of elections without controversy.
- 2001/2002: An error in a legislative bill puts CDs on general election ballot. The error was fixed in the following session. But this gave some insight into the costs experienced by those districts who had to go on the general election ballot in 2001.
- 2010: WAC chapter 135-110 establish rules for CD elections.
 - Includes a provision whereby CD elections can be cancelled, and 70% usually are.
- 2015: Proviso Committee and Report. In 2014, the legislature passes a budget proviso in the Commission’s operating budget directing a study to be done of CD elections and recommendations for improvements.
- 2019: In anticipation of a legislative discussion on special purpose district elections, the Commission passes a motion directing staff to convene discussions on possible changes to the CD election process.
- 2020: After recommendations provided by the Conservation District Election and Appointment Committee, the Commission undertook major revisions to WAC Chapter 135-110, which became effective September 2020
 - Elections are no longer cancelled – all CDs have an election again.
- 2020: Election discussions are completed by December with a report to the Commission which included the results of an election options survey of districts. The report did not include any recommendation as to a particular option. The Commission passes a motion leading to the formation of the Joint Committee on Elections (JCE).

The JCE also reviewed information on how other special purpose districts in the state conduct elections or if they are appointed. The group also discussed how other states elect conservation district supervisors.

Following the first meeting and discussion of the history of CD elections and election changes, the JCE identified a path forward for meeting discussion topics. It was agreed such an approach would provide background information for all JCE members as they entered the process of proposing and evaluating various options for changes to the election process.

Guest speakers

Following the introductory discussion of how other states conduct CD supervisor elections, the group expressed interest in inviting individuals from other states to learn about their elections processes and ask questions. It was agreed to reach out to Oregon where conservation district elections are on the state general election ballot. It was also agreed to engage with staff from Michigan, where the election process is similar to ours in Washington.

Oregon model

The JCE heard from Sandi Hiatt, Grants Administrator with the Oregon Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Program in the Oregon Department of Agriculture. The SWCD is

the equivalent to the Washington State Conservation Commission. Every two years in Oregon, positions that are to be reelected go on the state general election ballot. Requirements for office are established in statute. Interested individuals submit candidate applications to the SWCD for review and verification that the candidate meets the requirements for the position. The candidate application is then sent to the appropriate county auditor to be placed on the general election ballot. As required by Oregon statute, costs for the district elections are paid by each county.

JCE members were interested in whether being on the general election ballot created more partisan races. Hiatt answered it can change from year to year and by location in the state. It also depends on whether there are local issues that have increased interest. JCE members also asked if the information in the voter's pamphlet included information on the local conservation district and what the district does. Hiatt replied only if the candidates put that information in their candidate statements.

In addition, 14 of the 45 conservation districts Oregon have taxing authority. This authority has to be voted on at the local level.

Michigan model

Michigan elections are similar to Washington conservation district elections. The JCE heard from staff with the Michigan Conservation Program (MCP) which is a part of the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD). The MCP is the equivalent of the SCC. There are 75 conservation districts in Michigan. The districts receive no direct state appropriation as Washington districts do. Michigan districts are funded through grants. Each district has five directors, either elected or appointed. Appointments are done by district directors. Elections are nonpartisan and occur during the district's annual meeting. Each CD determines when the election is held. Staff at the MDARD oversee and certify the election results, similar to Washington.

Term of office for a Michigan conservation district director is 4 years. Residents of the district are eligible to vote. To become a candidate, interested person must submit a petition signed by at least five residents of the district. Election documents are submitted to MDARD for verification of candidates.

Some issues experienced by Michigan conservation districts:

- Some districts have difficulty conducting the elections themselves.
- Stagnant or inactive boards.
- Lack of diversity on boards.
- Low voter turnout.
- High voter turnout when local issues drove elections.

County auditor discussion

The JCE invited a group of county auditors to share their perspective on elections and the conduct of conservation district elections. The auditors addressed the issue of the cost of elections, saying the cost depended on which election it was held, the general or primary. All county auditors use a state system for determining the cost of an election. Costs are allocated

among all the entities on the ballot and are based on the number of voters. So the more entities on the ballot, the more costs are reduced. However, the more voters, the more costs are increased. The district on the ballot would also be required to contribute to the cost of the voter's pamphlet that is now required by law.

The King County elections representative stated the costs are higher when the election is on a year with a high voter turnout, which is typically the presidential election year. In King County, the cost of the election for the district in an even year would be approximately \$1.4 - \$1.7 million. In an odd year the cost is still around \$1 million.

In Spokane, the cost would be approximately \$100,000 for all three conservation district supervisors to be on the ballot. However, the county auditor noted that costs are going up , and that when Spokane CD was on the general election ballot in 2001, it took two years for the district to pay off the election costs.

Assessment of options

When the JCE began considering various election change options, they first considered the needs of various entities relating to the district elections. With any election, there are certain expectations. These expectations vary depending upon the observer. Voters have one set of expectations, conservation district supervisors and staff have their own set. And legislators have a particular perspective on the role of elections for a given entity.

From these various expectations, the JCE developed a list of needs upon which each election option would be evaluated. These needs included:

- Non partisan
- True to mission
- Affordable/manageable
- Flexible
- Transparent
- Trustworthy/Secure
- Accessible
- Equitable/Inclusive
- Increase voter turnout

Next, the JCE identified a suite of options for consideration as possible changes to district elections. In order to encourage "out-of-the-box" thinking, the JCE was informed by the election discussions that had gone before, but they did not feel they needed to be held to the options considered in previous processes. Essentially, the JCE engaged in a "white board" exercise where all proposals were welcomed. From this broad list of ideas, the group narrowed the ideas to a workable number. These options included:

- A. General election for all CDs – paid for by CDs
- B. General election option for CDs – paid for by CDs
- C. General election option for all – not paid for by CDs

- D. Conservation week for all – all elections in one week
- E. Conservation week option
- F. Current process with more outreach
- G. 4-year terms
- H. Every other year election

Commission staff developed a “matrix” tool to assist in the evaluation of each proposal. In this “matrix”, the reviewer would score each proposal on each of the needs listed above. The reviewer would score on a 0-5 scale, with 0 meaning a high risk or does not meet the need, and a 5 meaning no risk and best fit for the need. The purpose of this approach was to develop a “heat map” where JCE members could see how each scored the proposals.

A first round of scoring was conducted. After this round, the JCE met to review and discuss the results. Following the discussion, the JCE determined some of the options could be combined or modified based on responses to the first evaluation. Based on this discussion a second round of evaluation was conducted with the following options:

- A. 4-year term held every other year with staggered elections, plus option of either the current election process with more outreach and a conservation month, or elect to go on the general election ballot.
- B. 4-year term held every other year with staggered elections for all conservation districts using the current election process with more outreach and a conservation month, and no option to go on the general election ballot.
- C. All district supervisors appointed by the Conservation Commission.
- D. All district supervisors appointed by county commissioners or county council.
- E. All district supervisors appointed, some by Conservation Commission, some by county.
- F. Keep current election process but have Commission run the elections for the district.
- G. If no one runs for open supervisor position, then the Commission appoints (rather than district board filling vacancy under current system).
- H. General election for all, not paid for by CD, with 4-year term and staggered election.
- I. Conservation districts serving a county of a certain size (such as over 2 million population) on general election ballot.

After reviewing the second round of results, the JCE determined the next step should be a longer meeting where the options could be discussed in more depth. The existing JCE meetings were typically no more than two hours. The JCE felt to get to a resolution on the narrowed list of options, a longer four-hour meeting was needed. A face-to-face meeting was preferred, but

given the ongoing COVID related restrictions, a long web based approach was selected. The result of this lengthy and focused discussion is the list of recommended proposals described in this report.

Process for conservation district review and feedback

The JCE's list of proposed election changes was distributed to all conservation district supervisors and managers on July 19 with comments due back by August 18. Comments were open to conservation district supervisors, managers, and to district boards. The responder was requested to indicate who they were representing in their response. Attached as Appendix 1 are the results from this survey. In total there were:

- 17 comments from individual supervisors
- 7 comments from district managers
- 13 comments on behalf of a district
- 26 total districts represented in the comments

Responses for each proposal were as follows:

- Every other year elections: 68% support
- 4-year term for supervisors: 89% support
- Conservation Month: 60% support
- General ballot option: 58% support

There were various nuances for each comment to each proposal. Some were enthusiastic supporters of a proposal; others supported with caveats. Some expressed concern with how a proposal would be implemented. Others urged caution in opening the Commission's statute to make changes. Overall, there was support among the respondents for the proposals recommended by the JCE.

In addition to seeking written input, the JCE held a listening session on August 11 for conservation district supervisors and managers. This was an opportunity for district members to hear about the proposals from JCE members and to ask questions or make comments. Notes from this listening session are attached as Appendix 2.

Following the deadline for written comments and after the district listening session, the full JCE met on August 25 to review the input and make a final decision on each proposal. Comments on each proposal were discussed. The JCE then reached consensus on each recommended proposal.

Final recommendation

Members of JCE came to consensus on the following four-part proposal for CD election reforms. When combined, these four proposed changes give power to the locally led approach to conservation. The JCE also believes these are the best possible options to satisfy other election needs, such as increasing turnout, reducing costs, and staying true to mission.

It's important to note the current election process would remain in place. Conservation districts would still conduct local elections. Commission staff would still provide technical assistance to conservation districts and Commission staff would continue to monitor elections, respond to complaints, and report election results to the Commission. Of course, the current election process would not apply under part four of the proposal should a conservation district opt to go on the general election ballot. In that situation, the district election would be conducted according to the state statutes relating to general elections, and would be conducted by county auditors as part of the local election process.

Each part of the proposal outlined below will require a change to our agency statute, Title 89.08 RCW. The one exception could be part three, the establishment of a “conservation month”. The Commission could select a path that would not require a statutory change. This is discussed in more detail in the proposal description below.

JCE Recommendation for CD Election Reforms

The JCE offers the following recommendations for CD election reforms. These recommendations are offered as a package consisting for four individual recommendations. During discussions, the JCE always considered these recommendations together, each balancing the other. They are offered to the Conservation Commission for consideration:

Part 1: Districts hold a supervisor election every other year.

Currently, all conservation districts conduct elections every year. This proposal would move elections to every other year.

Why propose this change?

- Saves costs associated with conducting an election.
- Gives districts the option of choosing to run their election in either an odd or even year.

Part 2: The term for all CD supervisors, both appointed and elected, would be extended. The JCE proposes extending to a four-year term (supervisors currently serve a three-year term).

When this proposal was floated to conservation districts, the option was for either a 4-year term, or a 6-year term. Most responders felt the 4-year term would be most appropriate. Some commenters noted a 6-year term would be too long of a commitment for a voluntary board member.

- With a four-year term, two supervisor positions would be up for election during one election cycle, and one supervisor position would be elected in the next cycle two year later.
- Under the four-year term, the two appointed supervisor positions would be appointed by the Commission in “off years” when no election is held.

For current supervisors, there will be a process to modify the three-year term to a four-year term.

Why propose this change?

- Reduces election costs.
- Normalizes CD elections to match terms of several other elected positions.
- Allows CDs to follow same schedules as other elections.

Part 3: Districts would conduct supervisor elections during one Conservation Month. (currently CDs hold elections in either January, February, or March)

Districts follow the current election process but with more emphasis on local election outreach.

All districts would conduct their election during one “Conservation Month”, with the Commission determining the month. The SCC would coordinate broad statewide advertising/promotion of conservation districts and potential election opportunities throughout Conservation Month. The campaign will be developed in coordination with CDs, particularly with members of the Communications, Partnership, and Outreach group who have been building a foundation for this.

Why propose this change?

- Focusing the election in a Conservation Month would allow for broad communication and publicity of CDs and their work to a statewide audience.
- Goal would be to increase awareness of CDs and increase participation in CD elections.
- Cost of the “Conservation Month” publicity would be borne by the Commission.

Part 4: Districts would have the option to go on the general election ballot.

- By a vote of the board of supervisors, a CD could choose to go on the general election ballot, rather than conduct the election under the current process.
- CD supervisors would not be required to run in a primary election, and — similar to cemetery districts, supervisors would be exempt from Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) and personal financial filing requirements.

Why propose this change?

- Empowers each CD to make a local determination about which election approach works best for their communities and their district, consistent with our core value of locally led conservation.
- This option has the highest potential to increase voter turnout because it would be on the ballot with other entities.

Recommended timing to bring this proposal to the Legislature

The JCE discussed the best timing for bringing these proposals forward for legislative action. One commenter suggested we should not bring these proposals forward in the next legislative session. After discussion, the JCE recommends the Commission move these proposals forward

in the months ahead to be introduced next legislative session. The JCE also recommends staff from the Commission and WACD work together to conduct outreach to legislators to gather feedback on the legislative course of action.

Addendums:

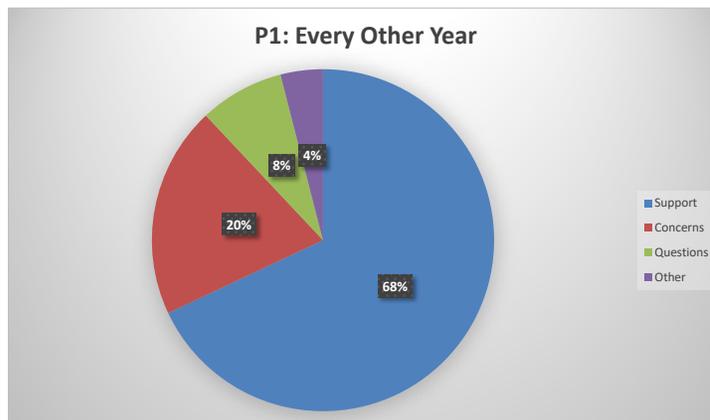
Appendix 1: Comments from CDs Excel file

Appendix 2: Notes from listening session

Appendix 3: Letter from Pacific Conservation District

Name (First)	Name (Last)	Select your conservation district:	Are you commenting on behalf of your district or sharing your individual views as a supervisor or district manager?	Comments on Part 1/4: Districts hold supervisor election every other year	
David	Lange	Whitman	Individual views as supervisor	Should work well.	S
Larry	Davis	Whatcom	Individual views as supervisor	I support. So long as the Legislature does not provide full or partial funding for the conduct of CD elections and under-recognizes how over half the CD's operate solely on 100% grant funding, any idea that saves CD's money is worthy of support.	S
Alan	Chapman	Whatcom	Individual views as supervisor	What would be the lag time between proposal and implementation? What about currently elected supervisor terms?	Q
FRANK	COREY	Whatcom	Individual views as district manager	This change would be a welcome change from more frequent elections.	S
Tracy	Kier	Jefferson County	On behalf of my district	Would be in favor of this change.	S
David	Edwards	Whidbey Island	Individual views as supervisor	What does a district do if an elected supervisor should resign after the election date in an election year? In theory, there would not be another election for up to 23 months. For example, Supervisor X is in the second year of her four-year term. The district election is held in February. In March, Supervisor X has a family health emergency and can no longer serve as a supervisor. What is the process for replacing Supervisor X? The next scheduled election isn't for 23 months.	Q
Paul	Andersson	San Juan Islands	On behalf of my district	SIJCD supports this.	S
Craig	Nelson	Okanogan	On behalf of my district	The Okanogan CD Board of Supervisors are in support of this recommendation if it is with 4-year terms of office for supervisors.	S
roderick	camarce	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	Okay sounds good I agree	S
Kirstin	Haugen	King	On behalf of my district	We enthusiastically support this proposal.	S
Sharon	Call	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	I believe Annual elections provide us the opportunity to remind the community of an opportunity to participate in a very worthy organization.I	C
Joy	Garitone	Kitsap	Individual views as district manager	I am not sure this would be that impactful. Truth be known, it's complicated enough as is and just easier to remember the rules and steps if we do it every year!	C
Albert	Allpress	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	The election every other year is a bit much. Leave it as it is.	C
Shirley	St John	South Yakima	On behalf of my district	South Yakima Conservation District Proposes that Elections be held every other year	S
Kim	Williams	Clallam	Individual views as district manager	Agree with every other year this would save a significant amount of time and money. This with be able to sponsor Conservation Month, this will assist with providing even more outreach even on the off years of elections.	S
Michael	Tobin	North Yakima	On behalf of my district	As an option of each individual district we can allow this. NYCD will not be utilizing this option.	C
Ronald	Juris	Eastern Klickitat	Individual views as supervisor	I like this idea. It reduces costs and staff time for elections, especially in small rural CDs like ours where it can be difficult to gather enough voters to participate and have a meaningful election.	S
Gary	Ketcheson	Whidbey Island	Individual views as supervisor	I support this change. It seems like the best way to relieve some of the burden on Districts to conduct elections annually. I don't think it will affect election turnout, but if combined with the Conservation Month suggestion, then the public may be much more aware of CD elections than they are now.	S
Dean	Hellie	Stevens County	On behalf of my district	Agree with prefer 6 year term and on even years to coincide with national elections	S
Gerald	Scheele	Spokane	Individual views as supervisor	I believe it would save costs	S
John	Keatley	Cowlitz	Individual views as supervisor	Suggest we move away from the two appointed supervisor positions to elect all five supervisors. Rationale: Elections for all supervisors is more opportunity for direct involvement, participation and representation by the voters in a district, and more transparent, perhaps more accountability.	O
Tova	Tillinghast	Underwood	On behalf of my district	The frequency of holding elections is not a major issue for our District, however, it's true that holding them once a year gives us a little more ability to retain the process and procedures among staff. We already have to review procedures each year, but moving to every other year will provide more time to forget the process and have to re-learn it.	C
Zorah	Oppenheimer	Clark	On behalf of my district	The Board liked this idea.	S
Mark	Nielson	Benton	On behalf of my district	We are ok with this.	S
Mark	Nielson	Franklin	On behalf of my district	We are okay with this.	S

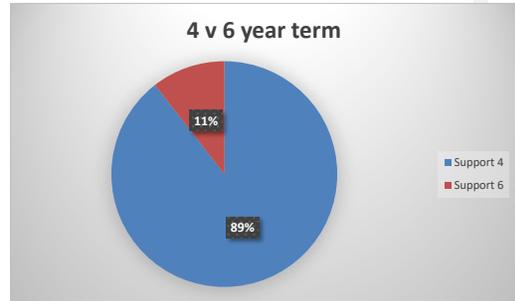
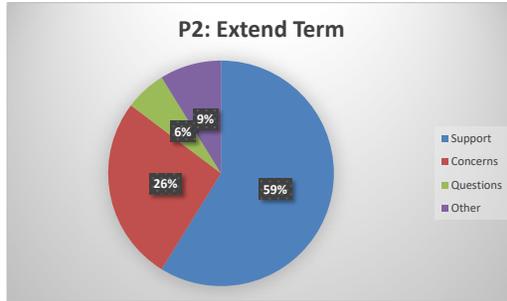
Support	17
Concerns	5
Questions	2
Other	1



Name (First)	Name (Last)	Select your conservation district:	Are you commenting on behalf of your district or sharing your individual views as a supervisor or district manager?	Comments on Part 2/4: Term for all CD supervisors extended to either 4- or 6-year terms.		
Renee	Hadley	Walla Walla County	Individual views as district manager	This proposal assumes each supervisor would complete their term as intended. What about mid-term vacancies? Will we be able to appoint/ elect mid-term per current procedures?	Q	C6
Al	Latham	Jefferson County	Individual views as supervisor	4 years	S	4
David	Lange	Whitman	Individual views as supervisor	4 year I guess Why not 2 years??? Like to keep committees fresh and term limits short.	Q	4
Al	Latham	Jefferson County	Individual views as supervisor	4 years	S	4
Larry	Davis	Whatcom	Individual views as supervisor	☑️Support extending terms to four years. I do not support six-year terms. Four years aligns with State Senator terms and terms for other local and county offices. Four years is not too long to disincentivize the incumbent from running for a second four-year term. Six-year terms I believe would lead to an increase in one-term supervisors. ☑️Support because it will save CD's monies. ☑️Support because it will align with other elections' schedules (BUT, please provide some examples. Other elections typically occur in November.)	S	4
Selena	Corwin	Pierce	Individual views as district manager	I would like to see the CD supervisors terms extended to a 4 year term.	S	4
Alan	Chapman	Whatcom	Individual views as supervisor	I think a 6 year term would be best with an election every other year	S	6
FRANK	COREY	Whatcom	Individual views as district manager	6 years is too long of a commitment and will likely limit the field of potential candidates.	O	
Tracy	Kier	Jefferson County	On behalf of my district	Would be in favor of extending to a 4-year term, not a 6-year term.	S	4
David	Edwards	Whidbey Island	Individual views as supervisor	Six years is too long; we will have elected and appointed supervisors resigning before their terms are up in unmanageable numbers. This creates additional off-cycle work for the administrative staff. Four years is probably OK, but I am not convinced it's better than three years.	O	C6
Paul	Andersson	San Juan Islands	On behalf of my district	SIJCD supports 4-year terms specifically.	S	4
David	Iyall	Thurston	Individual views as supervisor	I am all for elections every other year. I would prefer the four year terms.	S	4
Craig	Nelson	Okanogan	On behalf of my district	The Okanogan CD Board of Supervisors are in support of 4-year terms of office if changed from the current 3-year terms.	S	4
roderick	camarce	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	4 year term	S	4
Kirstin	Haugen	King	On behalf of my district	We enthusiastically support this proposal.	S	
Sharon	Howard	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	Lengthening the term for supervisors will make enlisting a new supervisor more difficult. I understand this will need to be done to accomplish the "every other year" election schedule, but PLEASE don't adopt a six year term. That would be a hard sell to any new candidate. Yes, most supervisors go on to serve a long time, but there would be reticence to commit to a long term at the outset.	C	C6
Sharon	Call	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	It may be more difficult to get volunteers to sign up for a longer term, especially six years.	C	C6
Joy	Garitone	Kitsap	Individual views as district manager	Our Board had strong feelings about longer terms. While nearly all of them are there for decades, they would like to have the option to leave. Six years is a very long time. and 4 years doesn't change much. I think our three years is feasible to most volunteers.	C	
Doug	Miller	Central Klickitat	Individual views as supervisor	Allows for longer continuity, and reduces overall cost to District.	S	
Albert	Allpress	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	I think it would be harder to find folks that would be willing to commit to that long of a time...although the longer between elections, the less cost involved in the election process.	C	
Shirley	St John	South Yakima	On behalf of my district	South Yakima Conservation District Proposes that the term of all CD Supervisors, both appointed and elected, would be extended to a 4 year Term.	S	4
Kim	Williams	Clallam	Individual views as district manager	We prefer no more than 4 years.	S	4
Michael	Tobin	North Yakima	On behalf of my district	In allowing part 1/4 the door is now open for allowing even longer tenure of an elected official. When this is done the special purpose district can be stuck with a dud, a antagonist, etc... This all comes at the pro-longed detriment of the special purpose district effecting supervisors, staff and the programs the special purpose district implements. The WSCC should also ask itself how much time, energy and effort is put into these situations. WHATCOM, CLALLAM, etc... At a glance the idea of serving that long would reduce the likelihood that candidates (viable) would run. For us a 6 year term is absolutely out for too many reasons to list and for things we haven't even thought of.	C	C6
Amanda	Ward	Foster Creek	Individual views as district manager	I believe many of Foster Creek's current supervisors have probably set some kind of record for terms served, however, I think an initial 6-year term might be daunting for a 'newbie'. We have a low population in Douglas County and it makes it all the more obvious that the same people serve on all the local committees, leading to 'uninspired consistency' and predictability in each committee. Burn out is also an issue, meaning people don't bother to turn up to meetings, which can become problematic. You want to try to encourage new ideas, younger people and greater diversity. The longer the commitment, the harder that will be.	C	C6
Ronald	Juris	Eastern Klickitat	Individual views as supervisor	Obviously the only way alternate year elections would work. Not sure on term length. 6 year allows more staggering of the board terms so there is smoother transition when new members are elected but is also asking for a much longer commitment which might put some potential candidates off.	O	

Gary	Ketcheson	Whidbey Island	Individual views as supervisor	Since many Supervisors tend to stay active for a number of years, it seems that extending terms would give supervisors more time to settle into the role and effect changes and/or more fully support District staff and programs. Maybe at the risk of contradicting the above, I would suggest not extending to 6-year terms. Recruiting Supervisors can sometimes be difficult, and a 6-year term may be off-setting for some, whereas a 4-year term may be more palatable.	S 4
Dean	Hellie	Stevens County	On behalf of my district	6 year terms	S 6
Elsa	Bowen	Lincoln County	On behalf of my district	Great webinar explaining all the options and answering questions. Really helpful!! Leave at 4 years if possibly going to deter board members form applying.	S 4
Gerald	Scheele	Spokane	Individual views as supervisor	I would support the four year term only.	S 4 C6
John	Keatley	Cowlitz	Individual views as supervisor	Suggest the term be kept at 3 years because some potential supervisors might be reluctant to serve either a 4 or 6 year term and might result in more resignations from the board members.	C
Tova	Tillinghast	Underwood	On behalf of my district	This is the most concerning for our board. Among our board members, there is a common concern that 6 year terms would be too much to ask, and would also dissuade new supervisors from joining the board. While we understand board members can always resign if needed, that should not be a common exit strategy, and filling mid-term vacancies creates extra work and expense for CDs as well. A four-year term is almost too much and could pose similar challenges. A 2 or 3-year term is more palatable. We do encourage the Commission to include options for incumbents to have minimal paperwork requirements, and enable incumbents to be easily re-elected if unopposed. Having long-term institutional memory for the board is very important.	C
Zorah	Oppenheimer	Clark	On behalf of my district	The Board all agreed that 6 years was too long. From a recruitment perspective, it will be challenging to have people join our Board with a commitment of that long. While we understand that long-term board members would prefer a longer term, we suggest a 2-4 year term to encourage the most diverse pool of candidates. Our Board also suggested a farmer's position of 2 years with the option to extend to 4. This could add complication, but it would also encourage working farmers to participate.	C
Mark	Nielson	Benton	On behalf of my district	Would definitely prefer a 4 year term as opposed to a six year term.	S 4 C6
Mark	Nielson	Franklin	On behalf of my district	Would definitely prefer a 4 year term as opposed to a six year term.	S 4 C6

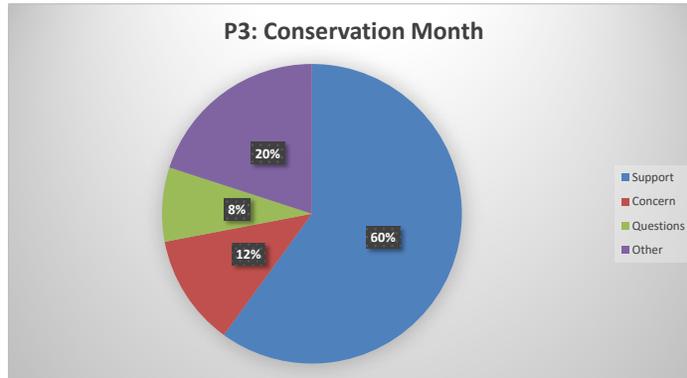
Support	20
Concerns	9
Questions	2
Other	3
Support 4	17
Support 6	2
Concern about 6	15



Name (First)	Name (Last)	Select your conservation district:	Are you commenting on behalf of your district or sharing your individual views as a supervisor or district manager?	Comments on Part 3/4: Districts follow current process but with more local outreach and they all hold their election during one "Conservation Month"	
Al	Latham	Jefferson County	Individual views as supervisor	OK but survey might have included an option to choose which month is preferable.	S
David	Lange	Whitman	Individual views as supervisor	If 4/4 takes place we are all tied into November for the election month?	Q
Larry	Davis	Whatcom	Individual views as supervisor	I support with one caveat - King CD is unique for many reasons. I think its use of electronic balloting and need to 'serve' the King County Council for political reasons, argues for giving King CD the latitude to run its election in a month other than January, February, or March. The caveat can be legally worded in a way that this optional latitude would apply only to King CD. Example: "Any county with a population of greater than two million and a city therein with a population of greater than 700,000 may conduct its supervisor elections in a month other than January, February, or March."	S
Alan	Chapman	Whatcom	Individual views as supervisor	I am not convinced of the value of a conservation month related to elections, though support for local districts might be in order. Perhaps sub areas might have separate conservation months.	O
FRANK	COREY	Whatcom	Individual views as district manager	The "Conservation Month" concept is intriguing. However, the best scenario is for the legislature to either fund these elections or require Counties to fund. The best scenario is to do County or District wide elections run by the County. Doing this in the spring like school districts have makes some amount of sense.	O
Tracy	Kier	Jefferson County	On behalf of my district	Would be in favor of this change.	S
Paul	Andersson	San Juan Islands	On behalf of my district	SIJCD supports this.	S
Craig	Nelson	Okanogan	On behalf of my district	The Okanogan CD Board of Supervisors are in support of holding our supervisor elections during a "Conservation Month".	S
roderick	camarce	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	sure sounds more uniform	S
Sharon	Call	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	I feel a "Conservation Month" should work for Districts.	S
Joy	Garitone	Kitsap	Individual views as district manager	This might help raise awareness if we were all doing it together.	O
Albert	Allpress	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	I believe the process works just fine the way it is. The conservation districts do not have money to put out to get an election done. The money we have is better spent performing the conservation tasks at hand. The supervisor positions are a volunteer position so any disclosure of personal background is not going to help the fact that folks are on the board for free. No reason to put oneself in that kind of position.	C
Shirley	St John	South Yakima	On behalf of my district	South Yakima Conservation District is in Favor of Districts Conducting Supervisor Elections during One Conservation Month. South Yakima Conservation District Board of Directors has Signed a Resolution sighting all of the above.	S
Kim	Williams	Clallam	Individual views as district manager	The idea of Conservation month would definitely help to educate the community on who and what we are. With this education, elections might feel less like a "popularity contest". March works best for our district.	S
Michael	Tobin	North Yakima	On behalf of my district	Currently "orca days" funding has come the WSCC / all special purpose districts...correct? Will the new Conservation Month come from the same pot? How will participation by individual Special purpose districts be folded into CAPP? just asking. Having "asked" we like the idea of increasing awareness of Local Special Purpose District Programs and if that increases participation by knowledgeable voters and or candidates so be it. If the goal is to simply increase the number of votes then the activities of this committee are misplaced. "Voter turn-out isn't a measure of a special purpose districts value to the natural resources it conserves, protects or enhances (notice we didn't say people...we serve natural resources first...by working with landowners... i.e. our purpose for existing). We need educated voters who understand the natural resources of our District Area and how those natural resources fit into watersheds, communities, cultural values etc...this should be the focus of conservation month. If we don't focus we will end up with issues that only a couple of CD's have that are threatening our purpose.	Q
Ronald	Juris	Eastern Klickitat	Individual views as supervisor	Could be a way to try to elevate the attention level of the voting public. The hard part will be finding a month that works just as well in King county as it does in Garfield or Klickitat. The commission will have to pick a month that makes all of us independent supervisors equally unhappy. ☺	O
Dean	Hellie	Stevens County	On behalf of my district	Election in November and like Conservation Commission providing state wide outreach	S
Elsa	Bowen	Lincoln County	On behalf of my district	LOVE THIS and the potential that it has to get all conservation district's recognized. A big pro for districts that don't have an outreach dedicated person. This options has the most pros vs cons.	S
Lynn	Simpson	Cowlitz	Individual views as supervisor	If Cowlitz CD does not hold elections in March with our annual meeting with Farm Foresters, we will have very few votes. They don't want to change the meeting month. Our last election had only supervisor votes and other past elections have had very few votes. This is the only way we have found to increase voting, despite all the advertising we have tried.	C
Gerald	Scheele	Spokane	Individual views as supervisor	This would be worth a try, even with the present system	S

John	Keatley	Cowlitz	Individual views as supervisor	Agree with current process expanded to vote all five positions and agree with more local outreach in each county and see no significant benefit to have a common month for elections as voters can only vote in one C.D. (even when some landowners have land in multiple districts.)	C
Tova	Tillinghast	Underwood	On behalf of my district	<p>Because we are often holding our plant sale in March, we would prefer either a mail-in-only ballot option or February as our election month.</p> <p>Although the Commission staff supporting CD elections may find they are overwhelmed when we're all doing our elections at the same time. It's essential to have responsive and capable Commission staff to help answer our questions in a timely manner.</p> <p>It's true that our messaging and outreach will be more effective by uniting around a "conservation month." This kind of unified outreach could be just as important if disassociated from our elections; outreach and CD elections do not necessarily need to be combined, and it also may not be realistic to organize a slew of outreach and expect immediate results in election turn-out the same month.</p> <p>The outreach effort could lead up to the elections, such as a Conservation Month which takes place when CDs are recruiting board candidates, and include outreach about elections that are scheduled to occur in the next month or two.</p>	O
Zorah	Oppenheimer	Clark	On behalf of my district	The Board and staff liked this idea so long as the month wasn't during Spring/Summer or November/December. We like March personally.	S
Mark	Nielson	Benton	On behalf of my district	This is okay. Since the RCW must be changed we suggest November as the Conservation Month to coincide with when most elections are held.	S
Mark	Nielson	Franklin	On behalf of my district	This is okay. Since the RCW must be changed, we suggest November as the Conservation Month to coincide with when most elections are held.	S

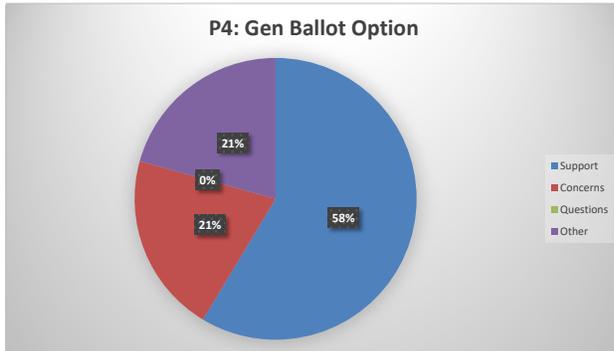
Support	15
Concern	3
Questions	2
Other	5



Name (First)	Name (Last)	Select your conservation district:	Are you commenting on behalf of your district or sharing your individual views as a supervisor or district manager?	Comments on Part 4/4: Districts have the option to go on the general election ballot	
Chris	Porter	King	Individual views as supervisor	Hello, While I appreciate the work that was done to write this proposal, it continues to fall short of the most important goals to achieve: Transparency, Equity, inclusiveness, and trust. As long as the elections remain hidden across the state, there is no true transparency, trust, inclusiveness, and equity. Allowing one CD to have their elections on the ballot is like appealing the loudest voice, but believing it will allow the status quo to continue. As we look across this country and see laws and rules making it harder to vote, it should be our goal to ensure we are not doing the same or perpetuating the same. This proposal remains a great disappointment, because it places the needs of districts over the rights of the voters. It seeks to make everyone happy, while keeping a zone of silence about these elections. It is hard to believe that just about any and all elected positions in this state appear on a ballot and our accessibility to all voters except the conservation districts. It is hard to believe that voters can pick up a pamphlet in any election and get information and make a decision about a candidate, except for conservation districts. It is hard to believe that voters can track just about any elected official, except for conservation district supervisors. It is hard to believe in 2021, we are still grappling with whether or not an old system of exclusion and lack of transparency will continue to be our legacy when there is a national effort to strengthen voting access and the right to vote. If this proposal becomes the way we continue to do business, which is to say that one distinct will change, we should all hang our heads in shame because protecting CDs continues to have greater importance than the voters that should and much have a greater say. Shame because there is not trust in this status quo.	C
David	Lange	Whitman	Individual views as supervisor	Too expensive for us, no comment	O
Al	Latham	Jefferson County	Individual views as supervisor	The slippery slope..... If some districts go on the general ballot there will be pressure or requirement for all districts to do so. There would need to be dedicated funding for each district to participate - in addition to the normal funding we receive from the state, not pulled out of operational or program funding. Without a gaurenteed separate source of funding for being on the general ballot i am against this.	C
Larry	Davis	Whatcom	Individual views as supervisor	I support giving CDs the option of running a general election ballot. I support CDs not being required to run a primary election. I support CD supervisors being exempt from PDC and personal financial filing requirements. COMMENT: It will be interesting to see if the expectation of increased voter turnout happens because of a CD going to the general election ballot.	S
Alan	Chapman	Whatcom	Individual views as supervisor	Support this option	S
FRANK	COREY	Whatcom	Individual views as district manager	The only long term solution is to put all CD elections on the general ballot. Either in the fall or a special spring election like school districts. Rather than proposing legislation to modify the current processes it makes more sense to propose legislation to fund special district elections on a general ballot.	O
Tracy	Kier	Jefferson County	On behalf of my district	Would be in favor of this change as long as it stays as an "option" for Districts who can afford it.	S
Paul	Andersson	San Juan Islands	On behalf of my district	SIJCD supports having this as an option though will not likely pursue it due to cost and complication of doing so.	S
Renee	Hadley	Walla Walla County	On behalf of my district	In general, our board of supervisors and regular public member attendees are ok with the 4 parts. However, we want to make clear that we support part 4 of 4 as long as OPTION does not become mandatory.	S
Craig	Nelson	Okanogan	On behalf of my district	The Okanogan CD Board of Supervisors are in support of Districts having the option to put their supervisor elections on the ballot. The Okanogan CD Board of Supervisors believe that decision should be made by each individual CD Board and nobody else.	S
roderick	camarce	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	okay that sounds good too	S
Kirstin	Haugen	King	On behalf of my district	We enthusiastically support this proposal.	S
Sharon	Howard	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	The term "option" has to stay in this section. In out county it is prohibitively expensive for small agencies to appear on the general ballot. Personally, I don't understand why the accounting strategies for elections is to spread their costs in such a way as to discourage participation by small entities. But that is a battle for another day.	O
Sharon	Call	Kitsap	Individual views as supervisor	Going on the general election ballot is a very costly method for District elections and difficult to fund.	O
Joy	Garitone	Kitsap	Individual views as district manager	As long as 'option' is firm. Going on the general ballot might work for larger and richer districts, but for most of our 45 districts it is unaffordable and completely unnecessary.	S
Joe	Holtrop	Jefferson County	Individual views as district manager	The cost of being on the general election is continually mentioned as being prohibitive. However, like is done in Oregon (and Idaho, I think), legislation can require counties to cover the miniscule additional cost of adding conservation districts to the ballot every other year. And the fear that every special purpose district would then want to have their costs covered can be dealt with by making it only apply to non-junior taxing districts. One can make the case that rates and charges is a tax, but it is technically different. Hopefully, the committee considered this.	O
Kim	Williams	Clallam	Individual views as district manager	I would prefer to not have anything to do the general ballot. Not only costs involved, but also not wanting to become a part of a partisan election.	O
Michael	Tobin	North Yakima	On behalf of my district	Absolutely not. NYCD is against this option. The current election process as set up by the legislature is and has worked well for the NYCD and the majority of the other 44 districts. It has allowed for engaged, knowledgeable and willing Supervisors to serve. With these attributes NYCD is fully meeting the true intent of the legislation as are other districts. We have always had a full Board that truly represents the Natural Resource priorities (as supported by data). Our Board comes to their position with a certain level of trust within our communities where natural resource priorities exist. Without that trust most of our special purpose district programs would be defunct. Their knowledge in countless situations have proven more valuable than any amount of funding and group hugs! It is a fact that politics is a real part of a few Districts. We would love to hear how this has improved their service to the Natural Resources (remember that's first not people). General Election ballots are political don't kid yourselves or try to pull the wool over our eyes. Go back to 1/4....don't fix it if its not broken. The WSCC, WACD, the legislator, a few CD's haven't proven to NYCD that there's a problem. How does using the general election process not violate each of the committees three guiding principals that were presented today to start the webinar?	C
Ronald	Juris	Eastern Klickitat	Individual views as supervisor	As long as the "option" doesn't get spilled over to everyone having to go this way, I can see where some of our CDs may need this to satisfy their constituents and the issues that they are dealing with. Lots of hard work and thinking went into this. Thanks to all the members who gave their time and energy to it. But keep your hard hats handy just in case. 😊	S
Gary	Ketcheson	Whidbey Island	Individual views as supervisor	I think this is an appropriate compromise for those districts that want the exposure and presence on the general ballot. I do have concerns that it could lead to pressure on all districts to be on the general ballot, and that would be financially devastating for some districts. While being on the general ballot reaches more of the electorate, I'm not sure it elevates the knowledge and understanding of Conservation Districts among a rather unformed electorate. Having separate elections for CDs, if properly handled, could better inform and educate the electorate on CD programs. The only way I could really get behind this change is if I knew it would not start a domino effect on all districts.	S
Dean	Hellie	Stevens County	On behalf of my district	option to go on general not mandatory allow for self managed elections	S
Elsa	Bowen	Lincoln County	On behalf of my district	Absolutely not- even allowing just a couple to have the option really opens the door to forcing all districts on the ballot.	C

Lynn	Simpson	Cowlitz	Individual views as supervisor	As long as it remains an OPTION. We are afraid that legislators will grab onto this idea and require it for all districts. We have looked into this subject seriously and deeply with our county auditor and the cost would be prohibitively high - it would break our district financially and we would no longer exist.	S
Gerald	Scheele	Spokane	Individual views as supervisor	It would be good to have the option, but I think that just a few would go that route. I feel it would be way too costly, using up funds that would put a lot of conservation on the ground. I think there would be more voter turnout by emphasizing Part 3 above. There should also be an option to have Supervisors be appointed by the County legislative authority, like some other special purpose districts.	S
John	Keatley	Cowlitz	Individual views as supervisor	Support each district having the option to go on the general election ballot or not; perhaps the option could also include electing all five supervisors by conservation district ... We should recognize the risk; that if we want to make legislative changes we might not want some of what the legislature ultimately does.	S
Tova	Tillinghast	Underwood	On behalf of my district	It's very important to keep "the option," and NOT require everyone to go on the general ballot. As many CDs know, this could be extremely expensive, politicize our elections unnecessarily, and attract unhelpful attention. Since not all district boundaries align with county boundaries, there may be some unforeseen complications to being on a general ballot. In our district, we would have to be on two counties' general ballots and ensure that our district boundary is reflected accurately in the ballot distribution.	S
Zorah	Oppenheimer	Clark	On behalf of my district	The Board agreed to this so long as it was not a requirement. The language would need to be written such that it is very clear that there are two options and one isn't preferred over another. We are very concerned about an easy slide into a requirement to be on a general ballot.	S
Mark	Nielson	Benton	On behalf of my district	We have concerns. We are fearful that if a few conservation districts choose to go on the general election ballot then eventually the legislature will make it mandatory for all districts. We would suggest studying this further with, among other things, detailed analysis of the cost to each county. One option is to allow conservation districts to opt into the general election but then they would be authorized to unilaterally implement charges (without limitations) for district programs including election costs.	C
Mark	Nielson	Franklin	On behalf of my district	We have concerns. We are fearful that if a few conservation districts choose to go on the general election ballot then eventually the legislature will make it mandatory for all districts. We would suggest studying this further with detailed analysis of the cost to each county. One option is to allow conservation districts to opt into the general election but then they would be authorized to unilaterally implement charges (without limitations) for district programs including election costs.	C

Support	17
Concerns	6
Questions	0
Other	6



[Watch the full session here.](#)

Mark Craven calls the meeting to order at 11:05 a.m., and gives a brief summary of why the committee was formed. For years, there has been discussion about conservation district election reform, how to make things better. It's important to come up with solutions now. Some years back, there was an instance where a special purpose district was found to have inappropriately spent funds. This caused the legislature to say all special purpose districts should go on the general ballot. There was legislation for this, but it did not make it out of the committee. CDs saw this, and said that they want to be part of the solution, and at the forefront of the changes, not to be legislated and told what to do.

This Committee has been meeting every other week since mid-March. A lot of time and consideration went into this. Each committee member came into this with their own perspectives and opinions, and there were a wide variety of these. However, there are 45 CDs throughout the state, so committee members kept this in mind when coming up with a proposal. There are a few proposals, listed below, and information was given during the meeting from members of the JCE committee.

- 1. Districts would hold a supervisor election every other year (currently, all CDs hold an election every year) – Covered by Audrey Ahmaan**
 - Saves costs associated with conducting an election.
 - Gives districts the option of choosing to run their election in either an odd or even year.
- 2. The term for all CD supervisors, both appointed and elected, would be extended. The JCE proposes extending to either a four- or six-year term (supervisors currently serve a three-year term) – Covered by Audrey Ahmaan**
 - When combined with part 1 (above):
 - i. If we propose a four-year term, two supervisors would be up for election during one election cycle, and one supervisor would be elected in the next cycle two years later.
 - ii. If we propose a six-year term, one supervisor position would come up for election every two years.
 - iii. Under the four- or six-year term scenario, the two appointed supervisor positions would be appointed by the Commission in “off years” when no election is held.
 - iv. For current supervisors, there is a process to modify the three-year term to a four- or six-year term.

- Reduces election costs
- Normalizes CD elections to match terms of several other elected positions
- Allows CDs to follow same schedules as other elections.

3. Districts would conduct supervisor elections during one Conservation Month (CDs currently hold elections in either January, February, or March)

– Covered by Cindy Reed

- Districts follow the current election process, but with more emphasis on local election outreach.
- All districts would conduct their election during one “Conservation Month” (month TBD). The SCC would coordinate broad statewide advertising/promotion of conservation districts and potential election opportunities throughout Conservation Month. The campaign will be developed in coordination with CDs, particularly with members of the Communications, Partnership, and Outreach (CPO) group, who have been building a foundation for this.
- Focusing the election in a Conservation Month would allow for broad communication and publicity of CDs and their work to a statewide audience.
- Goal would be to increase awareness of CDs and increase participation in CD elections.
- Cost of the “Conservation Month” publicity would be borne by the Commission.

4. Districts would have the option to go on the general election ballot –

Covered by Mike Nordin

- By a vote of the board of supervisors, a CD could choose to go on the general election ballot, rather than conduct the election under the current process.
- CD supervisors would not be required to run in a primary election, and, similar to cemetery districts, supervisors would be exempt from Public Disclosure Commission and personal financial filing requirements.
- Empowers each CD to make a local determination about which election approach works best for their communities and their district, consistent with our core value of locally led conservation.
- This option has the highest potential to increase voter turnout because it would be on the ballot with other entities.

Vicki Carter, Spokane, invited Vicky Dalton, Spokane County Auditor, to attend the session. Spokane CD has met with her regarding the cost of going on the general ballot. Ms. Dalton shares that she is appreciative of the work the JCE has accomplished. Going on the general ballot is expensive, and it would most likely be cost prohibitive for

Spokane CD. Ms. Dalton suggests putting forward a recommendation that is very tight, and make absolutely clear why there is more than one option. It is also likely that legislators will have to be educated every few years, and invites the JCE to work with the state's auditors to draft recommendations and legislation.

Mr. Nordin shares that the JCE has been thorough, and completely understands where Spokane CD is coming from. The JCE has met with state auditors, and has done a lot of thinking about these issues. Ms. Dalton shares that the state auditors are impressed and thrilled with the work of the JCE, especially the collaborative nature of the process.

Randy James, of the Spokane Conservation District, shares that it is good to put a conservation perspective on the cost. For one election, SCD could put in five private fish passage projects, fifty septic/sewer conversion projects, fifty forest home ignition zone projects, five full-time employees, and more. Mr. James shares it is important to put these things into perspective.

Mr. Craven shares that the JCE did think about these perspectives a lot, and by sharing them with the legislature, it will really display why it is not feasible for all CDs to go on the general ballot, and why the option/flexibility is the best option for all.

Mike Tobin, North Yakima CD, shares that the fourth option, the option to go on the general ballot, is the one that causes most concern surrounding potential politicization of elections. **How can we be sure politicization won't happen in elections when changed?**

Ron Shultz, SCC, shares that this was a concern shared and discussed during JCE meetings. This was one criticism, but in current elections, there is the most turnout when there is a controversy. It can also be politicized when candidates are seen as representing various political parties, which can have an effect on the district. There isn't a way to keep this from happening, as it is a part of the democratic process. Minimizing this is by making this an option for CDs.

Mr. Craven shares that during a meeting with Oregon CD representatives, this was brought up as a concern. Oregon representatives shared that elections were similar over the years, unless there was a controversy, and they haven't seen too many races become politicized. It is still a concern, it is still a worry, but Mr. Craven shares that he feels better after hearing from people who have been working with this system for many years.

Dawn Bekenyi, Whatcom CD, shares that previous elections became political when a candidate made them so. They were on the board for two years, and have been gone for two years, and are still politically based. Ms. Bekenyi is concerned that with the option of going on the general ballot that in the current climate and community, would be forced as 100% grant funded to go on the general ballot with no way to pay for it. She is worried it will be perceived as trying to hide something from voters by not going on the general ballot.

Zorah Oppenheimer, Clark CD, shares that the board likes the option of going on the ballot every other year, but the four- or six-year term felt like a lot. The board suggests a two-year farmer term, with an option to renew. **Would Conservation Month elections apply to all districts, or only districts running their own election?**

Mr. Shultz shares that all district elections would be held during Conservation Month, but if some districts were on the ballot, they would not hold their elections during Conservation Month.

Mr. Craven expands on the idea about Conservation Month. One of the reasons behind this is that there's a common saying that CDs are the state's "best kept secret." There has been discussion for years about engaging with community, teaching the community about what CDs do, etc.

Mr. Shultz shares that one of the criticisms from the legislature is surrounding voter turnout. Because it is so low, he is curious about what the group thinks about how that can be addressed.

Mr. Tobin answers that high voter turnout does not always mean a better district. There is a difference between legislative authority and special purpose district. Legislators created CDs, but the two are not the same.

Al Latham shares the perspective that although the turnout is low, they are generally well educated on the issues or people being voted for. Ms. Bekenyi disputes that, saying that in the past with the politicization, voters haven't known much about what or who they are voting for.

Jerry Sheele asks if someone can explain how the governing bodies of other special purpose districts are chosen, appointment or election.

Mr. Shultz explains that special purpose districts and how those boards are chosen are set by the legislature. Irrigation Districts are one entity whose elections function like ours. Generally, those that are elected or go on a general ballot are special purpose districts who have taxing authority (i.e. fire districts), which is a reason as to why they are on the general ballot.

Ms. Bekenyi shares that her board is not a fan of the six-year term, it felt too daunting. The four-year term is more favorable.

Alan Chapman asks if there was any discussion relative to the issue of increasing the number of supervisors, or making all supervisors elected.

Mr. Craven responds, saying that they are still leaving two supervisors appointed by the Commission, and three being elected. Every other year elections provides lower election cost for districts. There was much discussion surrounding the specific question Mr. Chapman posed.

The other aspect of four-year terms provides another benefit for the SCC, with on and off years for elections and appointments.

Q: If you went to the general ballot, would that be the November election?

Yes, the more that is on the ballot, the lower the cost for the districts. November elections provide the most issues on the ballot. Even years are reserved for partisan races, and odd years are reserved for non-partisan races. The way the proposal was written is to provide the option for even or odd years.

Ms. Meyer shares some background on the Communications, Partnership, and Outreach (CPO) group, who have been working on the foundations of Conservation Month. If this option is chosen, there will be much work done already.

Q: If there was a financial change in the district, what is the district supposed to do if they have to pay for the general ballot? Can they go back and forth?

A: That's a great question, and should be addressed as the recommendation is written. Something that should be talked more about in upcoming meetings.

Q: When you say next year, does that mean beginning to work the legislature in the 2022 session, or is that a goal of having something ready to go and implementing next year?

A: The idea is to begin presenting to the legislature next year. There is still some unknown because of the ongoing pandemic. The goal is to begin presenting before something is presented without CD's input.

Mr. Shultz shares what is next for the committee. Comments are due by August 18, 2021. Staff will compile these comments for the August 25 JCE meeting. At this meeting, they will finalize whatever recommendation will be presenting to the commission at their September meeting.

All these options will require a statutory change. If the Commission chooses one, some, or all of these options to advance, there will be a lot of work to do to begin drafting legislation, engaging legislators, etc. The goal is to have the statutory changes complete in the upcoming legislative session.

Mr. Craven adjourns the meeting at 12:40 p.m.



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8/4/2021

To the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC),

In regards to "Election Reform Proposal (Draft)",
Pacific Conservation District (PCD) response: PCD Resolution #8-21-1, unanimously approved.

The PCD Board of Supervisors, on August 4, 2021, unanimously approved the following;
"The PCD BOS support the JCE Draft Proposal for CD Election Reform Parts 1-4, with these preferences or changes.

1. PCD BOS prefers 6-year terms instead of 4-year terms.
2. PCD BOS supports a "Conservation Month", but would prefer that this month would not be held in November.
3. PCD BOS holds steadfast that CD's are NOT required to be on the general ballot, and that CD's that choose to be on the general ballot pay for their own effort on the general ballot.
4. PCD BOS also is firm on Supervisors being exempt from Public Disclosure Commission filing requirements.

Thank You for your time and consideration,

Allen Lougheed, PCD Chair
August 4th, 2021