

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2051

As Reported by House Committee On:
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to providing short-term disaster recovery financial assistance to agricultural producers.

Brief Description: Providing short-term disaster recovery financial assistance to agricultural producers.

Sponsors: Representatives Rule, Shewmake, Ormsby and Ramel.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 1/25/22, 2/1/22 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Conservation Commission to develop a short-term disaster recovery financial assistance program for farmers and ranchers.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 32 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boehnke, Chandler, Chopp, Cody, Dolan, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Frame, Hansen, Harris, Hoff, Jacobsen, Johnson, J., Lekanoff, Pollet, Rude, Ryu, Schmick, Senn, Springer, Steele, Stonier, Sullivan and Tharinger.

Staff: Dan Jones (786-7118).

Background:

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

Conservation Districts (CDs) are a type of government entity that provide voluntary land use and conservation services to landowners, such as habitat restoration and natural disaster preparedness and recovery. Each CD is led by a five-member board. There are 45 CDs in Washington, and at least one in each county.

The Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) is the state agency that coordinates and provides state funding to CDs. The SCC is led by a 10-member board, and provides landowner services in addition to and in coordination with CDs.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Subject to amounts appropriated, and in cooperation with conservation districts, the Conservation Commission must develop and implement a short-term disaster recovery financial assistance program (Program) for farmers and ranchers. The Program funding must initially address physical damage or economic losses caused by flooding in Whatcom County during November 2021.

Grants may be used for payroll, utilities and rent, marketing and advertising, building improvements or repairs, replacing damaged or lost crops, livestock, and equipment, and other operations and business expenses. To be eligible for grant funds, farmers or ranchers must provide documentation of lost agricultural income or activity as a result of a natural disaster.

The Conservation Commission must coordinate with the Department of Agriculture and CDs to increase awareness of the Program and other state and federal disaster relief assistance.

The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute removes an appropriation of \$600,000 from the State General Fund to the Conservation Commission for the Program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) When Whatcom County experienced major flooding, the Whatcom CD reached out to farmers to determine their needs and provide various forms of technical assistance and funding. The grant Program created in this bill would allow more assistance of this kind to farmers and ranchers after natural disasters.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Alison Halpern, Washington State Conservation Commission.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.