

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5437

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to the state conservation commission.

Brief Description: Regarding the operation and authority of the state conservation commission.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Agriculture & Rural Economic Development (originally sponsored by Senators Schoesler, Hatfield and Haugen; by request of Conservation Commission).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 3/13/09, 3/20/09 [DP].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Authorizes the State Conservation Commission (Commission) to seek and accept grants, gifts, and endowments.
- Authorizes the Commission to contract for or conduct conferences, seminars, and training sessions and recover costs associated with those activities.
- Authorizes the Commission to provide reimbursement and meals to participants in Commission meetings and events.
- Requires the Commission and the Office of Financial Management to approve and financially justify supplying the Commission office accommodations, supplies, and equipment.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Jacks, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Smith, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Grant-Herriot, Kretz, Liias, McCoy, Nelson, Ormsby, Pearson and Warnick.

Staff: Jaclyn Ford (786-7339)

Background:

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

Membership of the State Conservation Commission.

The State Conservation Commission (Commission) has 10 members: two appointed, three elected, and five ex officio. Two members are appointed by the Governor, one of which must be a landowner or operator of a farm. The two appointed members serve four-year terms. The three elected members serve three-year terms. One of these members is elected each year by the District Supervisors at their annual statewide meeting. One of the members must reside in eastern Washington, one in central Washington, and one in western Washington. At least two of the three elected members must be landowners or operators of a farm. The Director of the Department of Ecology (DOE), the Director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, the Commissioner of Public Lands, the President of the Washington Association of Conservation Districts, and the Dean of the College of Agriculture at Washington State University are the ex officio members of the Commission.

Conservation Districts.

Conservation districts (districts) are special local government districts authorized to engage in a variety of activities relating to the conservation of soil, water, and other natural resources. Currently, there are 47 districts.

Duties of the Commission.

The Commission has several duties: (1) assist the supervisors of the districts; (2) keep the supervisors of the districts organized and informed of the activities and experiences of the other districts, and facilitate an interchange of advice and experience among the districts; (3) review and advise on agreements by the districts; (4) secure cooperation and assistance of federal, state, and local agencies in the work of the districts; (5) administer and distribute allocated funds; (6) facilitate with local governments in the administration of activities dealing with the conservation of renewable natural resources; (7) disseminate information throughout Washington about the activities and programs of the districts; (8) review and comment on state and local plans, programs, and activities; (9) compile information and make studies, summaries, and analyses of district programs; (10) assist the districts in obtaining legal services from state and local legal officers; (11) require annual reports from the districts; and (12) establish uniform accounting and auditing procedures.

Summary of Bill:

Commission members are eligible for compensation at a \$100 per diem rate when attending an official meeting or performing statutorily prescribed duties approved by the Chair of the Commission.

As long as the Commission and the Office of Financial Management find it appropriate and financially justifiable, the Commission must be supplied with suitable office accommodations at the central office of the DOE and must be furnished necessary supplies and equipment.

The Commission may seek and accept grants from any source, public or private. The Commission may also accept gifts or endowments, in trust or otherwise, including real and personal property.

The Commission may contract for or conduct conferences, seminars, and training sessions. The Commission may recover costs, at a rate determined by the Commission, for conferences, seminars, and training sessions sponsored or co-sponsored by the Commission. The Commission may provide reimbursement and meals to participants in these activities and other Commission-sponsored meetings and events, as approved by the Commission.

There are technical corrections to make language gender-neutral and delete or correct improper terminology.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill is updating the Commission statute and clarifies the Commission's authority. The Commission may want to relocate if it becomes too expensive to stay at the DOE headquarters; this bill will give the Commission that option.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Ron Shultz, Washington State Conservation Commission.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.