
**State Government & Tribal Relations
Committee**

HB 2499

Brief Description: Modernizing conservation district election procedures and requiring financial disclosures from district supervisors and candidates for district supervisor.

Sponsors: Representatives Gregerson, Pollet, Reeves, Hill, Stearns, Macri, Obras and Reed.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Lengthens conservation district supervisor terms from three to four years.
- Removes the requirement that a certain number of conservation district supervisors be landowners or farmer operators.
- Permits conservation districts to choose to hold their elections under Title 29A, the regular election process used for federal, state, and many local offices.
- Requires conservation district supervisors, as well as candidates, to submit a statement of financial affairs for public disclosure.

Hearing Date: 1/27/26

Staff: Connor Schiff (786-7093).

Background:

Special Purpose Districts.

Special purpose districts are local governments formed for a limited purpose that are separate from a county, city, or town government. There are more than 80 types of special purpose

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districts in Washington, providing services such as fire protection, libraries, water and sewer treatment, and mosquito control.

Conservation Districts.

Conservation districts are special purpose districts that are organized to promote the conservation of renewable natural resources. They are supported by the State Conservation Commission (SCC). There are 45 conservation districts in Washington.

A conservation district may be formed when 20 percent of the voters within the proposed district area file a petition with the SCC. A public hearing is then held and, if the SCC determines that public health, safety, and welfare warrant the creation of the district, the SCC must determine whether district creation is practicable. To assist in its decision, the SCC must call an election to submit the proposition to the voters in the proposed district area. If a majority of voters in a proposed district area support creation of the district and the SCC determines creation is practicable, the district is created.

Board of Supervisors. The board of supervisors of a conservation district is comprised of five members, three of whom are elected to staggered three-year terms. Two of the three elected supervisors must be landowners or operators of a farm. The other two supervisors are appointed by the SCC; one must be a landowner or the operator of a farm.

Voting Rights. The SCC may determine the qualifications necessary to vote in elections for board supervisors. By SCC rule, an individual registered to vote in the county where the district is located and who resides within the conservation district boundaries may vote.

Election Mechanics. For the creation of a district, the SCC sets the date of the election and designates the polling places. For elections to the board of supervisors, the board of supervisors sets the date of the election during the first quarter of the calendar year. The SCC must establish procedures for elections, canvass the returns, and announce the official results.

Washington State Institute for Public Policy Study. In 2023 the Washington State Institute for Public Policy was directed to study the costs of conservation district supervisor elections. The final report, issued in June 2025, summarizes election costs, funding sources, voter turnout, and projected election costs under alternative policies.

Title 29A Elections.

Other than some types of special districts and a few other exceptions, local government and special district elections are conducted under Title 29A. Candidates file for office during a filing period in May; a primary is held to narrow the field to two candidates in August; and a general election is held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. General elections for local government candidates are conducted in odd-numbered years, except for counties in which the charter specifies even-year elections. Special elections may be called by a county auditor on one of four days (one in February, one in April, and the date of the August primary or November general election) when the legislative authority so requests.

Ballots are mailed to voters by the county auditor, who largely conducts the elections at the county level, and returned ballots are canvassed by a county canvassing board. Each registered voter is entitled to one vote in the local government races for the jurisdictions in which the voter resides. Elections are overseen by the Office of the Secretary of State. The Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) oversees campaign finance laws and rules for these elections. Candidates and elected officials are required to report certain campaign finance information to the PDC. Candidates and elected officials in political subdivisions with fewer than 2,000 registered voters as of the date of the most recent general election are exempt from campaign reporting requirements. Elected conservation district supervisors are also exempt from these requirements.

Statements of Financial Affairs.

Every year, all elected officials and executive state officers must file a Statement of Financial Affairs for the preceding calendar year with the PDC. Statements are also required of every candidate for such elected offices. These statements are called F-1 statements. According to the PDC, F-1 statements are intended to allow the public to assess whether state officials may have conflicts of interest. "Executive state officer" is defined to include the director of many state agencies, councils, and commissions.

Subject to certain monetary thresholds, F-1 statements must include information about a person's:

- bank accounts, savings accounts, and insurance policies;
- debts;
- other public or private offices, directorships, and positions as a trustee;
- other sources of compensation;
- real property ownership and interests within Washington; and
- acceptance of food, beverage, and gifts.

Candidates and elected officials in political subdivisions with fewer than 2,000 registered voters as of the date of the most recent general election are exempt from the F-1 reporting requirement. Conservation district supervisors are also exempt from this requirement.

Summary of Bill:

Conservation district supervisor terms are lengthened from three to four years. The requirements that two of the three elected supervisors be landowners or operators of a farm and that one of the two appointed supervisors be a landowner or the operator of a farm are eliminated.

A district board of supervisors may choose to conduct its elections under Title 29A instead, by majority vote after public notice and hearing. For districts that hold elections under Title 29A, supervisors and candidates are subject to the campaign disclosure requirements that apply to other Title 29A elections. Both elected and appointed supervisors, as well as candidates, in those districts must also file F-1 statements with the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC). Consistent

with the existing exemption for political subdivisions with fewer than 2,000 registered voters, elected supervisors and supervisor candidates in districts that hold their elections under Title 29A and have fewer than 2,000 registered voters are exempt from campaign finance and F-1 reporting requirements. Appointed supervisors in these districts are granted a conforming exemption from F-1 reporting requirements.

All elected and appointed supervisors, as well as candidates, in districts that continue to conduct their elections under the supervision of the State Conservation Commission must file F-1 statements with the PDC.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 26, 2026.

Effective Date: The bill contains multiple effective dates. Please see the bill.