

August 19, 2020

TO: Conservation District Board Supervisors and Managers

FROM: Ron Shultz, WSCC Policy Director

RE: Seeking District Comment on Adding WDFW to the WSCC

Recently the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) communicated to the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC or Commission) the interest of WDFW to be added to the Commission as a full voting member.

The Commission considered WDFW's request and has directed WSCC staff to submit the question to conservation districts for feedback. When considering the WDFW request, the Commission also considered the current composition of the Commission board. In particular, the Commission considered whether the Commission board contains the right mix of representation. The Commission considered various possible additions and how the addition of an agency representative would impact the current composition.

The Commission also directed staff, when seeking input from conservation districts on the addition of WDFW, to include a number of options for possible changes to the Commission membership. These options are detailed below.

BACKGROUND

The Conservation Commission currently consists of 10 voting members, the composition of which is established in statute. RCW 89.08.030. According to the statute, Commission membership consists of the following:

- 2 members appointed by the governor, one of whom shall be a landowner or operator of a farm.
- 3 elected members, at least 2 of which shall be landowners or operators of a farm.
- 5 members representing: the directors of Ecology and WSDA; the commissioner of public lands; the dean of the college of agriculture at WSU, and the president

of the Washington Association of Conservation Districts. These members may appoint a designee through delegation of authority.

The statute also authorizes the Commission to invite appropriate officers of cooperating organizations, state and federal agencies to serve as advisers to the Commission. These advisors are not official members of the Commission and do not vote on Commission matters.

WDFW has served as an advisory member of the Commission for many years. There are a number of issues managed by WDFW which overlap with the work of conservation districts and the Commission. Specifically these issues relate to species management, land management, and habitat protection and restoration.

SCC staff and conservation districts work very closely with WDFW staff on a variety of issues, including:

- WDFW is one of four agencies on the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) technical panel, and the Commission included a specific funding request for WDFW in our 2019-21 VSP budget proposal, supporting WDFW's remote sensing program. This proposal was funded.
- SCC staff worked with WDFW staff on funding for beach restoration activities on the Pacific coast, the projects being coordinated by the Pacific Conservation District.
- Commission staff engaged with WDFW staff in the agency's development of the revision to the Priority Habitat and Species (PHS) Riparian update guidance for aquatic species.
- WDFW is the lead on the Southwest Washington Small Forest Landowner RCPP in partnership with SCC staff and local conservation districts.
- SCC staff have also coordinated with WDFW staff on Farm Bill matters. WDFW staff have done a large amount of work informing members of Congress on the impacts of the Farm Bill to our state. Continued coordination on this topic will be beneficial.
- From 2008 to 2010 the OFP Farmland Preservation Task Force conducted a series of meetings around the state to discuss issues impacting farmland. The number one issue of concern to the group was management of WDFW lands. We invited WDFW staff to meet with the Task Force to have a dialogue about land management issues.
- WDFW and SCC actively participate in Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) at the state and local levels. CRM is a collaborative process that helps stakeholders develop local solutions to contentious natural resources issues.
- WDFW and CDs have worked together on many fish passage and fish screening projects. Given the number of road crossings and irrigation screens, there will be many opportunities to partner in the future.

For any changes to the composition of the Commission, the statute must be changed. This would be a process of introduction of legislation. However, once legislation is considered, the perspectives of legislators must be addressed as well as gathering input from any interested stakeholders.

DISCUSSION

There are several factors to consider when evaluating whether to add WDFW, or any entity, to the Commission board. In no particular order, some of these factors include:

1. The mutual work and interests between the entity under consideration and the work of the Commission and conservation districts.
2. The balance of voting on the Commission. Currently there are 4 conservation district representatives, 4 agency representatives, and 2 Governor appointees. One may wish to consider how the addition of another representative will fit within this balance.
3. Whether there is appropriate representation on the Commission based on the issues the Commission and conservation districts undertake. For example, there's a considerable amount of mutual interests between the work of WDFW and the work of the Commission and conservation districts. There may be other areas where there is a significant nexus in mutually important work where representation on the Commission would be beneficial.
4. Currently, the Commission does not have specific representation from any particular group, such as "large ag" or "urban ag". The two Governor appointees are not required to have any particular affiliation according to the statute. That said, over the years an informal affiliation has been used with one appointee reflecting environmental interests and one reflecting tribal interests.

These are only a few of the possible factors to consider when thinking about the appropriate composition of the Commission. You may have other factors that are important to you.

OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

Commission staff will be distributing a survey for your responses as to whether to add any of the following as voting members to the Commission. The survey will be in a "yes / no" format and each option is considered independent of the others.

The options approved by the Commission for consideration by conservation districts are:

Option 1: Add WDFW to the Commission as a full voting member.

Option 2: Add one additional representative of conservation districts, if WDFW is added.

Option 3: Add one representative of urban or small acreage agriculture, if WDFW is added.

Option 4: Add tribal representative, if WDFW is added.

Option 5: No change to the Commission's current membership.