



# District Digest

monthly summary of essential information for Washington's conservation districts

JUNE 2024

## Important Dates

### Events

- **June 4 - Voluntary Stewardship Program Joint Technical Panel & Statewide Advisory Committee Meeting** (*Spokane/Hybrid*)
- **June 10-12 - WADE Conference** (*Sleeping Lady Resort, Leavenworth*)
- **June 19 - Juneteenth** (*SCC Closed*)
- **June 30 - Last Day of Fiscal Year 2024**
- **July 1 - First Day of Fiscal Year 2025**
- **July 4 - Independence Day** (*SCC Closed*)
- **July 17-18 - Commission Tour and Regular Meeting** (*Clark CD*)

### Deadlines

- **May 31 - Annual Work Plans** due to SCC
- **June 30 - Last Day of FY24.** SCC Operational Grant Funds Spending Deadline
- **July 10 - Final SCC Grant Vouchers Due**
- **July 12 - Conservation District Facilities Needs Survey Due**

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## Congratulations to returning and new supervisors!

At the May 16, 2024 meeting, the Commission certified and announced the winners of conservation district elections. The Commission also made appointments for all the positions that were before them. Congratulations on becoming part of a proud, decades-long history of conservation work in Washington State!

### We are here to support you

Newly appointed and elected supervisors will be hearing from their [regional manager](#) soon to schedule an orientation. Feel free to reach out with any questions you may have, and become familiar with the [Conservation District Supervisor Reference](#) and other materials on our [Accountability, Operations, and Supervisor Trainings webpage](#).

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## Fiscal year 2025 funding approved

At the May 16, 2024 meeting, the Commission approved the suggested allocations presented in the Funding Approval for Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025). [See the FY25 Budget Allocation Proposals & Table](#). Please reach out to your [regional manager](#) if you have any questions.

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## A change in the Municipal Ethics Act - limits for Municipal Officers

## Updated district operations brief available [here](#)

The state Code of Ethics for Municipal Officers, chapter 42.23 RCW, prohibits municipal officers from having a beneficial interest in most contracts made by, through, or under their supervision. MRSC recently posted a blog that provides a brief overview of the Municipal Ethics Act and the new changes that **generally double the size of allowed contracts for municipal officers from \$1,500 to \$3,000 per month**. For more information, [read this MRSC blog](#) and the [MRSC Ethics and Conflicts of Interest page](#).

A reminder that district board supervisors are exempt from this limitation. Chapter 89.08.220(4) RCW states, "For purposes of this subsection only, land occupiers who are also district supervisors are not subject to the provisions of RCW 42.23.030." Even though supervisors are allowed by law to receive cost-share above the limitation, we advise taking public perception into consideration and establish evaluation and prioritization procedures. We have updated the district operations brief about financial assistance and conservation district supervisors, and it has been reviewed by the Attorney General's Office. You can [find the updated district operations brief here](#). It will also be posted on the [SCC Accountability, Operations, and Supervisor Training webpage](#) on the operations tab. Reach out to your [regional manager](#) if you have any questions.

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## Conservation District facility needs survey

We are collecting information from conservation districts regarding office and auxiliary space and property needs. Your answers will provide us with a foundational understanding of the facility needs among conservation districts. We can use this information to share anticipated interest in Department of Enterprise Services and inform the Conservation Technical Assistance budget decision package. We anticipate that the survey will take 20-30 minutes and SCC will share the survey results in a report with all districts. Please only provide one response per district. Complete the survey by **5:00 pm, Friday, July 12th**. Reach out to your [regional manager](#) if you have any questions. [Click here for the Conservation District Facility Needs Survey](#)

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## Professional Engineering program guidelines updated

At the May SCC regular business meeting, the Commissioners approved updates to the Professional Engineering Program. The updated guidelines can be viewed [here in the Program Guidelines tab](#). In 2023, the Commissioners requested SCC staff bring to them a process whereby a new engineering area could form. Over the fall and winter, staff developed a process that includes timelines, a workload analysis, and criteria to approve or deny a new area. The program guidelines are effective immediately. If you have any questions, please reach out to your [regional manager](#).

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## Updated VSP program funding guidelines

At the May SCC Commission meeting, commissioners approved the proposed VSP Program Funding Guidelines. These guidelines are intended to assemble all funding information in one set of guidelines: implementation funding, capital funding (cost-share and DIP), and monitoring expenses. *These guidelines now include content of the former VSP Capital Funding Guidelines 2023-25 Biennium and the Monitoring Expenses Guidelines July 2023.* Through this review process, we received comments, concerns, and ideas regarding program policies. We appreciate these comments greatly and will further consider in collaboration with our VSP partners and the Statewide Advisory Committee. [View the VSP guidelines here](#).

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## District Operations

## **New overtime rule for salaried employees**

On July 1, 2024, the US Department of Labor will substantially increase the minimum salary an employer must pay certain employees to classify them as exempt from overtime pay. Under the new rule, millions of salaried workers will be entitled to overtime pay. [Learn more on the Department of Labor website](#) and [at MRSC](#).

## **Starting the clock: Washington's Supreme Court gives new guidance on closing records requests**

(from MRSC) A new state supreme court decision provides the clearest guidance yet on how a public agency should inform members of the public that a public records request is considered closed by the agency. [Read more in the MRSC blog post](#) about the importance of and how to properly close records requests.

## **Peer-to-peer rental guidance**

SCC finance staff have pulled together guidance for peer to peer rental (AirBNB, VRBO, etc.) for conservation districts. Read more in the [May 2024 Financial Times Newsletter](#). Make sure you are familiar with the guidance so you know what is eligible and ineligible for reimbursement, in addition to information that must be provided to finance.

## **Reminder: L&I heat rules to protect outdoor workers**

Even though it's been a mild spring, a reminder that warm weather is likely (maybe?) around the corner and there are rules overseen by the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) that require frequent breaks, access to shade, and water cool enough to drink, among other things. [Read more here](#).

## **WA State Archives updated requirements for the destruction of paper records after imaging (scanning)**

The updated guidance informs agencies on what requirements must be met when digitizing paper records and what to do with paper records after imaging. [Read the guidance](#) and find more information about how to scan/image records and go paperless [here](#).

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## **Sustainable Farms & Fields Updates**

### **Next Round of SFF Funding**

There will be another application round for SFF funding (both livestock and non-livestock projects) that will be open Jun 21-Jul 19.

### **SFF Proviso Funding for Research and Demonstration**

Research and Demonstration funding is still open! We will do another pull of applications on Jun 3 and the first Monday of every month as long as funds remain. More information [here](#).

### **Organic and Climate Smart Agriculture Evaluation**

One time funding is provided solely for the commission to conduct an evaluation of the current contribution that organic and climate smart agriculture makes toward Washington's climate response goals, what potential there is for increasing this contribution, and how additional investments will help realize this potential, while supporting resiliency. Conservation district representatives who would like to contribute their thoughts on this topic via an interview should contact Karen Hills [khills@scc.wa.gov](mailto:khills@scc.wa.gov). We anticipate offering a webinar to present initial findings in October 2024 which would be another opportunity for CDs to engage.

## Training Tidbits

### NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program Webinar, June 5

NRCS-WA will be hosting a webinar for partners to provide an introduction to the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), June 5, 2024 from 9 to 11 a.m. [Click here for more information.](#)

### Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) - recorded webinar available

A CRM 101 webinar was held on May 22, presented by Ray Ledgerwood. Ray brings 40 years' experience in CRM work with state conservation agencies, state associations, conservation districts, and agriculture organizations across the nation. [If you missed it, you can catch the recorded webinar here!](#)  
[Presentation slides available here.](#)

### WADE Conference June 10-12

2024 Virtual [Registration](#) still available! View the [full schedule](#) here. You will be directed to the Zoom Events page for WADE 2024. Please register using either your own Zoom account or choose 'Register with email'. Your join link is unique to you, so using a shared district account is not recommended. Once you've registered, enter the Lobby, browse and bookmark sessions to add them to your personalized Itinerary, and add events to your calendar.

### MRSC Trainings

- June 13 - [\(FREE\) Legislative Update on 2024 Public Records Bills](#)
- June 25 - [\(FREE\) Digging into Public Works Fundamentals: Yakima](#)
- July 16 - [How to Recognize and Respond to First Amendment 'Audits'](#)

### Enduris Training Seminars

Visit the [Enduris seminars page](#) to learn about and register for training opportunities, a few upcoming offerings are listed below. Remember, they are free for conservation districts and most of the seminars are virtual. They tend to fill up fast! Check out upcoming seminars in June:

- June 11 - [Best Practices for Coaching and Counseling](#)
- June 27 - [Legal and Practical Issues Involving Recruitment and Hiring](#)
- July 16 - [How to Recognize and Respond to First Amendment 'Audits'](#)

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## District Operations Question & Answer of the Month

**Q: *What is a First Amendment 'Audit,' and what do we do if one occurs in our office?***

A: Washington local governments have been experiencing so-called “First Amendment audits,” where private individuals unexpectedly arrive at an agency office building and begin recording their interaction with officials and staff. The intent of these “audits” is to test how the agency responds to the asserted First Amendment rights of the auditor, which can be challenging to deal with appropriately in the moment. A webinar, offered by MRSC in partnership with Washington Cities Insurance Authority (WCIA), will prepare local government staff and officials on how to best address First Amendment auditors when they arrive at your agency’s front counter or your public meeting. It will cover the auditors’ legal rights, control measures local governments can implement, and de-escalation techniques staff can utilize if the situation becomes contentious. We highly recommend attending the training to best prepare the district and avoid any areas of risk. [Register for the training here.](#) Read more in this MRSC article: [Rights and limits on filming in public facilities.](#)