



Washington State Conservation Commission

Meeting Packet

September 18, 2025

***This meeting will be held virtually via Zoom.
Options to participate in-person are available**

Chewelah, Washington

Our Mission:

*“To conserve natural resources on all lands in Washington,
in collaboration with conservation districts and partners.”*



WSCC Business Meeting

Mistequa Casino Hotel – Ballroom B
2545 Smith Rd. Chewelah, WA 99109

Time

Please note that the times listed below are estimated and may vary. [Please visit the SCC website for the most up-to-date meeting information.](#)

Meeting accommodations

Persons with a disability needing an accommodation to participate in SCC public meetings should call Lori Gonzalez at 360-791-0226 or call 711 relay service. All accommodation requests should be received no later than Friday, September 5, 2025, to ensure preparations are appropriately made.

Online Meeting Coordinates

To participate online, please click on [this link](#) to register. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting virtually. You may use your computer audio, or dial into the meeting using the information provided after logging in. Guests will be muted by the host upon login to allow for full discussion by Commissioners. Chat will be allowed between host and guests.

Public Comment

Public comment will be allowed after each presentation prior to adopting an action item. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per speaker. Once a public comment session is closed, no further discussion will be allowed from the public on that specific topic.

Agenda – Please note: All agenda items needing action will be listed under Tab 1.

TIME	TAB	ITEM	LEAD
8:30 a.m.		Call to order/Welcome/Introductions - Commissioner Roll Call - Guest Introductions - Pledge of Allegiance - Opening Remarks from the Spokane Tribe of Indians Representative - Additions/Corrections to agenda items	Chair Cochran
8:50 a.m.		Executive Director's Report	Director Thompson

TIME	TAB	ITEM	LEAD
9:00 a.m.	1.	Consent Agenda <i>(Action item)</i>	
		Public comment will be allowed after each presentation prior to adopting action. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per speaker.	
		a) July 17, 2025, Draft Business Meeting Minutes	Chair Cochran
9:05 a.m.	1.	Commission Operations <i>(Action items)</i>	
		Public comment will be allowed after each presentation prior to adopting action. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per speaker.	
		b) Proposed 2026 Locations for Commission Meetings	Mike Baden
		c) Voluntary Stewardship Program Statewide Advisory Committee Appointment	Mike Poteet
9:25 a.m.	1.	District Operations <i>(Action item)</i>	
		Public comment will be allowed after each presentation prior to adopting action. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per speaker.	
		d) Columbia Basin Conservation District Mid-term Supervisor Appointment	Commissioner Troutman
9:30 a.m.	1.	Programs <i>(Action items)</i>	
		Public comment will be allowed after each presentation prior to adopting action. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per speaker.	
		e) Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Programmatic Guidelines for Final Adoption	Allisa Carlson
		f) Farmland Protection & Land Access Grant Authorization – Great Peninsula Conservancy’s Petersen Farm Project	Hilary Aten
10:05 a.m.	2.	Policy, Budget and Finance <i>(Information Only)</i>	
		Public comment will be allowed after each presentation prior to adopting action. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per speaker.	
		a) Biennium 23-25 Close Update	Sarah Groth

TIME	TAB	ITEM	LEAD
10:25 a.m.		15-minute break	
10:40 a.m.	2.	Commission Operations <i>(Information Only)</i> b) Chair and Vice-chair Nominating Committee c) Western Region Commissioner December Election	Chair Cochran Kate Delavan
10:55 a.m.		Commissioner Longrie Recognition and Farewell	
11:10 a.m.	2.	District Operations <i>(Information Only)</i> d) District Operations and Regional Manager Report	Mike Baden
11:25 p.m.	2.	Partner Updates <i>(Information Only)</i> e) Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) f) Washington Association of District Employees (WADE) g) Washington State Department of Ecology (DOE) h) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) i) National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) j) Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) k) Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)	Heather Wendt Craig Nelson Brook Beeler Roylene Comes at Night <i>Packet item only</i> <i>Packet item only</i> <i>Packet item only</i>
12:00 p.m.		Closing remarks - Adjourn	Chair Cochran
12:00 p.m.		Lunch <i>(lunch is pre-ordered for guests who RSVP'd)</i>	

TAB 1

Regular Business Meeting ~

The Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission/SCC) met virtually as well as in-person on Thursday, July 17, 2025, in Port Townsend, Washington. Chair Larry Cochran called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

Note: All meeting materials can be found on our [meetings webpage](#). You will find the meeting packet with background information, presentations and past meeting information.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Larry Cochran, Chair, Elected eastern region rep.
Cherie Kearney, Vice-chair, Governor Appointee
Brook Beeler, Department of Ecology
Dani Gelardi, Department of Agriculture
Dean Longrie, Elected west region
Jim Kropf, Washington State University (online)
Katie Rose Allen, Department of Natural Resources
Wade Troutman, Elected central region
Amy McKay, Washington Association of Conservation Districts

COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT

James Thompson, Executive Director
Alicia McClendon, Administrative Assistant
Hilary Aten, Office of Farmland Preservation
Jodi Prout, Communications
Josh Giuntoli, SW Regional Manager
Kate Delavan, Policy Director
Lori Gonzalez, Executive Assistant
Sarah Groth, Chief Financial Officer
Sarah Wilcox, Communications
Shana Joy, District Operations Manager

A quorum was present.

PARTNERS REPRESENTED

Angie Reseland, Dept of Fish and Wildlife (online)
Roylene Comes at Night, Natural Resources Conservation Service (online)
Craig Nelson, WA Association of District Employees
Nick Peak, EPA Region 10 (online)
Heather Wendt, WA Association of Conservation Districts

All other guests are listed in the following attachments:

Attachment A – online registration/attendance sheet

Attachment B – in-person sign-in sheet

ACTION MINUTES TAKEN

Meeting opened with Lori Gonzalez taking commissioner roll call. A quorum was announced as present. Following commissioner roll call, introductions were done for guests who attended the meeting in person as well as online.

Chair Cochran asked if there were any additions or corrections needed to be made to the agenda. There were none.

CONSENT AGENDA

Draft May 15, 2025 regular business meeting minutes

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to approve the May 15, 2025, draft business meeting minutes Seconded by Commissioner Kearney. Commissioner Allen abstained. Motion carried.

Draft June 18, 2025 special meeting minutes

Motion by Commissioner Gelardi to approve June 18, 2025, special meeting minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Longrie. Commissioner Allen abstained. Motion carried.

Out of State Travel

Motion by Commissioner McKay to approve the State Conservation Commission (SCC) Executive Director and designated member(s) to attend the NACD Southwest and Pacific Region Meeting September 7-10, 2025, in Golden, Colorado. Seconded by Commissioner Longrie. Motion carried.

COMMISSION OPERATIONS

Farmland Protection Project Approval – Swauk Prairie Farm

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to approve the following:

The Commission has determined the acquisition of a conservation easement on the property is consistent with the mission, duties, and purposes of SCC.

The Commission hereby authorizes the State Conservation Commission’s Executive Director to sign documents for acquisition of an agricultural conservation easement, for appraised fair-market value, on the approximately 601-acre Swauk Prairie Farm in Kittitas County, project 22-1544, contingent upon completion of the appraisal review and all standard due diligence.

Seconded by Commissioner Kearney. Motion carried.

POLICY, BUDGET AND FINANCE

Supplemental Budget Decision Package

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to approve the supplemental budget decision packages authorizing staff to seek supplemental budget allocation up to the following amounts:

- 1. Forest Health & Community Wildfire \$2.5M
- 2. Conservation Technical Assistance \$2.25M

3. IT – Data Modernization \$3.2M

Seconded by Commissioner Beeler. Motion carried.

DISTRICT OPERATIONS

Annexation of Territory – Okanogan Conservation District

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to approve the petition for inclusion of the City of Twisp within the boundaries of the Okanogan Conservation District. Seconded by Commissioner Kearney. Motion carried.

Walla Walla Conservation District Mid-Term Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Troutman to appoint Rhonda Gothberg to the Walla Walla Conservation District Board of Supervisors. Seconded by Commissioner Longrie. Motion carried.

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI) Draft Program Guidelines

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to approve staff to initiate opening a 45-day review and public comment period on the WSRRI draft guidelines. Seconded by Commissioner McKay. Motion carried.

Farmland Protection and Land Access (FPLA) Guidelines for Approval

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to approve the adoption of the revised FPLA Guidelines, effective July 17, 2025. Seconded by Commissioner McKay. Motion carried.

Voluntary Stewardship Program Funding Guidelines for Approval

Motion by Commissioner Beeler to approve the Voluntary Stewardship Program Funding Guidelines effective retroactively to July 1, 2025. Seconded by Commissioner Longrie. Motion carried.

Chair Cochran adjourned the meeting at 1:31 p.m.



Washington State Conservation Commission

ATTACHMENT A

Please Sign In

Conservation Commission Business Meeting

Thursday, July 17, 2025

	NAME	ENTITY/DISTRICT
1.	Lori Gonzalez	SCC
2.	Alicia McClendon	SCC
3.	Sarah Green	SCC
4.	Kate Delavan	SCC
5.	Sarah Wilcox	SCC
6.	Josh Giuntani	SCC
7.	Ryan Baye	WACD
8.	Evan Brader	Mason CD
9.	Dana Ward, guest (JST)	
10.	Joe Holtrop	Jefferson CD
11.	Mark Craven	Snohomish CD
12.	Jennifer Boje	Palouse CD
13.	Jodi Pratt	SCC
14.	LARRY COCHRAN	WSCC
15.	Levi Keeseecker	WSCC

Please turn over →

16. Dean Longrie CCD
17. SARAH MOOREHEAD TCD
18. Craig Nelson WIAE CO-President
19. Katie Rose Allen DNR
20. Brooke Becher ELY
21. Amy McKay WACO
22. Wade Troutman Eastern Rep Commissioner
23. Dani Gelardi AGR
24. Cherie Kearney Vice-Chair
25. James Thompson SCE Exec Director
26. Shara Joy SCE RM
27. Al Latham Jefferson CO

29.

30.

31.

32.

33.

34.

↓ public

July 17, 2025 Commission Meeting**Zoom Attendee Details**

#	First Name	Last Name	#	First Name	Last Name
1	Ashley	Wood	28	Paul	D'Agnolo
2	Karla	Heinitz	29	Paige	DeChambeau
3	Roylene	Comes At Night	30	Karen	Hills
4	Brandy	Reed	31	Alicia	McClendon
5	B'Elanna	Rhodehamel	32	Allisa	Carlson
6	Victoria	Fischella	33	Dave	Hedrick
7	Evan	Bauder	34	Jean	Fike
8	Mike	Mumford	35	Toyo	Garber
9	Jennifer	Coe	36	Amy	McKay
10	Kris	Neely	37	Emmy	Engle (Okanogan CD)
11	Amy	Martin	38	nick	vira
12	Angie	Reseland	39	Bill	Eller
13	Sarah	Wilcox	40	Brian	Cochrane
14	Kara	Kaelber	41	Tom	O'Brien
15	Jan	Thomas	42	Taylor	George
16	Nate	Jackson	43	Rosa	Mendez
17	Zorah	Oppenheimer	44	Anna	Lael
18	Nicole	Boyes	45	Allen	Lebovitz
19	Heather	Folks-Lambert	46	Leslie	Michel
20	Mike	Poteet			
21	Alan	Chapman			
22	Megan	Stewart			
23	Joy	Garitone			
24	Ryan	Williams			
25	Wade	Trotman			
26	Jack	Clark			
27	Jim	Kropf			



Washington State Conservation Commission

September 18, 2025

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, Executive Director

FROM: Shana Joy, Deputy Director of Operations and Programs

SUBJECT: 2026 Commission Meetings Proposal

Action Item	☒
Informational Item	☐

Summary:

Annually, the Regional Managers work with other Commission staff and conservation districts to propose meeting locations and host conservation districts for the upcoming year of Commission meetings. A proposal for the following years' meetings is being brought forward today for review and requested action.

Requested Action:

Staff is requesting that Commissioners approve the proposed Commission meeting dates, proposed locations, and hybrid meeting format for calendar year 2026.

Staff Contact:

Shana Joy, sjoy@scc.wa.gov, 360-480-2078

Background and Discussion:

SCC staff propose the physical locations for 2026 meetings noted in Table 1. Offering a remote participation option for each meeting is also proposed in keeping with current policy and practice. Multiple factors are considered as locations and conservation district hosts are determined. Those factors include:

- weather and potential travel conditions at that time of the year,
- local infrastructure and logistics for a tour, interactive dinner, and the business meeting (available hotels/meeting spaces),
- conservation district capacity to put together and host a tour and interactive dinner,
- conservation district willingness,
- proximity to Olympia during legislative session,
- length of time since the conservation district last hosted,
- potential tour content or stops, and
- SCC staff capacity and meeting costs.

Accounting for the poor weather conditions statewide in January making travel difficult if not unsafe, the proximity to the start of the 2026 legislative session, and conservation district interest and capacity to host a tour that time of year we are proposing not to conduct an in-person tour in January of 2026. Instead, we propose to hold the physical business meeting in Lacey with a conservation district virtual tour/presentation incorporated into the business meeting timeframe.

Table 1: 2026 Commission Meeting Dates and Physical Locations

Date	Hosting District	Location
January 15, 2026	Thurston CD <i>(virtual tour only)</i>	Lacey
March 18 & 19, 2026	San Juan Islands CD	Friday Harbor
May 19, 20, 21, 2026	South Yakima CD	Zillah/Yakima
July 15 & 16, 2026	Skagit CD	Mount Vernon/Burlington
September 16, & 17, 2026	Underwood CD	Stevenson/White Salmon
December 3, 2026	TBD	TBD



Washington State Conservation Commission

September 18, 2025

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Mike Poteet, VSP Coordinator

SUBJECT: Appointment of New Member to VSP Statewide Advisory Committee

Action Item

☒

Informational Item

☐

Summary:

The Statewide Advisory Committee (SAC) to the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) currently has two openings for members representing environmental organizations. SCC staff have identified and is prepared to nominate a candidate to fill one of the two open positions: Brian Muegge, Farm Program Manager for Salmon-Safe.

SCC's Executive Director, VSP Coordinator, and Interim VSP Coordinator interviewed Brian Muegge separately during June and July 2025 to vet the nominee before presenting his nomination to the Commission for appointment to the SAC.

Requested Action:

The Voluntary Stewardship Program requests the Commission appoint Brian Muegge to a two-year term to the Statewide Advisory Committee, effective immediately.

Background and Discussion:

The Voluntary Stewardship Program is supported by a Statewide Advisory Committee that provides guidance to SCC and its Executive Director on program implementation and participation. The SAC has eight seats for voting members: two from county governments, two from agricultural organizations, two from environmental organizations, and two from Tribal governments. The SAC currently has two openings for members representing environmental organizations. The VSP team has prioritized filling the vacant positions on the SAC in advance of the submission of counties' ten-year reports, scheduled to begin in November 2025.

The SCC Director, VSP Coordinator, and Interim VSP Coordinator interviewed Brian Muegge separately on several occasions during June and July 2025 to vet the nominee before presenting

his nomination to the Commission for appointment to the SAC. Mr. Muegge has worked for Salmon-Safe for the last 4+ years. Prior to his work with Salmon-Safe, he worked as a wildlife biologist for the US Forest Service. He also serves as a Board Member for several regional watershed advocacy groups. Mr. Muegge leads Salmon-Safe's efforts to facilitate and deploy conservation programs and practices on commercial farms in the Pacific Northwest.

Mr. Muegge expressed strong interest in supporting the work of VSP through the position on the SAC. Many of the on-farm projects that Salmon-Safe supports and deploys are directly connected to voluntary protection and enhancement of critical areas at a watershed scale. This overlap with the intent of VSP will help Mr. Muegge bring relevant perspectives to the SAC. Mr. Muegge also has experience with marketing programs and incentivization structures, which may bring additional value and expertise to VSP's broader scope of work and needs in coming years. He is well connected to other environmental organizations and has multiple projects with Tribal partnerships across the state.

Recommended Action and Options:

The VSP Coordinator, VSP Interim Coordinator, and SCC Director recommend Brian Muegge from Salmon-Safe be appointed to the VSP SAC.

**Should Mr. Muegge not be appointed by the Conservation Commission, VSP staff will continue to seek viable candidates for the position.*

Staff Contact:

Mike Poteet, VSP Coordinator, mpoteet@scc.wa.gov



Washington State Conservation Commission

September 18, 2025

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Alicia McClendon, Administrative Assistant

SUBJECT: Columbia Basin Conservation District Mid-Term Appointment

Action Item

☒

Informational Item

☐

Background and Summary:

The Columbia Basin Conservation District has one position open for a mid-term appointment to the Board of Supervisors. As of this writing, the SCC received one application. The application period for this position closes on September 4th which means that there is still an opportunity for applications to be received until that date.

Commissioners and Commission staff followed the process adopted in March of 2018 to conduct a more comprehensive vetting of the applications received for Commission appointment. This application was sent to all Commission members for their review prior to the September 18th business meeting as will any others received by the September 4th application deadline. Consistent with the aforementioned adopted process, if additional applications are received by the application deadline then interviews will be conducted prior to the September 18th meeting. If no other applications are received, interviews will not be conducted as the current applicant is the prior incumbent.

Requested Action:

A recommendation for the appointment will be given by the central area elected commission member for SCC approval at the September 18, 2025 meeting.

Note: To protect the personal information, the application received by SCC will not be included in the public meeting packet; only the name of the applicant is provided below. All members were sent full application for review ahead of time.

Conservation District Mid-Term Supervisor Applicant

<i>Conservation District</i>	<i>Incumbent</i>	<i>Name of Applicant</i>	<i>Regional Manager</i>
Columbia Basin	Vacant	1. Richard Leitz	Mike Baden

Staff Contact:

Alicia McClendon, amcclendon@scc.wa.gov and
Mike Baden, mbaden@scc.wa.gov



Washington State Conservation Commission

September 18, 2025

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Allisa Carlson, South Central Regional Manager

SUBJECT: Final Guidelines for the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative

Action Item

X

Informational Item

Summary:

The Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI) is in its third biennium of funding. Staff have engaged with conservation district staff, Tribes, and the WSRRI steering committee to develop the previous funding procedures to program guidelines.

Requested Action:

SCC staff recommend commission approval of the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative Guidelines.

Background and Discussion:

The Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI) was established in 2021 in response to the 2020 wildfires to restore shrubsteppe habitat and support associated wildlife and communities. Led by a three-agency steering committee—the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Natural Resources, and the State Conservation Commission (SCC)—WSRRI envisions a resilient shrubsteppe landscape that benefits both wildlife and human communities.

As WSRRI continues to grow, formal guidelines are being established. The draft guidelines expand eligible project types beyond wildlife-friendly fencing and deferred grazing to now include habitat restoration, reflecting the broader vision and long-term goals of the initiative.

The draft guidelines were presented to the Commission in July 2025 and released for a 45-day public comment period beginning July 17. During that period, we received four comments from conservation districts and one letter from the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR).

Key Themes from Public Comments:

Conservation District Feedback

1. **Geographic Eligibility Flexibility**

One district requested flexibility for shrubsteppe projects located just outside the defined Columbia Plateau boundary. The WSRRI steering committee agreed with this recommendation and has revised the guidelines accordingly. The Columbia Plateau will remain a guiding reference, but eligibility will no longer be strictly constrained by this boundary. This change reflects our commitment to ecological realities on the ground and enables more inclusive project consideration.

For the 2025–2027 biennium, project prioritization will align with the Washington Habitat Connectivity Action Plan and important habitats for priority species. This data-driven approach ensures alignment with state conservation goals while allowing flexibility for high-value projects outside the previous geographic scope.

2. **Support for Expanded Project Types**

Other comments expressed appreciation for the inclusion of habitat restoration, universal landownership eligibility, and the option to implement projects through the District Implemented Project (DIP) framework. These changes remain intact and reflect consensus support.

Letter from the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR)

CTCR provided thoughtful feedback addressing both the current guidelines and the broader direction of WSRRI's 30-year strategy. Key recommendations included:

- Maintain wildlife-friendly fencing specifications and visibility markers
- A call for sustainable and accessible funding
- More frequent grazing season monitoring
- Coordinated restoration across property lines
- Management of encroaching conifer species
- A request for clear, actionable implementation steps with assigned responsibilities

While these comments did not result in immediate changes to the draft guidelines, they are highly valued and align with the long-term vision of WSRRI. The steering committee is actively drafting a formal response and is committed to continued engagement and follow-up conversations with CTCR.

SCC staff will also ensure CTCR receives current fence specifications and will seek opportunities to incorporate their input into upcoming project planning cycles and broader program development.

Next Steps

Feedback received during the public comment period has directly informed adjustments to the guidelines, and broader strategic comments—particularly from CTCR—will shape future programmatic planning and funding strategies.

WSRRI's criteria will remain adaptable based on available data, restoration needs, and stakeholder input. Project solicitation under the finalized guidelines is on track to open **by October 1, 2025**, and will incorporate the refinements described above.

The WSRRI steering committee remains committed to a collaborative, adaptive approach. As we move toward the next phase of strategic planning, we will continue engaging with Tribes, conservation districts, landowners, and partners to ensure the program reflects shared goals and the on-the-ground realities of shrubsteppe conservation.

We appreciate the thoughtful input received and are committed to ensuring that WSRRI remains responsive, strategic, and action-oriented.

Staff Contact:

Allisa Carlson, South Central Regional Manager
acarlson@scc.wa.gov, 360-480-6686

Comments received August 2025

Comment	Action/Edit
We have a couple projects that are in shrubsteppe habitat, but slightly out of the Columbia Plateau mapping area. I wonder if there is a way to include a "case-by-case" parameter for shrubsteppe ecosystems outside of the Columbia Plateau/WSRRI Project Areas. They could rank lower, but still tentatively be approved by and with permission of the program manager.	For the 25-27 biennium, project selection will be based on WSRRI's spatial priorities, landscape connectivity values as determined through the Washington Habitat Connectivity Action Plan, and important habitats for priority species, regardless of the mapped Columbia Plateau ecoregional boundary. These criteria should encompass potential projects in shrubsteppe habitat that fall outside of that boundary. The guidelines have been modified to reflect this change.
Thank you for expanding project types to include habitat restoration! We are excited about this for weed/invasive annual grasses management in the shrubsteppe.	We are glad to hear this and are excited that WSRRI has more resources for habitat restoration projects. No changes made to the guidelines.
We also appreciate that all landownerships are eligible under this program. Okanogan County includes significant leased public lands.	Thank you for this feedback! No changes made to the guidelines.
Thank you for adding a DIP option for the habitat restoration and wildlife friendly fencing. Some landowners lack the means to implement projects and this minimizes barriers to enhancing the shrubsteppe and wildlife habitat.	For the DIP options on habitat restoration projects, we want to ease barriers and realize not everyone will have the expertise to implement shrubsteppe restoration. We will be interested in hearing feedback once project implementation is underway as well. DIPs for wildlife friendly-fencing will be allowed on a case-by-case basis. No changes made to the guidelines.



The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

P.O. Box 150, Nespelem, WA 99155

(509) 634-2200

FAX: (509) 634-4116



8/12/2025

State of Washington
Conservation Commission
PO Box 47721
Olympia, WA 98504-7721

Subject: The Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI) Long-term Strategy (Strategy) comments.

Dear Ms. Carlson,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide comments on the draft guidelines for the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI). The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (Colville Tribes) appreciate the chance to participate in this important process and build on a collaborative approach to the stewardship of Washington's shrub-steppe habitats.

As managers of substantial shrub-steppe tracts, the Colville Tribes have a longstanding commitment to protecting and restoring native wildlife habitats through diverse strategies. We look forward to continued partnerships with regional agencies to advance quality management of these critical ecosystems. Drawing on our decades of stewardship and hands-on management experience, we aim to offer both our support for the Initiative's primary objectives and constructive feedback on areas where the guidelines might be strengthened. Detailed below are critical priorities—including habitat connectivity, accessible funding, wildlife-friendly fencing, fire management, and the importance of strong partnerships—to ensure the long-term protection and vitality of shrub-steppe ecosystems and the species that rely on them.

- **Support for Enhanced Management:** We support enhanced management of all wildlife species and habitats across their historic range, as reflected in our Fish and Wildlife Program's mission statement: to maintain and protect viable populations of native and select non-native species, ensuring their distribution and abundance meet the cultural, subsistence, recreational, and economic needs of Tribal Membership.
- **Funding Accessibility:** As a regional co-manager, the Colville Tribes are often ineligible for widely-available grants due to location or agency requirements. Securing accessible and dedicated funding is crucial to expanding our established efforts to safeguard and revitalize habitats. This will directly benefit wildlife in the region.
- **Connectivity and Fencing:** The loss of functional connectivity in shrub-steppe habitats, often exacerbated by restrictive fencing, remains a significant concern. Species such as pronghorn may avoid crossing barriers even in life-or-death situations. Others—including coyotes, ungulates, badgers, and porcupines—face injury or death due to inadequate fence design. We recommend

wildlife-friendly fencing standards and fence marking to promote safe movement and reduce mortality.

- **Fire as an Ecological Driver:** Prescribed and natural fires are fundamental to the shrub-steppe ecosystem. While fire can foster native vegetation regrowth, it can also favor invasive species. Post-fire, these ecosystems are fragile, and heavy livestock grazing during regrowth can cause lasting damage. Deferred grazing areas need ongoing monitoring throughout the grazing season, not just a single check before the funding period ends.
- **Implementation Challenges:** We recognize that contracting, budgeting, sub-contracted work, personnel challenges, fire seasons, weather, and appropriate seasonal timing can all affect implementation. Addressing these realities in the program's structure is vital to successful outcomes.
- **Clear Program Goals:** With well-defined program goals, restoration projects can be tailored for maximum positive impact. As "umbrella" species, conservation efforts focused on key native shrub-steppe and grassland wildlife will benefit the entire ecosystem. Population-level impacts can be amplified by combining restoration activities on adjacent properties.
- **Conifer Encroachment:** Many areas have experienced conifer encroachment, creating forested shrub-steppe. Wildfires have reverted some of these areas to open habitats, and ongoing funding is necessary to maintain these as functioning shrub-steppe.
- **Collaboration and Dedicated Funding:** We are grateful for the outreach and coordination efforts and remain ready to discuss and develop solutions to regional natural resource concerns. The future of regional wildlife species and their habitats depends on robust partnerships among managers and the assurance of dedicated funding.

We acknowledge that, from an ecological perspective, the Initiative addresses the central issue of connectivity between shrub-steppe habitats with notable effectiveness. This aspect is critical to the health and sustainability of plateau ecosystems, and we are satisfied with the attention it has received.

However, we must highlight a significant shortcoming related to funding mechanisms. While the draft guidelines reference enhancing and leveraging existing eco-based funding streams—such as conservation programs, forest fire programs, and state agency resources—the plan lacks detailed, actionable strategies for securing the necessary resources to implement these goals. Notably, while the Habitat Protection Strategy includes points such as HP22 (creation of a WSRRI investment account) and HP23 (engagement in Federal Farm Bill development), the specifics of "who" and "how" remain underdeveloped. Actions like HP27, HR9, and HR10 are valuable partnering strategies, but without concrete direction, they are unlikely to succeed.

We draw your attention to the statement on page 83 of the guidelines: "Outline a clear funding strategy, including sources, allocation, and management. Develop and maintain a catalog of potential funding sources for WSRRI and a process and criteria for selecting funding opportunities to pursue." We strongly urge that this work be prioritized now, not deferred. Without clear and immediate action on funding, the plan risks joining the lineage of plateau habitat restoration efforts whose implementation was impeded by inadequate resources.

As managers of substantial shrub-steppe tracts, the Colville Tribes have a longstanding commitment to protecting and restoring native wildlife habitats through diverse strategies. We look forward to continued partnerships with regional agencies to advance quality management of these critical ecosystems.

Thank you again for considering our comments. We look forward to continued collaboration and to seeing the WSRRI fulfill its promise for the people, wildlife, and landscapes it aims to serve.

Sincerely,



Jarred-Michael Erickson, Chairman
Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

Enclosure(s)

cc: Colville Business Council
Executive Director
Natural Resource Director
Fish and Wildlife Director
History and Archaeology Director

Program Background

The Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI) was established in 2021 in response to the 2020 wildfires by the Washington State Legislature, through a budget proviso to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to restore shrubsteppe habitat and associated wildlife impacted by wildfires. WSRRI is led by a three-agency steering committee that includes the WDFW, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC). The vision of WSRRI is to create a resilient shrubsteppe landscape that benefits wildlife and human communities.

The [WSRRI 30-year Long-Term Strategy 2024-2054](#) charts the course for increasing the restoration of habitat and supporting sustainable working lands management across Eastern Washington's shrubsteppe landscape. For the fiscal year 2023-2025 biennium, capital funds were allocated to SCC for wildlife friendly fencing implementation. For the fiscal year 2025-2027 biennium, capital funds have been allocated to SCC to build upon this work and expand on the ground restoration.

2025-2027 Budget Proviso:

"Funded at \$3,000,000 from the State Building Construction Account to implement the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative 30-year strategy."

This document provides guidance for activities funded through WSRRI with specific detail for habitat restoration, fencing, deferred grazing, and associated activities.

General Eligibility

Conservation districts are eligible to apply to WSRRI under these program guidelines.

All landownerships are eligible under this program including private, tribal, federal, state, non-profit organization, or local government ownerships.

2.1 - Projects must demonstrate a benefit to shrubsteppe habitat and associated wildlife, will be based upon criteria set in the solicitation for the respective funding cycle.

Deleted: . Projects must be located within the Columbia Plateau as shown [in this map](#).

2.2 – Eligible Project Types:

- **Habitat Restoration** – Funds are available for shrubsteppe habitat restoration projects.
- **Wildlife Friendly Fencing** - Funds are available for wildlife friendly fencing (WFF) installed in accordance with [WSRRI specifications](#). WFF may include new wildlife friendly fence,

replacement of existing fence (including burned or damaged) with new WFF, retrofit of existing barbed wire fencing to WFF, removal of fence, and virtual fencing. Perimeter fence may be considered for virtual fence and fire recovery projects, but cross fencing and virtual fence projects for grazing management will be prioritized in the case of new fencing projects.

- **Deferred Grazing** - Funds *may* be provided for fire recovery activities such as deferred grazing. The Deferred Grazing project type may be implemented dependent on the needs that arise each wildland fire season, as determined by the WSRRRI steering committee.

General Requirements

All general requirements and policies of the SCC must be followed as set out in the [Grant and Contract Policy and Procedure Manual](#) including but not limited to monthly vouchering and [cultural resources policy compliance](#).

Work must begin on all funded proposals within 120 days of the award of funding. To be eligible for reimbursement, all work including all project types (see below) must be completed by the date listed in the award notification. Dates will be the end of the fiscal year or biennium, depending on the source of funds – operating or capital.

Equipment will be considered on a case-by-case basis for district-implemented projects only. The WSRRRI steering committee or designated review committee will consider requests for materials and equipment for the installation of habitat restoration projects such as sprayers, seeders, and hand tools. Vehicles (including utility task vehicles and all-terrain vehicles) and tractors are not eligible.

Application

Projects shall be submitted to WSRRRI utilizing the application form provided on the [SCC WSRRRI program webpage](#).

Once received, the funding requests will be reviewed and ranked, by the WSRRRI steering committee or designated review committee. Funding will be allocated for as long as funds remain available. Application deadlines and availability of funds will be announced on the [SCC WSRRRI program webpage](#).

It is recognized that from time to time, projects may need an expedited review and/or further review.

Applications must include enough detail to determine the eligibility of all activities and geography. Incomplete or vague applications may result in an extended review period or a request to resubmit an application.

An application may be partially funded if the application includes ineligible activities, activities for which funding is not currently available, or if other resources are available. Additionally, if funds

are limited, applications will be reviewed and ranked according to adopted and published prioritization criteria; a portion of an application may rank a higher priority than other proposed projects or project types. For example, in a situation of limited funding, some project types or activities *may* be prioritized over other project types. Prioritization is generally described in Project Prioritization section.

Applicants may submit more than one application over the course of a granting period.

Upon approval of the project(s) by the WSRRI steering committee, districts will be formally notified of the award by SCC financial staff.

Scope Changes

Any scope of work changes to an approved and funded project may only be made upon review and approval by the WSRRI steering committee. Contact the program manager at SCC to discuss any scope of work change requests. Expenditures related to a changed scope are eligible only after the change is approved by the WSRRI steering committee and a formal amendment has been processed by SCC financial staff, if applicable.

Data Tracking & Reporting

All cost-share projects must be entered into and closed out in CPDS. "Shrubsteppe Initiative" will be chosen as the program type under the funding tab. For other project types, reporting requirements will be prescribed by SCC/WSRRI as well as a format/template provided.

Project Prioritization

All project applications will be evaluated against criteria set by WSRRI for the respective project type and funding cycle. Criteria will be shared during the solicitation announcement.

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Eligible Project Types and Activities

WSRRI funds may be used for the following eligible project types:

- Habitat restoration projects – cost share or District Implemented Project (DIP)
- Wildlife friendly fence – cost share, DIP allowed w/permission of program manager
- Virtual fence – cost share

The following are the eligible activities and associated parameters for each:

Wildlife Friendly Fence (WFF)

- Cost-share will be the primary means for implementing WFF, but district-implemented projects (DIPs) will be allowed on a case-by-case basis upon approval by the program manager. The cost-share percentage is determined by the type of project as outlined below. There is no cap on funding that can be awarded to a private landowner, tribe, or public landowner or lessee participating in this program.

- Funds awarded shall follow the cost-share percentages established under this program, see below.
- Any fences being built on state, federal, tribal or non-profit lands must also follow all rules and regulations as outlined by those landowners.
- Factors that may be considered in the ranking of projects include how the WFF integrates with other WSRRI actions. Selection criteria may also include whether the application is for perimeter, cross, or exclusionary fencing; whether the fence is a total replacement or retrofitting, listed species considerations, overall value to wildlife in the area, whether landowners will remove old fence at their expense, and/or whether suitable perimeter fencing already exists and other pertinent information.

Wildlife Friendly Fence Projects with details:

- Replacing burned fence with Wildlife Friendly Fence. [See Wildlife Friendly Fence Specifications](#). Cost share requires removal of old fence.
 - 100% cost share
- Retrofit existing fence to Wildlife Friendly Fence.
 - 100% cost share
- Fence removal when not being replaced with new Wildlife Friendly Fence
 - 75% cost share
- Fence markers to increase fence visibility and decrease hazards to grouse will be required where appropriate on selected projects that result in hard fencing. Markers will be provided by WSRRI.
- Towers (or other permanent/semi-permanent signal transmitter equipment) and collars for livestock are eligible expenses for virtual fence projects. If collar leases (vs purchases) are requested for the funding, the following parameters shall apply:
 - **Collar Lease** - WSRRI will fund the collar lease and batteries for the initial period that falls within the current biennium (project starting date - end date of funding cycle). The collar lease will be a maximum of from the time the lease is entered into (the date that the collar lease is signed) and the end of the biennium, whichever is less.
 - **Hard wire fencing** - Districts may utilize cost share or DIP to remove hard wire fencing in virtual fence areas, as applicable and dependent on funding available.

Shrubsteppe Habitat Restoration

Cost share projects or DIPs can be used for implementing habitat restoration projects. The cost-share percentage is determined by the conservation district and SCC cost-share policies apply.

The WSRRI wildlife habitat restoration objective is to enhance and restore wildlife habitat, with a special emphasis on benefitting Species of Greatest Conservation Need as identified in [Washington's State Wildlife Action Plan](#).

WSRRI aims to expand native, perennial plant communities where they remain, and to reestablish them where they have been lost. Restoration projects may include NRCS or other

practices designated by WSRRI, designed to address inadequate habitat for wildlife and/or degraded plant condition.

Deferred Grazing Reimbursement

If the Deferred Grazing Program is authorized by the WSRRI steering committee following wildland fire in WDFW prioritized wildlife habitat areas in the shrubsteppe, the following procedures will apply.

- The Deferred Grazing Reimbursement program provides reimbursement for emergency hay feed and pasture rental to rest burned native shrubsteppe pastures. Eligible producers (including public land lessees) may receive up to 75% of the cost of the emergency hay and/or alternative pasture rental up to a maximum amount that is set by the WSRRI steering committee.
- Reimbursement for emergency hay feed and pasture rental to rest burned shrubsteppe pasture is available for hay that was purchased, or pasture rented. The starting dates of deferred grazing and hay purchases and pasture rentals must be on or after July 1 of the funding cycle (fiscal year or biennium) in which the fire occurs. The pasture must be rested within the funding cycle in which the costs are incurred.
- If the pasture is going to be rested for a period beyond the funding cycle, you must apply separately for each funding cycle the pasture will be rested, the awards do not “roll over.”
- Priority will be given to projects that rest pasture during the spring growing season and up to two years after a fire.
- Only hay is eligible as ‘emergency hay feed,’ not other types of supplemental feed (grain, corn silage, minerals, etc.)
- Hay will be prioritized for pastures that need to be rested immediately following a fire. Pasture rentals will be prioritized for resting pastures during the critical growth period (typically April-July, though it varies by location). However, the WSRRI steering committee will consider other time periods on a case-by-case basis due to the unique circumstances of every fire.
- Monitoring of rested pastures will be performed by the conservation district and/or WDFW in the fall following the grazing period or towards the end of the funding cycle cut-off.
- Any livestock that graze shrubsteppe requiring rest to recover from wildfire are eligible.
- This is a reimbursement program only, not a cost-share structure. A [Deferred Grazing Reimbursement Program Voucher Form](#) will be utilized to accompany all invoices and receipts for application for reimbursement.
- Reimbursement will occur after the district/WDFW has monitored the pasture to ensure it was rested and received receipts and/or invoices supporting actual costs.

Definitions

Columbia Plateau - An ecoregion located in eastern Washington and northern Oregon, characterized by shrubsteppe habitats and grasslands with extensive areas of dryland farming and irrigated agriculture (Sleeter et al., 2012). Used interchangeably in the Strategy with shrubsteppe landscape.

Restoration - Returning shrubsteppe habitats to those dominated by native species (e.g., perennial grasses, shrubs, forbs). Restoration activities include enhancement, rehabilitation, creation, or improvement to mean the manipulation of the physical or biological characteristics of a site with the goal of returning natural functions to the lost or degraded native habitat and improving ecosystem resilience.

Shrubsteppe - The communities of plants and animals in the shrubsteppe landscape and the nonliving things (e.g., soil, air, water) that they interact with. 'Shrubsteppe ecosystems' is inclusive of the multiple ecological systems (vegetation communities) that include shrubsteppe, grasslands, mesic systems, and other vegetation communities (<https://deptofnaturalresources.app.box.com/v/amp-nh-eco-sys-guide>) that occur in the Columbia Plateau.

Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) – Washington State list of species identified in State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). SGCN is a non-regulatory designation chosen to bring attention to the species before they become more rare or costly to conserve and inclusive of species with protected and classified statuses (e.g., listed species).

Steering Committee – WSRR is led by a tri-state agency steering committee consisting of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington State Conservation Commission, and Washington Department of Natural Resources.

State Wildlife Action Plan - The SWAP identifies Washington's wildlife and habitats needing conservation attention, the key problems they face, and outlines actions needed to conserve them over the long-term. SWAPs are updated every 10 years.



Washington State Conservation Commission

September 18, 2025

TO: Washington State Conservation Commissioners
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Hilary Aten, Office of Farmland Preservation Coordinator

SUBJECT: Request for Authorization – FPLA Petersen Farm Application

Action Item

X

Informational Item

☐

Executive Summary

The Farmland Protection and Land Access (FPLA) program received an application from Great Peninsula Conservancy to fund acquisition of a conservation easement on the Petersen Farm property in Kitsap County. The FPLA Working Group reviewed the project and recommends approval of the application for funding.

Background

Program Overview

The Farmland Protection and Land Access program (FPLA) serves the dual purpose of permanently protecting high-quality farmland and facilitating access to land for next-generation farmers and ranchers. FPLA complements the “Buy-Protect-Sell” category of Farm Protection and Affordability Investment Program (FarmPAI), a program of the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. Conservation entities that have secured a loan through FarmPAI can apply to FPLA to fund the agricultural conservation easement (the second step in a “Buy-Protect-Sell” transaction).

Project Overview

The Petersen Farm property in Kitsap County was acquired by the Great Peninsula Conservancy (GPC) with a FarmPAI loan in January 2025. The property has been in agriculture since the 1880’s and is characterized by prime if drained or irrigated agricultural soils, surface water rights, and farm infrastructure which has supported decades of dairy and beef cattle production on site. The farm has excellent access for direct on-site marketing, with high community visibility along the County’s main arterial highway near Silverdale. A keystone agricultural property for the County, the Petersen Farm is more than eight times the size of the average farm in Kitsap County and is one of the County’s largest remaining agricultural properties.

A portion of the Petersen Farm property is subject to an NRCS agricultural conservation easement that was acquired in 2014. The NRCS easement left a portion of the property unprotected and did not prevent the previous landowner from pursuing residential and estate home development on portions of the property. Recognizing the property owner's proposal to take the property out of agriculture and develop additional housing, GPC pursued purchase of the farm.

Having secured the farm with a FarmPAI loan in January 2025, GPC proposes to overlay an FPLA agricultural conservation easement over the full 142-acre property, extinguishing three remaining development rights and enhancing protection of the farm's agricultural and natural resource values in perpetuity. GPC applied to FPLA for the easement funding in July 2025.

Discussion

The threat of conversion to the Petersen Farm property is unique. Kitsap County is experiencing high residential development pressure and rural estate market demand. When recently listed for sale, the previous property owner pursued a development plan to create three additional home sites on 25 acres of the farm, and rebuild two estate-size homes in the farm's current building envelope. Although 117 of the farm's 142 acres were placed under an NRCS conservation easement in 2014, the seller retained an ability to develop the unprotected portion of the property, as well as pursue options in the estate market on the protected portion of the farm.

The property is zoned Rural Protection and Rural Residential, allowing for at least three additional home sites to be developed on the property. Kitsap County does not have an agricultural resource land zoning classification. Recognizing the continued threat of conversion, GPC approached NRCS to discuss options to extinguish the remaining development rights on the property, and promote long term farmland affordability and continued agricultural production on site through additional easement restrictions. After considering all options, NRCS expressed support for the approach of overlaying an FPLA conservation easement across the full 142-acre property, to further restrict and reinforce the agricultural and natural resource protections. GPC intends to include affordability mechanisms in the overlay easement to reinforce protections of the property's continued agricultural use, and address the potential for future estate market demand on the property.

After the easement is in place, GPC plans to operate an Affordable Farmland Leasing program on the property, in partnership with WSU Kitsap County Extension, Kitsap Conservation District, Washington Farmland Trust, and Business Impact Northwest. The leasing program will make land available to farmers through mid- and long-term lease terms (10 – 25 years). GPC and their partners plan to form an oversight committee to develop the program and adopt criteria for prioritizing leasing opportunities for historically underserved farmers and ranchers, in accordance with the FPLA Program Guidelines.

Finally, the acquisition of an FPLA easement on the Petersen Farm provides significant opportunity for natural resource enhancements and investments on the property. GPC is working with the Suquamish Tribe and Kitsap Conservation District to restore more than 3100' of fish-bearing Clear Creek that bisects the property. Clear Creek supports various salmon species, including coho, chum, cutthroat, and historically, limited runs of ESA-listed steelhead. GPC plans to conduct restoration on site that may include channel meanders, removal of reed canary grass and other invasive species, removal of artificial fish passage barriers (e.g., culverts), and replanting a diverse native riparian canopy. GPC has

proposed that the FPLA easement terms increase the riparian buffer on Clear Creek from 50 feet to 105 feet based on site potential tree height. In addition, FPLA easement terms would strengthen requirements for improved management of timber harvest on the property, as well.

Next Steps or Recommendations

The FPLA Work Group supports the GPC overlay easement proposal for the Petersen Farm project. The proposed FPLA overlay easement would remove the remaining development rights from the Petersen Farm property and incorporate easement language to improve protection of the property's wooded and riparian areas. The FPLA overlay easement would also include terms to support long term affordability and continued agricultural use of the full 142-acre property. The work group noted that the FPLA easement value would be based on a fair market value appraisal of only the new encumbrances defined in the overlay easement.

Proposed authorization language:

"The Conservation Commission accepts the FPLA Work Group's recommendation regarding Great Peninsula Conservancy's Petersen Farm application. The Conservation Commission approves up to \$780,000 in FPLA funding for the Great Peninsula Conservancy to acquire an agricultural conservation easement on the 142-acre Petersen Farm property located in Kitsap County. The Conservation Commission authorizes its Executive Director to sign the conservation easement as a third-party beneficiary."

Staff Contacts:

- Hilary Aten, OFP Coordinator, E: haten@scc.wa.gov, Ph: (564)250-0691

TAB 2



Washington State Conservation Commission

September 18, 2023

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Sarah Groth, Chief Financial Officer

SUBJECT: Biennium 23-25 close update

Action Item

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Informational Item

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Summary:

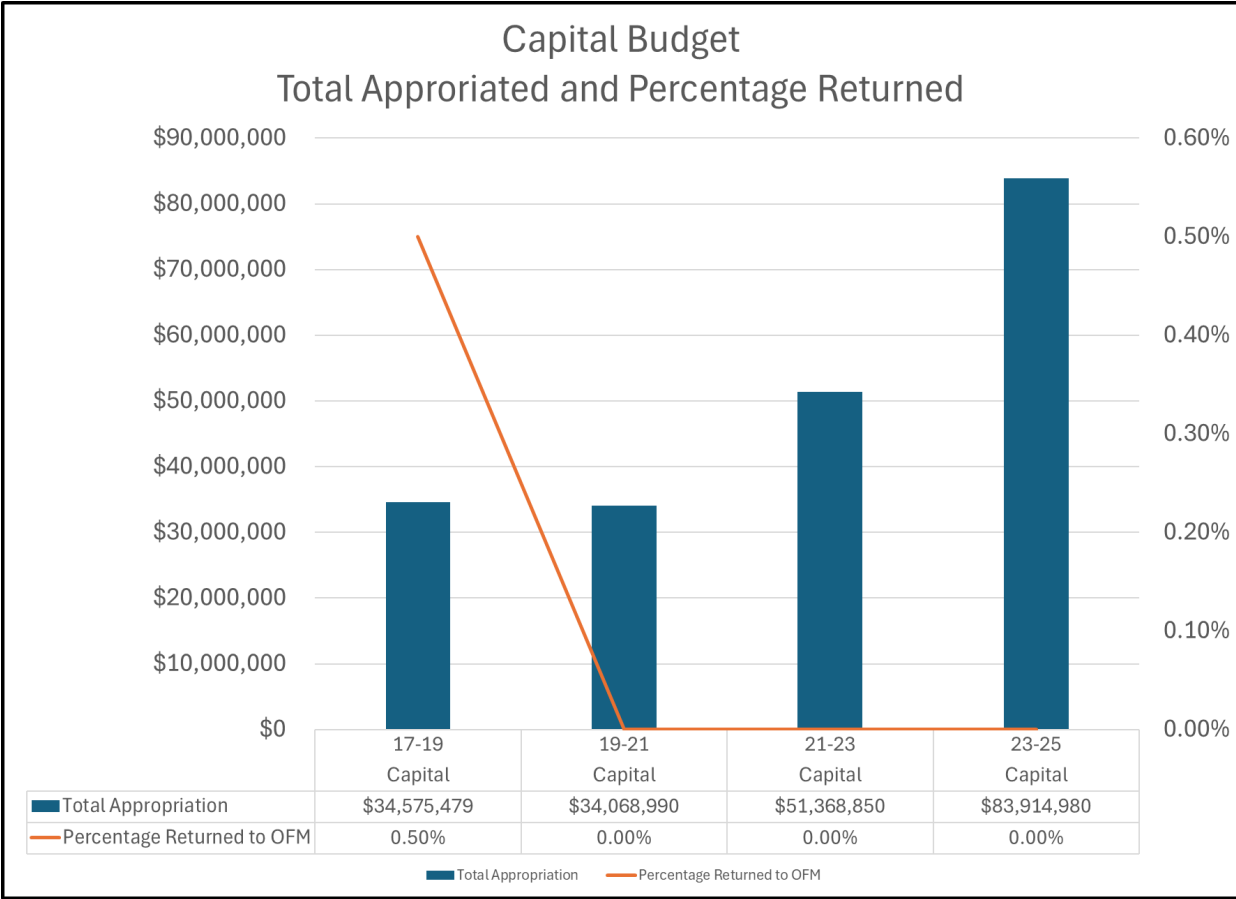
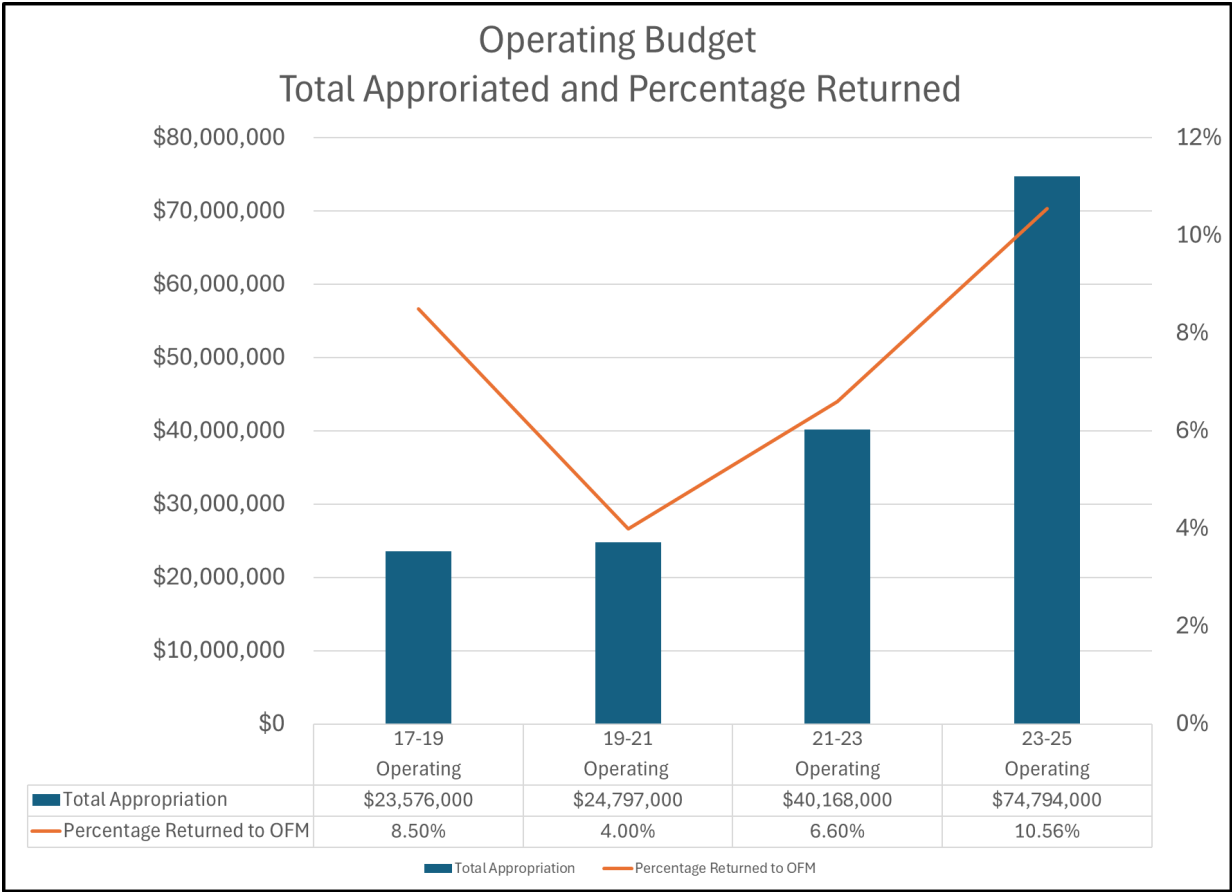
SCC recently completed close out of our 23-25 biennium financials and reports in compliance with Office of Financial Management (OFM) deadlines.

Closing out the fiscal year and biennium creates a significant lift in workload for the SCC finance staff. In the last 3 months, SCC finance staff processed over 928 vouchers totaling over \$28,914,025 in reimbursements to conservation districts, counties, and contractors between June 1, 2025 and August 31, 2025. This represents a 16% increase in the number of vouchers and a 50% increase in the amount of reimbursements over the same period of time last biennium.

SCC closely tracks the amount of funding returned to the Office of Financial Management each biennium to understand how effectively and efficiently the agency is administering funding. For the 23-25 biennium, returned operating dollars reflect 10.56% of the total operating budget appropriation. This percentage is slightly higher than in recent years (see charts on the following page) but is in line with expectations given the unprecedented number of new programs and new investments this biennium.

The returned 23-25 operating funds are spread across several SCC programs. There is not a particular program responsible for a majority of the returned funds. SCC did not return any unspent capital funding as all unspent capital funding was reappropriated for use in the 25-27 biennium.

Fiscal staff are collaborating with Regional Managers and Program Managers to refine budget and project management processes, aiming to keep projects on track and minimize returned funds. SCC is also reviewing policies, the Grant and Contract Policy and Procedure Manual, program guidelines, and internal procedures to further reduce future fund returns.



Staff Contact:

Sarah Groth, Chief Financial Officer

Next Steps:

SCC financial staff will continue to closely monitor all budgets and appropriations and will continue to provide reports and updates to support Regional Managers, Program Managers, the Executive Director and other staff to ensure we use the funding in accordance with state laws, federal laws, and programmatic guidelines.



Washington State Conservation Commission

September 18, 2025

TO: Conservation Commission Members

FROM: Larry Cochran, SCC Chairman

SUBJECT: Chair and Vice-chair nominating committee

Action Item

X

Information Item

X

Summary:

In 2021, the Commission Board adopted policy number 21-07 titled Governance: Commission Expectations Policy. The purpose of establishing the policy was to provide agency governance policy and commitments, provide additional clarity and establish standards of behavior and expectations for service by the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) Board of Commissioners.

On page 4 of policy 21-07, the procedure for the election of chairperson and vicechair person is outlined. The full policy is followed by this memo and the specific section of the election of chair and vicechair has been provided below for quick reference.

The formation of the three (3) member nominating committee occurs annually during September at a regular business meeting by the Board.

Election of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson (replaces policy no. 05-02)

A nominating committee will be formed for the purpose of recommending candidates for the office of chairperson and vice chairperson for action by the governing body at the December Commission Meeting.

The nominating committee will include members of the Commission Board. The term of office for the chairperson(s) and vice chairperson(s) shall be one year, with a maximum of two consecutive terms per role.

Only the three elected, two appointed, and ex-officio member representing Washington State University (WSU) shall be eligible for the office of chairperson or vice chairperson. Ex-officio members representing the regulatory Departments of Ecology, Agriculture, Natural Resources and WACD shall be ineligible to serve as chairperson or vice chairperson.

PROCEDURE

A nominating committee of three (3) Commissioners will be formed annually by the Board at the September regular Commission meeting for the purpose of recommending candidates for the offices of chairperson and vice chairperson.

At the next regular meeting following the September meeting, the nominating committee shall present recommendations to the full Commission board and request action. While the recommendation of the nominating committee is not binding on the full Commission board, it will be carefully considered prior to board action.

The newly elected chairperson and vice chairperson will begin service at the next regular or special meeting of the Conservation Commission, typically occurring in January of the following year.

Staff Contact:

James Thompson, Executive Director / jthompson@scc.wa.gov

Lori Gonzalez, Executive Assistant / lgonzalez@scc.wa.gov



Washington State Conservation Commission

Policy #	21-07 Governance and Commissioner Expectations
Applies to:	WSCC Commissioners
Effective Date:	Board approved on December 2, 2021

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish agency governance policy and commitments, provide additional clarity and establish standards of behavior and expectations for service of the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) Board of Commissioners.

BACKGROUND

The WSCC is established and authorized under RCW 89.08. Several specific sections of this RCW guide and authorize the policies established herein:

RCW 89.08.030

“The commission shall consist of ten members, five of whom are ex officio. Two members shall be appointed by the governor, one of whom shall be a landowner or operator of a farm. At least two of the three elected members shall be landowners or operators of a farm and shall be elected as herein provided. The appointed members shall serve for a term of four years.

The three elected members shall be elected for three-year terms, one shall be elected each year by the district supervisors at their annual statewide meeting. One of the members shall reside in eastern Washington, one in central Washington and one in western Washington, the specific boundaries to be determined by district supervisors.

The director of the department of ecology, the director of the 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 shall be ex officio members of the commission. An ex officio member of the commission shall hold office so long as he or she retains the office by virtue of which he or she is a member of the commission. Ex officio members may delegate their authority.

The commission may invite appropriate officers of cooperating organizations, state and federal agencies to serve as advisers to the conservation commission.”

RCW 89.08.050

“It shall have authority to delegate to its chairman, to one or more of its members, to one or more agents or employees such duties and powers as it deems proper...”

“The commission shall organize annually and select a chairman from among its members, who shall serve for one year from the date of his selection...”

POLICY

Governance

Board of Commissioners Purpose

The Board of Commissioners represents, leads, and serves the agency and holds itself accountable to it by committing to act in the agency’s best interests and by ensuring that all Board and agency action is consistent with law and the agency’s policies. The Board’s purpose is to assure that the agency achieves its goals and that it operates according to its values.

The Board and its Commissioners are committed to effectively governing the agency, testing all of its decisions, maintaining Commissioner relationships with each other, evaluating the Executive Director, training new Commissioners, working with staff and subcontractors and serving its constituents.

Governing Commitments

The Board will govern lawfully, encourage full exploration of diverse viewpoints; act with integrity as ethical leaders, focus on governance matters rather than administrative issues; observe clear separation of Board and Executive Director roles, make all official decisions by formal vote of the Board; and govern with long-term vision.

The Board will function as a single unit. The opinions and personal strengths of individual Commissioners will be used to the Board’s best advantage, but the Board faithfully will make decisions as a group, by formal vote. No officer, individual, or committee of the Board will be permitted to limit the Board’s performance or prevent the Board from fulfilling its commitments.

The Board is responsible for its own performance and commits itself to continuous improvement. The Board will assure that its Commissioners are provided with training and professional support necessary to govern effectively, including ethics training. After attending conferences or events, Commissioners will report back to the Board at the next regular meeting about what they have learned.

The Board will carry out a summative self-assessment with full, honest and timely participation by all Commissioners. The assessment will include evaluation of the Board as a whole.

Board Job Description

The Board's job is to represent, lead and serve the agency and to govern by establishing expectations for organizational results, expectations for quality operational performance, and monitoring actual performance against those expectations. The Board will:

- Set agency external-facing policy
- Evaluate Board performance.
- Hire the Executive Director and evaluate their performance.
- Adopt and keep current a long range strategic plan and monitor performance against the plan.
- Review and accept the periodic report of the State Auditor.
- Adopt and monitor implementation of biennial operating budgets.
- Review and approve biennial and supplemental budget requests, and new legislation to the Governor and state legislature.
- Appoint two conservation district supervisors to each conservation district board.
- Work with the Office of the Attorney General to support the WSCC in its work.
- Support implementation of the Conservation Accountability and Performance Program
- Set election rules for conservation district elections (Chapter 135-110 WAC)

Board Officers

The officers of the Board of Commissioners (Board) are those listed in this policy. Their duties are those assigned by this policy, and others required by law.

Chair

The Chair provides leadership to the Board of Commissioners, ensures the faithful execution of the Commission's processes, exercises interpretive responsibilities consistent with the spirit and intent of the Commission's policies, and normally serves as the Board of Commissioners' spokesperson. The Chair has the following specific authorities and duties:

- Monitor Commissioner actions to assure that they are consistent with the Board's own rules and policies:
 - Chair Commission meetings using the authority normally vested in the Chair as described in Robert's Rules of Order;
 - Conduct and monitor Commission meeting deliberations to assure that Board discussion and attention are focused on Board issues, as defined in Board policy;
 - Assure that Commission meeting discussions are productive, efficient, orderly, and respectful;
 - Lead the Commission's annual performance evaluation of the Executive Director;
 - Execute all documents authorized by the Commission, except as otherwise provided by law or delegation of authority;
 - Appoint members of all Commission committees and sub-committees with the ratification of the full Commission.
 - Represent the Board as its official spokesperson about issues or topics decided by the full Board.

Vice-Chair

The Vice-Chair serves in the absence or inability of the Chair to perform the specific authorities and duties of the Chair.

Election of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson (replaces policy no. 05-02)

A nominating committee will be formed for the purpose of recommending candidates for the office of chairperson and vice chairperson for action by the governing body at the December Commission Meeting.

The nominating committee will include members of the Commission Board and partners. The term of office for the chairperson(s) and vice chairperson(s) shall be one year, with a maximum of two consecutive terms per role.

Only the three elected, two appointed, and ex-officio member representing Washington State University (WSU) shall be eligible for the office of chairperson or vice chairperson. Ex-officio members representing the regulatory Departments of Ecology, Agriculture, Natural Resources and WACD shall be ineligible to serve as chairperson or vice chairperson.

PROCEDURE

A nominating committee of 3 Commissioners will be formed annually by the Board at the September regular Commission meeting for the purpose of recommending candidates for the offices of chairperson and vice chairperson.

At the next regular meeting following the September meeting, the nominating committee shall present recommendations to the full Commission board and request action. While the recommendation of the nominating committee is not binding on the full Commission board, it will be carefully considered prior to board action.

The newly elected chairperson and vice chairperson will begin service at the next regular or special meeting of the Conservation Commission, typically occurring in January of the following year.

Executive Committee (replaces policy no. 05-03)

Purpose and Structure

The purpose of the Executive Committee is to provide feedback and guidance, upon request and as appropriate, to the Executive Director between regular meetings of the full Commission Board and to make any decisions as are formally delegated to the Executive Committee by the full Commission Board. The chairperson and vice chairperson, will collectively be called the Executive Committee of the Commission. The Executive Committee shall serve as a standing committee of the full Commission Board with no expiration.

Duties

Duties of the Executive Committee may include but are not limited to:

- Provide feedback and informal guidance, upon request and as appropriate, to the Executive Director on agency matters between regular Commission meetings,
- Remain informed of legislative developments and provide feedback to SCC staff on pending legislation that may be contentious and urgent,
- Review and provide input into draft agendas for commission meetings

Additional responsibilities of the Executive Committee may also be assigned by action of the Commission. The Executive Committee shall report out its activities, as appropriate, to the full Commission board at the next regular Commission meeting.

Committees or Sub-Committees

The Board may create committees or sub-committees if they are deemed helpful to assist the Board in the performance of its responsibilities. If committees are established, they will be used exclusively to support the work of the Board at the direction of the Board.

- Committees will not be used to direct, advise, assist, or oversee the staff. Committees will have no authority over staff and may exercise demands on staff time and organizational resources only to the extent authorized by the full Board and Executive Director.
- Committees will customarily prepare recommendations for consideration by the full Board.
- Committees may not speak or act for the Board unless specifically authorized to do so. The responsibilities and authority of all committees are carefully stated in writing to assure that committees fully understand their duties and extent of authority, and to assure that committee work will not usurp or conflict with the Board's own authority or conflict with authority delegated to the Executive Director.
- All Board committees are considered to be ad hoc, or temporary, unless specifically authorized by the full Board as a standing committee. The date for the termination of each committee is listed for each committee. Committees may be renewed or reauthorized upon their expiration, but unless the Board acts to renew the committee's existence it shall cease to exist upon the date specific.
- Format for Board Committees will follow:
 - Name
 - Purpose and Charge
 - Membership
 - Reporting Schedule
 - Term
 - Authority over Resources

Advisors to the Board of Commissioners (replaces policy no. 05-07)

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Forest Service are recognized as an important contributor to Conservation Commission meetings. Even though they are not a regular member of the Commission, the following policy shall serve as a guide for their participation in the meetings.

- They may attend all meetings and executive sessions by invitation.
- They may not make motions or vote.
- They may be recognized by the chairman and enter discussion on any subject in the same manner as any regular Commission member.

Additional short-term or topic-specific advisors may be invited to participate in Commission meetings, agency initiatives or projects at any time.

Commissioner Expectations

Attendance and Engagement

Commissioners will make every effort to attend all regular and special meetings of the WSCC. To ensure that the WSCC's meetings are conducted with maximum effectiveness and efficiency, Commissioners will spend such time as may be needed in advance of the meetings to review meeting materials, interact with the agency, organization, or region of conservation districts represented as may be needed on topics appearing on each agenda in preparation for and to enable fully engaged participation in each meeting.

If a Commissioner must be absent for a meeting, the Commissioner is expected to notify the Chairperson and Executive Director as soon as possible. A substitute delegate may participate on behalf of ex-officio Commissioners only. Any substitutes are expected to adhere to and uphold all policies, procedures, and expectations of the WSCC and the Commissioner for which they are acting as a substitute. Every effort will be made to provide timely meeting materials and information to identified substitutes but it is the primary responsibility of the appointed Commissioner to ensure the substitute is fully prepared to attend the meeting.

Code of Conduct

The Commissioners will conduct themselves lawfully, with integrity and high ethical standards, in order to model the behaviors expected of staff and to build constituent confidence and credibility. The Commission will conduct its official business with social and fiduciary responsibility that encourages public trust. Commissioners will maintain awareness of, abide by and uphold all WSCC policies and procedures.

To build trust among Commissioners and to ensure an environment conducive to effective governance, Commissioners will:

- Communicate openly and respectfully with one another, agency staff, and the public;
- Listen to understand one another, staff, and the public;
- Support the Chair's efforts to facilitate an orderly meeting;

- Focus on issues rather than personalities;
- Exercise honesty in all written and interpersonal interaction, never intentionally misleading or misinforming each other;
- Make every reasonable effort to protect the integrity and promote the positive image of the organization and one another;
- Maintain confidentiality appropriate to sensitive issues and information that otherwise may tend to compromise the integrity or legal standing of the Commission, especially those matters discussed in executive session.

Commissioners will not attempt to exercise individual authority over the agency or staff.

- Commissioners will not attempt to assume personal responsibility for resolving operational problems or complaints;
- Commissioners will not personally direct any part of the operational organization;
- Commissioners will respect decisions of the Board and will not undermine those decisions;
- Commissioners will not publicly express individual negative judgments about Executive Director or staff performance. Any such judgments will be expressed in executive session;
- Commissioners will refer any requests for access to the agency's records to the SCC Public Records Officer;
- Commissioners will serve the interests of the entire organization. Commissioners recognize this responsibility to the whole to be greater than:
 - any other responsibility a Commissioner may have as a member; and
 - ties based upon membership on other boards or staffs.

Communication and Representation

Each Commissioner will strive to serve as a communication conduit with the agency, organization, group, or region of conservation districts represented. Each Commissioner should bring relevant news from their constituents to the WSCC in a timely manner and carry WSCC news and information back to their constituents as well.

Representing the Commission

Only the designated spokesperson(s) for the agency will provide formal or informal comments to the press or media on behalf of the agency or Board. In the circumstance where Commissioners participate in meetings or events where it may not be clear from which perspective or which organization they are representing, all Commissioners will make it very clear that while they do serve as a Commissioner, they are not speaking on behalf of, or representing the agency unless formally designated to do so by the Chair or Executive Director. Commissioners may be involved in numerous aspects of natural resource conservation in roles outside of their service as a Commissioner; it is essential that when speaking as a Commissioner to ensure that the policies and formal positions adopted by the full Board and agency are represented accurately and are not undermined.

Ethics and Conflict of Interest (incorporates language from SCC policy no. 13-02)

The Ethics in Public Service Act, RCW 42.52 applies to all state employees and officers. All Commissioners are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Ethics Act (RCW 42.52) and rules (WAC 292-110), applicable agency policies and procedures, and for making choices that exemplify an adherence to the highest ethical standards. Detailed information on issues related to state ethics, including interpretations and clarifying examples of the Ethics Act and rules are available at the Executive Ethics Board's website www.ethics.wa.gov.

Commissioners are expected to avoid conflicts of interest involving all matters considered by the Board. A conflict of interest exists when a Commissioner is confronted with an issue in which the Commissioner has, or appears to have, a personal or financial interest or an issue of circumstance that could render the Commissioner unable to remain objective and focus upon the agency's interest.

To assure that there is no perception of impropriety or unethical behavior, Commissioners will recuse themselves from any discussion or decision which directly involves or affects them. A Commissioner will recuse him/herself by notifying the Chair of the potential conflict of interest and leave the room when the issue in conflict is voted upon.

If a Commissioner does not recuse him/herself when it may be improper for them to participate in discussion or decisions, other Commissioners or the Executive Director, have the right and obligation to request that the Commissioner recuse him/herself.

Commissioners should notify the Chairperson and Executive Director of any actual or potential violations of this policy. When in doubt, Commissioners should consult with the designated Ethics Advisor (Executive Director) or the Human Resources Office.

Process for Addressing Violations by Commissioners

The Board and each of its Commissioners are committed to faithful compliance with the provisions of the Board's policies. The Board recognizes that failure to deal with deliberate or continuing violations of its policies risks the loss of confidence in the Board's ability to govern effectively. Therefore, if the Board determines that a Commissioner's violation of law, regulation, or policy requires it the Board can address the issue and may use the following process with every attempt made to resolve the issue at the lowest possible level:

1. Conversation in a private setting between the offending Commissioner and the Chairperson or other individual Commissioner;
 - a. If the Chair's compliance is in question, the Vice-chair will be notified.
2. Discussion in an executive session between the offending Commissioner and the full Board if in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act.
3. Removal by the Board from any leadership or committee positions to which the offending Commissioner has been appointed or elected.
4. Censure of the offending Commissioner as a means of separating the Board's focus and intent from those of the offending Commissioner.
5. Removal from the Board. For ex-officio Commissioners, a request may be made to the agency or organization that has appointed the Commissioner in question to appoint

another representative for their agency or organization. For Governor appointed Commissioners, a request may be made to the Office of the Governor to consider making a new appointment.

Ethics Violations

The Executive Director is designated as the agency's Ethics Advisor who coordinates and manages the agency's ethics program. The Executive Director may also appoint another member of staff to serve as the Ethics Advisor. The Ethics Advisor is the agency's liaison to the Washington State Executive Ethics Board. The Ethics Advisor may:

- a. Assess the application of conflict of interest laws and regulations to the information reported and counsel those Commissioners with regard to resolving actual or potential conflicts of interests or appearances.
- b. Counsel Commissioners concerning ethics standards and programs.
- c. Assist Commissioners in understanding and implementing agency ethics programs.

The Executive Ethics Board has the authority and responsibility for investigating alleged violation(s) of the Ethics Act. Anyone may file an ethics complaint against a state employee or officer. Complaint forms are available on the Executive Ethics Board's website. Complaints may be filed anonymously or the complainant may choose to remain confidential. Ethics complaints may be filed directly with this Board at the following website: <https://ethics.wa.gov/online-complaint-form>.

Decision Making

Board Decision Making

The Board will make decisions:

- Through a formal vote of a quorum of the Board in an open and public meeting.
- After seeking out the most complete and accurate information and perspectives from all sides of a situation.
- After providing opportunity for and consideration of public comment.

Action items brought to the Board, to the greatest extent possible, will be initially introduced at an open and public meeting. If the Board chooses to act, action would occur at the next or a future open and public meeting.

Board and Executive Director Relationship

The Executive Director is the Board's primary contact with Commission staff. The Board does not work directly with individual staff members on the operations of the organization. The Executive Director may direct staff to communicate with Commissioners as needed.

The Board will direct the Executive Director only through official decisions of a quorum of the full Board.

- The Board will make decisions by formal, recorded vote in order to avoid any disclarity about whether direction has been given.
- The Executive Director is neither obligated nor expected to follow the directions or instructions of individual Commissioners or committees unless the Board has specifically delegated such exercise of authority.
- Should the Executive Director determine that an information request received from an individual Commissioner or a committee requires a material amount of staff time or is unreasonable, the Executive Director is expected to ask that the committee or the Commissioner refer such requests to the full Board for authorization.

Staff Accountability

The Executive Director is responsible for all matters related to the day-to-day operations of the agency, within the values expressed by the Board in policy. All staff members are considered to report directly or indirectly to the Executive Director.

- The Board will never give direction to any contractor hired by the Executive Director regarding a contract with the Executive Director or to any employee other than the Executive Director.
- The Board will not participate in decisions or actions involving the hiring, evaluating, compensation, disciplining or dismissal of any contractor hired by the Executive Director or any employee other than the Executive Director.

Authority of the Executive Director

The Board will provide direction to the Executive Director through written policies and/or formal vote of the full Board. The Executive Director is authorized to establish any administration policies or procedures, make any decisions, establish any practices and develop any activities that the Executive Director deems appropriate to achieve the work of the agency. The Executive Director is not expected to seek Board approval or authority for any decision falling within the Executive Director's area of delegated authority.



Washington State Conservation Commission

September 18, 2025

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, Executive Director

FROM: Kate Delavan, Policy Director

SUBJECT: Election of Conservation Commission Western Area Representative

Action Item	☐
Informational Item	☒

Summary:

The State Conservation Commission (SCC) will hold an election for the Western Area Representative to the Conservation Commission at the Washington Association of Conservation District (WACD) annual meeting of conservation district supervisors in December 2025.

Staff Contact:

Kate Delavan, Policy Director, kdelavan@scc.wa.gov

Background and Discussion:

SCC is governed by a 10-member board of Commissioners. Three Commissioners are elected by conservation district supervisors with geographic representation from Eastern Washington, Central Washington, and Western Washington. Each term is three years with one seat up for election each year (RCW 89.08.030). The Western Area Representative seat is up for election this year. The Western Area Representative seat corresponds to the WACD Northwest and Southwest Areas. The seat represents the following conservation districts:

- Clallam Conservation District
- Clark Conservation District
- Cowlitz Conservation District
- Grays Harbor Conservation District
- Jefferson Conservation District
- King Conservation District
- Kitsap Conservation District
- Lewis Conservation District
- Mason Conservation District
- Pacific Conservation District
- Pierce Conservation District
- San Juan Islands Conservation District
- Skagit Conservation District
- Snohomish Conservation District
- Thurston Conservation District
- Wahkiakum Conservation District
- Whatcom Conservation
- Whidbey Island Conservation District

SCC Interpretative Statement 24-01 directs staff to issue a notice of opening for candidates for the elected commission member seat by October 1. Interested candidates will be asked to submit their interest by November 15 to be included in the list of candidates distributed to district supervisors on or before November 30.

The annual meeting will be conducted in person and online. Conservation district supervisors will have the opportunity to meet the candidates in a virtual or in-person setting (dependent on the applicant's preference) during the WACD statewide annual meeting in Spokane. Nominations will also be taken directly from the floor and online. Nominations will be accepted during the candidate meet and greet.

Next Steps:

The election will be conducted through an online ballot at the WACD annual meeting December 1-3, 2025, with the winner announced by December 3. Following the announcement of the results, the elected member of the Commission shall be sworn into the position by the Chair of the Commission or designee at the December 4 Commission Business meeting.

September 18, 2025

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, Executive Director

FROM: Shana Joy, Deputy Director of Operations and Programs
Mike Baden, NE & NC Regional Manager

SUBJECT: District Operations and Regional Managers Report

Action Item	☐
Informational Item	☒

Report Summary:

Regional Managers (RMs) offer this report of recent activities and support provided to conservation districts in various district operations aspects, Commission operations assistance, and program administration support.

District Operations

Conservation district operations includes many aspects of operating legally and efficiently many of which are included as part of the [Conservation Accountability and Performance Program \(CAPP\)](#).

RMs have provided significant support for CDs in closing out grants for the end of FY 25. Support included reminders, support with questions, and issues resolution. RMs have also assisted CDs in with the onboarding of grant funding for the new biennium

RMs have begun the process of preparing for the upcoming elections cycle. One activity currently underway is to update various forms as needed for the new year. RMs are also working on putting together the mandatory elections training that will be held on September 25th.

Through the summer months RMs have been visiting with CDs in the field to conduct implementation monitoring visits for completed projects. RMs have also continue to conduct new supervisor orientations.

RMs continue to support districts, offer advice, resources, and assist with day-to-day operations matters including troubleshooting and problem solving when things do not go as planned in areas such as financial management, risk management, human resources, governance or board dynamics.

Commission Operations & Program Administration

Regional managers have been supporting and participating with SCC finance and program staff close out of grants from the prior biennium as well as awarding funding for the new biennium. The RM Team thanks fiscal staff for their diligent work and assistance working through issues during this very busy time.

Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resilience Initiative (WSRRI) program guidelines for Commission approval. We look forward to beginning project awards in the near future.

Partnerships & Partnering Assistance

The Regional Manager team provides ongoing assistance with partnering or participated in partner and relationship building efforts with: individual conservation districts, WADE, PSCD Caucus, Center for Technical Development, Building Better, WACD, DNR, Ecology, DFW, NACD, Washington Association of Land Trusts, State Auditor's Office, RCO, Department of Veterans Affairs, WA Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, Washington Conservation Society, Arid Lands Initiative, and Integrated Pest Management Workgroup.

RMs have been working with fiscal staff and NRCS to develop new contribution agreements for task orders as well as funding for a shared training coordinator. Task order agreements being developed focus on the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA). CRP support for NRCS remains a high priority and a large workload, particularly in E. Washington. This work helps to ensure ongoing producer contracts for this important conservation program. Task orders for CTA are more generalized and can provide for CDs to assist NRCS with a number of priority tasks related to Farm Bill programs. The training coordinator funds are also a part of the CTA agreement and would support the work of the Center for Technical Development working with NRCS to identify and implement technical training resources and training events for CD staff. Training remains a large need in the state.

SCC participation and partnership with the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) is ongoing. Shana Joy is representing the Pacific Region on the NASCA Policy Committee. Mike Baden serves as the Pacific Region Director on the NASCA Board.

Chehalis Basin

Josh Giuntoli, SW RM, represents the Executive Director of the Commission as ex-officio member of the Chehalis Basin Board (CBB).

SCC staff continues to coordinate with CDs and partners every other month. These are opportunities to share updates and information, identify possible issues, and generally stay connected.

Programs

RM's are currently in the lead role for the following programs.

- Implementation
- Shellfish
- Natural Resource Investments (NRI)
- Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resilience Initiative (WSRRI)
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
- Whitman County Fire Recovery

- NRCS Task Orders
- Professional Engineering
- Livestock Technical Assistance



Washington Association of
Conservation Districts



September 2025 Partner Report

ADVOCACY

WACD's 2025–26 Legislative Outreach Campaign

In partnership with conservation districts, WACD will be launching a targeted postcard campaign to elevate the importance of Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) and cultivate sustainable funding for Forest Health and Wildfire Recovery.

The postcards, designed by KR Creative Strategies, are being shaped with input from a focus group of conservation district managers, executive directors, outreach staff from across the state, and SCC staff.

Each card will feature testimonials from landowners directly impacted by funding cuts. These personal stories are powerful—if there's one thing we know, it's that legislators want to hear from their constituents.

UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

- October 20: WACD Board Meeting
- November 4: WACD's Natural Resources Committee Meeting
- November 5: WACD's Leg., Bylaws and District Policies Committee Meeting
- November 17: WACD November Board Meeting
- November 20: NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
- December 1 – 3: WACD Annual Conference & Business Meeting

WACD AREA MEETINGS

[WACD Area Meetings](#) are right around the corner. Area Association meetings are where resolutions are discussed and decided by voting members of each area. Resolutions that are adopted advance to WACD's annual business meeting. The resolution process is how Washington's conservation districts collectively work to effect change in laws, rules, policies, and programs at the regional, state, and national levels. Area meeting dates and locations are below:

- Wednesday, October 15 – Northwest Area meeting – hosted by King CD
- Thursday, October 16 – Southwest Area meeting – hosted by Wahkiakum CD
- Wednesday, October 22 – Northeast area meeting – hosted by Stevens CD
- Thursday, October 23 – North Central Area Meeting – hosted by Foster Creek CD
- Tuesday, October 28 – South Central Area Meeting – hosted by Eastern Klickitat CD
- Wednesday, October 29 – Southeast Area meeting – hosted by Columbia CD

OPERATIONS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

- The WACD Board of Directors will hold its next **board meeting** on October 20th. The agenda for that meeting will be posted [here](#).
- The WACD Board of Directors approved several updates to their **Board Policy and Procedure Manual** in June. The updated manual can be found [here](#).
- WACD and SCC recently asked districts if they offered tours to legislators and other officials, and if so, can we help? The resounding response was, YES! So WACD and SCC created a [form](#) for districts to request assistance for **legislative tours**. Several tours have occurred over the summer, with more planned this fall.
- WACD hosted its **Strategic Planning Session** on June 17th. WACD Board members, staff, and partners all convened to draft a road map for the Association through 2030. A draft of the plan can be found [here](#).
- The 2025 WACD Annual Conference **CONSERVATION CONNECTIONS: Connecting the Land, Water, and People** will be held December 1st – 3rd at Northern Quest Resort and Casino, Spokane. We have an impressive line-up of speakers and sponsors, and we encourage you to attend! Registration information can be found [here](#).

PLANT MATERIALS CENTER

- **Revenues** are nominal this time of year, but there is an interesting trend in expenses. They are 30% less than the same time last year. Overall expenses decreased from \$104,420 last July to \$72,645 this July. As of April 30, 2025, PMC plant sales totaled \$1,702,317, which exceeds the sales budget of \$1,659,910 by 3%.
- **Sales** currently stand at \$774,156, which is \$46,500 less than the same time last year. There is confidence that sales will catch up with last year's and hopefully surpass them. There is plenty of good-looking stock to make that happen.
- Join us in **welcoming Zinny Hansen**, PMC's new Assistant Manager. Zinny will start on September 2nd. She has experience in the nursery industry as well as a degree in horticulture. Zinny has an upbeat personality, and we are looking forward to her joining the team.
- **The PMC on TV:** The public television show [Washington Grown](#) came to the PMC to film an episode on the PMC. The show's hosts, Kristi and Tomas, came along with a producer and videographer. They toured the facilities and learned about the mission and work of WACD and the PMC. The episode will air in the new 13th season that begins in the new year. We will let everyone know when that is.



Updates from the Washington State Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences (NRAS) Program

As we close out our fiscal biennium, we're excited to report several projects completed in collaboration with conservation districts and the SCC:

1. Climate Smart Equipment Grants

With one-time funds from the legislature, WSDA distributed an extra \$1m to applicants of Sustainable Farms and Fields (SFF) who did not receive awards due to a shortage in funds. Through WSDA's Climate Smart Equipment Grant Program, 24 eligible SFF applicants were contacted and 12 producers ultimately awarded. Funded projects include reduced tillage equipment, tractor GPS units, electric manure scrapers, and drone pesticide applicators.

2. CTD Soils Curriculum

For years, conservation district staff have been waitlisted for limited seats in the NRCS Soil Health Course. This delays how quickly a CD staff can receive their planner accreditation, and keeps soil health knowledge behind a paywall. To address this gap, WSDA soil scientists have partnered with the Center for Technical Development to produce *Soils 101: Learning Soil Science to Build Soil Health*. This course will be available to CD staff, as well as farmers, agronomists, and interested members of the public. In a recent MOU, NRCS approved the course as an equivalent to theirs, and will issue planner credits to eligible CD staff who complete the CTD curriculum. The course is currently [available for beta-testing](#), with a planned release for early 2026.

3. Groundwater Nitrate Testing

WSDA launched a new groundwater monitoring program in 2023 to detect pesticides and nutrients in regional aquifers. Through strong partnerships with local CD staff, sample collection has begun in the Pasco and Walla Walla basins. Working together, WSDA, local health jurisdictions, and CD staff connect study participants with high nitrate concentrations to alternative drinking water programs. This project aims to improve local health and environmental outcomes while supporting VSP monitoring goals. The sampling program will expand to new regions in Fall 2026. Learn more at agr.wa.gov/groundh20monitor

4. Education and Outreach for Upcoming Pesticide Changes

In many cases, new EPA requirements will mandate the use of conservation practices to mitigate the runoff and drift of pesticide applications. Through collaboration between staff from WSDA, CDs, and NRCS, trainings and surveys were held in the Palouse region to understand grower needs. These efforts have made clear that Palouse farmers—due to geographic conditions and the use of practices such as reduced till—largely meet or exceed the new EPA requirements. Additional trainings and listening sessions will be held as EPA releases more information about their pesticide runoff and drift mitigation menus. The next event will be held on October 29th at 12:00pm at the Walla Walla Community Center.

For registration, contact Andrea Cox at andrea@wawg.org.



5. STAR

The STAR conservation assessment tool is live! Enrollment is currently open for producers of grains and legumes, juice and wine grapes, and tree fruit, and will open soon for vegetable and root crops. If you're a farmer, visit startool.ag to enroll today! Or, contact the STAR team at WaSHI@agr.wa.gov if you're a CD interested in using STAR with your farmers or in your VSP monitoring, or if you're a processor, packer, or food company interested in using STAR to green your supply chain.

NACD Update for
Washington Conservation Commission
Meeting of September 18, 2025

- **Proposals being accepted for NACD's 2026 Annual Meeting Breakout session** - NACD is now accepting breakout session proposals for the upcoming 2026 Annual Meeting in San Antonio, TX, on February 14-19, 2026. If you have any questions or would like to discuss your proposal before submitting, please reach out to NACD's Director of Membership Engagement, Dr. Ariel Rivers, at ariel-rivers@nacdnet.org.
- Executive Order aimed at overhauling the **federal grantmaking process**. The order, titled "[Improving Oversight of Federal Grantmaking](#)," directs each agency head to designate one or more senior appointees to be responsible for creating a new process to review funding opportunities. Agency heads have until **September 6** to review standard grant terms and conditions and submit a report to the OMB Director detailing progress on the order.
- Congress August Recess – (until September 2) – Most of our delegation members are in their home district this month so now is a good time to reach out to them (and their staff) to let them know your views.
- **NACD 2025 Summer Meeting**
 - Things are still in flux, therefore not much credible information to share. CEO Peters advice is to stay out of the guessing game and keep focused on our mission and values.
 - NACD is commencing work on a three year strategic plan update with achievable goals, defined action items, and tactics. Effort is to include CDs.
 - Canon will once again be a prime sponsor of Envirothon for 2026.
 - Guam is likely the site of the **Pacific/SW 2026 regional meeting**.
 - **NRCS Chief Aubrey Bettencourt's Comments**
 - Initiatives -Farmers first, with dollars on the landscape and ROI on those efforts. Enhance broadband connectivity. Have the plan fit the farmer, not the farmer fit the plan.
 - Looking to get credit in the regulatory arena for the voluntary environmental benefits provided. In the market arena engage big companies and work with them as they seem to be attempting to take credit for what is actually done by farmers.
 - The farmer is the hero of the story – 2% of the population provides benefits to the 98%.
 - Measure success in more than dollars and acres -e.g., environmental benefits provided.
 - **Consolidating Wildfire Services** - with wildfire services proposed to move from the US Forest Service to the Department of Interior, it is unknown how this program will exist or be managed in coming fiscal years. NACD will re-engage with USFS staff to elevate concerns about CWDG scoring inconsistencies and elevate feedback on proposed ranking criteria.
 - **Responsibilities of NRCS and FSA** - - NACD supports transferring management of CRP, including CREP and additional subprograms, to NRCS with FSA handling non-technical financial functions, and establishing an inter-agency collaboration framework to ensure program effectiveness. Given the priorities set forth by the Secretary and USDA's pending reorganization, discussions relating to such topics have been on hold.
- **Upcoming NACD Events**
 - **SW/Pacific Region Meeting** - in Golden, CO on **September 7-10, 2025**. See the agenda [here](#) and register for the meeting [here](#). The meeting is at the Denver Marriott West, Golden, CO.
 - **NACD's 80th Annual Meeting** - San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter, February 14-19, 2026.
 - Summer July 18-22, 2026 Grand Rapids, MI
 - Annual February 6-10, 2027 Las Vegas, NV
 - Summer Meeting 2027 To be determined
 - Annual February 5-9, 2028 Louisville, KY
 - Summer Meeting 2028 To be determined
 - Annual February 3-7, 2029 New Orleans, LA



July/August 2025

Our mission depends on partnerships. The work of conserving fish, wildlife, and the natural landscapes we all treasure is too big for any one organization to do alone. That's why the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), alongside tribal governments, relies on a wide network of partners – local community groups, volunteers, non-profit organizations, landowners, businesses, schools, researchers, and other public agencies – who bring unique expertise, perspectives, and capacity. Together, we're restoring habitats, creating opportunities for outreach recreation, and finding innovative solutions to complex challenges. Partnerships don't just help us move our mission forward – they make it possible.

From grants supporting wildlife diversity and watchable wildlife projects to community outreach and hunter education with tribal leaders, many stories in this edition showcase how we're working together to protect fish, wildlife, and habitat as well as to connect people with nature. Partnerships are also a critical part of how we're engaging future generations of conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts.

Another timely example is an ongoing collaboration between WDFW, Bellingham Technical College (BTC), Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, Lummi Nation, and the Nooksack Indian Tribe, which is resulting in thousands of Chinook salmon returning to Whatcom Creek in downtown Bellingham this season.

This innovative partnership creates hands-on opportunities for students from BTC's [Fisheries and Aquaculture Sciences program](#) to learn how to raise salmon and operate a fish hatchery, preparing them for jobs with the state, tribes, or other agencies or businesses. At the same time, it helps provide food for struggling Southern Resident killer whales during the salmon's return migration through the Salish Sea, as was recommended by the Southern Resident Orca Task Force.

On top of benefits for students and orcas, the collaboration at Whatcom Creek creates opportunities for both recreational and tribal fishers – including special tribal youth fishing days – in an accessible urban area where a boat or other expensive gear is not necessary.

We're seeing strong community benefits, too, with many Bellingham residents and visitors getting to see Chinook right in the heart of the city, mere steps from a metro bus stop, and learning about treaty rights and salmon co-management. WDFW and the City of Bellingham recently posted signs sharing information about the program, and the City's volunteer ambassadors are trained to answer questions about the salmon lifecycle and local fisheries.

We're proud of this valuable collaboration, and grateful for the support from our co-managers, partners, and the Bellingham community.

Chinook began arriving at Whatcom Creek in mid-August and will continue returning into October. For more information as well as fishing regulations, [refer to our news release](#). Additional photos can be found in [this month's presentation](#) to the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Looking to see salmon in your area? Visit WDFW's [salmon viewing webpage](#) for tips and places to go.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kelly Susewind", written in a cursive style.

Kelly Susewind, Director



Tribal youth with their catch of hatchery Chinook from Whatcom Creek. Photo by Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.

Topics in this message include:

- WDFW awards \$1 million in Wildlife Diversity Grants for at-risk species
- Hope on the edge of the abyss: northern spotted owl family raises fledglings in Eastern Washington
- Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Academy
- Tribal leaders and WDFW team up to teach the next generation of hunters
- Coastal steelhead rule making
- A new way of looking at Washington's waterways
- Looking back on a panel discussion
- New video series: Big-game processing
- Join us for National Hunting and Fishing Day

- Think Pink Salmon



WDFW awards \$1 million in Wildlife Diversity Grants for at-risk species

WDFW has announced the next round of Wildlife Diversity Grant recipients, awarding approximately \$1 million to support eight collaborative projects over the next two years. This significant investment focuses on Washington's most at-risk wildlife species, reflecting WDFW's broader strategy for long-term species recovery.

These grants include both crucial second-phase funding for ongoing successful projects and support for new proposals addressing emerging conservation needs statewide. Projects range from protecting rare snakes and monitoring endangered shorebirds to creating artificial burrows for burrowing owls and controlling invasive bullfrog populations. This initiative demonstrates WDFW's commitment to sustained, collaborative, science-based action, investing in both momentum and innovation for biodiversity conservation.



Hope on the edge of the abyss: Northern spotted owl family raises fledglings in Eastern Washington

On Aug. 6, WDFW and USFS staff witnessed a remarkable conservation milestone: A northern spotted owl pair nesting north of I-90 in the East Cascades successfully raised two fledglings—the only known breeding young in that region this year. This compelling observation offers a rare glimmer of hope amid steep population declines driven by habitat loss, wildfires, and invasive barred owl competition.

Despite this success, the species remains fragile, with juvenile survival rates low and threats mounting. WDFW emphasizes the urgency of a multifaceted recovery strategy: protecting mature forest habitat, implementing barred owl management, and exploring population support efforts such as translocation and headstarting.

This sighting reinforces that, with proactive, coordinated action across state, federal, and tribal partners, recovery of this iconic Pacific Northwest indicator species is still within reach. Read more about the encounter and spotted owls in our [blog post](#).



Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Academy

WDFW and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Working Group are pleased to announce that online registration is open for the sixth [Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Academy](#) that will be held in Seattle from Feb. 16-20, 2026.

Professionals from state, federal, municipal, nonprofit, private, and academic organizations and institutions come to the Academy to share and discuss real-world examples, case studies, and processes for nature tourism programs and wildlife-viewing projects throughout North America. Make plans to [join us](#), early bird registration lasts through Nov. 30!



Tribal leaders and WDFW team up to teach the next generation of hunters

Since 2013, WDFW has partnered with nearly 20 Native American tribes to offer hunter education courses across Washington — primarily in the Coastal and North Puget Sound regions, which are home to many of the state's

treaty tribes.

Many tribal members choose to take the state's hunter education class to strengthen their safety practices and feel best prepared for the field. WDFW certifies tribal members to teach classes on their own and can provide additional teaching support with Department staff and other certified instructors when needed.

Learn more [in our blog post](#), produced in collaboration with the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.



Coastal steelhead rule making

WDFW is proposing modifying permanent regulations for steelhead, game fish, and trout seasons in rivers on the western Olympic Peninsula, Grays Harbor, and Willapa Bay.

Because of low coastal steelhead returns, state and tribal fishery managers have frequently made significant changes to fisheries, resulting in emergency regulations that differ from the annual Washington Sport Fishing Rules. Preliminary data from 2024–25 steelhead returns indicates most areas are again below escapement goals.

WDFW's public rule making process aims to balance wild steelhead conservation with more consistent, stable opportunities for anglers. The Department held two virtual public meetings this summer, along with inviting public comment through multiple avenues. Following upcoming Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission presentations, the Department aims to enact final rules by January 2026.

Learn more on WDFW's [coastal steelhead management webpage](#). Photo by Zac Greenwood.



A new way of looking at Washington's waterways

Riparian areas are places where land and water intermingle, like the banks of a river or the marshy land around a stream. Aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems meet in these spaces, playing a role for a huge number of fish and wildlife species — in fact, more than three-quarters of Washington's land-based species use riparian areas as

habitat.

Because of their importance to the state's fish and wildlife and the wide variety of species they support, riparian ecosystems are [designated as a priority habitat](#) in Washington, and WDFW works hard to conserve and restore these areas wherever possible.

A groundbreaking new tool years in the making, the [Riparian Data Engine](#) (RDE) underscores this commitment by offering a platform that combines multiple data sources to provide the most comprehensive view yet of the state's riparian ecosystems. This tool helps everyone from state and federal land managers and tribes conducting large-scale restoration projects, to county or city planners mapping out the future of their communities, and even private landowners who want to better understand and

responsibly manage their own property where it backs up to a creek or wetland. Refer to WDFW's [blog post](#) for more information.



Looking back on a panel discussion

WDFW Director Kelly Susewind recently joined former Nisqually Indian Tribe Tribal Council Chair Willie Frank III and Taylor Shellfish's Bill Dewey for a panel on salmon recovery and co-management in Washington. The conversation was part of "Honoring the Waters: Tribal Sovereignty, Salmon Recovery, and Co-Management in Washington," a workshop hosted by the Pacific Education Institute and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The workshop included a screening of the documentary [Fish War](#) and a discussion of the Boldt Decision, the history of treaty rights, and the ongoing work of the state and tribal co-managers to restore salmon. Director Susewind and workshop leaders highlighted classroom resources available for educators, including the [State of Salmon](#) unit plan for upper elementary students, which is aligned with Next Generation Science Standards.

This event gave educators the chance to connect directly with tribal members, WDFW leadership, and natural resource partners while exploring ways to bring salmon education and co-management into Washington classrooms.



New video series: big-game processing

WDFW's new [six-part video series](#) on big-game processing is designed to help hunters get started with processing wild game at home.

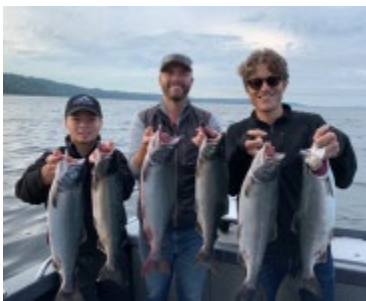
The series covers essential topics including setting up a workspace, selecting and sharpening knives, aging game meat, breaking down front and hind quarters, trimming cuts, grinding burger, and properly wrapping and storing meat to ensure the best results at the dinner table. Along the way, you'll also hear cooking suggestions for specific cuts that are sure to impress friends and family.

Refer to WDFW's [YouTube page](#) for more information.



Join us for National Hunting and Fishing Day

Celebrate National Hunting and Fishing Day in East Wenatchee on Saturday, Sept. 13, 2025! The fun will be at the North Central WA Gun Club with a variety of family-friendly activities, including rifle, shotgun, archery, air rifle, and arts and crafts. Volunteers are needed for event setup, cleanup, registration, vendor support, and assisting youth at activity stations. A Hunter Education field course will kick off the day from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. All are welcome—sign up for as much or as little time as you wish! For details or to volunteer, contact Nicholas Montanari at nicholas.montanari@dfw.wa.gov. The event runs from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. at 2740 Gun Club Road in East Wenatchee. Refer to the [WDFW website](#) for more information.



Think Pink Salmon

WDFW is putting a focus on pink salmon in Washington over the next several weeks with “Think Pink Salmon!” Both experienced and new anglers can learn all about this odd-year opportunity. The fishing highlights on myWDFW.org will feature informative blog posts all about pink salmon, and WDFW’s social media will also have some short videos and educational posts. The campaign continues into September as the salmon move from Puget Sound into local rivers.

Director’s Bulletins are also published [on WDFW’s Medium blog](#) and archived on the Director’s [webpage](#).