



Washington State Conservation Commission

Meeting Packet

January 15, 2026

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

Lacey, Washington

Our Mission:

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

WSSC Business Meeting
Lacey, Washington

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 contact Lori Gonzalez at lgonzalez@scc.wa.gov or call 711 relay service. All accommodation requests should be received no later than January 9, 2026, 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 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioner Roll Call Commissioner Introductions Guest Introductions Pledge of Allegiance Additions/Corrections to agenda items 	Chair Kearney

TIME	TAB	ITEM	LEAD
8:45 a.m.		Executive Director's Update	Director Thompson
8:55 a.m.	1.	Consent Agenda (<i>Action item</i>)	
		Public comment will be allowed <u>after</u> each presentation prior to adopting action. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per speaker.	
		a) Draft December 4, 2025, Business Meeting Minutes	Chair Kearney
9:05 a.m.	1.	District Operations (<i>Action items</i>)	
		Public comment will be allowed <u>after</u> each presentation prior to adopting action. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per speaker.	
		b) City of Poulsbo Annexation Request into Kitsap Conservation District Boundaries	Jean Fike
		c) Lewis Conservation District Mid-Term Supervisor Appointment	Comm. Blake
9:20 a.m.	1.	Programs (<i>Action items</i>)	
		Public comment will be allowed <u>after</u> each presentation prior to adopting action. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per speaker.	
		d) Appointment of New Member to the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Statewide Advisory Committee	Mike Poteet
		e) Farmland Protection & Land Access Application – Big Red Barn Farm (North Olympic Land Trust)	Hilary Aten
9:45 a.m.	2.	Legislative and Budget (<i>Information Only</i>)	
		a) Legislative Update	Dani Madrone
		b) 2027-2029 Decision Package Development	Kate Delavan

TIME	TAB	ITEM	LEAD
10:15 a.m.		BREAK – 15 minutes	
10:30 a.m.	2.	Partner Report <i>(Information Only)</i> c) Washington Association of Conservation Districts 2025 Resolutions	Ryan Baye
10:45 a.m.	2.	District Operations <i>(Information Only)</i> d) District Operations January Report	<i>Packet item only</i>
10:45 a.m.		Thurston Conservation District Virtual Tour	
11:30 a.m.	2.	Partner Updates <i>(Information Only)</i> e) Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) f) Washington Association of District Employees (WADE)	Heather Wendt/ Ryan Baye Craig Nelson / Sarah Moorehead
11:45 a.m.		Closing remarks - Adjourn	Chair Kearney

Please note the times listed above are estimated and may vary.

TAB 1

Regular Business Meeting ~

The Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission/SCC) met virtually as well as in-person on Thursday, December 4, 2025, in Airway Heights, Washington. Chair Larry Cochran called the meeting to order at 8:33 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 east region
Cherie Kearney, Vice-chair, Governor Appointee
Amy McKay, Washington Association of Conservation Districts
Brook Beeler, Department of Ecology
Dani Gelardi, Department of Agriculture (online)
Bill Blake, Elected west region (online)
Jim Kropf, Washington State University (online)
Katie Rose Allen, Department of Natural Resources (online)
Wade Troutman, Elected central region

A quorum was present.

COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT

James Thompson, Executive Director
Alicia McClendon, Administrative Assistant
Brian Cochran, Habitat and Monitoring Coord
Hilary Aten, Office of Farmland Preservation
Jessica Wilson, Chief Engagement Officer
Kate Delavan, Policy Director
Lori Gonzalez, Executive Assistant
Sarah Groth, Chief Financial Officer
Sarah Wilcox, Strategic Initiatives Manager
Tami Stubbs, Regional Manager

Additional staff are listed in the attachments.

PARTNERS REPRESENTED

Angie Reseland, Dept of Fish and Wildlife (online)
Nick Vira, USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Zorah Oppenheimer, WA Association of District Employees
Heather Wendt, WA Association of Conservation Districts
Ryan Baye, 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

The meeting was opened with Commissioner roll call taken by Lori Gonzalez. A quorum was present. Following roll call, introductions were made for guests attending both in person and online.

Chair Cochran asked for any additions or corrections to the agenda; none were offered.

CONSENT AGENDA

September 18, 2025 Draft Business Meeting Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Troutman to approve the Draft September 18, 2025, Business Meeting Minutes. Seconded by McKay. Motion carried.

Out of State Travel Approval

Motion by Commissioner McKay to approve the SCC executive director and a commission member to travel to San Antonio, Texas for the National Association of Conservation District's (NACD) 80th Annual Meeting, February 14-19 2026. Seconded by Commissioner Troutman. Motion carried.

COMMISSION OPERATIONS

Appointment of SCC Chair and Vice-chair

Motion by Commissioner McKay to appoint Commissioner Kearyne as Chair and Commissioner Troutman as Vice-chair of the State Conservation Commission for the next calendar year (2026). Seconded by Commissioner Beeler. Motion carried.

DISTRICT OPERATIONS

Kitsap Conservation District Election Certification

Motion by Commissioner Troutman to certify the Kitsap Conservation District's November 7, 2025, election. Seconded by Commissioner Beeler. Motion carried.

Chair Cochran adjourned the meeting at 10:55 a.m.

Zoom Registration Report
 December 4, 2025 Business Meeting
 Attendee Details

	First Name	Last Name		First Name	Last Name
1	Annie	Byerley	29	Dani	Gelardi
2	Alec	Sorensen	30	Dave	Hedrick
3	Joy	Garitone	31	Tom	Salzer
4	Mark	Craven	32	Jim	Kropf
5	Theodore	Alvarado	33	Elsa	Bowen
6	Karla	Heinitz	34	Amy	Martin
7	Bill	Eller	35	Brad	Bortner
8	B'Elanna	Rhodehamel	36	Dani	Madrone
9	Jenny	Coe	37	Allisa	Carlson
10	Gracie	Pearson	38	Rosa	Mendez
11	Kris	Neely	39	Anna	Lael
12	Angie	Reseland	40	Tova	Tillinghast
13	Lance	Frederick	41	Evan	Bauder
14	Jodi	Prout	42	Mike	Poteet
15	Katie Rose	Allen			
16	stuart	crane			
17	Craig	Nelson			
18	elayne	hovde-knudson			
19	Steve	Matsen			
20	Bill	Blake			
21	Paul	D'Agnolo			
22	nicole	boyes			
23	Ashley	Wood			
24	Karen	Hills			
25	Alicia	McClendon			
26	Jenni	Allen			
27	Rodney	Heit			
28	Margaret	McKeown			



Washington State Conservation Commission

Attachment B

Please Sign In

Conservation Commission Business Meeting
Thursday, December 4, 2025

	NAME	ENTITY/DISTRICT
1.	Sarah Wilcox	SCC
2.	Heather Wendt	WACD
3.	Kate Delavan	SCC
4.	Alicia McClendon	SCC
5.	Lori Gonzalez	SCC
6.	Sarah Groth	SCC
7.	James Thompson	SCC
8.	Mike Baden	SCC
9.	Tami Stubbs	SCC
10.	Megan Stewart	Asotin CCD
11.	Pauline Hagen	Stevens
12.	Scott Schibul	LCED
13.	Jan Thomas	CTD
14.	Hilary Aten	SCC
15.	Jessica Wilson	SCC

- 16. LARRY COCHRAN
- 17. Nikki Atkins
- 18. Zornh Oppenheimer Clark CD
- 19. Josh Larsen Whitman CD
- 20. NICK VIRA NRCS
- 21. Brad Riehl Asotia CD
- 22. Jennifer Boire Palouse CD
- 23. Dean Helle Stevens County CD
- 24. Becca Hebron Foster Creek CD
- 25. Brian Cochran WSCE
- 26. Loren Meagher CKCD
- 27. Lance Brender Cascadia CD
- 28. Steve Matsen EKCD
- 29. Brian Muesse Palouse CD
- 30. Mike Totsia NYCD
- 31. Joe Holtrop JCCD
- 32. Ryan Williams Cascadia CD
- 33. Area 3 Chapman WMedcon CD
- 34. Sarah Gowan SCC
- Wade Trout WSCE

January 15, 2026

TO: Conservation Commissioners
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Jean Fike, Puget Sound Regional Manager

SUBJECT: Approval of Poulsbo Petition for Inclusion Within the Kitsap
Conservation District

Action Item	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Informational Item	<input type="checkbox"/>

Summary

The City of Poulsbo and the Kitsap Conservation District request the Commission's approval for the inclusion of Poulsbo within the boundaries of the Kitsap Conservation District.

Background

The City of Poulsbo has approved a petition to be included within the boundaries of the Kitsap Conservation District. The District and City, pursuant to RCW 89.08 and established procedure have submitted the Petition for Inclusion of Additional Territory Within the Kitsap Conservation District, included in your meeting packet. The Board of Supervisors of the Kitsap Conservation District has approved this petition. Approval by the Conservation Commission is also required and is requested here.

Requested Action:

I formally request on behalf of the Kitsap Conservation District and the City of Poulsbo that the Commission approve the Petition for Inclusion of Additional Territory Within the Kitsap Conservation District.

Staff Contacts:

- Jean Fike, Puget Sound Regional Manager, JFike@SCC.wa.gov 360-764-0533

Washington State Conservation Commission
Olympia, Washington 98504

PETITION FOR INCLUSION OF ADDITIONAL TERRITORY
WITHIN THE
KITSAP CONSERVATION DISTRICT

TO: The Washington State Conservation Commission

Pursuant to the Conservation Districts Law (Chapter 89.08 RCW) the undersigning government authorities of the City of Poulsbo and the Kitsap Conservation District, respectfully represent:

First: That heretofore the Kitsap Conservation District was duly organized as a governmental subdivision of this state, and a public body corporate and politic.

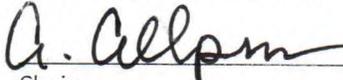
Second: That there is need, in the interest of the public health, safety, and welfare, for the inclusion of the territory hereinafter described within the said Kitsap Conservation District.

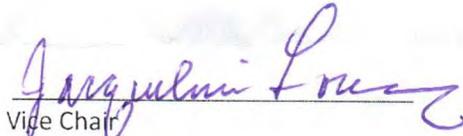
Third: That the territory proposed for inclusion within the said district includes substantially the following:

Incorporated City of Poulsbo

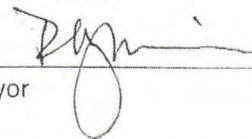
WHEREFORE, the undersigned petitioners respectfully request that the State Conservation Commission duly define the boundaries of the additional territory; and that the State Conservation Commission determine that such additional territory be so included and made a part of the Kitsap Conservation District.

Kitsap Conservation District


Chair


Vice Chair

City of Poulsbo


Mayor

Attest:


City Clerk

Date: 11/10/25



January 15, 2026

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Alicia McClendon, Administrative Assistant

SUBJECT: Lewis Conservation District Mid-Term Appointment

Action Item

Informational Item

Background and Summary:

The SCC received one application for a mid-term appointment on the Lewis Conservation District Board of Supervisors.

The application was sent to all Commission members for their review prior to the January 15th business meeting. 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, including conducting an interview with the candidate listed below and contacting references.

Requested Action:

A recommendation for the appointment will be given by the western area elected commission member for SCC approval at the January 15, 2026 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>
Lewis	Vacant	1. Robert Russell	Josh Giuntoli

Staff Contact:

Alicia McClendon, amcclendon@scc.wa.gov and Josh Giuntoli, jgiuntoli@scc.wa.gov

January 15, 2026

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 one opening for a member representing agricultural organizations. SCC staff received a nomination and endorsement from The Agricultural Coalition on behalf of Washington Agriculture, a collective of 11 distinct industry organizations and associations, to appoint Ben Buchholz, co-owner of Buchholz Farms and founder of Buchholz & Associates, LLC, to the vacant position.

SCC's Executive Director, Policy Director, and VSP Coordinator interviewed Mr. Buchholz in December 2025 to vet the nominee before presenting his nomination to the Commission for appointment to the SAC. This nomination is in response to the unexpected resignation of Member Dan Wood (WA State Dairy Federation), to whom the Commission and VSP would like to express gratitude and appreciation for his many years of commitment to the Program and the work of voluntary conservation.

Requested Action:

The Voluntary Stewardship Program requests the Commission appoint Ben Buchholz to the Statewide Advisory Committee to serve out the remainder of the two-year term (through May 10, 2017) for one of the positions representing agricultural organizations, 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 an opening for one member representing agricultural organizations. The VSP team continues to prioritize filling vacant positions on the SAC while reviews of counties' ten-year reports are underway.

SCC's Executive Director, Policy Director, and VSP Coordinator interviewed Ben Buchholz in December 2025 to vet the nominee before presenting his nomination to the Commission for appointment to the SAC. Ben grew up in Prosser on the family tree fruit orchard. He is the fourth-generation farm owner alongside his dad. The family owns and operates a second farm in Wapato that has been in the family since 1927. In total, the family farms over 100 acres of tree fruit and alfalfa. In late 2005, Ben founded Buchholz and Associates LLC, to advocate for agricultural and energy clients on legislative and regulatory matters in Washington state.

Ben and his wife Teresa have two daughters, ages 5 and 2. The family loves spending time boating on Lake Washington, hiking the Horse Heaven Hills, and taking care of their cattle, goats, and chickens. Ben and his family enjoy splitting their time between the farms and the big city.

Ben holds a degree in Political Science from the University of Washington. His farm background and his experiences working with a variety of agricultural interests, state governmental agencies, and elected leaders afford him a unique perspective at the interface between policy and stewardship. He is looking forward to serving on the SAC to help make VSP a successful program across the state and believes that farmers are the best stewards of the land they work.

Recommended Action and Options:

The VSP Coordinator, SCC Policy Director, and SCC Director recommend Ben Buchholz be appointed to the VSP SAC.

**Should Mr. Buchholz 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

January 15, 2026

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

FROM: Hilary Aten, Office of Farmland Preservation Coordinator

SUBJECT: Request for Authorization – FPLA Big Red Barn Farm Application

Action Item

Informational Item

Summary

The Farmland Protection and Land Access (FPLA) program received an application from North Olympic Land Trust (NOLT) to fund acquisition of a conservation easement on the Big Red Barn Farm property in Clallam County. The FPLA Working Group reviewed the project and unanimously 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 revolving loan program of the Washington State Housing Finance Commission (WSHFC). 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).

The FarmPAI and FPLA programs were designed and launched to fill a critical gap in resources and tools available to protect highly threatened farmland in Washington state. As the rates of family farms retiring without a successor continue to increase, more and more farm properties are vulnerable to imminent conversion as those properties transition ownership and become available to non-farm buyers. At the same time, the increasing cost of farmland across the state serves as a critical barrier to young, beginning, or expanding farm businesses seeking land, but unable to purchase at the unprotected, speculative land values. These market dynamics are evidenced in the 2022 USDA Agricultural Census data, which shows these trends increasing across most counties statewide.

FarmPAI and FPLA were launched to enable eligible conservation entities to act in circumstances where critical agricultural resource lands are at imminent threat of conversion out of agricultural use. Through financing provided by WSHFC, eligible conservation entities can purchase fee title to a highly threatened farm property,

then work with FPLA to secure a perpetual conservation easement on the property, protecting it for agriculture in perpetuity. The FPLA easement also serves the purpose of reducing the property cost (by extinguishing the speculative development value) for the next generation farmer buyer, helping young, beginning, and expanding farms access land affordably for their operations. Once the easement is in place, the conservation entity can sell the property to a new farmer owner, and repay the WSHFC FarmPAI loan with the proceeds of the easement and property sale.

Since FPLA was launched in the 2022 supplemental capital budget, the program has permanently protected 5 farms, for a total of 667 acres of priority agricultural lands across 5 counties. An additional 3 farms totaling 194 acres in 2 counties are under FPLA contract to close by the end of 2026. Example projects that have been successfully supported by FarmPAI and FPLA include the Torres Dairy in Grays Harbor County, the Beaver Valley Farm in Jefferson County, and the Schmid Farm in Klickitat County.

Project Overview

The Big Red Barn Farm property is a 135-acre farm at imminent risk of sale and potential conversion to 27 residential lots. The farm is located in a priority agricultural area north of Sequim, Washington on the Olympic Peninsula. Comprised of 100% prime agricultural soils and with well-maintained agricultural infrastructure and active irrigation shares, the property has been in agricultural operation for at least 115 years. The property has irrigation shares from the Dungeness Irrigation Company and two irrigation pipes running north to south and west to east on the property that serves all the available lots. The farm also includes a 14,000 square foot barn, a shed, two silos, and farm equipment.

For the past 40 years, the property has been leased for production of row crops, brassica seed, cattle, and hay. The current tenant farmer on the property intends to continue leasing and operating on the property, should NOLT be successful in acquiring the property and securing the agricultural conservation easement with FPLA.

Protection of the Big Red Barn Farm was identified by NOLT as the top local conservation priority under their recent 2024 Farmland Conservation Strategy Update, given the farm's location, agricultural values, threat of conversion, and anticipated climate resilience. In 2021, North Olympic Land Trust and Jefferson Land Trust completed a study identifying quality working farmland projected to remain productive in our changing climate. In this analysis, the Big Red Barn Farm was identified as a priority farm to protect for its likelihood to retain robust productive capacity for food and fiber and continuance of adequate water supplies. In addition, the farm is adjacent to two other agricultural conservation easements held by the Land Trust: Jane's Farm and Plowsong Farm. With an easement on Big Red Barn Farm, a block of approximately 200 acres of high priority farmland will be contiguously protected.

NOLT's wholly-owned subsidiary, Olympic Peninsula Conservation Resources, LLC, purchased the fee title of the Big Red Barn Farm property on December 31, 2025, with financing from FarmPAI. Having secured the FarmPAI loan, in November 2025 NOLT applied for funding to secure an FPLA easement on the property. The FPLA Work Group reviewed the easement funding application at their December 11, 2025 meeting.

Given the high appraised value of land in the Sequim/Clallam County local market, and the significant number of development rights on the property, the easement is estimated to be of significant value. The final purchase price of the easement will be established by a third-party fair market value appraisal and appraisal review before funding is released, as required under the FPLA Program Guidelines. In order to address the anticipated easement cost, NOLT's application to FPLA includes proposed third-party funding (including funding from the Recreation & Conservation Office and Clallam County Conservation Futures) to leverage FPLA's funding. Together, these three funding sources will be used to protect the full 135-acre property in perpetuity. FPLA's

funding will be used for the first phase of the easement acquisition, removing development rights from approximately half of the full property by the end of 2026.

Discussion

The threat of conversion to the Big Red Barn Farm property is imminent. The current landowner shared with NOLT their intent to sell for development if the Land Trust was not able to purchase the property by the end of 2025. The property was grandfathered into Agricultural Retention zoning with 27 pre-existing 5-acre legal lots, all with water and site access from regional and local arterials. Current County code allowances could allow up to 54 new residences on the farm property. Sequim is experiencing a strong residential development market due to the area's drier climate within the Olympic Rain Shadow and lower costs of living compared with areas along the I-5 corridor. The growth of retirement housing in Sequim in particular has driven local farmland conversion and fragmentation. The area has seen a decrease of over 75% of its farmland since the 1940s. Failure to secure the conservation easement on the Big Red Barn Farm property will leave the property vulnerable to imminent residential conversion.

Once the easement is secured, NOLT intends to continue the existing lease to the current operator through 2032, in alignment with the tenant's retirement plan. The current operator does not qualify as a historically underserved producer according to the FPLA Program Guidelines. Once the current tenant retires, NOLT intends to market the property for sale through a transparent application and review process, which will include outreach to historically underserved producers, including young or beginning, veteran, socially disadvantaged, and limited resource farmers and ranchers in accordance with the Program Guidelines.

Finally, the acquisition of an FPLA easement on the Big Red Barn Farm will provide opportunity for natural resource enhancements and investments on the property. The easement deed on the property will require Farm Plans to be created for all operations on the property. Permeable surfaces will be limited under the easement to protect aquifer recharge, a key consideration for this property. The property also falls along a corridor that is important to key pollinators and birds that readily use fields as forage and habitat, including Trumpeter Swans and the Western Bumble Bee. Farm plans can describe practices to provide refuge for these species and to support their lifecycles. Current cover cropping practices to prevent soil erosion will also continue.

Next Steps or Recommendations

The FPLA Work Group unanimously recommended approval of NOLT's Big Red Barn Farm application for funding as submitted. The proposed FPLA easement and funding would leverage additional public funding to remove the remaining development rights from the 135-acre Big Red Barn Farm property.

Proposed authorization language:

"The Conservation Commission accepts the FPLA Work Group's recommendation regarding North Olympic Land Trust's Big Red Barn Farm application. The Conservation Commission approves up to \$2,678,000 in FPLA funding to North Olympic Land Trust for the acquisition of an agricultural conservation easement on the Big Red Barn Farm property owned by Olympic Peninsula Conservation Resources, LLC. 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

January 15, 2026

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, Executive Director

FROM: Dani Madrone, Legislative Director

SUBJECT: 2026 Legislative Session Update

Action Item

Informational Item

Summary:

This update takes place during the first week of the 2026 legislative session. This year, the Legislature will adopt a supplemental budget, consider legislation introduced last year that did not meet cutoff deadlines, and introduce new legislation. This presentation will focus on bills that SCC is currently tracking, an update on the process for state budget, and our activities to engage with legislators and the Governor's Office.

Staff Contact:

Dani Madrone, Legislative Director, dmadrone@scc.wa.gov, 564-250-2677

Background and Discussion:

The 2026 legislative session begins on January 12 and ends on March 12. SCC has been meeting with legislators to share agency priorities, tracking bills that impact SCC and conservation districts, and engaging in regular meetings with the Governor's Office and legislative staff at other agencies.

SCC's priorities for the budget include funding for the Forest Health and Community Wildfire Resiliency program, Conservation Technical Assistance, and the Business and Technology Transformation IT request. None of these decision packages were included in the Governor's budget, and we also see limited proposed reductions. The legislature is currently facing an estimated \$4.5 billion shortfall for the four-year budget period. With exemptions to the state law that typically requires a 4-year balanced budget, the Governor has proposed a balanced budget for the 2025-27 biennium. This was reached through ending tax loopholes, pulling back unspent funds, reductions, and tapping the rainy day fund. The Legislature will consider the Governor's budget as they craft their own proposal, with a new revenue forecast due by February 20.

As legislative session is quickly approaching, limited information on bills is available at the time of writing this memo. More information will be shared on bills we are currently tracking during the presentation at the Commission meeting.

Next Steps:

The next Commission meeting will occur in mid-March after the conclusion of the 2026 legislative session. At that time, there will be another update to share the results of our legislative efforts and the next steps to prepare for the 2027 session.

January 15, 2026

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, Executive Director

FROM: Kate Delavan, Director of Policy and Intergovernmental Affairs

SUBJECT: 2027-29 Decision Package Development Process

Action Item

Informational Item

Summary:

This memo outlines a plan for identifying and requesting Commissioner approval of 2027-29 decision packages. SCC's primary objective is to develop decision packages that accurately represent the needs of SCC, conservation districts, and other partners served by SCC programs while recognizing the fiscal constraints and political realities of the state budget. To achieve this, SCC seeks to ensure Commissioners, conservation districts, and SCC staff have the opportunity to inform the process each step along the way.

Staff Contact:

Kate Delavan, Director of Policy and Intergovernmental Affairs, kdelavan@scc.wa.gov, 360-280-6486

Background and Discussion:

To be well prepared for the next biennial budget, SCC is getting an early start on planning for 2027-29 decision packages. Decision packages, also known as budget requests, are the formal process for an agency to communicate their budget needs to the Governor's Office and Legislature. SCC's decision packages are jointly developed with conservation districts to reflect the needs of our local conservation delivery system.

SCC expects decision packages will be due to the Governor's Office and the Office of Financial Management (OFM) mid-September 2026. Conservation districts told SCC that the process for developing the 2026 supplemental budget went well. Developing our decision packages for the next biennial budget will be a more extensive process. Building on the positive momentum from the previous process, SCC staff are starting conservation district and Commissioner engagement even

earlier this year. SCC will need to evaluate the collective needs of conservation districts and all SCC programs.

SCC Leadership has developed a structured process to understand agency and conservation districts needs through facilitated conversations, written communication, and survey tools. The goal is to ensure Commissioners and conservation districts are involved from the very first step in the process. Staff have organized and summarized the process into three component parts: Commissioner meetings and approvals, conservation district engagement, and SCC staff engagement.

Staff propose the following timeline and activities to prepare for submission to OFM in mid-September 2026:

- **Commission Business Meetings and Approvals**
 - January 15, 2026: Brief Commissioners on proposed process.
 - March 19, 2026: Seek Commissioner approval of decision package topics.
 - May 21, 2026: No action or discussion necessary unless needed to seek approval on an emergent topic.
 - July 16, 2026: Seek Commissioner approval of final package topics, not-to-exceed amounts, and prioritization of decision packages.
- **Conservation District Engagement**
 - February – June 2026: Collect information from conservation districts regarding budget needs through facilitated conversations and survey tools (exact tools are still to be determined)
 - February 9, 2026: Hybrid meeting “Funding Locally-led Conservation: Preparing for the Next Biennial Budget” in Olympia and online.
 - February: Survey tool to capture needs across CDs.
 - March – June: Virtual meetings as needed to seek additional input and keep districts informed.
 - July-August 2026: Conservation district input on and review of decision package content.
- **SCC Staff Engagement**
 - January – February: Discuss process, structure, and expectations with program staff. Capture current understanding of program needs and identify areas where more information is needed.
 - February – July: Keep staff informed and engage with program managers on specific requests.

Next Steps:

SCC is hosting a hybrid meeting in Olympia called “Funding Locally-led Conservation: Preparing for the Next Biennial Budget” to gather early input from conservation districts on budget development for the next biennium. SCC will seek Commissioner approval of decision package topics for the 2027-29 budget from Commissioners at the March Commission meeting.

January 15, 2026

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, SCC Executive Director

FROM: Ryan Baye, WACD Director of Legislative & Membership Services

SUBJECT: 2025 WACD Resolutions

Action Item

Informational Item

Summary:

The Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) held its 2025 Annual Meeting on December 3, and among the outcomes were the adoption of new policy goals and position statements. These items, known as “resolutions”, originated from individual conservation districts and were ultimately approved by the membership.

Several resolutions either name the Washington State Conservation Commission as a partner in new projects or seek to address identified concerns with SCC programs and priorities. By briefing the SCC on these new membership priorities, WACD hopes to facilitate additional engagement with SCC Commissioners and staff.

Background and Discussion:

WACD develops its priorities through the resolution process, with items originating with member-districts and resulting in the association’s membership making the final decision on adding new resolutions. The WACD Board of Directors then works to implement these resolutions over a five-year period.

This year, resolutions were adopted on several topics related to the Conservation Commission:

- Releasing the results of the CREP audit done by USDA
- Clarifying CREP agency responsibilities
- Adopting shellfish aquaculture eligible practices
- Explicitly defining the paramount duty of the Conservation Commission
- Declaring March 17th as “Washington Conservation District Day”
- Re-stating WACD’s support for the findings of the Joint Committee on Elections

Next Steps:

Following this briefing of the SCC Commissioners, WACD staff will analyze the 2025 adopted resolutions to best determine how to accomplish the stated objectives of the membership, with recommendations from the WACD Ways & Means Committee. The WACD Board of Directors, and the Executive Director, will then seek to engage with SCC in the coming months on the resolutions that concern SCC programs and priorities.

2025 WACD Adopted Resolutions

Resolution	Title	Sponsoring District
2025-01	Resolution to Release Full CREP Audit Results to Washington State Conservation Districts and the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC)	Skagit CD
<p>NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that WACD will send a letter requesting that the Farm Service Agency (FSA), in coordination with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC), shall release the full results of the recent CREP audit to all Washington State conservation districts and to WSCC, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) County-level summaries of audit findings; 2) Conservation district-specific summaries for each of Washington’s 45 districts; 3) Watershed-level data, such as HUC-8 or an equivalent scale; 4) Statewide summary tables that report: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Total CREP acreage reviewed, b) Total acreage lost or removed from the program, and c) Primary causes of acreage loss (e.g., failed replanting, voluntary withdrawal, enforcement, land use change). <p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Washington State Conservation Districts collectively and respectfully request that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All data shall be released in accessible, machine-readable formats (e.g., Excel, CSV), with clear metadata and documentation to support interpretation and use at the local level; • Where feasible, data shall include contract identifiers or anonymized references to support district-level follow-up and planning for technical assistance; • The full audit dataset shall be released within 60 days of the adoption of this resolution to ensure that conservation districts and WSCC can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and respond to regional and ecological trends, • Improve the implementation of CREP practices, • Support transparent communications with landowners, • Participate in the ongoing redesign and improvement of the CREP program. <p>BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Washington State Conservation Districts collectively and respectfully request that access to complete and localized audit data will empower conservation partners to make informed decisions, strengthen the conservation delivery system, and improve long-term outcomes for riparian restoration, habitat conservation, and water quality throughout Washington State.</p>		

2025-02	Resolution to Clarify Agency Responsibilities under the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)	Skagit CD
<p>NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that WACD will send a letter to the agencies below requesting the formation of a workgroup:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting Director (FSA), • Roylene Comes-At-Night (NRCS), • James Thompson (WSCC), <p>or their successors, to define and clarify agency roles and responsibilities under CREP.</p> <p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Washington State Conservation Districts collectively and respectfully request that the workgroup consider shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consult existing CREP agreements, federal and state program guidance, and partner feedback to inform decisions; 2. Regularly solicit feedback from CD technical staff during the clarification process and incorporate this feedback into recommendations; 3. Explicitly define: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Which agency(ies) is responsible for the technical workload in CREP; b. Whether FSA will accept technical products prepared by CD staff, including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Status Reviews, ii. Form 848s, iii. New and revised CPOs, iv. MCM prescriptions; c. Whether FSA will accept such products without NRCS signature when completed by CD staff with delegated JAA; d. Whether FSA will reinitiate consultation with NMFS to renew conservation measures for salmonids and update its CREP Biological Opinion; e. What formal recourse is available when CD staff disagree with FSA decisions; f. Whether FSA or NRCS can make CREP eligibility or compliance determinations without visiting the site; g. Whether FSA staff must respond within a defined timeframe to CD, NRCS, or landowner inquiries once deadlines have been imposed. <p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Washington State Conservation Districts collectively and respectfully request that the workgroup shall produce a Written Guidance Document outlining the clarified roles and responsibilities of CDs and partner agencies in the current CREP structure, to be distributed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FSA County Offices, • NRCS Field Offices, and • All Washington State Conservation Districts. <p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Washington State Conservation Districts collectively and respectfully request that the workgroup shall recommend policy revisions to ensure flexibility for CDs, allowing conservation districts to decline to provide technical products or conservation plans without penalizing the landowner or affecting CREP eligibility when the district:</p>		

- Lacks staffing capacity,
- Cannot technically support the proposed practice, or
- Cannot ethically or legally sign off on the plan.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Washington State Conservation Districts collectively and respectfully request that:

- The workgroup shall convene within 30 days of this resolution’s adoption;
- A draft guidance document and policy recommendations shall be completed within 60 days;
- Final guidance and implementation shall be approved and released within 90 days.

2025-03	Shellfish Aquaculture Practices	Pacific
----------------	--	----------------

WACD staff will engage with WSCC leadership and advocate for supporting shellfish aquaculture practices and programs through the creation of a workgroup to:

1. Expand the list of eligible practices based on the initial recommendation from the 2025 Recommendations for Supporting Shellfish Aquaculture
2. Specifically, look at adding blue carbon practices to the SFF Program.

2025-04	Evaluating Impacts to Agricultural Viability	Ferry
----------------	---	--------------

WACD will form a committee to work with the WSCC to define ag viability and to develop or identify a simple, trackable metric that would rate the impact an SCC funded project would have on agricultural viability. The committee could be comprised of conservation districts, state agencies, and other entities as determined by WACD. The system could be adopted across agencies and used to evaluate legislative actions. The rating may or may not be used in deciding if a project would be funded.

2025-05	CRP Mid-contract Mowing	South Douglas
----------------	--------------------------------	----------------------

WACD will send a letter requesting that FSA and NRCS consider bio weed control, and other emerging science, in farm plans and recommend less disruptive practices for mid-contract CRP maintenance.

2025-06	State CREP Agreement	Asotin County
----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

Request WACD work with WSCC to create a task force that includes Conservation Districts to review the current Washington State CREP agreement, identify problems and opportunities, and propose modifications to be presented to the Washington State Legislature, Governor’s office and USDA.

2025-07	Protecting Agriculture	Ferry
----------------	-------------------------------	--------------

WACD will actively support legislation that requires public entities to analyze the impact to agriculture and agricultural viability when enacting legislation and policies. . This would involve engaging legislators, agencies, NGOs, the public, and conservation districts to promote the benefits that this information and legislation would provide.

2025-09	Conservation Commission’s Paramount Duty	Okanogan
----------------	---	-----------------

The WACD President, serving as an Ex-Officio voting member of the Conservation Commission, shall introduce and promote a policy change, until it is approved, that reaffirms the Commission’s paramount duty to design and manage policies and programs—at both the Commission board and staff levels—that enable conservation districts to carry out locally developed and administered programs with maximum efficiency for the districts, placing district needs above the Commission’s own operational convenience.

2025-10	Legislatively Recognized Conservation District Day	Okanogan
WACD shall work with the Washington State Legislature and the Governor’s Office to enact legislation that adds March 17, Washington Conservation District Day to the official list of “legislatively recognized days” in 1.16.050 RCW.		
2025-11	Sustainable District Funding	Okanogan
WACD will develop a preferred option and an implementation strategy for the Association’s consideration at the 2026 WACD Annual Meeting.		
2025-12	Support ENABLE Conservation Act	Foster Creek
We request that WACD and NACD support SAFE Acres that are not subject to the County and National CRP cap in any ongoing legislation dealing with the Food Security Act of 1985.		
2025-13	Supervisor Elections	Pacific
<p>WACD will support the recommendations put forth by the Joint Committee on Elections. In addition, WACD will actively oppose any legislation, policy, or other proposals to place the elections of CD Supervisors under the 29A election process without the authorization of the individual conservation district. WACD will oppose any requirement for all CD supervisors to submit personal financial affairs statements through the F1 form.</p> <p>This would involve engaging legislators, agencies, NGO’s, the public, and CDs to promote the current CD supervision election process and to oppose a mandate requiring all CDs to hold elections through the Title 29A election process.</p>		

January 15, 2026

TO: Conservation Commission Members
James Thompson, Executive Director

FROM: Mike Baden, NE Regional Manager

SUBJECT: District Operations and Regional Managers Report

Action Item	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informational Item	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Report Summary:

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

District Operations

Conservation district operations encompass a wide range of activities necessary for legal compliance and efficient management, many of which are outlined in the [Conservation Accountability and Performance Program \(CAPP\)](#). CAPP communications with CDs will begin in the first quarter of 2026 with a preliminary report at the May Commission Meeting and a final report scheduled for the July Commission meeting.

Regional Managers continue to support Conservation Districts (CDs) in onboarding and initiating grant activities in the current biennium. This support has included timely reminders, assistance with questions and issue resolution, and guidance on preparing addenda and amendments.

Regional Managers continue to support CDs during the current election cycle. RMs send regular reminders to CDs to monitor important dates and deadlines for their elections. Elections will occur January through March 2026.

The Regional Manager team collaborated with MRSC and WACD to organize training sessions that were conducted at the WACD Annual Meeting. Planned topics include the Open Public Meetings Act, Public Records requirements, and the Municipal Ethics Act.

SCC coordinates regularly with the State Auditor's office. A brief report on CD audits that were

published in 2025 will be included in the District Operations memo for the March Commission meeting.

Regional Managers continue to provide ongoing support to districts by offering guidance, resources, and assistance with day-to-day operational matters. This includes troubleshooting and problem-solving in areas such as financial management, risk management, human resources, governance, and board dynamics.

Commission Operations & Program Administration

Regional Managers work closely with SCC finance and program staff in the administration of grant funding as well as participate in the ongoing Ombuds group work.

Partnerships & Partnering Assistance

The Regional Manager team provides ongoing assistance with partnering, or participated in partner and relationship building efforts, with individual CDs, WADE, PSCD Caucus, Center for Technical Development, WACD, DNR, Ecology, WDFW, 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.

Allisa Carlson has been working closely with WDFW on the implementation of WSRRI funding. Twenty-five fencing and 12 habitat restoration proposals were received in October, including several submitted by conservation districts. Review committees have convened, and the WSRRI steering committee has approved 9 wildlife-friendly fencing and 4 habitat restoration projects for this round. All fencing funds have been allocated at this time, and it is anticipated that a second solicitation for habitat restoration projects will open in early 2026.

Regional Managers have been collaborating with fiscal staff and NRCS in a number of areas, including agreements for task orders, a shared training coordinator, and a shared RCPP easement liaison. In the coming months, RMs will coordinate with NRCS on preparations for 2026 local work groups.

SCC participation and partnership with the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) is ongoing. 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).

On November 20, the Department of Ecology released the Draft State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) EIS on the proposed Flood Retention Expandable (FRE) facility proposed by the Chehalis River Basin Flood Control Zone District. A public comment period will run for 75 days, and a Final SEPA EIS is expected to be completed by early 2026; however, this is subject to change based on the public comment period outcomes.

Completed under the SEPA, the revised draft state environmental assessment is not a permit, nor does it approve or deny the Flood District's proposal. Instead, it assesses how the project would impact the area, providing critical information for decision-makers, like the Board, to consider as they evaluate options for the long-term Chehalis Basin Strategy.

The Board is also considering several options for large-scale flood damage reduction, including a proposed system of local levees and floodwalls in and around Centralia and Chehalis, also known as the "Local Actions Non-Dam Alternative", or LAND. Board members will decide which projects to move forward after their independent analysis is complete in 2026.

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)
- NRCS Task Orders
- Professional Engineering



Washington Association of Conservation Districts



January 2026 Partner Report

ADVOCACY

Resolutions Adopted at the WACD Annual Meeting

The twelve resolutions adopted by the membership at the 2025 Annual Business Meeting are now included in the [**Resolution Tracker**](#) on the WACD Website. The WACD Ways and Means Committee will start meeting in January to put together a recommendation for the Board on which active resolutions are actionable and achievable in the short and near term.

February 10th Legislative Day

Each year, WACD organizes a Legislative Day in Olympia to help coordinate district engagement with the legislative process. For 2026, our Legislative Day will be February 10th. You can find a schedule, hotel information, and more on our [**Advocacy Page**](#).

WACD Legislative Services

During the session in Olympia, WACD offers support for each conservation district to engage with the legislative process. Districts can subscribe to our [**Legislative Newsletter**](#) for weekly updates, utilize available educational material, or simply reach out to a WACD staff member.

New in 2026, WACD will be hosting a **Legislative Check-In** every Monday at Noon for districts to interact face-to-face (virtually speaking). You can read more on the Advocacy section on the [**HUB**](#).

UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

- January 26, 2026 – WACD Board Meeting
- February 9, 2026 – SCC’s Funding Locally-led Conservation: Preparing for the Next Biennial Budget
- February 10, 2026 – WACD Legislative Day
- February 19, 2026 – State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
- February 23, 2026– WACD Board Meeting

NEW WACD OFFICERS ELECTED

Congratulations and welcome to the newest WACD Officers.

- Secretary - Elizabeth Bella (Underwood CD)
- Treasurer - Cyndi Schaeffer (Snohomish CD)
- National Director - Heather Smith (Grays Harbor CD)

OPERATIONS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

- The WACD Board of Directors will hold a **Board Meeting** on January 26th. Information on the meeting can be found [here](#).
- As we reflect on the conference, we are already thinking about how we can improve next year's event. WACD asks for your participation in a quick **survey** so we can improve the experience for 2026 at Skamania Lodge, December 3rd - 5th. The survey is designed to be anonymous. WACD staff are also available if you want a longer discussion.
- For those who weren't able to attend the WACD Conference or participate online, many of our session recordings are now available on the 2025 **Annual Conference webpage**.
- In case you missed it, here is a recap of this year's **WACD award winners**:
 - Conservation District of the Year - Kittitas County CD
 - Eugene Scholz Outstanding Supervisor Award - Jed Holmes (Skagit CD)
 - Associate Supervisor of the Year - Teri Jo Summer-Reiger (Whidbey Island CD)
 - Wayne Reid "Young Tiger" Award - Heather Smith (Grays Harbor CD)
 - Professional Service Award - Ryan Gelwicks (Skagit CD)
 - Special Service Award - Alan Chapman (Whatcom CD)
 - Vim Wright "Building Bridges" Award - Sarah Moorehead (Thurston CD)
 - Wildlife Steward of the Year - Riverbend Ranch (Tenino, WA)
 - President's Award - Doug Rushton (Thurston CD)
 - President's Award - Jim Brown (WACD PMC)

PLANT MATERIALS CENTER

- The **2025 growing season** at the PMC is going well. According to field inventories, there are approximately 3,092,000 plants composed of over 70 species currently in production at the PMC. Of that total, over 2,000,000 plants are for this year, and the rest are in production for next year as 2-0's. That includes seedlings, transplants, contract plants, and live stakes. Current production is 22.5 acres. Add to that the 6.5 acres of new seedbed planted this fall and an additional 9 acres for spring planting, resulting in 38 acres under cultivation.
- After 28 years, Director of Nursery Operations **Jim Brown** has decided that the time has come to shift some focus to other things. He continues to work for 1 day a week to help with the transition, as well as help at other times when needed. John Knox was promoted to Nursery Manager, and a new Assistant Nursery Manager, Zinny Hansen, was hired.
- A seasonal crew of 24 **started harvest** on December 1st. Over the course of approximately 14 weeks, over 1.5 million plants will be harvested, sorted, graded, packaged, and placed into cold storage before shipping out.
- Mark **February 7th** on your calendar because that is the day the TV show Washington Grown will first air episode 6 of season 13, which will include their visit to the PMC.