SCC- CD Roundtable Notes 4.10.25

SCC Leadership Remarks – James Thompson

- VSP Meeting, Moses Lake
  - Went great, kudos to Mike and Victoria
  - A lot of feedback from conservation districts, very informative and time well spent
- Governor's Office
  - Natural resources cabinet meeting – waiting to see what happens
- May Commission Meeting
  - Dense agenda, covering comments on the programs we put out for public comment
  - Very much looking forward to hearing comments on the Grants Manual, please weigh in on that. We want participation.
    - Grants Manual Public Comment Open: https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/WASCC/bulletins/3d6399d
- WADE
  - Several staff providing presentations
  - All CDs meeting the day after WADE in Leavenworth

Legislative Updates –Dani Madrone

Last Friday, James sent summary table of 25-27 budget, includes what we requested, Gov Inslee & Gov Ferguson proposals, and House and Senate proposals. Legislative budget proposals released

- FHCWR a big area of focus, House maintained $4m, but Senate dropped to $2.5m. Senate Republicans proposed $0. A lot of dynamics between the parties and chambers. Top line item to discuss for Dani, so legislators understand the impact of underfunded programs. Had well-received discussions with Senate on moving funds into capital budget but did not see that reflected in the proposed budgets.

- Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee asked for presentation, and Dani presented on FHCWR to show the work that CDs do and impacts of reduced funding. Chapman and Schoesler are on that committee. Not sure of outcome based on that, but continuing to do what we can to raise awareness. Link to presentation: https://app.leg.wa.gov/committeeschedules/Home/Document/286872#toolbar=0&navpanes=0

- Current effort – big cuts in Senate budget vs House. Trying to figure out how to meet in the middle. Can live with RGP cuts to an extent, but not for FHCWR. Advocating to see what we can do for this program.

- Communicated concerns with Owen Rowe, Senior Policy Advisor Natural Resources, Governor's Office.

- Also working in partnership with WACD, who is communicating concern, including through lobbyist Brynn Brady.

- HB1168 Wildfire Account, created in 2021, $125m each biennium, but seeing reduced funding for this program as well. Seeing that there will be a balance carryover from current biennium. Perception of this could be affecting other programs and lack of prioritization, including ours. But is still tough to pin down why this isn't a priority. Article in Seattle Times, reports that decision makers are focusing on fighting fires now and will focus on preventative work in the future.

  - Q: Is funding for SCC's FHCWR coming from DNR account?

    - A different account, it is SCC's own program (in operating).

  - Q: Is there concern about overlap or duplication of effort between agencies?

- Haven’t specifically heard this but think there is a need to message this. Stressing importance of districts having dedicated funding.
- Think we need to do better; program managers should talk about the synergy of what DNR is doing and what CDs are doing and how it creates a complete package. Maybe CD managers can discuss this and come up with a message. Dani asked Brandy to send messaging, things are moving so fast and furious so any details like that would be helpful. Dani can share slides from committee presentation.

- Q: Looking at House and Senate budgets, see that Senate has RGP getting $50million. $50m is a lot and appreciated, but FHCWR could use some dollars, any negotiation possible here? Where are we losing on House budget? For capital…
  - In operating not gaining on Senate side. In capital, some more funds proposed from House in NRI and VSP. Although Senate gave us the $50m not many gains elsewhere in capital budget.
  - Senate side – natural resource champions are focused more on transportation budgets, seated on transportation committee, so losing their attention in operating budget. Need to cultivate more Senators for natural resources.
- Comment: For FHCWR, we need $15 million between implementation and operating. That should be the goal.
  - At committee meeting, Dani did highlight this at $14 million just to maintain. (see link to presentation above)
- Q: What do we need to do to make sure legislators know about the importance of FHCWR funding? Can WACD provide advice and support? Another legislative day? Need detailed strategy about specific people to reach out to. More people could help drive attention to this.
  - Senate has identified their budget conference committee folks, Robinson, Stanford, and Gildon. House has not identified their committee, but leadership includes Ormsby, Macri, Gregerson, Fitzgibbon. The more that these folks hear this message, the more it will land as a priority. Make sure their staff are looped into these conversations as well.
  - (WACD comment) That is exactly what we did this year for CTA. The forestry funding need emerged a little late for that, but I think campaign-style messaging that is consistent and persistent year-to-year will be impactful. This year, we are suffering from a lot of change in legislators and perhaps a Governor that doesn't embrace natural resource conservation in the way we'd most like.
  - If looking for a template letter and emails, WACD can provide this. Waiting for House to select operating folks. Ryan Baye can provide this today.
  - Encourage everyone to speak out!
  - Legislator seems to not want to fund forest and fire prevention this year.
  - Ideas for a more robust campaign if we aren’t successful because of the state of the operating budget, for the supplement budget cycle.
  - Capital budget comms – best to lean into best management practices that have a useful life over a decade. Not just FTEs…
- Q: Right now, have a very difficult budget situation, very different ideas on both sides. We are emotionally attached to forestry issue because it is so important. Straight face test on spinning wheels

asking for more $ for forestry in this environment. Should we advocate for $4m or more? If we ask for more, they might just shut us out…

- As Dani is talking with legislators, emphasizing what we requested, once we saw the proposed operating budget, realized there is a risk the ongoing will fall to $4m. At the bare minimum, we need to maintain the $5m ongoing. This is tact SCC has been taking. Fair to ask why ongoing funding is being cut, when the need is so high. Try not to move backwards…

- Q: Shared spreadsheet of what the need is, linked below. Regarding DNR connection, look at their Forest Health tracking tool, a lot of data of conservation districts getting long lasting BMPs on the ground. CDs tied to plans that recommend this work. How do we get this data to SCC and WACD? Wondering why $5m was the request when the need was so much higher. Need to work on this together to get data into a letter. What do you need from us for letter? Would be helpful to get more details on approach and expectations.

  - https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WS2gYEsE7zlphhtc4gSLF-mRu3U0an4WbIHJP206o6k/edit
    8.8M / Yr 17.6M

  - Like suggestion of adding more detail, Linda willing to help work on and work with WACD on letter. Dani willing to participate as well.

  - We are also looking to the future, all districts meeting in June…what does it look like when we are all working together well?

  - Owen Rowe, Senior Policy Advisor Natural Resources, Governor's Office – has been asked to be looped into communications, wants to have on his radar.

- DNR created a one-pager that explains the budgets and role of DNR and their partners that has been used in communication with legislators. Jenny Coe can share.

- Budget woes, federal cuts puts WA plans at risk as wildfire season nears | The Seattle Times

- RGP. $20m House, $50m Senate, trying to understand where that came from. Chapman remarked want to reward districts for great work being done on the ground.

  - Heard suggestion on trading mentioned in question above and will keep in mind.

  - Proviso language – Inslee proposed very limiting language, difficulty with implementing program. All that is fixed, Senate put in the exact language we asked for, House didn't have initially but have added now. Proviso language is exactly what SCC asked for.

  - C: Great work on advocating for appropriate proviso language!!!!!!!

- House operating – small decrease in CTA, $200k over the biennium and deeper cut to Engineering, trying to keep those from getting cut too deeply. Understand cuts, but not deeper cuts proposed here.

- All district meeting, co-hosting with WACD, up to $1000 of reimbursement for travel to attend, will send registration out soon. Figure out how to make positive steps in the right direction on these big issues. It will be in Leavenworth. There will be a hybrid option. If you have thoughts, share with Dani.

Legislative budget proposals released

State lawmakers have unveiled their proposed budgets, shaping the future of conservation funding in Washington. SCC has compiled a summary comparing the House, Senate, and two Governor's budget pro...

Budget & Finance Update – Sarah Groth & Courtney Woods

- Thank you to everyone who attended the EOY fiscal training, a couple follow-up items, will be sending information out through the District Digest and Financial Times.
    - Similar training at WADE with additional details
    - Was recorded and will be posted to SCC website
    - Any additional questions, reach out to RM or fiscal staff, sooner the better if you are running into questions!
- Grants Manual
    - Thanks to everyone who has reached out and provided feedback, thank you to the ombuds group as well
    - Additional work will start late summer/early fall, realize a lot of work to be done to get to where we want to go
    - Q: Incorporating recs from ombuds group earlier rather than later. Hiring an outside consultant to help with this to ensure this is completed sooner rather than later?
        - Yes, we can hire a consultant, looking for expertise. Working with DES to identify if this is a facilitator or copy editor to help us with these services. Also looking to language from other agencies, some policies such as advance policy language has been shared. Linda will share name with Sarah of someone who could be helpful in this space.
- Courtney also thanked the group for attending EOY fiscal training. Recording links will be shared in newsletter.
    - Manual open for comment. Please review so we can incorporate comments and concerns!
        - Grants Manual Public Comment Open: https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/WASCC/bulletins/3d6399d
    - 5 highlights proposed at SCC meeting:
        - Timing of vouchering – still requiring monthly vouchering due by the 20th, change to a 60-day window of when the district pays the expense to then voucher for it
            - Q: Why do we have a 60-day window, as long as we are billing within the grant time period? Seeing other state agencies doing things differently. Wondering where the restriction policy lies. A lot of good things about working with SCC, but this is a point that will continue to be asked about.
                - RCO and ECY give more time. While it's the same type of funding, RCO and ECY bring forward projects to legislature to fund. Get funding for specific projects, can't change anything outside of those parameters (landowner, project type, etc.) SCC has more flexibility because we don't ask funding for specific projects, we need a better handle on up-to-date funding so we can remain flexible, and shift funding as needed.
                - Operating grants –these funds expire at end of each fiscal year. 10 days to close out at end of fiscal year – allows flexibility, move expenditures as needed to make the most of the funding.
                - Q: On capital side, we've been hearing a different color of funding for many years. RCO doesn't shop a list of projects for all their programs, such as SRFBD.
                - James invited folks to come down to office to talk about accounts, do a deep dive and set up a meeting.
                - Complicated topic, good to approach with a deeper dive.
                - Q: Are operating grants 1-year contracts by choice? Could they extend the entire biennium if we changed SCC policy?
                    - Operating grants are one year funding, so each fiscal year funding can only be used within each fiscal year the funding is awarded. That is the way we are given the funding from the legislature.
            - Q: 60-day rule does not cross over fy/biennium, correct?
                - Yes, that is correct.
        - No activity reports – do not have to send these in starting 7/1/25

        - Composite rates – currently required to submit every January even if there hasn't been a change. Change as of 7/1/25 will be to only send in when there are changes, not required to send in automatically starting January 2026.
        - Re-structured Section 5 to only include a summary blurb of each program and a link to the actual programmatic guidelines in one place in the manual. Previously included guidelines for a few programs.
        - A programs comparison chart – a tool to help with questions on what is allowable between programs, such as training or vehicle purchases. Includes what each program allows and doesn't allow.
            - Link isn't currently in manual but will be sent out to districts soon for review.
            - Comment: This is great, thank you!

Communications Update – Paige DeChambeau & Jodi Prout

- Updates to the website
    - https://www.scc.wa.gov/cd/home
    - Different format, everything still there
    - Videos & Training under Trainings & Education is new. All our webinars and training videos are uploaded here.
    - Grant Funding Info, new, similar to work finance folks are doing, link to manual, matrix of who is accepting funding, review timeline, program guidelines, fact sheets, reporting forms. Get in touch if you see anything that's missing or incorrect. Still in progress.
        - https://www.scc.wa.gov/cd/funding-matrix
    - Hopefully more user friendly, but if not, please reach out to Paige!
        - Comment: great job! it looks more user friendly
- GovDelivery troubles
    - Everyone manages their own subscriptions, can update those here: https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/wascc/subscriber/new?category_id=wascc_c6
- Jodi – Education Outreach Manager
    - Ripple Effect Riparian Communications Campaign, advertised through May. CBCD featured in the campaign. Thank you for sharing when you see it.
    - Outreach Toolkit available that can be tailored for your CD, you will be receiving a box that includes a Conservation Catalog, fact sheets, youth activity booklet, magnets and stickers. If you would like to opt out, please let Jodi know as soon as possible.
    - Mostly positive responses, helpful to hear of any impacts. Share feedback link.
    - This was a one-time directive from Gov Inslee to support riparian work CDs are doing, raise awareness.
    - Report coming out in coming months, including heat map. If curious of how it's being advertised in your area, please reach out to Jodi.
    - More information at https://www.conserve.wa.gov/

Riparian Plant Propagation Program Update – B'Elanna Rhodehamel

- Limited RFA released yesterday for remaining FY25 funds, open for districts that already have holding sites.
    - Deadline April 30, reviewing on a rolling basis
    - https://www.scc.wa.gov/news/limited-rfa-now-open-riparian-plant-propagation-program
- Planning riparian work for Fall of 2027 and want to be considered for contract grows, plant needs survey is open
- Q: B'Elanna is there a maximum amount allowed per application for the limited RFA funding?
    - No maximum amount.

Additional SCC Program Updates

- VSP
    - Funding guideline draft sessions coming up in the next two weeks
    - On the 22nd, discussing capital funding component

    - To make sure you are on the invites, reach out to Mike Poteet
    - Wahkiakum County opted into VSP
    - James shared appreciation for work being done by districts and SCC VSP staff touring the state, keep an eye out for those opportunities
- Science Hub
    - Partnering with CDs and universities, things underway in Spokane, Whatcom, Mason, and Columbia counties. Bringing NRCS partners in with experience on watershed scale work. Still in process so no tangible work to show but it is ongoing.
    - Bringing resources to CRM. Catalyzing with education and outreach. Whatcom helping with inventory of existing CRMs. More webinars and training coming. Thank you for support from districts.

WACD Update – Ryan Baye

- Another legislative piece to be aware of is HB1488, made it through the Senate, waiting for reconciliation between House & Senate. House does not have a cap, Senate version is $25, but no population breakdown. Expecting reconciliation to go through. Will let everyone know when this happens and if you want to be a part of the bill signing please reach out to Ryan Baye.
- Plug for the all-districts meeting, Together for Conservation: Statewide Leadership Forum, on June 12 after WADE.
- WACD meeting on 6/16 in Bow and strategic planning meeting on 6/17 – inviting a district manager from each area
- Busy time, appreciate the support

CTD Update

- Hosting an in-person 3-day IWM training, CBCD is lead with Harold Crose as the planner. Registration is open, went out in CTD newsletter and will be on website soon. About 10 spaces open currently, financial support available for travel and staff time, but the training itself is free. April CTD Newsletter
- WADE registration is open until May 1, employee of the year nominations open until May 9
- GIS account change, CTD is working with Andrew Phay who is developing a comprehensive set of GIS trainings for districts. Coming out before the end of the fiscal year.