

## **SCC-CDs Roundtable Meeting**

May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Facilitated by Jessica Wilson, Notes by Hilary Aten

Next Roundtable Meeting: July 9, 2026 – 9:30 am

### **Welcome & Roundtable Discussion Topic Introduction**

Jessica Wilson, SCC Chief Engagement Officer, welcomed everyone to the April Roundtable meeting and with appreciation to SCC's wonderful Regional Manager Team. Jessica shared that the Regional Manager Team has been hard at work in recruitment and training, and we hope to have some time at the end of today's meeting for Q&A with Regional Managers.

Jessica then introduced the May meeting topics:

- Recruitment and hiring updates
- Decision package update
- Elections rulemaking update
- Interactive discussion on technology transformation project

### **SCC Recruitment and Hiring Update: James Thompson**

- SCC is working towards realizing the new organizational structure shared with CDs earlier this year. This takes significant effort and administrative capacity, but we are making great progress.
- There has been an excellent quality of candidates applying to SCC openings.
- The Director of Tribal Affairs position has been hired and will be a great addition to the SCC team. As soon as we are positioned to release the information on the hire, we will share that information with CDs.
- We are currently deep in the interview process for the NE Regional Manager, and are beginning application reviews for the Puget Sound Regional Manager vacancy.
- We have two additional positions open currently – the Strategic Initiatives Manager (vacancy) and the Director of Programs (new position). Both recruitments are seeing significant interest.
- James asked for District Managers to reach out with any questions and concerns.

### **Decision package update: Kate Delavan & Dani Madrone**

- Kate provided an update on the current status of the decision package budget development process for the 27-29 Biennium.

- This year's process sought to engage deeper and earlier input from CDs, to help communicate the needs of CDs as we navigate a constrained and difficult budget environment. Kate thanked all the CDs who contributed significant time and effort to this work, including the program demand survey earlier this spring.
- At the last Commission meeting, Commissioners approved the slate of decision packages to be worked on for the upcoming biennium. In July, Commissioners will be affirming this slate of decision packages including the specific budget request for each decision package.
- We are hearing that the current state of the State's budget is bleak, and that we need to be prepared for a very challenging budget cycle. The general fund is projected to be in a deficit in the first fiscal year of the next biennium, and is projected to become positive in the second year of the biennium, only if the millionaire's tax survives the current court challenge.
- We will share more as we know more, but we have been notified by OFM that we should not put in requests for any new funding, and we should be prepared for cuts, particularly to programs that may be seen as duplicative or redundant across state agencies. We could potentially see wholesale programs eliminated and changes to RCWs that mandate those programs at relevant agencies.
- We anticipate this budget session will be worse than the prior two sessions. The state is seeking solutions to the continuing revenue shortfall due to economic conditions and reliance on the sales tax.
- We are also hearing that there is salmon fatigue in the legislature. We have unfortunately lost some of our key champions for natural resources and salmon recovery in the legislature. We will have a lot of work to do to champion and advocate for the critical work of Conservation Districts in this climate.
- Kate shared a summary of the program demand data. The data shared is based on the data gathered from CDs and from Program Managers through the survey. This data is very helpful for demonstrating alignment with historical trends in support of SCC's requests to the legislature.
- Over 77% of CDs filled out this survey, which was not a small task – thank you!
- CDs were asked what percentage of your annual budget comes from SCC funding? Responses ranged from 5 CDs who receive only 10-19% up to 4 CDs who receive 90-100% of their funding from SCC. The majority of CDs receive 40-49% of their funding from SCC.
- Kate shared the numerical results of the program demand survey, with additional thanks to the SCC Program Managers for their support in analysis and interpretation of the survey results.
- Data gathered was analyzed and summarized into four categories –

- What was requested for the 25-27 Biennium;
  - What was received in the 25-27 Appropriation;
  - What is the estimated Demand for the 27-29 Biennium to Maintain; and
  - What is estimated Demand for the 27-29 Biennium to Expand.
- Maintain = what is program demand for your CD to maintain current services in the next biennium?
- Expand = if there aren't funding constraints, what work could you realistically get done in the next biennium?
- Note: the data was extrapolated from the 32 responses received to determine an estimated total demand for 45 Districts.
- Take aways –
  - The demand to maintain services is not too far off of what was requested in decision packages for the 25-27 biennium. It is different from the actual appropriations received.
  - We can demonstrate to the legislature the demand for these programs that greatly exceeds the funding available.
- Kate will be sharing the presentation with CDs as soon as it is finalized for the Commission's meeting next week.
- Request for feedback or comments from CDs – do you see anything that doesn't look quite right, or that jumps out to you as an outlier?
  - Zorah Oppenheimer shared that RPPP looks a little low for both estimated demand for maintenance and expansion, given the program ran out of funding in the current biennium. Kate will double-check the data and calculation to identify if there is an error, and will adjust the numbers for the Commission meeting accordingly.
  - Tova Tillinghast asked how/why are the lower two rows different from the total numbers in the two left columns? The difference comes from the way the questions were asked for Disaster Assistance Program (DAP) and Forest Health and Community Wildfire Resiliency (FHCWR) in the survey, where only the expanded demand was asked for. The columns will be adjusted for the Commission meeting to help clarify the comparison.
  - Ryan Williams flagged a similar question on WSSRI. Kate and Allisa will clarify how the way funding is coordinated with partner agencies is communicated in this data.
- Kate will also be sharing a qualitative analysis of the survey responses at the Commission meeting. Key themes include:
  - Demand exceeds funding in nearly every program, in some cases by 5-10x. This is reported by both CDs and by program managers.

- Technical assistance is a major statewide need, particularly in the early project development phase.
- Flexibility is highly valued, particularly with CTA and NRI for their value and speed. Similar feedback was received from program managers.
- Cultural resources costs are emerging as a rising cost.
  - Becca Hebron shared that cultural resources has been confusing to estimate for different programs, and this may translated into an overestimate in the survey data.
  - Brad Riehle shared that their District is projecting increased cultural resources costs due to the number of projects that are funded solely by SCC, rather than by matching funders which have historically covered these costs. Brad noted that the cost of surveys has gone up quite a bit in the last few years as well.
  - Zorah Oppenheimer shared that their District is receiving more requests for cultural resource surveys than historically, and they are increasingly relying on third party contractors to complete the work due to limited staff capacity, which is increasing costs.
  - Craig Nelson shared that Tribes are asking that they be paid to do more of these surveys and at a higher cost than internal staff.

#### **Elections Update: Bill Eller**

- Bill Eller presented a set of proposed rule changes for CD elections.
- In March, SCC commissioners authorized SCC to begin the rulemaking process to update certain election rules. Currently SCC is on track to update those rules before the next election cycle.
- These changes focus on issues identified during a Dec 12, 2025 Thurston County Superior Court hearing.
- Rulemaking requires specific steps laid out by the Office of the Code Revisor, which is a highly complicated process. Bill shared a timeline of the process and current status. The first form has been filed with the Code Revisor's Office. A proposed set of edits and changes has been drafted and will be available on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, with a public comment period scheduled for June 17-July 31. A public hearing will be held on July 30. Comments received will be incorporated and addressed in August, in preparation for a final proposal presented to Commissioners at the September meeting.
- There are nine areas where we are proposing making changes to the WAC:
  1. Designating an alternate for the CD election supervisor:

- Establishing that the CD board of supervisors, when appointing an election supervisor, may also appoint a designee who would be able to perform the same duties if the election supervisor is unavailable.
- 2. Voters must be verified before a ballot is provided:
  - Requiring that before a ballot request from a voter can be fulfilled, the CD must verify that the voter is a qualified district elector.
- 3. One ballot per voter:
  - Every voter is going to have to request a ballot individually (rather than by household)
- 4. Use of provisional ballots for unverified voters:
  - If a voter requests a ballot, if the CD cannot verify the voter is a qualified district elector, then the CD must issue a provisional ballot
- 5. Providing a provisional ballot for duplicate requests; only the first tallied counts:
  - If a voter requests another ballot after a request has been fulfilled, the CD must issue a provisional ballot, and the first ballot tallied is the only ballot that counts for that voter.
- 6. Polling officers and the election supervisor verify voters:
  - Only polling officers, and the election supervisor (if acting as a polling officer) can verify if a voter is a qualified district elector.
- 7. CD must first verify each voter if using a list to send unrequested ballots to voters:
  - If a CD uses a mailing list to send out a ballot, the CD must verify that each voter on the list is a qualified elector before providing a ballot.
- 8. Keeping a list of voters who requested a ballot:
  - If a CD keeps a list of contacts who have requested a ballot every year, this will be allowed as long as the CD confirms the voter on the list is a qualified voter before providing the ballot.
- 9. Voters put their own ballot in the ballot box:
  - Voters must place their ballot in the ballot box themselves.
- Request to CDs – in the next two months, please review and confirm that these proposed changes accomplish the described intent, and do not create unintended consequences for CDs. Keep in mind that there are certain changes that SCC must be responsive to due to the nature of the Court ruling.
- The rulemaking process information can be found here - <https://www.scc.wa.gov/rulemaking>. The comment form is already live, and we can begin taking comments at any time (ahead of the formal comment period).
- Questions:

- Emmett Wild asked - Which of the 9 proposed changes will increase election costs, either directly or through an increase in staff time?
  - Dani Madrone: verification of voters before sending them a ballot.
- Tova Tillinghast asked - What constitutes "verification" - is it just finding their name on the voters list or do we need to see ID for each voter?
  - Dani Madrone: No ID needed - you'll need their name and address to check against the registered voter list. Also noting that voter verification can only be done by the polling officers and the election supervisor.
- Emmett Wild asked - How will WSCC ensure increased costs are met with increased elections funding?
  - Jessica Wilson: We probably need to gather some data from CDs on the potential cost implications to inform a response.
  - Dani Madrone: For CDs that do non-poll site elections, there will be more up-front work to certify voters, which will require more up-front capacity from the CDs. We do not currently have additional resources to support this. For decision packages, we will need to address this need through CTA funding. It would be helpful to learn from CDs what additional capacity will be needed to comply with these changes.
  - Bill Eller requested that CDs share this information with Bill directly, or through their formal comments on the proposed changes.
- Alan Chapman asked – Does a ballot box definition apply to a drop box for ballots mailed out?
  - The concept for the rule change is that for boxes that are in close proximity to the CD office, we want to ensure that the ballot is not placed in the ballot box by a CD staff member, but by the voter directly. This applies specifically to poll site locations rather than mailed ballots.
- Zorah Oppenheimer shared - We currently verify all ballot requests up front, and it is a bit more work, but it's not too bad. But we also receive between 10-200 ballot requests only.

### **Technology Transformation Update: Jessica Wilson**

- Thank you to those who completed SCC's Strategic Planning survey. One of the clear themes was the desperate need for an updated technological system for SCC.
- We took the failure of our prior decision package proposal for technology transformation to represent the legislature's distrust for similar state proposals, which have either been stymied or have blown past their budgets and timelines.

- To pivot, we looked into alternative approaches through existing resources and partnerships to find a proactive solution.
- Through this investigation, RCO's PRISM platform consistently came up as a potential solution to our current technological challenges. SCC has been holding several conversations with RCO staff to explore this avenue.
- SCC is going to be entering an interagency agreement with RCO to begin using PRISM as a back-end solution for SCC's grant database system. We will be existing in the environment of PRISM, but with a customized SCC database and workflows.
- With this change coming and the opportunity to customize, we have several questions for CDs as we begin this transformation. (The following questions and feedback were presented in a Slido poll.)
  - What should SCC's new system be called?
    - Sage
    - Canopy
    - My Conservation Hub
    - Conservation Grant Management
    - Other? Suggestions in the chat include Conservationism, Artemis, SCC Hub, Madrona, Reboot, Thompson Works, Conservation Tracking, Slate, Sigla, Orca, Manatee (but not native to WA), Cascade, Calgon, The 45
    - Craig Nelson shared - There's great naming ideas in the official list of Washington State Symbols: <https://leg.wa.gov/learn-and-participate/educational-resources/state-symbols/>
  - What are the biggest frustrations you have with current systems or workflows?
    - Landowner based
    - Confusion
    - Can't edit
    - Nothing is connected
    - Too many data boxes
    - Antiquated
    - Find useful information
    - Can't delete our own records
    - Required fields before you can move on
    - Unnecessary files – way too many
    - Can't relate it to expenditures
    - Clunky system
    - Too focused on farms

- Cooperator IDs
- What tasks take the most time or feel unnecessarily complicated?
  - Training new staff
  - Returning to input actual costs take way too many clicks
  - Using it to generate landowner agreements
  - Generating cost share agreements
  - When entering a multi landowner project, no way to group, one project with 40 landowners will take weeks to enter all the data
  - Understanding input needed
  - Everything
  - Entering each and every required unnecessary field
  - Cost inputs
  - Too many separate documents to process cost-share payments
  - Learning how to use the system
  - The entire systems I unnecessary
  - Landowners should not be required, we have lots of fake landowners in our system
  - New system needs to have clear focus
- What data or functions do you need immediate access to when you log in?
  - Grant balances
  - Workflow or approval status
  - Key deadlines
  - Tasks requiring action
  - Active grant status
  - Reporting tools
  - Important documents
  - System should be designed so that we can quickly and easily filter to exactly what we are needing to find.
  - Other functions noted that were not included in the poll option – searchability, multi biennial awards, ability to favorite things for quick access, customizable by district users, in terms of views, summary reports, easy for Districts to add and set user access for their staff, ability to customize branding for reports, tracking user entry changes
- What would make reporting, grant tracking, or communication easier?
  - Electronic transmission of vouchers
  - Communication channel, chat or messaging
  - Link form system to support materials, manual, website info
  - Ability to make requests to move money for cost share in the platform

- Keeping communication in the system instead of in emails
- Customized dashboard, electronic vouchers, help line to human
- Ability to electronically sign/approve documents
- Streamline an intuitive structure, only requiring necessary input
- Tracking request, award, and close out in one spot
- Get rid of authorized signature forms
- Reorganize authorize signature forms, by person rather than topic
- Ability to upload more than one document or picture at a time
- Simplified reporting requirements that will meet many needs
- All documents able to be saved in the system like PRISM
- Be able to authorize people in the system instead of authorized signature forms
- Fields required only at the time a request for funding is being made
- Are there features or tools in CPDS that you rely on that must be preserved?
  - No
  - Generation of the cost share contract from entered info
  - It's so complex and un-user friendly that I avoid it and call staff
  - If working, the property location (GIS) tool would be helpful
- What does "success" look like for you in a redesigned system?
  - Peace and harmony
  - We actually use the system
  - No complaints
  - That the first iteration is not the last – that there is some established process to continue iterating to improve the system
  - SCC uses this system for additional programmatic demand budgets
  - Can utilize the data for reporting and budget status
  - Transition to electronic based operations for signatures, communications, and program overview and improved workflow
  - Finance Staff are happier
  - Easy roll up of data showing conservation implemented and conservation needs
  - Ability to query data easily for reports
  - Elimination of supplemental end of fiscal year reporting, SCC can just pull data from system
  - Comprehensive, transparent, streamlined intuitive system
  - User friendly intuitive system for technicians and planners
  - Clear metric definitions incorporated
  - Talk with RCO about using grant data to measure progress to goals

- This poll will be kept open through May 22<sup>nd</sup>, to continue gathering information and feedback, please continue to add comments and feedback.
  - Zorah requested that we add a suggestion box for the name question, as well.
- Next steps – SCC is working with RCO to determine the timeline of the project, then identify one program to pilot the transition. We will also be asking for CD partners willing to help engage in the system testing as the project moves forward.
  - Jessica expressed thanks and appreciation to Megan Stewart from Asotin for sharing a system with features preferable to current PRISM interface.
  - Evan Bauder asked for the appropriate venue to share this information and solicit feedback from the primary system users in his staff – WADE?
    - CDs recommend hosting a special session with other CD staff, workshoping with the Finance Managers Forum, circulating the Slido poll broadly through CD finance and technical staff, and presenting to all of the CD focus group forums. Jessica will coordinate with the Regional Manager team to reach those forums.
  - CDs strongly encouraged SCC to engage with all CD staff to inform the process, particularly since the system intends to streamline several lines of information in addition to fiscal. More input will help avoid mistakes, mistakes in the process will be expensive. Getting as much of this right on the front end as possible is important. This is also part of why we will approach adoption with a program-by-program strategy.
  - Evan Bauder asked if we had heard feedback on whether data from CPDS would be transferred over? This has not yet been determined. James shared that the existing CPDS data would need considerable cleaning before any data transfer and may be infeasible. The fiscal Access dataset is much cleaner and could be transitioned more easily. Evan Bauder and Brad Riehle shared that a prior CPDS data migration and upgrade in 2017 significantly scrambled pre-existing data that has not been able to be corrected, so it is already inaccurate and not fixable or cleanable. Request from CDs to consider not migrating data and focus the new system on future grants only.
  - Craig Nelson shared that one great way to learn a new database is entering data. Though time intensive, it may be a good way to learn the new system by having employees enter active projects in the new system and any projects that are recently completed that need to be tracked for some reason.
- **Feedback survey on SCC's technology transformation project.**  
 Please feel free to add additional thoughts or share with others who were not able to attend today. This will be sent out via email and on the website as well. This has been updated to include name suggestion box. All ideas welcome!

### **July Roundtable Meeting & Reminders**

- Due to timing today, the Q&A with Regional Managers will be rescheduled for July. In the meantime, you can find them here - <https://www.scc.wa.gov/cd/regional-managers>
- The June Roundtable is cancelled due to conflict with WADE.
- The next CD Roundtable is Thursday, July 9 at 9:30 a.m. Please use the Roundtable Discussion Topic tool (found here: [Business Improvement](#)) to submit topics for the next discussion.