Proposal for Conservation District Election Reform

The Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) propose a package of reforms to the conservation district (CD) election process. After a thorough and collaborative exploration of potential election improvements, this proposal represents the best option to meet the needs of CDs and the communities and natural resources they serve.

Background: CD elections and what makes them different

- By statute, CDs conduct elections to fill volunteer positions on their boards outside the general elections process.
- Part of the reason for this is related to cost. Unlike most special purpose districts, CDs don’t have taxing authority. This limits their funding for everything from carrying out their statutory duties to covering election costs.
- Another unique feature of CDs is they are subject to state oversight, which is provided by the SCC.
- As part of their oversight role, the SCC sets the CD election process, monitors election administration, and verifies/certifies election results.
- As with any process, changes may be needed over time. The SCC reviews procedures after each election cycle to assess opportunities for improvement.

Why change the CD election process?

- **INCREASE VOTER TURNOUT**
  Participation in CD elections typically is low. We want more people to have a say in CD leadership.

- **IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY**
  Many are unaware of CDs’ locally led structure. This limits community feedback to elected supervisors.

- **EMPOWER LOCAL FLEXIBILITY**
  The one-size-fits-all approach to elections isn’t meeting the needs of all CDs and their communities.
Goal: Increase participation in and access to CD elections without causing unintended impacts to communities and CDs’ statutory role.

PROPOSAL 1/3: TERMS AND ELECTION SCHEDULE
- Extend the CD supervisor term to four years.
- For the three elected supervisor positions, hold elections every other year during even years.
- For the two appointed supervisor positions, make appointments every other year during odd years.

PROPOSAL 2/3: SCC ELECTION PROCESS
- CDs host elections during one “Conservation Month” designated by the SCC. SCC will run statewide campaign to promote CDs/election opportunities leading up to and during this month.
- CDs increase local elections outreach.

PROPOSAL 3/3: GENERAL ELECTION OPTION
- By a majority vote of a CD board, any CD may choose to go on the general election rather than follow the SCC election process.

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