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Washington Association of Conservation Districts

WACD Legislative Update

April 25, 2023

This is WACD's fifteen and final week of legislative updates for the year. We hope these emails were of use and benefit to our members as we collectively navigated the 2023 legislative session. As we wait for the Conservation Commission to release its definitive budget summary (expected on Wednesday), this is WACD's view on the outcomes from this session.

1. Operating Budget Highlights

Over **\$55 million dollars** was granted in new programmatic funding, bringing the Conservation Commission up to \$97 million in operating funds for the FY23-25 biennium. WACD's priority in Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funding was not fully realized, but a \$1 million increase to nothing to sneeze at. WACD is grateful that this increase will be ongoing. Among the other new funding to help conservation districts achieve the goal of on-the-ground conservation:

- \$3 million for outreach and implementation of salmon riparian habitat projects with an additional \$2 million to develop and implement a riparian buffer outreach plan.
- \$5 million for CDs to address unhealthy forests and build community resiliency to wildfire with \$10 million for the Commission to provide Firewise grants.
- \$30 million to the Sustainable Farms and Fields Program, with up to \$6 million of that total available for technical and financial assistance.

2. Capital Budget Highlights

\$63.5 million is the total the Conservation Commission is set to receive in capital budget funding for FY23-25, an increase of almost \$40 million compared to the previous biennium. The bulk of that expansion comes from \$25 million for riparian restoration grants, satisfying a WACD priority that riparian grants be funded through the capital budget. Other programs were funded at, or above, target amounts including:

- \$15 million for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
- \$4 million for Natural Resource Investments
- \$4 million for Farmland Protection
- \$3.5 million to Improve Shellfish Growing Areas
- \$3 million for VSP Project Funding

3. District Elections Study

As expected, \$154,000 is allocated in the final operating budget to the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to study the costs and benefits of shifting all five supervisor positions to the general election ballot and Title 29A. A preliminary report will be due December 1 of this year, and the final report must be published by June 30, 2024. You can view the [full proviso language](#) on the WACD Hub.

4. Final Legislative Watch List

Of the 18 bills on WACD's Legislative Watch List adopted by the legislature, the policy bill most likely to impact CDs going forward is [SB 5353](#). This is the Voluntary Stewardship Program re-enrollment bill, allowing the twelve counties not currently participating in VSP a new opportunity to enroll in the program. You can see the final list of our 2023 Legislative Watch List on the [WACD HUB](#).

5. Sine Die Report

WACD Lobbyist Brynn Brady provided a breakdown of all the bills adopted this session, as well as her analysis of potential legislative action after the proposed "Blake fix" regarding drug possession laws failed to pass before the end of session. You can view that, along with all the new legislation related to agriculture and environment on the [WACD Hub](#).

6. "It ain't over 'til it's over"

Those immortal words of Yogi Berra seemed appropriate during this first month of baseball. With the legislature adjourned, Governor Inslee now has his part to play in the legislative process. The state constitution gives him 20 days after adjournment to sign, not sign, completely veto, or partially veto bills. If the Governor does not sign a bill within the 20-day window, they become law without his signature. You can track his actions on the [Governor's official website](#).



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