

The 2019 Conservation District online survey on some election reform options

Washington State Conservation Commission

28 January 2020

2019 Conservation District Elections online survey
Created by the State Conservation Commission
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The State Conservation Commission (SCC) and the conservation districts are always looking at ways to improve the supervisor election process. Because each conservation district is a division of local government with unique natural resource concerns, community priorities, and varies by program budget and size, it can be challenging to find a solution that will work well for all 45 districts. One approach may be beneficial to some districts, while another may have serious unintended consequences for others. This is one reason why the SCC formed its Conservation District Election and Appointment Committee (CDEAC) in fall of 2018 to review existing election and appointment procedures and make recommendations to the SCC on how to make improvements to the rules (Chapter 135-110 WAC) and statute (Chapter 89.08 RCW). The CDEAC was made up of conservation district staff, supervisors, and SCC staff. It met for six months and proposed changes to the election and appointment rules.

As a result of the CDEAC's work, The SCC is moving forward in the rulemaking process to amend election and appointment procedures to make them more user-friendly and increase participation by voters and candidates. One example of how we can improve election voting participation through rulemaking is to consolidate the period during which elections occur. Currently, the statute directs conservation districts to hold elections between January and March. A change proposed by the CDEAC would direct all elections to take place during one week in March. The SCC and conservation districts could coordinate their statewide outreach to inform the public about conservation district elections and how to participate in the process – as voters, supervisor candidates, or both.

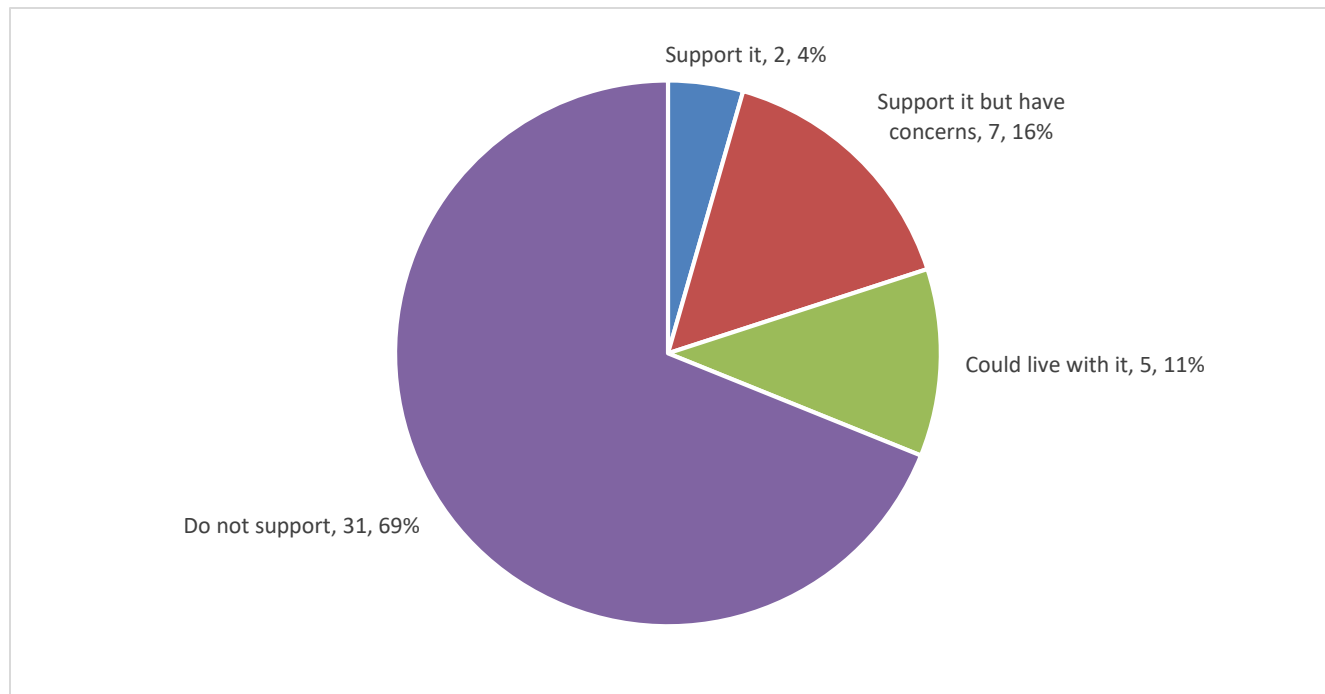
After reviewing the work of the CDEAC, the SCC decided that in addition to the input provided by the CDEAC, it would be valuable to receive input from all conservation districts statewide through an online survey. The survey consisted of 10 options on how the election process might be changed, and districts were asked to choose a position for each option: support; support with concerns, could live with it; do not support. They had the option of provided comments for each scenario. The survey was distributed on October 31, 2019 and had a suggested deadline of Monday, November 25, 2019 so that we could share the results at the annual Washington Association of Conservation District (WACD) conference and State Conservation Commission (SCC) meeting the first week of December. SCC Regional Managers encouraged CDs to fill out the survey during Board of Supervisor meetings. By November 27, 43 of the 45 CDs had filled out the survey and the remaining two CDs completed the survey after the deadline. That we had a 100% response rate is indicative of how interested and engaged conservation districts are in election reform.

We understand that change can be hard, but with all 45 conservation districts engaged in a discussion about improving the election process we feel confident that we can all work together to find solutions that increase public engagement with local conservation districts, improve voter participation, and better promotes inclusivity of all communities.

The survey results are summarized graphically below with links to the full comments received for each option.

Survey options and results, summarized:

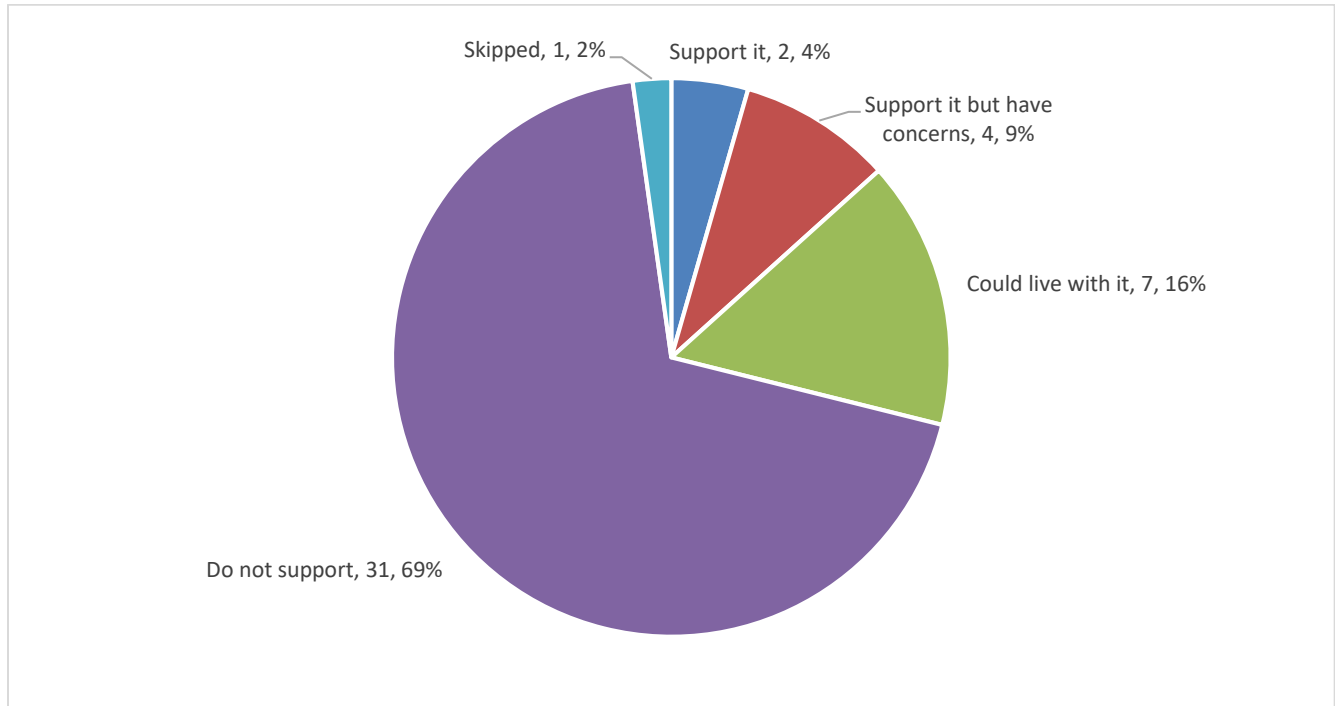
1 The three elected board members on each conservation district board would be included on the regular general election ballot.



The biggest concern among conservation districts for this option is the cost, with several districts noting that they could not afford the expense of being on the general election ballot. SCC staff estimate the cost for conservation districts to move onto the general election ballot would be \$1 million to \$1.5 million. A few conservation districts in rural communities pointed out that people often serve on multiple boards, and being on the general ballot would preclude them from doing so. There is also concern that the disclosure requirement would deter interest in serving as an unpaid, voluntary supervisor.

[Click here to read all comments.](#)

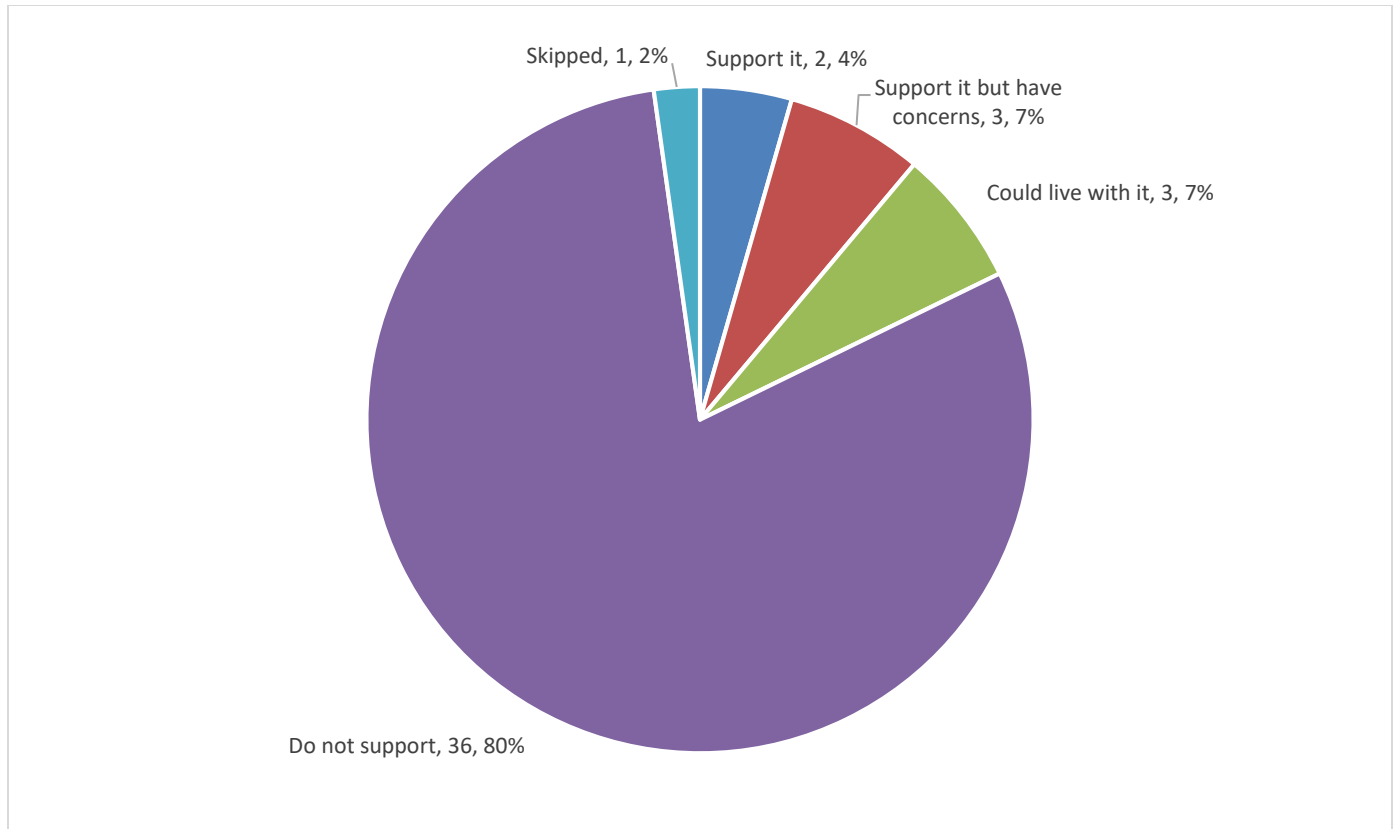
2 Conservation districts above a certain population threshold would be included on the regular general election ballot and be granted the authority to set Rates and Charges (e.g., used, in part, to cover election costs)



Several conservation districts expressed concern that creating a populous threshold would result in division and inconsistency among them. A few noted that their supervisors did not feel comfortable setting rates and charges (a local option, approved by the county legislative authority, to fund conservation districts) independent from the county legislative authority.

[Click here to read all comments](#)

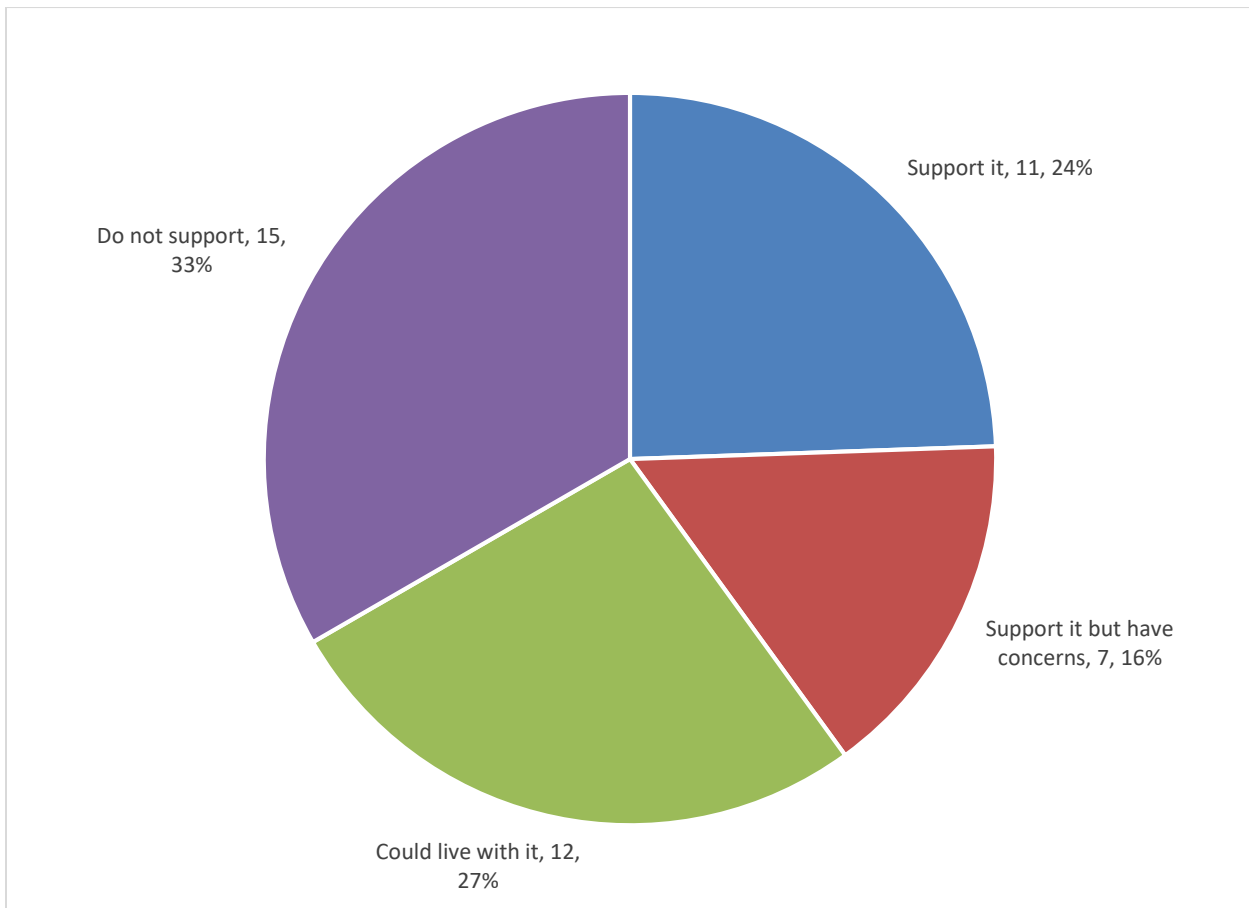
3 Conservation districts above a certain annual budget threshold would be included on the regular general election ballot and be granted the authority to set Rates and Charges (e.g., used, in part, to cover election costs).



Similar to option 2 (population threshold), conservation districts expressed concern that having a budget threshold would create division among the 45 districts. Several also pointed out that budgets can fluctuate from year to year, making this criterion difficult to adhere to.

[Click here to read all the comments.](#)

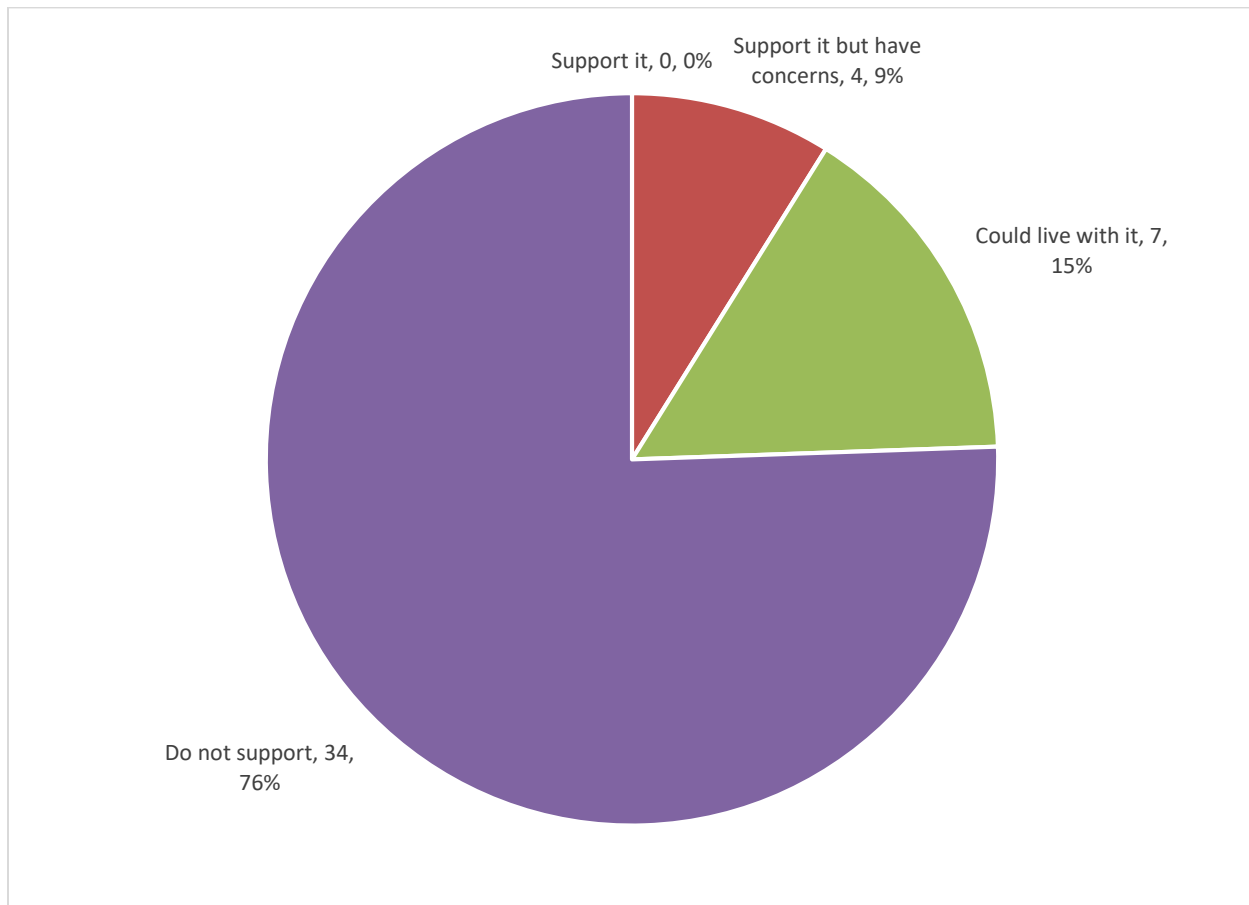
4 Conservation districts would have the option (but not required) to participate in general election ballot.



There was more support for allowing conservation districts the option of participating in the general election ballot than making it a requirement for all 45 districts. Several conservation districts appreciated the flexibility for districts to decide whether to be on the general ballot. A few expressed concern that it would cause inconsistency among the conservation districts.

[Click here to read full comments.](#)

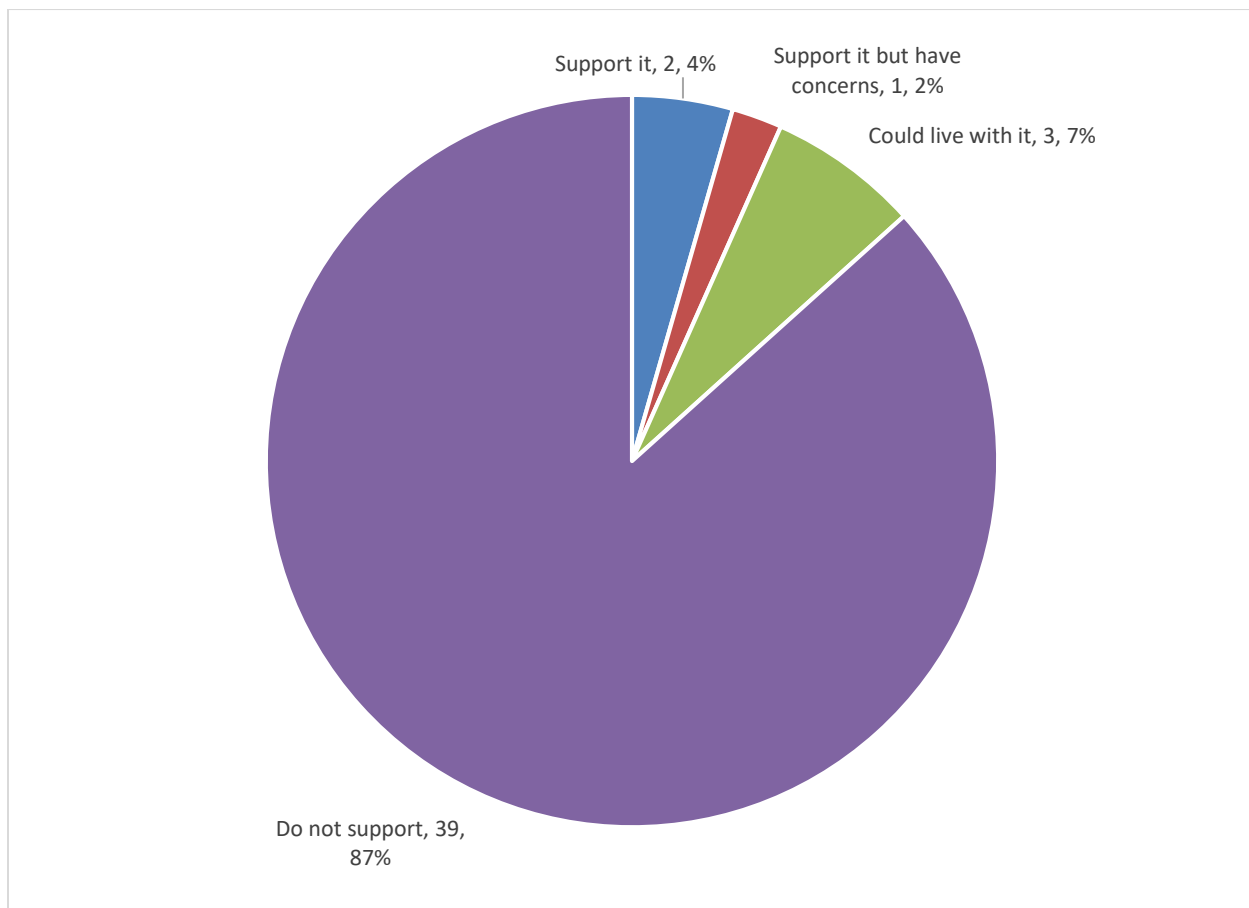
5 All conservation district supervisors should be appointed by the SCC.



There was not much support for this option. Most comments stressed that conservation districts are locally led, and that having the SCC appoint all five supervisors would take away that local input.

[Click here to read full comments.](#)

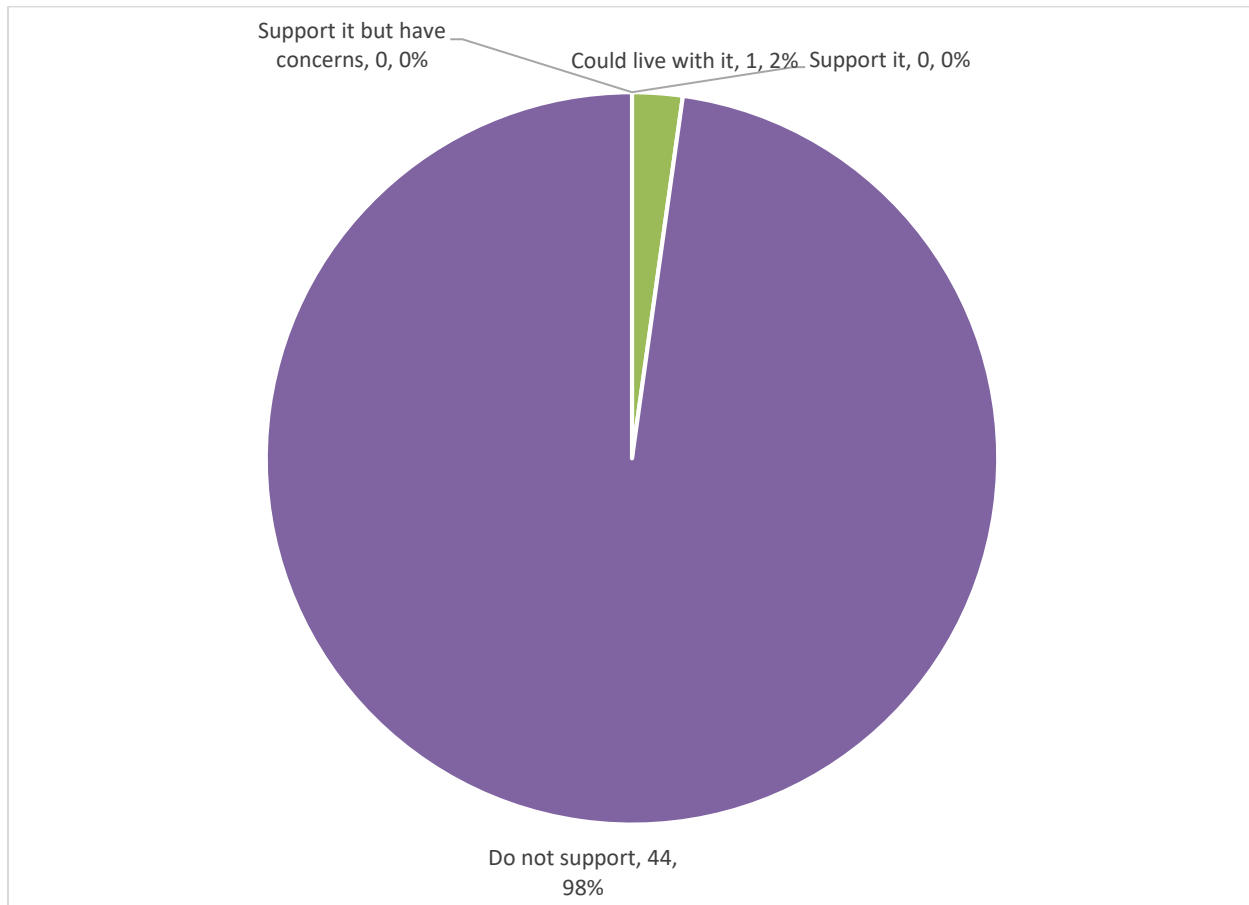
6 Two conservation district supervisors should be appointed by the SCC and 3 should be appointed by county legislative authority.



The majority of conservation districts did not support this option either, again expressing concern that it also prevented local participation in who would serve as supervisors. Several districts also worried that two appointments by the local legislative authority may politicize those positions.

[Click here to read all comments.](#)

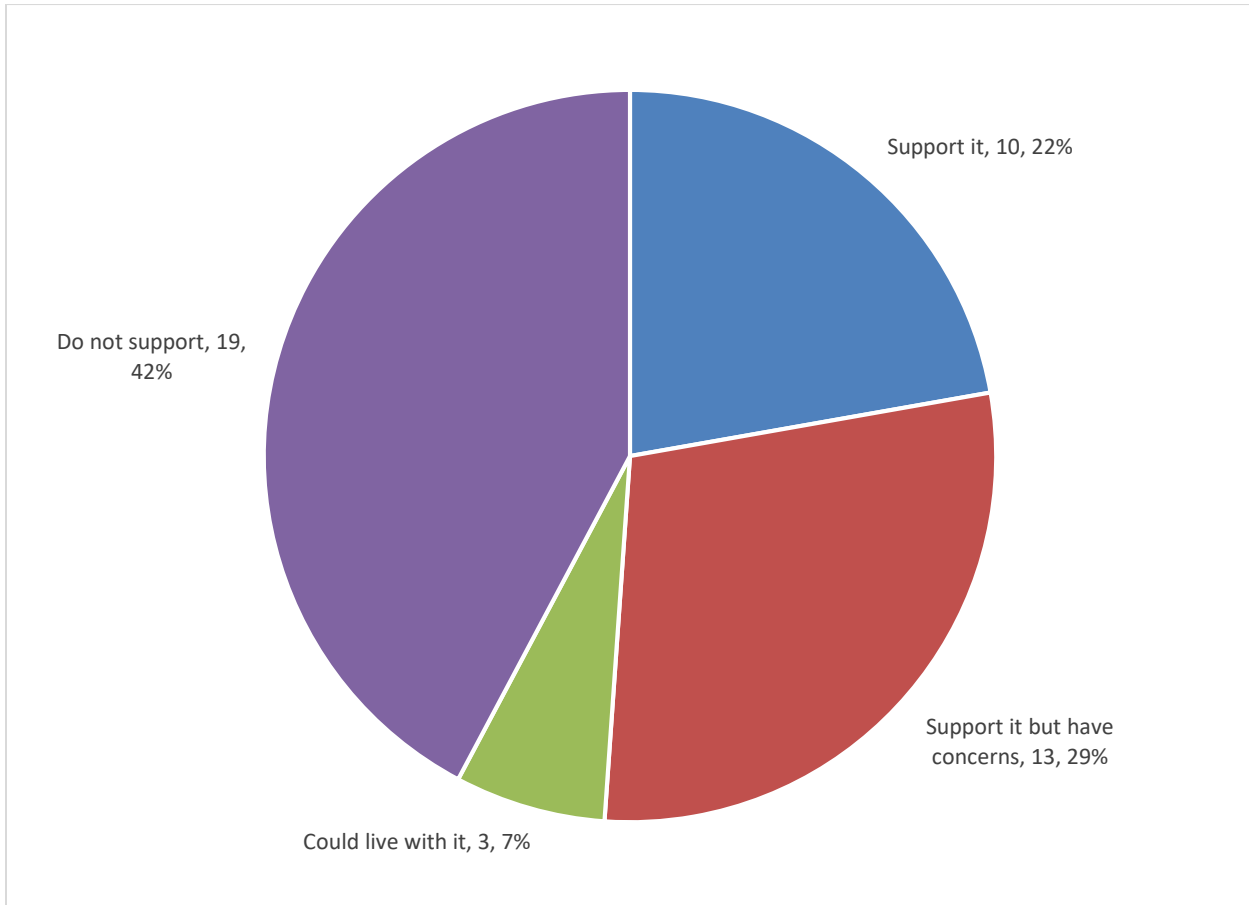
7 Hybridized structure where conservation districts above a certain threshold (such as population or annual budget) would conduct elections for three supervisors and those below that threshold would have all five supervisors appointed by SCC or the SCC and county legislative authority



There was almost complete agreement among all 45 conservation districts that this was not a viable option. It was seen as too complicated, confusing, and lacked consistency.

[Click here to read full comments.](#)

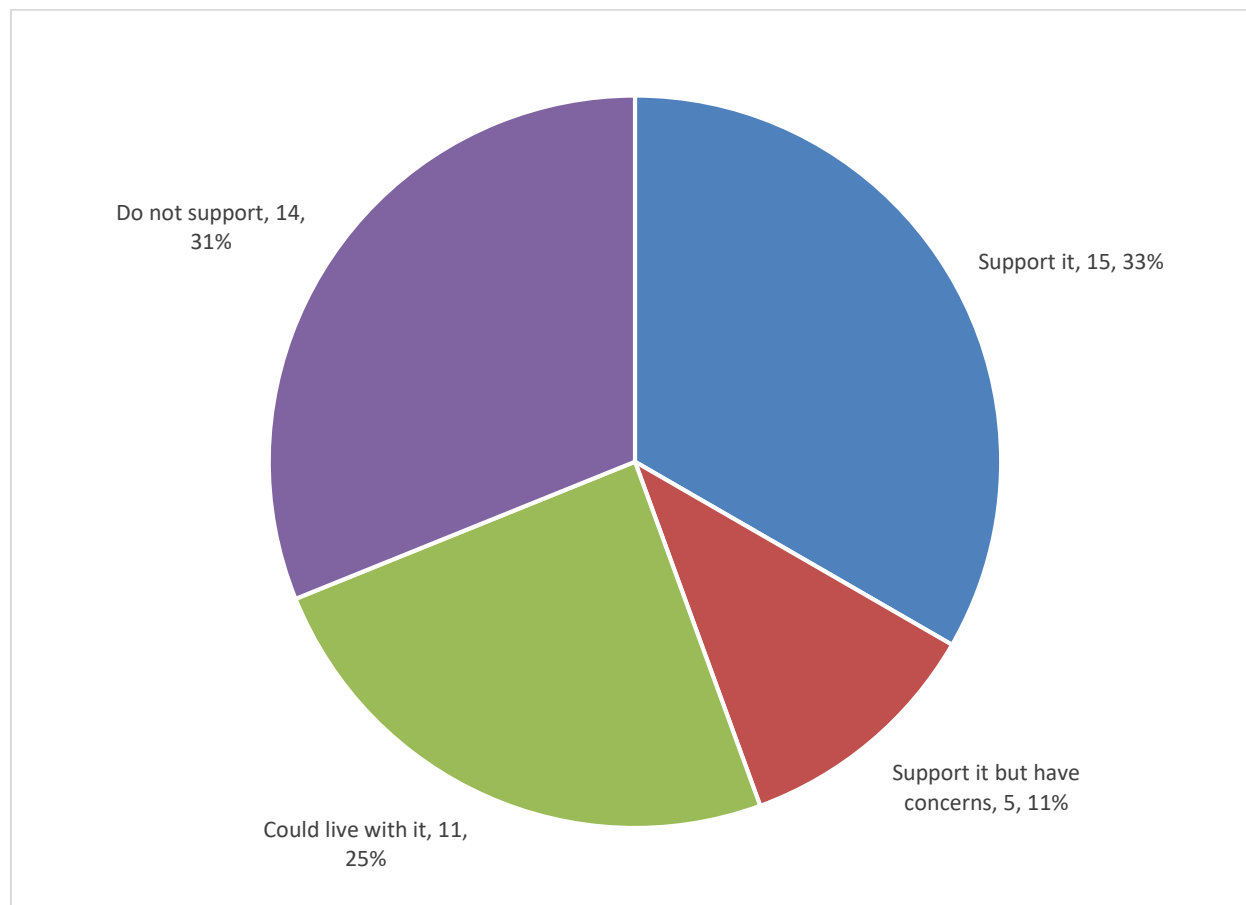
8 Pursue funding to support technological improvements, such as online voting, that could be used to assist with conservation district elections.



There was support for this option, citing an increase in transparency and improvement in the election process. Concerns centered around the cost of implementing new technologies and online security to ensure fair elections.

[Click here to read full comments.](#)

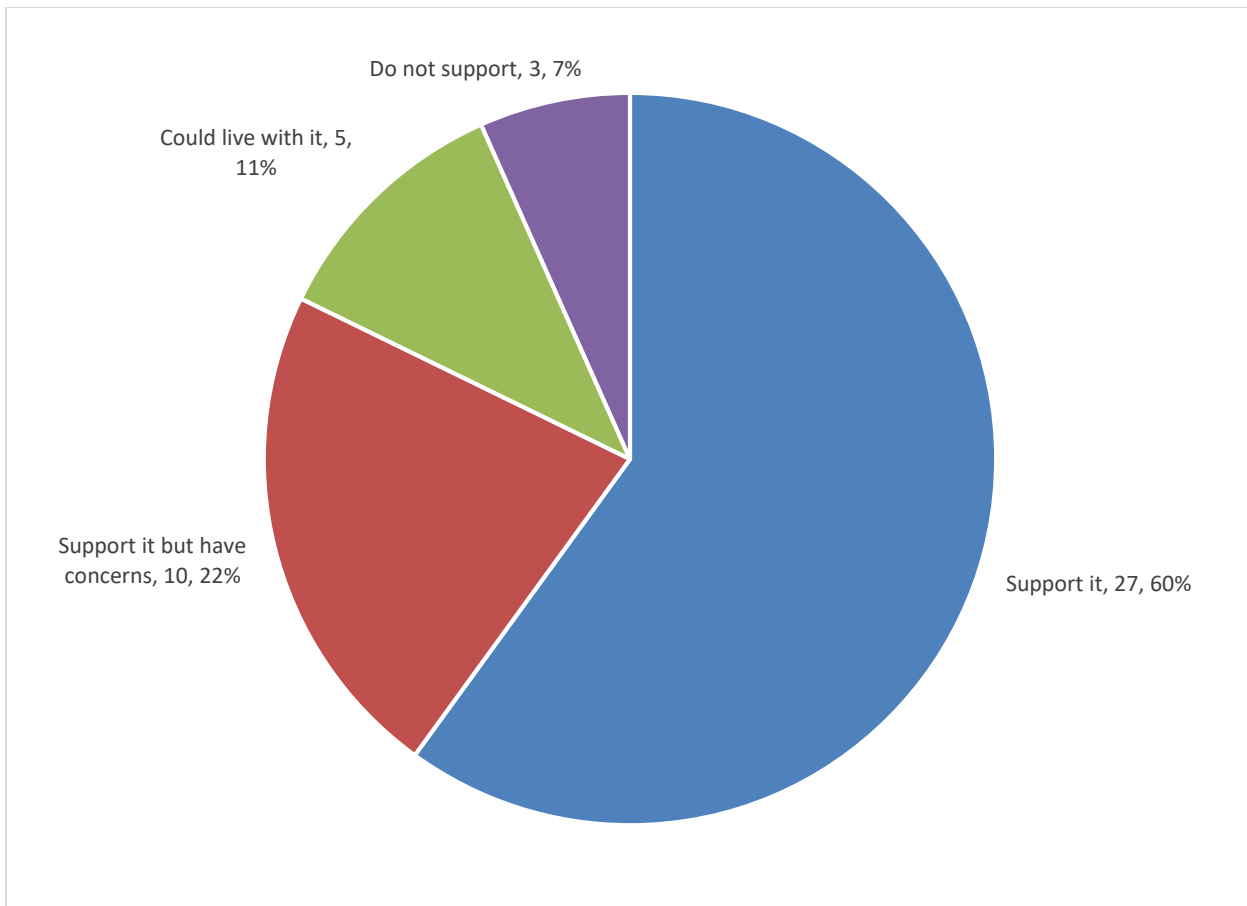
9 Make no changes to current CD election process, but encourage all CDs to work with the county auditors to have the county auditor assist, as much as they are willing and able, with the CD's election.



There was some support for this option by conservation districts, who noted that the county auditor's office was experienced and trustworthy in conducting elections. A few districts noted that they already work with their auditor's office. Concerns focused on the cost, added steps to the election process, and lack of consistency.

[Click here to read full comments.](#)

10 Continue to explore streamlining and improving opportunities within the current elections procedures (e.g., proposed WAC changes)



Most conservation districts supported our current process of improving the existing election process set in rules and statute. Some districts cautioned about the need to work carefully and deliberately to find solutions that would work for all 45 districts.

[Click here to read full comments.](#)

Full Comments received for the survey options

Comments: The three elected board members on each conservation district board would be included on the regular general election ballot.

Support it
We support being on the general election ballot in November provided that arrangements can be made to make it affordable, such as exempting non-taxing districts from being included in the formula for distributing election costs.
Support it but have concerns
The concern was the cost. We would either need to be granted rates and charges authority or be exempt from paying the fees for the election.
King CD is supportive of the concept of having 3 elected Board Members included on a general election ballot- and has passed a resolution to that effect. Our concerns center around the details of how practically this would be achieved. Cost is a major concern-both for King and for the CD's that do not have large operating budgets. While it is true that costs are proportional to the size/population of a District's service area - frequently, so too is their revenue stream. For those Districts that do not have a "rate and charge" or an "assessment" it is highly unlikely that they would be able to secure third party grant funds to cover election costs. For those Districts using a rate or assessment those funds are collected as a "recovery" for the cost of conservation services provided to a property owner-and while the costs of electing supervisors to administer the delivery of those services could legitimately be defined as "overhead", and considered in the same vein - care must be taken to ensure that rate payers do not come to the erroneous conclusion that they are being assessed to cover the cost of individual political aspirations or to advance (or thwart) particular policy agendas. King County allocates no more than 2% of their total operating budget to support the cost of elections - KCD would recommend adoption of a similar governor should CD's lace their supervisor elections on a general ballot and would encourage the Commission, and the legislature to codify both the limit - and the necessary funds in whatever proposal is developed.
Financial cost is a concern
We have concerns regarding the cost of this option. If the costs were to be covered, this would be the best option.
It's a great idea, but can be costly, effecting our budget.
cost, timing and rotation of terms
Difficult to support without knowing the financial impact on districts.
Could live with it
Much concern over cost of being put on the general ballot. The state would have to pay for it for the BOS to agree to it.
Much concern over cost of being put on the general ballot. The state would have to pay for it for the BOS to agree to it.
We could live with it. However, with the funds allocated to a general election effort, our board's criteria for success will need to shift a bit. They'll have to learn to value this election process as much as they would an additional 1-2 cost share projects, the opportunity cost associated with this proposed change.
Financial burden has to be addressed
Could increase interested candidate pool, ballot costs are shared in general elections. Inconsistent with RCW 89.08. Cost is still significant to be on the general ballot, Supervisors become politicians - rather than community volunteers which may be intimidating to many landowners and farmers and deter them from service. If the law changes to require general ballot elections without a funding strategy it will likely close some CDs in the state - it is imperative that funding be provided to cover the cost of a general ballot election

Do not support
Cost prohibited
ACCD does not support having the election utilizing the general ballot process. The disclosure requirements would prevent many people from being willing to run for a CD supervisor position. This is a nonpaid voluntary position.
Could live with it if election costs and public disclosure issues were addressed.
<p>1) The general election is cost prohibitive unless funded by SCC or the legislature. 2) Financial disclosure and other candidate requirements would likely be applied despite the fact that the positions are not compensated. Would the same disclosure rules apply to appointed supervisors under this scenario, since they have the same rights and responsibilities? 3) Proposed legislation as follows presents significant concerns: Special Purpose District Reform Legislation Outline for Review, Discussion November 20, 2019 Election Reform Provisions will be in bill by Rep. Hudgins, Financial and Transparency / Open Government Reforms will be in bill by Rep. Pollet; Senator Carlyle will be introducing one bill in Senate Election Reforms: Under current law, many districts have not had elections in years. Those that do have election have very low participation and arcane rules, which undermine trust in elections (e.g., district commissioners setting time, place, election tally committee, etc.). 1. Move all special purpose district elections into RCW 29.A general election statutes a. Special purpose elections will be held at general election b. Primary election applies c. Filing period and filing rules same as for all other local government elections d. Must have election even if only one person files for office e. Q: different phase in or treatment conservation districts? Why? 2. Remove requirements for land ownership in order to vote 3. Replacing land ownership qualification with registered voter residing in the district to vote. 4. End land ownership as a qualification for office 5. Disallow corporate voting. 6. Removes weighted/more votes voting for larger land owners. 7. Removes the husband and wife / married couple treated as one vote 8. Should we end appointment of 2/5 conservation district commissioners? 9. Cost burden - a. Counties pay for state's share of election offices in even years (\$16 million). Some of the largest county wide special purpose districts may have high cost for being on primary and general election relative to total assessment. Alleviated by having registered voters eligible instead of special land based qualification. 10. Should we move to four year terms of office, not six, to enhance public trust? 11. Other potential provisions? Financial / Openness / Transparency Reforms: 1. Special Purpose Districts which are not certified by State Auditor as having complied with state law to submit financial statements or deemed unauditable will have funds held by county in escrow, county will not approve and distribute expenditures until certified as being in compliance. 2. County may expend the funds held for the purposes of the assessment by vote of the county legislative body with county agency designated to perform the services; or, 3. County legislative body may dissolve the special purpose district if it is certified as unauditable and continue the assessment for the same purpose with work to be carried out by the county. a. Alternate from Senator Carlyle: Allow counties with property tax rate capacity to increase general fund levies by the amount of the dissolved district's property tax levy or assessment in the prior year if the county assumes provision of the services of the dissolved district. 4. Special Purpose District commissioners will be required to file F1 forms 5. PDC rules would apply as to local government elections, e.g., for campaign under \$5,000, no filing required. a. Apply PDC rules and oversight to conservation district elections. 6. Application of the Code of Ethics for Municipal Officers RCW Chapter 42.23 with provision barring any special interest of a district commissioner in, or benefit from, any contract, lease, purchase, etc. (except for benefit that is generally available to other similarly situated persons or property owners in the entirety of the district or a substantial portion of the district). a. Add bar on commissioner from becoming a salaried staff or contractor to the district in excess of limits in RCW Chapter 42.23 for any position created or contract authorized during the term of the commissioner. b. Define "direct or indirect" benefits in RCW Chapter 42.23 as including any immediate family member or dependent. 7. Notice of meetings pursuant to the Open Meetings Act, ending exception for small jurisdictions by requiring that a district have a website on which notice of meetings, minutes, budgets and contracts shall be posted. 8. Dissolution: Allow for a county legislative body to dissolve a special purpose district and end the assessment or to have a vote at a general or special election to eliminate the district and continue the assessment with services to be carried out by the county. For multi-county districts, authorize inter-local agreements for each county to take over services of a district or allow the district to expire. 9. Four year terms of office, rather than six. 10. Annual updating of signature authority by commission action transmitted to the county treasurer along with transmission of an approved budget. County shall not expend funds or transmit funds without compliance. 11. Require all special purpose districts to have the county treasurer as ex officio treasurer. 12. Other potential provisions?</p>

Some of the board members, at least one at CKCD, serve on other elected positions and boards, such as the PUD Commission. In a small community, this could limit the participation of those willing to volunteer to serve on the CD Board. There is also the question of cost to the district.
Cost, Overkill for our county, the candidate is usually unopposed
We explored locally in past and cost is prohibitive
In rural communities, some of the board members (and potential board members) serve on other elected positions and boards. This could limit the participation of those willing to volunteer to serve on the CD Board. There is also the question of cost to the district.
Our District couldn't afford it.
We can't afford it
Could live with it if election costs and public disclosure issues were addressed.
Living in a rural county, most individuals involved with serving on a board , serve on multiply boards such as a Conservation District and Weed Board, and by serving on both if they both came on the ballot they would have to choose which board to sit on, making it difficult to find another willing individual to serve on the vacant spot. Also, the cost of having to be put on the ballot each year would cause a financial burden on the District which would also take away from our Technical Support and Cost Share capabilities. Also, by putting a Special Purpose District on the ballot, you may not get qualified individuals to serve on a board because they may not want to fill out the necessary PDC forms required. Where does the money come from to pay to be put on the ballot?
JCCD is concerned, in part, about whether this type of change is appropriate for JCCD's election needs. In addition, JCCD recognizes that, at its current capacity, it would not be able to meet the financial and resource demands required to implement this change.
We do not see this as good use of conservation funds and also do not have discretionary funding. Some object to the information and filing needed to be on the general ballot
Concerned about costs to be included on general ballot and whether all districts can afford it. Also we are comfortable presenting our rates and charges proposals to our County Commissioners and them making the decisions.
Cost.
People who run for CD elections should realize they are a local government and therefore have a desire to serve the elements of the RCW that guides us. being on the general ballot evokes a stereotype of political entity and distracts from our purpose and therefore the reason landowners serve. With general election promotion these positions will become coveted for political purpose and will change who we are and diminish our successes related to the RCW. All of which does not respect nor honor the voluntary purpose of CD's. other factors do include cost, etc...
The cost to put our District on the ballot would have been over \$17,000 for just a general election ballot run in 2002 the one and only year CD elections were on the general election ballot. Thankfully, we didn't have that expense because nobody filed for the position. We have a Rates and Charges but don't feel that using approximately 12% of these funds for this election is appropriate. Districts must have a source of income, that doesn't sacrifice the meager amounts of funding we have for on-the-ground conservation work, to pay for the costs to put these positions on the ballot. If Districts became a junior taxing district with ad-valorem taxing authority, putting supervisors on the ballot may become feasible.
It would put an undue financial burden on smaller conservation districts.
Concerned about the costs related to administering the election on the general election ballot and using a significant amount of our basic funding for elections rather than implementing conservation. If CD elections were to be on the regular ballot, we should think more about a spring or August (primary) election rather than the general election in order to not get lost in the shuffle of a very long general election ballot. We should also think through the differences of running elections on an odd-number year vs. even-numbered year.
Cost & potential for uninformed voters who have no knowledge of the CD selecting board members.
The added cost to the district for putting this on a general election ballot to deplete our budget. We have only one person over the last 10 years on our ballot.
Appointments help to make sure conservation minded supervisors are on the board
Too costly

Not an acceptable option at this time
It would be too costly for most CD's. Also, CD's are total voluntary positions - unpaid! This would likely disincentivize others from serving on the board due to the disclosure of income requirement of a general election.
We need to know how much it would cost and any other ramifications of being on the general ballot. This is likely to be very expensive if CDs have to pay for it. We are also concerned with how this will change the political dynamics of board elections, introducing more controversy or political agendas in the process of recruiting board members.
The county auditor estimated a cost of 17,000 to put elections on the ballot. The board felt this was a poor use of public funds since it would not affect election outcomes, only add cost. Discussion included that there has been only one instance in recent memory when more than one person volunteered to run for a supervisor position, and in that case, the second had volunteered on a lark.
It should be a local decision. Concerned with language as written, instead of "would" if should say "could." Election costs for a general election is a concern. Difficult for people to run due to financial public disclosure documentation requirements. General election is not essential for a acceptable election.
cost to be on the ballot, whitman county has 4 districts, it would be complicated. we can barely fill the board when seats go vacant

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Comments - Conservation districts above a certain population threshold would be included on the regular general election ballot and be granted the authority to set Rates and Charges (e.g., used, in part, to cover election costs)

Support it but have concerns
Again, cost is the main concern. Two different election processes would be confusing for Districts and the public.
Depends on the population threshold
Even if a District has the ability to set rates and charges, and to include the election costs in the calculation of that rate-there is still the concern, expressed above, about the perception of politicization and agenda advancement. The comments expressed above regarding a 2% threshold apply to this question as well.
concerned that it might just end up being required for all counties
Could live with it
depending on the threshold, its a concern
Why limit it to population? Just give all districts the option to be on the ballot and the authority to set rates and charges. Then keep limits currently in RCW. Becoming a taxing authority would change districts.
It would depend on the population threshold.
Independent ability to access Rates and Charges funding (outside of county government politics). CDs maintain autonomy from county government and the ability to direct local funds for CD driven priorities - rather than accommodate caveats put in place by county governments. This offers a more stable funding stream for CD's, rather than soft money (grants). Not fair to smaller CD's. Rates and Charges tiers need to maintain consistency in RCW 89.08 with populations as they increase. Could close some CDs if Board of Supervisors voluntarily does not approve a system of Rates and Charges AND opts in to the general election requirement. Will Rates and Charges funding be enough to comply with general election requirements across the state?
Concerned with where we fall in relation to population threshold
Do not support
We do not support "marrying" Rates and Charges to the election process in anyway. Rates and Charges needs to be an option a CD chooses to utilize or not.
Do not support using population thresholds as a criteria for anything. This creates divisions amongst districts.
The population threshold would need to be high enough to exclude counties like ours, where the cost-benefit does not pencil out. Spending 50-75% of the amount collected annually on elections versus providing services to the landowners seems excessive. In addition, the justification to the landowners for imposing Rates & Charges would need to disclose this fact. We are not the only entities affected by the proposed legislative changes. Collectively, they could multiply the taxes on landowners significantly (ten times or more), depending on the number of special purpose districts, simply to provide general election voting.
There is the potential for backlash against the CD setting Rates & Charges. Population threshold is not defined.
Do not support as stated. Need to know what the threshold would be.
Concern over the equitable treatment amongst districts, and basically more taxes
There is the potential for backlash against the CD setting Rates & Charges. Population threshold is not defined.
Do not support using population thresholds as a criteria for anything. This creates divisions amongst districts.
We would support for Conservation District above a certain population threshold would be included on the regular general election ballot but NOT have the authority to set Rates & Charges.

The BOS are not comfortable with the authority for Rate and Charges for them or any district. The "districts of certain population", or anything, would further the separation of one district from another, different class system.
JCCD is concerned, in part, about whether this type of change is appropriate for JCCD's election needs. In addition, JCCD recognizes that, at its current capacity, it would not be able to meet the financial and resource demands required to implement this change.
We will not ask for rates and charges. It would be trouble for our current, stable, uncontested funding through the County's Clean Water Kitsap program.
Everyone should do it the same way.
What does population have to do with elections and serving as an engaged and mindful landowner who wishes to serve as a volunteer board member. Yes casts are a concern but only incurred when you go with a general ballot election. If all CD's are equal why would you create a "crack to be exploited" by creating a different set of guidelines for the 45 CD's. Are you suggesting that a Supervisor who is elected by a general ballot election has more importance than one who is not? Are you suggesting that a supervisor is actually more important than the CD's natural resource program?
One of the drivers to recent changes in CD election processes was to make CDs hold their elections in a more consistent manner. The option of putting only some CDs on the general ballot seems to counter the notion that similarity between districts is better.
The BOS are not comfortable with the authority for Rate and Charges for them or any district. The "districts of certain population", or anything, would further the separation of one district from another, different class system.
All Districts should have the same requirements and authority.
Similar concerns as #1.
very small population district that hasn't had any issues with elections in the past
I have concerns about any size population district on the general ballot
Too costly
Population dynamics could impact elections adversely
Segregating CD's is not a good idea. Could limit some CD's from getting Rates and Charges passed depending on the BOCC and political will.
does not address financial burden
This would likely not affect us, being a low-population area, but seems problematic to allow some districts to set their rates and others not. We also think there would be less confusion among the public and easier administration by SCC if all CDs do rates and charges and elections under the same process.
Comments included that such a measure would probably not pass. To raise funds in order to spend 17,000 on an election is still a waste of funds. The district does not have a large tax base: the last time we investigated rates and charges, it was estimated the district would raise 70,000, less county accounting fees, so some 25% would be used just for elections that aren't needed
It should be a local decision to set rates and charges independent of population level or being on the general ballot.
Keep elections uniform across all districts - population threshold should not dictate elections process.
Skipped
unable to answer without knowing the threshold - may not impact us

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Conservation districts above a certain annual budget threshold would be included on the regular general election ballot and be granted the authority to set Rates and Charges (e.g., used, in part, to cover election costs)

Support it but have concerns
see comment above
What is the threshold amount
if addresses financial costs, those with rates and charges more important as the people paying fees has a larger input
Could live with it
Why limit it to budget? Just give all districts the option to be on the ballot and the authority to set rates and charges. Then keep limits currently in RCW.
It would depend on what the budget threshold is.
Do not support
We also do not support having "thresholds" determine an election method. There should be a clear method for conducting CD elections and be consistent from year to year for a CD. CD budgets can fluctuate based on many factors each year and requiring different election methods will increase the likelihood of proper election processes taking place. It would also be confusing for County Auditors trying to determine when they need to plan for CD elections to be included or not. Again, we do not support "marrying" Rates and Charges to the election process in anyway.
Why treat "rich" districts differently? Just because a district exceeds a certain budget threshold doesn't mean they have the discretionary fund for an election or the desire to impose rates and charges to cover election costs.
Annual budgets can change drastically due to grant cycles. Bouncing between election procedures would be more damaging than staying with one or another.
Again, the threshold is not defined.
Do not support as stated. Need to know what the threshold would be.
This is a confusing option. Budgets can vary wildly based on projects, would this annual budget include pass through funds (for a FFFPP bridge for example?). It's just too confusing.
could impact conservation on the ground to remain below threshold
Concern over the equitable treatment amongst districts, and basically more taxes
Again, the threshold is not defined.
Unfortunately, Rates and Charges aren't an option in Ferry county.
Why treat "rich" districts differently? Just because a district exceeds a certain budget threshold doesn't mean they have the discretionary fund for an election or the desire to impose rates and charges to cover election costs.
Each year, our annual budget fluctuates, what would happen if a District has an annual budget that exceeds the threshold, and then unforeseen circumstances the District falls way below, how do you allow them to change each year the procedure? No to setting the Rates & Charges as stated before the reason.
Same reason to the last question. it would create a class system. We have it already, it would make it worse.
JCCD is concerned, in part, about whether this type of change is appropriate for JCCD's election needs. In addition, JCCD recognizes that, at its current capacity, it would not be able to meet the financial and resource demands required to implement this change.
No funding for this and will not ask for Rates & Charges model
everyone should ve the same

Sounds like the ideas is to make a deal with the devil - ask King CD how that went!!! Words to describe this are "blackmail, coercion, etc... The idea would lead to an even greater belief in the idea that there is a "BIG" vs "little" issue. Are we trying to develop an elite group of CD's?
Same concern as the population method for determining who's on the general election ballot. Furthermore, the threshold would need to be more than a single year because budgets can fluctuate wildly for some CDs. However, this method at least gives CDs a better chance to cover the high cost of being on the general ballot.
Same reason to the last question. it would create a class system. We have it already, it would make it worse.
All Districts should have the same requirements and authority.
Similar concerns as #1.
see no reason to pursue taxing authority at the CD for rates & charges
Same reason as above
Too costly
Annual Budgets should not play a role in CD elections including rates and charges
Same as above - segregation of CD's is not a good idea plus this would result in more work, cost, and effort than it's worth.
Provides additional accountability to tax payers for the highest levels of public funding. Inconsistencies in grant funding could result in inconsistencies in elections procedures from year to year. This would be a major concern for voters and create community outrage. Not community driven.
This would likely not affect us, being a lower-budget CD, but it seems problematic to allow some districts to set their rates and others not. We also think there would be less confusion among the public and easier administration by SCC if all CDs do rates and charges and elections under the same process.
Comments included that such a measure would probably not pass. To raise funds in order to spend 17,000 on an election is still a waste of funds. The district does not have a large tax base: the last time we investigated rates and charges, it was estimated the district would raise 70,000, less county accounting fees, so some 25% would be used just for elections that aren't needed
It should be an option to be on the general election ballot independent of annual budget, it should be local control.
Keep elections uniform across all districts - CD size should not dictate elections process.
budgets change year to year and could be a pain to keep track of
Skipped
unable to answer without knowing threshold - may not impact us

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Comments - Conservation districts would have the option (but not required) to participate in general election ballot.

Support it
While we support this, we do not think it would fly with legislators. Also, in order to make being on the general election ballot affordable, it would have to be in November, which would mean all elections would likely have to be in the last quarter rather than the first quarter of the year.
We believe this is the way it is, or should be, now
Support it but have concerns
support options
Concerned about costs related to implement this. Would only support this optional structure if the District could have the authority to approve a system of Rates & Charges if the elections administration changed. Worried about the "peer pressure" effect here - if King CD went this route and Pierce or Snohomish did not, would the other CDs look like outliers and be pressured in to adopting this practice even if it is not fully desired by our local Board?
Setting a precedent that all should be on ballot
what would be the level of opt out
If it was an option for District's but we choose not to do it, the public perception would be that the District is being exclusionary. Not taking this option helps to keep elections cost effective for Districts. Support with funding.
Could live with it
We do not want to take options away from other CDs and if they feel the general ballot is the best option we can live with it. We are concerned that once any CD is included on a general ballot there may be pressure to require all CDs to use the same method.
This should be the way it is now???
Worried that 'could live with it' would turn into 'must do'
Cost
Option only
None
Do not support
Costs will vary depending on the number of other local positions on the ballot, and whether it is an even or odd year, or a presidential election year. County auditors may not support this, and the law change may have complications. In Chelan County, requiring elections in March will rule out the general ballot, as no elections are conducted in that month.
If the law is being changed, it should be one way or the other. Giving some CDs the option to participate in the general election could be a slippery slope for other CDs where this would not be a suitable option.
It doesn't include the authority to set rates and charges, so we don't support it.

If the law is being changed, it should be one way or the other. Giving some CDs the option to participate in the general election could be a slippery slope for other CDs where this would not be a suitable option.
You would be setting a precedent that Conservation Districts can do what they want, rather than what is legal. If a provision was made, such as previously suggested, that over a certain population a Conservation District will be on the general election ballot, then hopefully every County and Citizen will understand why the process is different for each Conservation District, but once again, if we are not united in the process, what message will that send to the general public and for those who would like to serve on a Conservation District?
everyone needs to be the same
Bad idea, if system works well for NYCD it should work for all CD's. In addition, if one does it then the question is no longer a question but a requirement that ALL do it. use some critical thinking here people.
Again, this will create a checkerboard of CDs that are on the ballot while others remain off the general ballot. This continues the same problem of District's not being unified in their process.
All Districts should have the same requirements and authority.
All or None
Who would make that decision? Does it change annually with each incoming board or fiscal year? Does not provide continuity among CD's.
Needs to have funding allocated to be a viable option. Inconsistencies across the state could create inequity and chaos for voters and CDs. Need to ensure that there is a requirement for the county auditor's office to work with CDs opting in to general ballot. Inconsistencies with changing supervisor priorities/politics could create chaos within individual CD communities.
We need to know how much it would cost and any other ramifications of being on the general ballot, as we think it would be very expensive. We are also concerned with how being on the general election ballot will change the political dynamics of board elections, introducing more controversy or political agendas in the process of recruiting board members. This option may not solve the public perception problems of our elections, since there could be questions raised if two similar districts chose differently. We think there would be less confusion among the public and easier administration by SCC if all CDs do elections under the same process.
Keep elections uniform across all districts.

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Comments - All conservation district supervisors should be appointed by the SCC.

Support it but have concerns
I think our current board make up is fine.
This has some possibility since WSCC would provide oversight. CD positions would function much like the WSCC board appointments.
This sounds like a much simpler process for each CD, by removing the elections, but we'd need to know if there would be a cost to the CD for SCC handling these appointments. Appointed supervisors should represent local needs, and at least some should live in the district. The appointment process would need to be well-structured and thorough, to include local input, including vetting with the board and manager. District elections are not the primary way our CD receives public input around our operations, since our voter turnout is so low. We have other ways to get more valuable input.
Could live with it
Not the preferred option but could live with it.

Not the preferred option but could live with it.
only if there was part of the process that included local input.
only if there was part of the process that included local input.
Do not support
Loss of local control and potential for politics to come into play that would outweigh conservation and natural resource needs.
CDs are locally led agencies and the local public should have a voice in deciding who represents them on the CD board.
Districts are to be guided by the SCC, not controlled by it. Will this change effectively make districts subdivisions of a state agency instead of separate subdivisions of state government? If so, will there be different requirements for personnel, hiring, benefits, contracting, purchasing, etc.?
Has the potential to make politics worse. Takes away local control.
Absolutely not. This is not an option.
Could lose local agricultural voices on the board, Locals should have the say on who represents them SCC doesn't know the local people.
Would require revamp in procedures used to appoint candidates. Board was not contacted for last appointment. very concerning
Has the potential to make politics worse. Takes away local control. Population and budget constraints creates a challenge to maintain a full board.
By experience, an appointed supervisor up for re-appointment put in their nomination. Another individual also filed for the same appointed position. The new individual was appointed but only went to a handful of meetings. The district would have been better with the re-appointment with a dedicated individual. Having all appointed may not work out in the best interest of the Conservation District.
The locally led nature of CD's is a strong contributor to our success. To elevate the selection of all 5 supervisors to the state level dilutes this and has the potential to undermine the local flavor of CD character. Additionally - special purpose districts generally elect their governing boards and to move away from this construct entirely, takes us away from the norm, not towards it.
Impossible for SCC to know who is the farmer that is best suited and who is not a political appointment. This option does not provide local choice.
CD's are local governments who understand their backyards. an appointment comes from a distant third party who's reading a resume'. are all resume's true and correct? The WSCC is a State entity so therefore the State / governor would then hold power over a local government. I'm sure that this wasn't the idea when CD's were created under CD law. What would have changed to make them all State entities which is exactly what the goal and outcome of this idea would be.
As wise and conscientious as the Commission is, we feel this creates a situation where there is no longer a local voice in selecting the leaders of "local" conservation.
Elected positions should remain elected to cultivate diversity and pride participation
If public participation / perception is the issue at hand here, I feel change would only increase skepticism by the public.
This option would lessen the elements of local control for the District.
It's important to have local support for Supervisors.
SCC can not have control of elections at the local level, This takes away the local landowner and community representation the local Districts require.
no local representation may become political
CDs should be locally controlled not solely controlled by a statewide agency. This option could conflict with potential outcomes of current litigation based on the final ruling regarding the removal/recall of CD supervisors. Are general elections included under recall for removal? Does this remove SCC WAC ability to remove?
Loss of local control, the board needs local input and the insight of local landowners in terms of who should be on the board. Local landowners know the community better and can provide a better vetting process than a distant agency relying on applications and interviews

Potential for political misuse. Local guidance preferred. Unduly burdensome on the part of the Commission to appoint 225 supervisors with limited funding.
Retain some elected positions
lose local control of who represents constituents

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Comments - Two conservation district supervisors should be appointed by the SCC and 3 should be appointed by county legislative authority.

Support it but have concerns
Has some possibility; however, with BOCC's being a political body, there are possible ramifications especially if a BOCC is not in favor Rates and Charges.
Could live with it
not a favorite option
Do not support
Once again, the public should have a voice in who represents them on a CD board. Having county government officials appoint supervisors gives counties a lot of power over the CD
Not all districts have support and cooperation from their county government.
It would be difficult to find volunteers.
Absolutely not. This is not an option.
Again, would need some policy / process to ensure sound procedure for appointments.
It would be difficult to find volunteers. Would really lose local control with this option.
Not a good idea. At all.
The selection process may give the opportunity to favor another individual due to political pressures, etc. Having a balance of 3 elected and 2 appointed has worked for Conservation Districts boards and getting dedicated individuals who support the efforts done by the staff.
Appointments to governing bodies (community college boards etc.) are typically made at the gubernatorial level. At the local level, appointments of elected officials to governing boards (flood control districts) are typically after an individual has been duly elected. As noted above - this course of action moves us away from the norm, not towards it.
Oh, God no! Way too political! Our folks come to us from the land, not the podium.
The County Legislative Authority is a politically driven group of individuals. Lets be clear they are either Republicans or Democrat's. Where is it written and practiced that Natural Resource Programs are best suited be align with political parties - really, great idea. further our experience with the CLA is that County staff really run things and would therefore be relied upon by the actual elected officials to appoint. this is further away from what we are and what the RCW asks us to be.
This sets up an opportunity for county legislative authorities to take too much control over what are designed to be, and should be, independent conservation agencies. Some county legislative authorities may attempt to take over control of District operations by only appointing supervisors that are beholden to county priorities which may not align well with local conservation priorities.
WA
Elected positions should remain elected to cultivate diversity and pride participation
Concerned the appointment process through the county would get too political and the District would lessen its autonomy.
Absolutely not a good idea as County government would have to much control of CDs
not county leg authority
County Legislative Authority would most likely hinder the local landowner (farmer) participation at the local level
loose political independence. One supervisor in the past supports all supervisors elected locally.

Takes away both the locally led, community driven nature and autonomy of the CD. County politics change and this could create instabilities in CDs. This politicizes the CD, where CD work should remain non-partisan.
We are located in two counties, and this would be administratively difficult. Also, this would introduce another layer of politics and controversy around board supervisors, tying the CD's work to county agendas.
This is better than having the SCC appoint board members but still oppose as it reflects a loss of local control, putting a lot into the hands of three people, and still diminishes landowner input.
Magnify potential for political misuse. Clear separation of Conservation District's and regulatory agency (local County).
Retain some elected positions and appointments by county legislative authorities may encourage politicization of CD boards
revolving door of board supervisors?

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Comments - Hybridized structure where conservation districts above a certain threshold (such as population or annual budget) would conduct elections for three supervisors and those below that threshold would have all five supervisors appointed by SCC or the SCC and county legislative authority

Do not support
There should be one consistent method for supervisor appointment/election regardless of the size of the CD. And local voters need to have the ability to voice regarding who represents them on a CD board.
Do not support districts being divided by thresholds.
District budgets are too variable for this method, the structure is too confusing, and the same concerns exist as for each of these components in above comments. In addition, this conflicts with our purpose and mission as a local, not political, entity.
Too convoluted.
Absolutely not. This is not an option.
way to complicated
Hate threshold if/then procedures
Too convoluted.
We would not support anything that would tie us to county government in any way.
Do not support districts being divided by thresholds.
As stated before, having all appointed and the political pressures in some Counties, you may end up with someone who is there not to serve the best interest of the Conservation District or have the dedication another may have.
See comments above.
This would be very confusing to the public. There would be less continuity that we currently have. Not sure how this would be helpful. We feel the system isn't so broken that this option would be better.
not even going to answer this.
This option takes all of the worst elements of previous options and bundles them into one.
it would widen an already class system.
All Districts should have the same requirements and authority. Elected positions should remain elected to cultivate diversity and pride participation.

Concept is extremely confusing.
Similar concerns as #1.
Population and budget dynamics should not determine Local CD Election policies.
Too complicated, limiting, and creates inconsistency and division in CD's.
Too confusing or complicated
Adds additional inconsistencies and variability to already "bad" ideas. Does not appear to be a method that would work for anyone involved. Confusing and includes too many unknown variables to be successful.
We believe all districts should have the same process across the state, to reduce confusion among the public and simplify administration by SCC. For the smaller districts, under this proposal, it would be a much simpler process by removing the elections, but we'd need to know if there would be a cost to the CD for SCC handling these appointments. Appointed supervisors should represent local needs, and at least some should live in the district. The appointment process would need to be well-structured and thorough, to include local input, including vetting with the board and manager. We are not in favor of appointments by the county legislative authority: We are located in two counties, and this would be administratively difficult. Also, this would introduce another layer of politics and controversy around board supervisors, tying the CD's work to county agendas.
Same as above, would result in a loss of local control. The people closest to the district have a better idea of who should be on the board. Local people have local knowledge of the issues and who is best able to address them.
We support maintaining locally elected positions on Boards.
Keep elections uniform across all districts

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Comments - Pursue funding to support technological improvements, such as online voting, that could be used to assist with conservation district elections.

Support it
Additional funding is always a good thing. Election process has been an issue for many years and a solution needed.
If online options were secure, inexpensive to operate annually, optional, and not exclusive - meaning in-person or mail-in options would still be available to voters. Not all voters have access or interest in web-based activities. Questions remain, however. How will voters be validated? This makes sense only if it dovetails with improvements at the state level as they are made available to counties.
The statement should be amended to read "online ballot access" (online voting is a hot topic and is not currently allowed in Washington State). Also, KCD notes that funding to support all aspects of elections, not just the use of technology should be pursued.
I see this as a great solution that can provide CD election with more transparency while maintaining current procedures. Seems like a win-win.
To improve transparency - if chosen would need to fund the entire process not just technology
Support it but have concerns
This might work in some parts of the state, but might not work in more rural areas. And, it would have to be affordable.
The concerns we have are cost and the security of the voting system.

Need to focus on pursuit of funding to support basic CD needs
Who would pay for this? Our Board is worried about security. Good old paper ballots work every time
Concerns about on-line voting, social media impacts, also areas without access to technology need to be considered.
cost and security
Where is the funding coming from
Worth pursuing these options in an effort to increase voter participation and access and reducing costs to administer the election at the same time. Concerned about costs to adopt "technological improvements".
Not all voters have access to electronic voting in which case there would have to be access made available or offer mail-ballot option.
This is an improvement over curren process, a step in the right direction. CDs need some accountability to initiate change in election process - not just additional options. CD elections need to be fixed and this does not ensure it will be improved across the board.
Need to focus on pursuit of funding to support basic CD needs
Difficult to support without knowing financial impact on districts
Could live with it
WSCC would need to be the one that researches this
None
Do not support
Online voting has not been proven to be secure. Election tampering could occur via hackers, software manipulation, etc.
We are a small entity - if the fed/state do not already use an online system, how would the CDs be able to manage something like this? Also, many of the constituents in this district do not have accessibility to such technology.
expense unknown
We are a small entity - if the fed/state do not already use an online system, how would the CDs be able to management something like this? Also, many of the constituents in this district do not have accessibility to such technology. System would be very susceptible to fraud.
Online voting has not been proven to be secure. Election tampering could occur via hackers, software manipulation, etc.
Unfortunately, in rural areas internet is spotty at best, but also very slow. This is an unfair disadvantage to the smaller communities who support local Conservation Districts but would not be able to sign-in due to lagging.
It has been proven to be hackable.
funding comes with strings - it always does. Do you really think that "technology" is going to change this fact? so what if only 7 vote in an election vs. 70,000? does that fact change the CD's program for the better or is it actually diluted because everybody wants services and they think their needs are the most important and when they don't get it they sue, complain, get press involved (ALL EXPENSES against the limited funds of the CD's budget).
Our greatest concern is the training and budget necessary to conduct online voting along with public disclosure concerns about voter e-mail addresses. If funding is sufficient to properly train election personnel and the public disclosure issues related to voter e-mail addresses, that already exists for some CDs, are properly addressed, this would be a viable option. However, there are still many rural areas and voters who don't have access to the internet.
It has been proven to be hackable.
Not necessary in a small district.
increased cost could be prohibitive for this option
too costly. Dollars could be used for conservation instead

Tech Improvements? What would that look like? What would the voter fraud protection be for on-line voting?
Our county does not have the technology for equal representation could support if ensure all can participate
Managing an online voting system that is defensible from hackers and public criticism will be endlessly expensive and potentially more confusing, limiting to certain voters, or apt to have errors and problems. CD election staff would all need to be trained on proper use, and be able to troubleshoot for "day-of" issues that might arise (internet-outages?). CPDS, as an example of technological improvements, has already had plenty of challenges; we would not want this to be repeated.
Russian hacking concerns. (lol) Assurances on security of voting process.

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Comments - Make no changes to current CD election process, but encourage all CDs to work with the county auditors to have the county auditor assist, as much as they are willing and able, with the CD's election.

Support it
County Auditors are trained to run elections and any support that could be provided will only improve CDs ability to conduct elections properly.
If the local County has the time and staff to help with the process that would be a great benefit for the Conservation District.
Kitsap's Auditor does already help with voter registration, ballot boxes and other ballot paperwork when we do not have an incumbent re-elected
Definitely pursue this. Could the County Auditor be contracted to conduct the election (rather than the current third-party, CPA we contract with) to increase the confidence in the system? Ads in the Voter's Guide pamphlet about CD elections would be a good way to market to voters.
As long as county personal are willing and can provide help at no cost, but skeptical that they would be able to do so
Support it but have concerns
This seems redundant. If the CD does not already need, want, or have access to auditor assistance, how does "encouragement" improve the situation? Are they not already "encouraged" to do this?
This is really only a step, not a solution. Also, it doesn't include rates and charges.
JCCD currently works collaboratively with Jefferson County Elections Department for minimal assistance at no cost. JCCD is concerned that any additional requests for assistance of the County may result in an increase in Election costs.
Would this satisfy concerns?
Could live with it
County may charge CD for assisting.
not expecting much from local auditor office
There would need to be a lot of front end work to make this connection in our county. If it would not take away from other program areas to make possible, I think it is an option worth exploring.
cost?
We don't really see the value in this, since they're not involved in our elections. The County Auditors (we have two counties) provide the voters list when we request it, but we're not sure what else they could really assist us with.

Would not expect much from auditor office
Do not support
Lipstick on a pig. Extra bureaucracy.
to costly to pay Co. Auditor VS our staff time
Involving the county would create many challenges here.
Lipstick on a pig. Extra bureaucracy.
County auditors should not have the "option" to assist, if it suits. Supervisor positions are mandated elected seats and as such county auditor offices should be factoring support of supervisor elections into their regular book of business and should be considering the burden of CD election support in their budgeting and staffing and planning analysis.
if 5 districts have success with their county auditor and 40 don't what will be the result...the political nature of people will say why are you all doing it different, you MUST ALL DO IT THE SAME - who cares about the cost. This creates the on-going confusion.
The cost of having the county auditor assist could be cost-prohibitive for some CDs. It certainly would be cost-prohibitive for us and we have a system of rates and charges.
possible cost make this option not realistic, county auditor service not free
The current Auditors office staff time would preclude them from assisting our CD and would assuredly complicate the Election Process further.
Challenging for the county auditor's office to implement. Outdated voting model that needs to be updated with the current way of doing business. Cumbersome and expensive to comply with. Never a guarantee that county auditor's office will provide support.
We are seeking ways to improve the current election process. The current election guidance makes it very difficult to run an election. It is broken. The election current process needs to be changed. It is not financially sustainable.
The genie is out of the bottle so some action must now be taken.

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Comments - Continue to explore streamlining and improving opportunities within the current elections procedures (e.g., proposed WAC changes)

Support it
These responses were already submitted.
One size DOES NOT fit all so this needs to be carefully decided.
Our current system isn't perfect, but for many CDs, it works well. Most CDs are run well, have active programs that engage community members, have ample opportunity for input in the District operations, and keep costs at a minimum so our limited funding can be focused on the work we are designed to accomplish.
This should be pursued very earnestly. The current system is imperfect, but better timing, voter education, alignment with other elections happening the same week would improve awareness and participation.
Yes. Continue to improve the election process.
Support it but have concerns
If we have to stay with the current system we should improve it as much as possible. However, we believe it is time to significantly change the system.

If it's not broken, why fix it? CKCD doesn't feel there is currently a problem with the way elections are run in the district.
If it's not broken, why fix it? EKCD doesn't feel there is currently a problem with the way elections are run in the district.
If we have to stay with the current system we should improve it as much as possible. However, we believe it is time to significantly change the system.
KCD has submitted comments outlining our concerns with these changes
NYCD's concerns are that based upon the questions of this survey the "streamlining and improving" actions will lean towards these questions and their implementation.
Need statewide election service available to CDs and funded through the legislature. WAC changes do make improvements, but don't solve the problem entirely.
There have been changes to procedures already that we do not necessarily agree with
Support WAC changes if legislative proposals do not move forward.
Could live with it
Does not appear the WAC changes will negatively effect our CD election functions, however the training for personnel charged with running CD elections and the standards set might. We can not comment on any new additions to(EQAP) this at this time until we see what is of new intent by SCC.
Do not support
If each Conservation District follows the election calendar, lays out each step with deadlines (notices, paperwork needed, etc.), work with County Auditor(s), the process works and the local Conservation District are able to manage the election process just like Irrigation Districts, etc. One issue we have, we have 2 Counties in our District, if we had to have the County do our process, or be on a ballot for both Counties, it would be very expensive for our District. I can see issues down the road also, do we run ballots for the candidate in both counties even though they do not live in one of the Counties?

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