



# Washington Association of Conservation Districts

**To:** WACD Board of Directors and WACD Staff

**From:** Tom Salzer, Executive Director

**Date:** January 10, 2025

**Subject:** WACD messaging in January 2025

The Washington State legislative session opens on Monday, January 13, 2025. By now we've seen Governor Inslee's proposed budget and we have some ideas of Governor Ferguson's priorities. By all accounts, natural resources and agriculture are not in the new Governor's short list of top priorities.

We've heard that Governor Ferguson wishes to reduce state spending by \$4 billion before he considers additional taxes. That is a huge number. We'll see most agencies working on contingency plans that incorporate reductions in some programs, or in some instances, even elimination of under-performing programs.

We also have a host of new legislators starting their first days on the job in Olympia. Many of these representatives and senators don't know their local conservation districts, so they don't understand the vital connections between State Conservation Commission funding, local conservation district programs and services, and the communities and landscapes helped by our conservation community.

This is where each of us has a role. This year, more than any other in recent memory, every member in our community must be in contact with their elected officials, agency heads, and the staff who support them. We have basic materials for you to use on the WACD Hub. The public-facing materials are available at <https://wadistricts.us/wacd/member-services/#advocacy2025>. The same materials, plus instructions, are not intended for public distribution. Find those documents at <https://wadistricts.us/campaign2025/>.

Just as important as the concepts and talking points in these documents is the way you present them, and yourself, when talking with legislators. When you speak of your conservation district or WACD, you become the face of that entity. They will judge all of us by how you carry yourself. What's best? Just be yourself: honest, sincere, and committed. They will appreciate that. If you want some help, WACD staff stand ready to assist.



Remember they may not know you or may not understand why we do what we do. Whether they are new to the job or seasoned veterans, they are overwhelmed with all of the things that go with being an elected official or agency head. Be kind, have some empathy for their plight, and be sincere that you need their help.

My suggestion is that you reach out immediately to every legislator in your district. Make sure they get the appropriate informational materials from our Advocacy/Campaign 2025 resources.


My other suggestion is to be positive when you talk with legislators and with the great people who make up our conservation district community. Everyone is feeling a little unsettled by the changes in leadership. Nobody wants to hear doom and gloom. What conservation districts do helps to protect the vital natural resources of Washington State: resources needed to support vibrant agricultural businesses and healthy communities. Conservation district programs and services help build a stronger future for all Washingtonians and you are a key part of that work. When you are positive and sincere, we stand a much better chance of manifesting the positive outcomes we all hope for.

Also, remember that these budget ideas are just the opening salvo in a series of proposals that will be discussed in the coming weeks. What we've seen so far is unlikely to be what comes out of the other end of the sausage-making machine in Olympia!

We must acknowledge the difficult reality we face: it will be hard to hold onto the gains we've made in the past few years. Nevertheless, WACD will continue to advocate for more Conservation Technical Assistance funding. CTA is the engine that makes it possible to deliver conservation programs and services in communities all across Washington. CTA is important and we'll proudly live up to our commitment to support it, and conservation districts.

So: we have our work cut out for us. It's very early in the process, so try to be positive. Hold fast. Stay the course. Work the time-honored process of becoming well known to your elected officials and agencies. And don't forget to come to the February 5<sup>th</sup> Legislative Day when we can show legislators what **45 Strong** looks like!

Yours for conservation and community,



Tom Salzer, WACD Executive Director