

Regular Business Meeting

The Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission/SCC) met virtually on July 16, 2020. Chairman Longrie called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Dean Longrie, *Chairman and elected west region rep.*
Harold Crose, *Vice-chairman and elected central region rep.*
Perry Beale, *Department of Agriculture*
Larry Cochran, *elected eastern region rep.*
Jeanette Dorner, *Washington Association of Conservation Districts*
David Giglio, *Department of Ecology*
Jim Kropf, *Washington State University*
Jennifer Watkins, *Department of Natural Resources*
Daryl Williams, *Governor Appointee*

COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT

Carol Smith, *Executive Director*
Mike Baden, *NE Regional Manager*
Allisa Carlson, *Central Regional Manager*
Stephanie Crouch, *Administrative Assistant*
Kate Delavan, *Office of Farmland Preservation Coordinator*
Bill Eller, *Elections Officer and VSP Coordinator*
Josh Giuntoli, *Southwest Regional Manager*
Lori Gonzalez, *Executive Assistant*
Sarah Groth, *Fiscal Manager*
Alison Halpern, *Policy Assistant*
Laura Johnson, *Communications Coordinator*
Shana Joy, *District Operations Manager*
Ron Shultz, *Policy Director*

PARTNERS REPRESENTED

Lucy Edmondson, *US EPA Region 10*
Mike Kuttel, Jr., *Department of Fish and Wildlife*
Roylene Comes at Night, *Natural Resource Conservation Service*
Sherre Copeland, *US Forest Service*

GUESTS ATTENDED

Please see "[Attachment A](#)" for full list of attendees.

Consent Agenda

Draft May 21, 2020 meeting minutes

Motion by Commissioner Crose to approve the May 21, 2020 draft meeting minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Cochran. Motion passes.

Budget and Finance

Budget Packages & 15% Budget Reduction Plan for 21-23 Biennium

Sarah Groth, SCC Fiscal Manager, presents the first item on the agenda. At the Commission meeting in May 2020, the budget proposal concepts for 2021-2023 were approved by the Commission. The Commission was also briefed on the process for the biennial budget development. At that time the budget package topics were approved, and work teams have since been formed around each of the budget proposals.

These teams consist of participants from conservation districts and are led by Commission staff. The work teams are continuing their efforts to provide additional detail to the budget proposals.

For this Commission meeting, SCC is seeking approval for each proposal as well as the proposed funding level. SCC is also seeking prioritization of the budget packages, which Ms. Groth presented and are listed below. Ms. Groth, as well as SCC, have been working with OFM in the hopes that any budget packages submitted won't ask for too much, and they have been working to make sure that SCC's, as well as CD's, stories are told through budget packages.

Ms. Groth also recommends a special meeting be held to hear presentations from staff on 21-12 biennium budget reductions. Ms. Groth is confident SCC can meet the reductions required, and clarifies that SCC will be realizing 11% of the budget reduction.

Commissioner Dorner moves to approve budget packages as presented for the 21-23 biennium, with the \$5,000,000 for CTA. Seconded by Commissioner Cochran. Motion passes.

Motion by Commissioner Dorner to hold a special commission meeting in August 2020 (possibly week of August 10-14) to hear presentations from staff on budget reductions. Seconded by Commissioner Giglio. Motion passes.

Motion by Commissioner Dorner to prioritize the budget requests in the order as presented by staff (see below), which reflects the prioritization from conservation districts. Meeting packet pages (15-19) Seconded by Commissioner Williams. Motion carries.

Packages in priority order, based on district budget survey results 4/20/20:

- 1. Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) \$5,000,000*
- 2. Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) \$7,850,000*
- 3. Food Policy \$600,000*
- 4. Natural Resource Investments (NRI) \$11,905,000*
- 5. CREP Riparian Planning (Cost Share & TA) \$ 7,725,000*
- 6. Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) \$7,962,000*
- 7. CREP Riparian Planting (Practice Incentive Payment PIP Loan Program) \$ 500,000*
- 8. Shellfish Funding \$4,326,000*
- 9. Irrigation Efficiencies \$3,000,000*

Policy/Programs

Kate Delavan Introduction

Ron Shultz, SCC Director of Policy and Inter-governmental Relations welcomes Kate Delavan as SCC's new OFP Coordinator. Kate joined the Commission in June 2020. She comes to us most recently from PCC Farmland Trust where she worked on farmland preservation issues including conservation

easements. While in this role she also worked closely with the Pierce Conservation District on the Puyallup RCPP, so she is very familiar with conservation districts and their role in farmland preservation.

Kate also brings a broad understanding of food systems to her work, with experience in farmland conservation transactions and policy, land-use planning, farmers markets, food assistance programs, and the grocery industry. Kate holds a B.S. in Global Business from the University of Redlands and a Master's in Public Administration from the University of Washington. Kate is a member of AgForestry class 42.

Office of Farmland Preservation – Schuster Easement

Kate Delavan, SCC OFP Coordinator, presents the next agenda item regarding the Schuster Ranch Easement. The Conservation Commission secured grant funding from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, Farmland Preservation Account during the 2017-2019 biennium to acquire a permanent agricultural conservation easement on the Schuster Ranch property in Klickitat County. The Conservation Commission will hold the easement and assume primary legal and financial responsibility for stewarding and enforcing the easement in perpetuity. The project was developed in partnership with the Central Klickitat Conservation District.

Ms. Delavan provides an in-depth look at easements and SCC's current easement portfolio. SCC does not currently hold any agricultural conservation easements. Schuster Ranch Ag Conservation Easement was developed by Central Klickitat CD. Funding secured in 2016 WWRP grant round. SCC will hold easement and RCO will be 3rd party enforcement.

Motion by Commissioner Crose to formally authorize the WSCC Executive Director to sign required documents to purchase an agricultural conservation easement on the Schuster Ranch property. Seconded by Commissioner Cochran. Motion carries.

District Elections Update

Bill Eller shares the next agenda item pertaining to the SCC District Elections. At the December 5, 2019 regular business meeting, the Conservation Commission approved moving forward on the proposed WAC changes. The necessary forms were filed with the Code Reviser's Office, and public hearings set. The due date for comments is 5:00 pm on September 1, 2020.

In order to identify and refine these issues and others that came up during the past legislative session, the Commission will be hosting a meeting of Commission staff with WACD staff to discuss these issues. This group will also discuss the path forward for engagement with conservation districts. The goal is to bring suggested changes to the Commission by the December Commission meeting for consideration. These would include any potential legislation.

Food Policy Forum Update

Ron Shultz presents the next agenda item regarding the Food Policy Forum. In March of this year, after the Governor issued a series of proclamations shutting down business activity in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Governor's Office asked the Food Policy Forum to evaluate the recommendations from the 2017 report in light of the impact the COVID related shutdowns were having on the food system. Forum

members met in 5 groups through April and May to develop recommendations for actions. The report was completed and finalized on June 25.

The actions recommended in the Food Policy Forum COVID Report are categorized in four challenges:

- ▶ Threat to near and long-term economic viability of ag and food enterprises.
- ▶ Public health elements of the food system need support to maintain capacity.
- ▶ Increased need for nutrition services and assistance due to unemployment and economic insecurity.
- ▶ Need to foster resilience in the face of a changing climate to ensure long-term food security.

The recommendations cover all aspects of the food system. Many of the recommendations do not impact the work of the Commission or conservation districts, but there are several recommendations relating to conservation district work. On June 16, during a briefing on the draft recommendations with the Governor's Office, OFM, and directors of SCC and WSDA, OFM requested a decision package related to the Food Policy Forum. To help identify activities of CDs for possible funding request, Commission staff put together a survey for CDs. The survey will help gather information on what CDs are currently doing relating to the food system, actions they may have initiated due to Covid-19, and actions they would be interested in taking if resources were made available.

Mr. Shultz shares that the next steps include: Finalizing the report, preparing and completing additional information addressing the inclusion of diversity, equity and inclusion in the food policy recommendations. Prepare and complete a decision package relating to the SCC food policy work, and complete and summarize conservation district responses to the survey.

Legislative Update

Ron Shultz returns to share Legislative Updates with the Commissioners. The state response to the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted our state's health care system, strained the state food system, and had devastating impacts to our state's economy. One result of these combined hits has been a dramatic revenue shortfall in the state's operating budget.

On June 17, the state Revenue Forecast Council released a revenue forecast for the remainder of the current fiscal biennium and for the 2021-23 biennium. This revenue forecast takes into account the economic impacts of the shutdown as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Forecast Council projects a shortfall in state general fund revenues of \$4.5 billion in the current biennium, and \$4.4 billion in the 2021-23 biennium.

Previous discussions and communications from the Commission have detailed the OFM requested 15% reduction in the agency's FY 2021 state general fund budget. Subsequent to the 15% reduction exercise, it was requested non-cabinet agencies participate in furlough days for employees as well as a hold on 3% pay increases. The Commission chose not to participate in these reductions due to the adverse impacts they would have on staff. At this time, it's unclear whether more reductions will be required of state agencies.

District Operations

Grant County CD- Annexation of Moses Lake

Mike Baden, SCC Northeast and North Central Regional Manager, presents the next agenda item regarding the annexation of Moses Lake. Upon approval, in 2017, of the system of Rates and Charges by the Grant County Commissioners for the Grant County Conservation District, the City of Moses Lake withdrew from the Conservation District. The Commission approved the de-annexation request at the November 30, 2017 Commission meeting. The Grant County Conservation District has been diligently engaged in a long-term effort to work with the City of Moses Lake to rejoin the Conservation District. On May 12th the City of Moses Lake voted to approve Petition for Inclusion into the Grant County Conservation District in a split decision. The district has subsequently also approved the petition for inclusion.

Motion by Commissioner Crose to approve the Petition of Inclusion of the City of Moses Lake into the Grant County Conservation District. Seconded by Commissioner Beale. Motion carries.

Pend Oreille CD Supervisor Mid-term Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Cochran to appoint John Floyd to the Pend Oreille Conservation District Board of Supervisors. Seconded by Commissioner Crose. Motion carries.

San Juan CD Mid-term Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Longrie Lynn Bahrych to the San Juan Island Conservation District Board of Supervisors. Seconded by Commissioner Crose. Motion carries.

Snohomish CD Mid-term Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Longrie to appoint Marni Swart to the Snohomish Conservation District Board of Supervisors and David Edwards to the Whidbey Island Conservation District Board of Supervisors. Seconded by Commissioner Williams. Motion carries.

Presentation: Pacific CD Virtual Tour by Mike Nordin

Mike Nordin, of Pacific Conservation District, provides an update regarding this district's recent successes and current projects. Mr. Nordin shares the district's fish/water barrier projects, including the upcoming Smith Creek Project. Mr. Nordin shared many of the district's projects that are in process and planning, including the Salmon Creek Project is almost a mile of two-sided stream where they will plant trees. The second landowner wants to expand the project, and it is still in the planning stages, and on track for implementation next year. Rue Creek is the second half of a 16.4 salmon habitat that is opening back up, and next summer hope to have the east side completed (on the Willapa).

Commission Operations

SCC General Update

Director Carol Smith presents updates on VSP Thurston and Chelan. Director Smith has made a decision regarding the VSP concurrence of Thurston and Chelan Counties. That decision is to concur that they are meeting their goals and benchmarks stated in the five-year report. There are significant concerns on the technical panel about their reports. But, all of the technical panel members noted that these two counties only had two actual years to meet their five-year goals. The issue is that if there is not concurrence there are serious repercussions, which could lead to failure not only for these two counties, but could reflect poorly on the program as a whole. Since they are just starting the program, Dir. Smith didn't want to put the program in that deficit right away. Thurston and Chelan have made progress, and Dir. Smith wants to acknowledge that progress and encourage them to make additional progress, and especially acknowledge that they only had two years to work on these plans with a deficit in funding. Dir. Smith's letter is in concurrence, and highlighted the technical panel's concerns to set expectations that those concerns would be addressed in their ten-year report.

Now that SCC has almost a full staff, they are putting together a group to look at policies, see what needs to be updated, and create ones that may be missing. SCC will reach out to Commissioners for assistance in crafting, updating, and adding policies.

SCC is promoting and encouraging telework from staff until at least the end of the year. SCC will be holding virtual meetings for the rest of the calendar year, including both September and December SCC meetings.

Website Redesign

Laura Johnson, SCC Communications Manager, presents on the upcoming launch of the redesigned SCC website. SCC learned they had some pretty serious security issues on our site, which already had accessibility issues. SCC get to redesign and address what we really want to feature. One thing they are excited about is that each CD will have an individual landing page.

Executive Session

Chairman Longrie calls for an executive session per [RCW 42.30.110 \(1\) \(g\)](#) at 1:20 p.m. to discuss the performance of a public employee. The regular meeting will resume in 30 minutes.

Motion by Commissioner Crose to recognize Executive Director Carol Smith's performance during the January 2020 – July 2020 performance period by awarding 80 hours of annual leave and recognize her at the WACD Convention with a plaque of recognition. Seconded by Commissioner Williams. Motion carries.

Chairman Longrie adjourns the meeting at 2:02 p.m.