

## Regular Business Meeting

The Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission/SCC) met virtually on December 3, 2020. Chairman Longrie called the meeting to order at 8:33 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*  
**Terra Rentz**, *Department of Natural Resources*  
**Sarah Spaeth**, *Governor Appointee*  
**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*  
**Jean Fike**, *Puget Sound Regional Manager*  
**Lori Gonzalez**, *Executive Assistant*  
**Sarah Groth**, *Fiscal Manager*  
**Alison Halpern**, *Policy Assistant*  
**Laura Johnson**, *Communications Coordinator*  
**Shana Joy**, *District Operations Manager*  
**Alicia McClendon**, *Administrative Assistant*  
**Ron Shultz**, *Policy Director*  
**Ashley Wood**, *Fiscal Analyst*

### PARTNERS REPRESENTED

**Roylene Comes at Night**, *Natural Resource Conservation Service*  
**Sherre Copeland**, *US Forest Service*  
**Mike Kuttel, Jr.**, *Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife*  
**Tom Salzer**, *Washington Association of Conservation Districts*

### GUESTS ATTENDED

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

## Consent Agenda (Action)

*Draft September 17, 2020 meeting minutes*

**Motion by Commissioner Cochran to approve the September 17, 2020 meeting minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Crose. Motion carries.**

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## Budget and Finance (*Action*)

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### *January – June 2021 Implementation, Orca/CTA & Engineering remaining allocation*

Sarah Groth begins presentation on the first agenda item. At the May 2020 Commission meeting, she asked for six (6) month allocations to be approved for implementation, including Orca/CTA and Engineering due to the uncertainty surrounding the budget in the COVID-19 emergency response. That request was approved at the May 2020 meeting. Ms. Groth is requesting approval to allocate the remaining six-month installment of implementation, including Orca/CTA and Engineering funds to district. Ms. Groth recognizes the uncertainty surrounding additional budget cuts, and understands the need to distribute funding to districts.

***Motion by Commissioner Dorner to approve the request for the remaining six-month installment of Implementation including Orca/CTA and Engineering funds to districts. Seconded by Commissioner Beale. Motion carries.***

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## Policy & Programs (*Action*)

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### *Potential Election Changes*

Chairman Longrie calls for public comment on the next agenda item relating to Conservation District elections. Kirsten Haugen, a member of the King Conservation District Board of Supervisors, shares her experience with elections in that district. In the last election cycle, only 6,000 people voted, which means decisions are being made by a handful of people in the know. Ms. Haugen stresses that there must be action taken to bring people of all races, genders, and orientations to the table.

Jean Mendoza, a resident from Yakima County, offers her experience with the South Yakima Conservation District's election process. Ms. Mendoza shares that there is minimal communication from SYCD regarding elections, and is concerned that the board has members who have been automatically reelected since 2002. Ms. Mendoza also alleges that SYCD provided insufficient notice regarding elections during the last cycle.

Chairman Longrie closes public comment and calls Ron Shultz, SCC Policy Director, and Laura Johnson, SCC Communications Manager, to present on the next two agenda items. Mr. Shultz begins his presentation by providing a "101" on SCC election processes. Prior to the beginning of the 2020 Legislative session, several legislators expressed interest in examining special purpose district election processes. This included conservation district supervisor elections. At the December 2019 Conservation Commission meeting, Commission members discussed the proposed legislation being developed by some legislators and expressed concern about such legislation moving forward without input from conservation districts. At this meeting the Commission passed a motion regarding district elections in the 2020 Legislative Session (see **pg. 17** in meeting packet for 2019 motion text).

On Saturday, September 26, 2020, an open video conference was held for all districts. During this discussion, districts identified a rubric of items for consideration when reviewing election options. District participants specified that district elections must be, affordable/manageable, non-partisan, flexible (a.k.a. not "one-size-fits-all"), inclusive/equitable, transparent, accessible, trustworthy, and true-to-mission.

The districts then suggested several options for changes to elections, as follows.

**Option 1:** Allow option for CDs to go on the general election ballot

**Option 2:** “Election Week” pilot project

**Option 3:** Increase outreach in the current election process by pursuing technology changes and continuing with WAC changes.

**Option 4:** Make elections more affordable, extend board supervisor terms of office to four (4) years (a statutory change), conduct elections every other year (a statutory change), allow conservation districts to set the election date at a point during the year (a statutory change), and explore policy and considerations for SCC to review/approve CD proposals for setting zones/precincts for elected supervisor positions (an administrative change).

Mr. Shultz continues to show input from districts during a following meeting, held on November 21, 2020. During this meeting, districts helped to create a pro/con list for each of these options (*see pgs. 18-21 in meeting packet for full list of pros/cons*). Additionally, SCC received separate comments from conservation districts – Clallam, Clark, Grays Harbor and Pacific, Whatcom, and Palouse. SCC also received comment from a representative of Friends of Toppenish Creek (*see pgs. 22-34 in meeting packet for full comments*).

Laura Johnson begins presenting on the next agenda item, regarding the “Election Week” pilot project (information only). Ms. Johnson explains that the concept would allow for state-level promotion of CDs and CD elections. Under the current system, state-level promotion is limited because the districts host their elections at different dates within a three-month timeframe. If all (or most) CDs host their elections during a more limited timeframe, such as within the same week, the SCC could run a statewide marketing campaign to promote the opportunity to the public.

Two estimates have been created to provide an estimate of the time and cost for running a “Conservation Week” marketing campaign (*see pg. 36 in meeting packet for full estimate*). Both estimates are for marketing/communication-related work only (not including election administration time and costs). The estimate is based on work required for the first year of a campaign when all plans/materials/processes are first developed. Ms. Johnson shares that it’s likely that the staff hours required may go down in subsequent years.

***Motion by Commissioner Dorner for the Commission to create a joint committee with WACD to develop a list of recommendations for action on election reform. The committee should be formed and begin meeting in January 2021 and submit updates to the Commission and WACD board for their regular meetings with a final report and recommendations to the Commission in September 2021. Seconded by Commissioner Cochran. Motion carries.***

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## Commission Operations (*Action*)

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### *Governance and the SCC*

Chairman Longrie calls Shana Joy, SCC Regional Manager Coordinate, to present on the next item on the agenda relating to governance and the SCC. Ms. Joy begins her presentation by giving a brief overview of just what governance is and why it is needed within SCC, including for consistency, continuity, shared clarity between Commissioners, and providing a positive example of good governance to CDs.

Under the leadership of SCC’s new Executive Director (Carol Smith), SCC staff have been reviewing existing agency policies, identifying gaps and needs in our policies, and prioritizing efforts to update existing policies, and craft new ones where gaps exist. Governance policies is one such gap. Ms. Joy calls on the Commission to “craft our own governance policies” - managing risk as an agency by filling gaps around governance policies while providing an example for conservation districts.

**Motion by Commissioner Dorner to establish a Governance Sub-committee of Commissioners Giglio, Spaeth, & Dorner, to work with Shana Joy and other SCC staff with regular reports to the full Commission to craft and adopt governance policies for the State Conservation Commission by the end of calendar year 2021. Seconded by Commissioner Spaeth. Motion carries.**

#### *Chair & Vice-chair elections*

Vice-Chair Crose calls for the next item to be presented by the sub-committee on chair and vice-chair elections, regarding Chair and Vice-Chair appointments for the next calendar year.

**Motion by Commissioner Beale to reappoint Dean Longrie as Chair and Harold Crose as Vice-chair for the next calendar year (2021). Seconded by Commissioner Dorner. Motion carries.**

#### *Strategic Plan Timeline*

Director Smith presents on the five-year Strategic Plan Timeline and provides an overview of the timeline itself, using the graphic on **pg. 70** in the meeting packet. The overall goal is to have the 2022-2027 strategic plan approved during the September 2021 meeting.

**Motion by Commissioner Cochran to approve proposed timeline for strategic planning. Staff will develop work products towards the completion of this strategic plan as outline in the timeline. Seconded by Commissioner Crose. Motion carries.**

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## District Operations (Action)

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### *Pierce Conservation District Supervisor Appointment (mid-term)*

The SCC received four applications for mid-term appointment on the Pierce Conservation District Board of Supervisors. All applications received after the annual March 31 deadline for full term appointment, will now be processed as a mid-term until next year's cycle. Applications were sent to all Commission members for their review prior to the December 3 business meeting. Commissioners and Commission staff followed the process adopted in March of 2018 to conduct a more comprehensive vetting of the applications received for Commission appointment including conducting telephone interviews of each of the candidates listed on **pg. 37** and contacting references.

**Motion by Commissioner Crose to appoint Mark Mauren to the Pierce CD Board of Supervisors effective December 10, 2020. Seconded by Commissioner Williams. Commissioner Dorner abstains. Motion carries.**

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## Executive Session (Action)

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Chairman Longrie calls for an executive session per [RCW 42.30.110 \(1\) \(f\)](#) at 12:30 p.m. to receive and evaluate complaints or charges brought against a public officer or employee. The meeting reconvenes at 1:19 p.m.

**Motion by Commissioner Williams to direct staff to conduct further research into a complaint made against a supervisor and draft a response letter to be distributed to Commission members**

**prior to the next regularly scheduled commission meeting for action. Seconded by Commissioner Crose. Motion carries.**

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## District Operations (*Information*)

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### *District Operations & Regional Manager Report*

Chairman Longrie calls on Jean Fike, SCC Puget Sound Regional Manager to present on the next agenda item. Ms. Fike shares recent accomplishments, including but not limited to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, election changes, RCPP development, the release of the supervisor development module, and CD personnel and hiring. Ms. Fike also highlights some “coming attractions” such as continued support for COVID-19 response, creating more supervisor development modules, supporting RCPP development, NRI & Shellfish project tracking as the end of the biennium approaches, and working with CDs that experiencing personnel challenges and turnover.

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## Policy & Programs (*Information*)

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### *Legislative Preview*

Chairman Longrie invites Mr. Shultz back to present on the next agenda item relating to the upcoming 2021 Legislative Session. Mr. Shultz shares that the upcoming legislative session will be unprecedented in how it will be conducted in light of precautions surrounding COVID-19. The session will also be significant in that they will be developing the 2021-23 biennial operating and capital budgets. Commission staff will continue previous processes for coordination with WACD and conservation districts. Staff will also continue evaluation of legislation and recommendation of agency positions on bills, as well as testimony on legislation important to the Commission.

Although the official legislative calendar has not been released, it's anticipated the 2021 Legislative session will start on Monday, January 11, 2021. This will be a long, 105-day session, ending Sunday, April 25. Mr. Shultz provides a brief update regarding the 2020 election results and how that may affect SCC, and then presents possible legislative topics in the coming session.

**Budget:** Earlier this year, revenue projections indicated an \$8 billion shortfall over the next three fiscal years. Since that time actual revenues have come in stronger than expected. The mid-summer revenue forecast changed their projection to a \$4 billion shortfall due to strong revenues. The most recent actual revenue collections report on November 17 indicated an increase of \$380 million increase over projections for the period September 11 to November 10, an 11.5% increase.

**Accountability:** There continues to be legislative interest in accountability and transparency of special purpose district operations, including conservation districts. It's unclear the exact nature of any legislation, but it's likely the House may move the bill they passed last year that failed in the Senate.

**Net Ecological Gain:** This was a topic of several bills last session. Net Ecological Gain (NEG) is the concept of going beyond current environmental law requirements to avoid and mitigate impacts to require ecological gain when there are on-the-ground activities impacting natural resources. Although legislation incorporating NEG into the growth management act and the Voluntary Stewardship Program did not pass, there are ongoing discussions among stakeholders to see where NEG can be incorporated into state actions. The focus now seems to be around state funded projects, particularly transportation projects.

Open Public Meetings Act: When the pandemic closures were announced they impact the ability of agencies to conduct open public meetings as required by law. Action by the Governor was required to allow agencies to conduct meetings remotely. There's interest among several state agencies and local governments to have legislation to change the Open Public Meetings Act to allow for remote meetings under certain circumstances.

Water Banking: Stakeholders in the Methow area have been working with their local legislators on a bill to establish a water banking program in several watersheds largely in Okanogan county. The idea is to have a state program with funding to purchase water rights from willing landowners and "bank" those rights so the landowner can continue to use the water, but cannot sell the water right to someone who wants to move the water out-of-basin. The discussions have included the Commission as a potential agency home for the banking program.

Equity: There may be legislation relating to state agencies and policies for equity and transparency in operations and funding allocation. No specific bills yet, but this topic is frequently mentioned as a top issue of concern by legislative leaders and members.

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## Presentation of award to Director Smith

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At the July Commission Meeting, the Commission approved a motion to recognize Director Smith's exceptional performance by awarding an additional 80 hours of annual leave and presenting her with an award during this meeting. Chairman Longrie presents Director Smith with a plaque commemorating her work during 2020.

Chairman Longrie adjourns the meeting at 2:31 p.m.