

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1097

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to special assessments for conservation district activities and programs.

Brief Description: Regarding special assessments for conservation district activities and programs.

Sponsors: Representatives Kirby and Chase.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/20/09, 1/27/09 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Allows counties that contain cities with a population of 180,000 people or more to have a maximum annual per parcel rate of \$10.
- Requires money to be spent in conservation districts on programs to conserve natural resources, including soil and water.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Jacks, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Smith, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kretz, Liias, McCoy, Nelson, Ormsby, Pearson, Van De Wege and Warnick.

Staff: Jaclyn Ford (786-7339)

Background:

Conservation districts are authorized to engage in a variety of natural resource conservation activities, including the conservation of soil and water. In 1989 the Legislature authorized a process through which county legislative authorities could generate funds to finance conservation district activities by establishing a system of special assessments on lands located within the district.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

By August, prior to the year assessments are proposed to begin, conservation district supervisors conduct a public hearing on the proposed system of assessments. After the public hearing, the supervisors can file the proposed system of assessments and a budget with the county legislative authority. The county must then hold a public hearing on the proposal, find that the public interest will be served, and determine that the special assessments will not exceed the benefit the land will receive from the district activities. The county may accept or revise the proposed system of assessments and once agreed to, must post notice as specified in statute.

The system of assessments will include a classification of lands, an annual per acre rate of assessment for each classification, and the total assessment proposed. Lands that will not receive benefit are to be classified separately and are not subject to the assessment.

The maximum annual rate of special assessments is 10 cents per acre, \$5 per parcel, or both. However, counties with more than 1.5 million residents may have a maximum annual per parcel rate of \$10. Currently, only King County has more than 1.5 million residents.

Special assessments may be imposed for up to 10 years. They are spread by the county assessor separately on the tax rolls, and are collected along with property taxes by the county treasurer. The county treasurer deducts a specified amount established by the county legislative authority for the county's costs in spreading and collecting the assessment.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Counties that contain cities with a population of 180,000 people or more may have a maximum annual per parcel rate of \$10.

After the county treasurer deducts the amount from the collected special assessments to cover the costs incurred by the county assessor and county treasurer, the remaining funds must be used by the conservation district on programs to conserve natural resources, including soil and water.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

King Conservation District, Pierce Conservation District, and Spokane County Conservation District were named in the original bill as the districts that may have a maximum annual per parcel rate of \$10.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support of original bill) This is simple and self-explanatory; the bill would allow Spokane and Pierce County to collect assessments just like King County. The workload of the conservation districts has grown and there's been no increase in revenue, which makes it difficult to implement programs. Phosphorous in the river comes from nonpoint sources, and the conservation districts have to increase their efforts to decrease phosphorous levels. Assessments are one of the best tools that conservation districts have for implementing conservation projects. Agriculture acre rates would not increase in Spokane. Thirteen conservation districts use the assessment authority, giving them a stable funding source. This bill would provide an opportunity for three districts to put more conservation on the ground. This is an enabling bill that allows districts to work with the counties to conserve natural resources, keep farms in business, and support many different programs.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Kirby, prime sponsor; Jim Armstrong, Spokane County Conservation District; John Larson, Washington Association of Conservation Districts; Monty Mahan, Pierce Conservation District; and Brynn Brady, Pierce County Government Relations.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.