

Testimony regarding HB2958

House hearing date March 12, 2019

Qualifications to run for a Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) position

From: Brian W. Lightcap 13342 NW Newberry Rd Portland Oregon

I oppose this bill. There is no need to make any changes based upon one or two unhappy candidates who found out they didn't qualify for a zone position. Currently there already is provision for landowners to serve as zone directors if they don't own or manage 10 or more acres. Further, there are usually 2 at large positions in each conservation district whose sole purpose is to provide for board members who don't own 10 acres. This is the case for the East and West Multnomah SWCD. In fact, if a member of the public is truly interested in furthering the cause of conservation, they can learn about the conservation district by serving in a meaningful capacity for a year or more. After that, they are eligible to serve as a representative in a zone, even though they own less than ten acres.

There remains a great misunderstanding from those in urban areas of what it really takes to manage natural resources, farms, forests and ranches. Urban residents rarely know the history of conservation districts and it's still a good idea that they serve as associate directors for year and learn about conservation districts and the dedication of it volunteer board members to spread the gospel of conservation and land stewardship. I note that individual home owners rarely can adversely impact water quality to the extent of larger properties. Nevertheless, Conservation districts in more urban counties still direct a lot of educational resources toward urban populations so that residents understand that rural portions of counties are drastically underserved in areas of conservation and water quality compared to cities like Portland and Gresham.

Large amounts of public funds are already dedicated to urban needs, via open spaces and natural areas managed by Metro. Metro occasionally partners with conservation district to increasing funding for certain public projects. But, Rural landowners typically do not have access to Metro funding for conservation; thus it's up to conservation districts to work with landowners.

*Brian Lightcap*