

WATERSHED INVESTMENT DISTRICTS
A SUMMARY OF DRAFT LEGISLATION
July 27, 2011

Rationale for Watershed Investment Districts (WIDs)

- Establish sufficient and dedicated resources to effectively implement watershed salmon recovery plans, stormwater improvements, and other watershed priorities.
- Break down existing funding silos and better coordinate investments to address watershed issues and priorities across landscapes.
- Empower local decision makers to make investments that improve watershed health.

Purpose

The proposed legislation allows creation of special purpose "watershed investment districts" organized on watershed boundaries and authorizes them to raise and disburse funds to conserve and restore lands and waters. It authorizes WIDs to seek funds to implement watershed and salmon habitat recovery plans. While the legislation was developed by WRIAs in Central Puget Sound, it could apply statewide.

Process to Create a District

The boundaries of a district may include all or a portion of a single Watershed Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) or all or portions of contiguous WRIAs. One or more counties (within which a Watershed Investment District was located) would pass an ordinance to create a WID. Cities with a majority of the population within a proposed WID could petition a county or counties to create a WID.

Governance

The board of a WID would include elected officials of counties and cities that are wholly or partly within a WID. The legislation defines an optional process for forming a board in WIDs with more than 15 participating local governments. Each WID board may appoint non-voting advisory members representing stakeholders' interests directly to the board or appoint a separate advisory committee.

Activities Funded by a District

The primary purpose of the proposed legislation is to create local funding and coordinate all funding for implementation of watershed and salmon habitat plans. WIDs could also apply for and accept federal, tribal, state and private funds. A few examples of activities, programs and projects that could be funded include: acquisition of high-value aquatic and upland habitat; restoration of key aquatic habitat; and projects and programs to address regional problems related to storm water; outreach and education; and multi-benefit projects such as floodplain management.

To the maximum extent possible, WIDs must seek other sponsors (such as cities, counties, tribes or non-profit organizations) to carry out activities, programs and projects. A WID itself could carry these out if it finds that it is specially qualified to do so.

Funding Sources

Types of funding that a WID could incorporate into a funding plan and a funding proposition include:

- General property tax
- Sales and use tax
- Utility fee
- Per parcel assessment
- Real estate excise tax; and
- Pollution discharge tax

Watershed Funding Plans

Within three years of creation of a WID, the WID board must adopt a watershed funding plan for future activities, programs and projects. The board must consider allocating up to 10 percent of the funding to activities, programs and projects identified by individual participating cities and counties.

Watershed Funding Propositions; Voter Approval

Within seven years of creation of a WID, the WID must prepare a funding proposition for submittal to the voters within the WID. The funding proposition would include a list of activities, programs and projects (from the WID's funding plan) and proposed increases in taxes, fees or charges to support their implementation. Each participating county within the WID must submit the funding proposition to voters in the WID who reside in that county at either a special or general election.

If the voters fail to approve a WID's first funding proposition, the WID may submit additional funding propositions to voters. If voters fail to approve two consecutive funding propositions, the counties that created the WID must act to dissolve it.