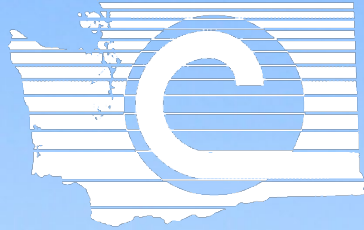


Washington State
Conservation
Commission



Office of
Farmland
Preservation



Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP)

Nov. 2021 Conservation Easement Survey Results

CD Demand for Conservation Easement Programming

- Survey results
- Information only item
- See page 38 of packet for survey results handout

Strategic Priority Areas and Goals



Voluntary Conservation of Natural Resources

- Goal I. Protect and enhance fish and wildlife habitat
- Goal II. Protect and improve water quality and availability
- Goal III. Protect and improve soil health
- Goal IV. Improve forest and rangeland health on private land
- Goal V. Strengthen awareness of natural resources' value and conservation opportunities



Agricultural and Working Lands Viability and Food System Support

- Goal I. The SCC is a trusted and knowledgeable partner in advancing working lands protection and agricultural viability across Washington
- Goal II. Working lands are available for future generations
- Goal III. Maintain water supply for agriculture
- Goal IV. Economically viable farms, farmland, and strong local and regional food systems



Climate Resiliency

- Goal I. Equip producers and land stewards to strengthen adaptive management strategies to successfully adapt to a changing climate
- Goal II. Increase carbon sequestration
- Goal III. Decrease greenhouse gas emissions
- Goal IV. Increase stakeholder understanding about climate-smart practices and holistic co-benefits
- Goal V. Strengthen the ability of our natural and working landscapes and communities to prepare for and respond to drought, wildfire, flood, and other climate-related hazards



Governance and Accountability

- Goal I. The SCC Board and agency operates legally, transparently, accountably, and inclusively
- Goal II. A fully engaged and representative Commission board
- Goal III. Conservation district boards represent their community
- Goal IV. Conservation districts operate legally, transparently, accountably, and inclusively
- Goal V. Conservation district boards are well-supported to achieve their mission



Leadership, Partnership, and Collaboration

- Goal I. Earn and maintain the trust of partners and decision-makers
- Goal II. Demonstrate leadership in voluntary conservation resulting in innovative natural resource solutions that work
- Goal III. Cultivate a broad and inclusive culture of conservation
- Goal IV. Foster collaborative, holistic, multi-benefit solutions for natural resources and agriculture

Agricultural and Working Lands Viability



Agricultural and Working Lands Viability and Food System Support

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- **Goal II:** Working lands are available for future generations.
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- **Goal IV:** Promote policy and funding to support farmland preservation and economic viability as part of the food system.

Agricultural and Working Lands Viability



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Survey Methodology



Purpose

Purpose

- The purpose of the analysis is to help the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and the Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) assess conservation district interest in conservation easements.

Survey Methodology



Method

Method

- Conservation district supervisors and staff responded to a series of questions via an electronic survey.
- The survey included questions on general conservation easements and on agricultural conservation easements

Survey Methodology



**Response
Rate**

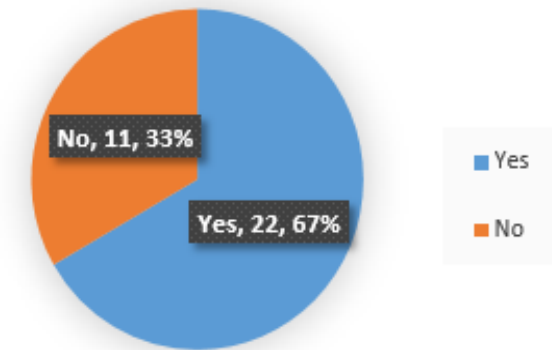
Response Rate

- OFP sent the survey via GovDelivery to all 45 conservation districts (CDs).
- 43 CD staff or supervisors responded.
- The responses represent 33 CDs.

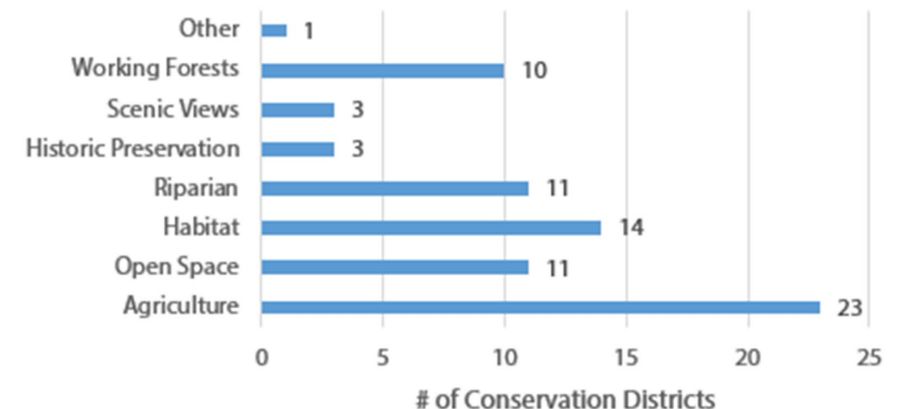
Key Findings on General Easements

- 22 CDs have conservation easements in their long-range plan and reported landowners contact the district for help with conservation easements.
- The majority of CDs do not hold conservation easements currently and the majority stated either they do not want to hold easements in the future or they are not sure if they want to hold easements in the future.

**CDs with conservation easements
in their long-range plans**

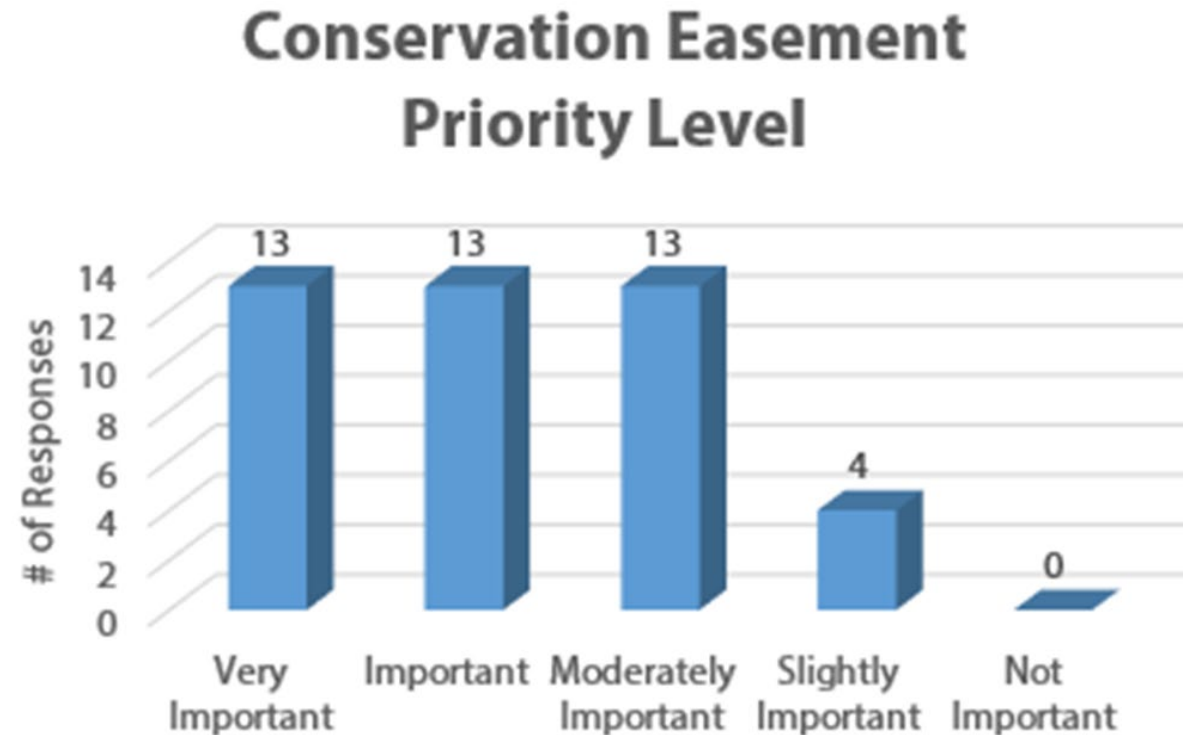


**# of CDs reporting landowners
approach them for help**



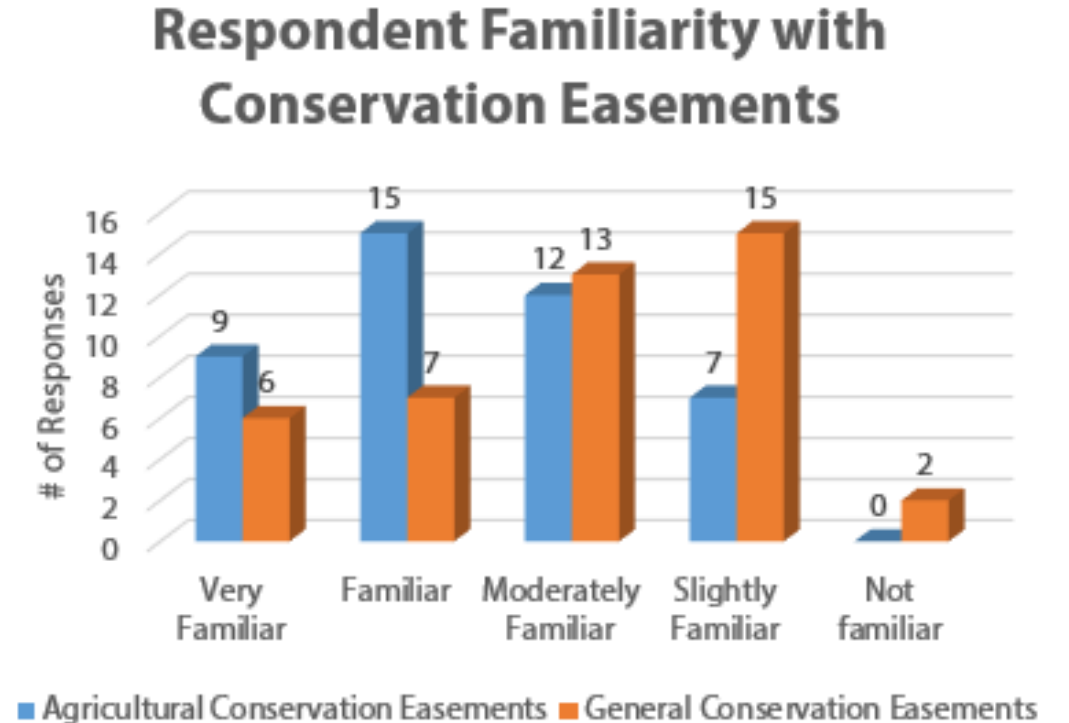
Conservation Easement Priority Level

- CDs prioritized conservation easements at varying levels of importance. None stated they are “not at all important.”



Familiarity with Conservation Easements

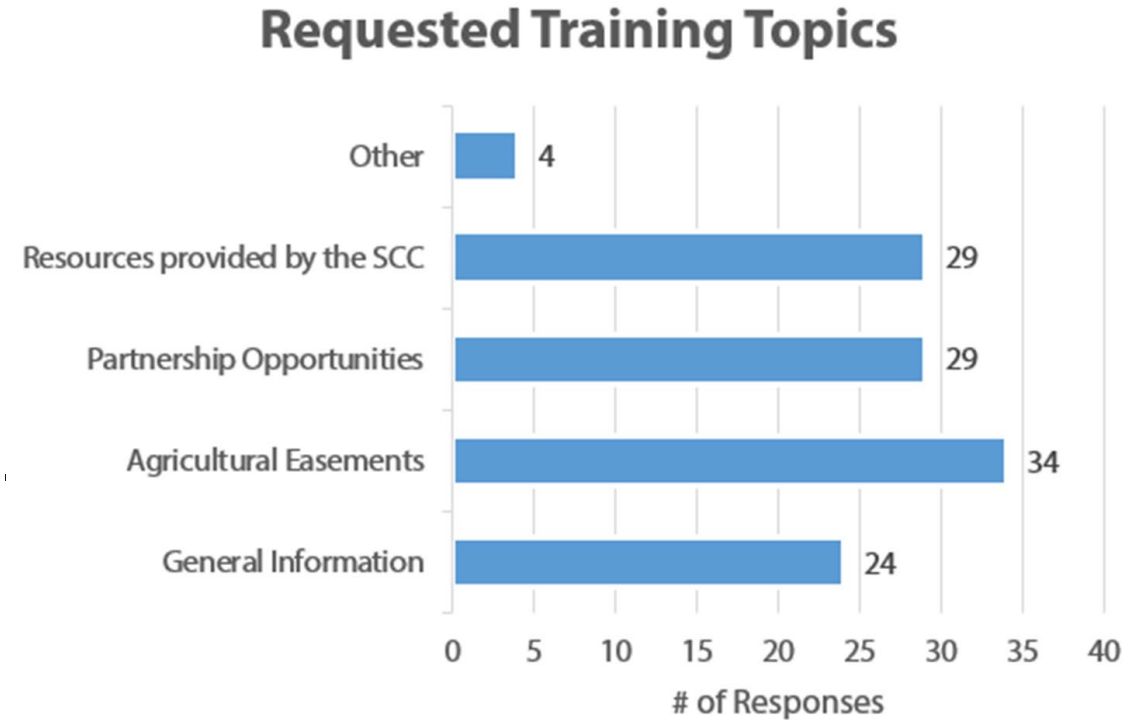
- Staff and supervisor familiarity with conservation easements is varied.
- Respondents stated a slightly higher level of familiarity with agricultural conservation easements than with general conservation easements.



Desire for more training and resources

Training Needed

- More than 80% of respondents indicated they are interested in a training on conservation easements.
- There is strong interest in all topic options (general information, agricultural easements, partnership opportunities, and SCC resources). Agricultural conservation easements received the most interest.
- Recognition this work takes specific staff expertise and significant time.
- One district proposed the idea of hosting a liaison to facilitate easements across multiple counties.



Importance of Partnership

- Partnership is a key opportunity for CDs. Several districts reported they partner with land trusts and county governments and stated that they value the partnership.
- 22 CDs reported there is a land trust or county government in their service area that holds agricultural conservation easements.
- 19 of the CDs reported they partner with an entity that holds agricultural conservation easements.



Partnership on Agricultural Conservation Easements

Methods of partnership include:

- Information sharing, the CD provides technical assistance during or after easement acquisition (e.g. farm plan or cost-share programs);
- CD supports or coordinates outreach to landowners;
- CD refers landowners to the easement holder;
- Partnership established via RCPP;
- District representative serves on a land trust advisory committee (1 response).

Challenges to Implementing Agricultural Conservation Easements

- CDs experience varying challenges related to protecting farmland through agricultural conservation easements.
- The most common challenge listed was funding followed by staff capacity and expertise.



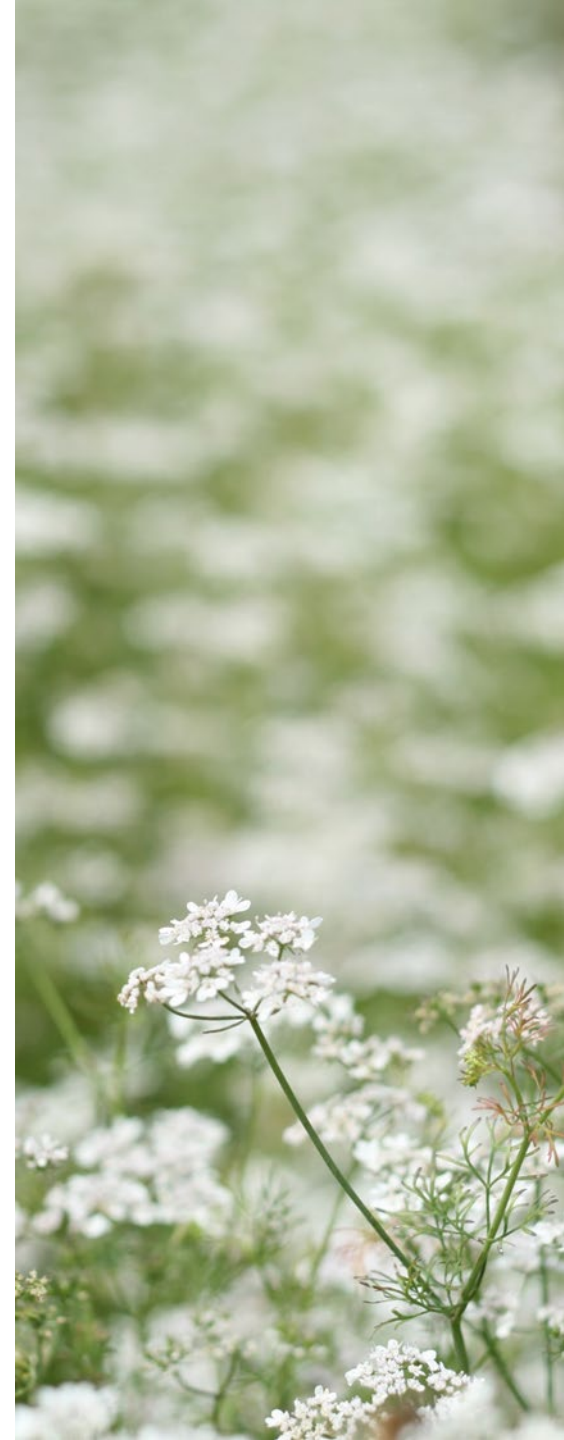
Findings on Agricultural Conservation Easements

Challenges identified by respondents include:

- Not enough funding for easement acquisition or funding programs are too complex (match requirements, process difficult to navigate) or funding timeline is too lengthy
- Lack of staff capacity and expertise
- Concern over long-term stewardship obligations (funding, liability, legal issues)
- Lack of partnership
- Lack of resources for education and outreach
- Lack of willing landowners: Easement values are perceived to be too low or easement timeline is perceived as too lengthy
- Existing programs don't align with local needs (rangeland and shellfish properties)
- Lack of community support
- Concerns about perpetuity
- Concerns about the future viability of agriculture in the area
- Poor administration of easement funding programs
- Lack of tools to protect timberland
- Next generation farmers aren't able to access land

Next Steps

- OFP welcomes continued feedback from CDs on their needs
- OFP staff will continue to:
 - Facilitate partnerships between CDs and other land conservation entities
 - Provide CDs with one-on-one technical assistance
 - Provide project management services on agricultural conservation easements
- OFP will seek to develop:
 - Additional resources and training for CDs
 - Additional funding sources for conservation easements





Contact

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Download the pdf of the results [here](#).