

February 4, 2014

Dear Representative Feige,

The Board of Supervisors of the Palmer Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) requests that you vote against HB 207 (consolidating the Board of Agriculture and Conservation with the Natural Resource Conservation Board) as it is currently written for a number of reasons.

1. In the HB 207 Sponsor Statement the idea is given that consolidating the two boards will improve efficiency and reduce the size of government. Since the members of both boards are primarily unpaid volunteers this doesn't really influence the size and efficiency of state government.
2. We are very concerned with redistributing the management of the Agriculture Revolving Loan Fund from the Division of Agriculture to the Commerce Department. Agricultural opportunities require a significant knowledge of the biology driving the system. It is questionable that the appropriate level of agricultural insight is present within the Commerce Department.
3. While the mission of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts somewhat overlaps the mission of the Board of Agriculture the broad mission to conserve water and soil resources causes the conservation districts to work with many non-agricultural partners. For example, the Palmer SWCD works with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to identify and characterize regions of salmon streams that need to be improved and we are in the proposal stage with the Department of Environmental Conservation to monitor water quality in several impaired rivers. We are also discussing with Department of Transportation how our unique knowledge base can provide unique solutions for some of their roadside management issues. These are just several examples of projects that are appropriate to the Soil and Water Conservation District's mission but would not take a high priority on a combined board that focused on agricultural issues.
4. Some of the Soil and Water Districts work on local conservation issues despite their being almost no commercial agriculture in their district. The Yukon-Kuskokwim district and the Southeast district come to mind. The Southeast District works with the local shellfish industry and the department of Fish and Game more than they work with agriculture.
5. While the Soil and Water Conservation Districts actively seek agricultural opportunities the brutal facts of funding availability dictate that we receive far more funds for accomplishing non-agricultural projects than we do for actual agricultural projects. The proposed Board of Agriculture, Conservation and Development would likely give these important non-agriculture projects the short end of the stick.

It is far better to keep the current structure of the Natural Resource Conservation Development Board and the separate Board of Agriculture and Conservation than the combined board that HB 207 would create.

Please vote against the proposed version of HB 207 !

Sincerely,

The Board of Supervisors  
Palmer Soil and Water Conservation District

Todd Pettit  
Bruce Bush  
Don Berberich  
Doug Warner  
Arthur Keyes

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