

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5539

As Passed Senate, April 20, 2005

Title: An act relating to restoring Washington's watersheds with help from postconflict veterans.

Brief Description: Establishing the veterans conservation corps.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Jacobsen, Oke, Rasmussen, Doumit, Schmidt, Benson, Kastama, Shin, Pridemore, Franklin and Roach).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 2/9/05, 2/23/05 [DP-WM].
Ways & Means: 3/2/05, 3/22/05 [DPS].
Passed Senate: 4/20/05, 45-1.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Doumit, Vice Chair; Oke, Ranking Minority Member; Fraser, Hargrove, Morton, Spanel, Stevens and Swecker.

Staff: Vic Moon (786-7469)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5539 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Doumit, Vice Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Kohl-Welles, Parlette, Pflug, Pridemore, Regala, Roach, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Brian Sims (786-7431)

Background: Veterans often return from conflicts with serious stress problems which affect their ability to adjust to civilian life. Working in a natural setting has been shown to help veterans with that adjustment. Washington timber and salmon enhancement programs could benefit from employed or volunteer returning veterans, and the work in these natural settings could help ease the transition of these veterans back to civilian and family life.

Summary of Bill: A veteran conservation corps is created and is administered by the salmon recovery funding board, in consultation from the Department of Veteran Affairs. The Veterans Conservation Corps Program Account is created. Grants from the account are for salmon recovery, watershed, and water clean up projects. Grant recipients must demonstrate that at least 75 percent of grant funds are for activities involving veterans coping with posttraumatic stress disorder. The program must be organized and marketed to the Department of Veteran Affairs.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For (Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation): This program could help veterans with all types of combat related problems and is an innovative approach to address both salmon habitat restoration and a serious health issue.

Testimony Against (Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation): None.

Who Testified (Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation): PRO: Tim Smith, Department of Fish and Wildlife; John Beal.

Testimony For (Ways & Means): This program is an innovative approach to helping returning veteran re-enter civilian life. It is a way for veterans to restore their health and well being, while at the same time restoring salmon habitat. The model has worked in other parts of the country.

Testimony Against (Ways & Means): This program is poorly thought out. It appears to be a new program assigned to an agency, but it also sets up a new account and makes an appropriation. It insults veterans and opens old wounds. It doesn't provide meaningful work. The state has a poor track record regarding veterans.

Who Testified (Ways & Means): PRO: Senator Ken Jacobsen, prime sponsor; Skip Dreps, Northwest Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America.

CON: Earl Emerson, taxpayer.