

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## 2SSB 5164

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As Passed Senate, March 13, 2007

**Title:** An act relating to expanding the veterans conservation corps program.

**Brief Description:** Expanding the veterans conservation corps program.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Jacobsen, Hobbs, Shin, Rasmussen, Kilmer and Franklin).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 2/1/07, 2/15/07 [DPS-WM].  
Ways & Means: 2/20/07, 3/2/07 [DP2S].  
Passed Senate: 3/13/07, 46-0.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5164 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Morton, Ranking Minority Member; Fraser, Hargrove, Poulsen, Spanel and Stevens.

**Staff:** Kim Johnson (786-7346)

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Majority Report:** That Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 5164 be substituted therefor, and the second substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair, Operating Budget; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, Fairley, Hatfield, Hewitt, Hobbs, Keiser, Kohl-Welles, Oemig, Parlette, Rasmussen, Regala, Roach, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Tom.

**Staff:** Chelsea Buchanan (786-7446)

**Background:** The Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC) was created by the Legislature in 2005 to assist veterans by providing volunteer opportunities on natural resource restoration projects that help protect and restore Washington's watersheds, rivers, streams, lakes, marine waters, forest lands, and open lands. The VCC is administered by the Department of Veteran Affairs (Department).

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**Summary of Second Substitute Bill:** The Department is required to assist veterans who are enrolled in the VCC with obtaining employment in conservation programs and projects to restore habitat. In order to incorporate training, education, and certification in environmental restoration into the program, the Department must consult with the appropriate state level higher education and work force training boards and other state agencies.

The Department may enter into agreements with community colleges, private schools, state or local agencies, or other entities to provide training and educational courses as part of the enrollee benefits from the program. The Department may enter into an agreement with a local government or other entity for use of VCC enrollees in a project where work will begin prior to June 30, 2008.

The Department must collaborate with other state agencies that administer the Washington Conservation Corps and identify stewardship and maintenance projects on agency-managed lands that are suitable for the VCC program.

The Department must seek to enter into agreements with federal agencies managing lands in Washington for the employment of VCC enrollees in environmental restoration projects.

During calendar years 2007 and 2008, the Salmon Recovery Funding Board must cooperate with the Department to inform salmon habitat project sponsors of the availability of VCC enrollees to work on projects. The Department may also inform project sponsors of the benefits of using VCC enrollees, including the benefit of additional funds that may be available for the project. The Salmon Recovery Funding Board shall consider funds provided by the Department for a project using VCC enrollees as match funding in the evaluation of projects for funding by the Board.

By September 30, 2007, the Department must submit a report to Office of Financial Management and the Legislature that identifies projects on state agency-managed lands that are: currently planned or are suitable for VCC enrollees and have funding in place; and additional projects that if funded would be suitable for VCC enrollees.

The Department is required to submit a report to the Legislature by December 1, 2008, on the status of the VCC program, including the number of enrollees employed in projects and training, certifications earned, employment placement achieved, program funding provided and the results of the pilot project.

The Veterans Conservation Corps Account is created in the state treasury. Monies in the account may only be expended after appropriation and must be used for the VCC program.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation):** PRO: Our state will have over 48,000 returning veterans from Iraq and I urge you to utilize this talented group of individuals. These are people with extraordinary skills and

work ethic. The VCC has done more for me than any other veteran related support program. The bottom line is that many of the returning veterans have young families and need to find a family wage job. This bill provides the link to job training in environmental work, which will enable these young men and women to get certificates and experience in this growing field. Most of the money for this program will be used to provide a stipend to help support these people while they complete their training. Assimilation is very difficult for many of our veterans. This bill helps to provide a smoother transition for veterans back into civilian life and society.

**Persons Testifying (Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation):** PRO: Donald Freeman, Mark Seery, Arthur Johnson, VCC; Ken Jarrett, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; Skip Dreps, Paralyzed Veterans of America; Bonnie Bunning, Department of Natural Resources; Tom Davis, Department of Fish and Wildlife; Jim Crabbe, State Board for Community and Technical colleges; Mark Fischer, Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Substitute Bill (Ways & Means):** PRO: As Vietnam veterans, we know how difficult it was to start over again after coming home. There were no efforts in the post-Vietnam era to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder. Being outdoors and doing hard work can be the best thing for a returned veteran. New veterans are coming home even more damaged. This program will benefit the veterans, the environment, and the economy. It will lead to new job skills, reduce unemployment, and reduce mental health problems.

**Persons Testifying (Ways & Means):** PRO: Art Johnson, Don Freeman, Mark Seery, Andrew Mowry, Veterans' Conservation Corps; Joe LaTourrette, Pacific Coast Joint Venture.