

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1294

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to establishing the Puget Sound corps while reforming the state's conservation corps programs.

Brief Description: Establishing the Puget Sound corps.

Sponsors: House Committee on Environment (originally sponsored by Representatives Tharinger, Warnick, Seaquist, Finn, Smith, Upthegrove, Springer, Dunshee, Orcutt, Hudgins, Reykdal, Rolfes, Hunt, Moscoso, Green, McCoy, Morris, Frockt, Ryu, Jinkins, Fitzgibbon, Sells, Blake, Appleton, Liias, Maxwell, Kenney, Carlyle, Hope and Billig; by request of Commissioner of Public Lands and Department of Ecology).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Environment: 1/27/11, 2/3/11 [DPS];

General Government Appropriations & Oversight: 2/15/11, 2/16/11 [DPS(ENVI)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/28/11, 67-30.

Passed Senate: 3/29/11, 38-9.

Passed Legislature.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Consolidates the administrative functions of the Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) with the Department of Ecology.
- Creates a Puget Sound Corps within the WCC to focus on projects related to the recovery of Puget Sound.
- Removes agency-specific project goals for WCC projects.
- Adds WCC projects to the list of projects that receive grant funding priority by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT

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.

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Upthegrove, Chair; Rolfes, Vice Chair; Fitzgibbon, Jacks, Jinkins, Moscoso and Tharinger.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Short, Ranking Minority Member; Crouse, Nealey, Pearson and Taylor.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS & OVERSIGHT

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Environment be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Hudgins, Chair; Miloscia, Vice Chair; Blake, Fitzgibbon, Ladenburg, Moscoso, Pedersen and Van De Wege.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives McCune, Ranking Minority Member; Taylor, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Ahern and Wilcox.

Staff: Owen Rowe (786-7391).

Background:

The Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) is a program that provides fee-for-service youth work crews for projects that address defined goals. The WCC is implemented jointly by the Employment Security Department, the Department of Ecology (DOE), the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks). Each department is responsible for: recruiting staff and WCC members; executing agreements that allow the WCC crews to work; applying for and accepting grant funding; and prioritizing projects.

The DOE, DNR, WDFW, and State Parks all have specified tasks that their respective WCC crews can complete. These eligible projects are related to the functions of the associated agency. For instance: the WCC crews working for the DOE may work on litter pickup or irrigation ditch maintenance; the WCC crews working for the DNR may focus on jobs such as wood cutting and reforestation. The WDFW and State Parks have similar agency-specific lists.

With some exception, the WCC members must be: unemployed; Washington residents between the ages of 18 and 25 years; and United States citizens or lawful permanent residents of the United States. Special efforts are required for the recruitment of minority and disadvantaged youth, and for youths residing in areas with a substantial unemployment rate.

Members of the WCC serve a six-month term which may be extended up to two years. Members may only be paid the state minimum wage, however, an increase in pay of up to 5 percent is allowed for each additional six-month term served.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The administration of the WCC is centralized at the DOE. The DOE must administer the WCC program as a partnership with the DNR, the WDFW, and the State Parks. The DOE may also partner with other agencies and non-profits when appropriate to advance the WCC's program goals. Partnering agencies may maintain a WCC coordinator to assist with the agency partnership.

The WCC remains an organization that provides pay-for-service work crews to complete projects designed to address identified program goals. The program goals for the WCC are broadened and are no longer individually specified for each state agency participant. The program goals, applicable to both the DOE and all the partner agencies, are related to the protection, promotion, or restoration of certain identified public assets. These assets include public lands, state natural resources, water quality, habitat, outdoor recreation and state historic sites. The DOE may develop more than one career pathway within the WCC to match crew member interests with project types.

In addition, the DOE is directed to create and administer the Puget Sound Corps (PS Corps). The PS Corps is to be a distinct program within the WCC. The PS Corps work crews may be assigned to projects meeting the same goals as other WCC work crews, however, the PS Corps shall also seek to deploy work crews to assist with the restoration of the Puget Sound. The activities of the PS Corps must be prioritized, when practicable, to focus on projects located within the Puget Sound basin that further the Puget Sound Partnership's Action Agenda, benefit public lands, lead to habitat restoration, or are centered on education and stewardship.

The administrative responsibilities for the WCC are removed from the DNR, the WDFW, and the State Parks. These responsibilities are given only to the DOE and include: recruiting staff; serving as a central grant application recipient; establishing consistent work standards; and reviewing the success of the WCC projects. The recruitment of the WCC participants is a primary function of the DOE; however, the DOE should coordinate recruitment when possible with the DNR, the WDFW, the State Parks, the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs, the Employment Security Department, technical and community colleges, and any interested postsecondary education institution.

A person must be a Washington resident and between the ages of 18 and 25 years to participate in the WCC. The upper age limit may be waived for crew leaders, specialists, military veterans, and individuals with sensory or mental handicaps. Recruitment efforts must be targeted to fully matriculated students, disadvantaged and minority youths, and military veterans. Recruited WCC participants serve a three-month tour and are eligible for three-month extensions until two years are served. Longer terms of service are available for certain specialty crews.

The Director of the DOE and the Commissioner of Public Lands are directed to jointly host an annual meeting to serve as a forum for partner agencies and other affected organizations and to provide guidance and feedback concerning the WCC. The annual meeting participants must review recently completed WCC projects and establish a work plan for the next year.

The centralization of administration is prospective only and does not affect any existing grant awards or WCC placements. Going forward, the Salmon Recovery Funding Board must include projects proposed to be undertaken by the WCC in the list of projects that qualify for grant funding.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Environment):

(In support) Consolidating the WCC program into one agency allows the state government to address unemployment, advance the recovery of the Puget Sound, and do more with the existing funding levels. Veterans and youth would have more job opportunities working to benefit their local communities. It is a win-win for veterans, the state, and the environment.

The concept of a centralized WCC program is supported by the affected agencies. The idea is a concept of various agencies initiating the consolidation of disparate programs into just one agency.

The PS Corps will help raise the profile of the entire WCC program and attract additional non-state money. This will benefit the local jurisdictions that partner with the WCC. The Puget Sound has a degraded shoreline and this program will help complete projects to advance recovery.

The existing programs, both the WCC and the Veterans Conservation Corps, have benefited from the opportunities created. The current programs help veterans transition from service to college and then into the workforce. They also allow participants to learn new skills and put to use skills they already possess. Programs like this create new generations of environmentally conscious citizens.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (General Government Appropriations & Oversight):

(In support) This bill streamlines the WCC program by reducing administrative efforts. The WCC program is currently four separate programs under four different agencies. This bill does not request additional state dollars; it assumes \$4 million in federal grant funding to support the creation of the Puget Sound Corps. This bill could create 150 new jobs for youth and veterans, and will result in a 10 to 1 return on the state's investment.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Environment): Representative Tharinger, prime sponsor; Peter Goldmark, Commissioner of Public Lands; Mark Fischer, Washington Department of Veteran

Affairs; Michael Farnum, Veterans Conservation Corps; Bruce Wishart, People for Puget Sound; Wes Pruitt, Workforce Board; Tom Clingman, Department of Ecology; and Anthony Foote, Washington Conservation Corps.

Persons Testifying (General Government Appropriations & Oversight): Bridget Moran, Department of Natural Resources.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Environment): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (General Government Appropriations & Oversight): None.