

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1294

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources & Marine Waters, March 17, 2011

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, Lias, Maxwell, Kenney, Carlyle, Hope and Billig; by request of Commissioner of Public Lands and Department of Ecology).

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

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Marine Waters: 3/10/11, 3/17/11 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & MARINE WATERS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Ranker, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Fraser, Hargrove and Swecker.

Staff: Sherry McNamara (786-7402)

Background: The Legislature created the Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) in 1983 to provide work experience and skills to the youth of the state between the ages of 18 and 25. The WCC program involves the following agencies:

- Department of Natural Resources (DNR);
- Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW);
- Department of Ecology (DOE);
- Employment Security Department; and
- the State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks).

WCC is a program that provides fee-for-service youth work crews for projects with defined goals that support conservation, rehabilitation, and enhancement of the state's natural, historic, environmental, and recreational resources. Currently, 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.

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.

WCC members are required to 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.

Corps members are usually hired for six months with the possibility of an extension up to two years. Corps members are reimbursed at the minimum wage established by state or federal law, whichever is higher, which may be increased by up to five percent for each additional six month period worked.

Summary of Bill: Administration for the WCC is centralized at DOE. The DOE must administer the corps in partnership with the DNR, DFW, and State Parks. The agencies may maintain a WCC coordinator to assist with the agency partnership. The centralization of administration is prospective only and does not affect any existing grant awards or WCC placements.

The goals for the WCC are broadened and are no longer individually specified for each state agency. The WCC must complete projects that meet goals associated with the protection, promotion, or restoration of public lands, state natural resources, water quality, watershed health, habitat, outdoor recreation, forest health, wildfire risk reduction, and state historic sites.

The Puget Sound Corps is to be created by DOE as a distinct program within the WCC. In addition to the WCC project goals, the Puget Sound Corps must participate in the restoration of the Puget Sound ecosystem. The Puget Sound Corps must be prioritized, when practicable, to focus on projects identified in the Puget Sound Partnership's action agenda, projects located on public lands, habitat restoration projects, and education and stewardship projects.

The requirements for WCC members is changed to allow underemployed residents; and waives the age requirements for veterans. Recruitment efforts are to be the primary responsibility of DOE and are to be targeted to residents who meet the eligibility requirements and are either:

- enrolled at a community or technical college, private career college, or a four-year college or university;
- a minority or disadvantaged youth residing in an urban or rural area of the state; or
- military veterans.

Participation as a WCC member is for an initial three months that may be extended for three-month periods by mutual agreement but cannot exceed two years. Longer terms of service are available for certain specialized crews.

Any state agency using federal funds for WCC crews must contract with Washington's Department of Veterans Affairs for at least 5 percent of the federal funding, to sponsor Veteran Conservation Corps Crews. This requirement applies statewide.

The Director of DOE and the Commissioner of Public Lands must host an annual meeting with other WCC participants and partner agencies to:

- review the WCC projects completed in the previous year, and
- establish a work plan for the coming year.

The Salmon Recovery Funding Board is required to include projects proposed to be undertaken by the WCC in the list of projects that qualify for grant funding.

RCW sections are repealed that authorize WCC in the DFW, the DNR, and State Parks.

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: PRO: This bill consolidates the WCC Program under DOE which has the most effective program. The WCC crews working across the state to restore and rehabilitate our ecosystems, with a subset primarily working on the restoration of Puget Sound, addresses the legacy of the state. This bill streamlines the delivery of the WCC Program and creates 150 new jobs. The bill raises the priority for the restoration of Puget Sound ecosystems.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Tharinger, prime sponsor; Bridget Moran, DNR; Tom Clingman, DOE.