

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5230

As of January 26, 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: Senators Ranker, Swecker, Litzow, Rockefeller, Regala, Kohl-Welles, Hargrove, Kline, Conway, Fraser, Nelson, Hobbs, Shin and Harper; by request of Commissioner of Public Lands and Department of Ecology.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Marine Waters: 1/24/11.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & MARINE WATERS

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. WCC projects support conservation, rehabilitation, and enhancement of the state's natural, historic, environmental, and recreational resources. Corps members are usually hired for six months with the possibility of an extension of six months. Corps members are reimbursed at the minimum wage established by state or federal law, whichever is higher.

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.

Summary of Bill: The DOE must administer the corps in partnership with the DNR, DFW, and the State Parks and Recreation Commission. The corps 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 created as a distinct program within the WCC. The Puget Sound Corps must participate in the restoration of the Puget Sound ecosystem. The Puget Sound Corps must prioritize and focus on projects identified in the Puget Sound Partnership's action

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agenda, projects located on public lands; habitat restoration projects, and education and stewardship projects.

The Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Conservation Corps must collaborate with the Department of Ecology and the Department of Natural Resources in the implementation.

DOE must serve as the corps' central application recipient for grants from federal service projects and service organizations and specifically funding for Puget Sound restoration. DOE is responsible for the recruitment of conservation corps members. The recruitment efforts must be targeted to unemployed or underemployed residents of the state between the ages of 18 and 25; fully matriculated students at a technical school, college, or university; or military veterans. A corps member's participation is for three months that can be extended for an additional three months.

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.

RCW sections are repealed that authorize WCC in the DFW, the DNR, and State Parks.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 24, 2011.

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 four state agency programs into one, leverages federal dollars, and creates at least 150 new green collar jobs for young adults and veterans. This streamlining of government programs will provide us with an excellent opportunity to meet our goal of cleaning up and restoring Puget Sound. This bill is timely, compelling, and transformative. The corps was excellent in helping me transition from active service to the workplace and to assist me in preparing for life after active duty. The corps' projects provide eco-therapy and are amazing for helping with post-traumatic stress syndrome. The corps provides an income and something to look forward to that is meaningful. It is a positive experience that provides positive benefits and more employment opportunities.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Peter Goldmark, Public Lands Commissioner; Ted Sturdevant, DOE; Mark Fischer, Department of Veterans Affairs; Scott Copeland, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Martha Henderson, The Evergreen State College; Allison Vasallo, King County DNR; Wes Pruitt, Workforce Board; Bruce Wishart, People for Puget Sound; Philip Hansen, Jeremy Grisham, Michael Farnham, Veterans Conservation Corps.