
Environment Committee

HB 1294

Brief Description: Establishing the Puget Sound corps.

Sponsors: 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 Summary of Bill

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

Hearing Date: 1/27/11

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

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. 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.

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: WCC crews working for the DOE may work on litter pickup or irrigation ditch maintenance; 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, WCC members must be: unemployed; Washington residents between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five years; and US citizens or lawful permanent residents of the United States. Special efforts are required for the recruitment of minority and disadvantaged youth and to youths residing in areas with a substantial unemployment rate.

Members of the WCC serve a six-month terms 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 five percent is allowed for each additional six-month term served.

Summary of Bill:

The administration of the WCC is centralized at the DOE. The DOE must administer the WCC program as a partnership with DFW, WDFW, and 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 DOE and all 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. Work crews from the WCC may also assist with wildfire risk reduction projects.

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. 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 forward the Puget Sound Partnership's Action Agenda, benefit public lands, lead to habitat restoration, or are centered on education and stewardship.

The DOE may develop more than one track within the WCC to match crew member interests with project types. Examples of these tracks may include: a technical track for corps members interested in technical training; a science track for members interested in scientific training; and an emergency response track for members interested in providing responses to natural or man-made disasters such as wildfires and oil spills.

The administrative responsibilities for the WCC are removed from the DNR, the WDFW, and 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 WCC projects. The recruitment of WCC participants is primary

function of the DOE; however, the DOE should coordinate recruitment when possible with the DNR, the WDFW, State Parks, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Employment Security Department, and any interested postsecondary education institution.

A person must be a Washington resident and between the ages of 18-25 to participate in the WCC. The upper age limit may be waived for crew leaders, specialists, and individuals with sensory or mental handicaps. Recruitment efforts must be targeted to fully matriculated students 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 is directed to jointly host an annual meeting to serve as a forum for partner agencies and other affected organizations and provides 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.