

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

HB 1246

Title: An act relating to the Washington conservation corps.

Brief Description: Changing Washington conservation corps provisions.

Sponsors: Representatives Regala, Buck, H. Sommers, Huff, Linville and Haigh; by request of Department of Fish and Wildlife.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Meeting Date: February 2, 1999.

Bill Analysis Prepared by: Josh Weiss, Counsel (786-7129)

Background: The Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) was created in 1983 and was enacted 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 to 12 months and receive minimum wage.

While state law authorizes six state agencies to implement the WCC, only four have done so. The Department of Agriculture and Department of Employment Security do not have WCC programs, while the Department of Ecology, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and State Parks and Recreation Commission have active WCC programs. These four active programs have received a total of \$12.3 million for their WCC programs over the last five fiscal years. In these five fiscal years, 1866 men and women have enrolled in the WCC through one of the above mentioned four agencies.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee performed a sunset review of the program, issuing its report on October 6, 1998. In addition to recommending continuation of the program, the report made four suggestions for improvement. Apart from providing legislative authority to continue the program, only one other recommendation required legislative action. This recommendation was to formulate a legislative decision on whether to dedicate a portion of the WCC general fund appropriation to economically distressed areas or populations. If such a dedication is desired, agencies should be

required to track those expenditures in order to demonstrate compliance.

Absent specific legislative action, the powers and duties for the WCC will sunset on June 30, 1999, and the enabling and operating statutes will be repealed on June 30, 2000.

Summary of Bill: Sunset review provisions are repealed and the WCC is permanently enabled. WCC program goals are expanded to include: eco-tourism and heritage tourism, statewide water quality, and salmon recovery. The position of crew supervisor– is defined, and the maximum length of enrollment is set at two years.

Reference to the Department of Agriculture is removed, and language authorizing a WCC program in this department is repealed. Reference to the Youth Employment Exchange (now the Washington Service Corps) is removed, as this agency no longer coordinates the WCC.

References to duties of the Employment Security Department are removed. Such duties included: evaluating projects, developing training plans, ensuring that preference is given to persons between the ages of 18 and 23, ensuring that corps members respond to emergency projects, providing data on projects, project requests, applicants, and reports to the Legislature. Language referring to the Employment Security Department as the centralized administrative authority for the WCC are repealed. Similarly, language requiring the Washington Conservation Corps Coordinating Council to develop a cost-effective administrative system is repealed.

WCC programs are required to focus on distressed areas, which are defined according to the Washington State Development Loan Fund Committee. The economically distressed areas language referred to by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee report is repealed, thereby removing the ambiguity identified in the report.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 20, 1999.

Effective Date: This bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Rulemaking Authority: None.

