

FINAL BILL REPORT

SHB 1294

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Synopsis as Enacted

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).

House Committee on Environment
House Committee on General Government Appropriations & Oversight
Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Marine Waters

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 (SPRC). 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 SPRC all have specified tasks that their respective WCC crews may 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 SPRC have similar agency-specific lists.

With some exception, the WCC members must be unemployed Washington residents between the ages of 18 and 25 years who are 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.

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.

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, although an increase in pay of up to 5 percent is allowed for each additional six-month term served.

Summary:

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 SPRC. 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 are also directed to 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 SPRC. 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 SPRC, 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 give preference to projects proposed to be undertaken by the WCC within the list of projects that qualify for grant funding.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	67	30
Senate	38	9

Effective: July 22, 2011