



HILARY S. FRANZ
COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS

\$8 million ongoing – to maintain existing program level

Underfunding will necessitate cutting current crew capacity, which may have the following statewide consequences:

- Unsafe conditions at recreation sites and trails
- Furthering the existing tribal concerns about impacts to lands from public access
- Degradation of ecological conditions across all types of landscape
- Fewer available crews for emergency work such as wildfire response
- Reduced workforce development opportunities and career on-ramps for youth and veterans
- Potential reduction in RCO grant awards due to loss of match from crew time
- Downsizing of Ecology’s Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) Program

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Conservation Corps Partnerships: Washington’s Conservation Corps to protect our state’s lands and waters

For 40 years, DNR has sponsored conservation corps program crews to help manage the variety of needs of our state’s lands and waters. They provide essential services that include restoration, invasive species removal, recreation site rehabilitation, waterway remediation, and hazard mitigation to protect people, infrastructure, and entire ecosystems.

Conservation corps crews provide a cost efficient solution while also offering pivotal career opportunities in natural resources management to youth and veterans, fostering our state’s vital natural resources workforce.

DNR-managed recreation lands have experienced an very significant increase in public utilization, according to a [2022 Earth Economics report](#). This increased use leads to additional stresses on the landscape, facilities, and infrastructure, requiring a significant increase in stewardship efforts.

TABLE 1: ESTIMATED VISITOR DAYS TO STATE RECREATION LANDS, 2019 TO 2020

AGENCY	2019	2020	CHANGE
Observed			
Parks	38,456,657	37,549,238	
Predicted			
WDFW	27,230,000	29,069,000	+7%
WDNR	16,572,000	20,080,000	+21%
Parks	34,239,000	37,991,000	+11%
All State Lands	78,041,000	87,139,000	+12%

Furthermore, Washington’s urban forests are seeing an increase in stresses related to changing climate and invasive pests, and our aquatic lands have seen an increased prevalence of noxious weeds, an increased need to remediate waterways, and a critical need for improved fish habitat.

With rising inflation and increases in the state’s minimum wage, it is projected that **DNR will have to pay up to 26% more** for WCC crews by FY 2025 compared to the start of the 2021-2023 biennium.

Fluctuations in funding and timing create challenges for our corps partners, including Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) under the Department of Ecology. When funding is less than anticipated or doesn’t align with planning timelines, WCC and other corps programs risk losing crew capacity altogether.



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Delivering on Equity, Inclusion & Environmental Justice:

Our Corps program provides inclusive career ladder opportunities to tribal youth, LGBTQ+ identifying persons, veterans, BIPOC communities, and those from rural communities. For example, DNR sponsors a BIPOC focused WCC crew who will be conducting a seven-day trail project with DNR on the Olympic Peninsula in summer 2023.

Project selection and prioritization of crew work is determined at the region/local level, allowing land managers to support and engage communities that have been historically underserved by conservation and recreation efforts, or where recent spikes in visitation have occurred.

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The Good News:

Given significant success in Ecology's hiring/filling of their WCC program with crew members, it is projected that this upcoming biennium DNR will be able to receive 92 percent of its crew time sponsorship requests from WCC, with private corps program sponsorship requests meeting the remaining 8 percent.

The Concerning News:

However, **DNR will not be able to maintain financial sponsorship of its current 12 full time crews and its individual placements if funding falls short of \$8M:**

Within Senate budget proposal of \$4.98 million appropriation:

Would necessitate cutting 4 full time WCC crews as well as cutting all additional summer crew time from other Corps partners.

Within House budget proposal of only one-time \$3 million appropriation:

Would necessitate cutting 8 full time WCC crews as well as the Aquatics Reserves corps program.

Likely Detrimental "Ripple Effect":

As **DNR is the largest sponsor of the Ecology-managed Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) Program**, if DNR does not have the funds to sponsor crews, the WCC program would either need to secure significant alternative sponsorship or reduce the size of its program. Reducing the number of WCC crews would:

- Exacerbate ecological degradation, impair safe recreation access, and prevent important hazard mitigation work
- Impact recruitment, as many WCC members have gone on to accept permanent staff positions at DNR and in the broader natural resources sector
- Reduce our ability to respond to immediate and emergency situations
- Impair ability to address backlogged maintenance efforts, which are vital to prevent current and future damage and degradation

