



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

One East Main, Suite 301 • Madison, WI 53703 • (608) 266-3847 • Fax: (608) 267-6873

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #1029

Wisconsin Conservation Corps -- Funding for Crews (DWD -- Employment, Training and Vocational Rehabilitation Programs)

[LFB 2001-03 Budget Summary: Page 728, #11]

CURRENT LAW

The 2000-01 base level funding for Wisconsin Conservation Corps (WCC) crew support is \$5,185,400 and is comprised of the following: (a) \$1,514,500 GPR; (b) \$455,900 PR; and (c) \$3,215,000 SEG.

GOVERNOR

Decrease funding for general work crew operations by \$248,900 GPR and \$221,600 SEG in 2001-02 and \$367,800 GPR and \$573,300 SEG in 2002-03 to reduce the number Wisconsin Conservation Corps crews from 55 to 45. The SEG funding is from the forestry and water resources accounts of the conservation fund.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The WCC was created in 1983 to provide employment to young men and women 18 to 25 years of age through the completion of conservation and natural resource projects. In addition, a major goal of the WCC is to teach young adults basic work habits and job skills, to develop cooperation and discipline through meaningful work experiences, and to provide training and educational opportunities, all of which will improve their chances of securing employment in the private sector. Initially, the Corps consisted of four work crews, each of which spent most of their time on forestry-related projects such as planting or cutting down trees. Currently, WCC has approximately 50 crews conducting projects throughout the state, in both rural and urban areas. Each crew typically consists of four to six corps members and a crew leader.

2. Projects for WCC crews are developed in association with sponsors, such as governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations and school districts, and are typically designed to last for one year. Corps members are hired for the duration of a project. In some cases, projects can be renewed and corps members rehired. Sponsors are responsible for providing transportation for the crew from a designated reporting location to the worksite, for tools, materials and equipment to complete project activities, for some technical assistance and for support services for the crew leader.

3. WCC crews perform a variety of conservation and community development projects, including timber stand improvement, trail development, planting trees, soil erosion control, construction of recreational facilities, weatherizing buildings and providing various human services. General categories of the types of projects that have been undertaken include forestry management, wildlife management, fishery development, natural area improvement and restoration, weatherization and energy conservation, historical preservation, physical accessibility, housing, parks and recreation, and erosion control.

4. WCC pays wages, statutorily set at the higher of the state or federal minimum wage (currently \$5.15 per hour), and workers compensation, and provides personal safety equipment for the crew members. The WCC also hires and trains a crew leader who is responsible for discipline and paperwork for all the crew members.

5. The bill would reduce funding by \$470,500 (\$248,900 GPR and \$221,600 SEG) in 2001-02 and \$941,100 (\$367,800 GPR and \$573,300) in 2002-03. The reduced funding would provide for 50 crews in 2001-02 and 45 in 2002-03. The administration notes that the WCC has had difficulties in filling all of its work crews and the reduced funding level reflects the expected number of corps members that would be employed.

6. WCC indicates that the funding reduction would increase competition for WCC projects between new sponsors and current sponsors that wish to renew an existing contract for another year. In addition, the total number of young adults that could be employed in the Corps would be reduced.

7. The GPR and SEG appropriations used to fund WCC crew operations are biennial appropriations. At the end of the biennium the unencumbered balances revert to the fund from which the funds were appropriated. At the end of the 1997-99 biennium, the WCC lapsed over \$1.1 million in unencumbered funds out of total GPR and SEG spending authority of \$8.47 million. As of April 30, 2001, over \$1.7 million in funding for crew operations was uncommitted. Total biennial SEG and GPR funding for crew operations for 2001-03 was \$9.3 million.

8. Program revenue funding of \$445,900 for crew activities comes from contracts with DNR for natural resource and fish and wildlife projects. The bill would not reduce PR funding because it would require the WCC to limit the amount of outside revenue it could obtain to fund projects.

9. The WCC has a seven-member Board appointed by the Governor that sets policies and approves project applications. Project sponsors compile applications for projects and submit them to the Board for approval. In deciding which projects to fund, the Board uses the following guidelines: (a) the extent to which the project will provide meaningful labor-intensive employment to Corps members; (b) the extent to which the project will promote the long-term beneficial conservation of resources; (c) the extent to which the project will promote the social well-being of children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and persons with low incomes; (d) the difficulty in implementing the project and its compatibility with other projects in the area; (e) the value of financial support provided by the sponsor; (f) the extent to which the sponsor will provide Corps members with additional wages and benefits; and (g) the extent to which the project will benefit the community. The number of projects approved by the Board determines the number of crews that will be needed to support the projects. However, there is no statutory requirement that a specific number of WCC projects be approved each year.

10. Sponsors can provide funds to cover part or all of the cost of a WCC project. State agencies are statutorily authorized to use monies from any appropriation of the agency to sponsor a WCC project if implementation of the project is consistent with any purpose for which the monies are appropriated. WCC has a program revenue appropriation for sponsor contributions to project costs. If funding for WCC work crews is reduced, sponsors could provide additional funds to offset the reduction in funding for crews for projects that were viewed as desirable.

11. An alternative to the bill that could be considered would be to reduce funding authority to the level of 47 crews in 2001-02 and 40 crews in 2002-03. This would allow the Corps to undertake about 87 projects during the biennium. If the Corps wished to conduct more projects it could seek additional funding from sponsors. Under this alternative, funding would be reduced by \$398,300 GPR and \$354,600 SEG in 2001-02 and \$551,600 GPR and \$860,000 SEG in 2002-03. This would adjust the funding for crew operations to reflect lower levels of crew members and expenditures for crew activities. The following table provides a comparison of the alternative funding reductions and base level funding for crew operations.

**Comparison of Base Level Funding
An Alternative Funding Reduction
Crew Operations**

	<u>Base Funding</u>	<u>Bill</u>		<u>Alternative</u>	
	<u>2001-02</u>	<u>2001-02</u>	<u>2002-03</u>	<u>2001-02</u>	<u>2002-03</u>
GPR	\$1,591,200	\$1,342,300	\$1,223,400	\$1,192,900	\$1,039,600
PR	455,900	455,900	455,900	455,900	455,900
SEG	<u>3,138,300</u>	<u>2,916,700</u>	<u>2,565,000</u>	<u>2,783,700</u>	<u>2,278,300</u>
Total	\$5,185,400	\$4,714,900	\$4,244,300	\$4,432,500	\$3,773,800

ALTERNATIVES TO BILL

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to decrease funding for general work crew operations by \$248,900 GPR and \$221,600 SEG in 2001-02 and \$367,800 GPR and \$573,300 SEG in 2002-03 to reduce the number Wisconsin Conservation Corps crews from 55 to 45.

2. Modify the Governor's recommendation to decrease funding for general work crew operations by a total of \$398,300 GPR and \$354,600 SEG in 2001-02 and \$551,600 GPR and \$860,000 SEG in 2002-03 to reduce the number of WCC crews from 55 to 40.

Alternative 2	GPR	SEG	TOTAL
2001-03 FUNDING (Change to Bill)	- \$333,200	- \$419,700	- \$752,900

3. Maintain current law.

Alternative 3	GPR	SEG	TOTAL
2001-03 FUNDING (Change to Bill)	\$616,700	\$794,900	\$1,411,600

Prepared by: Ron Shanovich