

Veterans Conservation Corp

http://www.dva.wa.gov/veterans_conservation_corps.htm

- **Washington Department of Veterans Affairs**
- **Assist any honorable veteran by providing opportunities on projects that help protect and restore Washington's rivers, streams, lakes, marine waters and open lands**
- **Initially established in 2005 for Veterans with PTSD**
- **Expanded in 2007 by State legislation to include an Environmental Certification Program (Veterans Academy) and SRFB affiliation**
- **2008 legislation extended Veterans Academy to the Olympic region and eastern Washington**



Veterans Conservation Corps



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Type of Work

- **Stream Restoration & Monitoring**
- **Restoration of watersheds, forest, prairies or native grasslands**
 - Re-vegetation of native plants
 - Removal of Invasive Plants
- **Accessible trail building or maintenance**
- **Office or Clerical Duties**
 - Especially for those that have disabilities that prevent active outdoor involvement, but with a purpose to connect those duties with something in the outdoors: i.e. GIS post processing
- **Environmental or Community Education**
- **Other Protection or Restoration Activities**

The VCC at Work!



Benefits to Veterans

- **A way to reintegrate back into their community upon return from military service**
- **For group projects, the network of learning from each other and interacting to solve some of the life issues they face since arriving back home.**
- **Outdoor training and experience that adds value to their lives and taps into the quality of their sense of duty**
- **Seeking a different career path than just working at the retail outlets; to expand on that quality of work they learned as service members which leads to self gratification.**

Benefits to Veterans

- **For veterans with service connected disabilities:**
 - An outlet, a method for their ability to “self-medicate” using the outdoors as that medicine
 - For stipends to make ends meet when disability compensations aren’t enough.
- **An adjustment to a standard college or technical school/continuing education model; skills learned in the classroom and/or skills learned in the “true” field.**
- **To understand what are the environmental needs of their own community,**
 - to draw upon their own skills or supplement by learning new skills that address those needs,
 - to seek employment to meet those needs so they can remain in their own community and don’t have to leave home again
 - A feeling that it’s time for stability in one’s life.

Lessons Learned So Far

- **The standard model for what is a volunteer may not fit the veteran, adjustments need to be considered and value given for the veteran still trying to serve their country, now at the community level**
- **The urban regions tend to equal group projects, whereas rural regions tend to support the individual veteran on an individual project**
- **The VCC does not provide liability coverage for the veterans and a majority of the veterans are not self-insured, the projects have to consider this upfront**

Lessons Learned So Far

- **Salmon recovery projects in remote regions of the state many times do not have the built in logistics or the infrastructure to provide for the veterans while in the field. This is causing loss opportunity on both parts.**
- **Federal, State/County, and Tribal agencies are learning to incorporate veterans into their environmental and recovery programs, but it would help to have the leadership to also emphasize the veterans option in the directions given to their own departments.**
- **Suggested that non-profits, conservation districts and RFEGs use their expertise in applying for grants and funding sources to capitalize on under-tapped veterans-specific opportunities**

The Veterans Conservation Corps Academy

- **“I wanted to thank both of you for bringing the VCC members to the Miller Creek project on Friday and Saturday. I was impressed with how quickly they grasped what needed to get done. Together with the other volunteers on both days, they got everything done I had hoped (but had not expected) would be accomplished this fall. Please convey my thanks to all those who participated.”**



Senate Bill 5164 Legislation-2007

And expanded to Olympic and Spokane Community Colleges in 2008

- **Veterans who are enrolled in the Veterans Academy:**
 - Worker training in conservation programs and habitat restoration projects.
 - Provide training, education, and certification in environmental restoration which is funded through the VCC program.
 - Green River Community College
 - Satellite program through Olympic and Spokane Community Colleges
 - 10 months classroom work and on the job training in actual projects
 - Erosion and sediment control techniques
 - Stream restoration
 - GPS / GIS / Surveying
 - Heavy equipment operations around environmentally sensitive areas
 - Permitting, project management, small business contracting with natural resource agencies, storm water mitigation, etc.

Using VCC in Restoration Projects is encouraged!

- **Legislature bills provide veterans suffering from combat related stressors the opportunity to be involved in restoring Washington's waters and open lands.**
- **The Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) encourages applicants and sponsors to use veterans in their projects.**
- **The VCC may, in the future, match SRFB grants.**
- **RCO and the VCC are investigating additional opportunities and incentives for applicants that incorporate veterans into their projects.**
 - We're asking for assistance from the SRFB to identify what incentives may be an option and who can provide them, to help incorporate veterans into a SRFB project proposal.
- **Lead Entities are encouraged to provide their own incentives through their local processes. VCC is working with the LEAG to develop how this can be done.**

SRFB - Upcoming Round 9

- **Added consideration during the SRFB process for projects that include VCC Veterans**
 - SRFB Manual 18, Page 18, Section 3 (April 30, 2007), *Application and General Guidance*
 - The SRFB will give consideration to salmon restoration projects that use the Veterans Conservation Corps. Lead entities also should give consideration to such projects.
- **At what level in the process is the appropriate place for that consideration?**
 - The December SRFB approval, the regional organization, or each individual lead entity?
- **How does the project receive this consideration?**
 - Currently— A Support Letter through VCC Coordinator