Aquatic Resources Conservation Corps

For 40 years, DNR has utilized conservation corps programs to manage the needs of our state's lands and waters. The Aquatic Resources Division is highly dependent on the Corps as "boots on the ground" for both the Aquatic Invasive Species and Aquatic Reserves programs.

The Aquatic Resources Division depends upon the Corps to maintain critical services. Conservation corps provides a cost-efficient solution while also offering pivotal career training in natural resources management to youth and veterans, supporting our state's vital natural resources workforce. DNR is requesting continued funding for conservation corps within both Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) and Aquatic Reserves programs including a full time AIS crew with supervisor, five individual placement Puget SoundCorps, an Aquatic Reserves Team Lead, a new Aquatic Reserves technician, and travel and equipment.

Career Pathways

Corps programs are an incredible opportunity for corps members, including BIPOC youth, veterans, and young people from underserved communities, to get exposure to job skills, the natural resources management, and opportunities to progress in a field that they otherwise might never have seen. This includes providing leadership skills and mentorship, fostering connection to ecological systems, and supporting career pathways. The future leaders in natural resources are coming from Corps programs.


Aquatic Invasive Species

Noxious weeds (non-native invasive plants) are not just a farm and ranch problem in Washington State. In the aquatic and riparian environment, they outcompete Pacific Northwest native plants, causing economic, ecological, and environmental damage to fisheries, shellfish, recreation, and wildlife. The AIS program implements noxious weed and invasive species control to eradicate or reduce infestations, preserve and restore the ecological integrity of aquatic lands, and increase awareness and partnerships to achieve a shared vision of healthy habitats.

Conservation corps crews in the AIS program restore critical habitats and conduct legally required invasive species/noxious weed control in partnership with local, state, federal, and tribal partners. Corps crew support is needed to meet landowner obligations under RCW 17.10 for noxious/invasive weed control. Significant agency projects such as the Snohomish Watershed Resilience Action Plan have been supported by the AIS crews. Despite the importance of this work, AIS funds have continued to be reduced over the past decade. AIS is looking to restore sustainable program-level funding for the 25-27 biennium. **This funding is critical as we continue to see an increase in aquatic invasive species.**

$1,828,791 Operating Request (GF-S)

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This request would:

- Restore Aquatic Invasive Species crew time to a sustainable level
- Maintain the successful Aquatic Reserves program
- Add 1 FTE within Aquatic Reserves to restore staffing capacity to historic levels as well as improve career ladder opportunities

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Aquatic Reserves

The Aquatic Reserves Program relies upon a Puget SoundCorps team for outreach, stewardship, and field monitoring efforts at each of our eight aquatic reserves. The team partners with Community Stewardship Committees and provides public outreach and education within the reserves. In addition, the team supports critical monitoring and data collection projects, which benefit many stakeholders beyond DNR:

1. Seagrass monitoring – Data shared with the Global Seagrass Monitoring Network
2. Floating and understory kelp monitoring – Data sharing planned with Kelp Conservation & Recovery Plan
3. European green crab monitoring – Data shared with Washington SeaGrant and Invasive Species Control
4. Forage fish monitoring – Data shared with WDFW for the Forage Fish Spawning Map
5. Lake Kapowsin amphibian and water quality monitoring – Data sharing planned with WDFW Wildlife Program
6. Fidalgo Bay sediment transport monitoring – Data sharing planned with City of Anacortes and Samish Indian Nation
7. Acidification Nearshore Monitoring Network (ANeMoNe) monitoring – Directly supports DNR Aquatic Assessment and Monitoring Team
8. Oyster spat survivorship monitoring – Data sharing planned with Puget Sound Restoration Fund and Samish Indian Nation
9. Light trap monitoring – In partnership with the Lummi Nation, Nisqually Tribe, Pacific Shellfish Institute, and Nisqually Reach Nature Center; larval crab data is shared with the Pacific Northwest Crab Research Group
10. Mussel contaminant loading data (Mussel Watch) – In partnership with WDFW
11. Sediment quality monitoring – Data shared with Ecology for oil spill response

This is a unique team made up of individual placements and supervised by an Aquatic Reserves Team Lead. Members are highly responsible and capable of independent work, data management and analysis, lab work (microscopy), presentation and speaking skills, and other professional skills. Our alumni become highly qualified for and obtain jobs at DNR, Ecology, DOH, WDFW, and other agencies. The team currently consists of 5 individual placements, though the team historically had 6 positions. Aquatic Reserves is proposing the addition of one FTE, which would bring the field staff back to previous levels and provide an entry-level technician position for an improved career pathway within the program.