

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION The nature of environmental stewardship corps programs presents unique conditions for evaluation and monitoring. To address these challenges and provide rigorous evaluation of corps programs, a collaboration between The Corps Network, member organizations of the Public Lands Service Coalition (PLSC), and North Carolina State University (NCSU), developed and implemented standardized measures of habitat improvement projects on public and private lands. Projects focused on changes occurring in assessed indicators of habitat health following work by Conservation Corps crews. Trained crew members documented project-level outcomes and systematically evaluated conditions within sample plots using both visual and measurement-based assessment techniques prior to and immediately following work. **Results provide information on the efforts and outcomes of corps fieldwork and identify opportunities for future evaluation.**

PROCEDURES Evaluation focused on improving ecosystem health and visitor experience through six objectives (see box at right). Data were collected both at the **project-level**, which incorporated overall work including acres covered, crew members involved, and activity objectives, and at the **plot level (within projects)**, which used a systematic approach to sample work impacts. The number of plots placed in each project was based on the homogeneity of the entire project area and three plots were to be placed per area type. Assessments were based on observation and objective measures. Plot-level data focused specifically on invasive species management and forest fuels reduction.

Activity Objectives

1. Encouraging or improving habitat for native plants
2. Encouraging or improving habitat for native animals
3. Discouraging or removing invasive plants from habitats
4. Discouraging or removing invasive animals from habitats
5. Reducing forest fuels to mitigate wildfire risk and severity
6. Restoring or creating habitat

Project-Level Findings

Findings are based on **149 habitat projects** conducted by 10 corps between April 1 and November 15, 2017. Projects covered almost 26,000 acres of forest, grassland, and aquatic habitats across the US, and involved 1,461 crewmembers who contributed almost 38,000 hours in 19 states.



X 375

53-ft semi trailers

A combined total of
1.43 million cubic feet of
biomass was removed at
the project level



25,732
ACRES



37,710
HOURS

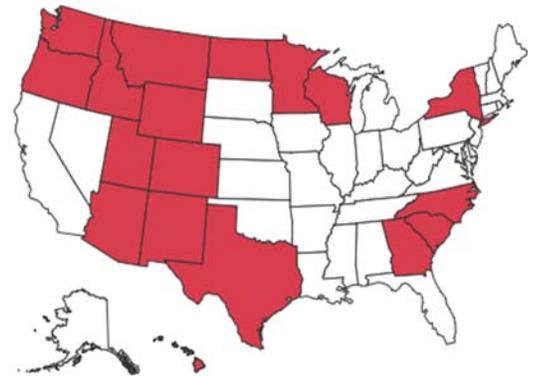


1,461
CREW

Invasive Species Management Findings

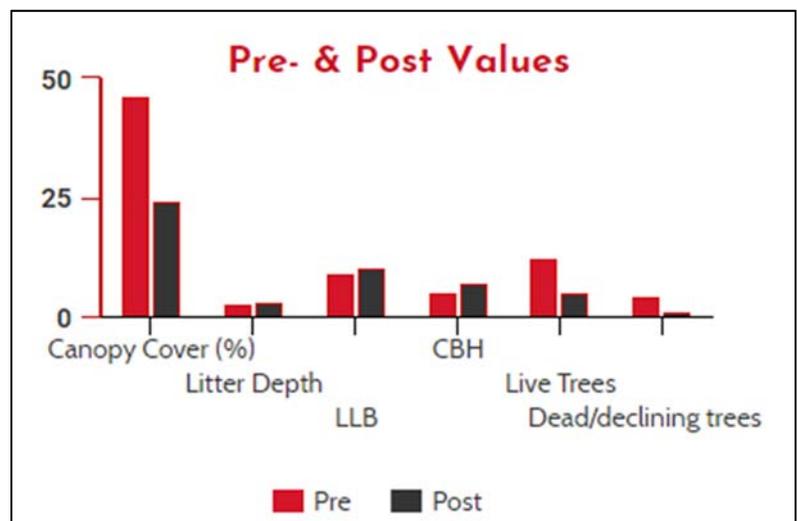
277 invasive species management plots were evaluated, employing chemical controls (n=168), manual/mechanical removal (n=44), and mixed methods (n=65). Pre-work and post-work assessments were conducted on plots that employed manual and mechanical removal methods (n=109 plots). The **overall percent change** in the total coverage of invasive species averaged **-81% and was statistically significant**. The majority of plots were reported as being treated prior to seed maturation and the equivalent of 335 semi-trailers of biomass was reported as being removed from plots. **Results indicate that corps work contributed significantly to the goal of reducing invasive species impact on ecosystem health.**

64 species targeted | 277 plots



Forest Fuels Reduction Findings

123 forest fuels reduction plots were evaluated. Pre-work and post-work assessments evaluated canopy cover, litter depth, height of the lowest live branch (LLB), tree circumference at breast height (CBH), and number of live and dead or dying trees. **All but one indicator exhibited statistically significant changes** due to work. Changes in these indicators represent a **reduction in forest fuels from evaluated plots and progress towards mitigating fire risk and severity.**



Conclusions

This evaluation provides evidence of positive impacts to habitats by Conservation Corps field crews in relation to invasive species management and forest fuels reduction, contributing to overall ecosystem health and resilience. The protocols introduced in this study are meant to support corps in ongoing evaluation efforts and are recommended for future application.



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