

Xia's Story: Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument Project

By Xia Ren Arnold (they/them)

Co-Crew Leader, Trail Crew at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument

Summer 2020

I began with AmeriCorps and Mile High Youth Corps in 2019 as a Corpsmember for the purpose of learning, earning, and serving communities and lands new to me. Two seasons later and I am now a co-crew leader for a land conservation crew.

The impact I've seen, the differences made in lives and communities, and the fulfillment felt while doing so has been unmatched. ***For these reasons - I choose to serve, am still in this line of work, and plan on doing similar for some time to come.***

During my crew's first six-week project at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument, we completed numerous projects and learned a lot along the way. Our project partner for the duration was Parker Severson. With his extensive knowledge of the area, conservation methods, and youth corps experience - it was an incredible, productive month and a half.

As one of our first assignments, we removed the 20-year-old signs, broke some concrete, used some elbow grease, and at one point, had to use extensive methods to get one out. After replacing all of the park's primary signs, we built timber and rock retaining walls, stairs, drains, widened miles of trail, and had a blast while doing so. Parker took this opportunity to teach the crew about various drains, their purposes, and when to use which. With each day came a new skill to hone and many adventures to be had.

The park is beautiful, filled with trails, petrified trees, and consistent information signs. We were lucky enough to be able to experience the tours around the monument: petrified trees, homestead, and ground cellar. On our off time, we'd hike the local trails, attempt to identify surrounding plant life, and simply enjoy the view. If you find yourself in the area, it wouldn't be a missed afternoon experiencing the sites, meeting some rangers, and hiking on some beautifully made trails. Maybe we'll see you there...

- Xia