

# Veterans Service & Conservation Corps

Career Pathways Through Continued Service | Fall 2017



**The  
CorpsNetwork**

Strengthening America through  
service and conservation



Veteran serving as an AmeriCorps member with **Southwest Conservation Corps'** Veterans Fire Corps Program.  
- Photo Credit: Jenna Rosengren



**COVER IMAGES:**

*Front:*  
(L) Arizona Conservation Corps  
(R) California Conservation Corps  
*[Veterans Fisheries member Dustin Casey]*

*Back:*  
(L) Washington Conservation Corps  
(R) Montana Conservation Corps

## Contents

- 2 Background: Service & Conservation Corps
- 3 The Situation Report: Building a 21st Century Conservation Service Corps
- 5 The Veterans Corps Model
- 6 Return on Investment of AmeriCorps & Veterans Corps
- 8 Examples of the Veterans Corps Model
- 14 Corpsmember Profiles
- 17 References & Contact Information

# Veterans Service & Conservation Corps

Career Pathways Through Continued Service | Fall 2017

## Background: Service & Conservation Corps

---

Service & Conservation Corps (Corps) are community-based programs that provide young adults (ages 16 – 30) and veterans (up to age 35) the opportunity to serve our country, advance their education and obtain in-demand skills. Serving in crews or individual positions, Corpsmembers perform important conservation, recreation, infrastructure, wildfire, disaster response, and community development service projects on public lands and in rural and urban communities.

As descendants of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) – a depression-era program created as part of President Roosevelt’s New Deal – today’s Corps, most of which are nonprofits and are no longer federally run, provide work opportunities for many populations across the country, including military service veterans from all branches.

The CCC was an enormously successful program. During its operation from 1933 to 1942, the program enrolled over 3.4 million persons, including over 25,000 veterans. Corpsmembers lived in camps managed by the U.S. Army and engaged in reforestation and other reclamation projects. The Army’s experience managing an operation of this magnitude provided preparation for the massive call-up of civilians in World War II.<sup>1</sup> Military officers received valuable leadership skills through running CCC camps.<sup>2</sup>

As of 2016, 3.9 million veterans had served in the post-9/11 era.<sup>3</sup> While the CCC provided meaningful opportunities for young men with few skills and limited education, today’s Corps leverage the talent and commitment of our veterans and builds upon the investment that we as a nation already made in their training.

# The Situation Report: Building a 21st Century Conservation Service Corps

---

The transition from service member to civilian is not always an easy path for our nation's veterans. Many experience a lack of purpose, a lack of job confidence, and feel they no longer have the level of peer support they had while serving. Veterans Conservation Corps are particularly adept at addressing these challenges by allowing veterans to build on their military experience and ethic of service by training for careers in resource management.

Today's Veterans Corps connect veterans to the places they fought to protect, and provide an environment that promotes healing and a continued sense of community. In 2016, 90 percent of Veterans Corps alumni surveyed indicated that Corps opportunities helped them transition from military to civilian life.

The Corps model benefits veterans in a range of ways: it provides a similar structure and sense of purpose as the military; offers the therapeutic benefits of getting outdoors and working with fellow veterans; and helps participants transition back to civilian life through skills development and other supportive services.

Veterans Corps are one piece of a larger Corps movement. There is currently a public conversation about broadening the American perception of "national service" to include Corps and other non-military activities. This conversation is led by two well-known national figures: Stanley McChrystal, a retired U.S. Army general, and Senator John McCain (R-AZ), a former Navy pilot and prisoner of war in Vietnam.

## MEET ALUMNI OF MT. ADAMS INSTITUTE VETSWORK PROGRAM

**Clockwise from upper left:** Verna Gonzales - US Army; Dakota Mahaffey - US Army; Laurel Poff - US Air Force; Nathan Dameron - Army National Guard; Tenesha Carney - US Navy; Jose Vidal - US Marine Corps



Both McChrystal and McCain note, “Although we served in different wars, in different decades and in different branches of the military, we are bound together through the common experience of national service and have come to believe that such a bond between the nation and its citizenry is essential to our country’s future.”<sup>4</sup>

McChrystal and McCain are supporters of the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC): a national initiative to, through public-private partnerships, annually engage 100,000 young adults and veterans in service to strengthen our infrastructure and public lands. There are currently more than 200 official 21CSC member organizations across the country that collectively engage tens of thousands of young people every year in completing quality, cost-effective maintenance and improvement projects on public and tribal lands and waters. The programs of the 21CSC help address the backlogged maintenance needs of land and water management agencies; enhance outdoor recreation opportunities; improve the accessibility of public lands; and respond to wildfires and other natural disasters.

In June 2017, Sens. John McCain (R-AZ), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Lamar Alexander (R-TN), and Tom Udall (D-NM) introduced the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) Act (S.1403). The bill was introduced in the House (H.R.2987) by Reps. Martha McSally (R-AZ), Seth Moulton (D-MA), Scott Tipton (R-CO), and Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ). The bipartisan 21CSC Act would allow federal land and water management agencies to create formal, more flexible partnerships with 21CSC member organizations; expand the focus on engaging veterans and developing new partnerships to support them; enable additional federal agencies to more easily partner with 21CSC organizations to accomplish their goals; and encourage federal agencies to collaborate. By more efficiently allocating limited resources and using innovative funding strategies, including private support, the goal of growing the 21CSC to 100,000 youth and veterans can be accomplished with existing funding.

## **BY THE NUMBERS**

### ***IMPACT OF VETERANS CORPS ON PARTICIPANTS***

Preliminary results from a Veterans Corps participant evaluation demonstrate the following outcomes:

**47%** increase in job confidence

**23%** increase in sense of purpose

**53%** of Veterans Fire Corps members surveyed in 2016 indicated they have gained or are pursuing related post-program employment

**90%** of Veterans Fire Corps members surveyed in 2016 indicated that VFC assisted them in adjusting from military to civilian life

**94%** of Veterans Fire Corps members surveyed in 2016 indicated that the VFC prepared them for entry-level employment in wildland fire

## BY THE NUMBERS OVERALL ENGAGEMENT

Conservation Corps nationwide have engaged **over 1,600 veterans** since 2009.

Since 2011, Conservation Legacy, California Conservation Corps, the Student Conservation Association, and Montana Conservation Corps have trained and prepared **over 1,000 veterans** for careers in wildland fire through the Veterans Fire Corps (VFC) program.

A member of the Veterans program at  
**Wyoming Conservation Corps**



## The Veterans Corps Model

Many Corps across the country offer programs in which returning veterans can serve together on public lands and learn skills to help leverage their military experience for careers in resource management.

The Veterans Corps model benefits veterans in a range of ways: it provides a similar structure and sense of purpose as the military; offers the therapeutic benefits of getting outdoors and working with other veterans; and helps participants transition back to civilian life through skills development and other supportive services.

### Continued Sense of Mission & Purpose

Corps are organized around an ethos of conservation and service. Having a mission and purpose greater than oneself enables veterans to carry their dedication to service and country beyond their time in the military.

### Military-like Structure

Corps are organized in teams or crews that serve together for an entire term of service, or at least train together in the beginning. This is similar to working with a unit while in active duty.

### Transition to Civilian Life

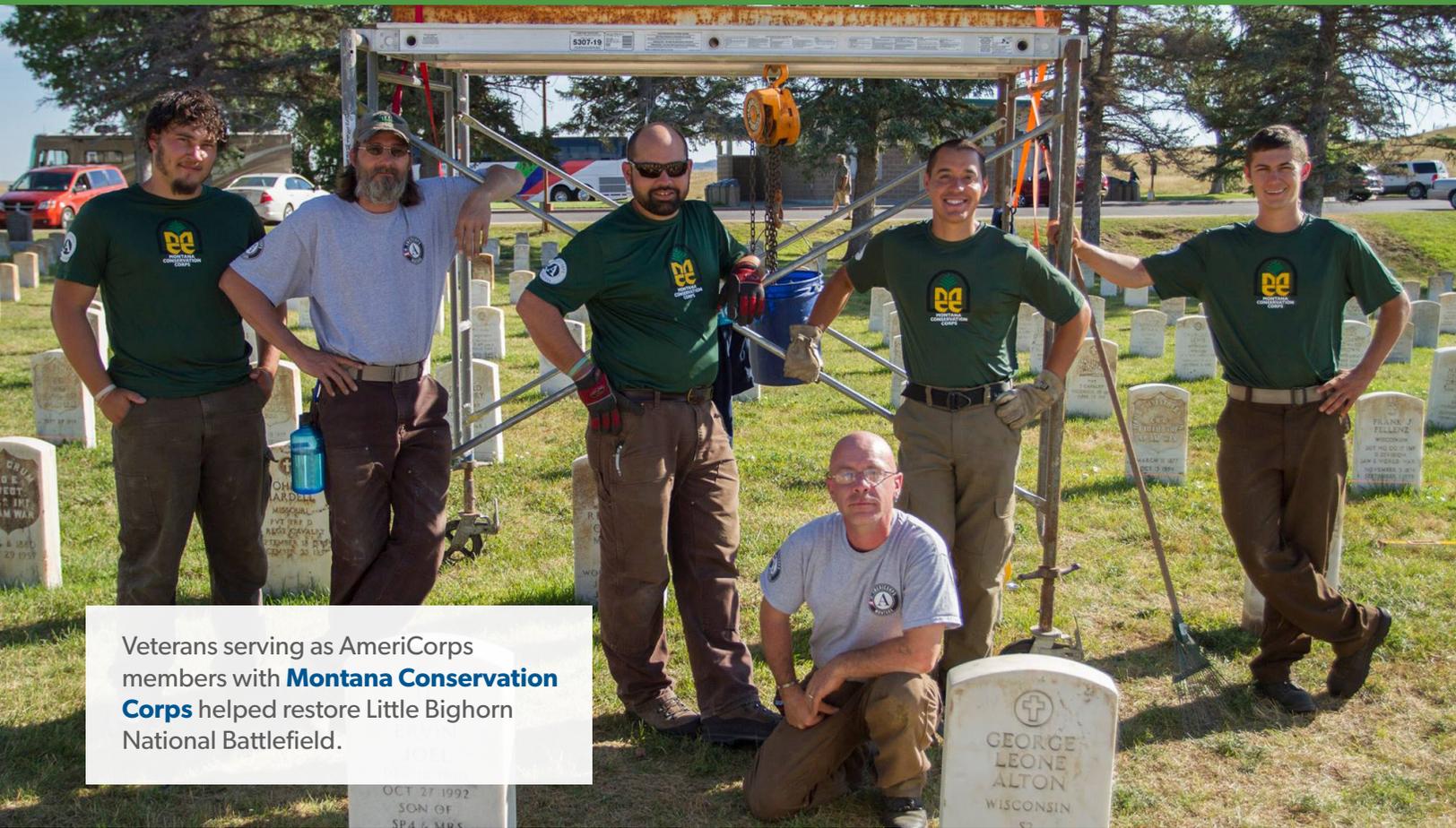
Through a term of service, Corps offer a transition period for veterans to reintegrate into civilian life and begin to build networks of peers, and other professionals.

### Outdoor Stewardship & Health

There are well-known benefits to being outdoors and engaging in physical activity. For veterans, the outdoors can improve physical and mental health, and serve as a place of healing and calm for those dealing with post-traumatic stress or other combat-related injuries.

### Supportive Services

Corps often have connections in the community with service providers and can help ensure veterans receive any additional support they may need. Services can include mental health and counseling, housing assistance, financial guidance, public services guidance, transportation, and childcare.



Veterans serving as AmeriCorps members with **Montana Conservation Corps** helped restore Little Bighorn National Battlefield.

## Return on Investment of AmeriCorps & Veterans Corps

AmeriCorps investments in Veterans Corps, and veterans national service opportunities generate positive returns for our communities, our veterans, and our nation as a whole. By supporting in-demand skills development and the completion of priority projects, AmeriCorps is critical to Veterans Corps.

### *Veterans Corps...*

#### **Protect Communities from Wildfire & Invasive Species**

Wildfires ravage hundreds of communities and thousands of homes and businesses each year, while invasive species mar landscapes and reduce the productivity of fish and wildlife habitat and the quality of our water supply. Through firefighting, invasive species removal, hazardous fuels removal and forest thinning projects, Veterans Corps help protect communities from wildfire, and mitigate the impacts of invasive species around the country.

#### **Help Communities and Government Save Money through Wildfire Remediation**

Wildfires are becoming costlier and larger. Remediating wildfire risk through hazardous fuel removal and forest thinning is a critical element to reducing the incidence of wildfires. This helps the federal government and communities save money in response and suppression costs.

#### **Offer Industry-Recognized Certifications**

During their term of service in a Corps, veterans gain hard credentials and certifications that have labor market value and put them on a career pathway. For example, veterans can gain their wildfire Red Card, or chainsaw certification.

## Ready the Civilian Workforce

Military service and structure are inherently different than civilian institutions and workplaces. Veterans Corps offer a transition period where veterans can re-acclimate to a different workplace culture where authority is not based on rank, but on other skills that may be outside the norms of a military setting.

## Help Reduce Healthcare Costs

Being outdoors offers proven physical and mental health benefits. Veterans Corps enable veterans to get outdoors through quality, structured programming that encourages mental and physical healing through service, camaraderie, and the opportunity to share stories and experiences with other veterans. This can reduce the need for mental and physical healthcare.

## Leverage Private Funds

Corps typically bring at least 25 percent private matching funds to projects they complete for federal partners. This helps limited federal funding go further, and allows land managers to – with the help of Corps – complete maintenance projects they otherwise wouldn't be able to complete.

## Enhance Access to Public Lands

Americans want access to the public lands their taxes support, and they want them to be in good shape when they arrive. Veterans Corps ensure trails and recreation opportunities remain open and accessible to families, recreationists, and sportsmen and women.

## Increase Recreation Opportunities and Support Economic Development

Veterans Corps work on projects that enhance recreation opportunities and access to local, state, and federal public lands and waters. More opportunities to recreate means more tourism dollars and economic development in the outdoor industry, an \$887 billion economy nationally. When public lands attract visitors, surrounding businesses like restaurants and hotels succeed, too. Corps also support local economies by purchasing boots, food, supplies and vehicles, while developing the next generation of recreationists who will contribute to future local economic development.

## Use Federal Funds Effectively

Veterans Corps can be run by Corps that are in existence already and have a long history of effective partnerships with land managers. Corps already have in place the operational infrastructure and administrative capacity to manage contracts, agreements, and programs. This also helps land managers get more projects done in a more effective manner.

## Develop the Next Generation of Leaders

Veterans Corps, and AmeriCorps generally, engage a diverse group of young adults and instills in them an ethos of service to country and community; exposes them to hard work through conservation projects; and also helps develop leadership skills and the next generation of outdoor stewards, recreationists, sportsmen and women, and entrepreneurs. Many Corpsmembers go on to resource management careers, recreation careers or starting their own businesses as a result of their experience in Corps.

*"I think that for a lot of veterans like myself there will never be another real job. I think that it's important to note that I actually have a real job right now. What I mean is this: after being in charge of millions of dollars of equipment, and squads or even platoons of personnel, the prospect of a conventional 9 to 5 job does not sit well with most veterans. Additionally, some lack skills and experience required for the career path they may want to cross over to. For myself, it was never a question of finding another career; it was finding something that I love doing again."*

*- DARRIN GRANT, alumnus of Mt. Adams Institute VetsWork program*



## EARNING YOUR FIREFIGHTING CERTIFICATION

Members of Montana Conservation Corps' Veterans Fire Corps program perform a prescribed burn. The majority of veterans who serve in Corps participate in Veterans Fire Corps.

# Examples of the Veterans Corps Model

---

## VETERANS FIRE CORPS

The Veterans Fire Corps (VFC) has been extraordinarily successful. Born out of a 2009 collaboration between Southwest Conservation Corps (now part of Conservation Legacy) and Veterans Green Jobs, the VFC was created to provide veterans a clear pathway into the natural resource management field. The model now operates as private-public partnerships between Conservation Corps, land management agencies, and the Corporation for National and Community Service. To date, VFC crews are trained and operated by six programs, with a seventh starting early 2018.\* (see following page)

In the VFC model, crews of Veterans serve together full-time for ten or more weeks to complete projects focused on wildfire prevention and response. Project work can include forest fuels reduction, hazard tree removal, prescribed burning, invasive species removal, and habitat improvement/restoration. Crew leaders can be graduates of a prior VFC program who and have proven to be capable firefighters, managers, and logisticians. Crewmembers have the unique opportunity to network with agency personnel and gain insight on future job openings. They receive the kind of exposure and mentoring that can help inform career decisions. Transportation, tools, and gear are provided by the Corps.

## Certifications

All VFC Participants can receive up to Fire Fighter Type II training and obtain red card certification through the U.S. Forest Service.

### ***This training includes:***

- Basic Wildland Fire Fighting Course
  - S-130: Firefighter Training
  - S-190: Intro. to Wildland Fire Behavior
  - I-100: Intro. to the Incident Command System
  - L-180: Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service
- S-212 – Wildland Fire Chainsaws
- First Aid/CPR Certification

Additional certifications may be obtained as needed.

## Funding/Structure

VFC programs operate as public-private partnerships and often draw from different funding sources for program operation. In most cases, Corps enroll participants through AmeriCorps – a national service program administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). AmeriCorps helps cover the Corpsmember's living allowance, provides an education award (scholarship) to those who successfully complete their service, and helps provide additional supportive services. Project work is formalized through task agreements at the discretion of land management agencies.

## Corps programs operating VFC's

- Conservation Legacy
  - Southwest Conservation Corps
  - Arizona Conservation Corps
  - \*Southeast Conservation Corps
- California Conservation Corps
- Student Conservation Association
- Montana Conservation Corps
- Mt. Adams Institute.

*"I felt that the focus on bringing military veterans into these programs and into the natural resource workforce was a brilliant idea. Who better to protect our natural resources and lands than those who have already been protecting our nation?"*

*- ROBERT MCDONALD, alumnus of Mt. Adams Institute VetsWork program*

## BY THE NUMBERS VFC ENGAGEMENT

Since 2009, Veterans Fire Corps have engaged over **1,500** individuals on public lands. **1,324** veterans have performed work on US Forest Service land, and **189** have served on Department of the Interior property (Bureau of Land Management and/or National Park Service).

For context, The Corps Network's member Corps have collectively engaged a total of over 1,600 veterans in this time frame.

Robert McDonald (quoted at left), far left  
**Mt. Adams Institute**





## SAW CERTIFICATION

Many Veterans Corps programs focus on certification in essential forestry skills. Here, members of the Arizona Conservation Corps Veterans Fire Corps program clear fire fuels.

## OTHER VETERANS CORPS & APPRENTICESHIP MODELS

### **Mt. Adams Institute - VetsWork**

Based in Trout Lake, WA, Mt. Adams Institute houses two programs for veterans. The VetsWork programs are many things:

- A new model for apprenticeships that engage veterans in natural resource-related AmeriCorps and national service programming
- A career development program where participants learn new skills and build professional networks.
- A workforce development program where land management agencies have an active role in shaping its future workforce.
- A community and national service program (AmeriCorps) that engages the local public to solve land management challenges. VetsWork participants receive a modest living stipend, an AmeriCorps Education Award and basic health coverage.

The first program, VetsWork – Environmental Internships is an 11-month US Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship for veterans in the natural resource management/public lands/environment sector. VetsWork participants are placed at local/state/federal land management agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, where they provide project support while learning about various career paths.

The second program, VetsWork: GreenCorps, is a 12-week career training program for veterans interested in wildland firefighting and other natural resource management / public lands jobs. VetsWork GreenCorps participants serve with the Umatilla National Forest and live in Forest Service bunkhouses for the duration of the program.



## **CALIFORNIA CONSERVATION CORPS VETERANS FISHERIES PROGRAM**

In partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, California Conservation Corps (CCC) Veterans Corps began their fisheries program in 2012.

### **Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) – Veterans Green Corps**

Based out of their Central Divide (Helena, MT) office, Veterans Green Corps (VGC) is a field-based opportunity for post-9/11 era veterans. Participants address a variety of conservation needs while building on their skills in preparation for positions in resource management and wildland fire. Crews serve in some of the Rocky Mountain's most coveted regions, become efficient in chainsaw operation and maintenance, reinforce their leadership skills, and work on a high-performing team of their peers.

Trainings are largely field-based and project partners include various land management agencies. Project work typically involves fuels reduction or thinning projects, however, it may also include trail maintenance, historic preservation, fencing, and/or addressing many other accessibility issues on public lands.

VGC members receive certifications in chainsaw use and Intro to Wildland Fire Behavior, 300+ hours of marketable hands-on skill development and training, and the opportunity to network with land management employers. MCC's VGC Program is a VA-approved non-college degree (NCD) training program. Participants can also receive an AmeriCorps Education Award.

### **Washington Conservation Corps**

Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) provides meaningful service and training opportunities for young adults and military veterans. Veterans are encouraged to apply for any WCC program including serving on a Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC) crew. VCC crews restore and protect Washington's natural

environment through a variety of restoration projects including tree planting, streamline repair and replanting, and backcountry and urban trail construction and maintenance. Members also have the option of serving on one of four designated disaster response crews. These crews serve in Washington and beyond, assisting communities after fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, oil spills and more. As Corpsmembers, veterans earn the state minimum wage and an AmeriCorps Education Award upon completion of the program. They can use the award to repay student loans or put it toward future tuition expenses as a supplement to any GI Bill benefits earned. Program participants also attend a series of paid trainings and earn certifications including Wilderness First Responder, Hazardous Waste Operator, and Wildland Firefighting.

### **Wyoming Conservation Corps – Veterans Trail Crew**

The Wyoming Conservation Corps promotes individual development, stewardship, and education through localized national service. Beginning in 2017, the Wyoming Veterans Trail Crew (WyVTC) became part of the WCC's effort to engage as many young adults as possible in meaningful service. The WyVTC is a collaborative program focused on the design, creation, and maintenance of diverse trail systems on public lands in Wyoming. This crew of eight (two leaders, six members) lives and works on site for 10-14 days, collaborating with partners from Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources, as well as other trail stewards in Wyoming. WyVTC members engage with agency contacts in a one-on-one way and, through this collaborative approach, discover and develop the skills in themselves to become the next generation of land managers.

WyVTC members earn (at no cost to the member) S-212 chainsaw certification, wilderness first aid training, Leave No Trace training, upper division University of Wyoming credit, a living stipend (in 2017: \$8,200 - leaders, \$4,250 - members). Crew participants also receive an AmeriCorps Education Award, which can be used to pay tuition, student loans, or for other educational expenses.

### **California Conservation Corps**

The California Conservation Corps (CCC) is a state agency that hires young men and women, ages 18 to 25, for a year of natural resource work and emergency response. Simply stated, the CCC puts young adults and the environment together to benefit both. Corpsmembers work hard protecting and restoring California's environment, responding to disasters, and becoming stronger workers, citizens and individuals through their service. In addition to their Veterans Forestry Crews (which are fire-related), CCC administers a fishery program designed for veterans.

**Veterans Fisheries Program:** CCC partners with NOAA Fisheries, the U.S. Forest Service, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to give post-9/11 veterans new opportunities to build their skills and work experience by restoring habitat for endangered salmon and steelhead and conducting fisheries research and monitoring. Veterans develop skills by gaining real-world experience in natural resources fields, thus positioning them to compete for job opportunities with a variety of agencies and organizations. By the time they complete the program, their experience encompasses fisheries biology, habitat restoration, project development, and many other areas. In addition, veterans in the program are eligible to receive college tuition and a \$5,000+ AmeriCorps Education Award.

### **Delaware State Parks – Veterans Conservation Corps**

Delaware State Parks provides a year-long opportunity for military veterans or immediate military family members to engage in environmental stewardship through the state park system. Working as a part of a team, Corpsmembers perform a variety of conservation activities, including trail maintenance, invasive species identification and eradication, and park-based service projects. Benefits include a bi-weekly stipend, AmeriCorps Education Award, health insurance, childcare, and admission to Delaware State Parks.

## A Complete List of Corps that Engage Veterans

- Arizona Conservation Corps (Conservation Legacy)
- California Conservation Corps
- Citizens Conservation Corps (West Virginia)
- Conservation Corps North Bay
- Delaware State Parks
- Maine Conservation Corps
- Montana Conservation Corps
- Mt. Adams Institute
- Nevada Conservation Corps (Great Basin Institute)
- Rocky Mountain Youth Corps - New Mexico
- Southeast Conservation Corps (Conservation Legacy)
- Southwest Conservation Corps (Conservation Legacy)
- Student Conservation Association
- Utah Conservation Corps
- Virginia Service and Conservation Corps
- Washington Conservation Corps
- Western Colorado Conservation Corps
- Wyoming Conservation Corps



Zachary Dancy of the VFC program at **Southwest Conservation Corps.**

## FIREFIGHTING WITH THE FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES

LEFT: Darrin Grant (quoted page 7) served as an AmeriCorps member with Mt. Adams Institute out of Monongahela National Forest in WV. Darrin pictured middle row, second from right. RIGHT: Veterans Fire Corps members with The Student Conservation Association (SCA).



# Corpsmember Profiles

---

## Matt West Mt. Adams Institute

Matt West is a U.S. Navy veteran who served with VetsWork: Environment, an AmeriCorps program through the Mt. Adams Institute that supports career development for veterans seeking a civilian career in natural resource and public lands management.

Matt served with the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), where he engaged other veterans in service opportunities that restore the natural environment of the South Puget Sound and Joint Base Lewis McCord area. Matt designed an internship program for veterans with a community partner, the Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM), which has helped over 25 veterans develop job skills. This program doubled in size in its second year.

Matt is passionate about helping other veterans connect with the natural world. He believes there is a mutual benefit when veterans work on environmental restoration projects: the land benefits from attention, and, equally important for Matt, are the personal and potentially therapeutic effects of this work for Corpsmembers. Matt says, "By offering veterans a chance to heal the Earth, I have witnessed incredible transitions of incredible people doing incredible work."

Matt's civic engagement was also demonstrated through his personal Community Action Project. He worked with local organizations to secure donated materials, equipment and land, to create an edible garden for the community. The garden is situated in an urban neighborhood where children from 60 percent of the households receive free or reduced price school lunches. Matt's objectives were multi-dimensional: he sought to engage veterans in the project for their ethic of community service; he wanted to provide low-income families with access to healthy food options; and he wanted to demonstrate the value of growing local, healthy food. The garden was installed and the community is actively engaged in its maintenance. It was an incredible project with clear community impacts.

Through all of Matt's experiences with VetsWork, he came to realize something: he loves service. Although he has a bachelor's degree in Environmental Science and thought he would continue looking for a career in that field, Matt has discovered that he finds value and purpose in helping others.

Over the course of his 18 months in the program, Matt developed a place for himself and his family in the national service world. He was even asked to share his thoughts about his experience to an audience of 200 supporters, including Washington State representatives and Veterans Affairs officials. As a result of his hard work at his site and in his community, Matt was offered an employment contract with his sponsoring organization to support the internship program he developed as a VetsWork AmeriCorps member.



## Karla Rubio

### California Conservation Corps - Inland Empire

Karla Rubio grew up in Borrego Springs, CA. After graduating from high school, Karla followed her childhood dream of joining the military. Her occupational code in the military was 92Mike: Mortuary Affairs Specialist. The Mortuary Affairs Specialist performs duties relating to deceased personnel, including the recovery, collection, evacuation and establishment of tentative identification of remains. Mortuary Affairs Specialists also inventory, safeguard and evacuate the personal effects of deceased personnel. Karla was stationed at Fort Lee in Virginia. She also had an internship at the Richmond Morgue.



After leaving the Military, Karla became a stay-at-home mom and took some college classes. She then joined the California Conservation Corps (CCC) where she served for about six months. She received basic firefighting 32-hour training from the U.S. Forest Service and S-212 wildland fire chainsaw certification from the CCC. While in the Corps, Karla served on fire fuel reduction projects on Yucaipa Ridge and in Big Bear. Karla is currently working at the Amazon Warehouse in San Bernardino, CA. She is scheduled to take the Sheriff's Department exam early next year. She wants to continue her education in Criminal Justice or a similar field. Amazon has a program that will pay for 98 percent of her school tuition after she has been employed for one year. She plans to apply for that program after she has one year with the company.

## Emily Hovendick

### California Conservation Corps - Camarillo

Emily Hovendick grew up in Wyoming and served in the US Navy for two terms. She was an aviation mechanic and finished her military career as an E6. She then attended University of California, Irvine and graduated with a bachelor's degree in Archeology. In November 2014, Emily joined the California Conservation Corps' (CCC) Camarillo Center as a Veterans Fisheries Corpsmember. She was hired to assist with population status and trend monitoring of southern California steelhead, and to help restore critical habitat for these endangered fish.

Emily worked with many of the CCC's partner agencies and organizations, including the CA Department of Fish and Wildlife, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, South Coast Habitat Restoration, Mountain Restoration Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and Ojai Valley Land Conservancy. She worked on a variety of restoration projects, including non-native species eradication, barrier removals, and native planting projects. Emily performed over 30 miles of various types of surveys to locate and quantify steelhead habitat, spawning activity, and population status. She also attended numerous trainings through which she learned about safe herbicide usage, proper grant writing, and various field survey techniques. Emily also attended the annual Salmonid Restoration Federation Conference in Santa Rosa, CA.

Emily took advantage of all of the resources the CCC offered, including the AmeriCorps scholarship opportunity. In May 2015, Emily left the CCC to take a job with the U.S. Forest Service as a training archaeologist/firefighter. She earned this position with the fieldwork experience she gained with the CCC. Emily was always one of the hardest working Corpsmembers on any CCC project and repeatedly received praise from sponsors. She is greatly missed at the Camarillo Center!

## Jason Griffith

### Mt. Adams Institute

Jason Griffith was born in Jonesboro, AR, the last of seven children. After high school graduation, he worked several jobs ranging from construction to cook and bouncer to receptionist. The most rewarding jobs were those that allowed him to use his artistic and creative skills. After many attempts to find his place in the world he decided to join the Army Reserves.

Enlisting in June 2001 as a Tracked Vehicle Mechanic he attended Basic Training at Ft. Knox, Kentucky. After graduating near the top of his Advanced Individual Training (AIT) class, he quickly rose to team leader status and later to squad leader. Jason's unit was deployed twice to Iraq, in 2003 and 2008. His creative talents earned him the Meritorious Service Medal for his design of an external storage and deployment system for the TALON robot, which is used to clear routes of explosive devices. The design decreased the amount of time that soldiers inside and outside the vehicle were exposed to enemy fire from four minutes down to ten seconds.



During his second deployment on a mission to recover vehicles that had broken down near Baghdad, Jason was thrown from his 50 caliber machine gun turret. He sustained a cracked spine, ruptured disk, and a compressed nerve that would eventually lead to three surgeries, four different pain management procedures and countless rounds of shots, physical therapy and painkillers, and ultimately a medical discharge. During this period he entered the Community Based Warrior Transition Unit (CBWTU), a program that allows Reserve and National Guard soldiers to stay at home while undergoing medical treatment and recovery. Jason took advantage of an option that allowed him to report to the Mark Twain National Forest near his home in southeast Missouri for the duration of the program. There, he worked mostly with the recreation department. His experience was profound. Jason felt he "was destined to follow a career path within the Forest Service."

He stayed with the Forest Service as a sponsored volunteer for two years, and then another six months as a regular volunteer. He hoped his experience would lead to a permanent job, but, when this did not work out as planned, he left his volunteer position to find a job that paid the bills. A little more than a year later, in 2014, Jason discovered the VetsWork program, an AmeriCorps program supporting veterans seeking to transition from their military career to a civilian career in natural resources or public lands management. The program had an open position at the Mark Twain National Forest! He decided to give it another chance. Jason accepted a position as a Recreation Assistant, responsible for ensuring that the forest's lands were accessible to the public. Jason says it felt "like being away for a long time, and finally coming home."

Jason served a full 45-week VetsWork term of service and began a second one before being offered a permanent full-time position on the forest as a Recreation Technician in August 2015. In summing up his experience, Jason shared, "Of all the stepping stones on the path to becoming a permanent employee with the US Forest Service, the VetsWork program has taken me farther and higher than any other."



**Southwest Conservation Corps**



**Student Conservation Association**

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Civilian Conservation Corps <http://www.history.com/topics/civilian-conservation-corps>
- <sup>2</sup> "Training a generation in manliness" <http://www.artofmanliness.com/2010/01/07/the-civilian-conservation-corps-training-a-generation-in-manliness/>
- <sup>3</sup> Employment Situation Of Veterans – 2016 <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/vet.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup> "Expand Opportunities for Young Americans..." <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/10/opinions/mccain-mcchrystal-national-service-legislation/>

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please contact Josh Tuohy, Government Relations Manager, [jtuohy@corpsnetwork.org](mailto:jtuohy@corpsnetwork.org).

The Corps Network provides leadership and support to over 130 of America's Service and Conservation Corps. Through advocacy, access to funding opportunities and expert guidance, The Corps Network annually enables over 25,000 Corpsmembers to strengthen communities, improve the environment and transform their lives through service.

To learn more about The Corps Network, please visit [www.corpsnetwork.org](http://www.corpsnetwork.org).

[This page intentionally left blank]

