

Case Study:

Safety and Stewardship on California's Community Trails: The Arcata Ridge Trail and Lassen Volcanic National Park Peak Trail - California Conservation Corps

Arcata Project Partners

City of Arcata Natural Resources Department, Humboldt State University,

Lassen Volcanic NP Project Partners

National Park Service, John Muir Charter School program

Key Terms

Ecosystem Protection, Mechanical Operations, Safety, Vegetation Management, Rock Work

Arcata Ridge Trail

Background

The California Conservation Corps (CCC) Fortuna Campus was hired by the City of Arcata, CA to construct a new trail within the Arcata Community Forest using RTP funds. The City of Arcata is located approximately five hours north of San Francisco and is home to Humboldt State University. This small college town has committed to improving non-motorized transportation within the city and the surrounding area. They have contracted with the CCC on many projects to ensure that the young people from the Fortuna Campus have the opportunity to do meaningful work in the Arcata community.

Project Work

The goal of this project was to build .53 miles of hiking trail in order to close a gap in the trail system at the ridgeline of the Community Forest. By closing this gap, the city was able to offer hiking access to the previously inaccessible ridgeline. The new trail provided hikers with an easier mode of travel compared to the previous steep gradient access of the "Ridge Road" trail.

The City of Arcata used RTP funds to pay for the CCC member labor. The amount contracted between the parties amounted to 200 hours of member labor or \$4,000 in total. The City of Arcata provided staff to provide guidance and direction on the trail labor. The CCC Crew Supervisors worked with the city's staff to ensure the Corpsmembers learned the required techniques and executed the work satisfactorily. The end result was a completed trail to add to the Arcata Community Forest trail system.

Outcomes and Successes

The Corpsmembers learned about trail construction, appropriate tools for trail work, the city's Community Forest priorities, and how to prioritize visitor and public safety while still completing the work at hand. At the same time, the Corpsmembers worked with city employees who engaged them in conversations about how they came to have a career in the city's Natural Resources Department.

Using CCC Corpsmembers for this project offered benefits both to the Corpsmembers and the local community. The Corpsmembers were exposed to the city's natural resources workforce in a capacity that prepares them for future opportunities. They learned about job opportunities and the need for communities to have people who are willing and able to maintain public lands. The City of Arcata benefited by completing critical work and having the chance to interface with potential future job applicants. The city worked side-by-side with Corpsmembers and got to know them, thus essentially taking the first step in recruiting their next round of applicants for local field positions.

The City of Arcata has been a long-time partner and champion of the CCC Fortuna Center. They have publicly proclaimed the importance and value of the Corps. This partnership has succeeded multiple times, leading to the completion of other trail projects partially funded by public sources.

Lassen Volcanic National Park Peak Trail

Background

The Lassen Peak Trail, located in Lassen National Park in Northern California, is an historic trail that was in existence before the spectacular series of eruptions of Mt. Lassen between 1914 -1917. During the Great Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps participated in trail maintenance of the path by erecting retaining walls. The relatively short 2.5-mile trek to the peak, which towers at an elevation of 10,426 feet, attracts thousands from around the world. Unfortunately, three years ago a catastrophic incident occurred when a rock wall collapsed onto nearby minors, which caused severe

injuries and one fatality. The trail has received upkeep and preservation projects in the past, but it became clear that much more work was needed.

The decision was made to pursue a more comprehensive rehabilitation project beyond the annual summer trail work. Planning, surveys, and assessments were completed, and the decision was approved by the National Park Service (NPS) in February 2010.

Project Work

Corpsmembers from the California Conservation Corps (CCC) spent approximately 8,442 vocational education hours reconstructing retaining walls, constructing causeways, and repairing and constructing steps in extreme conditions for the safety of the trail's 25,000 annual visitors, and for the protection of our natural resources in Lassen National Park.

The work implementation began in the spring of 2014 and was completed in summer of 2015. Responsibilities included the widening of the trail; replacement of rock structures; establishment of a route around the top of the crater; and delineation of a route to the very top of the peak. Over 6,000 square feet (almost one million lbs.) of dry-stone walls were reconstructed/replaced along a 1.8 mile stretch of the total 2.5 miles of the Lassen Peak Trail. The rock wall construction helped ensure that the trail's tread could stand up to heavy snow loads and the mechanical erosion caused by thousands of hiking visitors per year.

The Corpsmembers' work on the trail contributed to the protection and stewardship of endangered vegetation that can only be found in Lassen National Park. Over 1,000 linear feet of the Lassen Peak Trail were rehabilitated, which included widening the trail to allow for the safe passing of other hikers, and redefining switchbacks to reduce human impact on several species of rare and endemic alpine plants that grow on the Lassen Peak. The Lassen Smelowskia flower only grows within Lassen Volcanic National Park, with the largest population on Lassen Peak, and is considered a threatened and endangered species.

Outcomes and Successes

In addition to protecting hikers climbing Mt. Lassen, the project provided the Corpsmembers education, job training, and experience in environmental stewardship. Each Corpsmember received a Certificate of Recognition from NPS for their involvement in such a significant project. Corpsmembers had the opportunity to work side-by-side with NPS employees, who could then potentially provide professional references that could eventually lead to seasonal or full-time employment in trail work.

All 15 Corpsmembers who worked on the project were enrolled in the CCC Educational Award Program and earned hours towards their educational award of \$2,000. This award promotes post-secondary education and assists young people with paying for their future education. Several Corpsmembers were enrolled in the AmeriCorps Education Program and earned hours towards additional education-focused funds. Also, Corpsmembers enrolled in the John Muir Charter School program through the CCC earned two additional education hours towards their high school diploma.

For More Information

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