

# Environmental Education, Case Study: Utah Conservation Corps Bike Crew

## Utah Conservation Corps (Utah)

Environmental Education National Benefit Description: Trail-related environmental education teaches economic, social, and ecological interdependence while experiencing nature and the outdoors. Trails and the natural areas they pass through are outdoor laboratories for schools as well as adults. For children active in natural settings, research indicates a number of benefits in better understanding of the environment as well as improvements in physical and mental health.

### *Key Terms:*

- Bike Trails
- Ecosystem Protection
- Single-Identity Crews
- Vegetation Management

### *Project Partners:*

- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program
- Deer Creek State Park
- East Canyon State Park
- Utah Department of Transportation
- Utah State University

### *DOT Strategic Goal Alignment:*

- Accountability
- Infrastructure
- Innovation
- Safety

### *Best Practices:*

This case study provides an example of a Corps refurbishing used bikes and using them as an alternative form of transportation in an effort to help the organization reach its goal of becoming carbon-neutral.

### *Background*

The Utah Conservation Corps (UCC) Utah State Parks Bike Crew created new tread and upgraded existing trails and old road grades to establish the Water's Edge Wallsburg Trail at Deer Creek State Park. Located in northwestern Utah, Deer Creek State Park features a large dam and picturesque reservoir that attracts seasonal fisherman, hikers, and boating and sailing enthusiasts. The park sees over 300,000 visitors per year.

The Wallsburg Trail was once a social trail, unofficially developed by years of hikers creating their own footpaths instead of using official trails. Dear Creek State Park worked with the UCC Bike Crew to turn this path into a safe and sustainable trail.

### *Project Work*

Thanks to the UCC Bike Crew, this two-mile trail within the park is now a family-oriented singletrack path that allows for fishing access along the south side of Wallsburg Bay. A portion of this trail is heavily used by fishermen accessing the water via three boat pull-outs along Provo Scenic Byway 189. The majority of this trail was an existing road grade that UCC Bike Crew members improved and extended to the Chokeycherry Campground inside the park.

The project involved chainsaw work and sawyering, as well as habitat restoration. UCC crews performed juniper fitting along the trail, which is a form of vegetation management that helps reduce the number of moose visiting the area. Moose cause damage to native plants and pose a safety threat to drivers and hikers.

The UCC Bike Crew also maintained tread on the historic Mormon Pioneer Trail at East Canyon State Park (ECSP). The park is located northeast of Salt Lake City within a narrow-walled canyon. This trail was originally blazed by the Donner Reed party and later used by the Mormon Pioneers. This trail is heavily used for interpretive hikes and hosts handcart enthusiasts. The trail boasts wildlife value and is accessed year-round by thousands of non-motorized user groups. In the fall, this trail is the only public access point for hunters in Morgan County, UT. Horseback riders and hunters also frequent this trail, which runs along private property in the mountains. UCC and ECSP worked with the landowners to make sure the trail stays open and accessible to these users during hunting season. The UCC crew completed tread work, brushing, back-slope and out-slope work, and improved drainage on a trail that had not seen maintenance in over ten years.

From UCC's office in Salt Lake City, the Bike Crew respectively traveled 33 and 56 miles, one-way, to these two Utah State Parks project sites. Corpsmembers carried all food, camping supplies, and group gear by cargo bicycle.

With a mission and commitment to be carbon-neutral by 2030, UCC, in partnership with Utah State University, had collaborated on a Bike Crew idea for the previous ten years. Thanks to the RTP grant, this program came to fruition. UCC has always been conscious of the fuel expended to drive to and from projects sites and wanted to try a sustainable and clean transportation alternative.

### *Outcomes and Successes*

The success of the inaugural Bike Crew launched additional crews from 2016 to 2018 and inspired some of the Corpsmembers to pursue trail and transportation-related jobs. One Corpsmember from the 2016 crew remained with UCC to become a Crew Leader the following season. Another Corpsmember from the 2016 crew was hired as a program coordinator for the Aggie Blue Bike program located on USU's campus. Started in 2005 by a Utah State University student who wanted to make a difference, the Aggie Blue Bike Program (ABBP) refurbishes used bikes and returns them into circulation, providing the USU students and local community healthy transportation and recreational habits during the colder months. UCC recruits USU students into the ABBP to serve as AmeriCorps members. The program helps provide the training and inspiration for a new generation to gain skills and experience with a sustainable, transportation-alternative career pathway. Aggie provides the bikes and maintenance in time for the UCC field season for the Bike Crew to use.

The primary funding source for the ABBP is the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program (CMAQ), a program funded by the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT). The state has given special approval to UCC to utilize the grant funds for their program.

#### *Challenges and Barriers*

The Bike Crew posed some challenges, including needing to dedicate an entire day for travel and only applying Bike Crews to shorter projects. UCC staff also had to figure out the logistics and safety planning for this new endeavor, such as mapping safe bike routes to the project site, scheduling time and distance for the bike travel, having the crew wear special visibility gear and clothing while on the roads, and lining up all of these logistics with the project sponsor's timeline.

UCC hopes to continue their public-private partnership to fund future Bike Crews, which will help contribute to UCC's carbon-neutral commitment and provide more access and opportunities for youth Corpsmembers to learn about sustainable and clean transportation alternatives.

#### *For More Information*

#### **Utah Conservation Corps**

Address: 7205 Old Main Hill  
Logan UT, 84322  
Phone: (435) 797-0964

#### *Award Winner*

Coalition for Recreational Trails Annual Achievement Award and The Corps Network Project of the Year Award