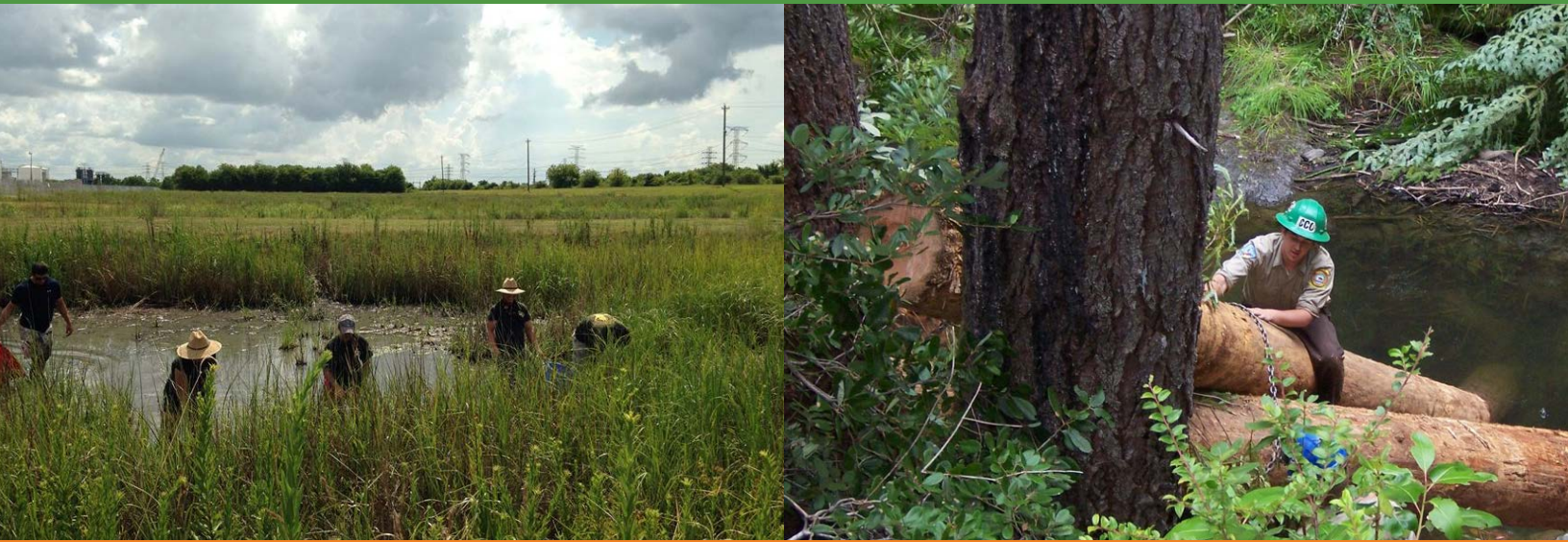


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service & Conservation Corps Partnerships

Engaging the Next Generation in Conservation | 2020



**The
CorpsNetwork**

Strengthening America through
service and conservation

US Fish & Wildlife Service & Conservation Corps Partnerships

What is a Corps?

Corps are locally based organizations that engage young adults (generally ages 16 – 25) and veterans (up to age 35) in service projects that address conservation, disaster response, and community needs. Through service to our country, Corps participants – or “Corpsmembers” – gain work experience and develop in-demand skills. Corpsmembers are compensated with a stipend or living allowance and often receive an education award or scholarship upon completing their term of service. Additionally, Corps provide educational programming, mentoring, and access to career and personal counseling.

About The Corps Network (TCN)

Established in 1985, The Corps Network (TCN) is the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps. Our membership of 130 Corps provide young adults and veterans the opportunity to serve our country through projects on public lands and in rural and urban communities. TCN supports Corps by advocating on their behalf, providing access to funding and project opportunities, and offering expertise in Corps operations and programming.

About the 21st Century Conservation Corps Initiative (21CSC)

The 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) is a bipartisan-supported, national initiative to increase the number of national service opportunities that engage young people and veterans in protecting and enhancing America's infrastructure, lands and waters. A mechanism for increasing these opportunities is through expanded public-private partnerships between Corps and resource management agencies.

The 21CSC Act

The John S. McCain III 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act was signed into law in March 2019 as part of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. The 21CSC Act assists the Service and Conservation Corps movement by, among other measures, requiring participating resource agencies to establish coordinator positions to oversee partnerships with Corps; creating a framework for tracking data and accomplishments; and establishing enrollment in Corps among Native American youth and veterans.

California Conservation Corps members based in San Diego work on the Steele Canyon Creek arundo removal project with the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge. Corpsmembers removed 35 patches of arundo within 10 acres and filled five dumpsters; they also treated the stumps with herbicide.



Project Development and Partnering with Corps

The Corps Network has a Master Participating Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Under this agreement, FWS units may enter into public-private partnerships with member Corps of The Corps Network to complete projects that advance FWS' mission.

FWS funding can be provided through appropriated funds that support a variety of the agency's priority needs. FWS covers 75 percent of project costs, while the Corps brings 25 percent match as required by the Public Lands Corps authorization (16 USC Chapter 37, Subchapter II).

FWS units should identify priority projects and which ones are appropriate for Corps. Units can include Corps projects in their typical project and priority planning and determine appropriate funds based on the type of project. FWS would then work with The Corps Network to identify a Corps to complete the project, and then enter into an agreement with The Corps Network.

Given the nature of The Corps Network's Master Agreement, FWS staff would want to oversee the execution of the project work while also engaging the youth in mentoring or leadership development. FWS staff should work with the Corps to track project data and track Corpsmembers' hours towards meeting their non-competitive hiring eligibility requirements.

Why Partner with Corps?

Corps are a common-sense partner for resource management agencies. Corps are effective and show up ready to work. They manage their own crews, insurance, and recruitment services. Given tight budgets, engaging Corps can help increase the capacity of FWS staff to focus on other priority areas. By bringing matching funds and community support to projects, Corps are cost-effective partners towards meeting USFWS priorities.

For example, one land management agency found that using Corps saved, on average, 65 percent over using their own crews, and 83 percent over contractor crews. Ninety percent of 1,500 nationwide Corps project partners evaluated the work of Corps as "good or outstanding," while virtually all federal project partners (99.6 percent) said they would work with Corps again.

Additionally, partnering with Corps gives FWS units the chance to engage the next generation of diverse conservation leaders. Corps are embedded in their communities; around half of Corpsmembers are female and roughly half identify as persons of color. Corps offer an opportunity for young people and veterans to, through service, gain work experience on the path to careers. Serving in a Corps could qualify Corpsmembers for federal non-competitive hiring eligibility.

FAQs – Partnering with Corps

Are the youth supervised?

Yes, each crew includes one to two adult supervisors who manage the participants. FWS staff will want to work with these supervisors and provide project oversight, but Corps are generally able to work independently, freeing time for agency staff to focus on other priority issues.

What are the costs?

- Costs vary, but Corps provide at least 25 percent match and typically more.
- A week of a crew is approximately \$6,000 depending on crew type, location, etc.
- Intern cost is dependent on living allowance.

Who selects the participants?

- **Crews:** Corps does all of the enrollment and selection.
- **Interns:** Corps may handle the enrollment, or they may work with the partnering agency to review qualified applicants and make the selection.

Where are the participants housed?

- **Crews:** Typically camp, either front country or backcountry
- **Intern:** Either finds own housing or, in some situations, lives in agency housing.

What does the Corps provide?


- Supervision
- Tools
- Gear
- Camping equipment and food
- Transportation
- Uniforms
- Payroll administration
- Insurance

Who provides transportation?

- **Crews:** crew has its own vehicles and provides all transportation
- **Interns:** Agency can require intern to have transportation or can provide it themselves.

Is the work high quality?

Yes! Year after year, Corps receive extremely high marks from agency partners on the quality of their project work.



Montana Conservation Corps at Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. Corpsmembers removed encroaching conifers.

Hiring Authority

Participation in a Conservation Corps may qualify certain young people for preferential hiring status with federal resource management agencies.

Benefits to Agencies

- These authorities help meet agency employment needs by providing a path to jobs for Corps alumni who have experience and have demonstrated their skills and knowledge.
- The young people who serve in Corps reflect the diversity of America. Hiring Corps alumni offers an opportunity to build a resource management workforce that's more reflective of our nation's population.

Public Land Corps 2-Year Non-Competitive Eligibility

Public Land Corps (PLC) are Conservation Corps that partner with the Departments of Interior, Agriculture (Forest Service), and Commerce (NOAA) to engage Corpsmembers in projects that meet agency priorities. A former member of a Public Lands Corps is eligible for two years of noncompetitive hiring status after their term of service is completed. Corpsmembers can acquire this status up to age 30 and use it up to age 32.

Details/Requirements

- The Corpsmember must complete a minimum of 640 hours of satisfactory service on appropriate conservation projects, including at least 120 hours of service on federal lands or waters through a Public Lands Corps.
- Public Land Corps work with federal agency staff to ensure the Corpsmember's service hours and activities are properly tracked. Once agency staff verify the Corpsmember has met the requirements, the Corpsmember will be issued a certificate. Note that different agencies and regions have slightly different ways of handling the PLC program. Contact the youth program lead for your region or agency for specifics.
- Having a certificate does not guarantee hiring; the PLC alum must also meet other qualifications for a given position.

Resource Assistant 2-Year Direct Hire Authority

Resource Assistants serve in an internship-like capacity and partake in research or resource protection activities within a given agency. Resource Assistants can be directly appointed to a position with the Departments of Agriculture, Interior, and Commerce.

Details/Requirements

- Resource Assistants must complete a minimum of 960 hours of work and attain at least a two-year degree from an accredited institution of higher education.
- Resource Assistants can acquire this status up to age 30 and use it up to age 32. Individuals must be at least 17 years old to participate in the program. There is no upper age limit to be a Resource Assistant, but individuals must be no more than 30 years old to be eligible to receive this hiring authority.

Project Partnership Highlights

Types of projects in which Corps can engage include (but not limited to)

- Engaging the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders
- Habitat Restoration
- Deferred Maintenance
- Recreation Enhancement
- Wildfire Remediation
- Invasive Species Remediation
- Pollinator Protection
- Urban Wildlife Conservation
- Cooperative Recovery Projects
- Historic Preservation
- Coastal and Wetland Restoration
- Climate Adaption & Resiliency
- Research and Resource Development
- Education and Outreach

FWS Region 2 & American Conservation Experience (ACE)

Project Type: Invasive Species Control & Habitat Restoration

ACE partners across FWS Region 2 on over 7,000 acres of critical restoration projects on 29 refuges in Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. ACE provides invasive species management, including surveying invasives, removing species (often using mechanic and chemical "cut stump" treatments), collecting seeds, planting, controlling erosion, and installing/maintaining fencing. Under guidance of FWS biologists and ecologists, crews have incorporated an integrated pest management approach that utilizes manual, mechanical and chemical methods to remove plants identified as threats to cultural and biological resources.

"The support that ACE provides is unlike any other program that I have worked with. Teams arrive at the project sites trained in safety and technique for the specific type of project. The responsiveness to partner needs, & flexibility during project delays has been exceptional."
- FWS South Texas Refuge

FWS Region 8 & California Conservation Corps (CCC)

Project Type: Habitat Restoration, Wildfire Remediation, Invasive Species

In recent years, CCC has completed around 9,400 hours of service on FWS Refuges in Region 8. The CCC has been involved in improving habitats for fish by building fish ladders, installing fishways and fish screens, and building bypasses. Additional projects have included brush clearance, fire hazard reduction, land clearing/weed removal, landscaping, chipping, plant eradication, and tree pruning.

FWS Southwest Regional Office & Rocky Mountain Youth Corps New Mexico (RMYC)

Project Type: Engaging the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders

By partnering with the FWS Regional Office, RMYC developed an inter-governmental agreement to pool federal resources into a single Supplemental Project Agreement. This unique arrangement enabled a focus on youth engagement in projects like the preservation of native historic sites in Bosque del Apache NWR. RMYC also worked with five federal agencies, the City of Albuquerque Cultural Affairs Department, Community Centers, YMCA's and other area non-profits, water conservancy districts, and three out of the six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos. FWS professionals educated Corpsmembers about conservation-related careers and helped facilitate their progress towards personal goals. Staff ensured Corpsmember engagement in both learning and work experiences, encouraging Corpsmembers' long-term connection to environmental stewardship.

Monarch Joint Venture, Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa

Project Type: Research, Public Engagement, Education and Outreach

Over the past three years, Conservation Corps of Minnesota & Iowa has, in partnership with the Monarch Joint Venture (MJV), managed a one-year monarch conservation internship. The MJV interns performed extensive research and public engagement involving conservation efforts with the North American monarch butterfly. This included hosting citizen science and professional development workshops for monarch educators and developing a GIS map of national monarch conservation research efforts.

National Bison Range, Charles M. Russell NWR & Montana Veterans Green Corps

Project Type: Hazardous Fuels Reduction

Since 2011, USFWS's Montana Fire Management Zone has partnered with the Montana Veterans Green Corps to reduce hazardous fuels at the Charles M. Russell NWR and National Bison Range. Veterans Green Corps participants use chainsaws and hand tools to remove trees, brush, and other debris. Several Corps alumni have been hired as seasonal firefighters.

This type of partnership *"...is a fantastic opportunity for veterans to participate in habitat management and better prepares them to join the natural resource conservation workforce."*

- FWS Fire Management Officer

Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge & Nevada Conservation Corps

Project Type: Cooperative Recovery & Resilient Landscapes Program

Nevada Conservation Corps is working with the Greater Sheldon-Hart Mountain Resilient Landscapes Collaborative (RLC), which is a multi-agency effort to increase coordination between all partners to strategically identify and increase the resiliency of one of the last remaining large expanses of intact sage steppe habitat. Treatments in the proposed area include removing encroaching juniper, developing strategic fuel breaks, reducing invasive plants and exotic weeds, and restoring wet meadow complexes on private lands.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, Rock Flats NWR & Mile High Youth Corps

Project Type: Invasive Species Control

Mile High Youth Corps completed seven weeks of work with FWS at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR and Rocky Flats NWR. Crews removed invasive species by hand and with chainsaws, applied herbicide, and cleaned up deadfall from native Cottonwood trees. In 2016, an Outstanding Project Partner Award went to a Wildlife Refuge Specialist at Rocky Mountain Arsenal for incredible support of Conservation Corps crews.

Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge & Ancestral Lands Urban Barrio Corps

Project Type: Engaging the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders

Native and Latino Corpsmembers work on conservation projects at Valle de Oro NWR. The Corps and NWR staff engage diverse groups from surrounding neighborhoods in opportunities available at the refuge. The Corps is developing bilingual resources to help the community interact with, enjoy, and feel welcome at the refuge.



Learn More:

Interested in learning more about how the FWS and Corps can partner? Please contact us:

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Photos:

ABOVE: (L) A member of LA Conservation Corps' River Corps, which works with FWS' Urban Refuges program.
(R) Texas Conservation Corps members at Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge.

FRONT COVER: (L) Texas Conservation Corps Members at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge.
(R) California Conservation Corps.

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**21ST CENTURY
CONSERVATION
SERVICE CORPS**



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