

Building the Future v2: A Guide for Using the Recreational Trails Program to Partner with Service and Conservation Corps

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Introduction

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.

By annually engaging thousands of young adults and veterans in education and service, Corps...

- Increase access to public lands and waters
- Build and enhance multiuse trails
- Support productive fish and wildlife habitats
- Increase recycling and revitalize neighborhoods
- Restore communities and resources following disasters
- Prevent and fight wildfires
- Create and maintain parks and recreational spaces
- Remove invasive species
- Address the maintenance backlog on public lands
- Weatherize homes for money-saving resource efficiency

Corps Outcomes FY21

- 445,021 acres of habitat restored
- 623,626 trees planted
- 124,206 acres of invasive species treated
- 227,665 volunteer service hours generated
- 93,871 acres of hazardous fire fuels retreated
- 12,791 miles of trail built or improved
- 9,853 industry-recognized certifications earned by Corpsmembers
- 2,892 miles of waterways restored

Why Partner with a Service and Conservation Corps?

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

example, one federal land management agency found that using Corps saved, on average, 65 percent over using their own crews, and 83 percent over independent 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 transportation agencies the chance to engage the next generation of diverse recreation professionals.

If You Are a State Trail Agency Representative...

Since the implementation of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) in 1998, the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) has been encouraging State transportation and recreation agencies to enter into contracts and cooperative agreements with qualified service and conservation Corps. The more than 150 Corps that make up The Corps Network collectively engage more than 20,000 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 and recent veterans up to age 35 each year. Of these Corpsmembers, 44 percent identify as female and 46 percent identify as persons of color. State agencies should view Corps as a pipeline to diverse and prepared candidates for available and hard-to-fill trail, transportation, and infrastructure jobs. By partnering with Corps, agencies are offering a new generation of young professionals opportunities in the communities where these projects are located.

If You Are a Federal, State, or Local Land Manager...

By serving on trail and recreation improvement projects, Corpsmembers receive relevant workforce training and learn new industry-recognized conservation skills and certifications. Corpsmembers also have opportunities to learn about careers in the outdoor recreation economy and network with professionals in resource management. Many Corps operate under land management agreements with the Public Land Corps authority, allowing Corpsmembers serving under these agreements to receive a special hiring authority after their term of service. Corps also bring diverse funding sources and grants to a partnership, helping to meet match requirements and expand the work capacity.

Building the Future of Trail and Transportation Professionals

The purpose of this guide is to acquaint state trail programs, transportation agencies and land managers with the benefits of developing contracts and cooperative agreements with Service and Conservation Corps on trail and transportation projects; encourage the use of Service and Conservation Corps in state-funded trail programs; and promote employing Corpsmembers in trail and transportation careers. Our goal is to build upon Corps success and expand the number of quality trail and transportation projects Corps complete in partnership with state administrators and land managers. By

encouraging the use of Corps, we hope to strengthen transportation and recreation career pathways for a younger and diverse workforce.

Accomplishments: The Corps Network – FHWA Partnership

Training and Education

- 200+ meetings, workshops, teleconferences, and training sessions

Support

- More Corps accessing state education grants and safety programs

Resources

- 5+ Comprehensive publications and toolkits
- Development of a Trails and Transportation webpage

Department of Transportation Strategic Goals

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) established strategic goals and objectives to reflect the Secretary's priorities for achieving USDOT's mission of ensuring safe and efficient modern transportation systems, improving the quality of life for all American people and communities, and increasing the productivity and competitiveness of American workers and businesses:

USDOT Strategic Goals (2022 - 2026)

- How these Goals are interpreted through the Case Studies
- **Safety:** Make our transportation system safer for all people. Work toward a future where transportation-related serious injuries and fatalities are eliminated.
 - Corps projects have a primary objective to address user safety on trails and related projects through restorative work; installation of new trail or other active transportation structures; signage; implementing education and safety programming.
- **Economic Strength:** Grow an inclusive and sustainable economy. Invest in our transportation system to provide American workers and businesses reliable and efficient access to good-paying jobs, resources, and markets.
 - Corps projects strengthen trail and related access and connectivity options to adjacent communities; Corps recruit local young adults and offer post-program career pathway options and exploration.

- **Equity:** Reduce inequities. Support and engage people and communities to promote safe, affordable, accessible, and multimodal access to opportunities and services while reducing transportation-related disparities, adverse community impacts, and health effects.
 - Corps projects are intentional in their outreach and recruitment of young adults from underserved communities. Equity considerations are integrated into the planning, development, and implementation of trail and related projects, training, and workforce development plans.
- **Climate and Sustainability:** Tackle the climate crisis by ensuring that transportation plays a central role in the solution. Substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transportation-related pollution and build more resilient and sustainable transportation systems to benefit and protect communities.
 - Corps projects prioritize minimal environmental impacts to corridors through climate-informed techniques and preplanning. Projects address the effects of natural disasters on trail and related systems through restorative work, sustainable construction techniques, and other enhancements to promote resilience and sustainability.
- **Transformation:** Design for the future. Invest in purpose-driven research and innovation to meet the challenge of the present and modernize a transportation system of the future that serves everyone today and, in the decades to come.
 - Corps work with diverse stakeholders to prioritize trail and related infrastructure modernization work. Projects are designed and executed to accommodate and respond to the changing needs of users. Corpsmembers are trained in new industry-recognized trail building and conservation techniques.

Project Development and Partnering with a Service and Conservation Corps

Corps-Friendly State and Federal Programs

The Public Lands Corps (PLC) Authority

Congress passed the Public Land Corps (PLC) Act in 1993 with the intention to formalize relationships between nonprofit organizations – such as service and conservation Corps – and Federal land agencies to employ young adults aged 16 through 30 (or up to 35 if a recent veteran) on conservation projects. The Act has been amended multiple times to include a special authority to land management agencies in the Department of Interior (DOI) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to

hire Corpsmembers into Federal careers who complete at least 640 hours (and other requirements) on “PLC eligible projects” .

If serving on projects under an agreement with the PLC legal authority, Corpsmembers may obtain a two-year status of eligibility to apply noncompetitively for permanent or term jobs through USAJobs (on merit promotion announcements). This is “noncompetitive” because Corpsmembers are applying as if they are already permanent employees rather than applying for jobs in open competition posted to general public announcements. Federal land managers and their Corps subcontractors typically work together on the required documentation and processing of the PLC hiring authority certificates and will issue them to the qualified Corpsmembers. State program-funded projects on Federal lands (such as National Park Service or U.S. Forest Service) that use agreements with this legal authority is a best practice strategy of interagency and Corps collaboration that promotes Corpsmember career pathways.

AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps is a federal volunteer service program supported by the U.S. federal government, foundations, corporations, and other donors. Nonprofits, universities, and other organizations across the country receive AmeriCorps funding to engage people in up to a year-long term of service addressing critical community needs. AmeriCorps members participate in activities that include but are not limited to: mentoring and tutoring youth, responding to disasters, fighting poverty, increasing access to healthy foods, and restoring habitats. Many Service and Conservation Corps that are members of The Corps Network receive AmeriCorps funding to support the engagement of Corpsmembers in conservation and environmental stewardship, transportation, and recreation enhancement programs. The Corps Network is an AmeriCorps National Direct grantee, meaning The Corps Network receives AmeriCorps funding which is then subgranted to member Corps.

FAQS: Project Development with Corps

Supervision and Oversight

Corps offer multiple layers of oversight for their crew deployments. Typically, each crew includes one to two adult supervisors (Crew Leaders) who manage the crew members and a field coordinator/project manager will supervise the crew leaders. Oversight may even continue up the chain of command within a Corps, depending on the project. Crews are generally able to work independently or alongside project partners without taking up staff capacity.

Crew Structure

A crew can typically range from three Corpsmembers to 10+ and include one or two Crew Leaders.

Housing

Crews can camp in frontcountry or backcountry environments; Stay in agency-provided housing/bunkhouses; or return home each day (if the crew is local).

Interns/Single Placements can find local housing independently; Stay in agency-provided housing/bunkhouses; or work remotely.

Crew Cost Structures

This varies widely. Cost structures for crews can be calculated hourly, weekly, per day, or per Corpsmember. Estimates are typically adjusted and defined during partner negotiations. The following are rough estimates and ballpark figures for experienced trail crews:

- \$5,000/week or; \$15 - \$20/per hour or; \$500/day
- Interns or single placements can be calculated per hour, weekly, per month(s), or annually. 1700 hour (10 months) - \$12,000
- Corps Indirect cost rates (ICRs) can vary from 10 - 30 percent

What the Corps Provide the Crews/Interns:

The following are costs commonly found in a Corps estimate or project budget. These costs can also be adjusted and defined during partner negotiations, depending on what is permissible for the grant:

- Personnel and staff administration
- Field supplies and personal protective gear
- Project materials (lumber, gravel, sod, composite, etc.)
- Trail building tools and supplies
- Training and orientation
- Camping equipment and gear
- Transportation
- Fringe Benefits, insurance, and liability

Types of Corps-Appropriate Projects

Trail Maintenance and Restoration

El Morro National Monument,

Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps (New Mexico)

Project Type: Trail Restoration and Resurfacing

Young adults from the Acoma and Zuni Pueblos completed repair and rehabilitation of the historic Headland Trail switchbacks, including restoring historic retaining walls and drainage features and resurfacing the trail. Work improved the condition of the trail and enhanced visitor experience, access, and safety.

Trailside and Trailhead Facilities

New Hampshire State Forest,

Appalachian Mountain Club (New Hampshire)

Project Type: Trail Bridge Design and Construction

The 32-foot Croo Bridge was designed and constructed by AMC staff and Corpsmembers to serve as the main artery trail for all hiking the east side of Cardigan Mountain. The old bridge was constructed of native untreated timbers with supplies and materials financed by AMC.

Construction of New Recreational Trails

**Glacier National Park,
Montana Conservation Corps (Montana)**

Project Type: Trail Construction; Accessibility

Alongside the Swiftcurrent Nature Trail, crews widened the corridor, installed drainage systems, and applied gravel and composite to level and compact the trail for wheelchair accessibility.

Assessment of Trail Conditions

**Dixie National Forest,
Utah Conservation Corps (Utah)**

Project Type: Assessments of Trail and Trailside Structures; GIS Mapping

One intern worked on GIS mapping for USFS building a GIS database for USFS that had all of the bridges in the Forest; Received GIS certifications; and plans on pursuing imaging and mapping as a career.

Education For Safety and Environmental Protection

**Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge,
The Sustainability Institute (South Carolina)**

Project Type: Trail Building Training

The Corps received an education programming and safety grant through the state trail program to train Corpsmembers in trail construction. Crews applied skills in tool-use, trail maintenance, and bridge/boardwalk building on deferred maintenance projects.

Federal and State-aided Matching Strategies

Most federal and state projects require a match or cost-share from the contracted entity. Typically, agencies must document a minimum 20 percent of the total project funding. Corps grant recipients should make sure that matching funds are allowable and available prior to the start of the project and work with you on what is permissible. Corps subgrantees are not typically responsible for the grantee's match contributions, however a Corps should still work with their grantee on leveraging any of the Corps' resources to support the match requirement. Below are several ways Corps can offer options that can help make this requirement more manageable with cash and in-kind match contributions:

Cash Match Contributions

Many Corps bring non-federal, diversified funding sources to a partnership that can help with cost efficiency, promote program sustainability, and make it easier to achieve the

match requirement. Corps can leverage their foundation dollars, community fundraising, collected fees, private donors, and corporate grants. This is the case for any Corps program, whether they are a nonprofit or part of a state entity. When documenting cash-match, Corps can offer to cover portions of direct project costs like labor, supplies, and equipment with these non-federal funding sources.

Using In-Kind Services for Match

Many Corps that partner with federal land management agencies use in-kind service valuations to satisfy required match contributions. Corps serving as direct recipients or subgrantees can use their in-kind Corpsmember labor (provided those labor costs are supported by a non-federal source), equipment, supplies, and/or other donated items and services. It should be noted that some state entities and federal agencies may require specific documentation and proof of costs for compliance and reimbursement purposes. Corps and their awarding officers should clearly communicate permissible use of in-kind match contributions or required documentation in the beginning of the partner negotiations.

Corps Leveraging AmeriCorps Funding

Although this is a federally funded program, some state entities and agencies allow for certain federal funds to be credited toward the required cash or in-kind match contribution. With prior approval and in specific cases, AmeriCorps funding may be used for this purpose. The Corps—whether they manage their own AmeriCorps grant programs or receive AmeriCorps funding from a pass-through entity—is responsible for the AmeriCorps compliance and documentation, if being used as part of the match. Corps may also leverage AmeriCorps to supplement the cost of the crew labor and the sponsor's grant can cover the rest.

AmeriCorps members receive a living allowance to support their time in service instead of a wage or salary. As a result, they are federally recognized as volunteers. A Corps may calculate the value of AmeriCorps members' labor as volunteer time and apply this valuation towards the in-kind match requirement. Organizations like Independent Sector offer estimates for national and state value of volunteer time and is widely accepted by state entities and agencies. Along with prior approvals, Corps grant recipients are expected to keep accurate records of all project expenditures and documentation of any Corps staff and AmeriCorps members for all in-kind and cash match use. It should be noted that using AmeriCorps funding for match is not always permissible and may require an approval memo that the Corps can obtain from their AmeriCorps portfolio manager.

Procuring Sole-Source Contract and Agreements with Corps

If you are a State Trail or Transportation Program or Agency Representative...

Section 1524 of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act exempts contracts and cooperative agreements with Service and Conservation Corps from federal-aid highway contracting requirements – such as competitive bidding – under 23 U.S.C. 112. State trail and transportation programs are encouraged to sole-source contracts and cooperative agreements to qualified Service and Conservation Corps for not just RTP-funded projects, but any National Scenic Byways Program, Transportation Alternatives, Bicycle and Pedestrian, or Safe Routes to School project. This is not a mandate but rather strong encouragement with supportive legislative statute. You may have to consider alternative contracting strategies if you find these statutes to be in conflict with your state procurement process. One such option is to consider outreach to multiple Corps in your state – through grant announcements – rather than sourcing to one Corps.

42 U.S.C. 12656(c)(3) references and defines “Qualified youth corps to mean any program established by a state or local government or by a nonprofit organization, serving on project work deemed “Corps-appropriate” that:

1. is capable of offering meaningful, full-time, productive work for individuals between the ages of 16 and 25, inclusive, in an urban or public works or transportation setting;
2. gives participants a mix of work experience, basic and life skills, education, training, and support services, and
3. provides participants with the opportunity to develop citizenship values and skills through service to their communities and the United States

Agencies may reference The Corps Network’s Members by State page for a listing of Corps nationwide.

If you are a Federal, State, or Local Land Manager....

One option to consider is working with a Corps who have access to federal land cooperative agreements. Many Corps use single location, regional, and national agreement mechanisms awarded by their federal land partners with Corps-friendly authorities (such as the Public Land Corps) written into those agreements. Some Corps even have multi-year contracts and cooperative agreements with state, municipalities, and local agencies to perform work at one location or multiple recreational spaces. This makes it administratively easier to subcontract with your corps partners without having to go through the procurement process each cycle. Alternatively, as a land manager, you can be the direct recipient of a state trails program grant, subcontract with the Corps of your choice, and use the Corps’ matching funds and in-kind contributions towards the grant requirements.

If you are a Service and Conservation Corps...

Procuring sole-source agreements with your state trails program will be a challenging endeavor but a worthwhile long-term investment for your program. Unlike many federal

land management agencies, there are no universal processes, guidelines, or announcements for procuring a sole source agreement. Each state administered their trails program differently and will have to follow their own procurement procedures, which can sometimes be in conflict with the MAP-21 Section 1524 statute. There's also no one right way for a Corps to approach their state with a procurement conversation. Corps with existing state relationships and agreements may have ongoing projects for years and will not be awarded a sole-source agreement (due to a number of reasons), while some state trail agencies may be more receptive to awarding sole-source agreements.

The Corps Network (TCN) can help facilitate connections with potential Corps partners, develop materials, and provide technical assistance, as appropriate. For years, TCN has supported state and local agency partners identify new Corps partnerships and share strategies for how to take advantage of MAP-21 guidance through some of the following methods:

- Present with or on behalf of Corps during State trail council and committee meetings.
- Provide technical assistance and resources on developing career pathways for Corpsmembers who serve on Federal-aid funded projects and offer guidance on common contracting and agreement mechanisms.
- Host learning sessions, webinars, and exploratory meetings with State trail, transportation, resource agencies, and Federal land management agencies.

SEC. 1524. USE OF YOUTH SERVICE AND CONSERVATION CORPS.

(a) In General.-The Secretary shall encourage the States and regional transportation planning agencies to enter into contracts and cooperative agreements with qualified youth service or conservation corps, as defined in sections 122(a)(2) of Public Law 101-610 (42 U.S.C. 12572(a)(2)) and 106(c)(3) of Public Law 103-82 (42 U.S.C. 12656(c)(3)) to perform appropriate projects eligible under sections 162, 206, 213, and 217 of title 23, United States Code, and under section 1404 of the SAFETEA-LU (119 Stat. 1228).

(b) Requirements.-Under any contract or cooperative agreement entered into with a qualified youth service or conservation corps under this section, the Secretary shall--

- (1) set the amount of a living allowance or rate of pay for each participant in such corps at--
 - (A) such amount or rate as required under State law in a State with such requirements; or
 - (B) for corps in States not described in subparagraph (A), at such amount or rate as determined by the Secretary, not to exceed the

maximum living allowance authorized by section 140 of Public Law 101-610 (42 U.S.C. 12594); and

- (2) not subject such corps to the requirements of section 112 of title 23, United States Code.

Summary of Case Studies

The case studies in this section will explore 8 community-embedded Corps who have completed recreational trail and trail-adjacent conservation projects across geographically-diverse locations. While some projects are ongoing, the majority of the work occurred in 2021 with some foundational work and procurements initiating in 2020. As detailed in the summary below, many of these projects were funded and supported by a variety of sponsorships and project partners. Corps can serve as either direct recipients or subrecipients on state trail or transportation program grants, federal awards, or leveraging their own foundation, AmeriCorps or fundraising sources. Corps can even bring in-kind contributions to a partnership, such as managing community and volunteer groups, providing supplies and equipment, supporting crew labor, and travel.

With workforce development being essential to the Corps model, each case study will highlight the various ways Corpsmembers are impacted during their time providing direct service to the project. Civic engagement, industry-recognized skills and certifications, and career pathways following their service are some of the many opportunities Corpsmembers receive while serving.

Each case study includes background and history of the partnership, funding and contracting strategies, detailed descriptions of the project work, lessons learned, outcomes, and effective practices. All project examples intentionally align with the permissible uses of state Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funds - such as construction of new trails, maintenance, trailside facilities, and educational safety programming. While not all of these projects are supported by RTP grants, the following case studies may offer strategies, solutions, or direction for what can be accomplished with a Corps grantee or subcontractor through state trail or transportation program support.

For state trail agencies and/or land managers, your takeaway will be learning new strategies and best practices for how to partner and develop projects with a Conservation Corps; how to support the implementation of sustainable youth crews and programs; Leverage your capacity building through the Corps' facilitation of volunteer and community groups; and read examples of technical and advanced trail building projects completed by experienced crews.

For Corps Staff and leadership, these case studies highlight some best practices from your Corps counterparts around the country and can offer strategies for your own funding and development efforts. Case studies will demonstrate how the various levels of funding and resources flow into a trail project, which can offer some direction for how to approach new partners and build relationships.

1. Coastal Alabama Trails and Dauphin Island Alabama Conservation Corps

- Federal Funding
- Public-Private Partnerships
- State and Local Funding

Summary:

Maintained, blazed, and surveyed 28 miles of trails with state and local funding. Approx. two miles of new trail constructed in county parks and Land Trusts property.

2. Shawnee National Forest Wilderness Trails

AmeriCorps St. Louis

- Federal Funding

Summary:

3+ miles of wilderness recreational trails constructed and restored with federal grants and local nonprofit support in Southern Illinois.

3. Drinkwater Flats OHV trails

Conservation Corps of Long Beach

- Federal Funding
- State and Local Funding

Summary:

Five miles of OHV trails maintained and fenced with multi-year CalTrans and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation funding.

4. Arroyo Hondo Headwaters Mountain Biking Trails

Forest Stewards Youth Corps

- Federal Funding
- Public-Private Partnerships

Summary:

Corps constructed the first new mountain biking trail in over 10 years inside the Santa Fe National Forest

5. Cub Lake Trail

Larimer County Conservation Corps

- Federal Funding
- State and Local Funding

Summary:

Corps constructed the first new mountain biking trail in over 10 years inside the Santa Fe National Forest

6. House of Sky Trail

Montana Conservation Corps

- Public-Private Partnerships
- State and Local Funding

Summary:

Montana RTP-funded for multi-year new mountain bike trail construction. The Corps was subcontracted through a Mountain Bike Advocacy recipient.

7. Northwoods Trail Network

NorthWoods Conservation Corps

- Public-Private Partnerships
- State and Local Funding

Summary:

Vermont RTP-supported grant for trail construction, restoration, and bog bridges. Corps was the RTP grant recipient.

8. Lake County Forest Preserve District Trails

Youth Conservation Corps

- Public-Private Partnerships
- State and Local Funding

Summary:

Trail maintenance, trail structures, and vegetation management within county-funded Forest preserves.

Trail Construction and Recreational Improvements throughout Coastal Alabama

A newly established Corps kickstarts program sustainability through diversified partners and funding for Coastal Alabama's recreational trails

Alabama Conservation Corps

Project Partners and Sponsors

GulfCorps

RESTORE Council
NOAA
The Nature Conservancy
The Corps Network
Student Conservation Association

Alabama Power

City of Mobile

Peninsula of Mobile

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Alabama River Hiking Society

South Alabama Land Trust

Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries

FHWA Strategic Goals

Equity; Climate and Sustainability

Project Focus

Trail Construction and Maintenance; Surveying and Assessments; Vegetation Management

Sources

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/priority-landscapes/gulf-of-mexico/stories-in-the-gulf-of-mexico/gulfcorps-launches-in-the-gulf-of-mexico/>
<https://www.alabamacanoetrails.com/perdido/hiking-trail>
<https://www.alabamaforeverwild.com/perdido-river-wma>
<https://www.outdooralabama.com/rivers-and-mobile-delta/fish-river>
<https://www.dauphinislandbirds.com/>
<https://southalabamalandtrust.org/saving-land/>

Project and Program Overview

Promoting Recreational Access throughout Coastal Alabama

Between September 2021 and March 2022, the Alabama Conservation Corps (ACC) - part of the Student Conservation Association (SCA) - deployed crews to project locations throughout Baldwin County, Mobile County, and Dauphin Island to serve on a number of trail, and vegetation management projects in partnership with state, county, and nonprofit sponsors. Each ACC crew was assigned tasks to address recreational improvement work identified by local land managers. Area parks and trails were experiencing low visitor use, safety and inaccessibility issues and local officials wanted to support a revitalization effort to get locals using more of the trails and natural areas. Contracting the ACC became the common-sense solution to getting the immediate needs done efficiently while also creating workforce training and career pathways for the local young adults.

In this case study, we will discuss four project sites serviced by the Alabama Conservation Corps that highlight the use of diversified funding sources, community partnerships, and are helping establish local program sustainability. Since its inception, many of ACC's project partners were initially established by The Nature Conservancy (TNC)—a local leader and partner in the GulfCorps Program (see below). Both ACC and TNC worked with local land managers to assist with their recreation improvement projects involving trail construction and maintenance, habitat restoration, invasive species management, fire lane and prescribed fire preparation. Additionally, when funders support a locally-based Corps program like ACC, they are also supporting career pathway opportunities for local young adults in trail and conservation work.

Revitalization and Visitor-use Improvements

Schwarz Park

Managed by the City of Mobile, Schwarz Park sits adjacent the Halls Mill Creek and provides the local community with access to trails, fishing, and recreational waterways. In an effort to increase visitor use, the City partnered with ACC on a park revitalization plan that included construction of a new trail and a periodic maintenance plan that would use the ACC for ongoing stewardship of the park and its trails. In 2020, the City identified areas of needed improvement to promote safe recreation and increase visitor engagement. In the first year of the revitalization plan, the ACC constructed 0.25 of new trail, now known as Pond Trail, and has since returned annually to maintain the new trail, clear invasives, and steward the surrounding corridor.

Trail Construction, Surveying and Assessments

Perdido River Hiking Trail

Located in Baldwin County's rural southern pine forest is the popular Perdido River Hiking Trail, providing locals access to nearly 18 miles of trails, waterways, fishing, hunting, and wildlife observation. In recent years, the ACC was contracted to support surveying and assessment efforts that would map and pinpoint trail characteristics in need of restoration and improvements. ACC mapped 7 miles of trail and tracking areas of improvement that included flooded sections of the trail corridor, blown down trees, vegetation overgrowth, lack of signage and trail markers and erosion. Returning in fall 2021, the ACC crew worked alongside the Gulf Coast Chapter of the Alabama River Hiking Society and state of Alabama staff on blazing 28 miles of trail so that hikers can clearly follow the newly marked trail. The new markers and blazes will help with safe access and use for hikers since the Perdido River trail commonly experiences issues with erosion, flooding and vegetation overgrowth.

Trail Construction

Alta Fish River Land Trust

Staff from the South Alabama Land Trust worked alongside the ACC crew on the construction of two brand new trails on the Land Trust's new Alta Fish River property. As part of the Fish River Nature Preserve, this newly established property is an important part of the protection and restoration of watershed lands around Mobile Bay and Baldwin County. In fall 2021, the ACC crew constructed a new trail that runs along a local river on the land trust property, which created accessibility to and from the waterways for kayaking and provided recreation opportunities for hikers. The new trail tread was cut along a natural route in which no trees or rocks were removed, providing a clear but primitive hiking experience. The crew returns periodically to assist with trail maintenance mainly in the form of storm debris removal and vegetation overgrowth.

New Trail Construction and Habitat Restoration

Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries

A Coastal island located in the southernmost tip of Mobile Bay is Dauphin Island. The Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries (DIBS), a local nonprofit, protects 350+ species of migratory birds by acquiring land on the island for the nesting birds. With the support of diverse funders and ACC, DIBS has helped to protect approximately 16+ acres of critical habitat. Crew members worked with staff from DIBS to create an unnamed 0.28 mi of trail on one of their newly acquired DIBS properties. This trail will allow birders to access the property while not disturbing the migratory bird population. Initially, the crew mapped 25 different sites on the island for invasive overgrowth that can affect the nesting birds and obscure recreational bird watchers. The crew was able to remove all invasives from all the sites; planted natives along the trail corridor; and removed 16 acres veg from the island's wooded lots. New birders and visitors, including DIBS, are appreciative of the improved access to the bird nesting areas and newly constructed trail.

Program Funding

Year 1 - 4 of the Alabama Conservation Corps was fully funded and launched through The Nature Conservancy's GulfCorps Program, funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the RESTORE Council. The goal of this initiative is to build sustainable conservation Corps program capacity in the five states bordering the Gulf of Mexico that would restore valuable coastal habitats and train local young adults in conservation job skills. ACC was created with the support of The Nature Conservancy's GulfCorps Program in its initial years while growing their local presence. In program Year 5 (2021 - 2022), ACC has diversified its funding sources and project partners, working with state, local, and federal sponsors, nonprofits, and community volunteer groups—achieving program sustainability as a result. The projects previously discussed were in Year 5 and supported by a combination of GulfCorps funding from The Nature Conservancy; fee-for-service contracting with the City of Mobile, and grant funds from partners.

Workforce Development and Corpsmember Success

Over the past five years, 70+ young adults have successfully served with ACC and benefited tremendously from the program. All ACC Corpsmembers are young adults between 18 - 25 and locally recruited from the Alabama coastal communities of Baldwin County and Mobile County. Many have never worked on conservation, trail, or related field projects before. ACC will ensure Corpsmembers receive the hands-on, boots-on-the-ground training and experience needed for the service projects. ACC crews typically consist of 12 members total—10 crewmembers and 2 crew leaders who provide field oversight and management. ACC staff are also on sight for an additional layer of oversight and supervision.

Through ACC's orientation and training period, the Corpsmembers learn new hard and soft skills - such as trail building and identifying invasives; receive extensive professional development and public land lessons that will prepare them for their career and education goals. As part of the GulfCorps program, The Corps Network provides professional and workforce development training to each corpsmember using the IMPACT curriculum created by TCN. This includes professional development skill education, career exploration and workforce development strategies that ensure the Corpsmembers are properly prepared for their next steps in career and job placement. During their term of service, the Corpsmembers are connected with a mentor who helps them develop and work towards established goals, receive career advice and exploration; help with resume building and mock interviews; develop a professional portfolio to catalog all the skills and certifications gained; and attend a national career fair hosted by SCA.

Outcomes and Successes

ACC crews have improved more than 3,200 acres across state, federal, and nonprofit properties in coastal Alabama over the past five years. Crews removed invasive plant species, maintained fire breaks, conducted crucial monitoring, and restored popular trails and boardwalks. During last field season (Sept 2021 – Mar 2022), Corpsmembers conducted the following stewardship activities at 15 different project sites:

Removed 155.73 acres of invasives plant species

Removed 50 acres of debris and trash

Maintained, blazed, and surveyed 28 miles of trails

Maintained 2.15 acres of fire breaks

About the Corps

The Alabama Conservation Corps – part of the Student Conservation Association – offers local young adults (18 - 25) hands-on opportunities to restore Alabama's coastal and rural habitats and trail systems while improving their professional skills. This is a six to ten month program and has been running for the past 5 years.

Connecting with the Alabama Conservation Corps

For more information on partnerships, project development, and fee-for-service contracting, reach out directly to the Gulf Teams Manager at the SCA - Alabama Office:

251-289-9358

www.thesca.org

Shawnee National Forest Wilderness Trail Installation

Corpsmembers construct and restore miles of recreational wilderness trails affected by years of severe drainage issues

AmeriCorps St. Louis

Project Partners and Sponsors

U.S. Forest Service
Shawnee National Forest
Friends of the Shawnee National Forest
Backcountry Horseman

FHWA Strategic Goals

Climate and Sustainability; Transformation

Project Focus

Trail Construction and Maintenance; Trail Structures; Vegetation Management; Disaster Resiliency

Sources

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/shawnee>
<https://wilderness.net/visit-wilderness/?ID=333>

Background

Shawnee National Forest - Lusk Creek Wilderness

The Shawnee National Forest in southern Illinois stretches across 289,000+ acres of public lands and is best known for its unique geological features and remote wilderness areas. Over 1 million visitors annually experience the canyons, ravines, and sheltered caves of the Lusk Creek Wilderness - a protected area within Shawnee with over 6,000+ acres of wilderness and miles of trails and waterways. With the support of the AmeriCorps St Louis (ACSTL) and local nonprofit partners, Shawnee was able to complete critical deferred maintenance projects that restored and improved severely washed out and eroded trails due to years of poor drainage systems.

ACSTL's long partnership history with nearby Mark Twain National Forest in Missouri encouraged Shawnee to reach out for contracting. For years, ACSTL has deployed experienced crews to Mark Twain for trail construction, restoration, and wildland fire work while providing their Corpsmembers with career pathways and industry certifications. Since ACSTL is able to mobilize crews throughout the region, Shawnee developed a work plan that would deploy a crew to the Owl Bluff Frank's Trail in the Lusk Creek Wilderness to complete recreational trail improvements, construction, and drainage work.

Project Work

The Shawnee NF Wilderness Trail Installation partnership took place over a 6 week period in the summer of 2021 where ACSTL teams supported the creation of new trails and maintenance of existing trails within Lusk Creek. This project focused on water drainage installation, water bar construction, and check step dams to limit water erosion and included the clearing of downed trees and overgrown vegetation for user accessibility. The team retreaded the trail, installed the check step dams and water bars, removed hazardous trees along the trail corridor, and installed new gravel in heavy-use areas for erosion control. Additionally, a new trail was constructed with only hand tools and gravel composite was spread along the corridor that was packed in with the assistance of a mule train managed by the Backcountry Horseman.

Overall, the ACSTL Corpsmembers installed and improved 3.2 miles of recreational trails, maintained and improved two official campsites within Shawnee, and disbursed 14 user-established primitive campsites and covered up the social trails and access points to these unofficial sites. The team reported a positive service-experience following this project and enjoyed their time with the partner agencies and volunteers.

Accomplishments

3.2 miles of trails constructed, maintenance, and improved
23 trail drainages built
5 water bars installed
5 check dams constructed

Funding and Local Community Collaboration

Funding was allocated to this project from the US Forest Service's recreation budget - part of the mandatory Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) resources made available through the Great American Outdoor Act. Both the Department of the Interior and USFS manage these funds for conservation and recreation activities. Shawnee worked in partnership with ACSTL in providing in-kind tools, equipment, vehicles, project materials, and administration. Friends of Shawnee NF and the Backcountry Horsemen provided the transportation of project materials – such as gravel composite and large water bars – to the project sites and provided the Corpsmembers with traditional pack training.

Corpsmember Workforce Development

ACSTL Corpsmembers who participated on the Lusk Creek project received extensive orientation and training prior to their deployment. They received public lands history lessons and traditional preservation techniques specific for wilderness work. The Lusk Creek Wilderness has a special USFS designation that limits the use of tools and equipment to only nonmechanical interventions. Since this also limits the use of motorized vehicles, the Corpsmembers worked with the Backcountry Horsemen on learning traditional packing skills with mules and packed their materials and supplies into the project site. Corpsmembers also received crosscut certifications for felling and bucking trees within a wilderness area.

While working alongside the partners in the field, the Corpsmembers were able to network and discuss career opportunities with federal career professionals and the Backcountry Horseman. Career exploration is common with current and former ACSTL Corpsmembers who use their project time as an opportunity to learn more about next steps once they finish their corps experience. Several members from this particular deployment graduated and matriculated with full-time positions with the USFS, Missouri Department of Conservation, Arboretums, and/or pursued educational opportunities in biology and horticulture. Crewmembers have also continued their service with ACSTL in team leadership roles and staff after their term of service.

About the Corps

AmeriCorps St. Louis (ACSTL) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, engaging AmeriCorps National Service Volunteers in community service initiatives addressing critical unmet needs in the areas of Disaster Response, Environmental Stewardship, and Wildland Firefighting. ACSTL focuses on the training and development of the next generation of leaders while building the capacity of partner agencies to achieve impactful community results.

Connecting with AmeriCorps St. Louis

ACSTL is always available to discuss new partnership ideas and project development. ACSTL has a strong history and portfolio of past service projects that can serve as examples of future partnerships. Connect with the Executive Director for more information.

admin@americorp-stl.org

314-772-9002

www.americorpsstl.org

Drinkwater Flat OHV Trails

A multi-year SoCal Corps collaboration addresses decades of wildland fire damage along a popular OHV trail system

Conservation Corps of Long Beach

Project Partners and Sponsors

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Angeles National Forest

CalTrans

California State Parks, Off-Highway Motor Vehicle

Los Angeles County

California Botanic Garden

Tree People

SoCal Corps:

Los Angeles Conservation Corps

San Gabriel Conservation Corps

FHWA Strategic Goals

Equity; Climate and Sustainability

Project Focus

Trail Structures; Vegetation Management; Disaster Resiliency

Sources

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/angeles>

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/angeles/recreation/ohv/recarea/?recid=42250&actid=93>

Project Overview

Restoring and Protecting Off-Highway Vehicle Trails Post-Wildland Fire

The Drinkwater Flat Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Area, located in the Angeles National Forest (ANF), offers motorcycles, 4x4, and ATV enthusiasts a riding experience across 42 miles of rugged, remote trails. Users can access the larger OHV trail system within the Los Angeles Gateway Ranger District, including the popular Rowher Flat, Bouquet Canyon, and San Francisquito Road. ANF's long history of working with the OHV community and local California Corps has been critical in helping to improve the overall recreation experience in the Drinkwater Flat OHV Area while ensuring the natural and cultural resources are protected. Following the devastating Copper (2002) and Powerhouse (2013) fires, ANF launched a number of restoration efforts to address the OHV trail systems and burn areas impacted by decades of fire damage. These two fires in particular burned through a lot of the national forest, causing severe damage to the habitat and natural areas that cannot be recovered naturally. Working in partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), a notice of funding opportunity was announced for local SoCal Corps to partner with ANF on projects that would address the wildland fire damage that impacted the Drinkwater Flat OHV trails and surrounding areas. The restoration work would take place through a multi-year, multi-Corps cooperative agreement known as "Collaborative Restoration in the Angeles National Forest".

This case study will discuss how local Corps engagement and collaboration can address a decade's worth of backlogged wildland fire restoration and maintenance needs—promoting safe and sustainable OHV recreation and training Corpsmembers in new trail skills. The three Corps involved in the collaboration were able to provide diversified funding, cash and in-kind match, and other partner values that supported cost-efficient, quality conservation improvement of the

OHV trails and natural areas. We will also discuss how this partnership with the national forest has supported the workforce development for young adults from underserved communities and how this has kickstarted their conservation career exploration. Although three SoCal Corps were part of the collaborative, this case study will highlight the Conservation Corps Long Beach, their project work accomplishments, partnership history, and corpsmember engagement.

Project Work

Starting in 2021, three local Corps – the Conservation Corps of Long Beach (CCLB), Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC), and the San Gabriel Conservation Corps (SGCC) – were awarded funding through a NFWF grant and cooperative agreement with ANF with the purpose of bringing together local Southern California Corps to support the wildland fire restoration efforts while providing meaningful workforce development and training for Corpsmembers who are from Southern California communities. Through this multi-year agreement, the Conservation Corps Long Beach was tasked with project work in two phases: 1. initiate the removal of invasive species overgrowth and plant healthy natives; 2. Perform OHV trail restoration and install safety fencing along the trail corridor.

CCLB deployed crews consisting of 5 - 10 Corpsmembers that worked either independently in the field or served alongside the national forest rangers. The crews installed T-post fencing, performed trail restoration and maintenance, managed vegetation overgrowth, and installed native plant species across the Drinkwater Flat OHV area, which included sections throughout the overall trail system: San Francisquito Motorway, City Highline Motorway; Bouquet Canyon; Lake Hughes; and Elizabeth Lake. Before being deployed to ANF, the Corpsmembers received extensive training in herbicide application, S-212 wildland fire chainsaw training, and plant identification.

Phase one consisted of vegetation management in the areas surrounding the Drinkwater Flat corridor that would help reintroduce the native plants destroyed by the fires and remove the invasives that were preventing healthy flora from growing. CCLB deployed crews to work at cottonwood campground - one of the biggest sites for the aggressive 'tree of heaven' invasive species. The Corpsmembers cut the invasive trees with chainsaws and sprayed the stumps with herbicide to ensure the chemical would reach the roots and mitigate new growth. Tree of Heaven was a major issue at the Cottonwood Campground and required chemical application and dedicated time commitments for the extensive removal. Prior to the crew deployment, All of the Corpsmembers received proper training, new and updated certifications, and herbicide application from Los Angeles County. The Corpsmembers were also under the supervision of the national forest botanist while applying the herbicide.

Following the invasive removal, CCLB partnered with Tree People, a local nonprofit who manages and trains volunteers in planting trees and endangered natives. CCLB also worked with the California Botanic Garden who supplied the Corpsmembers with the native plants and trees while Tree People provided lessons on planting and maintenance. The Corpsmembers installed native plants in the Drinkwater Flat OHV areas that were impacted the most by the wildland fires to help promote the growth of healthy natural flora and are scheduled to return throughout the year to check-in on the newly-installed trees and plants and maintain them.

The second phase of work involved the Drinkwater Flat OHV trail restoration and fencing installation. The national forest reported issues with recreational users going off trail, creating social trails, spreading invasives with human contact, and damaging the native habitat and flora along the corridor. CCLB crews installed T-post fencing to keep OHV users out of the sensitive

habitat areas and on the designated trails. The crews also performed brushing and trail widening and closed off social trails with extra brush. During each crew deployment, the national forest rangers would meet at least once a week with the crew to survey the project sites and block off the trails that were being serviced. When working on the OHV trails, the crew arrived with the T-post fencing materials and installed them on-site.

In 2021

25k ft of fencing installed

26 acres of invasives chemically treated

58 bags of vegetation removed / 870 lbs of vegetation removed

Restored 5 miles of trails across the National Forest

Funding and Local Stakeholder Collaboration

The three Corps who were part of the collaborative – CCLB, LACC, and SGCC – contributed their own cash match and in-kind contributions to the overall partnership and cooperative agreement. Per cooperative agreement requirements, each Corps had to provide a 50 percent match and the NFWF provided the other half of the costs. The CCLB used non-federal funding sources from CalRecycle and Edison International (a public utility company). LACC and SGCC's match came from the California OHV State Parks grant (CalTrans). NFWF's contributions included providing the materials for fencing and some tools and herbicide. Each Corps provided trail building tools and field supplies. Additional community partners included Tree People and the California Botanic Garden who provided CCLB with in-kind training and the natives needed for the planting work.

Corpsmember Experience

The collaboration with ANF has been a good experience for the CCLB Corpsmembers who don't typically have field project deployments to the So Cal area mountains. While many of the Corps members are from Southern California communities such as Long Beach, many started out having had little to no exposure to this type of conservation and trail work. Many have never camped before or have even left Long Beach. During the experience, the Corpsmembers expressed their enjoyment working alongside the national forest rangers, receiving their mentorship, and discussing career options and jobs. Both the national forest staff and Corpsmembers inspired each other; ANF staff reported looking forward to working with more Corps and many of the Corpsmembers have started exploring conservation jobs.

About the Corps

Since 1987, the Conservation Corps of Long Beach has worked to help youth realize their potential. As a state-certified Corps, CCLB is positioned to offer its Corpsmembers access to a variety of environmental work experiences while also facilitating personal development opportunities. More than 12,000 youth and young adults have served and over 1,500 have received a high school diploma through CCLB's unique program. CCLB continues to serve local youth while working towards achieving a vision of a world where all young adults thrive, are resilient, have equitable access to opportunity, and are stewards of our community and the environment.

How To Connect with Conservation Corps of Long Beach

To discuss partnership development and fee-for-service contracting, connect with the Executive Director or Restoration Work Program Coordinator:

(562) 986-1249

<https://www.cclb-corps.org>

Arroyo Hondo Headwaters Mountain Biking Trails

Dedicated volunteer and Corps collaboration leads to the construction of Santa Fe National Forest's newest mountain bike trail in over a decade.

The Forest Stewards Youth Corps

Project Partners and Sponsors

Santa Fe Fat Tire Society

Santa Fe National Forest

Cibola National Forest

National Forest Foundation

The New Mexico Youth Conservation Corps Commission

Taos Ski Valley Foundation

Anya and Henry Bagley Fund

Enterprise Foundation

FHWA Strategic Goals

Transformation

Project Focus

Trail Construction and Maintenance

Sources

<https://santafefattiresociety.org>

<https://foreststewardsguild.org/>

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/santafe/>

Introduction

For several years, the Santa Fe Fat Tire Society (SFFTS), a local New Mexico nonprofit volunteer organization, worked on the procurement and final approvals needed to initiate the construction of five new mountain bike and recreational trails in the Arroyo Hondo headwaters area in Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF). After hundreds of volunteer hours contributed towards the scouting, flagging, and surveying the proposed trails, approval was awarded to construct approximately six miles of new trails, of which the first mile would be the first official trail in the SFNF in over 10 years. The overall goal of this new network is to provide an alternative riding area away from another heavily used trail in the national forest and provide better connectivity between other trails. The existence of the trail at all is a testament to the dedicated work and collaboration towards this effort as the SFFTS took a leading role in getting the project through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process, going so far as paying for an archaeologist to conduct the required cultural resource surveys.

The next step for the SFFTS was to collaborate with the Forest Stewards Youth Corps (FSYC) on the construction of the first mile of the newly approved section of the Arroyo Hondo headwaters trail system. This case study is a good example of how nonprofits in need of additional labor capacity can partner with a local Corps who can leverage their own organizational funding and resources to support the labor costs. Originally, the SFFTS was looking for local volunteers to help with the trail work, but the Corps offered their own trained trail building crew to support the construction work. This arrangement can be beneficial for Corps as they can build relationships, provide their members with new training and Workforce opportunities, and promote their organization.

Partnership Background and Project Work

The Forest Stewards Youth Corps (FSYC) partners with various land management agencies and southwestern tribal governments to provide employment, training, and professional certifications to youth and young adults from forest-dependent communities in New Mexico. Prior to the prescribed fire season, the FSYC fall fire and fuels crew assisted the Santa Fe Fat Tire Society (SFFTS) with construction of a new trail on the Las Vegas and Pecos Ranger District. Construction of the “21st amendment” trail is being done completely with volunteer labor and so the addition of the FSYC crew added significant capacity to cut more trail tread quickly. In 2021, the Corps reached out to the SFFTS, who announced they were looking for local volunteer groups to support the trail construction work. FSYC offered their trained crew labor to service the project and the Corps would leverage its own organizational funds and in-kind contribution to pay the labor costs.

The FSYC crew constructed 0.36 of the new trail in one week. Standard trail building hand tools were used, which were provided by the USFS. The team had a FSYC crew leader who provided management and oversight of the crewmembers while working in the field. Prior to the deployment, the leader spent 3 solid days working with the crew on the specific training needed for this project, which included trailing building construction, maintenance, and safe use of tools.

As this was the first new trail constructed in 10 years, the FSYC crew was appreciative to be a part of a historical project that now offers new access to mountain biking and recreation at Santa Fe NF.

Corpsmember Workforce Development and Experience

FSYC Corpsmembers benefited from a significant amount of training prior to this project. As a fire crew, they were already well acquainted with cutting fire lines, which is similar to cutting trail. All Corpsmembers received training and certifications as wildland firefighters, wildland fire chainsaw use, first-aid and CPR, and leadership development. The SFFTS provided additional trail construction and maintenance training on site from their volunteer trail crew leaders.

In general, FSYC Corpsmembers who serve on the Fire Fuel crew receive extensive and comprehensive training before their deployment. This includes a training component that will include Basic Wildland Firefighting (S-130/190) through the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, Wildland Fire Chainsaw Use (S-212), Wilderness first-aid and CPR, defensive driving, and New Mexico Forest Worker Safety. FSYC Corpsmembers also receive on the job training and mentorship from the U.S. Forest Service and Forest Stewards Guild staff.

Funding Sources and Partner Contributions

Funding for FSYC comes from a variety of sources. The New Mexico Youth Conservation Corps Commission is the primary funder for the program, covering the cost of all Corpsmember wages. Additional funding for the program is provided by the Santa Fe and Cibola National Forests, the National Forest Foundation, Taos Ski Valley Foundation, the Anya and Henry Bagley Fund, and the Enterprise Foundation. The SFFTS also provided in-kind support through their volunteers that worked alongside the Corpsmembers.

About The Corps

The FSYC program develops the next generation of skilled workers, educated and active citizens, and future community leaders. The mission of the Forest Stewards Youth Corps is to provide training, education, and employment in natural resource management fields for 16 - 25 year olds from forest dependent communities in New Mexico. FSYC supports high school aged youth with our summer program and 18 - 25 year olds with the fall Fire and Fuels program.

How to Connect with the Forest Stewards Guild

For questions regarding partnerships, projects, and contracting, reach out to the Southwest office of the Forest Stewards Guild.

505-983-8992

<https://foreststewardsguild.org/>

<https://foreststewardsguild.org/fsyc/>

Cub Lake Trail

Through a multi-year partnership, local youth and university students address a decade of restorative and safety priorities along the Cub Lake trail system while building their own future public land careers

Larimer County Conservation Corps

Project Partners and Sponsors

**Rocky Mountain National Park
Colorado State University**

FHWA Strategic Goals

Safety; Equity; Climate and Sustainability

Project Focus

Trail Construction and Maintenance; Trail Structures; Vegetation Management; Disaster Resiliency

Sources

https://www.nps.gov/thingstodo/romo_cublake.htm

<http://www.rockymountainhikingtrails.com/cub-lake.htm>

The Cub Lake Trail

One of the more popular destinations at Rocky Mountain National Park (ROMO) is the Cub Lake Trail. At approximately five miles and with a moderate elevation, this trail loop makes experiencing ROMO's most scenic summer sites accessible for a variety of visitors and experienced hikers. Each year, millions of ROMO visitors experience Cub Lake's meadows, flora, and water features in the summer and snowshoe and cross-country ski the trails in the wintertime. The trail follows the western edge of Moraine Park, a section of ROMO that provides excellent views of the park's wildlife and valleys. In 2012, certain sections of the Cub Lake trail experienced severe wildland fire damage and was believed to be one of the largest fires in the park's history. The wildfire burned 3500+ acres along Cub Lake and the surrounding areas. Recovery efforts are still being addressed to this today by the many service and conservation Corps that are contracted to work at ROMO. In addition to their restoration efforts, Larimer County Conservation Corps (LCCC) has supported recovery work through fire mitigation and vegetation management—including but not limited to herbicide spray applications for invasive species and planting natives.

This case study will explore how a multi-year strategic plan developed in partnership with a federal land management agency and local Corps program can address the critical safety and preservation needs of a heavy-use, popular trail system with backlogged and compounded restoration issues. By involving the Corps during the project development and budgeting phase, the park received precisely what was needed to address the trail system's safety and maintenance needs while ensuring the Corpsmembers are assigned impactful and mission-critical work to support their workforce development goals. Over several summers, ROMO trail staff worked alongside a well-trained, workforce-ready crew of young adults that completed efficient, quality work ahead of schedule—meeting visitor safety and accessibility priorities.

Background and History

Beginning in 2019, the Rocky Mountain National Park (ROMO) approached the Larimer County Conservation Corps (LCCC) to sponsor a seasonal trail crew for a multi-year effort that would address critical, back-logged maintenance and restoration needs along the entire Cub Lake Trail system. Over the past decade, the trail system experienced extensive deterioration of the

corridor due to heavy recreational and equestrian use, poor water drainage, and severe erosion of the corridor due to years of environmental impacts. ROMO rangers and park staff would frequently report on safety concerns and accidents, which included broken ankles, falls, and visitors getting lost. ROMO staffing capacity has also been a considerable factor in routine maintenance being backlogged in favor of other disaster priorities and immediate needs.

ROMO Staff and LCCC leadership worked together on project development and budgeting for a multi-year strategic plan that would address trail improvements, restoration, maintenance, and Corpsmember workforce and professional development. LCCC staff scheduled site visits to the Trail, set goals and expectations through periodic reporting of work metrics, and worked out which resources LCCC and ROMO would provide such as field supplies, equipment, personal protective gear, transportation, and on-site camping for the crew. Educational and training opportunities were also built into the budget and field season each summer for the Corpsmembers to ensure they are not only properly trained before entering the field but are also receiving guidance and mentorship from the experienced ROMO trails staff.

Involving the corps during the project and budget preplanning phase was a key component to the success of this multi-year partnership for all parties involved. By working in partnership with the Corps, ROMO was able to properly budget for the Corps' unique service and program costs, factor in the cash and in-kind partner contributions required for the federal grant and include local community and volunteer groups from Northern Colorado that LCCC helped to organize. The first summer along Cub Lake, the crew completed priority backlogged projects that helped protect the natural resources in the surrounding trail corridor area, formalize the trail corridor, improve water drainage, and mitigate issues affecting the visitor and recreational user safety. The Corps' cost match contribution included non-federal cash match from diverse funding sources and in-kind contributions that included tools, equipment, volunteer management, and other Corps resources.

Corpsmember Recruitment and Career Pathways

LCCC has a unique and beneficial relationship with the Colorado State University - Warner School of Natural Resources. For years, the LCCC has worked in partnership with the university to support their recruitment and outreach purposes by offering students with Environmental, Conservation, and natural resource career interests an opportunity to serve with the Corps on a summer field experience. Each season LCCC would develop a specific crew of CSU-Warner School students to serve on Cub Lake trail projects with the goal of receiving the hard and soft skills needed to be competitive for public lands jobs following their Corps experience.

The Corpsmembers would learn how to use trail building tools, equipment, receive trail maintenance lessons all the while working alongside and receiving mentorship from ROMO's trails staff. Concurrently, LCCC ensures that the Cub Lake crew serves a minimum of 640 hours—a prerequisite for the public land Corps hiring authority. If all requirements are met, the Corpsmembers may receive a two-year eligibility certificate that they can use to apply for public land jobs and careers with a participating federal land management agency. In exchange for providing its students with Corps field experience and career opportunities, the CSU-Warner School supports this partnership by providing the match contribution of 25 percent of the project value required under LCCC's agreement with ROMO.

LCCC found great success through this career pathways model which has helped many local University students find jobs immediately following their Corps experience working on the Cub Lake trail. Many former LCCC Corpsmembers have used their PLC certificates, received once

they successfully complete the program and requirements, for Department of Interior jobs. ROMO, and the National Park Service in-large, are supportive with including PLC considerations into the project preplanning as it results in a young, well-trained and enthusiastic Workforce that knows the park and the trails and is eager to start their new careers.

2021 Project Work

The LCCC crew returned to the Cub Lake trail to continue their restoration work that helped protect the natural resources in the area, formalize the trail corridor, improve water drainage and mitigated issues affected by high recreational use. The Corpsmembers installed the following technical trail structures: retainer bars, water bars, turnpikes, causeways and retaining walls. Additionally, the Cub Lake trailside natural resources were protected by the crew reformalizing a trail corridor and rehabilitating social trails that were created by visitors. The crew received training on all tools and equipment prior to the start of the project work, which included primitive hand tools, standard trail builder's tools—such as griphoist winch, rock cart dolly, chainsaws and rock drills. Other nonnative materials and LCCC equipment was packed into the park project site with ROMO livestock and packing services.

The 2021 Cub Lake crew consisted of 10 Corpsmembers between the ages of 18 and 29 and were locally recruited. There was a preproject period that included LCCC field staff, supervisor, leaders, and Corpsmembers receiving training and orientation together for approximately 10 hours per week to ensure they were properly trained and prepared before entering the field. The Corpsmembers during this orientation phase received professional and workforce development, trail building, public land history and stewardship, wilderness first aid, and tools and equipment usage. The crew's work was maintained for nine straight weeks where they focused most of their efforts on the heavily used and severely eroded sections of Cub Lake. The Corpsmembers also worked on the replacement of the trail's rock and wood steps that would help to decrease water flow and reduce erosion. The crew was also tasked with clearing drains and expanding the trail corridor for safe use for the recreational hikers and equestrians.

Corpsmembers serving on 2021's project received valuable guidance and mentorship from ROMO park staff that's in alignment with LCCC's education and workforce development goals. Throughout the field season, trail and conservation professionals – such as wildlife biologists, climbing rangers, ROMO HR representatives, and ROMO park staff – discussed next steps and professional goals with the Corpsmembers. There were even lessons on how to navigate the USAJobs.gov process, and a hosted Q&A session with the ROMO director.

Nearing the end of the 9-week period, the crew was so ahead of schedule that there was an opportunity to work concurrently on other nearby projects that also needed restoration and maintenance. This additional work included clearing trail drains on the popular Odessa Trail and Emerald Lake Trails and maintaining the tread on the Longs Peak Trail. This particular tread maintenance work included removing uneven rocks and placing flat, walkable rocks back into the trail to prevent tripping hazards and make hiking more accessible.

This phase of the Cub Lake Trail multi-year partnership with Rocky Mountain National Park is expected to finalize in summer 2022/2023. The success of this project and partnership has led to the park receiving \$24,000 value in trail restoration labor, provided dozens of Corpsmembers access to career pathways for public land jobs, and supported the park's staffing capacity issues.

About The Corps

The Larimer County Conservation Corps (LCCC) is a program housed within and administered by the Larimer County Economic and Workforce Development (LCEW) in Fort Collins, Colorado. Starting in 1986, LCEW created a summer youth employment program with local community support with the goal of addressing two key issues: the persistent challenges youth and young adults face in securing employment and gaining work experience; and to maintain local parks, open spaces, and natural lands for the enjoyment of the community. To date, the LCCC operates seasonal programs focusing on a variety of conservation projects such as trail construction, Trail, maintenance, habitat restoration, fire mitigation, invasive species removal, and home efficiency.

How To Connect with the Larimer County Conservation Corps

For partnership, project development, contract and agreement questions, please contact the Conservation Corps Program Director:

(970) 498-6660

larimer.org/ewd/lccc

House of Sky Trail

With minimal environmental impacts, Corps and community partners construct new trail that promotes safe, sustainable mountain biking

Montana Conservation Corps

Project Partners and Sponsors

Montana Recreational Trails Program

Mount Dean Stone Committee:

Montana DNRC

The Nature Conservancy

City of Missoula

MTB Missoula

Five Valleys Land Trust

Missoula Parks and Recreation

FHWA Strategic Goals

Climate and Sustainability; Transformation

Project Focus

Trail Construction and Maintenance; Trail Structures

Sources

<https://www.mtbmissoula.org/post/house-of-sky-nearing-completion>

<https://www.fvlt.org/projects/mount-dean-stone>

House of Sky Trail

The House of Sky Trail is a new ridgeline section of a larger mountain bike trail system located on Mount Dean Stone near Missoula, MT. With the support of the Montana Conservation Corps (MCC), the MTB Missoula, and other local community partners, this newly constructed section unites a network of previously disconnected mountain bike trails across Mount Dean Stone. Officially opening in summer 2022, 'House of Sky' will connect adjacent communities and neighborhoods to a seamless, united trail system with new access to the Mitten Mountain Summit that has views of the Missoula valley, the Rattlesnake Wilderness, and the Bitterroot Range. Although there were some sections of the tread that were cut with machines in order to create accessibility to the Ridgeline, the majority had to be constructed by hand with standard trail building tools to preserve the primitive, rugged landscape and minimize environmental impacts.

Project Work

The Montana Conservation Corps has a long history of partnering with Missoula's mountain bike advocacy group, MTB Missoula, to improve trails and create new opportunities for all recreational uses in the Missoula Valley. In the summer of 2021, MCC teamed up with MTB Missoula, Five Valleys Land Trust, and the City of Missoula to construct a 1.2-mile section of new trail on Montana DNRC and Nature Conservancy land. This piece of trail completed a larger trail system that had been constructed over the previous three field seasons.

Due to the difficult access and extremely rugged terrain, MCC constructed the trail section by hand. MCC deployed crews to serve on three, 10-day hitches in which the Corpsmembers setup a base camp near the ridgeline project site. Using MCC crews was an important strategy for this piece of the project because the crews were able to camp in the most difficult to access location of the project, allowing the crew to increase work efficiency by not having to travel and hike long

distances to access the terrain. MCC crews had excellent technical support from MTB Missoula staff and were able to engage community volunteers on several occasions during their time on the project. Terrain that was difficult to access, rugged and rocky in nature were certainly challenges to overcome. Frequent afternoon summer thunderstorms, while working on an exposed ridgetop, and long, physically demanding days required grit and determination to finish the job.

Funding and Local Community Collaboration

There were many partners that were involved over the course of constructing this trail system and multiple layers of funding flowed into this project. In early 2020, the Five Valleys Land Trust (FVLT) was the recipient of a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant to construct the full 4.6 mile House of Sky Trail. The MTB Missoula worked with FVLT to gain trail easement access to some of the pieces of property that were privately owned. They also worked with Montana DNRC and TNC to gain permission to construct trails across ground managed by these two entities. The City of Missoula has recently taken over stewardship of the entire trail system, hence working with City personnel was also critical to the success of the project. MTB Missoula and MCC also worked with additional community organizations to recruit volunteers to support the project throughout its various stages. Many local mountain bike groups volunteered their time to work alongside the MCC crew and support the trail construction efforts - providing tread and brush clearing.

Workforce Development and Corpsmember Experience

MCC provides its Crew Leaders with a comprehensive 12-week leadership training program prior to the start of the field season. During this time MCC Crew Leaders complete a Wilderness Advanced First Aid course, they partake in MCC's Fundamental Skills training where they learn strategies for managing their members during the season, and receive technical skills training which focuses on trail maintenance, chainsaw/cross-cut training (with certifications), backcountry skill development, and wildland restoration techniques. In turn, during our Corpsmember orientation, MCC Crew Leaders and field staff teach incoming CMs the basics of these skill-sets that allow them to be proficient to begin the season and go out in the field for their first hitch. Subsequently, Corpsmembers practice these skills in the field and develop proficiencies as the season progresses.

On this particular project MCC crews were camped on a remote ridgetop, in a backcountry setting. The site was difficult to access and had no water source available. They were supported by bike shuttles that brought water containers to them. It was an excellent experience for these crews to develop planning and project logistics skills around living and working in a remote setting. The trail project also provided opportunities for them to dig new tread, to learn how to design and construct switchbacks, and to locate and build drainage features. Hence their technical trail building skills were greatly enhanced on this project. MCC crews also had the opportunity to work with community partners and volunteers on this project. It was an excellent experience for them to see how a variety of community partners came together to create this trail system in the Missoula Valley and the amount of planning and hard work required to make a project like this possible.

About The Corps

The Montana Conservation Corps inspires young people through hands-on conservation service to be leaders, stewards of the land, and engaged citizens who improve their communities. MCC strives to give every member the experience of a lifetime through challenging conservation

projects and the rigors of life outdoors, coupled with education developed specifically to create engaged citizens and lifelong environmental stewards. Each year MCC participants deliver over 400,000+ hours of service on public lands while protecting amazing wild places like Yellowstone, Glacier, the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and local trails and parks. MCC enrolls over 300 young adult AmeriCorps members in crew-based and individual intern positions. MCC's innovative curriculum is grounded in the four pillars of connection to People, Place, Power, and future Pathways. Through these experiences, these emerging leaders may transform their passions into actions.

How To Connect with the Montana Conservation Corps

MCC is always looking to support various land management agencies and NGOs in enhancing their ability to maintain access to trails on public lands, as well as creating new opportunities for recreation through the construction of new trails.

Contact MCC's Conservation Corps Director for more information.

406-370-6643

www.mtcorps.org

Northwoods Stewardship Center Campus Trails

State and local funding contribute to the resiliency and stewardship of Vermont's northern trails.

NorthWoods Conservation Corps

Project Partners and Sponsors

Vermont Recreational Trails Program

Vermont Forest Parks and Recreation

Town of Brighton

Private Donor - Northwoods Trail Funds

Private Landowners

FHWA Strategic Goals

Economic Strength; Climate and Sustainability; Transformation

Project Focus

Trail Construction and Maintenance; Trail Structures; Vegetation Management

Sources

<http://www.northwoodscenter.org>

<https://fpr.vermont.gov/recreational-trails-program>

Introduction and History

The Northwoods Stewardship Center is located in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont and serves as a hub for conservation and education programs. NorthWoods' program areas include the Conservation Corps, Conservation Science, Environmental Education and Forest Stewardship. Each summer, NorthWoods employs more than 120 young adults, hosting conservation crews in all the New England states. The center sits on a 1,500-acre campus of conserved land in northern Vermont and offers visitors, school groups, and the local community access to its network of trails that are used year-round. Before NorthWoods was established, the forest was heavily logged. When NorthWoods was founded in 1989, year-round trails that are very well suited to winter cross-country skiing and snowshoeing were made available to the public and for regional schools. Northwoods has become a leader in their community for modeling best practices in trail-building, stewardship, and natural resource interpretation, but their program model is best demonstrated at partner sites where NorthWoods crews serve, including at municipal and state forests, private trail networks, and on federal lands. In 2020, NorthWoods employed a new strategic plan, with a key priority to reinvest in the NorthWoods network. It was their hope that a Vermont Recreational Trails Program (VT RTP) grant would help address the immediate needs of their trail network.

NorthWoods has a long history of working with the VT RTP both as a direct grantee and subgrantee contractor. In 2021, Northwoods submitted a proposal for a grant that would restore their campus trail system through restoration, drainage, trail structure installation, and overgrown vegetation clearing. The goal was to address decades of backlogged maintenance work and prepare for the upcoming winter recreational season by leveraging their youth Corps, staff, and community members. The grant awarded to NorthWoods, along with a private donation to the newly established NorthWoods Trails Fund, has been the catalyst needed to kickstart their trail program and strengthen the Conservation Corps program.

Project Work

Project work on the Northwoods Trail Network started in July 2021 and took place over a two month period. Two different youth crews were used on each of the four trails in the network: the first crew was composed primarily of high school-aged students; the second was a crew of forestry interns of older young adults. Each of these multi-use trails connect users through recreational hiking, interpretive educational programs, and winter activities year-round.

Lang Brook is a recreational and interpretive nature trail used by school groups when visiting the center. The trail runs through a sensitive wetland with creek crossings and old, rotting bog bridges. A crew of seven Corpsmembers and their crew leaders removed the old bog bridges and stalled new, mountain bike-style bog bridges. This particular style allows for the bridge work to meander through the woods rather than being straight and rigged like a typical bog bridge. This also helps to protect the sensitive wetland habitat that the trail occupies and it makes it easier for users of all hiking ability to use the bridges. The Corpsmembers also installed creek crossing bridges from the same materials that were harvested locally and donated by community members. Standard trail building hand tools were used for the installation while the crew Leaders use power tools for the material cutting. Since this is a narrower trail, Northwoods does not groomed the Lang Brook for winter activities—such as snowmobiling and cross-country skiing.

The Leadership is a multi-use trail and forestry access road that required bridge installation and extensive drainage work. A skidder bridge needed to be constructed and installed, which is a style of bridge that is strong enough to allow heavy equipment vehicles and snowmobiles to pass over. The crew started by removing tree stumps, rocks and other overgrown vegetation around the project site. Northwoods staff provided an excavator for the job and used that for additional clearing and preparation of the project site. For the bridge installation, a private landowner offered their tracker and bridge materials. The Corpsmembers installed a 8x10 support system and three inch decking on top of the new bridge.

The Hopkins Hill is a historic town road and trail that intersects with the Northwoods property. Trail maintenance and brushing from previous years revealed that there were two historic Barn foundations from the 1800s that were located on the side of the trail. Before starting the new work, Northwoods hired an archaeologist for a site visit to ensure the trail work would minimally impact the historic site. The forestry crew of interns were deployed to the site and started work on the entire length of the trail—performing maintenance, restoration, and corridor widening. Vegetation overgrowth was cleared from around the historic barns, making them visible and accessible to hikers.

Trip Hill connector is primarily a cross-country ski route for recreational winter users. The work needed on this trail was extensive drainage work and resurfacing in order to prepare the trail early in the year for winter grooming. Northwoods staff and community members used heavy equipment – such as mini excavators and trackers – while the Corpsmembers worked alongside volunteers on trail widening and vegetation clearing. Standard trail building tools were used for resurfacing and installing the new drainage systems. Water collected on the trail needed to be drained and removed properly in order for Northwoods staff to return and groom the trail for the upcoming snowmobile and cross-country ski season.

Outcomes

5+ miles of trail maintained across all projects

9 Bog bridges installed on Lang Brook at approx. 100+ ft of bridges
1 Skidder bridge installed
1 Snowmobile bridge installed
10 interpretive signs replaced, with new posts installed
(partly funded by RTP):
Created and printed interpretive climate trail resiliency content for the Hopkins Hill Trail

Funding Sources and In-kind Contributions

Northwoods supports its youth Conservation Corps and trail program through diversified funding sources and partner contributions. The Northwoods Trail Fund, a new fundraising effort, was initiated by a generous private donor which helped to kickstart the four trail projects and help with the costs. The Town of Brighton approved the use of their appropriation funds toward any match requirement, of which Northwoods used towards the VT RTP match. The VT RTP grant gave Northwoods the momentum they needed for the trail system restorative work, support of the youth Conservation Corps, and investment in their campus trails. A total of 8 weeks of trail work was funded from the VT RTP grant, in which Northwoods was a direct grantee.

In-kind support from local donors included supplying the materials harvested locally and donated to the projects. Private landowners issued a long-term use agreement for the trails that intersect on private property. Additional in-kind support came from Northwoods staff that provided excavators and other heavy equipment. Community members offered their volunteer hours and labor while they worked alongside the Corpsmembers.

Corpsmember Workforce Development and Experience

Northwoods is well known by the locals in northern Vermont. Many staff have been former Corpsmembers themselves and it's common to meet locals who are familiar with Corps' work and contributions to the area trails. Corpsmembers are recruited locally into a crew of five plus two crew leaders. Over 14 Corpsmembers served across all four trail projects, including five staff and community volunteers. Northwoods typically works with local schools, attends college career fairs, and builds relationships with teachers who will advocate for the Corps experience to their students. As there are not a lot of opportunities in northern Vermont, recruitment has not been an issue, prepandemic.

Northwoods Corpsmembers receive extensive trail building orientation prior to their deployment to the project sites. There's on the job training throughout the season and Corpsmembers can work alongside conservation professionals in the field. Staff offer career exploration, public land lessons, and certifications in wilderness first aid and chainsaw hosted onsite.

About The Corps

The NorthWoods Conservation Corps is a hands-on conservation-based education and employment program for young people ages 15 - 20. Crew members are hired from communities surrounding project areas and are provided with high-quality conservation training and environmental education. The experience provides an excellent opportunity for youth to explore career paths in various fields of conservation and science. The Conservation Corps fields crews annually in six New England states and provides 10,000+ hours of environmental education and conservation training every year.

How To Connect with the NorthWoods Conservation Corps

Consider donating to the Northwoods Trail Fund if you would like to support their continued trail work efforts. Northwoods also welcomes volunteers and can facilitate groups and community members who would like to dedicate their time to trail and conservation projects.

For information on partnership development, project fundraising, fee-for-service contracting, reach out to the Executive Director or the NWCC Director:

802-723-6551

www.northwoodscenter.org/wordpress/conservation-corps

Urban Recreation and Visitor-use Improvements within the Lake County Forest Preserve District

Collaboration with one of Illinois' largest forest preserves empowers a generation of local young adults through trail and visitor-use improvement projects

Youth Conservation Corps

Project Partners and Sponsors

Lake County Forest Preserve District

The Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves

Golf Outing Committee

Walgreens Corporate Office

AmeriCorps (Education Award Program)

Private Landowners (Lake County, IL)

Gewalt Hamilton Associates

FHWA Strategic Goals

Economic Strength; Equity

Project Focus

Trail Construction and Maintenance; Trail Structures; Vegetation Management

Sources

www.youthconservationcorps.org

<https://www.lcfpd.org>

<https://www.visitlakecounty.org/LakeCountyForestPreserves>

Partnership with The Lake County Forest Preserve District:

Half Day and Old School

Lake County Forest Preserve District (LCFPD) protects approx 31,000+ acres and is the second largest Forest Preserve in Illinois. Within lies two smaller preserves – Half Day and Old School – and the location for the majority of the project sites. Together, these two preserves offer visitors and locals some of southern Lake County's most scenic outdoor recreation sites. Half Day has a one mile trail used by urban hikers and cyclists with recreation shelters and a three acre pond for fishing. Old School has over three miles of secluded trails that travel through woods and prairies for hiking and equestrian use in the summer and cross-country skiing in the winter.

In collaboration with the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), several sites were identified by FPD for backlogged maintenance and restorative habitat work. Both the Half Day and Old School Preserves have been plagued by buckthorn and other invasive plant species overgrowing the trails and walkways and threatening the native vegetation. Additionally, FPD located several locations with trail erosion including deteriorating trail-side structures – such as stone walls and split rail fences – that needed repair. YCC deployed their crews to execute extensive vegetation clearing, invasive management, and native planting that involved seed and seedling collection to replant barren areas. The trail work included removing overgrown buckthorns and other invasive plant species, to provide for secure vegetation, the Corpsmembers also mulched a dog trail to attract dogs and provide a safer dog friendly walkway.

This case study will discuss County and local Corps collaboration through the successful implementation of an annual summer program that prioritizes environmental stewardship and youth professional development. Both YCC and FPD have shared goals of promoting local young adult engagement through conservation education and the preservation of Lake County's natural areas and ensure to embed those values into their collaborative partnership. We will discuss the impact this has on local youth, their career and education trajectories following the program, and FPD establishing a sustainable solution to routine maintenance and stewardship of their natural areas.

Trail Maintenance and Visitor Use Improvements

Between June and August 2021, YCC deployed crews to Half Day and Old School to address the trail and habitat restoration priorities, initially targeting an expansive buckthorn removal project. As the primary woody invasive species found in the Midwest, the removal of buckthorn is imperative to maintaining healthy ecosystems. The crew spent four weeks clearing areas in Half Day before moving to Old School for additional clearing. Once completed, the crews replaced split rail fencing along the preserve's trail and refurbished a canoe launch and recreation shelters.

Additional YCC crews were deployed to the Independence Grove and Greenbelt Forest Preserves – located within North Chicago's LCFP district – and spent their first three weeks removing buckthorn and honeysuckle, wood chipping a dog park exercise area trail, and building a stone wall to mitigate erosion of the trail corridor. The crews completed these improvements on 2.5+ miles of trails and waterways, cleared over seven acres of land of invasive vegetation, planted over three acres of land with native flora, and added 100+ yards of split rail fence along the preserve's trail. This work keeps the forest preserve sites well maintained during the active summer months and provides a safe, pleasant, and scenic experience to the visitors. LCFPD appreciates the additional small projects completed across the preserves where the crew work independently with little supervision. Their work ethic and direct service is an impactful, positive visual to the larger community and preserve partners.

Funding Sources - State and Public-Private Partnerships

The Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves (PF-LCFP) is an active partner for the YCC summer program by providing funding to purchase materials and supplies. In spring 2022, PF-LCFP made a three year commitment (2022 - 2024) to provide 1/3 of the funding for a fifth YCC summer crew which will be composed of opportunity youth from Zion, Waukegan and North Chicago.

Additional public-private partner contributions include the Golf Outing Committee (GOC), whose members volunteer to locally fundraise to cover the YCC summer crew wages. The Walgreens Corporate office provides a \$21K sponsorship annually for the GOC and is considered a major supporter of the summer program. Private landowners adjacent forest preserve properties and the local US Navy chapter provide volunteers to work alongside the YCC summer crews—expanding the work capacity. Starting in June 2022, Gewalt Hamilton Associates – a local Civil Engineering firm – will provide the YCC summer crew engineering education and will contribute 1/3 of the cost to add a 5th crew. The remaining 1/3 of the funding will come from an anonymous private donor.

Corpsmember Empowerment and Workforce Development

YCC Corpsmembers receive a wide variety of orientation and training throughout their term of service. Each week in the YCC program is dedicated to learning about careers in conservation,

developing environmental stewardship competency, and incorporating workforce readiness. The Corpsmembers practice resume writing and interview skills, teambuilding, leadership and various hard and soft professional development skills. The Corpsmembers then receive specific training needed for the forest preserve work, as requested by the project sponsors, prior to the crew deployment. This includes training with standard trail building tools; equipment use and safety for brush-cutter, carpentry, chainsaw, chipper; first aid and safety training.

Following their Forest Preserve experience, the YCC Corpsmembers develop a passion for public land stewardship and conservation and are encouraged to enter into jobs and careers in related conservation fields. They often credit their experiences with the YCC Summer Program at FPD as the defining feature that led to their new career and educational trajectories. Many of the YCC alumni have built upon their experiences following their LCFPD summer experience including the current LCFPD Chief Operating Officer; Current Superintendent of Recreation for the Grayslake Park District; and Program Manager and current Assistant Director of Data Collection for Gewalt Hamilton Associates in Vernon Hills, IL.

The Corpsmembers enable LCFPD to keep various forest preserve sites well maintained during the active months in summer to provide a safe, pleasant, and scenic experience to the visitors. They also facilitate FPD to complete small projects across Lake County Forest Preserve site for 8 weeks and with little supervision. Additionally, the Corpsmembers worked on the most visited sites of LCFPD and demonstrated a significant visual of service to the community, that help attract younger workforce, community funders and volunteers to expand the vision of FPD.

About The Corps

Youth Conservation Corps' Summer Conservation Program provides youth with 8 weeks of hands-on experience and education in conservation, environmental management, and preservation. They gain valuable teamwork, leadership and communication skills and life experience while preserving our natural areas through a partnership with the Lake County Forest Preserve District. Since our founding in 1974, YCC has provided area youth with life-changing experiences as they conserve our natural lands, restore habitats for vulnerable species and sustain native flora.

How To Connect with the Youth Conservation Corps

New partners and sponsors can contact the Executive Director or Program Director at the Youth Conservation Corps office in Waukegan, IL.

224-302-7104

youthconservationcorps.org

Appendix

About The Corps Network

Established in 1985, The Corps Network is the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps. Our more than 150 Corps provide young adults and veterans the opportunity to serve our country through projects on public lands and in rural and urban communities. The Corps Network supports Corps by advocating on their behalf, providing access to funding and projects, and offering expertise in Corps operations and programming.

- **Our Mission:** The Corps Network advances programs that transform young people's lives and communities through career development, conservation, and civic engagement.
- **Our Vision:** A high-quality Corps serving every community in America

Trail and Transportation Page

The Corps Network's Trail and Transportation webpage serves as a portal for Conservation Corps staff, state trail programs, and federal land managers who are looking for resources and guidance on how to partner with Service and Conservation Corps. The page offers a growing resource and video library, photo gallery, and technical assistance on how to connect with a local Corps for trail projects and career pathways.

- **Resource Library**
The Trail and Transportation Resource Library is recommended for those looking for guidance on how to connect with their state trail program, learn more about federal-aid funding programs, review model contracts and agreements, access TCN's publications and documents, and read Conservation Corps case studies on trail project best practices.
- **Video Library**
Our Trail and Transportation video library highlights field level footage of Corpsmembers serving on trail and transportation projects and candid stories from Corpsmembers who share their transformational experiences working with their Corps. New videos will be uploaded periodically to showcase the type of work getting done through State trail program and federal funding support.

Visit The Corps Network's Trail and Transportation page:
<https://corpsnetwork.org/programs-initiatives/trails-and-transportation/>

Nonprofit Trail Organizations and Programs

The following are national nonprofit trail organizations with a history of working with Conservation Corps and federal land managers on recreational trail projects. These organizations advocate for the use of Corps in legislation and policy, provide small grants and funding opportunities, offer educational programming, host national trail conferences and events, and serve as comprehensive resources on strengthening trail programs and initiatives. These organizations are recommended partners for Corps looking for guidance, technical assistance, and direction in how to build relationships with the recreational trails community.

Partnership for the National Trails System

The Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS) connects member nonprofit trail organizations and federal agency partners to further the protection, completion, and stewardship of the 30 national scenic and historic trails within the National Trails System.

The PNTS advocates on behalf of the National Trails System as a whole for land preservation and stewardship resources. Other major roles of the PNTS include the collection and dissemination of National Trails news and the development of outreach initiatives and youth programming.

<https://pnts.org>

American Hiking Society

The American Hiking Society is a nonprofit dedicated to preserving trails, the areas that surround them and the hiking experience with three main avenues of action: Volunteerism and Outreach; Policy and Advocacy; and Trail grants and assistance.

www.americanhiking.org

American Trails

American Trails is a comprehensive online source for planning, building, designing, funding, managing, enhancing, and supporting trails, greenways, and blueways. Since 1988, American Trails has been a training resource and collective voice for a diverse coalition of trail enthusiasts, professionals, advocates, land managers, conservationists, and friends of the outdoors and livable cities.

<https://www.americantrails.org/>

- **Coalition for Recreational Trails Annual Achievement Awards:**

This awards program recognizes outstanding uses of Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funds, showcasing excellent projects made possible by RTP funding and enhancing awareness and appreciation of the RTP among Members of Congress and other key officials. This award is given out by the Coalition for Recreational Trails, a federation of national and regional trail-related organizations

<https://www.americantrails.org/communications/awards/crtAwards>

Partnership Acknowledgments

The following are project partners and sponsors who have supported the Conservation Corps projects featured in these case studies either through direct grants, fundraising, volunteer support, or in-kind contributions. Some may have sponsored Corps as direct recipients through federal and state awards while others subcontracted Corps for their services. The support of each of these partners has been invaluable to the overall successful implementation of a Corps' trail program, strengthening community relationships, and creating workforce opportunities for Corpsmembers.

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Alabama Power
Alabama River Hiking Society
Angeles National Forest
Anya and Henry Bagley Fund
Backcountry Horsemen
California Botanic Garden
California State Parks, Off-Highway Motor Vehicle
California Recreation Trails Program (CalTrans)
Cibola National Forest
City of Missoula (Montana)
City of Mobile (Alabama)
Colorado State University
Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries
Enterprise Foundation
Five Valleys Land Trust
Friends of the Shawnee National Forest
Gewalt Hamilton Associates
Golf Outing Committee
Lake County Forest Preserve District
Missoula Parks & Recreation
Montana DNRC
Montana Recreational Trails Program
Mount Dean Stone Committee
MTB Missoula
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
National Forest Foundation
New Mexico Youth Conservation Corps Commission
Peninsula of Mobile
Rocky Mountain National Park
Santa Fe Fat Tire Society
Santa Fe National Forest
Shawnee National Forest
South Alabama Land Trust
Taos Ski Valley Foundation
The Nature Conservancy
The Nature Conservancy's GulfCorps Program
The Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves
Town of Brighton (Vermont)
Tree People
U.S. Forest Service
Vermont Forest Parks and Recreation
Vermont Recreational Trails Program

Walgreens (Corporate Office)

List of Corps Featured in the Guide

Alabama Conservation Corps (SCA)

Gulf Coast Teams
853 Dauphin St, Suite C
Mobile, AL 36602
703.952.1683
www.thesca.org

AmeriCorps St Louis

1315 Ann Ave
St. Louis, MO 63104
O: 314-772-9002
www.americorps-stl.org

Conservation Corps of Long Beach

340 Nieto Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90814
562-986-1249
www.cclb-corps.org

Forest Stewards Youth Corps

Southwest Region Office of The Forest Stewards Guild
2019 Galisteo Street, Suite N7
Santa Fe, NM 87505
505-983-8992
foreststewardsguild.org

Larimer County Conservation Corps

Larimer County Economic & Workforce Development
200 West Oak Street, Suite 5000
Fort Collins, CO 80521
970-498-6630
larimer.org/ewd/lccc

Montana Conservation Corps

301 N Willson Ave
Bozeman, MT 59715
(406) 587-4475
www.mtcorps.org

NorthWoods Conservation Corps

NorthWoods Stewardship Center Office
154 Leadership Drive, PO Box 220
East Charleston, VT 05833
Phone: 802-723-6551
www.northwoodscenter.org

Youth Conservation Corps

1020 W. Greenwood Ave
Waukegan, IL 60087
(847) 623-0900
www.youthconservationcorps.org

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