

Affinity and Identity-based Crews and Programs: Empowering the Next Diverse Generation of Trail and Conservation Professionals through Shared Experiences

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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 FY22

- 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 1998¹, 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

¹ <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/tea21/>

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 goals² 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.

² <https://www.regulations.gov/document/DOT-OST-2021-0140-0002>

- **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.

Affinity and Identity-Based Crews and Programs

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to highlight the work of Service and Conservation Corps who have experience managing affinity and identity-based crews and programs. The case studies in this guidebook will discuss partnership and project development with Corps, agencies, and sponsoring entities, how these projects identified infrastructure issues, and how that was resolved through the work of the Corps with a particular focus on the affinity crew. Case studies will discuss the intention and purpose of these crews, why they are important, and how they have been transformational experiences for the Corpsmembers.

It's important to note that affinity and identity-based crews receive the same training, development, oversight, and management as other traditional crew-based models. However, there are specific identity-based components and elements that make the programming experience unique for the community of young people the crew is meant to serve.

There's no one way to define an affinity crew's intention or purpose. Some Corps may explore using affinity crews as a mechanism for outreaching and recruiting from populations of

individuals they've historically had difficulty connecting with, build organizational cultural competency and inclusive practices, and use this crew model to act upon their organizational values and social justice efforts. There are some Corps who have made conscious efforts in outreach to particular communities but don't consider their efforts to be affinity or identity-based in nature – although from an outsider's point of view they may fit that definition. The case studies and examples in this guidebook intend to feature Corps Affinity crews with varying intentions, purposes, and goals and will not adopt one definition for what this type of program is and what its purpose should be.

Corpsmember Race Ethnicity

(Based on enrollment listed below)

- 57% White
- 19% Other
- 14% Black
- 5% Asian
- 3% American Indian
- 2% Pacific Islander
- 18% Latino or Hispanic

Enrollment

- 22,195 total
- 53% Male
- 44% Female
- 3% Gender Non-Conforming or Gender Expansive

Examples of Affinity Crew Models

- ASL Inclusion, Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Bilingual, English as a Second Language
- Disability Inclusion
- LGBTQ+
- People of Color
- Tribal Youth
- Veteran's Crews
- Women's Crews

What is an Affinity and Identity-Based Program?

Affinity and identity-based crews and programs offer spaces for young adults from historically marginalized populations, under-represented groups, and individuals with a shared lived experience, culture, and community to serve, grow, learn, and heal together while exploring career pathways into the trail building and conservation industry. Environmental and conservation spaces have been historically inaccessible, systemically marginalizing, and not inclusive or equitable for all populations, particularly people of color. Affinity crews and programs hope to empower young people within a shared, inclusive space that is representative of their identities and be a mechanism to help make the public lands and trail industry look more like the face of America.

Why is This Important?

Transformational Experiences

Many Corps alumni who have participated in affinity or identity-based crews have reported transformational experiences and renewed appreciation for conservation and environmental work. For Corpsmembers of color, many have not seen themselves represented in the conservation space, have grown up with negative associations to public lands and trails, and/or have alternative relationships with conservation work. Other identity groups – such as military veterans or people who have disabilities – may struggle to find Corps programs or opportunities that come with the cultural competency, organizational knowledge, and structure to support their community's unique needs. When Corps offers affinity crew opportunities, they create space for community, peer mentorship, safety, and inclusion – this can be enough to encourage individuals to consider trail and conservation jobs and careers.

Organizational Learning

Corps programs, project partners, and sponsoring entities can all learn from affinity and identity-based crews. Supporting and developing these types of programs can develop cultural competencies through engagement with new communities and populations of people. Organizations can gain new tools and knowledge for integrating inclusive practices into their program structures.

Outreach and Recruitment

Some Corps who manage affinity crews have found this can broaden their recruitment and outreach efforts to a wider range of young adult applicants. Some Corpsmember alumni have even traveled across the country to be a part of a crew that is inclusive and representative of their identity while also stewarding public lands and trails. Affinity crews that have built-in educational days and activities can also be strong incentives for recruitment, especially those that offer place-based lessons – such as Indigenous history or environmental justice. The next generation of trail builders and stewards may have alternative relationships with conservation work that is informed by concerns for a changing climate and social justice. It's important that Corps and project partners keep up with a shifting focus and evolving views of conservation work.

Affinity Program Model Examples

The following are examples for how specific affinity trail crews are structured and the types of elements needed to make these models successful, inclusive, and supportive for the Corpsmembers involved. Certain identity-based components and elements may need additional funding, resources, and preplanning with sponsoring entities and partners.

Veterans Trail Crew

- 1 Crew Leader; 4 crew members

- All members are recent military veterans up to the age of 35.
- Crew serves for 12 weeks:
 - 2 weeks of training and orientation with additional orientation and lessons on PTSD, health and mental wellbeing, and command structure.
- Build in identity-specific components:
 - Funding to support professional development and certifications that will expand upon trainings received during their military service: (S-212, S-130/190, NIMS IS 700a, Wilderness First Aid or First Aid/CPR)
- Allow time and space for group activities; flexible time-off; peer-based support and counseling space. Cultural competency training and discussion on engaging with military veterans could be beneficial for all partners.
- Housing:
 - Consider setting aside campsite space, bunkhouses, and temporary housing for just the crew for the duration of the project.
- This crew would receive a higher wage/stipend due to military experience and having immediate priorities – such as families, dependents, and other financial responsibilities.

LGBTQ Trail Crew

- 2 Crew Leaders; 6 crew members:
 - All crew members identify as LGBTQ and/or gender nonconforming.
- For the duration of the project, consider having on-site managers, field coordinators, and project managers from the sponsoring entity who also identify as LGBTQ.
- Trail crew serves for 10 weeks:
 - 1 week of training and orientation with additional orientation and lessons on safety, physical and mental well-being, queer history of public lands, etc. – preferably led by an LGBTQ-identifying instructor.
- Build in identity-specific components:
 - Educational days and activities; community building sessions; queer professional development and mentorship.
- Housing:
 - Consider setting aside campsite space, bunkhouses, and temporary housing for just the crew for the duration of the project.

Lessons Learned

Fostering successful affinity and identity-based crews can be a journey with opportunities for organizational growth for all project partners and sponsoring entities. The following are some lessons learned and considerations for fostering successful identity-based programs and crews from the Corps featured in the case studies in this guidebook. Some of these considerations, if

implemented, can help with short-term and long-term strategies for engaging diverse young people to consider trail and conservation jobs and careers. Early collaboration with a Corps partner in the preplanning and project development phase can help with identifying the resources and flexible funding needed to support crew components (housing, training, travel, etc.) in a way that's permissible for the contract or grant that's being used. Sometimes project partners can unintentionally carry cultural unawareness into their work or reflect outdated perspectives. Working with affinity programs and crews can serve as a learning and self-reflection opportunity about the communities and populations affected and impacted by Corps' work and learn how to be better community partners through inclusive relationships.

Identify Representative Conservation and Trail Building Trainers and Mentors

Some Corps have made a conscious effort to outreach to trail and stewardship trainers that represent the identities of the affinity crew - but in some parts of the country this can be impossible. It is important for young people to be able to see themselves in their professional aspirations. For example, an African American trainer with industry success could encourage the Corpsmembers to envision themselves as trail building professionals, simply by spending time through mentorship. Additional funding and budgeting to contract such a trainer, even if they are from out-of-state, would be invaluable since an affinity crew may be the only time this experience and connection could be offered.

Public Land Accessibility

Some Corpsmembers are connected to intergenerational communities who were historically excluded from many of the public land spaces and trails where they are currently serving. During project preplanning and development, setting aside space for educational days, activities, and conversation to discuss the accessibility of public lands – not just physically but socially, politically, and historically - can be significantly impactful for the crew in how they connect and see themselves in their work. Corps affinity crews who have offered these identity-base elements – with project partner and sponsor approval – have reported high Corpsmember retention and post-program placement into trail and transportation jobs following their term of service.

Being Mindful of Applying Deficit Thinking

“Deficit thinking” can happen when an individual establishes people or communities as problems, which shifts the focus onto blaming those people and communities rather than blaming systems and inequities. This can happen through the ways people communicate, personal or corporate engagement styles, and cultural homogeneity. The Corpsmembers who are enthusiastic to learn trail building may be discouraged to continue along this career path if trainers and professionals are applying deficit thinking and treatment before understanding the full spectrum of opportunities they have. Many partners in the trail building community, although unintentionally, may exhibit certain behaviors and attitudes that illustrate a lack of exposure and experience working with Corpsmembers that aren't from their same community or milieu. Self-reflection into personal and professional homogeneity and broadening exposure can help. Note that taking training in diversity, equity, and inclusion, while appreciated and sometimes helpful, is not always enough. Corps programs managing affinity crews should also communicate the

purpose and intention of the crew, get buy-in from project partners, or even be selective of the partners they work with. Racism and bigotry experienced in the field can undo all of the work that went into program development and affect all entities involved.

Funding for Staff Capacity and Resources

Trail building and conservation mentorship is a critical need for fostering Corpsmember workforce development and passing along institutional knowledge. However, identifying funding and resources that can support staff and mentor capacity is a major challenge. There are many passionate agency, organizational staff, and trail building professionals who care deeply about passing along their industry knowledge, guidance and providing mentorship. The challenge comes with connecting these individuals with Corps programs – particularly Affinity crews – when these individuals are already at their capacity, nearing retirement, or don't have the organizational support to lend their time to working alongside such crews. Capacity grants or allocating resources to supporting more professional mentors, particularly those who represent the identity of the Corpsmembers, can go a long way.

Summary of Case Studies

Case Study Summary Table

- **Trail Construction, Maintenance, and Restoration**
 - Ancestral Land Conservation Corps, Mt. Adams Institute, The Sustainability Institute, Urban Conservation Corps (YouthBuild Louisville), Wyoming Conservation Corps
- **Trail Structures, Facilities**
 - Ancestral Land Conservation Corps, Mile High Youth Corps, The Sustainability Institute
- **Education and Training**
 - California Conservation Corps, Kupu (Hawaii Youth Conservation Corps), Mt. Adams Institute, The Sustainability Institute, Urban Conservation Corps (YouthBuild Louisville)
- **Historic Preservation**
 - Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps, Kupu (Hawaii Youth Conservation Corps)
- **GIS, Surveying, and Assessments**
 - Kupu (Hawaii Youth Conservation Corps), Mt. Adams Institute
- **Vegetation Management and Fire Fuels**
 - California Conservation Corps, Urban Conservation Corps (YouthBuild Louisville), Wyoming Conservation Corps

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Rehabilitation of El Morro National Monument's Historic Headland Trail

Local Tribal youth complete historic trail preservation and restoration work that protects Puebloan land and culture

Ancestral Land Conservation Corps

Project Partners and Sponsors

National Park Service

El Morro National Monument
El Malpais National Monument
Vanishing Treasures Program

Conservation Legacy

Pueblos of Acoma and Zuni

FHWA Strategic Goals

Safety; Economic Strength; Equity; Climate and Sustainability; Transformation

Affinity Focus

Tribal and Indigenous Youth

Project Focus

Trail Construction, Maintenance, and Restoration

Trail Structures, Facilities

Historic Preservation

Project and Program Overview

El Morro National Monument (ELMO) is located in northwestern New Mexico and is the ancestral home of the Puebloan people and culture. For over a decade, the park has hosted more than 50,000 annual visitors who hike the trails and experience the rich history of the petroglyphs and cultural artifacts made by the Ancestral Puebloans. A popular destination, known as the Switchback Trails, was built in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The WPA constructed the trail by cutting into the native sandstone bedrock and installing retaining walls. The Switchback Trails annually provide access to thousands of visitors and hikers to the top of El Morro, where they will encounter *A'ts'ina* – the 14th-century ancestral Zuni Pueblo – also known as Inscription Rock.

ELMO contracted the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps (ALCC) – a program of Conservation Legacy – to complete trail resurfacing, rehabilitation of the historical retaining walls that support the switchbacks, and restoration of the historical drainage channels that were cut into sandstone bedrock that carry runoff away from trail surfaces. ELMO staff made the restoration efforts a high priority due to the trail having unique cultural heritage and preservation needs. Despite some minor stabilization work in 2009, the Switchback Trail needed over 50 years of work due to backlogged deferred maintenance and environmental impacts. The last time there was surface maintenance conducted on the trail was in the 1950s.

Project Work

During the Summers of 2020 and 2021, the ALCC deployed crews comprised of 5 - 10 Tribal youth and young adults from the local Pueblos of Zuni and Acoma to complete repair and rehabilitation of the retaining walls, apply preservation treatments to the historical trail features, restore drainage, remove asphalt, and resurface the tread. The crew focused primarily on the Headland Trail portion of the switchbacks; seven of these switchback sections had uneven grades and severe erosion caused by monsoon rains in 2014 - 2016. There were also stones and large rocks that had loosened and eroded, causing safety concerns.

The trails' asphalt surface cracked and deteriorated along the edges, creating an uneven and unsafe eroded surface spreading asphalt debris everywhere. The ALCC Corpsmembers removed the asphalt and replaced it with StaLok material, a non-petroleum based soil surface. This helped improve the durability of the surface and will make future trail maintenance easier and more efficient. The StaLok is also tan colored, which blends in with the surrounding sandstone bedrock, significantly improving the trail's appearance.

Funding Sources and In-Kind Contributions

The ALCC was a recipient of a federal grant from the National Park Service (NPS) and was contracted through an NPS cooperative agreement. ALCC contributed 25% in-kind matching funds which were primarily donations and non-federal funding sources. ELMO staff, as well as Cultural Resources staff from El Malpais National Monument, and staff from the NPS Vanishing Treasures program, contributed 25% in-kind services. Vanishing Treasures staff offered their administrative time towards historic preservation training, mentoring, and working alongside the ALCC crews in the field.

Additional in-kind contributions and services were provided by NPS archaeologists for the ALCC crew education days, in which they provided training and mentoring in preservation treatment and documentation methods throughout the project. ELMO Cultural Resources staff provided the crew chisels and all the necessary motorized and specialized equipment (such as motorized wheelbarrows, a rock saw, a power tamper, hand tampers, rock slings, and caliche bars, which are digging bars used for breaking up rock common in the Southwestern United States terrain). ELMO also provided all materials, including sandstone for the trail drainage, resurfacing materials, and mortar for the historic preservation repointing work.

Supporting Tribal and Indigenous Trail Crews

The ELMO and ALCC collaboration is a multiyear partnership with the goal of ensuring trail crews at the park will help foster economic independence for local Tribal youth and build leadership skills and abilities for career pathways. For years, the park has worked hard to create an environment that would support the growth and workforce development for underserved local young adults and Tribal youth and has been a proud partner of the ALCC who brings their guidance, technical assistance, and knowledge of how to recruit and work with local Tribal communities. The ALCC performed all the hiring, recruitment, training, and management of the trail crews from the Pueblos of Acoma and Zuni. Additionally, both partners agreed to build in education days for the Corpsmembers so that there would be opportunities to receive cultural heritage and public lands education alongside the project work.

Corpsmember Engagement and Workforce Development

The Corpsmembers serving at ELMO have all personally benefited from the experience through ALCC's organizational culture that encourages and supports healthy lifestyles and inspires conservation work ethics in its crews and crew leaders. The ALCC provides personal and professional development opportunities for its Corpsmembers, which includes technical skills that are transferable to careers in trail building, land management and related industries, as well as soft skills that will prepare them for success in their personal and professional lives.

The crews receive training and mentorship in historic preservation methods and techniques and by working alongside the NPS Vanishing Treasures and ELMO staff, the Corpsmembers were exposed to the preservation ethic and philosophy of the NPS. The work experience gained by participants serves ELMO's long-term goals of expanding opportunities to underserved communities and to better connect with tribal and Indigenous youth. The work experiences, mentorship, educational, and recreational opportunities will strengthen and deepen connections between the youth trail crews, ELMO, and the public lands that are so important culturally to the people of Acoma and Zuni.

Successes and Outcomes

Successes include the completed repair and rehabilitation of the historic Headland Trail switchbacks, with the conditions and associated features improving visitor experience, safety, and access for approximately 60,000 annual users. The resurfacing with the StaLok material applied by the Corpsmembers created a very durable, sustainable, and compact surface with a natural appearance. This will help reduce contamination of the environment and nearby archeological sites from the downslope migration of asphalt fragments and limestone base that scatter through runoff. Additional repairs to the WPA-built masonry features will preserve and protect the original drainage features and keep the stone features along the trail in good condition for years to come.

About the Corps

Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps (ALCC) is a Corps program based out of offices in Acoma Pueblo, Navajo Nation, Zuni Pueblo, Hopi-Kykotsmovi, and Albuquerque. ALCC originally began in 2008 at the Pueblo of Acoma in New Mexico as a program model within the Southwest Conservation Corps – another program of Conservation Legacy. ALCC established itself as its own Corps in 2021 and strives to cultivate a new generation of local land stewards. ALCC partners with tribal communities and land managers to accomplish impactful and lasting conservation service projects – such as historical preservation, traditional agriculture, chainsaw crews, hiking clubs, stream restoration, fencing, trail construction, and more. ALCC also aims to incorporate traditional culture and language as part of crew lifestyle and project work.

How to connect with the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps

Potential project partners or those interested in learning more about the Ancestral Lands crews are encouraged to visit the 'project partner' page to learn more about partnership opportunities,

contracting and agreements, and project development - <https://ancestrallands.org/project-partner>

Or visit the 'contact us' page to connect with a specific Pueblo field office - <https://ancestrallands.org/contact>

Yosemite Women's Fire Crew

As wildland fires continue to increase throughout California, women's firefighting crews address a strong workforce need in a male-centric industry

California Conservation Corps

Project Partners and Sponsors

National Park Service

Yosemite National Park
Fire Management Leadership Board

National Parks Foundation

REI

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire)

California Conservation Corps

Fresno and Monterey Bay District
Inland Empire District

FHWA Strategic Goals

Safety; Equity; Climate and Sustainability

Affinity Focus

Women

Project Focus

Trail Construction, Maintenance, and Restoration

Education and Training

Vegetation Management and Fire Fuels

Overview: The 2022 Washburn and Red Fires

In the summer of 2022, two significant wildland fires affected thousands of acres of forest, trails, and infrastructure within Yosemite National Park (YOSE). Starting with a lightning strike, the Red Fire burned hundreds of acres in the remote, wilderness sections of the park; the Washburn Fire – started by human activity – burned more than 5,000 acres. More than 1,600 wildland fire crews were deployed to support containment efforts, provide assessments, and apply natural barriers and materials to slow the spread. Notably, the Washburn Fire threatened the park's grove of giant sequoias, some of which are thousands of years old. Crews were fortunately able to mobilize quickly and wipe out the nearby blazes that threatened the older trees and protect the existing ones from being damaged.

As wildland fires like these become more frequent due to changing climate and human impacts, it is more important than ever that land managers support the training, mentorship, and development of career opportunities for the next generation of firefighters and conservationists. YOSE and other land management agencies have acknowledged their firefighting workforce is aging, not diverse, or representative of the adjacent communities and populations to the park. An affinity crew model was explored as a short-term solution to introduce new populations of Corpsmembers to the park and the firefighting industry while preparing for the workforce needs as wildland fires continue to increase.

Both partners found success in using an affinity model to develop a female fire crew with the goal of supporting efforts to diversify the park's wildland fire and park staff while adding much-needed personnel capacity as YOSE enters the fire season. The California Conservation Corps (CCC) is a longtime partner of YOSE and has been a leader in working with partners and managing various identity-based programs and crews. The CCC is uniquely positioned to recruit and train Corpsmembers from diverse backgrounds, outreach to the local communities their district offices are based in, provide their members with industry-recognized certifications, and track post-program job placement for alums.

The Yosemite Inaugural Female Fire Crew

YOSE leadership discussed strategies and solutions for expanding staff diversity, with a particular focus on increasing their female workforce across all NPS sectors. These conversations kickstarted efforts towards developing a female-centered affinity crew that would provide training, hands-on experience alongside veteran firefighters, and career opportunities at the park. In early 2021, Recreational Equipment, Incorporated (REI) donated \$70,000 in seed funding to the National Park Foundation (NPF) to pilot female wildland fire crews at YOSE and Grand Teton National Park (GRTE). The Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) was selected to run the GRTE crew early in the pilot phase with much success. That same year, YOSE selected the CCC Monterey Bay-Fresno district to manage the inaugural crew since they were based only minutes from the park entrance and had prior experience managing fire crews.

2021 Pilot Year

The first female fire crew deployed in June 2021 and ran for 10 weeks. Six female Corpsmembers were recruited from across the state and selected through a competitive application process conducted by the CCC. Many of the applicants had served as CCC Corpsmembers on previous crews, came with wildland fire training, or were attracted to the idea of serving again on a female-centered crew. During the first month, the crew mobilized each day from a wilderness base camp and worked on fire fuels mitigation and other area projects while concurrently receiving relevant fire training from YOSE. The crew strictly followed all rules and regulations and received required classroom and field training, including additional training hosted by the NPS and YOSE, prior to deploying to the field. Although all the Corpsmembers had fire training and experience, they were also all previously trained by state firefighters who have different methods and ways of managing fire.

Five of the six Corpsmembers completed the pilot program, with one member being placed on administrative duty due to an injury. The member was able to continue working and support the fire program by creating a career ladder guide for wildland firefighters, helped with timekeeping and incident reports, and worked in the fire cache. The remaining Corpsmembers spent their time engaged on wildfires while working closely with the YOSE staff, hotshot crews, and fire modules, including Yosemite Wildland Fire Module, the Saguaro Wildland Fire Module, the Whiskeytown Wildland Fire Module, the Mammoth Wildland Fire Module, the Arrowhead Hotshot Crew, the Horseshoe Meadow Hotshot Crew, and the Yosemite and Santa Monica engine crews. When working on these fires, the crew received an extra pay incentive – known

as Administratively Determined – to compensate for the hard and dangerous job of wildland firefighting.

The female fire crew served on 20 different fires throughout YOSE and the valley during the pilot year. They deployed to help support and serve in mitigating fires, worked alongside the park firefighters, and received rigorous training and exposure on prescribed fire, fire ecology training, setting up slash piles, and opening and closing park trails.

Outcomes

- Received National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Incident Qualification Cards (“Red Cards”) for Firefighter Type 2 – Crewmember (FFT2) and Basic Faller (FAL3)
- Completed NWCG S-212, Wildland Fire Chainsaws 24-hour training course
- Created a federal fire career ladder document to show how a beginner firefighter can move to being a fire management officer
- Constructed over 100 burn piles in Yosemite Valley in preparation for a prescribed burn

2022 Project Work

Following the success of the pilot program year, YOSE secured new funding to fully support an additional summer field season for a year-two female fire program. In summer 2022, eight Corpsmembers were recruited, this time omitting a previous wildland fire prerequisite to allow for more applicant accessibility. As before, YOSE and NPS provided all the pre-deployment fire training and CCC offered to issue the crew with Red Card certification, which would allow the crew to be deployed to serve on fires as though they were park firefighters.

The crew worked on reopening trails throughout YOSE that were closed off due to the spread of the blaze, worked on fire fuels reduction, removed brush on and around trail corridors, sawed trees and heavy vegetation, and created slash piles. The capstone project of the season for the crew was being flown by helicopter to provide fire line support on the Red Fire – working alongside hotshot crews, and the Mammoth Wildland Fire Module to help with the containment.

Affinity Experience

When working with CCC on the affinity crew pilot program, YOSE leadership emphasized the importance of providing a space for female Corpsmembers that will foster growth, positive experiences, and community. YOSE’s goal was to have a new generation of young women receive mentorship from strong women leaders in wildland fire and resource management and encourage pursuing jobs and careers with NPS. YOSE ensured that time during the field season would be set aside so that older female fire leaders could meet with the crew to share their guidance and discuss what’s needed to be successful in a firefighting career.

The Corpsmembers who served both years expressed appreciation with the time the YOSE team invested with the crew. Throughout the season, they met with industry leaders and professionals in wildland fire and park management, park leadership from the Fire Management Leadership Board (FMLB), and NPS wilderness staff. The program went above and beyond the

crew's expectations and played a vital role in helping women gain impactful experience and exposure to the firefighting world.

Funding Sources and In-kind Contributions

For the 2022 program year, the CCC was the direct recipient of a YOSE grant for \$90,000 in federal funds, which covered program expenditures, Corpsmember wages, management, and administrative support. In 2021, the REI seed funding of \$70,000 was awarded to the National Park Foundation, who selected YOSE and GRTE for the inaugural female fire crews. CCC provided the required in-kind match contribution for both program years of approximately \$40,000, which included administrative staff time, oversight, project management, tools and equipment, training, and Corpsmember supportive services. An additional value to the project was YOSE providing housing for the 2022 crew. The park usually has limited housing set aside for staff and seasonals. However, YOSE was able to offer accommodation for the crew, who considered this important for their health and recuperation following their strenuous workdays.

About the Corps

The California Conservation Corps is a department within the California Natural Resources Agency and is the oldest and largest conservation Corps in the nation. The CCC program provides young adults 18 – 25 years old a year of paid service to the State of California and during their year of service, Corpsmembers work on environmental projects and respond to natural and man-made disasters. Through this work, they gain skills and experience that lead to meaningful careers. The CCC motto is 'Hard Work, Low Pay, Miserable Conditions and More!'

How to connect with the California Conservation Corps

For more information on Corps partnership development, fee-for-service contracting, agreements, or to learn more about the CCC's other identity-based programs, contact the Monterey Bay/Fresno District Director:

559-458-0921

Ccc.ca.gov

Ventura Training Center - A Firefighter Training Reentry Program

A Firefighter Training Reentry Program

The Ventura Training Center (VTC) is a firefighting program and collaboration between three California agencies: the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations (CDCR), and the California Conservation Corps (CCC). VTC opened in October 2018 with an inaugural class of 20 participants receiving training for the CAL FIRE Basic Firefighter program – a certification that includes a rigorous 219 hours of training for those seeking a seasonal firefighter job with CAL FIRE. The Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) provided supervision, job training and life skills, health and wellness education, and additional rehabilitation to help participants with their post-program success and transition when returning home from incarceration.

Participants in the certification program receive the following certificates:

- CAL FIRE Basic 219 Hour Wildland Academy
- SFM Confined Space Rescue Awareness
- SFM Firefighter Survival
- CSTI Hazmat First Responder Operations
- CSTI Hazmat Decontamination
- CSTI Weapons of Mass Destruction

The VTC program accepts formerly incarcerated trainees who: 1) have worked as firefighters at a CAL FIRE or CDCR Conservation Camp or 2) are institutional firefighters who have completed their full term of incarceration and have been placed under parole supervision in the community. Eligible CCC Corpsmembers can also participate. The only convictions that automatically exclude an inmate from the Conservation Camp and VTC program acceptance are sex offenses, arson, and any history of escape. Up to 80 parolee participants can be enrolled at one time and are housed on an open campus.

VTC's 18-month residential training program is a rigorous curriculum that prepares participants with the experience, certifications and hands-on wildland firefighting experience required to have a successful firefighting career and second chance in life. Many program alumni have gone on to work for CAL FIRE, the United States Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and other interagency hotshot crews.

Post-program success data has been collected consistently from partner agencies since 2018 and details the successful hiring trends of the VTC program graduates. Overall, the recidivism rate of this firefighting reentry program is exceptionally low at .05% (only two out of 190 enrolled).

Inland Empire All-Female Fire Crew

All-Female Fire Crew

In 2018, the Inland Empire District collaborated with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to establish the first all-female fire crew. The goal was to provide women interested in fire management a career pathway into BLM, while helping meet the Bureau's needs for a more diverse applicant pool. The CCC and BLM developed a program that would provide the training, preparation, and encouragement needed to familiarize the women applicants with the challenges and skills needed to be successful in the firefighting world. In September 2018, CCC and BLM hosted its first classroom training sessions and field exercises consisting of fire safety, chainsaw operation and maintenance, tool operation, fire hose training, and live fire activities. There was also a "pack test" – a physically demanding performance review involving fitness assessments and long-distance hikes while carrying heavy gear. In a pack test, one must complete a three-mile hike in under 45 minutes while wearing 45 pounds of gear. The entire group of 14 women successfully passed each training requirement and the CCC's first ever All-Female Fire Crew was created, nicknamed "The Inland Crew 5."

Inland Crew 5 was the most requested crew in the region, having been dispatched every month during the inaugural program year. They responded to fires throughout California, with most being within San Bernardino and Riverside County, which are historically the most wildfire prone counties in the country. The crew was mostly deployed to address day fires, known as flare-ups, where an immediate response is needed. The crew was typically accompanied by a BLM Fire Engine, however, in remote desert areas, Inland Crew 5 was often the closest available crew and could be dispatched as new fires erupted. Inland Crew 5 also performed controlled burns and worked long days monitoring flames as they learned first-hand about fire behavior, fire safety, and weather conditions.

When not responding to fires, Inland Crew 5 worked on fuel reduction projects throughout the Inland Empire, working daily alongside a BLM Battalion Chief on fuel mitigation techniques, fire line construction, slash pile construction, and prescribed burns. The crew also received annual fire training refreshers and chainsaw training. In March 2020, the crew completed an Emergency Medical Responder course through Crafton Hills College and studied to complete the 72-hour course for certifications in both Public Safety-First Aid and Emergency Medical Response.

The crew is well known among the regional fire community, but the program's success is measured by the lives changed among the Corpsmembers. During their crew experience, the Corpsmembers built connections, were encouraged to pursue opportunities in fire management, and have even been employed on agency engine crews. Inland Crew 5 left a lasting impression and continues to encourage more women to consider careers in fire management and have a presence in the firefighting world.

Pololū Trail Stewards Program

For the lineal descendants of North Kohala, protecting the Pololū Valley is 'Kuleana'

Kupu (Hawaii Youth Conservation Corps)

Project Partners and Sponsors

Department of Land and Natural Resources

Hawaii Tourism Authority

Nakupuna Foundation

North Kohala community leaders

FHWA Strategic Goals

Economic Strength; Equity; Climate and Sustainability

Affinity Focus

Native Hawaiian; Lineal Descendants of North Kohala

Project Focus

Education and Training

Historic Preservation

GIS, Surveying, and Assessments

Protecting Pololū is Kuleana

In Native Hawaiian, “kuleana” means responsibility. It is a term that embodies an individual’s reciprocal relationship with responsibility and motivates caring for ourselves, our communities, and environment. In North Kohala, the largest region on the island of Hawaii, is Pololū Valley – an area with diverse geography, geology, and ecosystems. The valley holds many significant cultural sites, including ancient burial mounds, and is sacred to the communities of Pololū, Makanikahiō and neighboring ahupua’a. Many of the residents are deeply connected to the valley and are lineal descendants going back generations.

The residents have a special affinity – or kuleana – towards protecting the land and addressing the impacts of over-tourism. In recent years, the once isolated and little-known valley has seen an influx of tourism and trail users. Issues ranging from hiking off trail, not respecting Leave No Trace principles, illegal camping, and heavy foot traffic are now threatening the land and prompting discussions around how to mitigate these impacts. Nationally, trails and public lands have seen a record number of outdoor recreational users, eager to make up for lost time during the pandemic. Pololū Valley has also attracted an increase in new visitors who bring their recreation habits and unawareness of the valley’s cultural and spiritual significance.

In response to these growing concerns, the Pololū Trail Stewards was developed as a community-centered and community-led program designed to mitigate over-tourism impacts, protect natural and cultural resources, and improve the quality of life for North Kohala. Developed and administered by Kupu (Hawaii Youth Conservation Corps), with support from state and local partners, the program allocates resources and gives agency back to the ancestral lineal descendants of North Kohala who are the most impacted by over-tourism.

Developing the Pololū Trail Stewards Program

Tourism is one of the biggest industries in Hawai'i and finding solutions that protect the environment and cultural sites is an ongoing challenge. Over-tourism is when the industry is taxing on trail systems and the environment to the point of deteriorating the recreational spaces and experiences the industry was developed for in the first place. Kupu envisions the Pololū Trail Stewards program becoming a model for connecting interagency partners, stakeholders, and communities in protecting trails and public lands. Kupu hopes the program model can be used in other Hawaiian communities and beyond to holistically solve over-tourism impacts with community-centered engagement.

Kuleana is the foundation of the Pololū Trail Stewards. The program engages with intergenerational Pololū Valley participants – or Corpsmembers – who are paid, receive workforce development training, manage cultural resources, and educate trail users on the spiritual significance of the valley. Although uncommon across many Corps programs, the program intentionally encourages the recruitment of participants who are outside the standard 18 - 30 age range for young adults. For Kupu, because the work is so community-focused, it was important to offer participation and space to anyone from the valley who wants to support the stewardship and preservation program goals.

Pilot Year Development

2021-2022 was the pilot year for the program. Local Pololū valley stewards were initially recruited to assist with interpreting the historic nature of the valley and trails with visitors while mitigating unwanted behaviors and ensuring visitor safety. The Pololū trailhead is managed by the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources (HI DLNR), who has been involved and engaged with community concerns for years. HI DLNR provided an on-site manager who directed daily logistics, project oversight, and worked alongside the stewards – granting authorization to communicate regulations to visitors. Having state-level stakeholders advocating for Pololū Valley while being in a position to allocate resources, set guidelines, and manage regulations was significant for the program's success.

In June 2021, the first cohort of trail stewards were five Pololū Valley lineal descendants, with the youngest participant being 20 and the oldest coming out of retirement to join the program. Kupu served as the recruiting and administrative backbone for the program through their Corpsmember outreach, providing training and workforce development, maintaining community engagement, and managing program operations. Stewards were recruited intentionally from the communities adjacent to the Pololū Valley trailhead to ensure a cohort with a shared heritage, culture, and a deep connection with land.

Project Work

The Pololū Valley trail is a one-mile out-and-back style trail with a challenging terrain grade. The trail hosts scenic outlooks, vistas, and ancient cobblestones that are still embedded in sections

of the trail. These features, coupled with the rainy Hawaiian environment, can promote slipping hazards for inexperienced hikers.

Stewards were positioned at the trailhead, the nearby parking lot, and patrolled the entire trail – providing visitors cultural awareness briefings and other supportive services to promote safe and positive experiences for all hiker abilities. The patrols allowed stewards to look out for inexperienced trail users and report visitors who wander off trail into culturally sensitive areas in which ancient burial grounds are often adjacent to the trail corridor.

The stewards also performed data collection and assessments of visitor trends, hiking ability, and trail conditions. Using iPads, stewards collected surveys on visitor hiking and recreational experience, which Kupu analyzes to help inform how to expand upon safety practices in the program. Stewards were also tasked with greeting visitors at the trailhead's adjacent parking lot to help direct and facilitate traffic. With DLNR authority and oversight granted, stewards could collect vehicle and visitor information and report parking violations to authorities. At the trailhead, stewards share trail conditions and safety concerns, weather advisories, community stories about the land, and point out areas that should be respected and avoided. Stewards provide water and supplies for those who come unprepared, are properly trained in first aid and CPR, and carry medical supplies and GPS phones in case of emergencies.

Funding Sources and In-Kind Contributions

The pilot year for the Pololū Trail Stewards program was supported through a grant from the Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA), with a purpose of supporting locations facing over-tourism issues. Kupu was the direct recipient of a cooperative agreement with HTA, which awarded authority to administer the program. HI DLNR was a collaborating partner with regulatory authority and monitored property boundaries. HI DLNR also provided guidance, mentorship, and supervision of the stewards during the program. Additional funding and resources were awarded through the Nakupuna Foundation, a Native Hawaiian-owned and led organization.

Lessons Learned - Finding ways to support non-traditional Corps program models

Securing federal and state funding and resources for Corps program models, like the Pololū Trail Stewards, can be a challenge. Many Service and Conservation Corps rely on contracts, grants, and agreements with legal authorities that specifically support young adults federally defined as aged 18 - 30. Early collaboration with local Corps can help ensure these community-centered programs can continue to support Corpsmembers of all backgrounds and ages while doing so in a way that is permissible with the grant or contract being used. Corps can bring their unique strategies, community connections, resources, and diverse funding sources – which can be the most helpful in the pre-planning and project development phases.

Community engagement and buy-in was critical to the successful implementation and execution of this program. All the program stakeholders – including the trail users and visitors – benefited from having stewards who carry kuleana into their work and have deep knowledge of the land and trails. Successful models like the Pololū Trail Stewards should encourage reflection in our

own work as trail planners, agencies, and sponsors by asking ourselves – what can we do to make our trail work more community-based, led, and reflective of the people most impacted by adjacent trails?

About the Corps

Each year, Kupu offers hundreds of service opportunities that create positive environmental, cultural and community impact across Hawaii and the Pacific region. Kupu offers summer and year-long positions. All participants serve alongside experts, receiving valuable mentorship, and hands-on experience. These programs are ideal for youth ages 16 - 24 who are eager to spend time outdoors and seek educational support – through a high school education equivalency certificate or earning college credit and education awards.

How to connect with Kupu (Hawaii Conservation Corps)

For more information on Corps partnership development, fee-for-service contracting, agreements, or to learn more about Kupu's many programs – such as the Hawaii Youth Conservation Corps and Kupu 'Āina Corps – contact the programs department:

808.735.1221

info@kupuhawaii.org

www.kupuhawaii.org

Gender Spectrum Affinity Program

Creating gender-inclusive spaces in land management work engages new populations and starts important conversations on representation and community-building

Mile High Youth Corps

Project Partners and Sponsors

National Park Service

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument

Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Rosemont State Wildlife Area

United States Forest Service

South Platte Ranger District

Pike National Forest

City of Cañon City

FHWA Strategic Goals

Safety; Equity; Climate and Sustainability

Affinity Focus

Gender non-conforming; Gender-Inclusive; Queer and LGBTQ+ Youth

Project Focus

Trail Construction, Maintenance, and Restoration

Trail Structures, Facilities

Vegetation Management and Fire Fuels

Background and Overview

The Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument (FLFO) – located two hours south of Denver, CO – is known for its prehistoric natural resources, fossilized artifacts, and petrified redwoods. The park's centralized location makes it accessible for more than 70,000 annual visitors, volunteer groups, youth summer programs, and regional Corps that mobilize crews for trail work, wildland fire prevention, and conservation projects. In summer 2021, FLFO sponsored a Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC) crew to perform trail restoration, maintenance, install boundary fencing, and construct irrigation systems along the Petrified Forest Loop Trail and Ponderosa Trail. Many of these trail sections had critical restorative needs due to high visitor use, weather damage, and years of deferred maintenance. MHYC's crew work would help with addressing visitor safety and access to the park's monuments and historic sites while helping to sustain the trail systems for years to come.

MHYC deployed their Gender Spectrum Affinity Crew (GSAC) – a concept created with the goal of reducing historical barriers that have prevented natural resource management from being an inclusive field. This type of crew is meant to offer Corpsmembers from a shared community, identity, or lived experience the opportunity to serve on one conservation crew together. Throughout the spring and summer 2021 field season, the GSAC served FLFO and was deployed to several other federal and state public land sites throughout Colorado's Southern Front Range. This case study will discuss the GSAC's recreational trail and conservation work, the GSAC importance and impacts for the Corpsmembers involved, and lessons learned.

Through the creation of this crew and with the support from the federal and state partners, a transformational experience was created for the Corpsmembers, who found empowerment through meaningful work and representation in the public land space.

Why the Gender Spectrum Affinity Crew was Created

The origins of this identity-based crew go back to 2018, when Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC) ran its first-ever All-Women's Crew. The positive outcomes and feedback shared from the members who served on these crews was abundant, but it was also learned that MHYC was missing the mark when it came to the name of the crew and how to discuss it with Corpsmembers and program applicants. Some members who identified as gender nonconforming and/or transgender shared that the name "All-Women's Crew" reinforced a gender binary and was not inclusive of other genders. With that feedback in mind, MHYC changed the name of this affinity crew to Womxn's (pronounced "women-x") crew in 2020, which was intended to be inclusive of diverse gender identities. After more learning and listening, it became clear that Womxn was not a widely accepted or appropriate term for this group of identities, and that there were no positive established terms for this diverse group.

The Gender Spectrum Affinity Crew (GSAC) was the newest iteration in this affinity space, with a renewed goal of creating a safe space for underrepresented genders to learn and grow together in a cis, male-dominated industry. This crew ran similarly to MHYC's other land conservation crews and had similar outcomes, while starting important conversations about how to best create gender-inclusive spaces. All Corpsmember participants on the GSAC identified as gender nonconforming, transgender, or as a cis woman, and opted into this crew experience during their application and on-boarding process.

Project Work - Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument (FLFO) and Colorado's Southern Front Range

MHYC deployed a GSAC three times in July 2021 to install and construct new boundary fencing, restore and remove petrified fence stumps, and perform vegetation management along the boundary areas at FLFO. This work was critical for the protection of the natural and cultural resources at the park, keeping visitors on designated trail corridors, and wandering animals away from sensitive habitat areas. The crew was composed of eight Corpsmembers, whose positions were supported by AmeriCorps, and one experienced Crew Leader who served on previous MHYC seasonal crews. On their first deployment, the crew installed and removed 8,000 feet of fencing and installed and removed more than 90 holes and fencing posts.

The following are project outcomes after three deployments:

540 feet of fencing removed

540 feet of fencing constructed

54 holes were dug for fencing posts

300+ feet of trail and tread improved

100 feet of granite trail base and gravel was spread to reinforce the tread

400 feet of new trail installed

The GSAC also deployed to several other locations throughout Colorado's Southern Front Range to perform 10 weeks of trail construction and maintenance projects. Starting in May 2021, the Corpsmembers went through more than 40 hours of MHYC's public land stewardship orientation with an additional 40 hours of trail building training. In a standard hitch model, the crew stayed at a base camp near the project sites, typically for four to five days at a time, returned home, then redeployed to another site.

The GSAC served at four total project sites, including: Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument, Rosemont State Wildlife Area, Royal Gorge Park, and Lost Creek Wilderness. At each of these locations, the GSAC completed trail construction and maintenance, specifically designing and installing drainage structures, steps, and other trail features. Seven out of nine members on this crew successfully completed their AmeriCorps term of service, with a total of \$11,472 in AmeriCorps Education Awards dispersed.

The following are the end-of-season project outcomes:

- 2.5 miles of trails improved
- 1.08 miles of tread constructed
- 118 square feet of rock walls installed
- 1.69 miles of fence constructed
- 13 water bars installed
- 36 grade dips installed

Contracting, Funding Sources and In-kind Contributions

MHYC served as both a direct recipient and subrecipient of federal grants that supported the work at FLFO and the Southern Front Range projects through National Park Service (NPS) cooperative agreements and single-source agreements. A \$95,000 grant supported the trail maintenance and boundary fencing work at FLFO, in which the Corps provided \$30,000 for in-kind and cash match contributions towards the federal grant. Corps contributions included non-federal funding sources, administrative and budgetary management, project tracking and oversight, and value of volunteer time. MHYC used an NPS cooperative agreement with the Public Land Corps authority – allowing Corpsmembers who operate under that agreement to potentially have access to a hiring authority if they meet the minimum requirements and prerequisites. Many of the Corpsmembers and Crew Leaders who served on the GSAC did qualify and received hiring authority certificates.

Partner Buy-In and Support

Briefing project partners on the concept and importance of affinity crews or identity-based crews is a process that has also required some learning from MHYC staff. The affinity crew is typically discussed during the pre-project site visit. The partner is informed that they can expect to be working with an identity-based crew. If needed, project coordinators will explain the importance of identity-based crews and ensure partners that the number of crew members, quality of work performed, and behavioral expectations are the same as any other crew. MHYC prioritized chatting with the partners about the crew to answer any questions, alleviate any concerns, and ensure that the project partner will also promote a safe and inclusive space. These

conversations were an opportunity to be proactive and prevent microaggressions or biases that could have potentially shown up if these conversations were not had. The partners that worked with the crew – known as the Challenger Crew – were all incredibly supportive. They were excited to work with an identity-based crew after they had the opportunity to learn the importance of these crews and how their role as partners and supervisors could strongly impact a crews' experience.

Corpsmember Engagement and Experience

Corpsmember applicants were asked during a pre-screening interview if they wished to opt-in to the affinity crew experience. An MHYC staff member explained who the space was intended for and the goals of the space. If members had no interest in the affinity crew, they were placed on a traditional, all-identity conservation crew. Everyone who had explicit interest ended up placed on this crew, as well as a few individuals who indicated they were “open” to this crew or placement on an all-identity crew. Post-program Corpsmembers expressed appreciation for the skills, career support, friendship, and confidence gained from the GSAC experience. Some comments include:

- “MHYC helped me develop emotionally and professionally, as well as connected me with kinds of people that I’d have zero chance of meeting naturally.”
- “It has also broadened my perspective of outdoor activities that will make my free time way more enjoyable and has given me goals.”

Challenges and Barriers

After a season of observing interactions between Corpsmembers, MHYC staff learned that the lived experiences of gender nonconforming folks are often very different than the experiences of cisgender women. While they both face gender discrimination on a systemic level, members that identified as gender nonconforming had a perspective more strongly aligned with the LGBTQIA+ community, while many of the cisgender women did not feel aligned with that community. This led to a few disagreements and conflicts that required staff support in managing and resolving.

The affinity crew experience did not feel significantly different from a regular crew experience to the Corpsmembers that participated in it. Although this was part of the program design, members and MHYC staff felt that the crew likely would need more resources to meet its goal of “reducing historical barriers that have prevented natural resource management from being an inclusive field.” To truly engage in equity work, more must be done. Moving into 2022, MHYC staff plan on providing more resources and additional support from a parallel Spectrum Staff Committee.

Why the Gender Spectrum Affinity Crew is Needed

The GSAC is an identity-based crew that receives the same orientation, technical training, programming, and project experience as all of MHYC’s other land conservation crews. It is not a separate program, but a more intentional and meaningful crew formation. At MHYC, a crew is the group of individuals that Corpsmembers will serve, work, and live with for up to three months

at a time. The relationships and dynamics of a crew is what can make or break a Corps experience. The members of the GSAC get the same Corps experience as other crews, but are able to do so in an environment that may feel safer and more inclusive given that other individuals on the crew may have similar life experiences. MHYC provides educational opportunities and resources for all Corpsmembers to learn and grow in diversity, equity and inclusion competencies. Every Corpsmember may bring their own biases into the program and those biases can sometimes cause harm, especially to underrepresented genders. This affinity crew space helps minimize the harm that can be caused by other crew members to folks who are underrepresented in the field of natural resource management. This crew provides an opportunity for individuals to build confidence, learn new skills, connect to others with similar lived experiences, and break the gender norms that have been embedded in this industry.

Corpsmember Impacts and Lessons Learned

The 2021 Challenger Crew provided MHYC with the opportunity to learn that because the lived experiences of cis women and transgender or gender nonconforming folks can vary significantly, there was a need to provide the crew with more resources to ensure that the environment is safe for all underrepresented genders. A staff support group and an effective Crew Leader will play a crucial role in providing the crew with the support that they need. This may look like more structured educational opportunities, crew time, team builders, and other facilitated activities. With additional education, mentorship, and conversations started about the way gender identity affects the experiences of folks in this industry, Corpsmembers might have the tools to affect more change, bridge the gaps they feel in their past lived experiences, and feel a greater impact of this affinity space on their overall experience. When Corpsmembers have a positive Corps experience, they are often more likely to pursue crew leadership and staff positions at the Corps and create a more gender-diverse staff team.

About the Corps

For 30 years, Mile High Youth Corps has supported the development of youth and young adults ages 18 to 24 through meaningful paid service opportunities and career pathways in land, energy and water conservation, construction, and health and wellness. MHYC has a long history of working closely with local businesses, community organizations, and various partner entities whose support is essential to MHYC's continued efforts in youth recruitment, project development, educational curriculum, employment opportunities, community resources for Corpsmembers, fundraising events, and in-kind donations.

How to connect with Mile High Youth Corps

To learn more about how to connect with the Mile High Youth Corps for sponsorship, partnership and project development, donations, or to hire a crew, visit their Partner with Us webpage that directs to the appropriate department and contact.

www.milehighyouthcorps.org/partner-with-us/

www.milehighyouthcorps.org

<https://corpsnetwork.org/blogs/corpsmember-profile-creating-community-in-colorado-meet-xia-ren-arnold/>

VetsWork Program

Supporting military veterans in the transition to meaningful, service-oriented civilian careers

Mt. Adams Institute

Project Partners and Sponsors

U.S. Forest Service

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

King Conservation District

Tillamook Estuaries Partnership

Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership

Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery

FHWA Strategic Goals

Economic Strength; Equity

Affinity Focus

Military Veterans

Project Focus

Trail Construction, Maintenance, and Restoration

Education and Training

GIS, Surveying, and Assessments

Program Background and Overview

The VetsWork Program is an AmeriCorps-supported career development program for military veterans interested in a career in public lands and natural resources management. Created by the Mt. Adams Institute (MAI), VetsWork has been operating nationally since 2013, placing participants around the country in internships at federal, state, or local natural resource agencies. The program offers a unique blend of hands-on experience with specific training, mentorship and professional networking. As a result, VetsWork participants increase their employment opportunities while supporting the work of public lands and natural resource management agencies.

Military veterans interested in natural resources management, public lands, and environment sector jobs and careers can apply to participate in the 11-month career development internship program and be placed at local, state, and federal land management agencies. The work the participants engage in primarily includes but is not limited to recreational trails, habitat restoration, wildland fire, roads and highways, facilities and trailside structures, GIS mapping and surveying, and other conservation-related projects. This program was created to facilitate the transition from the military workforce culture to the civilian workforce culture. It offers veterans a career opportunity with the commitment to service and purpose that motivated many of them to serve the country in the military.

Project Partners and Sponsors

Most of MAI's partnerships are with federal agencies who value the experience that veterans bring and have mandates to hire more veterans into the workforce. MAI partners have been

interested in VetsWork primarily because of the level of sophistication the participants provide as part of the solution to filling their capacity gaps. MAI staff also provide project partners and sponsor administrative support throughout the internship placement and offer guidance on veteran hiring authorities.

Partners will identify specific areas of need at their host sites and develop a detailed position description for MAI so staff can work on recruiting veterans who have the needed skills, interests, and aptitudes. The individual placement positions offered to the veteran participants provide much needed capacity for agencies and organizations struggling to meet their management objectives. It also provides a mechanism for training and mentoring veterans with the intent to fill employment gaps. Through working with MAI, partners have experienced success with getting impactful work done while converting the participants into permanent employees at the end of their term of service.

Examples of some of the roles members have filled include:

Condition Assessment Surveyor
Recreation Technician
Dispatch Intern
Civil Engineering Intern
Geologist/Minerals Administrator Intern
Facilities Management Technician
Fleet Management Technician
Maintenance Intern
GIS Intern
Customer Service Intern
Biological Technician

Outcomes and Successes

MAI works with participating partners and host sites to ensure there will be accessible opportunities for the veterans. MAI works with partners to secure housing or housing allowances or to connect partners with the Department of Labor to certify VetsWork as a Department of Labor (DOL) apprenticeship. This allows veterans with GI Bill benefits to access their Basic Housing Allowance through DOL, which opens more positions to veterans who could not otherwise participate due to financial obligations and other barriers. VetsWork continues to expand nationally, offering more locations and a wider variety of positions. Over the past eight years, the program has created opportunities for veterans with a wider range of needs, skills, interests, and circumstances.

Over the course of the program, MAI has a proven track record in helping veteran participants transition into meaningful careers and jobs. Through the 2020 program year, 84% of participants who completed the program were offered employment within the field. In addition to the success participants experience in securing jobs in the public lands sector, MAI's partners benefit from their efforts in the program.

Each year VetsWorks participants work on a variety of projects. In 2020, VetsWork interns:

Maintained 1,398 miles of trails

Maintained 1,062 miles of roads

Maintained 197 structures and facilities

Created 321 maps

Worked in 15 different states

Treated 1,292 acres for fuel reduction

Built 1,833 linear feet of wildlife fence

Improved 42 miles of aquatic riparian habitat

Engaged with 783 community volunteers

Challenges and Barriers

Initially, establishing credibility within the veteran community was a challenge. MAI did not have any veterans on staff and the opportunity seemed “too good to be true.” However, MAI worked with respected institutions and veteran-serving organizations to ensure they were effectively meeting the needs of the veteran population. Over the years, MAI has developed credibility through the results of the VetsWork program and the relationships built with the participants.

An ongoing challenge is recruitment of veterans for these specific opportunities – which is complex and intensive. Veterans are not typical AmeriCorps members or Conservation Corps members. They are coming from a career and often have families, mortgages, car payments, and other financial obligations that limit their ability to participate. Providing resources that make participation accessible has been critical to MAI’s success.

Corpsmember Engagement and Experience

To attract Corpsmembers and participants, MAI engages in traditional recruitment through job websites and social media, and collaborates with veteran networks and veteran-serving organizations to help target veteran applicants. MAI has also found it helpful to collect member stories to use in recruitment and share these with potential new applicants.

Participants gain valuable professional experiences in public lands and natural resources. It connects them to federal agencies and nonprofits that have large networks and career opportunities while helping Corpsmembers determine if they want a career in this line of work.

“This internship has been nothing short of amazing. I've learned so much in the last 11 months. I've met really kind and very helpful people on the Deschutes National Forest.

It's heartwarming to see how much passion everyone has for their job. I've learned that every person serves a major role in being stewards of the community and our natural resources.”

- **Tenesha Carney, 2017 VetsWork Alum,**
U.S. Navy Veteran

“I had a buddy that went through the program (twice) who told me how it was compiled of a bunch of Vets who were in the same situation or background. That’s what drove me towards the

program – just being around people who connected to me. If that week of orientation was all that I got from the program, that itself would've been worth it and perfect. It was 100 percent life changing for me. Not only did it give me the camaraderie of being around veterans, but it helped me tremendously.”

- Adam Hale, 2020 VetsWork Alum
U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

Impacts and Lessons Learned

The success of the VetsWork program depends highly on the strength of the relationships of those involved in the program. MAI invests time and energy into building trust and respect amongst staff, VetsWork participants and VetsWork partners. All parties need to understand the program objectives and their roles in fulfilling them.

Understanding the cultural differences between the military and civilian workforce environment is a key element in increasing the likelihood of a successful experience. Additional ways to improve the VetsWork program include:

- Continuing to build program participation from underrepresented communities based on race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and socio-economic status.
- Broadening partnership sites across the country, increasing access to professional development and networking opportunities.
- Expanding organizational capacity, including hiring more veterans into program staff positions.

About the Corps

Through its programs, Mt. Adams Institute creates opportunities for people to connect meaningfully with the natural world in order to:

- Improve personal health and wellbeing
- Increase ecological literacy and a sense of interconnectedness
- Promote lifelong environmental stewardship and action
- Enhance civic and community engagement
- Facilitate career opportunities in the fields of natural resource management, conservation, and education

MAI serves youth, young adults, adults, and families because it believes that a strong connection with nature benefits people of all ages and walks of life. MAI seeks out opportunities to connect individuals with the natural world who are historically underrepresented in outdoor recreation and natural resource career areas.

How to connect with Mt. Adams Institute

For more information on Corps partnership development, fee-for-service contracting, agreements, or to learn more about the VetWorks program and other MAI programs - such as their Land Stewards, FireCorps and Environment Programs, contact the MAI Recruitment:

503-504-5994

mtadamsinstitute.org

mtadamsinstitute.org/vetswork-environment

Serving Coastal Carolina Public Lands through Trail Building Education

Trail building professionals train and mentor Corpsmembers from Charleston while completing accessibility and sustainable trail projects on Coastal South Carolina Public Lands

The Sustainability Institute

Project Partners and Sponsors

South Carolina Recreational Trails Program

Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission

Johns Island County Park

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge

Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge

Chinook Associates

Coastal Carolina University

College of Charleston

FHWA Strategic Goals

Economic Strength; Equity; Transformation

Affinity Focus

African American – Charleston, SC

Project Focus

Trail Construction, Maintenance, and Restoration

Trail Structures, Facilities

Education and Training

Overview: Protecting Coastal South Carolina's Public Lands

Coastal South Carolina is home to many local, state, and federal wildlife refuges that manage miles of trails, waterways, and protected lowcountry ecosystems. Within the Charleston metro area, Johns Island County Park is managed by the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission (CCPR) and offers more than 20 miles of hiking and equestrian trails, campgrounds, and recreational facilities. Within an hour's drive are the Cape Romain and Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuges – part of a complex managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These refuges extend along more than 20 miles of coastal South Carolina and feature wetland marshes, waterways, historic landmarks, and ecosystems that host more than 300 migratory birds with threatened or endangered classifications.

Visitors and local South Carolinians visit the refuge complex to hike the trails, camp, birdwatch, and kayak the waterways. For years, Cape Romain and Waccamaw relied on students from local universities and volunteer groups to support the trail maintenance and vegetation management needs. This has been an invaluable service for the small refuge staff, however the volunteer groups may not have the restoration skills and experience needed for the trails and habitat work, in addition to needing to be monitored and managed by refuge staff.

Building New Local Land Management and Corps Partnerships

While identifying new local partnership opportunities, The Sustainability Institute (TSI) connected with Johns Island leadership and proposed a service learning and training opportunity for Corpsmembers that would offer hands-on trail building skills through a contracted trainer, mentorship from Johns Island staff, and direct service work at the park. This would also come at no cost to the host site due to being fully supported by an education and safety grant awarded directly to TSI from the South Carolina Recreational Trails Program (SC RTP). Johns Island was excited to host the Corpsmembers and worked on identifying Corps-appropriate projects, such as trail drainage and irrigation, introductory trail construction and maintenance, and bog bridge construction projects. Additionally, TSI arranged similar training and service-learning projects at Cape Romain and Waccama, who were existing partners and wanted to offer opportunities for the Corpsmembers to work with different types of agencies and trail building professionals.

Project Work

In March 2021, TSI deployed a crew of six Corpsmembers to Johns Island to work on their first service-learning project that would address the trail's accessibility and primitive drainage issues. With a combination of working with a trail building trainer contracted through Chinooks Associates, mentorship from CCPR staff, and TSI staff oversight, the Corpsmember's first project involved spreading gravel composite and resurfacing the trailhead surface to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines, and lessons on grading in order to make the trail accessible for different mobility users. The Corpsmembers serviced the irrigation and drainage to mitigate ongoing flooding issues. Bog bridges were constructed and installed from reclaimed telephone poles. Those who were already properly trained on chainsaw operations performed the sawyer work and the other Corpsmembers performed the installations.

The training and field work took place over one week at three separate locations: Cape Romain, Waccamaw, and Johns Island. The following are the project work outcomes, trail building lessons, and skills the Corpsmembers received during their sessions:

Outcomes:

- Enhanced 0.25 of trail that leads to an archery range
- Constructed and installed three bog bridges

Trainings:

- Trail construction
- Trail maintenance
- Trail resurfacing
- Trail drainage and irrigation
- Constructing ADA-compliant trails
- Bog bridge construction and installation
- Trail building tool and equipment safety

When working on the ADA-compliant multiuse trailhead at Johns Island, the Corpsmembers began by covering the current primitive trail with substrate material before spreading gravel and leveling the surface. The trainer and Corpsmembers had thorough discussions on the preplanning and evaluation of accessible trails, offering considerations for maintaining these types of trails for all mobility users through widening, grading, type of surface materials used, and proper drainage. CCPR and Johns Island staff discussed how to restore multiuse trails to mitigate flooding and erosion and what's needed to make trails resilient and sustainable in coastal lowcountry South Carolina.

Service-Learning Work and Field Training

TSI's collaboration with the land management agencies was an effort to train a cohort of Corpsmembers in new trail building skills to prepare them for career pathways in this industry. By offering rigorous, hands-on experience with guided mentorship alongside industry professionals, the Corpsmembers were offered portfolio-building preparations for jobs and careers following their Corps term of service. The service-learning work also provided the host sites much-needed restoration and maintenance, overseen by trail professionals that guided and mentored the crew and performed any immediate corrective work.

Additional lessons included site assessments, water flow and drainage, and mitigating erosion. Some CCPR staff visited the host site and worked alongside the Corpsmembers. One staff member was a land resource manager who became an invaluable mentor, sharing guidance, technical assistance and explaining the importance of the work by providing additional context about the public land space.

Funding Sources and In-kind Contributions

TSI was a direct recipient of an educational and safety programming grant through the South Carolina RTP. The award was for \$10,000 and fully supported the contracted trail building training sessions by Chinook's Associates and the service-learning work at the three host sites. TSI and CCPR funded the materials, tools, and equipment needed for the ADA-compliant trail work, which used foundation dollars and other diversified funding sources managed by TSI. AmeriCorps program funding was used to support the Corpsmembers' wages while they worked on service projects. Additional in-kind contributions included using volunteer time from two interns from local South Carolina universities. Interns from Coastal Carolina University and the College of Charleston spent time at the project site and offered their time and trail building experience towards Corpsmember mentorship.

Corpsmember Experience and Post-Program Success

The Corpsmembers appreciated the tangibles of working on the service-learning project and being able to see the results of their work immediately. They enjoyed working together at the new project sites and improving their communication and team-building skills. For example, during the irrigation and drainage lessons, they appreciated witnessing the water flow from the ditches they created and dug together as a team. Following the wrap-up of the project, one of the Corpsmembers was hired for a permanent position with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. Having served on the entirety of this service-learning project, the

Corpsmember was excited for the opportunity since the position aligned with her career aspirations and goals. Her time at Johns Island and the refuges, while brief, had a positive effect on her. The experience added hard and soft skills to her professional portfolio, new trail building applications, and industry experience that will support her on the next steps of her career.

Lessons Learned: Considerations for Fostering a Meaningful Affinity Crew Experience

When creating and fostering affinity and shared-experience programming that include primarily Corpsmembers of color, it is part of TSI's core values that these programs are created authentically with meaningful intention and with a purpose of truly increasing representation in the public lands and trail building space. Some of the Corpsmembers who serve on these projects have immediate needs, priorities, and come from under-resourced communities; they also carry work experiences that are transferable to the trail industry – such as in construction and green energy. Many apply to TSI with the enthusiasm and intention of developing their personal and professional lives through workforce development, expansion of educational goals, and working towards new industry career goals.

The TSI crew who served on this service-learning experience is considered an affinity crew due to the shared experience and journey that the Corpsmembers are on together. Additionally, there was intention around outreaching from the same historic Charleston community that is largely African American and historically, culturally, and politically disconnected from public land use and recreation. Building a meaningful affinity crew experience means making a conscious effort to engage new trail and stewardship professionals while acknowledging that additional support, resources, and programmatic considerations are needed to get the work done and create positive associations for trail building and public lands work so that more African American and communities of color are encouraged to consider this industry.

In terms of program continuity and representation, the field site supervisor from TSI served an important role on this project. He was a graduate of TSI, from the same Charleston community as the Corpsmembers, and is African American. He worked alongside the Corpsmembers and provided oversight, facilitation, and management of the crew. Having an alum who is representative of the same community, experience, and journey was invaluable. He was intentionally placed to lead this crew so the Corpsmembers can see themselves as trail professionals through the leadership of their counterpart. He was also an experienced sawyer and supported the trainer and field mentors so the Corpsmembers can receive more focused, in-depth training from a variety of individuals.

About the Corps

For two decades, The Sustainability Institute has been a leader advancing its region's sustainability work: advising climate action and sustainability plans; producing new models and programs for high-performing commercial and multifamily buildings; retrofitting existing homes

with energy and water upgrades; empowering families with skills and know-how; training a new young workforce of conservation leaders and climate activists; and restoring and protecting coastal habitats with nature-based solutions.

How to connect with The Sustainability Institute

For more information on Corps partnership development, fee-for-service contracting, agreements, project development, and Corpsmember training and workforce opportunities, contact the Director of Conservation: 843-529-3421

<http://sustainabilityinstitutesc.org/>

Work-Study Partnership at Bernheim Forest

A collaboration with a local state park is supporting a new generation of urban Louisville youth through green workforce and trail training

Urban Conservation Corps (YouthBuild Louisville)

Project Partners and Sponsors

YouthBuild Louisville

Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest

Kentucky Colonels

FHWA Strategic Goals

Economic Strength; Equity

Affinity Focus

African American – Louisville Metro Area

Project Focus

Trail Construction, Maintenance, and Restoration

Education and Training

Vegetation Management and Fire Fuels

Overview: History of Bernheim Forest and Its Commitment to Work-Study Partnerships

Located within the Louisville metro area, Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest (Bernheim) is an official state arboretum with more than 16,000 acres of wildlife sanctuary, trails, and outdoor exhibits, such as the popular Forest Giant sculptures and canopy tree walk. Bernheim makes up the largest privately-owned natural area in Kentucky and attracts more than 500,000 annual visitors who come to experience the woodlands, prairies, wetlands, and more than 35 miles of hiking trails.

Bernheim's core value is connecting people with nature and creating an inclusive, welcoming space for every guest regardless of race, religion, or origin. The forest was founded by a German-Jewish immigrant who had experienced exclusion and discrimination in his home country. With this being a driving factor, the name for the new forest would include the word "heim," meaning "home" in German, ensuring everyone who visits Bernheim feels welcome and at home. Today, Bernheim continues to practice these values through their commitment to engaging local communities and underserved youth on trail and stewardship projects. With the formation of the Work-Study program with the Urban Conservation Corps (UCC), the shared goals of increasing exposure to green spaces for young adults of color has been invaluable for the forest.

Project Work

During the 2021 summer and fall field season, UCC deployed crews to Bernheim to complete trail accessibility and invasive species service-learning projects that would help restore the natural flow of the trails that were overgrown by vegetation. Using hand tools provided by UCC,

the crew removed invasive bush such as honeysuckle, autumn olive, and Chinese privet from the trail corridors. The Corpsmembers also reblazed the trails by removing old worn-down markers and replacing them with eco-friendly painted blazes. The crew worked alongside Bernheim's horticultural team and removed approximately 150 cubic yards of primarily invasive honeysuckle across 10 miles of trail system and reblazed eight miles of trails.

The Bernheim and UCC partnership extends beyond just trail work. Every year, UCC manages three seasonal program sessions at Bernheim that include hands-on training, education, and service. The Corpsmembers have the opportunity to shadow forest staff, conduct research projects with mentors, and participate in forest management service projects. The UCC Corpsmembers also manage the FreshCorps market stand, a collaborative effort that offers farmers market produce to guests.

Outcomes

- Maintained and improved 10 miles of trails
- Removed 150 cubic yards of invasives
- Reblazed trail markers across eight miles of trails

Funding Sources and In-Kind Contributions

The Urban Conservation Corps (UCC) is administered and housed within YouthBuild Louisville, one of more than 175 national YouthBuild programs that provides workforce training and educational opportunities for opportunity youth and young adults. UCC participants – or Corpsmembers – are full-time AmeriCorps members; they receive a \$15,000 living allowance and a \$6,195 AmeriCorps Education Award upon successful completion of their program year. Because Corpsmember costs and program expenditures are covered by YouthBuild, UCC is able to provide crews and direct service at little to no cost to the partner. Additional program support was provided by the Kentucky Colonels, a local nonprofit who awarded UCC a small grant that allowed the Corps to purchase their own van. This small gesture helped tremendously with round trip and on-site travel to Bernheim.

Corpsmember Workforce Development and Program Structure

It is part of the UCC program that the Corpsmembers work closely with a job coach that provides career development services and facilitates their transition from their Corps service year to employment in a relevant field. In recent years, UCC has had several Corpsmembers start new careers in conservation, landscaping, and trail building. One Corpsmember in particular transitioned into a full-time position at Bernheim as their Community Ambassador, working within the forest's education department to foster the relationship between Bernheim and the urban Louisville community.

With workforce development a key focus of the UCC program, the Corpsmembers who served on the Bernheim work-study program receive the following training and industry-recognized certifications:

- OSHA 10 and HAZCOM
- CPR/First Aid

- Soft skills and financial literacy training (Summer Works)
- Roots of Success (green jobs curriculum and pre apprentice program)
- Urban Forestry - Citizen Forester (Southern Regional Extension Forestry)
- Forest and land Management training (Bernheim Forest);

UCC incorporates STEM practices through classroom instruction and projects that provide training in the field. Corpsmembers are certified in “Roots of Success,” an activity-based green jobs curriculum facilitated by UCC in a classroom setting. The program includes 50 weeks of 35 hours per week job training, hands-on service projects, and life skills. Young adults who already have their GED or high school equivalent are eligible to participate in the UCC 12-month program, investing 1,700 hours of service each to the community.

The participating UCC members complete various service projects which include:

- Rebuilding/Improving public parks and public trails
- Trail maintenance and invasive plant removal in local forests
- Food waste reduction
- Managing community market garden
- Tree planting and management projects
- Environmental stewardship education activities
- Weatherization and retrofit training

UCC Corpsmembers complete the above-mentioned projects with partner agencies through service-learning projects and concurrently complete in-class and hands-on training in UCC’s greenhouse and garden space, and in-the-field training at Bernheim. Each Corpsmember receives a uniform, necessary tools, and protective equipment to complete projects. Each are also considered AmeriCorps members and participate in hands-on Environmental Education and Career Readiness service activities. They are intentionally engaged in urban community projects while building green sector workforce skills and increasing their knowledge of agriculture, arboriculture, horticulture, and land management.

Supporting More Than Just Trail Projects

The Bernheim and UCC work-study program has been a transformational experience for the Corpsmembers and the forest staff. UCC largely works with and intentionally outreaches to African American young adults from the Louisville metro area program with the goal of preparing a new generation for the green sector workforce. Many of the Corpsmembers have immediate needs that are addressed concurrently while serving with UCC. Some were even experiencing homelessness while serving on the Bernheim project. A major benefit with being part of a YouthBuild program means that UCC has programmatic support systems in place that can cover the wrap-around services a Corpsmember may need so they can focus on the project work and their education goals while also getting their life back on track.

The Bernheim staff have also been positively affected by the UCC partnership and have enjoyed their time mentoring the Corpsmembers. When welcoming the first two summer 2021 cohorts, staff reported strong enthusiasm from the Corpsmembers, many of whom have not

worked at the forest before or are not accustomed to spending time on trails and green spaces. Working alongside and mentoring young people who have a minimal experience in green spaces recreationally or professionally – due to cultural, political, or historical inaccessibility – has reinforced the importance of supporting programs like UCC who have mission-driven goals of working with identity-centered crews.

About the Corps

YouthBuild Louisville's Urban Conservation Corps (UCC) is an environmental program engaging young adults in meaningful projects while building workforce skills preparing them for living-wage, green job sector careers. UCC trains opportunity youth ages 18-24, especially young people of color, in green-sector workforce skills through 170,000 collective hours of meaningful community service projects related to environmentalism and conservation in the urban setting.

How to connect with YouthBuild Louisville's Urban Conservation Corps

YouthBuild Louisville has the knowledge and drive to make larger positive impacts and is eager to work with other Corps programs and sponsors to find and fund new partnerships.

For more information on Corps partnership development, fee-for-service contracting, agreements, project development, and Corpsmember training and workforce opportunities, contact the Urban Conservation Corps Coordinator:

502.290.6121

conservation@yblky.org

Or reach out through one of the Facebook pages. From there, YouthBuild Louisville staff will discuss the feasibility of said partnership/project and work in a time(s) to further discuss possibilities.

www.yblky.org/environmental-corps

www.facebook.com/groups/yblucc

Wyoming Conservation Corps' Inaugural All-Women's Trail Crew

A crew developed, led, and managed by women promoted Corps organizational growth while completing trail and vegetation projects

Wyoming Conservation Corps

Project Partners and Sponsors

Wyoming Recreational Trails Program

Wyoming State Parks

University of Wyoming

Medicine Bow National Forest

Grand Teton National Forest Foundation

Pilot Hill Recreation Area

FHWA Strategic Goals

Safety; Equity; Climate and Sustainability

Affinity Focus

Women

Project Focus

Trail Construction, Maintenance, and Restoration

Education and Training

Vegetation Management and Fire Fuels

Background and Overview

Located in southeastern Wyoming and sharing a border with Colorado, the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest (Medicine Bow) hosts year-round recreational activities for approximately 1.7 million annual visitors. There are 10 wilderness areas, more than 1,000 recreational sites, scenic lakes, and more than 2,300 miles of backcountry trails spanning 3 million acres. The Laramie Peak Trail is a popular and challenging 10 mile out-and-back corridor that leads visitors to the highest Wyoming peak in the Laramie Range but has been impacted significantly over the years due to high visitor use. Medicine Bow has reported severe erosion, irrigation, tripping hazards, and other deferred and backlogged maintenance needs along the trail's corridor. Some of the adjacent backcountry wilderness trails have also not seen maintenance and restorative work in over a decade. This prompted the Medicine Bow staff to reach out to the Wyoming Conservation Corps (WYCC) to discuss partnership opportunities that would address the restorative and maintenance work needed along the Laramie Peak Trail and other wilderness sites. During this same period, WYCC was implementing their inaugural All-Women's Crew in preparation for the upcoming field season and pitched the idea of deploying the women's crew to Medicine Bow. This would be the first time the national forest hosted an affinity crew; they were very excited to support an initiative that empowers and supports women exploring the conservation and trail building workforce.

Wyoming Conservation Corps' All-Women's Trail Crew

For years, Wyoming Conservation Corps leadership explored the idea of a women's crew after Corps alumnas expressed a strong interest in having this type of program experience. Current

female Corpsmembers and alumnae pitched the idea to WYCC leadership in the hopes of creating an empowering and transformational experience for those who want to have that shared community and space with other women. Some of the members even promised to return for the subsequent field season if the women's crew was implemented. Taking this advice, WYCC conducted a university survey and developed an actionable plan that Corps staff pitched to the University of Wyoming where the Corps program is housed. The survey results were overwhelmingly supportive for the affinity crew and received immediate approval from university leadership. Unlike most Corps who implement affinity programming for the first time, WYCC did not experience many barriers in getting started. The university and Medicine Bow offered their full support in ensuring the crew would be prepared for the start of the field season by working with WYCC on the logistics, resources, training, and planning needed.

WYCC's All-Women's Trail Crew is an AmeriCorps-funded program that offers participants who are interested in pursuing a career in land management and conservation an opportunity to receive training, certifications, and hands-on field experience while serving on public land projects in Wyoming and completing work alongside partners and sponsors. Participants, or Corpsmembers, serve on a variety of public land projects that include trail maintenance and construction, habitat restoration, construction, GIS and surveying, and agricultural projects. The All-Women's Trail Crew is structured in a 'hitch' model – meaning the crews are comprised of two crew leaders and six crew members who work 6 - 10 days consecutively and then take 2 - 4 days off before their redeployment to the next project site. This type of crew model efficiently accomplishes project goals in a short amount of time while providing an immersive experience for the crew.

Project Work

In June 2022, WYCC's inaugural women's crew was deployed to Medicine Bow to work on the Laramie Peak trail and other adjacent backcountry wilderness trails. Comprised of seven Corpsmembers – two crew leaders and five Corpsmembers – the crew lived at a base camp for 10 days, working and navigating the remote backcountry areas of the Laramie Peak recreation area. They cleared overgrown brush and completed trail maintenance which had not been worked on for many years. The crew hiked the trails and fixed the erosion issues along the way, sometimes pausing to focus on restorative and erosion work by removing down logs, cutting and removing dead trees, fixing old irrigation systems, and adding new trail markers. Since this was a wilderness area and mechanical equipment was restricted, the crew packed in all their hand tools, such as crosscut saws and Pulaskis.

The crew received extensive orientation and training prior to their deployment to Medicine Bow that was provided and funded by WYCC. This included wilderness first responder training, a university-required leadership and conversation course, Leave No Trace; S2-12 chainsaw certification, wilderness first aid, food safety and orientation on backcountry camping. Sexual harassment training and awareness is something WYCC has always provided for all participants before the start of a field season, however when working on implementing the women's crew, female alums expressed offering a more expansive sexual harassment orientation due to past experiences working in the field.

WYCC provided the crew with all the food, field supplies, hand tools, service gear, transportation, personal protective gear, training, and orientation. The federal grant from Medicine Bow covers the Corpsmember wages and specific training needed for the work – such as crosscut training. Four to six hours of public land education per hitch were supported by Medicine Bow, with the goal of enhancing the overall experience for the crew and providing context for the work and land they are stewarding.

Funding Sources and In-Kind Contributions

Although federal, state, and nonprofit funding sources were used to support the women's crew, the majority of the funding was granted to the WYCC as a direct recipient of a Wyoming Recreational Trails Program grant of \$11,500 specifically for the women's crew and \$46,000 overall for WYCC's 2022 summer trails program. WYCC provided the required in-kind and cash match contributions for the RTP grant, which included WYCC's administrative and budgetary management, payroll, project tracking and oversight, and allowable funding from a Wyoming State Park's grant that was used as cost-share.

The University of Wyoming manages an AmeriCorps program in which some funding is leveraged to support the Corpsmembers' wages and the federal grant from Medicine Bow covers the remaining amount. A local nonprofit partner, the Pilot Hill Recreation Area, owns and stewards public land spaces in the Southeastern-Laramie area and offered match contributions towards the RTP grant. WYCC also was awarded grants from Wyoming State Parks that was used as allowable cost-share for the RTP grant. The Grand Teton National Park Foundation (GRTE) provided federal project funds and support for the crew. GRTE is a longtime partner of the WYCC and currently has contracts and agreements with the Corps' other 2022 field season crews working on trail and vegetation projects at Grand Teton.

Lessons Learned: How this Affinity Crew Program has Strengthened WYCC's Work and Organizational Culture

For years, the Wyoming Conservation Corps' leadership team has been led by three males. Through diversity, equity, and inclusion education, and also listening to requests from their female Corps alums and colleagues, the leadership team reflected on how to strengthen their organizational culture and provide a safe, inclusive, and transformational experience for all of their Corpsmembers. Since this was a new initiative, implementing this type of crew took more effort, support, and planning than a standard trail crew. WYCC wanted to ensure that a strong foundation was laid before deploying the crew on their first service project and this meant applying additional work and resources to ensure the crew is supported and prepared. WYCC provided more background and training for the Corpsmembers in the beginning of the field season, including extensive sexual harassment training and more time throughout the field season for conflict resolution, debriefing and discussion so feedback is shared with Corps leadership on how to improve the program experience.

The women's crew has been transformational for the Corps in terms of attracting and retaining Corpsmembers, particularly women. The post-pandemic world has been a very challenging time

across the Corps community when it comes to hiring and outreaching to Corps applicants, resulting in a recruitment crisis within some Corps programs. This is due to a number of issues that the larger Corps community is adjusting to and trying to understand. WYCC has largely been unaffected and the presence of the new women's crew has increased their recruitment by attracting applicants from not just Wyoming but from all over the country. Many of the women in the 2022 crew season shared that this is their first time in Wyoming. Learning about the women's crew has attracted Corpsmembers wanting to be a part of this experience and willing to front the costs for the travel and relocation to Wyoming. For additional recruitment support, WYCC used social media to advertise and found tremendous success in attracting women from all over the country.

About the Corps

The Wyoming Conservation Corps' mission is to promote individual development, stewardship, and education through localized national service. Participation in the WCC program provides members with an opportunity to learn firsthand the complexity involved with current natural resource management decisions in Wyoming. The Corps program is housed within the University of Wyoming which allows WYCC to provide academic credit to Corpsmembers during their service term. WYCC collaborates with agencies and industry companies working on public lands in Wyoming. Through this partnership, WCC provides low-cost conservation crews who accomplish tens of thousands of hours of labor each summer. In return, WCC participants get one-on-one interactions with environmental and natural resources professionals working on the ground. These partnerships support WCC in its efforts to advance understanding of complex environmental challenges, inspire young adults to become stewards of natural resources, benefit Wyoming public lands and provide collaborative service-learning opportunities.

How to connect with the Wyoming Conservation Corps

For more information on Corps partnership development, fee-for-service contracting, agreements, or to learn more about the women's crew and other identity-based programs – such as WYCC's veterans program – contact the WYCC Program Director:
307-766-3048
wyoconservationcorps.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.

National Partners

Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Parks Foundation
U.S. Forest Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
REI
Conservation Legacy
Chinook Associates
Bureau of Land Management

California

Yosemite National Park
DOI, Fire Management Leadership Board
CalTrans - California Department of Transportation
Crafton Hills College
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations
Anti-Recidivism Coalition

Colorado

Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument
Rosemont State Wildlife Area
South Platte Ranger District
Pike National Forest
City of Cañon City

Hawaii

Department of Land and Natural Resources
Hawaii Tourism Authority
Nakupuna Foundation
North Kohala community leaders

Kentucky

YouthBuild Louisville
Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest
Kentucky Colonels

New Mexico

El Morro National Monument
El Malpais National Monument
Vanishing Treasures Program
Pueblos of Acoma and Zuni

South Carolina

South Carolina Recreational Trails Program
Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission
Johns Island County Park
Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge
Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge
Coastal Carolina University
College of Charleston

Washington

King Conservation District
Tillamook Estuaries Partnership
Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership
Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery

Wyoming

Wyoming Recreational Trails Program
Wyoming State Parks
University of Wyoming
Medicine Bow National Forest
Grand Teton National Forest Foundation
Pilot Hill Recreation Area

List of Corps Featured in the Guide

Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps

Pueblo of Acoma Office
70 Pinsbaari Drive
Acoma, NM 87034
505-552-4084

Pueblo of Zuni Office
P. O. Box 1250
Zuni, NM 87327
505-870-0101

California Conservation Corps

CCC Headquarters
1719 24th Street
Sacramento, CA 95816
916-341-4430

Fresno/Monterey Bay
2536 N. Grove Industrial Drive
Fresno, CA 93727
559-458-0921

Mt Adams Institute

2453 WA-141
Trout Lake, WA 98650
509-395-3469

The Sustainability Institute

Environmental Conservation Corps
1850 Truxtun Avenue, Suite 200
North Charleston, SC 29405

Kupu

Hawaii Conservation Corps and
Kupu Aina Corps
677 Ala Moana Blvd, Suite 1200
Honolulu, HI 96813
(808) 735-1221

Mile High Youth Corps

417 E Vermijo Ave.
Colorado Springs, CO 80903
719-630-7421

Wyoming Conservation Corps

1615 Fraternity Row
Laramie, WY 82070
307-766-3048

YouthBuild Louisville

Urban Conservation Corps (UCC)
800 S Preston St
Louisville, KY 40203
502-290-6121

Reading List

The following reading list features books on environmental justice, history of public lands, and outdoor recreational experiences by writers of color. The authors explore deep connections, relationships and experiences with public lands, recreational experiences, environmental justice, and Indigenous conservation through an examination and lens of historical and structural racism that has shaped how people of color have and currently experience public lands.

The Adventure Gap

By James Edward Mills

As Long As Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice from Colonization to Standing Rock

By Dina Gilio-Whitaker

Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors

By Carolyn Finney

Braiding Sweetgrass

By Robin Wall Kimmerer

The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World

By Lauret Savoy, Alison Hawthorne Deming

Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil

By W. E. B. Du Bois

Haunted by Waters: A Journey Through Race and Place in the American West

By Robert Terry Hayashi

The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature

By J. Drew Lanham

Remembering Our Intimacies: Mo'olelo, Aloha, 'Āina, and Ea

By Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio

Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming the African American Environmental Heritage

by Dianne D. Glave

There's Something in the Water

By Ingrid Waldron

Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape

By Lauret Savoy

The Unlikely Thru-Hiker

By Derick Lugo

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