



# Conservation Corps and Transportation: Making the Connection

*A GUIDE TO TRANSPORTATION FUNDING PROGRAMS FOR SERVICE AND CONSERVATION CORPS*



**The Corps Network**  
666 Eleventh St., NW, Suite 1000  
Washington, DC 20001  
(P) 202.737.6272  
(F) 202.737.6277



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# INTRODUCTION

## Developing New Partnerships

Public land managers should know about a variety of resources that can help accomplish their missions. Young people are eager to work, and funding is available to get projects underway. To connect stewardship needs with the right workforce, this guide uses case studies from several States to explain how best to proceed. In moving forward with these initiatives, following are key guiding principles:

- Federal transportation funding can be applied to natural resource and recreation projects.
- Every State has programs in place to make funds available to appropriate projects.
- America's service and conservation corps are trained and ready to do the work.

## The Transportation Connection

Funding for America's surface transportation system is available primarily from the Federal Highway Trust Fund, which is managed by the U.S. Department of Transportation through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The mission of FHWA is "Enhancing Mobility through Innovation, Leadership, and Public Service."

FHWA provides expertise, resources, and information to improve the nation's highway system and its intermodal connections. The Federal-Aid Highway Program provides financial assistance to the States to construct and improve the National Highway System, other roads, bridges, and trails. The Federal Lands Highway Program provides access to and within, national forests and parks, Indian reservations, and other public lands by preparing plans, letting contracts, supervising construction, and inspecting bridges. FHWA conducts and manages a comprehensive research, development, and technology program. Two important funding programs for public lands work are:

- Recreational Trails Program (trails, related facilities, and trail-related environmental work)
- Transportation Enhancement Activities (bicycle and pedestrian facilities, safety and environmental improvements, scenic and historic highway programs, landscaping, historic preservation, and environmental mitigation)

## Goal of the Guide

Our purpose in this guide is to help more organizations, including service and conservation corps, access this important source of funding for stewardship of our public lands and resources. We also want to acquaint Federal and State land managers with the benefits of employing Corps members on a variety of projects. Finally, our goal is to help State resource and transportation agencies encourage the use of corps in their funding programs.



## Why Service and Conservation Corps?

Corps are State and local programs engaging primarily youth and young adults (ages 16-25) in service. Corpsmembers receive training and mentoring from adult leaders, a modest stipend, and opportunities for education and career preparation. By partnering with resource and recreation providers, these young people have a chance to do important work for our public lands. Many agencies see another important benefit: nurturing a pool of potential employees who are able to step into jobs with both training and enthusiasm.

## The Recreational Trails Program

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is an assistance program of FHWA which provides funds to the States for grants and educational programs. The goal of RTP is to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational activities. Nationwide, \$85 million is available for Federal FY- 2009, which ranging from about \$825,000 for the District of Columbia to more than \$6 million for California. Most States receive between \$1.1 and \$1.8 million annually.

Official guidance for RTP notes: "States are encouraged to enter into contracts and cooperative agreements with qualified youth conservation or service corps." For details of the RTP funding process see the section, "Guide for Project Sponsors."

## Transportation Enhancement Activities

State transportation agencies are the contacts for another program, Transportation Enhancement (TE) Activities. These projects must clearly relate to transportation, thus making the use of funds very specific. Official guidance for the TE Activities notes: "States are encouraged to enter into contracts and cooperative agreements with qualified youth conservation or service corps." However, few State agencies have turned to corps to access this type of funding.

Maine and Alaska have included corps in TE-funded projects. (See Case Studies.) Eligible TE activities include pedestrian and bicycle facilities, scenic and historic highway programs, landscaping and beautification, historic preservation, and environmental mitigation.

Each State's department of transportation is able to set its own funding priorities for TE projects. For example, one state may give preference to historic preservation projects while another state prefers to fund trail projects. Overall, since the program began, bicycle and pedestrian projects have been the most commonly funded project type. The sponsor for a TE project is usually a State, county, or city government. Nonprofit organizations or community groups that want to sponsor a TE project may work in partnership with a local government. To assist potential applicants, each State department of transportation and Federal Highway Administration division office has an individual responsible for overseeing TE projects. (See the Resources section for more information and State contacts.)

## State Recreational Trail Programs

RTP has been the source of most transportation-funded corps projects. Each State administers its own programs, usually through a State resource or park agency, although several States administer the program through a transportation agency.



In response to recreational needs, each State develops procedures to solicit projects from project sponsors and selects projects for funding. RTP encourages trail enthusiasts interested in a variety of activities to work together in providing a wide variety of recreational trail opportunities.

Several States provide encouragement to project sponsors to partner with corps. California's RTP application echoes the Federal language, encouraging applicants to "develop cooperative agreements with qualified youth conservation or service corps to perform trail construction and maintenance." Some States include contact information for corps organizations; others allow extra points on grant applications for using corps. Minnesota, for example, affords "special consideration" to projects that involve "urban youth corps workers such as the Minnesota Conservation Corps." Wyoming gives higher scores to projects that "will be accomplished solely by State of Wyoming youth service corps."

RTP funds may be used for most types of trail work, including:

- » Maintenance and restoration of existing trails
- » Construction of new trails
- » Development and rehabilitation of trail-related facilities
- » Purchase and lease of trail construction and maintenance equipment
- » Acquisition of easements or property for trails.
- » Assessment of trail conditions for accessibility and maintenance
- » Operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection related to trails



Each State determines its own priorities for project selection. Some States have their own restrictions about the kinds of projects they will select.

RTP generally provides an 80 percent Federal share and requires at least a 20 percent match. However, there are exceptions and some program flexibility available to States. Many western States may allow a higher Federal share. A few States require a 50 percent match. (See the RTP Federal Share and Matching Requirements on FHWA's RTP Guidance webpage, and be aware that each State may have additional flexibility or requirements.)

## Funding for Motorized Trail Projects

Federal legislation requires that States use 40 percent of their RTP funds for "diverse recreational trail use," 30 percent for nonmotorized recreation, and 30 percent for motorized recreation. Only Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, and Rhode Island are exempt from the requirement regarding motorized recreation. Motorized recreation involves off-highway vehicles (OHVs) such as trail motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), four-wheel drive vehicles, and snowmobiles.

One of the goals of RTP is to provide funds to help agencies do a better job of managing motorized activities. Some of the greatest needs for resource protection are referred to by Federal agencies as "unmanaged recreation." Problems include erosion, impacts on sensitive habitat, and creation of unauthorized routes. While motorized recreation might not seem to be the ideal match for corps missions, many projects can involve typical corps work, including trail maintenance, fencing, signing, revegetation, and other environmental improvements. In the Midwest and East, States have been developing new OHV riding areas and parks, which may also provide opportunities for corps employment.

Corps have established good partnerships with several State OHV programs. Many States have funds from State vehicle fees or fuel taxes which can be used to match Federal RTP funds. Most jurisdictions also report that there is less competition for grants in the motorized recreation category. Following are examples of successful motorized projects in which corps have participated:

- » The Vermont Youth Conservation Corps constructed "kiosk assembly kits" for trail information and rider education. ATV clubs assembled and installed the kiosks.
- » In Colorado, the Mile High Youth Corps is helping a user group locate and mark 20 miles of new single track in the Rampart Range Motorized Recreation area. The Western Colorado Conservation Corps is constructing six miles of trail on the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Bangs Canyon area.
- » The California Conservation Corps and Student Conservation Association have worked on a variety of motorized trail projects in California including trail repair, signage, and habitat restoration work.

## Federal and State Requirements

The path to transportation funding is through the appropriate State agency. (See the section, "Guide for Project Sponsors.") Each State has its own procedures to solicit and select RTP projects for funding. Project sponsors should develop their proposals sufficiently so that, assuming approval, projects can move quickly to implement the project.

## Streamlining the Application Process

Many States are doing as much as possible to streamline their application process. There is a specific timetable for the initial application to be submitted, followed by a review process and notification of selection for funding. Grant recipients must sign a contract or other agreement to perform the work detailed in the application. Work cannot begin on the project until all needed information has been submitted and acknowledged.

Applicants are generally responsible for meeting legal requirements and documenting the process. Working with a partner who can more easily take on these responsibilities is often an advantage. Most States have a detailed checklist to clarify these requirements and can provide help to funding applicants. Project sponsors must also document compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other Federal environmental regulations.

Some States also have their own environmental review process. Most eligible projects will qualify as Categorical Exclusions under NEPA (23 CFR 771.117). Each project, however, should be reviewed to ensure that it does not have a significant impact on critical habitat or other natural and cultural resources.

## Accessibility

People with mobility limitations or differences expect public lands to be accessible for their enjoyment and full participation in outdoor recreation. Standards for addressing Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements are progressing towards finalization at an undetermined date. In the meantime, FHWA urges sponsors of projects for pedestrians to use the best available guidelines. (See Resources.) FHWA notes that "Recreational trails primarily designed and constructed for use by equestrians, mountain bicyclists, snowmobile users, or off-highway vehicle users, are exempt from accessibility requirements even though they have occasional pedestrian use." Routine maintenance or repair of existing trails without significant changes are also exempt from meeting the accessibility requirements.

Absent articulate standards, project managers should follow the spirit of the ADA and build or improve trails to a high standard of accessibility. Corps can be trained in the technical skills needed to provide valuable services, accomplishing accessibility goals with handwork that cannot be provided by mechanized trail building, building trails on native soil or improved natural surfacing with careful attention to grade and side slope.

## Accessing Transportation Funds

The Case Studies that follow highlight some of the many types of projects that have included corps as partners in transportation funding. Some corps have found that these funds are essential to engaging young people. The broad goals of transportation programs have encouraged some creative thinking when developing new projects. However, the States are the key to successful partnerships, and each has its own specific goals and grant procedures. The first step for corps should be to contact their State's RTP and TE program administrators, and become familiar with the opportunities.

“The key to these Recreational Trails Program projects is meeting the needs of the three partners: the land manager, the State agency charged with administering the funds, and the corps. For the corps, we are looking for quality service projects to support our youth development missions. Challenging work with meaningful results for our communities and public lands has proven to be a winning recipe for our programs – from the CCC in the 1930s to modern day youth corps.”

—Jono McKinney, Montana Conservation Corps



## Guide for Project Sponsors

These suggestions will help communities, organizations, agencies, and conservation and youth corps develop projects for funding. As a project sponsor, you should:

- » Contact your State (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreails/rtpstate.htm>) to ascertain the application deadlines, program requirements, and criteria for project selection. Applications are available on most State websites.
- » Prepare a project development plan. Identify the issues and steps that are critical to the project development process. What are the trail needs? What can you do realistically?
- » What are the planning requirements? Does your project meet the goals of, a statewide or metropolitan transportation plan and/or a statewide trail plan? Projects using FHWA funds must be incorporated into a statewide transportation improvement program (STIP) or, if in a metropolitan area, in a metropolitan transportation improvement program (TIP).
- » Develop a workable project that meets the program requirements and eligible categories.
- » Get public support for the project. How does the project benefit the community? Are there other potential project sponsors?
- » Find other funding sources. Some State or local governments may provide matching funds, but the project sponsor often has to provide most or all the match. Note: you can use RTP funds to match other Federal programs, or use other Federal funds to match RTP funds.
- » Consider donations of materials and services, including volunteer labor.
- » Consider how to involve youth conservation or service corps in the project. (See <http://www.corpsnetwork.org/> for information on youth corps.)
- » Consider training and skill needs for staff, volunteers, youth corps, contractors, or others. (See links to training opportunities at <http://www.NTTP.net>.)
- » Develop a good project design, keeping safety and security in mind.
- » Consider the natural environment in which the project is located.
- » Consider community benefits.
- » Consider user needs and desires, including use by people with disabilities.

- » Consider potential problems:
  - Environmental impacts — these must be minimized and mitigated, and may require some documentation.
  - Permits — various permits may be needed before submitting the project proposal.
  - Possible opposition — some individuals may oppose a project for various reasons, including concerns about property rights, liability, safety, security, noise, and historic archaeological or environmental impacts.
- » Complete the project application:
  - Make sure you fill it out completely — States often reject incomplete applications.
  - Make sure you fill it out clearly — exactly what are you going to do?
  - Make sure you fill it out accurately — make sure numbers add up and facts check out.
  - Don't ask for funds for items that aren't eligible — you risk the rest of your application.
  - Don't add information that isn't necessary for project approval; it may make your application confusing and it wastes time for reviewers.
  - Don't generate letters of support unless the State requires them, and then limit the letters to what the State requires. Most letter-writing campaigns only annoy reviewers because these letters rarely add any substance for them to consider.
- » If your project is approved, get to work! States will withdraw project approval if a sponsor does not show evidence of project progress within a reasonable time frame.

Some potential RTP projects may be eligible for other FHWA funding programs. For more program information, access the following sources:

- » Recreational Trails Program: [www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreails](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreails)
- » Transportation Enhancement Activities: [www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te)
- » National Scenic Byways Program: [www.bywaysonline.org](http://www.bywaysonline.org)
- » Federal Lands Highways Program: [flh.fhwa.dot.gov/](http://flh.fhwa.dot.gov/)

For projects on Federal lands, contact your local Federal Land Management agency. These agencies may apply for RTP, TE, and Byways funds through the States. A few States require Federal land management agencies to apply through a unit of State or local government.



## Resources

The Recreational Trails Program website sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is the best source for guidance and Federal RTP policies: [www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails).

For policies and funding in your State, consult the State RTP Administrators List to find program contacts and websites: [www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/rtpstate.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/rtpstate.htm).

The Coalition for Recreational Trails presents awards each year for outstanding projects funded through state RTP grants. The “Youth Conservation/Service Corps” award is one of several categories intended to highlight effective use of RTP funding: [www.americantrails.org/awards/CRTawards.html](http://www.americantrails.org/awards/CRTawards.html).

For many resources on trail planning, design, construction, management, accessibility, funding, training, for both motorized and nonmotorized trails, see the National Trails Training Partnership Resources & Library at [www.americantrails.org/resources/index.html](http://www.americantrails.org/resources/index.html).

FHWA encourages project sponsors for trail projects to use the accessibility guidelines proposed in the Access Board’s Regulatory Negotiation Committee on Accessibility for Outdoor Developed Areas Final Report found at [www.access-board.gov/outdoor/outdoor-rec-rpt.htm](http://www.access-board.gov/outdoor/outdoor-rec-rpt.htm). Projects within highway or street rights-of-way should use accessibility guidelines proposed by the Access Board for Public Rights-of-Way: <http://www.access-board.gov/prowac/>.

The FHWA Transportation Enhancement Activities site program details. See: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/index.htm>

The National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse (NTEC) provides TE project examples, a database of TE projects, resources for using TE funds, and links to State TE contacts and programs: [www.enhancements.org/](http://www.enhancements.org/).

The Corps Network, the voice of the nation’s 135 service and conservation corps, provides resources and links to member organizations: [www.CorpsNetwork.org](http://www.CorpsNetwork.org).



Maine’s “Recreational Trail Grant Program 2009 Application” includes a list of goals that are good examples of the elements addressed by a wide range of successful projects across the country:

- Trails that provide linkages with existing or planned networks
- Trails that serve a wide spectrum of users
- Proposals that address landowners’ concerns
- Trails that provide relatively high use levels
- Proposals that provide “close-to-home” trails
- Proposals that enhance tourism and economic development
- Proposals that facilitate trail use for youngsters, seniors, and persons with disabilities
- Projects that are well planned
- Trails that are destination-oriented
- Trails that further SCORP [Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan] or other established planning goals
- Multiple use trail projects that address conflicts between user groups
- Proposals that have adequate matching resources
- Proposals that consider operation and maintenance needs
- Projects that leverage other private and public funding sources
- Projects that rehabilitate existing, well-used trails
- Projects that preserve rights-of-way for public recreation purposes
- Trails that provide high levels of user safety
- Trails that provide aesthetic or cultural benefits to users
- Projects that provide for reasonable longevity



# BONNEVILLE SHORELINE TRAIL, UTAH

The Bonneville Shoreline Trail (BST) is an important regional project for several Utah counties. It is planned to run for over 300 miles along the foothills bordering the main population centers of the State, from the Idaho border south to Provo and beyond.

The Utah Conservation Corps (UCC) became involved in building a technically difficult section of this long-distance trail. As a multi-agency effort, it provides a good model for how youth corps can partner in a large project. The City of Logan took the leadership role in planning the project, dealing with land issues, and writing the grant application. The UCC role was to develop the relationship with the city, wait for resolution of the land issues, and be available when the project was ready to start.

## Multi-agency Cooperation:

The City of Logan held a series of meetings to promote the Bonneville Shoreline Trail concept and encourage public comment. One of these meetings provided the opportunity for UCC staff to learn more about the proposed work, and to introduce the city to the capabilities of the UCC.

The trail corridor is close to UCC headquarters at Utah State University, which made this a very convenient location for the project. The city's Parks and Recreation Department took the lead in the grant-writing process. In addition to city-owned land the trail also crosses national forest lands, which made cooperation of the Logan Ranger District recreation staff essential. The project also had the support and involvement of local nonprofit groups, in particular, the Bonneville Shoreline Trail Coalition and the Cache Trails Coalition.

## Cost Effectiveness of the UCC

The UCC role in recruiting and managing volunteers was an important contribution to the project. It heightened community engagement in the project, and the amount of work done by the volunteers has a significant and measurable value. It is easy to quantify the feet of trail built, surfacing material applied, and finish work performed. The dollar equivalent of this amount of work was used to demonstrate the true value of corps involvement.

## Funding and Grants

Primary funding for the project was awarded by the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) through grant funds administered by Utah State Parks. The State awarded the grant to the project sponsor, the City of Logan, in August 2003. All funding awarded under Utah's RTP program requires a 50/50 sponsor match. The match may be comprised of cash, in-kind services, volunteer labor, or donations. Upon completion of the project, the sponsor submits a request for reimbursement of cost to the State. A final inspection is completed, and payment is made.



(Before)



(After)



## The Trail Project

The BST runs at a level of several hundred feet above the valley below. The trail takes its name from the ancient Lake Bonneville, from the Ice Age, which was nearly as large as Lake Michigan. This vast expanse of water left a distinct line where waves cut terraces into the steep hillsides. The modern trail provides great views as it follows what was once the wave-lapped margin of this lake.

The project, as developed by the City of Logan, runs from Logan Canyon north to Green Canyon, two popular access points to public lands along the mountains. The original concept was a narrow footpath, but in order to meet State standards a wider “bench cut” trail across the steep side slopes was needed.

There were four major aspects of the trail project:

- » Design and layout of the trail by the Forest Service and the city
- » Mechanized trail work by the city
- » Volunteer work organized for National Trails Day by UCC
- » UCC work with a trail crew

A Forest Service trail supervisor did trail design work on the national forest portion of the route and advised the city on trail layout. Logan Parks and Recreation Department then began work on construction of a mile of trail tread with a SWECO trail-building machine.

National Trails Day is a nationwide effort (coordinated nationally by the American Hiking Society), much like Earth Day, which aims to involve the public in construction and maintenance of trails across America. With regard to the trail project, community members were involved through the National Trails Day volunteer project on Saturday, June 5, 2004. Work began at the mouth of Green Canyon heading south along the Bonneville Shoreline Trail alignment. The project was sponsored by the Utah Conservation Corps, Cache Trails Coalition, and the US Forest Service. More than 100 volunteers participated in the work of spreading gravel base for a one-mile stretch of the trail in one day.

The UCC fielded a six-person crew with a crew leader for their part of the project over a six-week period. The work consisted of constructing roughly a mile-length of trail corridor along a steep side slope. This kind of situation is more suited to work with hand tools than with mechanized techniques. UCC workers are 18-25 years old, the majority being students at Utah State University, which sponsors UCC through its Division of Student Services. All corps members receive training in basic trail work with Forest Service crews and supervisors.

## Benefits of the Project

The completed section is one of the most heavily used trails in this part of Utah. With their proximity to a major university and urban area, the trailheads for the new path are readily accessible by many people. As a segment of the Bonneville Shoreline Trail, the project has brand name recognition. For the Utah Conservation Corps, the trail provides a highly visible example of the kind of work it can complete. Because the trail is a regional priority with good public support, there will be years of future projects as the work progresses. For the communities of the Cache Valley as well as the Forest Service, the success of the trail has spurred even more interest in connecting trails and providing access to public lands. Finally, several UCC members have been hired as seasonal employees by the Forest Service based on their experience in building a quality trail.

## Key Points and Lessons Learned

Programs do best when the program:

- » Addresses priority trail projects as identified in current planning documents
- » Engages planners and outdoor recreation staff in discussion of proposed and potential projects
- » Gets involved with other nonprofit groups in the region that address outdoor recreation and resource stewardship
- » Documents the real value and cost effectiveness of working with corps
- » Reviews the budgets of other local trail projects to accurately identify costs of materials, equipment, and agency crews, as well as corps

## For More Information:

Bonneville Shoreline Trail  
[www.bonnevilleshorelinetrail.org](http://www.bonnevilleshorelinetrail.org)

Trails Program Coordinator  
 Division of Parks and Recreation  
 Department of Natural Resources  
 PO Box 146001  
 Salt Lake City UT 84114-6001  
 (801) 538-7344  
[www.stateparks.utah.gov/grants](http://www.stateparks.utah.gov/grants)

Utah Conservation Corps  
 7205 Old Main Hill  
 Logan, UT 84322-7205  
 (435) 797-0964  
[ucc@cc.usu.edu](mailto:ucc@cc.usu.edu)  
[www.usu.edu/ucc](http://www.usu.edu/ucc)





# MONTANA CONSERVATION CORPS

The Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) has been successful for several years in generating new funds for project work and in creating new partnerships with project sponsors. The success has largely been due to the efforts of MCC staff in writing successful grant proposals, understanding the needs of project sponsors, and in looking for opportunities.

The approach can be summarized in these typical steps:

- » Agencies, communities, and corps meet to discuss potential projects.
- » Partners sort out project ideas and select those most appropriate for corps work.
- » The project leader identifies potential matching funds and other interested partners.
- » The project leader writes grant applications for RTP funds that meet the State's funding goals.

## Developing a viable project

MCC's goal is to engage in multi-faceted projects that result in a good experience for crews as well as a success for sponsors. While every project has its own unique aspects, there are several points to look for. To begin with, the project should be large enough for an interesting challenge, but small enough that a crew can handle it from start to finish. Additionally, the project should provide a tangible sense of accomplishment, rather than the feeling of being handed a list of chores that never get done.

Land managers should have the responsibility for technical issues in trail design and layout while MCC focuses on doing the work. Project sponsors have their own ideas about standards and construction requirements, so the goal is to make sure all partners agree before getting into the middle of potential problems with design or trail building techniques.

Safety is another essential requirement. Staff need to be sure that the crews can do the work safely, and that tasks are within their capabilities. For example, are enough crewmembers certified in chain saw use? Does the sponsor have enough people to supervise difficult work such as building a rock wall?

It all comes down to mutual understanding: the sponsor has to know the capabilities of the crews, and the MCC staff has to be familiar with the specific needs and expectations of the land managers. To ensure coming up with appropriate projects, MCC can send seasoned staff to proposed sites to scope out the work.



## Community-based projects

One of the trends in trail work is that towns and counties sponsor more projects. Communities often have big plans and a shortage of funds; as a result, they are eager for partners who can help stretch limited resources. These projects have some different challenges from the familiar national forest and wilderness work.

In working with cities or nonprofits, there can be a big difference in technical support. Where a community needs more assistance, MCC staff can provide detailed input on the trail route, design, and construction techniques.

The increasing use of machines to build trails is another issue. On some projects, crews come in and help finish the work previously done by the trail building machine. More typically, MCC does the prep work: felling trees, pulling up stumps, and clearing the corridor, followed by mechanized tread construction.

## Variety of projects and work experience

Projects are the avenue for MCC to share the skills and values that enable young people to grow. Wilderness work provides the opportunity to learn traditional skills, to use crosscut saws, and bring in materials with pack stock. But young idealists also learn about the realities of Federal land management, which involves motorized recreation and many other activities. Crewmembers come to respect the common values that most public land users share. People riding motorcycles as well as bicyclists may stop and compliment the work crew. The challenge for MCC is to learn to work with different agency missions while still providing quality work.

## Generating new funds

The key to the success of MCC's efforts has been to generate new funding for stewardship of public lands. With agency funds shrinking, the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) has provided a great opportunity. With more than \$1 million available each year for trail work, MCC takes the lead in writing and securing funds for outdoor recreation and stewardship.

Another important source of funding is the National Forest Foundation (NFF). In addition to trail maintenance, NFF has been most interested in wilderness stewardship, which includes everything from removing old development debris and fences to controlling non-native plants. Crews have even repaired dams in designated Wilderness, using rigging, rope work, and other traditional non-mechanized techniques.

Both NFF and RTP funds can be used on a single project. RTP funds can be used for straightforward trail maintenance and construction. NFF funds can be applied to provide additional Wilderness benefits such as vegetation management or campsite inventory. NFF requires a one-to-one match; therefore, a \$10,000 grant requires a \$10,000 match. With RTP, the more leverage the better, so the commitment of NFF funds helps make the grant application more competitive. The 2005 reauthorization of the Federal surface transportation program specifically authorized the use of RTP dollars as non-Federal match. This has enabled MCC to leverage the RTP grants to expand the scope of projects with NFF funding, adding additional weeks of corps employment.

Another value for project sponsors is that corps may be able to provide matching dollars. While MCC charges \$3,600 a week for a crew, MCC contributes a \$1,000-per-week match from its AmeriCorps grant toward costs for crew member living stipends and staff supervision, tools, supplies, training, and administration.

## Working with project sponsors

For MCC, the biggest benefit from RTP funding is the ability to open the door to new opportunities. With MCC writing a successful grant application, there is new money on the table. However, it can take years to come up with an outstanding project. Sponsors are typically Federal land managers who feel the need to work within their own agencies.

Once an agency has a positive experience with the corps, it is more likely to bring projects to MCC. The real test is in how sponsors see the value of MCC work. To illustrate, the Forest Service receives funds earmarked specifically to clear trails of "blow down" timber in wilderness areas. Even where these projects are not suitable for matching with RTP or other funds, land managers see the benefit of using MCC crews.



## Benefits

For project sponsors, the Conservation Corps crews are highly productive, versatile, teachable, and cost-effective. Corps have also proven an effective means to develop a future workforce, prepared with the skills and agency understanding to be quality employees.

For crew members the varied situations offer valuable lessons in working with different agencies, tools, levels of maintenance, and user expectations. The experience gives MCC graduates a competitive edge in getting jobs with the Forest Service and National Park Service.

Besides the Federal agencies, partners have included communities, neighborhood organizations, land trusts, and local trail groups. The successful use of partnerships has also built long-term credibility for the MCC in managing complex projects with a variety of funding sources.

The RTP funds have provided a catalyst for a variety of trail and stewardship projects. The availability of funding has enabled MCC to assume greater leadership in proposing projects. Success in proposal writing has also created more opportunities with MCC as an essential partner.

### Key Points and Lessons Learned

Agencies and land managers can create successful projects by:

- » Clarifying agency needs and regulations in trail and land management
- » Engaging the corps in discussion on skills, expectations, and project management
- » Sharing ideas and information on potential projects with corps and other partners
- » Planning projects that address the goals of State funding programs, both as written, and as expressed by staff and members of the State trails advisory committee
- » Helping to identify matching funds and in-kind contributions.

## Proposal writing tips from Tim Dwyer, MCC Regional Supervisor

- » Get the dates and deadlines right for giving public notice, seeking agency sign-offs, and submitting applications.
- » Be clear and descriptive even where the project addresses a general need such as maintenance. Detail the specific work to be done, and include anything else that needs to be done if time and resources permit.
- » Don't try to write a proposal when you or the sponsor aren't clear on what the project is going to involve. Be sure to spend time on the ground and be sure any tough decisions are made.
- » Spend enough time with the sponsors to learn the history of the projects, the trail links and connections, and sensitive issues as well as the benefits.
- » Be as specific and detailed as possible, but not too long. Show the effort that has gone into research and how much knowledge you actually have of the project.
- » Ask partners to prioritize the work, so if they don't get all the funds requested, you could still do the most important things. You can also apply for a future year grant to complete the work or extend the project.
- » When dealing with matching funds, make sure your funding potential is solid. Don't jeopardize a good project by trying to leverage too many funding sources.
- » Provide good documentation: take photos and take good notes to make it easy to write the final report and progress reports if needed.

### For more information, contact the following sources:

Montana Conservation Corps, Inc.  
206 N Grand Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59715  
(406) 587-4475  
[www.mtCorps.org](http://www.mtCorps.org)

Recreational Trails Grant Program  
Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks  
PO Box 200701  
Helena MT 59620-0701  
(406) 444-4585  
[fwp.mt.gov/recreation/grants/rtp/default.html](http://fwp.mt.gov/recreation/grants/rtp/default.html)



# CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL



The Continental Divide Trail shows how Conservation Corps from different States can be brought together effectively in a major, multi-year project. A key innovation is to bring crews together with the identity of “Continental Divide Trail Alliance Youth Corps.” Recreational Trails Program grants have been awarded from State programs along with funding from Federal budgets, foundations, and volunteer resources. National recognition and support also contribute to continued success. The project has been in operation for several years and the strength of the partnerships should carry the work forward for many more years.

## Project scope and issues

Running from Mexico to Canada, the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) is a designated National Scenic Trail. Like the Pacific Crest Trail and the Appalachian Trail, the CDT runs north-south along the ridge of a major chain of mountain ranges. Along its 3,100-mile route, the CDT accesses some of the most wild and scenic areas in the United States.

The Continental Divide Trail Alliance (CDTA) was formed in 1995 to assist the Federal land management agencies in building and managing the trail. The goal of CDTA is to complete the entire trail through five States while “conserving the environment and promoting the well-being of all who use it.”

Several Conservation Corps have served as important resources in building the CDT. For these groups, the trail is a major source of pride, as well as employment, year after year. Montana and Colorado each have Conservation Corps that provide crews specifically for improving and extending the trail. Under the banner of the Continental Divide Trail Alliance Youth Corps, three regional organizations bring crews together for CDTA projects. In addition to the Montana Conservation Corps (MCC), they are the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps – Colorado (RMYC) and the Southwest Conservation Corps - Colorado (SCC).

A key objective of CDTA is creating an identity for the crews working on the trail. They receive CDTA T-shirts for work and special polo shirts for taking part in public presentations. In 2009, crews will have business cards to give to people they meet.

A full day of orientation helps the crew learn the facts of CDTA; at the same time, they also get a sense of being part of something really big. Young people who are developing their own identities seem to respond to this connection to the history and stories of America's long-distance trails. It is a way to contribute: to see results, to feel pride. It's not someone telling them what's important or what to believe. They experience it by themselves--and for themselves.



## Recognition

In 2007, the CDTA Youth Corps project received a Recreational Trails Program Annual Achievement Award. The Coalition for Recreational Trails (CRT) presents these awards in June each year for outstanding projects funded through state RTP grants. The "Youth Conservation/Service Corps" award is one of several categories intended to highlight effective use of RTP funding.

Four projects in Colorado were part of this RTP grant and resulted in the construction of 15 miles of new trail. In New Mexico, CDTA Youth Corps completed five projects in the Burro Mountains and Aspen Mountain areas, and crews worked four weeks to build five miles of the CDT. In Wyoming, corpsmembers and volunteers in partnership with the Forest Service completed seven miles of major trail reconstruction as well as turnpikes, bog bridges, drainage structures, and other improvements.

## Funding Sources and Challenges

The biggest funding issue with CDT, as in many areas of vast public lands, is declining Federal recreation budgets. The RTP funds have helped the trail project by serving as a source of ongoing and dependable resources for youth corps work. To supplement or match the RTP funds, other grants have been made through Colorado's share of State lottery dollars. The success of this vast undertaking is also largely due to Federal appropriations through the land management agencies. These infusions of funds have been provided for the CDT in the recreation budgets of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Other major funders of the trail work have included the National Forest Foundation, the Fausel Foundation, and REI, an outdoor merchandise company.

In 2007, MCC contracted with CDTA to manage crews in Montana, much in the way that RMYC and SCC's CDTA-sponsored crews operate in Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. Two CDTA Youth Corps crews in Montana and northwest Wyoming were planned for 2008 but, as budget problems developed for the Federal partners, projects were cancelled for the entire year. By contrast, RTP-funded work can be planned with more certainty because grant applications and contracts take place one-to-three years in advance.

## Collaboration on a Large Scale

A long-distance trail will be completed only with commitment and cooperation among many interested parties. The CDT is a larger and more complex partnership than most youth corps efforts. As the CDTA maintains the public identity for the project, each partner takes on its role as contractor for specific parts of the job. A great deal of flexibility is required, as roles and opportunities evolve.

Because Federal budgets have their ups-and-downs, it helps for several partners to be working on funding opportunities. In writing grant proposals RMYC, in many cases, is the organization that compiles the application for State funds, while most of the details of trail work and scheduling typically come from the Forest Service. Dedication to sustainable trail design and high-quality construction, however, is a constant among all partners.

## Presentations to the Public

An important aspect of CDT Corps experience is learning to do public presentations. During the last week the crew is together, members present programs about their work to schools, organizations, and community meetings. They can explain the importance of CDT and how the corps has helped them learn. For the short term, this provides a good tool for developing community support for grants and projects. More importantly, for the long term, the young people who talk enthusiastically about their hard work are likely to become the next generation of stewards of our public lands.

## Benefits

Because the Continental Divide Trail is well known, it is a more attractive project than routine work. Because it is a long-term project with years of work behind it and ahead, the corps gains in experience in the type of work and standards expected by the sponsors. Young people really want to work on the CDT. Many come to the corps already knowing about the Trail. It represents prestige and experience for returning crew members, and the series of complex projects provides a proving ground for dedicated crew leaders.

For funders, the trail follows a plan toward a measurable goal; grants are seen as contributing to a clear public benefit. Land managers increasingly rely on





outside interests to find money and develop partnerships. For CDTA, qualified project managers are ready with a dependable work force for the next season. For elected officials, there is wide support from rural citizens and large, well-established environmental groups. Communities increasingly regard sustainable tourism as a way to develop a future economy to replace the extractive industries of the last century. For the media, it's a great story with great images: young people hard at work, smiling volunteers caring for public lands, and promotion of the region's scenic beauty.

## Key Points and Lessons Learned

To work effectively on large, complex projects, agencies, organizations, and corps should:

- » Work together to operate a branded corps program rather than replicate existing agency programs
- » Be flexible and open to new types of work and partnerships
- » Have experienced, committed crews, as well as supervisors, available for technical work
- » Create dedicated crews for whom the project is a source of pride
- » Develop relationships with established, well-funded sponsors and partners
- » Seek opportunities for awards and media coverage that get the attention of decision makers, agency heads, and elected officials.
- » Develop ties with local public education officials and include crew members as advocates for the corps experience

## Ambassadors for Public Lands

The Continental Divide Trail a complex project which snakes through a vast area of local communities, has generated concern. The idea of a new trail cutting through people's communities is not an easy sell, especially in New Mexico. In talking to the public, trail advocates are beginning to realize that there is more at stake than just cutting a path. The real goal is building an image of the trail as an integral part of communities along the route.

When corps members stand up in a town meeting, they gain stature and confidence. People in the audience get a clear picture of the trail's real benefit: a way of reaching young people. Rural areas and small towns are looking for any means to keep young people connected and positive. Seeing the real accomplishments of the corps members, communities recognize the trail as an asset, a source of pride. It also presents a community development opportunity: a way to promote events and tourism, and to protect natural settings while bringing in new resources. For the young people of the Continental Divide Trail Alliance Youth Corps, trail work is a great opportunity to help communities achieve these goals.

## For more information, Contact:

Continental Divide Trail Alliance Youth Corps  
[www.americantrails.org/awards/CRT07awards/cdt07CO.html](http://www.americantrails.org/awards/CRT07awards/cdt07CO.html)

Continental Divide Trail Alliance  
PO Box 628 Pine, CO 80470  
(303) 838-3760  
[info@cdtrail.org](mailto:info@cdtrail.org)  
[www.cdtrail.org](http://www.cdtrail.org)

Montana Conservation Corps, Inc.  
206 N Grand Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59715  
(406) 587-4475  
[mcc@mtCorps.org](mailto:mcc@mtCorps.org)  
[www.mtcorps.org](http://www.mtcorps.org)

Rocky Mountain Youth Corps  
PO Box 775504  
Steamboat Springs, CO 80477  
(970) 879-2135  
[info@rockymountainyouthcorps.com](mailto:info@rockymountainyouthcorps.com)  
[www.rockymountainyouthcorps.org](http://www.rockymountainyouthcorps.org)

Southwest Conservation Corps  
701 Camino Del Rio, Suite 101  
Durango, CO 81301  
(970) 259-8607  
[www.sccorps.org](http://www.sccorps.org)





# ARIZONA TRAILS MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

Arizona is a good example of a State with policies that value and encourage corps involvement in conservation work. Arizona's Trails Maintenance Program applies 44 percent of the State's Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funds for work on existing trails. The State invites Conservation Corps and other workforce development service providers to submit their qualifications for trail work. Those who are selected become contractors with Arizona State Parks for employment by project sponsors. Land managers using these pre-approved trail crews are assured of a capable work force while reducing the administrative load typical of traditional grant application and reimbursement programs.

## Range of Funding Programs

As in many States, the areas which can benefit from trails ranges from urban greenways to open space parks to remote areas, and includes motorized and nonmotorized activities. Arizona's approach was to create different programs to take advantage of the funding opportunities.

Federal Recreational Trails Program legislation allows States to use up to seven percent of their funds for administration and up to five percent for safety and education. Arizona splits the remaining 88 percent of the funds equally between the State's motorized and nonmotorized trail programs. The result is the Trails Maintenance Program, which currently receives more than \$1 million for a two-year funding cycle.

The RTP motorized portion funds several larger projects each year for major work on existing OHV riding areas. The Trails Heritage Fund taps State lottery proceeds for nonmotorized trail acquisition and construction. Both the OHV and Heritage programs follow the typical grant procedures, which involve competitive grant applications and reimbursement for completed work. Conservation Corps may partner with project sponsors on either of these funding programs.



## Arizona's Trails Maintenance Program

The unique element of Arizona's program is the pre-selection of the crews who do the actual work for project sponsors receiving RTP grants. The procedure includes several steps:

- » The State sends out a Request for Proposals seeking trail crew services every two years.
- » Corps and other workforce development service providers submit their qualifications, expertise, financial responsibility, references, etc.
- » The State selects the qualified trail crews who will perform the eligible work under a contract with Arizona State Parks.
- » Project sponsors choose which of the pre-selected corps to use for grant-funded work depending on availability of the crews, crew structure, or price.
- » Trail crews will complete the work for the project sponsor and invoice Arizona State Parks directly.
- » Project sponsors are responsible for supervising the work and ensuring its satisfactory completion.

## State Perspective

Different funding programs allows for a wide array of trail maintenance and construction needs. The Trail Maintenance Program has an additional benefit of encouraging use of Conservation Corps resources. The type of work under this program is very specific, emphasizing maintenance and improvements to existing trails. This policy is based on a need identified in Arizona's Statewide Motorized and Nonmotorized Trails Plan. In both 2000 and 2005, survey respondents indicated that maintenance of existing trails was more important than building new trails. With the impact of Federal budget reductions, the State's program aims to help land managers keep their trails safe and useable.

## Corps Involvement

Currently under contract with Arizona State Parks for trail crew work are Coconino Rural Environment Corps (CREC), Northwest Youth Corps (NYC), and Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC). The Oregon-based NYC comes to Arizona for work in winter and spring. The travel enables several projects to develop crew leaders in preparation for the busy summer season back in the northwest.

Project sponsors can apply for up to \$50,000 in funding with a required match of 10 percent of total project costs, either with in-kind contributions or dollars. Most sponsors request the maximum amount, which equals about eight weeks of corps work over two years. On Federal lands, work includes clearing fallen timber with crosscut saws and reconstructing trails in rugged areas. Other projects, sponsored by towns and counties, require work on crushed rock trails or clearing vegetation along paved trails.



## Crew Qualifications

A qualified workforce is another key to making Arizona's system work. CREC training is a good example of the investment needed to develop basic skills. First, new corpsmembers receive a full week of basic orientation on camping skills, public service, healthy lifestyles, safety, and first aid. An additional 40 hours of instruction on trail building and maintenance teaches a wide range of basic techniques for different conditions. The terrain, ecosystems, and recreation activities vary greatly from desert to foothills to forest. Later on crew members may receive a third week of in-depth training for chain saw and forestry work.

The CREC trail construction and maintenance training was developed in-house from several resources, including curricula from Student Conservation Association, the National Park Service, and U.S. Forest Service. Recently, with mountain biking developing into a major activity, materials from the International Mountain Bicycling Association training is also included.

CREC staff does most of the training, but outside experts from universities and Federal agencies often contribute their expertise. The solid training in the basics, plus one or more seasons of experience, enable corps members to compete for jobs and careers on public lands after they graduate from corps work.

## Benefits

Arizona's program reduces the load of administrative procedures while ensuring that a highly competent, professional trail crew completes every project. In a typical grants program, a State may be producing dozens of individual contracts for separate projects. With work done by different Federal agencies, State parks, city and county governments, special districts, youth corps, and trail organizations, the legal issues proliferate. Applications may run to 60 pages or more, which consumes time both in writing and reviewing. Competitive applications raise the bar and identify the most beneficial projects but, for basic trail care, this elaborate process may be excessive. The essential ingredient is a clear agreement on trail needs and work standards. Finally, this process eliminates the separate contracts, agreements, billing, and reimbursement normally required for each project sponsor.

For Federal land managers, the program provides an opportunity to address trail needs efficiently. While the word “cumbersome” is often used to describe the Federal personnel and accounting procedures, agencies can contract for services such as the State’s trail crews. The real accomplishment of Arizona’s program is to make RTP funds readily available to land managers. Good trail projects are waiting to be done, and the State needs to spend the RTP funds.

For the corps, one benefit is diversity of available projects. Instead of working in the same location for weeks at a time, crews get a variety of experience, both backcountry and urban. The two-year cycle of RTP funding provides more ability to plan ahead. Being a pre-approved contractor simplifies the entire administrative process, and smoothes relationships with land managers. What’s more, with pre-approved status, a contractor ensures that a corps is included in every project and provides a steady stream of paid projects to the State’s corps.

### Key Points and Lessons Learned:

- » Pre-selecting a cadre of trail crews ensures that there is a consistent level of high-quality work on all RTP projects.
- » By reducing the load of administrative procedures, more work gets done on the ground.
- » For a noncompetitive program to work, all parties need to agree on trail needs and work standards.
- » Different kinds of projects — maintenance vs. paved trail construction — need appropriate funding mechanisms.
- » Different crews have different capabilities, and project sponsors need to clarify expectations and provide active supervision.
- » With so much recreation taking place on Federal lands, it is important to develop efficient ways of helping fund needed trail work.
- » A key asset of corps organizations is the quality training that trail crews get to ensure quality work.

Arizona’s Recreational Trails Program encourages the use of qualified youth conservation and service corps. Benefits to project sponsors are detailed in the Motorized Portion FY 2008 Grant Application Manual.

### Benefits of working with corps include:

- Federal funds used to support youth conservation or service corps may be applied toward the non-Federal share of an RTP project.
- Corps organizations often are able to bring other matching funds into projects.
- Corps activities often are funded from a mix of public and private sources.
- Corps organizations often are able to recruit, hire, train, and provide advancement opportunities for economically or educationally disadvantaged people, especially young adults.
- Corps have outstanding reputations of producing high quality work.
- Corps provide a training ground for the next generation of public lands employees.

### For more information, Contact:

Coconino Rural Environment Corps  
5410 E Commerce Ave.  
Flagstaff AZ 86004  
(928) 679-8160  
[www.crecweb.org](http://www.crecweb.org)

Northwest Youth Corps  
2621 Augusta Street  
Eugene, OR 97403  
541-349-5055  
<http://www.nwyouthcorps.org/>

Southwest Conservation Corps  
701 Camino Del Rio, Suite 101  
Durango, CO 81301  
(970) 259-8607  
[www.sccorps.org](http://www.sccorps.org)

Trails Maintenance Program  
Arizona State Parks  
Resources Management Section  
1300 W Washington St  
Phoenix AZ 85007-2932  
(602) 542-7116  
[www.pr.state.az.us](http://www.pr.state.az.us)

# NEVADA CONSERVATION CORPS



The opportunity to engage in a variety of partnerships has kept Nevada Conservation Corps (NCC) crews working on projects statewide. NCC works closely with many agencies in Nevada, including the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Nevada State Parks, and Washoe County Parks. With Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funds available for trail work, the State has encouraged the use of NCC crews and written grants to employ the crews on State park improvements. The State trails program also provides assistance to grant applicants when requested, and, at conferences, hosts a workshop on State funding and grant procedures.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Federal agencies are not alone in facing reduced recreation budgets. Many State agencies are also challenged to maintain services and facilities with higher costs and less State funding. At the same time, like the Federal land agencies, State parks managers are also seeking a qualified workforce. A typical problem is the difficulty in hiring additional staff, due to hiring freezes, or caps on employee numbers. As RTP allows for State administrative costs as well as grant money for trail work, the partnership with NCC is addressing the funding challenges.

In working with NCC on funding for statewide trails work, the Nevada Division of State Parks has typically followed the following process:

- » State parks staff identifies needs and days of work needed for trail maintenance or improvements.
- » NCC provides a budget for the days of crew work.
- » State staff writes the grant application with NCC as the workforce provider.
- » If the project is selected for funding, the State administers the grant.

Applications for projects on the State parks must compete on an equal basis with other applications from across Nevada. In general, projects involving NCC score well because they include significant matching funds, volunteers and, often, several additional partners. One of the criteria, "Interagency Cooperation," permits extra points for projects involving "qualified youth conservation or service corps groups."

## RTP Grant Procedures

Nevada's grants procedure is typical of many State trails programs. It is a competitive grant program to fund applications receiving the highest scores. For the Federal Fiscal 2008, Nevada received just over \$1.1 million in RTP funds. The main program elements are as follows:

- » Conservation Corps are eligible to apply, as well as local, State, tribal, and Federal units of government, and organizations.
- » Eligible projects include the construction and maintenance of motorized and nonmotorized trails and related facilities.
- » The maximum grant per project is \$100,000; the minimum is \$4,000.
- » Applicants must provide a minimum match of 20 percent.
- » As a reimbursement program, applicants must have the financial means to do the work without cash advances.
- » The State's Recreational Trails Advisory Committee reviews and scores RTP grant applications.
- » A short presentation to the review committee highlights key features, and answers questions.



Competing for funds means doing as much as possible to meet the needs detailed in the grant application. The Project Selection Criteria include explicit goals from the Nevada 2005 Recreational Trails Plan. This gives sponsors an opportunity to tailor their projects to include the most attractive features; at the same time, it signifies that some projects are not going to be competitive. Applicants need to clearly explain how their project—

- » meets an identified need or urgency;
- » furthers specific goals in the statewide trails plan;
- » links with other trails or recreational areas;
- » includes community support and interagency cooperation;
- » provides for the greatest number of compatible uses;
- » can be accessed by persons of varying abilities;
- » is compatible with adjacent land uses;
- » uses successful or innovative design techniques; and
- » helps restore natural resources.

## Conservation Corps Opportunities

In 2006, the State trails program manager contacted the Nevada Conservation Corps about their availability to provide trail maintenance work on State parks. A survey sent to all State park managers asked about their needs for trail maintenance, signs, reroutes, structures, bridges, etc. From the response, and working with NCC on scheduling and budgets, the trails program submitted two RTP proposals to address trail maintenance in State parks. Both grants were selected for funding at \$80,000 each.

Trail maintenance is the largest share of the work available in the State parks. Some projects seek to solve problems of use or poor design; others are to complete projects stalled by budget cuts. Nonprofits have also hired NCC to do a variety of projects. While the State parks staff takes care of technical issues, the nonprofits may need more expertise.

A mountain bicycle group, for example, received a grant for a trail on national forest land. The Forest Service had already done the environmental assessment but needed someone to do the technical design work. They then hired NCC to do the trail design and flagging. In other cases, NCC worked on the trail layout with Federal biologists and hydrologists to minimize trail impacts.

For the Corps to be qualified for this wide variety of work, NCC provides training for both corps members and leaders. Besides in-house training, NCC brings in State specialists to teach skills such as revegetation. Other training needs include restoration of old trails, converting roads to trails, and sustainable trail design and construction.

## Statewide Mapping Project

Due to a lack of good trail information for users, the State trails program initiated another project. The Great Basin Institute, which manages NCC and the State's largest AmeriCorps program, prepared a grant to develop and produce a trails website. This project was awarded RTP funding which the State dedicates for educational initiatives. The Institute partnered with Federal, State, and local land management agencies to create an online encyclopedia of designated motorized and nonmotorized trails.

An AmeriCorps volunteer worked as a research associate to do the actual data collection. Tasks included identifying where reliable Geographic Information System (GIS) data existed, then visiting the actual trails and checking trailhead locations.

The trails information website is a work in progress, with many trails to be added. The project points out a particular skill that may be in growing demand in the future. Some urban areas have the resources to do their own mapping and GIS work, but State and Federal agencies typically don't have either the skills or the funds to hire people. The Great Basin Institute could contract with them to provide this technical work, which would teach highly marketable skills to the young corps members.

## Benefits

The partnerships made possible with RTP funding have created a great deal of work for NCC. The funding also makes it possible for the State to address the needs identified in statewide outdoor recreation and trails plans. For the Federal agencies as well as nonprofit trail organizations, the NCC crews provide a reliable workforce with skills that go beyond the basics. As recreation management budgets have been reduced, the need for keeping up with maintenance has increased. RTP grants have provided a way to foster competition among potential projects and to encourage sponsors to bring matching resources. The conservation corps have emerged as valuable players in the statewide stewardship efforts.

## For more information, Contact:

Nevada Conservation Corps  
Mailstop 99, UNR  
Reno, NV 89557  
(775) 784-1192  
ncc@unr.edu  
[www.thegreatbasininstitute.org](http://www.thegreatbasininstitute.org)

Nevada Trail Maps  
[www.nvtrailmaps.com](http://www.nvtrailmaps.com)

Recreational Trails Program  
Nevada State Parks  
901 S Stewart St., Suite 5005  
Carson City NV 89701  
(775) 684-2787  
[www.parks.nv.gov/trails.htm](http://www.parks.nv.gov/trails.htm)

# ALASKA TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS



Alaska is one of the very few States that have used Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds for work involving the Conservation Corps. The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (AKDOT) has a large and continuing need for work in State highway corridors. The program to use crews from Serve Alaska Youth Corps (SAGA) has evolved over a decade. While the work is not the traditional backcountry trail project, the Corpsmembers benefit from learning to use mechanized equipment. This reliable funding source has allowed SAGA to engage more young people in service annually.

## The Transportation Connection

The impetus for involving the corps in transportation work has been described as a confluence of good timing, opportunity, and the right people. First, the “new generation” of Federal transportation funding included language encouraging States to use Conservation Corps for a variety of work. At same time, AKDOT was promoting a plan to deal with highway maintenance problems by increasing the use of herbicides in areas not reachable by large machinery. Public outcry over more spraying eventually led to an idea: use the corps to reduce encroaching vegetation with more intensive labor. The opportunity was clear: the State had a mandate to use the corps, the corps was available to do the work, and the potential funding was already administered by AKDOT.

All projects, however, need to conform with Federal and State labor and wage requirements, as well as existing contractor and union relationships. The corps called on a supporter to help understand the potential opposition of labor unions. A union official who supported the use of the corps argued that since the program involved such a small amount of money, it wouldn't affect union work.

The project has encountered periodic controversy. But in the ongoing flux of politics, the program has survived three governors and a succession of AKDOT commissioners. Another source of support has been the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) division office for Alaska, which oversees the transportation funding programs.

## Involving the Corps

One more recreation-oriented type of project has been clearing trees and tall shrubs to keep the vistas open at scenic viewpoints. Most of the work, however, has been in maintaining drainage and sight lines along highway corridors. Crews use power brush cutters and chain saws to remove encroaching vegetation. They also shovel sand and gravel that builds up during the winter off the roadway edge. As long as the work can't be done by AKDOT's large-scale mechanized cutters or sweepers, FHWA approves it as appropriate for the Conservation Corps.



Working in highway corridors is very different from parks and trails projects, but crews learn its importance for safer roads. Trees and brush not only impact the highway; their new growth attracts moose and other large browsers. Anything that reduces the potential for collisions with large animals is a valuable safety precaution. For SAGA, addressing risk management is essential to keeping the crews out of danger when working along highways. SAGA takes on the responsibilities of maintaining work zone protections and training workers in standard safety precautions.

Some projects are in remote areas along scenic highways; others are closer to urban areas with more traffic. SAGA recognizes the need to provide a variety of settings. As a result, crews that do a couple of weeks of highway work and move on to parks or backcountry jobs. Corp members learn to use chain saws and power brushers as well as road signage and traffic control. AKDOT promotes the experience as a way of nurturing interest in highway and transportation careers. Many corps members come from rural parts of the State where road maintenance is an attractive and well-paying job. Conservation Corps, like SAGA, help corps members learn important skills and serve as a pathway to road maintenance jobs.

## Funding and Logistics

A key issue for SAGA is that AKDOT pays more than many other projects. The cost, which is negotiated with each DOT region, runs between \$1,500-\$1,800 a day for each crew. The contracts include the costs of mobilization — transportation and getting set up for a new project. At 10 percent of the contract, this is typical of highway work but not common with conservation projects. AKDOT provides the matching fund requirement as well, which in Alaska is less than 10 percent. State funds are allocated each year to serve as match for transportation projects.

Early each year, the partners work together to clarify the project priority, the availability of crews, and funding by region. SAGA typically brings the prospective crew leaders on the job early, using the additional time to teach the technical skills as well as crew leadership. The future also holds the potential for other kinds of transportation-funded projects that are suitable for the corps.

Effective ways of controlling invasive species is a growing need. Environmental mitigation work also involves intensive handwork while learning about ecosystems and horticulture. While there are many possibilities, the challenges are to identify suitable projects, develop the training programs needed, and identify appropriate funding sources.



## Recreational Trails Program Projects

Alaska also administers its RTP funds through grants which are open to a variety of agencies and organizations. Some funds have also been set aside specifically for conservation and youth corps projects. Where a grant has fallen through, or funds have been returned, money becomes available and needs to be allocated to new projects. In this regard, Alaska has set up a fund that can support a wide variety of work on the State parks. The current cycle includes \$200,000, which is dedicated for corps to provide the workforce. The “statewide trail crews,” as they are called, have done tread widening and hardening, drainage improvements, turnpike trail and other construction, retaining walls, and campground maintenance. Typically the crews camp out at the parks. Another advantage for Alaska State Parks is that SAGA supplies all the tools, gear, and supervision needed to complete the different kinds of work.

## Benefits

The project serves two public purposes: providing good work for youth as well as safety improvements for public highway users. By tapping into the very large transportation fund for highway maintenance, the corps organization has access to work outside the usual parks and recreation field. Crews gain extensive experience in the tools and procedures of the transportation world, which supplements their work on the more traditional backcountry and trails projects. As a response to a real need in highway safety, the corps provides an effective solution.

## For more information, Contact:

Division of Program Development  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
3132 Channel Drive, Suite 220  
Juneau, AK 99801-7898  
(907) 465-6981

Recreational Trails Program  
Alaska State Parks  
550 W 7th Ave Suite 1380  
Anchorage AK 99501-3561  
(907) 269-8699  
[www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/grants/trails.htm](http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/grants/trails.htm)

Serve Alaska Youth Corps (SAGA)  
PO Box 33037  
Juneau, AK 99803  
(907) 790-6403  
[www.servealaska.org](http://www.servealaska.org)



# VERMONT YOUTH CONSERVATION CORPS



The Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) has been successful in securing funding from both transportation and recreation agencies. VYCC is in its twelfth year of a partnership with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans). Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds are used to employ crews on projects throughout the State.

Vermont is one of a very few states that have applied TE funds to Conservation Corps projects. VYCC has also been successful in partnering on projects funded by the Recreational Trails Program, managed by Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

The focus of the funding is on enhancement projects that encourage diverse modes of travel, foster local economic development, and bring direct benefits to communities from transportation spending.

The Agency of Transportation administers the funds through the Department of Civil Rights and Labor Compliance. In addition to the completion of transportation projects, the agency sees a benefit in exposing young Vermonters from a variety of backgrounds to potential careers and opportunities in the field of transportation. Project sponsors whose work meets specific TE criteria may receive completely-funded VYCC crew time to complete their projects. About \$3 million in TE grants were awarded in 2007. VYCC received about \$200,000 from VTrans during this time, and was able to grant crew time valued at that amount to communities in Vermont. During the same year, VYCC crews worked for 24 weeks in several locations across the State during June and July.

## Vermont Recreation Trails Grants

VRTF provides funds to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational trail use. Vermont's Recreation Trails Program (RTP) is administered by the Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation. Eligible projects include trail development, maintenance, and restoration, development of trailside and trailhead facilities, creating accessible trails, acquisition of trail easements or fee acquisition of trail corridors, maps/publications, and purchase of trail building hand tools.

Two grant programs are offered: an 80-20 match grant (\$3,000 - \$10,000) which is a reimbursable program; and a mini-grant (\$3,000 or less, paid up front with no match requirements). About \$450,000 was available for competitive grants for Federal FY 2008.



## Project Profile: Camp DREAM Trail Project

The VYCC/Camp DREAM collaboration won the 2007 Environment and Wildlife Compatibility Award from the Coalition for Recreational Trails. Camp DREAM provides summer camp experiences to low-income Vermont youth. This project involved VYCC and Camp DREAM working together to establish a safe, one-mile beginner mountain bike and cross-country ski trail. A second project involved the construction of a boardwalk, a quarter-mile long, to provide educational access to a high quality wetland, which will be used as an interpretive trail. This project involved building, maintaining, and upgrading 3,520 feet of trail surface to reduce erosion. To reduce the environmental impacts, it required the design and construction of 45 puncheon bridges through the wetlands as well as revegetating the area around the trail work site.

Eight corpsmembers and two crew leaders from VYCC spent two weeks completing the project, at a cost of \$13,100. While assigned to this project, the crew also conducted a program to educate the public about the Camp DREAM trails, public use of the natural areas, and trail work as it relates to conservation, service, and education.

## Project Profile: Cross Vermont Trail

The Cross Vermont Trail spans the State from Burlington to Newbury, crossing through 17 communities and providing direct links to 10 State parks and recreation areas, as well as schools and village centers. Sponsored by VTrans, VYCC crews have worked on several sections of the trail since 2000, and are proud to be part of this effort to create an alternative transportation route links the eastern and western parts of the State.

The VYCC Montpelier Community Crew spent three weeks in 2006 working on the Old Route 2 section of the Cross Vermont Trail in East Montpelier, at a cost of \$15,168. Two weeks of additional VYCC work on the trail was done in 2007. The work is fairly technical and quite varied. In 2000, for example, crew members installed 450 feet of log cribbing to help gradient and soil retention, installed 320 feet of geotextile, dug 100 feet of sidehill trail and 260 feet of drainage ditches, and installed two culverts and one cross drain.



## Benefits

VYCC corpsmembers gain an impressive variety of skills working on different types of trails and conservation projects. The range of projects includes backcountry trails, mountain biking routes, and transportation corridors. The years of partnership with VTrans has ensured that projects are efficiently brought forward for funding. By partnering with both the recreation and transportation agencies, VYCC has access to different funding options, which helps the organization weather changes in priorities and politics. The State has developed a reliable partner in VYCC, with crews tested in a broad spectrum of projects.

## For more information, contact:

Camp DREAM/Vermont Youth Conservation Corps Collaboration  
[www.americantrails.org/awards/CRT07awards/CampDream07VT.html](http://www.americantrails.org/awards/CRT07awards/CampDream07VT.html)

Vermont Recreation Trails Grants  
Dept of Forests, Parks, & Recreation  
103 South Main St, Bldg 10 South  
Waterbury VT 05671-0601  
(802) 241-3690  
[www.vtfrp.org/recgrant/trgrant.cfm](http://www.vtfrp.org/recgrant/trgrant.cfm)

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps  
1949 East Main Street  
Richmond, VT 05477  
(802) 434-3969 ext 137  
[info@vycc.org](mailto:info@vycc.org)  
[www.vycc.org](http://www.vycc.org)

VTrans Enhancements Program  
One National Life Drive  
Montpelier, VT 05633-5001  
(802) 828-2657; (802) 828-0583  
[www.vycc.org/projects/hirecrew/paycrew.html](http://www.vycc.org/projects/hirecrew/paycrew.html)





# MAINE CONSERVATION CORPS

The Maine Conservation Corps (MCC) is notable for two reasons. First, the corps' work is highly technical. Second the organization is housed within the Maine Department of Conservation, a State agency. The organization has risen to the challenge in a wide range of trail projects, developing skills from rockwork to accessible trail surfacing. The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) has become an essential part of MCC's budget in partnership with the State.

## State Funding Opportunities

Some projects involving MCC are funded by internal Department of Conservation RTP grants. A second program involves competitive grant applications from other agencies and organizations. MCC also receives modest AmeriCorps funding through the Maine Commission for Community Service.

The State also encourages the use of Conservation Corps in its trail grants program. The application asks, "Is the project supported through a letter of commitment between the applicant and a recognized youth conservation or service corps in which the corps agrees to supply a stated amount of labor?" Currently, MCC is the recognized provider of Conservation Corps services. Applicants receive two points in their application score for selecting MCC as a part of their proposal.

## Working with Project Sponsors

An important way that MCC created funding opportunities is by working more closely with potential project sponsors. The program, Trail Planning Assistance, helps applicants develop a better project from the start. There are three MCC staff members who are available to review potential projects offer design suggestions, and make accurate cost estimates for MCC to do the work. Since MCC has started the assistance program, the number of proposals has increased, and more of them are getting funded with RTP grants. MCC is scheduling 20-40 planning assistance days each year. While the project sponsor decides if they want MCC to do the work, the service enhances the reputation of MCC as a skilled resource.

In some instances, sponsors ask MCC to flag and route trails or plan a trail system through open space areas. Another area of expertise is in bridge design and construction. To meet State requirements, an engineer may be asked to review the plans.



MCC also receives an increasing number of requests for help with accessible trails. Corps members have been building at least one trail each year where accessibility is a key goal. The work requires careful design and construction to control grade and side slope, maintain enough width, and ensure a firm and stable surface. As an alternative to paving, trails may be surfaced with rock dust, reclaimed pulverized asphalt, or compacted gravel. MCC is purchasing motorized power wheelbarrows to make this work more efficient and maintain worker motivation.

## Partners and Projects

MCC sends out requests for proposals in October of each year to identify prospective projects. Staff maintains a database of partners including 400 different agencies and nonprofits, as well as land trusts. Maine has one of the strongest land trust communities in the country, with over 100 organizations, many of which seek to manage public access through a well-designed trail system.

Maine Trail Crew Projects are a joint venture with the Maine Appalachian Trail Club (MATC) and the Maine Conservation Corps. ATC volunteers join the MCC teams for work trips that are scheduled Saturday through Wednesday. Projects on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail are partially funded by a RTP grant awarded to the MATC.

MCC project funded by MCC include the following:

- » Borestone Mountain. At a preserve managed by Maine Audubon Society, MCC improved the footpath from the parking area to the visitor's center, one mile up the mountain, with rock steps and new side hill bench trail.
- » Camden Hills State Park. In a six-year effort to upgrade the 30-mile trail system, MCC teams built drainage structures, stone steps and staircases, bog bridges, and riprap protection.
- » Debsconeag Wilderness. In an area managed by the Nature Conservancy, MCC helped upgrade the trails with steel rungs set into ice caves, handrails, and new trail construction.
- » Thomas College. MCC built more than quarter-mile of riverside trail including a 40-foot timber bridge, 79 box steps filled with stone dust, and 24 bog bridges.
- » Quoddy Regional Land Trust received RTP funding for an accessible boardwalk. Volunteers prefabricated the boardwalk sections during the winter in a nearby warehouse, and the MCC team placed the sections across the 1,000 feet of wetland.

## Benefits

Recreational Trails Program funding provides about half of MCC's annual budget. With \$325,000-plus for project support, RTP is the single largest component of crew funding. With significant declines in much of the State's economy -- forest products, manufacturing, and fishing -- the State benefits from the investment in the tourism infrastructure. MCC improves many miles of trails each year while making outdoor recreation more visible and accessible. For corps members, the chance to work on a variety of challenging projects helps them gain confidence and technical skills for future jobs.

## Key Points and Lessons Learned

- » The growing need for improving the accessibility of outdoor recreation is an opportunity for corps to provide expertise and labor
- » Many partners need help in project planning and development; corps can generate work by providing this service.
- » Providing a wide range of technical skills challenges the organization's staff time, but creates many opportunities
- » Partnerships with volunteer groups can stretch dollars further while maintaining project quality with trained corps members.
- » Projects that show an economic benefit or connection to tourism are valued by State and local governments.

## For More Information, contact:

Division of Grants and Community Recreation  
Bureau of Parks and Lands  
Maine Department of Conservation  
22 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333  
(207) 287-4962  
[www.state.me.us/doc/grants/index.shtml](http://www.state.me.us/doc/grants/index.shtml)

Maine Conservation Corps  
124 State House Station  
Augusta ME 04333  
(207) 624-6087  
[www.maine.gov/doc/parks/mcc/index.html](http://www.maine.gov/doc/parks/mcc/index.html)





# CALIFORNIA CONSERVATION CORPS

The California Conservation Corps (CCC) works for a wide range of project sponsors throughout California, including State and Federal agencies, cities and counties, school districts, and nonprofit organizations. One project of special interest is a multi-year trail improvement effort at Humboldt Redwoods State Park. This \$235,000 project was accomplished with CCC crews and other resources in a challenging environment.

## The Park and the Project

Humboldt Redwoods State Park is the third largest California State Park and protects a rare and diverse ecosystem. The real jewel of the park is the 30,000-acre Rockefeller Forest, the largest remaining old growth redwood forest in the world. Over 100 miles of trails are open to hikers, bikers, and horse riders. The Johnson Camp Trail project improved the public's access into this portion of Humboldt Redwoods that undoubtedly will become the most popular trail in the park. Although it was not possible to meet accessibility standards, the trail is barrier-free.

As a major partner in the project, CCC used its Backcountry Trails Program, a special program established in 1979, to provide the necessary level of skill. Each year, six crews of the Backcountry Trails Program work on wilderness projects, including the trails that make these areas safely accessible to the public. The nature of the work on the Johnson Camp project encouraged the use of these crews. Concerns about working in the habitat of an endangered bird, the marbled murrelet, led to the decision to allow only nonmechanized tools. The CCC backcountry crews had the tools and training to work under these wilderness rules.

The Johnson Camp project, which spanned three years, began with trail routing and design, and approval for all plans. Three spike camp expeditions lasting six to seven weeks were needed to accomplish the tasks. The work included building new trail through dense old growth forest, all done with hand tools. Cable rigging and grip hoists were used to move fallen trees, including enormous redwood logs.

The main goal of the project was to remove two miles of steep, deeply eroded road, restricted to hikers only, and replace it with five miles of new trail, on moderate grade, available to both hikers and equestrians. By lengthening the trail route, an unsustainable steep climb straight up drainage routes was eliminated. By lowering the grade of the trail and removing barriers, the trail opened a unique wilderness setting to older visitors, families with children, and persons with disabilities.

CCC served as the main workforce along with other resources. State Parks supplied technical supervision, tools, and equipment. Parks staff also provided education on the park and its ecosystems along with technical training for the trail work.



## Funding and Administration

The California Department of Parks and Recreation managed the RTP grant for the project. Announced for Fiscal 2002, the Johnson Camp project was allocated \$235,000 of the statewide total of \$2.2 million. RTP funding typically supports recreational trail construction, land acquisition, rehabilitation of existing trails, and development of trails that promote the goals of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Among the criteria considered in selecting projects, the CCC looks for work that helps conserve the State's natural resources, enhance recreation opportunities, and provide improved access or other benefits. The other goal is to provide work that offers corps members an opportunity to boost employable skills. The sponsoring agency typically provides the technical plans and specifications, along with materials and on-site technical supervision. Local, State, and Federal agencies as well as nonprofit organizations may contract with the CCC on an hourly basis or per-project basis, depending on the work involved. It is also possible to sponsor a crew on an annual basis.

## Benefits

In the Humboldt Redwoods State Park, as in so many other parks and national forests, ongoing management problems are the legacy of old trail systems. Many trails were built straight up and down hills without regard to erosion or visitor experience. The Johnson Camp project provides a model for renovating trail systems to make them easier to maintain and far less harmful to land and habitats. In the long term, this investment will invite new generations to enjoy and respect our priceless public lands.

As a result of its experience with this and many other projects, CCC will be the major labor force helping State Parks reduce its backlog of trail work. Key efforts include improving the accessibility of trails and constructing portions of the California Coastal Trail. This cooperative trail-building partnership will continue to improve the quality of trails in the State parks while improving training for corpsmembers.

## Benefits to Corpsmembers

The CCC Backcountry Program is part of an AmeriCorps Program. Like many other service and conservation corps, it has allowed us to recruit corps members throughout the country. This helps create highly diverse teams of young adults committed to putting their best efforts forth to repair and restore wilderness trails, while living and working together for five months with few modern amenities or conveniences. There is a strong emphasis on learning how to function as a healthy community, and respect and support each other during trying times. Each day is full with chores, work, and evening classes. Mastering the social skills to get along with each other is central to succeeding in the Backcountry Program, where there is minimal time for privacy.

While completing service, corps members learn technical trail skills they did not have prior to joining the corps. For the Humboldt Redwoods State Park project, a 17-person crew of minimally-skilled Corpsmembers were willing to be trained and build new trail that measured up to the construction standards that State Parks required. State Park personnel were onsite to provide the training and quality

control. CCC supervisors worked in close cooperation with their State Park peers, making certain the corpsmembers were performing up to standard, and progressing. The investment in good training and providing highly qualified supervisors made it possible to complete a very challenging work project in a professional manner.

Some graduates have become supervisors, helping to train and teach the corps members who worked on the Johnson Camp Trail Project. The end result of this cooperative effort is a well-constructed trail that will serve the public for many decades to come, allowing visitors to experience one of the world's most magnificent forests, without damaging the resource.

## For More Information, contact:

Backcountry Trails Program  
California Conservation Corps  
2600 Old River Road  
Ukiah, CA 95481  
(707) 725-5106  
[www.ccc.ca.gov/backcountry/bcpage.htm](http://www.ccc.ca.gov/backcountry/bcpage.htm)

Humboldt Redwoods State  
PO Box 100, Weott, CA 95571  
(707) 946-2409  
[www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page\\_id=42](http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=42)

Johnson Camp Trail Project  
[www.americantrails.org/awards/CRT05awards/johnsoncamp.html](http://www.americantrails.org/awards/CRT05awards/johnsoncamp.html)





# AMERICAN YOUTH WORKS

American YouthWorks (AYW) is an Austin, Texas-based organization noted for both technical skills and a statewide reach. Through its Environmental Corps (“E-Corps”) young people contribute to the restoration and preservation of parks and public lands in Texas. A high level of experience enables staff to train crews in taking on many different kinds of resource and recreation work. Other American YouthWorks efforts include a charter high school and the Casa Verde home-building program. Recreational Trails Program grants through the Texas are increasingly important during a transition from AmeriCorps funding.

## Developing Skills

Skilled crews able to work on many different kinds of projects are the key resource of AYW. As the types of project work evolves, it is even more important to increase technical abilities of the workforce. By retaining staff members for several years an institutional memory of technical skills has been developed. However, experienced staff leave from time to time, and their skills are hard to replace. One strategy is to develop training opportunities with outside partners. Big Bend National Park, with its professional trail crew, has enabled AYW staff to attend training in rockwork, rigging, and other skills that require intensive experience.

The focus on training and technical abilities enables AYW crews to work on projects throughout Texas that provide more interest and educational value. Work done by the crews has included the following initiatives:

- » Woodlands restoration and invasive plant control was completed with the Town Lake Trail Foundation Healthy Trees for the Trail program.
- » At Westcave Preserve, crews built paths covered with limestone slabs that allow for natural seep drainage as well as run-off control, stone steps built into steep inclines, and sturdy handrails.
- » At Lake Possum Kingdom Fish Hatchery, 24 corpsmembers built a crushed rock trail, complete with hand-carved rocks to replicate the stonework of the Civilian Conservation Corps.
- » Crews also build structures that enhance trails, parks, and fishing and boating access, including information kiosks, benches, archways and gates, docks, and shade covers.

## Community Projects

American YouthWorks has been able to partner with towns, cities, and counties in planning cost-effective projects. In recent years, many communities have been preserving open space as well as developed parkland. Trails provide a low cost way of enabling the public to enjoy the outdoors, while channeling use to appropriate areas. AYW has built many miles of trails in community settings for local governments.

One example is a project done with Southwest Keys, a nonprofit with services provided to low-income families and youth. Knowing about the AYW trail building group, Southwest Keys asked for help in building a trail at their new facility in east Austin. AYW determined that the project would cost \$52,000, and helped with grant writing, and project planning and management. AYW crews performed a variety of work on the project, installing walls, bridges, and accessible crushed rock trail surfacing. AYW brought in subcontractors to deliver materials and do mechanized site preparation. Matching funds were in the form of in-kind services from both AYW and Southwest Keys.



AYW identified areas of the site with natural history and habitat value while staff at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildlife Center helped with environmental education programming. The finished trail, nearly a mile long, is used for health and exercise classes, nature study, and other ways to engage youth and the community. The trail work was completely funded with RTP money.

## Project Funding

RTP funds are administered by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). For 2008, TPWD approved a record \$5.3-million in federal funding for National Recreational Trail Grant projects. A number of projects funded in previous years were completed under budget and two large projects were cancelled, making nearly \$1.6 million available for re-allocation. TPWD planned to use about 10 percent of the total for trail improvements in 10 state parks, with the rest allocated to 30 trail construction projects sponsored by communities and organizations.

AYW does not normally apply directly for RTP grants, but develops partnerships with municipal governments, or with state or federal agencies, which act as project sponsors. AYW can then invoice the project sponsor for the full cost of the crews, about \$700 per day, which includes tools, transportation, training, insurance, safety equipment, meals, etc. The State reimburses the project sponsor, which pays the invoiced amount from AYW, covers its own costs, and documents the matching funds or contributions.

As to cities, counties, schools, and organizations, AYW is essentially entering into a fee-for-service contract. This contracted work helps these land managers with habitat improvement, firebreak construction, and invasive plant control, as well as trails and recreation facilities. Crews also bring a long-time interest in conservation of land and wildlife, and their work helps foster public attention to these issues.

## Opportunities with State Parks

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has also provided many opportunities for the youth crews through projects on its state parks system. This work provides an excellent variety of experiences due to the diversity of geography and habitat represented among the parks. For example, Huntsville State Park in east Texas is sandy as well as swampy, creating a challenge for trail development. AYW crews built over 600 feet of raised boardwalk trails, and planned several years of projects to build turnpike sections as well as reroute poorly located trails. At Franklin Mountains State Park, there is typically a lot of rockwork. Crews built an emergency escape trail for the Wyler Tramway, and a new ridgeline trail that gives visitors an opportunity to reach a mountain summit.

The 2008 pilot project with AYW is expected to be the model for future projects. Ten State park projects are being funded as a package rather than requiring individual grant applications. The State can contract directly with nonprofit groups for certain kinds of work without going out for bid. Citing RTP guidance specifically encouraging youth and conservation corps, the State is applying \$360,000 in RTP funds for this work. An additional \$90,000 in state funds provides the required 20 percent match. Volunteers are often invited to work with corps members, providing additional labor while learning new skills.

## Benefits

For American YouthWorks, the Recreational Trails Program projects have allowed it to employ young people beyond the AmeriCorps funding. Projects bring together both college graduates and youth who are seeking a new start. With skilled supervision, both groups learn from each other's life experiences. The variety of work helps them explore career ideas in the field of conservation and park management. It has been common for youth with AYW experience to be hired by several of the land management agencies.

For Texas State Parks, as well as for community recreation managers, the AYW's skilled staff can help develop appropriate projects based on available land and resources. With few qualified contractors for trail work in Texas, AYW provides an important service. There are "Friends of the Park" groups at several of the project sites. AYW provides training for these volunteers to raise the level of future trail maintenance. Nurturing a commitment to stewardship for the parks will be a long-term benefit.

## Key Points and Lessons Learned

- » In states without a lot of federal public land, local communities are the providers of much of the outdoor recreation facilities.
- » In Texas, RTP provides over \$3.7 million annually, the largest source of funds for trail construction and improvements.
- » Funding opportunities, both federal and state, can change abruptly; corps and other grantees need to understand the issues and have options available.
- » Plan work experience with careers in mind; corpsmembers gain marketable work skills if given the right training and encouragement.
- » To get projects moving quickly, schedule improvements to existing trails; projects needing environmental clearances can be planned for future years.

## For More Information, contact:

American YouthWorks, Austin, TX  
216 E 4th St., Austin TX 78701  
(512) 236-6100  
<http://www.americanyouthworks.org>



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