

Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa

restoring resources.
changing lives.

Presentation

MN House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Finance Policy
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conservationcorps.org



Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and AmeriCorps grantee, engages hundreds of youth and young adults each year in programs and initiatives that improve access to outdoor recreation, restore natural habitat, protect waterways, and respond to community needs and natural disasters.

Mission

To engage youth and young adults in meaningful service, leadership development, and environmental stewardship.

Vision

A world where everyone has equitable access to nature, is equipped to succeed in career and life, and is empowered to make a difference in conserving natural resources.

Values

- Safety
- Service
- Respect
- Equity
- Community



Our History



- **Rooted in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)** - The CCC marks the beginning of the *conservation corps* movement, over 85 years ago.



- **Established by the MN DNR in 1981** – Minnesota Conservation Corps was initially created as a program on the DNR to engage young adults in natural resources training.



- **Transformed into a Non-profit beginning in 1999** – Formally began operating as Conservation Corps Minnesota in 2003, expanded programs to Iowa in 2009





Our Relation to AmeriCorps

We are an AmeriCorps grantee. AmeriCorps is the federal agency connecting individuals and organizations through service and volunteering. AmeriCorps positions are hosted by local nonprofits (like us), government agencies, and faith-based organizations that have applied for and received AmeriCorps grants.



AmeriCorps

We instill environmental Stewardship / Leadership / Service

- **Improving access to outdoor recreation**
Build and maintain trails, boardwalks, campsites, facilities, and structures in city, state, county, and national parks
- **Restoring habitat on public lands**
Remove invasive species, conduct prescribed burns, plant native species
- **Protecting water quality**
Improve shorelines and buffers, clear waterways of debris and pollutants, and build rain gardens
- **Responding to natural disasters**
Support relief and recovery efforts regionally and nationally



Our Programs



- **Field Crews** - Field Crews serve outdoors restoring habitat, managing natural resources, and occasionally responding to natural disasters or community needs.

Including NEW programming:

- **Veterans Conservation Corps**
- **Iowa Monarch Habitat Monitoring Crews**
- **FDL Maajii-akii-gikenjigewin crew (pilot)**



- **Individual Placements** – Individual Placement members serve directly with nonprofit or government agencies focused on natural resource management, energy, and community outreach.



- **Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers (IDEC) Program** - Fellows participate in a fellowship, mentorship, and internship program focused on natural resources while pursuing a STEM degree in college.

A partnership between Conservation Corps and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).



Our Programs



- **Youth Outdoors** – Youth participants earn a paycheck while learning about the natural environment through conservation and community improvement projects. AmeriCorps members lead the youth in educational and service-learning activities and serve as Field Crews when not leading youth.



- **I Can Camp! and I Can Paddle!** – Outdoor Recreation Instructors serve alongside the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources teaching families camping or paddling skills and educating the public about local ecology and natural resources.



- **Summer Youth Corps** – Youth participants connect with the outdoors through paid hands-on conservation work during this summer residential program. AmeriCorps members spend the summer living outdoors while leading and supervising the youth.





Our Sources of Revenue

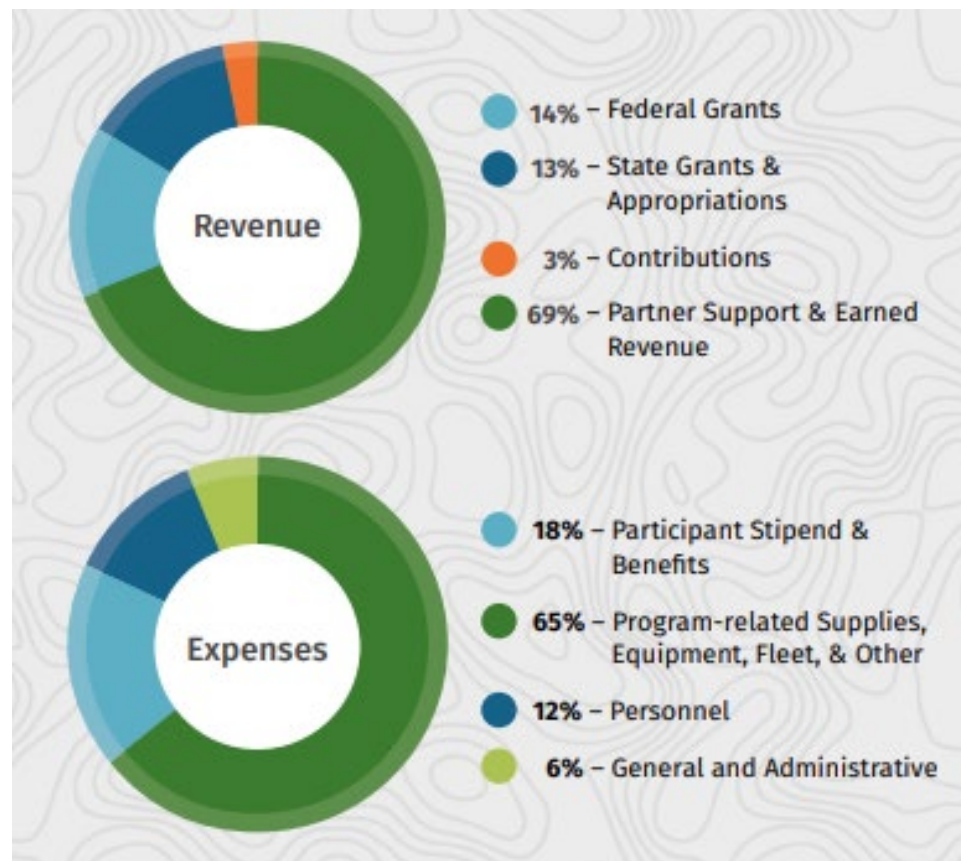
- **Federal** (Corporation for National and Community Service AmeriCorps)
- **State of Minnesota appropriations** - Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF); Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Trails
- **State of Minnesota Clean Water, Lands and Legacy Amendment** (Board of Soil and Water Resources)
- **State of Minnesota Grants** (e.g. Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) ; Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, etc.)
- **Contributed** (individuals, corporations, foundations)
- **Earned Revenue** (fee-for-service contracts with government agencies, non-profits)



2021 Financial Summary

Learn more about our impact
and financials online:

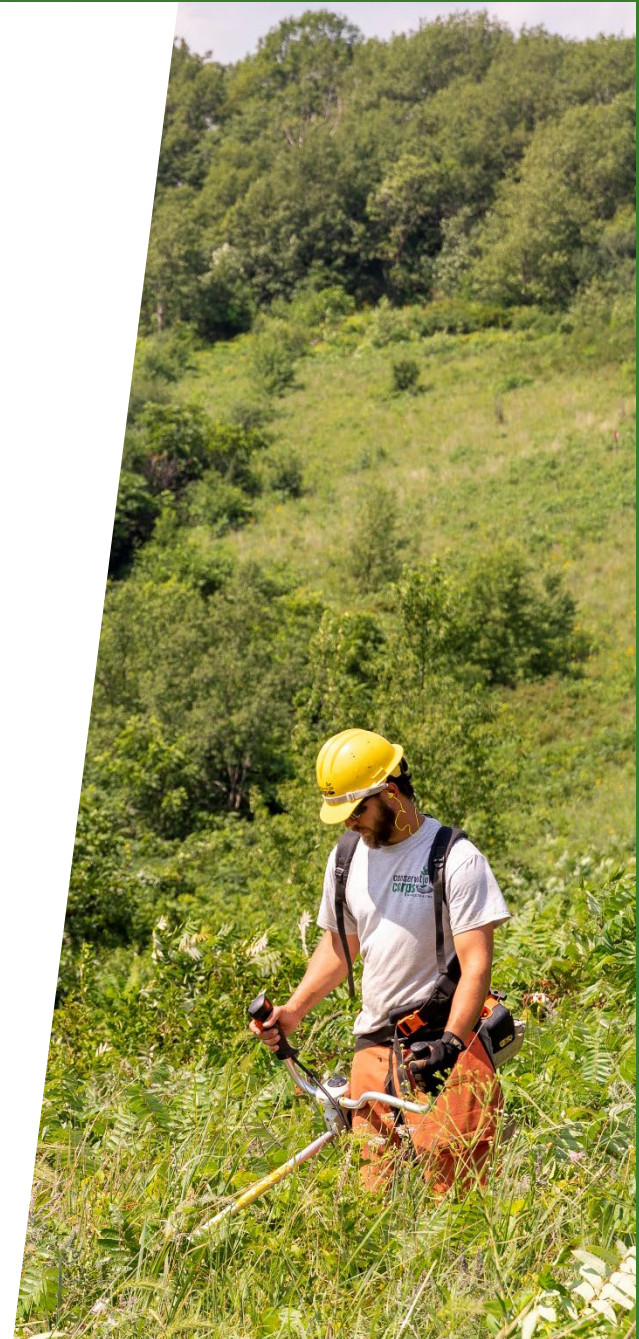
[www.conservationcorps.org
/about/impact](http://www.conservationcorps.org/about/impact)



2021-2022 Impact

- **496 young adults** engaged in national service
- **186 youth** engaged in our outdoor programs
- **74 fellows** participated in the IDEC (Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers) program
- Over **145,000 trees, shrubs, and forbs** planted
- Over **1,700 miles of trails** constructed or maintained, including water trail improvements
- Over **20,000 acres** of invasive species management, vegetation removal, seeding, and restoration maintenance

and more!





Our Current State – Bright Spots!

- Proven valued experience for hundreds of youth and young adults to get experience and exposure in natural resources sector
- Provides thousands of hours, acres, miles of service improving and maintaining public lands and parks.
- Supports state agencies with disaster response with wildland fire and flood response in times of critical need
- Unique among 140 other Corps nationally because of our unique and long-standing partnerships with MN state and local partners we serve and assist throughout Minnesota.



Our Current State – Sticky Spots!

- Residual and persistent effects from the disruptions caused by the pandemic, economic uncertainty, changes in the workforce, social justice reckoning, and trends in mental health among young people.
- AmeriCorps business model is outdated, stipend constraints, not staying up with “living wages”, housing costs for members
- Inflation and the rising costs for standing up a Corps in in the field or workplace today. Doing the work is the easy part! Recruiting, enrolling, training, deploying corps members is more costly today.
- Demographics are working against us. Student population trends are downward. Historically under-represented populations within the Corps and the Natural Resource Sector need to be introduced and given more access to the career opportunities in the sector.

Our Strategic Framework - 2023

OUR GOALS

Valued Experience

Service Satisfaction

Secure & Enduring Resources

Relevant Programming & Work

OUR STAKEHOLDERS

Participants

Partners

Associates & Supporters

Communities We Serve

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

PRIORITY 1:

Build Leadership Capacity and Skills

Instill and strengthen leadership capacity in our people and organization. Recruit and retain top talent.

PRIORITY 2:

Strengthen Management and Operational Systems

Better use our systems and processes to improve service and experience for partners, participants, and supporters.

PRIORITY 3:

Renew and Strengthen Our Programming

Seek innovative ways to make our programs more relevant, equitable, inclusive, and valuable to participants.

PRIORITY 4:

Attract and Retain a Diverse Pool of Participants

Improve our ability to attract a competitive pool of diverse candidates who are committed to our core values.

PRIORITY 5:

Develop and Foster Strategic Relationships

Build and expand upon existing channels for support and collaboration.

Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion at the Corps

To challenge the deep-rooted exclusion of marginalized groups in the natural resources sector, work towards our vision of equitable access, and promote the long-term success of Conservation Corps, we commit to:

- Use equity as a lens for all the work we do and the decisions we make.
- Build a shared vision surrounding Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion goals with our partnering organizations and communities.
- Provide an equitable training environment and high-quality programming to all our participants.

Read our full statement online at: conservationcorps.org/about/jedi/



Questions?

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[ConservationCorps.org](https://www.ConservationCorps.org)



APPENDIX

Additional Background Slides