

Final

**Statement of  
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United States Department of Agriculture**

**Before the  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Historic Preservation, and Recreation  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate**

**Concerning  
Youth Conservation Corps and Youth Job Programs**

**May 19, 1999**

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

I am pleased to be here to discuss the Youth Conservation Corps and other youth job programs in the Forest Service. I am accompanied today by Randy Phillips, National Forest System budget coordinator, who has been a district ranger and forest supervisor and who has managed several of the youth job programs I'll talk about today.

**The Array of Youth Job Programs**

The Forest Service has a long history of managing conservation work programs, many of which are targeted for young people. During the hard times of the 1930's, the Forest Service was one of the leading agencies in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) that employed thousands of workers. We managed the Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) program until it ended in 1982. We also have 34 years of experience in running Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers on National Forests. There are also many opportunities for young women and men to volunteer on local National Forests. The Forest Service has a national agreement with the Student Conservation Association (SCA) and local participating agreements with National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) members. Both of these programs provide opportunities for job skill development to predominately high school and college-aged youth. The major summer youth employment program for the Forest Service is the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) - the Forest Service has participated in this program for 28 years since its

inception in 1971. I will describe each program briefly and expand upon the YCC program in particular.

On a personal note, in the late 1970's and early 1980's, I supervised YCC and YACC crews on the Hiawatha National Forest in Michigan. These crews worked on projects such as lake mapping, fish and wildlife habitat improvement, stream restoration, installing fish cribs, trail and campground maintenance, and surveying. The YACC program was a great opportunity for at-risk teenagers and young adults to gain a new perspective on success. YCC and YACC were natural resource education at its best, with hands-on experience that enrollees shared with their family and friends.

### **Job Corps**

Through an agreement with the Department of Labor, the Forest Service operates 18 Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers, providing basic education and job training to disadvantaged youth between the ages of 16 and 24. The main purpose of the Centers is to produce graduates who are able to find employment, reenter school, or join the military. In 1998, our 18 residential Job Corps Centers provided educational, vocational, and social skills training for 9,373 young adults.

### **SCA, NASCC, Volunteers**

Our partnerships with SCA and NASCC are critical to expanding opportunities for youth to be involved in conservation projects and education. SCA is a public non-profit educational organization that provides young people the chance to volunteer their services for hands-on experience in conservation. In 1998, 338 young people worked in the program. NASCC is the national membership organization for local and state youth corps programs. Through our partnership with them, 51 National Forests nationwide work with 12 different state and local youth corps.

The volunteers program has provided assistance in natural resource protection and management at nominal cost for many years. The Touch America Project (TAP) is a component of the volunteers program. TAP provides the opportunities for youth ages 14-17 to gain work experience and environmental awareness while working on public lands. In 1998, 265 TAP participants served the Forest Service in the volunteer program.

## **Youth Conservation Corps**

The Forest Service operates the Youth Conservation Corps program under the authority of the Youth Conservation Corps Act of 1970, as amended in 1972 and 1974. The law authorizes programs in the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior to provide summer employment for young women and men, aged 15 through 18 years old from all segments of society, and to develop in participating youth an understanding and appreciation of the Nation's natural environment and heritage. Supervisors at each YCC site are required to provide a structured environment awareness program for the youth involved. In addition to earning money, participants have the opportunity to learn to work with others and to experience a sense of accomplishment.

YCC enrollees are paid minimum wage for 40 hours of work per week for a period of 6 to 8 weeks during the summer months. Work projects may vary depending upon the geographical location. As with their predecessors in the CCC, YCC enrollees perform many tasks that would not be accomplished otherwise. YCC programs offer youth opportunities to work in a forest setting as they complete projects in areas such as trail and campground maintenance, campground construction, fence building, tree planting, noxious weed removal, and fish habitat improvement. These projects yield benefits to public lands and to the public. Through involvement in the program, more youth are educated about natural resources and public land management and goodwill is created in the community.

A few examples will highlight the variety and constructive nature of these projects:

- On the Lincoln National Forest in New Mexico, the three person crew and their crew leader installed and repaired thirty one road and trail signs as well as repaired and maintained 29 miles of trails in the White Mountain and Capital Mountains Wilderness areas.
- The partnership between the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests and the Central Oregon Youth Conservation Corps gave 67 youth the opportunity to earn high school science credit through a unique education component using three part-time

AmeriCorps members as curriculum coordinators and Forest Service employees as field teaching staff.

Like the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and other service organizations for youth, YCC instills both a land ethic and a strong work ethic. The program provides young women and men with job experience, career skills, and educational incentives as well as experience in relating to peers and supervisors from various social, economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. In addition, YCC participants develop an awareness of the environment and a conservation ethic that lasts a lifetime.

The number of enrollees in the YCC program has fluctuated over its history, corresponding to changes in the Federal budget. As many as 14,191 enrollees in 1978 participated in the program and as many as 64 residential centers operated on National Forest lands. By 1998 the number decreased to 594 enrollees. Since 1982, there have been no direct appropriations for the Youth Conservation Corps programs. For the past 11 years, the Forest Service has been directed through report language in the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Acts to spend not less than 1 million dollars on the program. Despite fluctuations in funding over the years, our commitment to youth projects has never wavered.

In terms of the conservation work accomplished, the value of the resource work accomplished by YCC enrollees since 1990 is about \$22.6 million. In 1998, we expended \$1.8 million on the program and there was a \$0.88 cent return for every dollar spent. This return does not account for the value of the intangible benefits to the young people such as learning about the environment and working with others.

What is the capacity of the YCC program to expand? The Forest Service has the capacity to operate a \$6 million program. This could provide the 6-8 week non-residential program for approximately 2,000 youth. The key element to further expansion would be decisions on residential and nonresidential camps. Most supporting services such as residential supervision, meal preparation and so on could be contracted. There is no shortage of projects that could be done and funding could be allocated from benefiting programs. We will consider this for future budgets.

### **Summary**

In summary, Mr. Chairman, the Forest Service has a long history of managing conservation work programs for young people. We are proud to provide opportunities for the young women and men of our nation to contribute to the management of public lands. These youth programs are invaluable. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the members of the Subcommittee may have.