



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2022 Approved Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2022-034

Staff Lead: LCCMR General Universal Staff User

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: July 22, 2022

Project Title: Conservation Corps Veterans Service Corps Program

Project Budget: \$1,339,000

Project Manager Information

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Project Reporting

Date Work Plan Approved by LCCMR: July 27, 2022

Reporting Schedule: March 1 / September 1 of each year.

Project Completion: June 30, 2025

Final Report Due Date: August 14, 2025

Legal Information

Legal Citation: M.L. 2022, Chp. 94, Sec. 2, Subd. 08b

Appropriation Language: \$1,339,000 the second year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Conservation Corps Minnesota to create a Veterans Service Corps program to accelerate natural resource restorations in Minnesota while providing workforce development opportunities for the state's veterans.

Appropriation End Date: June 30, 2025

Narrative

Project Summary: To provide more and better natural resource restoration to Minnesota and create workforce development opportunities for the state's veterans, Conservation Corps proposes to create a Veterans Service Corps program.

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

To support veterans as they transition out of the military, to assist them in developing transferable workforce skills, and further its environmental mission, Conservation Corps proposes to establish a Veteran Service Corps.

Minnesotans are fortunate to have access to high-quality state and local parks, trails, lakes and waterways, and other natural amenities. However, without ongoing maintenance and restoration, Minnesota's public lands, trails, and waterways will quickly become impacted and natural habitat will become degraded. There is already substantially more demand for Conservation Corps' services than the organization is able to meet and due to Covid19, engagement with public lands in Minnesota has never been higher. Without increased investment in organizational capacity, this gap will continue to grow as demands on our public lands increase.

Covid19 has also severely impacted the labor market. Veteran unemployment has risen from a record low of 3.1% to nearly 12% in less than a year. Veterans Service Corps are a proven and effective model for veterans to develop skills, contribute to conservation and natural resource preservation, and receive the support and wraparound services they need to successfully transition out of service.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

Conservation Corps will develop, pilot and launch an innovative Veterans Corps field crew program to expand and supplement Conservation Corps' existing capacity to carry out natural resource restoration in Minnesota while also supporting veterans' transition from service. In the first year of the three-year pilot, Veterans Corps will recruit and train 2 to 12 veterans (delay in funding reduced recruitment in 2022) based out of Rochester and Mankato offices. Members are paid a stipend and are eligible for health insurance and other benefits. Members receive an education award at the completion of service that can be used to pay for college. Conservation Corps intends to expand the program to a target of 24 members in the second year and 36 members statewide in the third year.

Veterans Corps members will be trained to implement a wide range of natural resource management best practices, including mechanical and chemical invasive species management, prescribed fire and fuels management, and trail-building and restoration practices, including brushing and grading.

Through their service members will gain valuable workforce skills and credentials that are transferable to the professional natural resources management field, equipping veterans to move into high-skill, high-wage careers while expanding Minnesota's natural resource talent pool.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?

Conservation Corps works to restore vital degraded habitat and build and maintain our trails and waterways to better promote public engagement in the outdoors. The Veterans Corps program will result in an additional 72 miles of trails and waterways maintained and an additional 2,100 acres of habitat restored in the first year, with additional environmental outcomes scaling up as the program grows.

In the first year, veterans will gain natural resource management skills and certifications and improve job skills, as assessed in post-program evaluations. Veterans Corps members will also lead 200 volunteers annually.

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Statewide

What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Veterans Corps Members Carry Out Statewide Natural Resource Management and Restoration

Activity Budget: \$1,339,000

Activity Description:

After completing training, Veterans Corps members will complete natural resource management projects on public lands and/or private lands for public benefit. Carried out in partnership with public natural resource land managers, projects can range from one day to one week, up to several months. Ongoing projects, particularly invasive species removal, may be multi-year to ensure adequate follow-up. Funding will allow “start-up” type investments that are needed to create this program without having to pass those additional costs along to our partners.

Projects and activities are driven by local community need but generally fall into two types of projects—trail maintenance and habitat restoration. Trail maintenance projects typically include brushing and grading, rock removal, water management, erosion control, and trail construction. Water trail activities include snag removal, updating signage, maintaining campsites, and clearing portages to ensure safe passage.

Conservation Corps crews will also maintain and restore native habitat through exotic species removal, planting, nursery activities, seed collection, shoreline and stream bank restoration, rain garden installation, timber stand improvement, prescribed burning, and fire suppression

All activities are tracked using a "Survey of Accomplished Work" tool, which is uploaded to Salesforce daily. The SAW allows Conservation Corps to provide high-quality, verifiable environmental

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Year 1 - recruit and train 2-12 veterans for 3-6 months of service	September 30, 2022
Year 1 - Veterans Corps Members Improve and Maintain 72 Miles of Trails	December 31, 2022
Year 1 - Veterans Corps Members Improve and Maintain 2100 acres of habitat	December 31, 2022
Year 2 - recruit and train a target of 24 veterans for 6-11 month terms	June 30, 2023
Year 2 - Veteran Corps Members Improve and Maintain 144 Miles of Trail	December 31, 2023
Year 2 - Veterans Corps Members Improve and Maintain 4200 Acres of Habitat	December 31, 2023
Year 3 - recruit and train a target of 36 veterans for 6-11 month terms	June 30, 2024
Year 3 - Veterans Corps Members Improve and Maintain 216 Miles of Trail	December 31, 2024
Year 3 - Veterans Corps Members Improve and Maintain 6300 Acres of Habitat	December 31, 2024

Dissemination

Describe your plans for dissemination, presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products and how they will follow ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.

- Veterans Corps program results and accomplishments will be shared in several accessible ways with the public and our stakeholders (all communications and outreach activities will appropriately acknowledge the ENRTF):
- PR/media interactions – results may be included in media pitches or press releases to media outlets 1-2 times per year around Minnesota.
- Annual impact report – program results and highlights will be included in our public impact report to be shared with stakeholders, legislators, partners, program alumni, and funders. This report will also be published on our website and shared in our digital communications.
- Digital communications (website, email newsletters, and social media) – accomplishments will be shared throughout the year on our digital platforms.
- Video – we may share program accomplishments and testimonials in short videos to be published on our YouTube channel, and social media platforms, and shared in our digital communications.
- Results may also be shared in a one-page report with legislators and partners, and in public presentations.

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

Initial funding from LCCMR will enable Conservation Corps to develop, launch and implement the Veterans Corps program, leading to expanded, sustainable, and durable programming that will protect, conserve, preserve, and enhance Minnesota's natural resources. Funding will allow "start-up" type investments that are needed to create this program without having to pass those additional costs along to our partners.

Once established, CCM anticipates the Veterans Corps program will rely on the organization's proven funding model, which relies on a combination of federal AmeriCorps grants and earned fee-for-service revenue generated through partner agreements.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Veterans Corps Program Manager		Program manager will be responsible for recruiting and training Corps members and coordinating natural resource conservation projects.			22%	2.5		\$162,500
Field Coordinator		Assists in providing training, education, coordination and leadership to ensure a positive and safe experience for regional field program participants. Assist with personnel management, maintains equipment, and coordinates or provides training in technical and personal development skills.			22%	2.5		\$101,100
							Sub Total	\$263,600
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Personal Protective Equipment (Boots, goggles, hard hats, gloves, 300/per member, 72 members)	Veterans Corps member safety					\$19,400
							Sub Total	\$19,400
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-

Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		AmeriCorps Member Stipends (12 members x \$8,000 per member) and 60 members x \$16,000 per member)	Provide stipends for participation to Veterans Corps members	X				\$1,056,000
							Sub Total	\$1,056,000
							Grand Total	\$1,339,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Other Expenses		AmeriCorps Member Stipends (12 members x \$8,000 per member) and 60 members x \$16,000 per member)	<p>Due to federal AmeriCorps regulations, AmeriCorps members are paid stipends for their service and are not considered employees. National stipend ranges are set by the Corporation for National and Community Services. Members are paid their stipend biweekly during their term of service and are eligible for health insurance, child care assistance, and other benefits.</p> <p>These stipends are supplemented by an education award of approximately \$6,250 (changes annually) provided by the Federal government at the conclusion of service. This education award can be used to pay for college or applied to student loans.</p> <p>The requested amount (\$1,056,000) assumes a stipend rate of \$16,000 per member annually, with 72 members serving over three years. Support for member stipends is crucial to successfully launching the program. Once the program is established and built out, Conservation Corps will be able to sustain the program beyond the grant period and provide member stipends through a mix fee-for-service revenue and Americorps grant funding.</p>

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	\$ Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	AmeriCorps Federal Funding	Conservation Corps receives Federal AmeriCorps funding to support program operation expenses, including travel and fleet lease, equipment, AmeriCorps member benefits, administrative costs, and other eligible expenses.	Secured	\$1,114,488
			Non State Sub Total	\$1,114,488
			Funds Total	\$1,114,488

Acquisition and Restoration

Parcel List

Name	County	Site Significance	Activity	Acres	Miles	Estimated Cost	Type of Landowner	Easement or Title Holder	Status of Work
Public Lands	Statewide	varied	Restoration	12,600	432	-	Public		Has Not Begun
Totals				12,600	432	-			

Restoration

1. Provide a statement confirming that all restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.

I confirm that all restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.

2. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for the parcels to be restored by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation.

All restoration will be planned and completed in collaboration with partner agencies/organizations to meet long term goals. Detailed data will be kept on activities and accomplishments and stored electronically by Conservation Corps.

3. Describe how restoration efforts will utilize and follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” in order to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator enhancement.

Conservation Corps will work with partner agencies to utilize and follow this guidance. Existing agreement templates with the state already include provisions to support these efforts i.e. Pollinator: Habitat restorations and enhancements conducted on DNR lands and prairie restorations on state lands or on any lands using state funds are subject to pollinator best management practices and habitat restoration guidelines pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Section 84.973. Practices and guidelines ensure an appropriate diversity of native species to provide habitat for pollinators through the growing season.

4. Describe how the long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel being restored with these funds will be met and financed into the future.

This responsibility will be carried out by the public agency owner or non-profit that has requested our services

5. Describe how consideration will be given to contracting with Conservation Corps of Minnesota for any restoration activities.

N/A as Conservation Corps is the applicant!

6. Provide a statement indicating that evaluations will be completed on parcels where activities were implemented both 1) initially after activity completion and 2) three years later as a follow-up. Evaluations should analyze improvements to the parcel and whether goals have been met, identify any problems with the implementation, and identify any findings that can be used to improve implementation of future restoration efforts at the site or elsewhere.

Conservation Corps will reach out to project partners to solicit evaluation on project completion and again 3 years after completion.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [19c1946d-351.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Conservation Corps Veterans Service Corps logic model...

Financial Capacity

File: [dd218f24-4ea.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
CCMI Board Letter and Resolution	f2eb0a9c-6fb.pdf

Optional Attachments

Support Letter or Other

Title	File
Veterans Corps Whitepaper	d5fbce95-fdd.pdf
Background Check Certification Form	55033421-d05.pdf

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

changes include revisions to budget to reflect reduction from initial request to final appropriation. Proposal included 12 members serving 10 month terms in 2022 and has been revised to include up to 12 members serving 6 month terms in 2022 due to delay in funding decisions.

Additional Acknowledgements and Conditions:

The following are acknowledgements and conditions beyond those already included in the above workplan:

Do you understand and acknowledge the ENRTF repayment requirements if the use of capital equipment changes?

N/A

Do you agree travel expenses must follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?

N/A

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, or sale of products and assets?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No

Veteran's Service Corps Logic Model

Problem	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
Veteran Support: Veterans often need assistance acclimating to civilian life and veteran unemployment remains high. There is significant need for veteran workforce development to build sustainable post-service career options.	72 FT Veteran AmeriCorps members Veteran-specific supportive services and trainings to develop workforce skills	72 Veteran Corps members will receive up to 325 hours of training and leadership development and receive wraparound services 72 veterans participate in at least 1375 hours of natural resource conservation service learning to develop on-the-ground workforce skills	72 Veteran AmeriCorps members are trained to carry out natural resource conservation activities in Minnesota.	72 Veteran AmeriCorps members improve natural resource management skills and express higher confidence in job readiness capacity in post-program surveys	72 veterans are able to move into the natural resource workforce or other career paths of their choice using the skills and capacities gained	Veterans build long-term social and financial stability and wellbeing
Degraded Ecosystems: Degradation of tallgrass prairie, oak savanna, wetland, and forest habitat in the Upper Midwest is resulting in an increase in pollutants and sediment entering waterbodies and a loss of biodiversity, endangering plants, insects, and wildlife.	72 FT Veteran AmeriCorps members 50 partner sites Public agency project partners with approved resource management plans Federal, State, local funding Up to 325 hours of technical skills training per member	Degraded habitat will be restored as determined by public land managers on public lands Activities: Implement best scientific management practices to improve degraded habitat: remove invasive species, conduct prescribed burns, plant native trees, seed prairie, install rain gardens and stabilize shorelines, remove debris, collect habitat data Duration/Dosage: Each project varies greatly, but average project duration is 2 weeks, 80 hours per member per project for a total dosage of 400 hours	Improve 12,600 total acres of habitat on public lands with member activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove invasive species, conduct prescribed burns on native prairie, plant native trees and seed prairie to increase biodiversity Install rain gardens and control erosion to improve water quality Engage 200 volunteers in river clean-ups, rain garden installations, tree plantings, as tracked by volunteer logs 	Project hosts indicate that AmeriCorps member interventions have a direct positive effect on 10,000 acres by enhancing water quality, habitat, biodiversity, and pollution reduction as measured by partner surveys immediately following project completion	Decrease in non-native monocultures and corresponding increase in plant biodiversity Improved water quality as measured by Agency pollution reduction indicators	Restoration of healthy, sustainable, productive native ecosystems, resulting in increased biodiversity and native habitat, a decrease in pollutants and sediment entering waterbodies which will improve human quality of life



Veteran’s Service Corps Logic Model (continued)

Problem	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<p>Impacted Trails and Waterways:</p> <p>Overuse of trails and waterways reduces trail usability and reduces user experience quality.</p>	<p>72 Veteran AmeriCorps members</p> <p>30 partner sites</p> <p>Public agency project partners with approved resource management plans</p> <p>Federal, State, local funding</p> <p>Up to 325 hours of technical skills training per member</p>	<p>Trails and waterways to be constructed or improved as determined by public land managers</p> <p>Activities: improve trails and waterways by building and maintaining trail, improving waterways, increasing safety and access to parks</p> <p>Duration/Dosage: Each project varies greatly, but average project duration is 1 week, 40 hours per member for a total dosage of 200 hours per project</p>	<p>Improve 432 total miles of trails and waterways, increasing public access use and safety with member activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build or improve trail through brushing, grading, step and feature installation • Improve waterways through snag removal • Engage 150 volunteers in trail maintenance, as tracked by volunteer logs 	<p>Project hosts indicate that AmeriCorps member interventions have a direct positive effect on 400 miles, enhancing trail and waterway quality, safety, and accessibility, as measured by partner surveys immediately following project completion</p>	<p>Increase participation in outdoor recreation - greater use of trails, waterways, and public spaces due to increased safety and accessibility, as measured by user surveys</p>	<p>Improvement to public health through increased opportunities and access for participating in physical activity in the outdoors</p> <p>Increased citizen connection to the outdoors resulting in greater commitment and involvement in the protection of natural resources</p>



