



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2022 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2022-034

Proposal Title: Conservation Corps Veterans Service Corps Program

Project Manager Information

Name: Brian Miller

Organization: Conservation Corps Minnesota

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Project Basic Information

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.

Funds Requested: \$1,504,000

Proposed Project Completion: December 31 2024

LCCMR Funding Category: Methods to Protect, Restore, and Enhance Land, Water, and Habitat (F)

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

Narrative

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? i.e. What are you seeking funding to do? You will be asked to expand on this in Activities and 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 12 veterans based out of Conservation Corps' Rochester and Mankato offices. Veteran Corps members serve 10-month AmeriCorps terms. 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 at least 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, 12 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.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Recruit and Train Veterans to Perform Natural Resource Conservation and Management

Activity Budget: \$165,200

Activity Description:

In the first year Conservation Corps will recruit, train, and retain 12 veterans to form the initial Veterans Corps cohort. Veterans Corps participants will receive up to 325 hours of education, training, and professional development throughout their service term. Conservation Corps' training plan includes professional certifications (prescribed fire red card, Pesticide Applicator licensure, CPR/first aid, wilderness first aid) technical training (power and hand tool use, and trail-building and habitat management best practices, environmental education, and leadership development and personal growth.

Conservation Corps intends to scale the program up statewide to 24 members in the second year and 36 members in the third year. To ensure veteran retention through the term of service, Conservation Corps will provide additional wraparound support and assistance over and above what is typically provided, including assistance navigating veteran and AmeriCorps benefits, housing and relocation assistance, and referrals to specialized support as needed.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
First Year - Recruit and retain 12 veterans to serve as Veterans Corps members	December 31 2022
First Year - 12 Veterans Corps AmeriCorps members will be trained and certified	December 31 2022
Second Year - Recruit and retain 24 veterans to serve as Veterans Corps members	December 31 2023
Second Year - 24 Corps AmeriCorps members will be trained and certified	December 31 2023
Third Year - Recruit and retain 36 veterans to serve as Veterans Corps members	December 31 2024
Third Year - 36 Veterans Corps AmeriCorps members will be trained and certified	December 31 2024

Activity 2: Veterans Corps Members Carry Out Statewide Natural Resource Management and Restoration

Activity Budget: \$1,338,800

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.

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 accomplishment data.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
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 - 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 - 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

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 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.

Once established, CCMI 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 ongoing service agreements with federal, state and local agencies and nonprofit organizations. This funding model has been a successful and robust way to sustain the organization's programs for its nearly twenty-year history.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Brian Miller

Job Title: Program Director

Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.

Conservation Corps' Veterans Corps program will be directed by Brian Miller, Program Director - AmeriCorps Field Crew Program. As Program Director, Brian is responsible for overseeing planning, management, development, and outcomes for Conservation Corps' Field Crew Program across Minnesota and Iowa. Brian has been with the Corps since 2001, where he has served as crew leader, field specialist, wilderness crew coordinator, Central District and now serves as Program Director. Brian provides oversight for 14 full time staff and oversees programming for more than 200 AmeriCorps crew members annually, who provide more than 350,000 hours of natural resource conservation service to Minnesota annually.

Day-to-day management of the program will be carried out by regional staff located at South District offices in Mankato and Rochester. The South District is overseen by Doug Ekstrom, who started with the Corps as a crew member and crew leader. Doug has his Bachelors of Science degree in Natural Resource Management. He has also spent time working for the MN DNR and fundraising for conservation organizations. Doug is assisted by Dustin Looman, Assistant District Manager. Dustin brings expertise in prescribed fire and chainsaw training and is a RXB2-certified burn boss.

To better serve veterans and provide Minnesota with high-quality natural resource conservation service, Conservation Corps will hire two additional staff to manage Veteran Corps crews. Conservation Corps intends to hire staff with experience supporting veterans and their unique needs as well as experience in the natural resources field. New Veterans Corps staff will initially be based out of Conservation Corps' South District offices in Mankato and Rochester.

This program is being developed and implemented with the assistance of (Colonel-ret) John Morris Director, Office of Military & Veteran Services, Bethel University, Saint Paul, MN.

Organization: Conservation Corps Minnesota

Organization Description:

Conservation Corps Minnesota's origins are rooted in the tradition of the 1930s Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which provided natural-resource jobs to unemployed young men during the Great Depression. When federal support for conservation corps ended in 1981, the Minnesota Conservation Corps was created by the Minnesota Legislature to offer

youth and young adult programs through the Department of Natural Resources. In 1999, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization was formed and the nonprofit assumed operations in 2003. Conservation Corps' mission is to engage youth and young adults in meaningful service, leadership development, and environmental stewardship.

Today, Conservation Corps provides natural resource service learning opportunities for youth ages 15-18 and young adults ages 18-25 around the state of Minnesota. We serve 450 youth and young adults annually through our AmeriCorps Field Programs, Youth Outdoors afterschool program, Summer Youth Corps Program, and our Individual Placement program. Conservation Corps bases crews out of Rochester, Mankato, the Twin Cities, Duluth, Brainerd, Bemidji, Fergus Falls, and Saint Croix and Gooseberry Falls State Parks. Conservation Corps' members restore more than 450,000 acres of habitat and 1,500 miles of trails and waterways annually.

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%	3		\$191,000
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%	3		\$139,400
							Sub Total	\$330,400
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					\$21,600
							Sub Total	\$21,600
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 (72 members, \$16,000 per member)	Provide stipends for participation to Veterans Corps members	X				\$1,152,000
							Sub Total	\$1,152,000
							Grand Total	\$1,504,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Other Expenses		AmeriCorps Member Stipends (72 members, \$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 (\$1,152,000) 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

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

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

Alternate Text for Visual Component

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

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

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
Impacted Trails and Waterways: Overuse of trails and waterways reduces trail usability and reduces user experience quality.	72 Veteran AmeriCorps members 30 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	Trails and waterways to be constructed or improved as determined by public land managers Activities: improve trails and waterways by building and maintaining trail, improving waterways, increasing safety and access to parks 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	Improve 432 total miles of trails and waterways, increasing public access use and safety with member activities: <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	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	Increase participation in outdoor recreation - greater use of trails, waterways, and public spaces due to increased safety and accessibility, as measured by user surveys	Improvement to public health through increased opportunities and access for participating in physical activity in the outdoors Increased citizen connection to the outdoors resulting in greater commitment and involvement in the protection of natural resources



