

**Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)  
February 10, 2021, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM  
RMRI Workforce Capacity Subcommittee  
Meeting Summary - FINAL**

**ATTENDANCE**

*Participants:* Samantha Albert, Kevin Heiner, Scott Segerstrom, Tim Reader, Ellen Roberts, Jake Todd, Tara Umphries, and Nathan Van Schaik

*Facilitation:* Molly Pitts and Samuel Wallace

**ACTION ITEMS**

<b>Jake Todd</b>	Give an update on federal workforce development grants at the next RMRI Workforce Capacity Subcommittee meeting.
<b>Jake Todd and Scott Segerstrom</b>	Connect offline to discuss opportunities for veterans to apply for heavy equipment grants.
<b>Jake Todd and Kevin Heiner</b>	Connect offline to discuss opportunities for the Southwest Conservation Corps and Job Corps to connect.
<b>Kevin Heiner</b>	Send information on the Southwest Conservation Corps forest partnership program manager position to the Workforce Capacity Subcommittee

**ACTION ITEM UPDATE**

Meeting participants shared updates on their action items from the RMRI Workforce Capacity meeting on Wednesday, January 20. Their comments are summarized below.

- Tim Reader and Molly Pitts fulfilled their action items related to planning the January 27 Workforce Development webinar. Tim Reader reached out to the Colorado State University (CSU) Office of Engagement to participate in the webinar, but they could not attend. He sent them the recording of the webinar.
- Molly Pitts reached out to Angela Boag to see if there are funding opportunities related to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) emergency declaration. FEMA administrators will be working on 2020 wildfire recovery. Molly Pitts will continue to identify opportunities to use Colorado wood products, like wood straw, in post-fire rehabilitation.
- Ellen Roberts and Molly Pitts met with Erin Minks from Senator Bennet's Office to discuss the Outdoor Restoration Force Act. The bill is fairly broad now, but there may be opportunities from the bill to support workforce development programs and the purchase of a training simulator. The Outdoor Restoration Force Act emphasizes the importance of developing a workforce pipeline.
- Samantha Albert talked with the data analyst at the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT), who works on the Colorado Talent Pipeline Report. The Colorado Talent Pipeline Report provides data on ten key industries, one of which is natural resources. The 2020 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report was different than the rest because it focused on COVID-19 impacts. The Workforce Capacity Subcommittee has talked with Clarke Becker from the Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium and Ray Lucero from the Montrose Workforce Center about having the Colorado Talent Pipeline Report recognize the forest and restoration industry as a growth sector. There is an opportunity for the Workforce Capacity Subcommittee to engage the Colorado Department of Labor and

Employment (CDLE) and Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to highlight the wood products industry, especially under the Next Generation Partnerships Program and programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

- Jake Todd researched federal grant opportunities. The previous US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Workforce Development Grants focused on college and postdoctoral students. Many of the grants will be due later in 2021, and some of them require a non-governmental organization (NGO) to be the lead applicant. FEMA and Department of Labor grants are oriented around developing workforce opportunities for populations dislocated by large fires. Among RMRI's three priority landscapes, only the Upper South Platte may qualify for those grants. There are also agricultural programs for veterans. Jake Todd will give an update on federal workforce development grants at the next RMRI Workforce Capacity Subcommittee meeting.
- Jake Todd reached out to John Deere to see if they were interested in donating a large equipment simulator. They politely declined. A simulator will cost around \$25,000.
- Jake Todd reached out to the Job Corps Office in Collbran, Colorado. They were unable to present at today's meeting, but they provided Jake Todd with slides to present.

### **JANUARY 27 WEBINAR DEBRIEF**

Meeting participants debriefed the January 27 webinar. Their comments are summarized below.

- The webinar was very informative. It helped to hear about a range of forest operations training programs, from full-year programs to 12-week programs. The different structures have associated opportunities and challenges.
- The Northern Maine Community College and Shasta College programs were good models for a potential training program in Colorado. The 12-week program from Northern Maine Community College may be a good fit in Colorado. One challenge with replicating either program in Colorado is that the respective state governments helped subsidize their training programs. Additionally, over 200 contractors in Maine help support their program, and that number of contractors does not exist in Colorado.
- Northern Arizona University (NAU) is just starting. The Workforce Capacity Subcommittee could benefit from working with the NAU program more closely. The Subcommittee could consider developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to formalize a relationship with NAU.
- The Workforce Capacity Subcommittee should share the recorded webinar with decision-makers and community colleges to demonstrate that forest training programs can be viable.

### **COLORADO YOUTH CORPS ASSOCIATION PRESENTATION**

Scott Segerstrom, Colorado Youth Corps Association (CYCA), presented on the CYCA's programs. His presentation is summarized below.

#### *CYCA Overview*

- The CYCA started 30 years ago and has its roots in the Civilian Conservation Corps from the 1930s.
- The CYCA serves eight accredited youth corps programs that reach over 1,800 young people annually. The number of young people who participated in Youth Corps programs this past year dropped due to COVID-19, but they expect to regain those numbers once COVID restrictions are no longer in place.
- The eight accredited youth corps programs cover almost all of Colorado, besides Northeast Colorado. Youth corps programs still manage projects in Northeast Colorado, but there is no established program due to the lack of public land.

- Corps members earn an AmeriCorps scholarship, which they can apply to past student loan debt or future college credits.
- Colorado Youth Corps engage in various projects. They construct and maintain trails, mitigate and suppress fires, eradicate invasive species, maintain infrastructure, install green energy infrastructure, and engage in mining land reclamation projects. The Corps provides credentials and experiential learning for members.
- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages a paid internship program and CYCA program. The CYCA can deliver candidates, particularly candidates from disinvested and underrepresented communities, and the BLM helps develop the next generation of employees through these programs.

### *Careers in Natural Resources Initiative*

- The CYCA partnered with the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education (CAEE) to launch the Careers in Natural Resources Initiative. This initiative aims to create a bridge from the Youth Corps programs to a job and help young people and veterans start their careers. The Careers in Natural Resources Initiative has over 100 participating organizations and 350 individuals involved.
- The four main goals of the Careers in Natural Resources Initiative is to:
  - Raise awareness for high school students so that they can strategically select classes during college or high school to help them go straight into the natural resources field
  - Increase knowledge and skills about the type of environmental careers available and the education and training needed to pursue those careers
  - Increase the knowledge and skills of career influencers to help mentor and support young people pursuing environmental careers
  - Inspire young people to pursue a natural resources career
- The CYCA and CAEE wrote a how-to-guide for pursuing a career in the natural resources field. The guide is free and accessible. The guide gives an overview of ten career fields, identifies common entry points into those career fields, and outlines each field's career pathway.
- The guide emphasizes that a natural resources degree is not required to work in the natural resources field. People also do not have to work in the outdoors to work for the outdoors. The natural resources field encompasses highly technical jobs and jobs in the humanities.
- The guide gives a brief overview of natural resource agencies, from the most well-known agencies, like the National Parks Service, to the lesser-known agencies, like the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA). The guide also includes a directory of agency and field offices to help disinvested and underrepresented communities select offices if they do not have the resources or ability to move to a new place.
- The guide has information on every natural resource degree program in the state. The list is not comprehensive, but CYCA and CAEE try to keep the list as up-to-date as possible.
- The guide methodically outlines the step-by-step process for navigating USA Jobs. The USA Jobs portal can be confusing, so the guide lays out the process to make navigating the portal more manageable.
- CYCA and CAEE developed a curriculum to better engage university classrooms, youth corps members, and veterans. They also developed a free training program to teach people how to teach the guide, known as the Train-the-Trainer Program. When people complete the free training program, they receive hard copies of the guide and curriculum tool. The purpose of developing the curriculum and the Train-the-Trainer program is to help make the guide more accessible and useful.

- CYCA and CAEE formed a youth advisory council of high school students from underrepresented communities to discuss what tools they would like to help them get into careers in the natural resource field. The council developed the idea of creating an online career awareness tool, which would include a community forum to discuss entry-level jobs and student-produced videos that show a "day in the life" of a natural resource professional. CYCA and CAEE plan to launch the online career awareness tool in the next couple of months.
- CYCA and CAEE began the Work Gone Wild! Program. The Work Gone Wild! Program is an experiential career fair where students meet with agency professionals over one week. The Program deliberately engages students in underrepresented and disinvested communities.
- The website for the Careers in Natural Resources initiative can be found at [this link](#). The guide is on the website in both English and Spanish.

### ***Clarifying Questions***

Meeting participants asked several clarifying questions about the CYCA presentation. Questions are indicated in italics with corresponding answers in plain text.

*Is private industry mentioned in the career guide?*

The guide only tangentially mentions private industry. The CYCA and CAEE are looking to add private industry to the guide, from green energy to oil and gas. Their goal is to represent the full span of natural resource careers. They focused on creating a section on navigating the USA Jobs portal first because that process is more complicated than the hiring process for private industry.

*What is the next step for developing the guide further?*

The biggest barrier to developing the guide further is funding and staff time. It takes time and money to continue to update the guide.

*Can CYCA and CAEE embed videos into the guide?*

It may be possible.

*Does CYCA participate at CSU's natural resources career fair?*

CYCA has participated in the career fair in the past. The Larimer County and Weld County Conservation Corps have a close relationship with CSU.

*How can RMRI help CYCA?*

CYCA does not have a specific way that RMRI can help them, but it would be beneficial to continue discussions and leave this question open-ended.

### ***Group Discussion***

Meeting participants discussed the CYCA presentation. Their comments are summarized below.

- The section of the guide that describes how to navigate USA Jobs is the most popular section of the guide. Having a version of the guide in Spanish is helpful for non-native English speakers who have a particularly difficult time navigating the USA Jobs portal.
- Jake Todd is working on a project to direct veterans to resources for small business development. Veterans have access to grants for heavy equipment operations, so there is an opportunity for veterans to work as contractors. Jake Todd and Scott Segerstrom will continue this discussion offline.

## **SOUTHWEST CONSERVATION CORPS PRESENTATION**

Kevin Heiner presented on the Southwest Conservation Corps. His presentation is summarized below.

- The Southwest Conservation Corps provides opportunities for youth, young adults, and veterans to complete meaningful conservation services on public and private lands where there is a public benefit.
- The Southwest Conservation Corps is a program of Conservation Legacy. Conservation Legacy has offices and local corps programs across the country and has its foundation from the Civilian Conservation Corps. They provide support and advocacy for locally based programs. Conservation Legacy has over 2,400 participants with over 1.2 million total hours served.
- The Southwest Conservation Corps has offices in Durango and Salida, so they overlap with RMRI focus areas.
- The Southwest Conservation Corps works with federal, state, and non-profit partners and covers their funding through grants and cooperative agreements. The Corps recruits locally and nationally. They are also trying to match the demographics of the organization with the demographics of the country.
- The Southwest Conservation Corps provides leadership, training, and exposure to agency partners to members. Their members work on challenging projects, and many go on to become future agency staff. The Southwest Conservation Corps serves as a career pathways training program for motivated and enthusiastic members.
- The Southwest Conservation Corps conducts their work through partnerships. They develop and run programs from start to finish and help write grants and raise funds. They also onboard members, deploy them to different locations, and ensure their safety. The Southwest Conservation Corps is a fully insured operation.
- The Southwest Conservation Corps engages in many different projects, including watershed restoration, invasive species treatment, and resource assessment, inventory, and monitoring. They also engage in projects related to travel management plan road closures, mine reclamation, disaster response and recovery, wilderness closures, and weatherization and energy efficiency.
- The Southwest Conservation Corps manages several different types of crews, including:
  - Eight-person regional conservation crews that work on forestry, trail, and developed recreation projects
  - Veteran fire crews to help veterans get the credentials to manage fires
  - High school conservation crews to engage teens in local projects
  - Farm corps crews for people looking to get in agriculture and local food systems
  - Affinity crews for underrepresented populations, such as veterans, women, leaders of color, and deaf and hard of hearing
  - Small team crews that focus on ecological assessment, inventory, and monitoring
  - Individual placement opportunities that are customizable and adaptable
- Crews will often go to a site for 8-12 days at a time. They work in remote environments and are self-sufficient. The age range of corps members is from 16 to 35.
- All Southwest Conservation Corps members are AmeriCorps members, except those in the high school conservation crews. As AmeriCorps members, they receive various benefits, including a living stipend, AmeriCorps education award, certifications, on-the-job training, technical skills development, leadership development, agency exposure, mentorship, job-seeking skills and support, career pathway opportunities, and adventure.
- Some of the credentials that Southwest Conservation Corps members can receive include wilderness medicine, first aid/AED/CPR, and chainsaw operations.

- For each crew, Southwest Conservation Corps trains crew leaders. There are 30 crew leaders out of the Durango Office and 25 out of the Salida Office.
- The new presidential administration is considering starting the Civilian Climate Corps. The federal government has not appropriated any funding to the program yet. Federal agencies currently have a 90-day period to determine how to stand up a Civilian Climate Corps. There is an opportunity to take a public-private partnership approach to the Civilian Climate Corps rather than a government program. The Southwest Conservation Corps is considering how they could align their work with a Civilian Climate Corps.

### ***Clarifying Questions***

Meeting participants asked several clarifying questions about the Southwest Conservation Corps presentation. Questions are indicated in italics with corresponding answers in plain text.

*Has the Southwest Conservation Corps considered having an equipment operations training program?*

The Southwest Conservation Corps could explore that opportunity. They would need to determine the insurance implications of having equipment operations training. They also need to show the public benefit of the work, which they could do by working with RMRI. The Southwest Conservation Corps does not want to duplicate other efforts, so they would like to identify gaps in the workforce development pipeline where they could best contribute.

*Does the Southwest Conservation Corps track the hours committed by their crews and interns?*

Yes.

*Does the Southwest Conservation Corps connect with Job Corps graduations?*

The Southwest Conservation Corps is open to this possibility, but they have not done so yet.

### ***Group Discussion***

Meeting participants discussed the Southwest Conservation Corps presentation. Their comments are summarized below.

- There is a gap in people who has skills in operating logging equipment. Because there is a lack of training programs in equipment operations, businesses lose money when bringing on and training a new person. So much of the forestry industry today is mechanized. Front Range Community College provides some equipment operations training, and the CDA has a program to fund interns. Once the Office of Just Transition is operational, they could be another opportunity to train people moving from the coal industry to other industries.
- Besides a workforce gap for skilled operators, there are also workforce gaps for trained foresters, recreational managers, and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) planners. Federal staff could be available to train interns in these skillsets. Nathan Van Schaik could also offer training in communications and journalism.
- The forestry industry has difficulty recruiting people who want to work in the woods and are okay with being isolated. The Southwest Conservation Corps members would more likely match these qualifications and be a good place to recruit for private industry.
- There may be an opportunity for the Southwest Conservation Corps to partner with small business development centers to create a pipeline for small businesses to hire crew members.
- There is a need for a workforce that can target one or five acres of mechanical and manual treatment at a time. The Southwest Conservation Corps received money from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which they are passing through the American Forest Foundation (AFF), to conduct forest management planning on private lands in

Southwest Colorado. The Southwest Conservation Corps is currently hiring a forest partnerships program manager to develop forest management plans on private land. Kevin Heiner will send information on the Southwest Conservation Corps forest partnership program manager to the Workforce Capacity Subcommittee.

- There may be an opportunity for the Southwest Conservation Corps to connect with Job Corps. Job Corps has recently graduated people out of their heavy equipment operations program looking for opportunities to connect with employers. Kevin Heiner and Jake Todd can connect offline to discuss opportunities for the Southwest Conservation Corps and Job Corps to connect. The Workforce Capacity Subcommittee should also host Job Corps representatives to present on their program.
- RMRI-Southwest Colorado is currently prioritizing different potential operational delineations (PODs). The Southwest Conservation Corps is not an advocacy group, so they do not provide their input on these prioritization efforts.
- Three opportunities where the CYCA, Southwest Conservation Corps, and RMRI could partner include expanding the industry workforce, expanding the recreation management workforce, and incorporating the Civilian Climate Corps into their work. OEDIT is working with Jason Lawhon to consider recreation in their planning efforts. Involving Youth Corps Programs would be beneficial as RMRI-Southwest Colorado partners identify areas of high recreation usage.
- The Southwest Conservation Corps would like to showcase what the Southwest Conservation Corps can do and bring to RMRI landscapes.
- The CYCA could provide metrics to make the case to the Colorado Workforce Development Council that they should recognize the Colorado forest and restoration industry as a growth sector.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

- At the next meeting, Jake Todd will give an update on workforce development grants.
- Samuel Wallace will send out a Doodle to schedule the next Workforce Capacity Subcommittee meeting.