

Report to Minnesota State Legislature on State Appropriations

July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2017



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Report purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an accurate accounting of Conservation Corps Minnesota’s expenditures of Natural Resources Fund dollars and corresponding accomplishments for the reporting period. The report is created for the Department of Natural Resources Commissioner, State Legislature and committees of jurisdiction in the Minnesota House of Representatives and Senate.

Reporting period

While Conservation Corps Minnesota programs operate on a calendar fiscal year, this report correlates with revenue and expenses during the state fiscal year July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017.

Governing legislation

On July 1, 2003, Minnesota Conservation Corps transferred operations from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to the nonprofit 501(c)(3) Friends of the Minnesota Conservation Corps, which assumed governance responsibility over policies, fiscal management and advancement of Conservation Corps’ mission. The Minnesota State Legislature made the transfer to nonprofit status official through 2003 Session Law, Chapter 128, Article 1, Sec. 35. [84.991]. In addition, the DNR and Conservation Corps entered into a joint powers agreement (CFMS Contract No. A50895) on July 17, 2003. This agreement is renewed every two years, most recently on July 1, 2015.

2.3 Fund Integrity: Conservation Corps Minnesota will utilize Natural Resources Funds only for the purposes for which they were intended. Conservation Corps Minnesota will provide an accurate accounting of expenditures of Natural Resources Funds and project accomplishments annually to the legislature, the Commissioner of Natural Resources, and the House and Senate Committees with jurisdiction over environment and natural resources policy and finance.

Conservation Corps Minnesota overview

Conservation Corps Minnesota traces its roots to the 1930s Civilian Conservation Corps, which provided natural-resource jobs to unemployed young men so they could support their families during the Great Depression. In the 1970s, the federal government launched the summer Youth Conservation Corps and the year-round Young Adult Conservation Corps, continuing the employment of young people in meaningful conservation work. 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 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. In 1999, Friends of the Minnesota Conservation Corps was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization by community supporters and program alumni, and the nonprofit assumed operations of Minnesota Conservation Corps in 2003. In January 2010, Minnesota Conservation Corps changed its legal name to Conservation Corps, dba Conservation Corps Minnesota, to be consistent with the brand we established in 2009 when we launched Conservation Corps Iowa with funding from AmeriCorps and Iowa project partners. Minnesota state appropriations are not used to support the Iowa program.

Each year, more than 600 youth and young adults enroll in Conservation Corps programs. Young adult AmeriCorps members work throughout the state to restore native habitat, improve access to outdoor recreational opportunities, provide community outreach and serve as apprentices with Soil and Water Conservation Districts

throughout Minnesota. Young adults also lead youth in Conservation Corps Minnesota's two programs for high school students: our after-school Youth Outdoors program and residential Summer Youth Corps. All participants receive a stipend and AmeriCorps members receive an education award for college and qualified student loan expenses after completing the service term. These service-learning experiences change young people's lives and prepare them for natural resource, green industry and community leadership careers.

Mission and initiatives

Conservation Corps Minnesota provides hands-on environmental stewardship and service-learning opportunities to youth and young adults while accomplishing conservation, natural resource management and emergency response work. Our goals are to help young people from diverse backgrounds become more connected to the environment, engaged in conservation, involved in the community and prepared for future employment. Conservation Corps programs devote 20 percent of the service term to technical-skills training, career preparation that includes resume writing and interviewing assistance, and educational activities focused on environmental science and technology.

In 2017, we realized our mission and accomplished our goals through the following initiatives:

AmeriCorps opportunities for young adults, ages 18-25, include non-residential **Field Crews** in northern, central and southern Minnesota that engage young adults in conservation, natural resource management and emergency response work from February to December. **Seasonal Field Crews** work in Superior National Forest (two crews) building and improving hiking trails, improving timber stands and managing invasive species. **Conservation Corps Specialists** serve a yearlong term in nonprofit and government agencies focused on natural resource management and energy, assisting with community outreach, resource management and technical field work. **Conservation Apprentices** serve at Soil and Water Conservation Districts across Minnesota from May through August, assisting with surveying, monitoring, runoff prevention and landowner outreach.

AmeriCorps young adults are also **Youth Leaders** for two Conservation Corps programs that engage teens, ages 15 to 18, in outdoor service-learning. Our residential **Summer Youth Corps** unplugs teenagers from modern intrusions during two summer sessions, each four weeks long. Youth camp through the region, working in crews of eight youth and two AmeriCorps leaders each, restoring natural resources. **Youth Outdoors** engages Twin Cities teens in service-learning 12 hours per week, after-school and Saturdays during the school year. Youth earn a stipend while leading volunteers to revitalize local neighborhoods.

Corps functions

- Public service — Conservation Corps Minnesota serves public agencies and nonprofit organizations for the common good.
- Youth and young adult development — Corps members receive intensive training, preparing them for natural resource, green industry and other related jobs. Developing a strong work and community service ethic is the foundation of the Conservation Corps philosophy.
- Conservation and stewardship — The Corps completes projects that improve our environment, conserve energy and change corps members' lives through a commitment to community service.

Program participants

In 2017, Conservation Corps Minnesota engaged 576 youth and young adults in natural resource and energy conservation projects across Minnesota.

PARTICIPANTS	Summer youth enrollments	148	Youth, 15-18
	Summer youth leaders	19	Young adults, 18-25
	After-school youth enrollments	120	Youth, 15 to 18
	After-school youth leaders	39	Young adults, 18-25
	Year-round field crew members	127	Young adults, 18-25
	Seasonal field crew members	64	Young adults, 18-25
	Year-round single placements	11	Young adults, 18-25
	Seasonal single placements	48	Young adults, 18-25
	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	576	Youth and young adults
STAFF & BOARD	Full-time staff	34	staff
	Board of directors	9	directors

Importance of Natural Resources Fund for Conservation Corps Minnesota

In State Fiscal Year 2017 NRF dollars comprised 4 percent of Conservation Corps Minnesota’s budget. The chart below shows the revenue breakout.

Revenue	Total
Partner Support (fee-for-service)	5,405,099
Federal Grants	788,766
Charitable Contributions & Other	167,974
General Fund	455,000
Natural Resources Fund	378,142
Parks & Trails Legacy Funds	688,178
Clean Water Legacy Funds	622,235
Total	8,505,394

Fund management & financial systems

Conservation Corps Minnesota’s financial systems employ clear lines of authority, separation of duties, multiple layers of approval for cash disbursements, oversight by the board of directors finance committee and annual independent audits as part of its fiscal control policies. Annual audits are conducted by Abdo Eick & Meyers LLP, a firm experienced in working with nonprofit organizations. The Corps has received an “unqualified” opinion on all audits, the best opinion a firm can give. In addition, finance staff members participate in trainings sponsored by Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, Nonprofit Assistance Fund, University of St. Thomas and the Corporation for National and Community Service to stay current with changing financial standards.

Conservation Corps Minnesota uses the following procedure to properly account for NRF expenditures:

1. Conservation Corps and the project host discuss and agree on the scope, terms, timing and goals of the project as well as project qualifications under the NRF definition.
2. Conservation Corps and the project host sign a contract that outlines these items and indicates the NRF as the project funding source.
3. Conservation Corps assigns an internal project number to track the project and funding source.
4. Conservation Corps crews complete the project.

5. Conservation Corps tracks the hours used on the project with timesheets and the payroll system. The Corps also tracks work accomplished for each project through a Survey of Accomplished Work reporting system.

REPORT TO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Conservation Corps Minnesota's joint powers agreement with the DNR requires an annual report of Natural Resources Fund (NRF) expenditures and accomplishments. The 2016 report to the DNR is included in this report.

Use and importance of Natural Resources Fund for Conservation Corps Minnesota

Conservation Corps Minnesota is an effective investment of state monies for natural resource restoration and conservation. The return on investment includes improvements in water quality, wildlife habitats and public access to outdoor recreation. In addition, young people receive work-skills training from natural resource professionals, as well as civic leadership skills that help prepare them for future jobs.

The NRF impacts the Conservation Corps in a variety of ways:

- NRF projects benefit Minnesota's natural resources and the public's use and enjoyment of those resources.
- NRF projects provide quality corps member experiences; corps members are given the opportunity to work directly with DNR programs and professionals, offering valuable career-shadowing experiences.
- NRF provides a stable source of funding for Conservation Corps programs.

Natural Resources Fund appropriation

Conservation Corps Minnesota's direct appropriation of \$490,000 from NRF dollars shall be from the following accounts and corresponding amounts in each fiscal year for biennium 2016-2017:

- a) **Water Recreation Account: \$50,000**
Expenditures from this account shall be for acquisition, development, maintenance and rehabilitation of sites for public access and boating facilities on public waters; lake and river improvements; development of water access sites within state parks; watercraft safety; exotic species inspections and control.
- b) **All-Terrain Vehicle Account: \$50,000**
Expenditures from this account shall be for development, construction and maintenance of state ATV trails and ATV education and training.
- c) **Snowmobile Account: \$75,000**
Expenditures from this account shall be for construction, maintenance and grooming of snowmobile state trails.
- d) **State Parks Account: \$150,000**
Expenditures from this account shall be for construction, maintenance and natural resource management projects in state parks.
- e) **State Parks/Trails (Lottery in Lieu) Account: \$25,000**
Expenditures from this account shall be for maintenance and operation of state parks and trails.
- f) **Natural Resources Aquatic Invasive Species Account: \$25,000**
Expenditures from this account shall be for management of invasive species.
- g) **Forest Management Investment Account: \$50,000**
Expenditures from this account shall include forest management activities.
- h) **Off Highway Motorcycle Account: \$10,000**
Expenditures from this account shall be spent on acquisition, maintenance and development of off-highway motorcycle trails and use areas.
- i) **Off Road Vehicle Account: \$30,000**

Expenditures from this account shall be spent on acquisition, maintenance and development of off-road vehicle trails and use areas.

j) **Cross Country Ski Account: \$15,000**

Expenditures from this account shall be used for the development and maintenance of state cross-country ski trails.

k) **Parks and Trails Horse Trails Account: \$10,000**

Expenditures from this account shall be spent on acquisition, maintenance and development of horse trails and use areas.

Natural Resources Fund expenditure by hours & dollars

	FY16-17 Biennium hour appropriation	FY17 expended hours	FY16-17 Biennium dollar appropriation	FY17 expended dollars
Water recreation	5,490	1,353	\$100,000	\$26,149
All-terrain vehicle	5,676	3,049	\$100,000	\$52,861
Snowmobile	7,144	1,894	\$150,000	\$36,380
State parks	16,158	8,302	\$300,000	\$154,559
State trails	2,908	1,163	\$50,000	\$24,417
Aquatic invasive species	2,380	1,218	\$50,000	\$25,583
Forest management	4,944	1,803	\$100,000	\$30,608
Off highway motorcycle	952	261	\$20,000	\$5,490
Off road vehicle	3,040	0	\$60,000	\$0
Cross country ski	1,430	1,231	\$30,000	\$21,180
Horse trails	952	377	\$20,000	\$7,694
TOTAL	51,074	20,624	\$980,000	\$378,142

Natural Resources Fund work accomplishments & project partners

The following tables summarize work accomplished per fund:

WATER RECREATION FUND	AMOUNT	UNITS
Debris Removal	5000	pounds
River obstruction removal	24	feet
Access maintenance	378	hours
Other Restoration Projects	185	hours

ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE FUND	AMOUNT	UNITS
ATV/OHV Trail Improvement/Maintenance	29.6	miles
Vegetation Removal	.33	acre
Retaining Wall Construction	24	feet
ATV Education and Training	490	hours
Trail Structure Installation	70	feet
Trail Area Maintenance	134.5	hours
Campsite Establishment/Maintenance	6	sites

SNOWMOBILE FUND	AMOUNT	UNITS
Carpentry/Construction	214	hours
Natural Resource Area Maintenance	61	hours
Snowmobile Trail Improvement	1423	feet
Trail Access Improvement	8	hours
Vegetation removal	70	acres
Tree Removal	20	trees

STATE PARKS FUND	AMOUNT	UNITS
Campsite Establishment/Maintenance	32	sites
Exotic/Invasive Species Management	205	acres
Natural Resource Area Maintenance	396	hours
Non-motorized Trail Improvement/Maintenance	15.8	miles
Planting (trees/shrubs/forbes/grasses)	4000	plants
Prescribed Burning	50	acres
Tree Removal	60	trees
Vegetation Removal	15.5	acres
Wildlife Structure Construction / Installation	40	structures

STATE TRAILS FUND	AMOUNT	UNITS
Boundary Work/Signing	0	hours
Debris Removal - Litter/Dump Site	80	pounds
Campsite Maintenance	10	sites
Trail Area Maintenance	1488	hours
Non-motorized Trail Construction	3.4	miles
Non-motorized Trail Improvement / Maintenance	86.6	miles
Trail Structure Installation	214	feet
Fencing	6160	feet
Firebreak Construction/Maintenance	2736	feet
Tree Removal	992	trees
Exotic / Invasive Species Management	209	acres
Vegetation Removal	4	acres
Water Trail Obstruction Removal	1	mile

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES FUND	AMOUNT	UNITS
Invasive Species Management	824	hours
GIS/GPS Mapping/Data Collection	40	hours

FOREST MANAGEMENT INVESTMENT FUND	AMOUNT	UNITS
Campsite Maintenance	48	sites
Exotic/Invasive Species Management	308	acres
Natural Resource Area Management	606	hours
Planting	6000	plants
Prescribed Burning	75	acres
Timber Stand Improvement/Pine Release/Pruning	6.5	acres
Trail Improvement / Maintenance	17.8	miles
Tree Removal	90	trees
Vegetation Removal	23.25	acres
Wildlife Structure Construction / Installation	60	structures

OFF HIGHWAY MOTORCYCLE FUND	AMOUNT	UNITS
Off Highway Motorcycle Use / Access Training	233	hours

CROSS COUNTRY SKI FUND	AMOUNT	UNITS
Cross-country Ski Trail Maintenance	14	miles
Cross-country Ski Trail Construction	1000	feet

HORSE TRAIL FUND	AMOUNT	UNITS
Trail Improvement / Maintenance	4.3	miles

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