



United States Department of Agriculture

# Transforming Lives and Accomplishing Mission Critical Work The 21st Century Conservation Service Corps and U.S. Forest Service



Sitka Conservation Society



Canyon Country Youth Corps



Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa



California Conservation Corps

*Clockwise, from top left:*

The Anchoo Youth Conservation Corps crew lived on the Tongass National Forest in Alaska while working on wilderness projects; A member of the Canyon Country Youth Corps in Utah works on hazardous fuels removal; A California Conservation Corps crew works on the Stanislaus National Forest; Members of the Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa work on stream restoration.



Forest Service

## What is the 21CSC?

The 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) is a public-private initiative to employ youth and veterans on public lands to protect, restore, and enhance our natural and cultural resources. Through compensated opportunities, the 21CSC helps to develop a generation of skilled workers; educated and active citizens; future leaders; and stewards of the land.

There are currently 191 non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and local, state, Tribal, and federal governments that are providing opportunities for 21CSC work on National Forest System and other public lands. 21CSC programs operate in all 50 states. Some programs are operated directly by Federal agencies, such as the Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers and AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps. To see a full list of 21CSC member organizations, visit [www.21csc.org](http://www.21csc.org).

In FY 2014 and 2015, the Forest Service engaged 20,000 youth and veterans through partnerships with 21CSC member organizations. In FY 2015, more than 800 21CSC projects were carried out throughout the Forest Service.

## What can 21CSC participants do?

21CSC participants can accomplish a wide variety of mission critical work, including:

- Repair and rebuild recreation infrastructure, such as trails and kiosks
- Eradicate invasive/noxious weeds
- Protect communities from wildland fire and perform hazardous fuels removal
- Protect and restore wildlife habitats
- Preserve historic structures
- Conduct research and needs assessments
- Monitor and evaluate forest activities
- Perform interpretive activities
- Coordinate outreach programs
- Manage volunteer programs



## What are the benefits of working with 21CSC?

### *Fulfill multiple agency objectives simultaneously*

- By working with 21CSC, Forest Service units can:
  - » Help accomplish mission critical work on the ground
  - » Contribute to the agency's priority to increase field capacity and expand agency focus on providing compensated, work-based training and learning opportunities to youth and veterans
  - » Develop the next generation of conservation stewards and agency employees
  - » Expand participation of diverse audiences in the outdoors
  - » Contribute to USDA's priority of "cultural transformation"

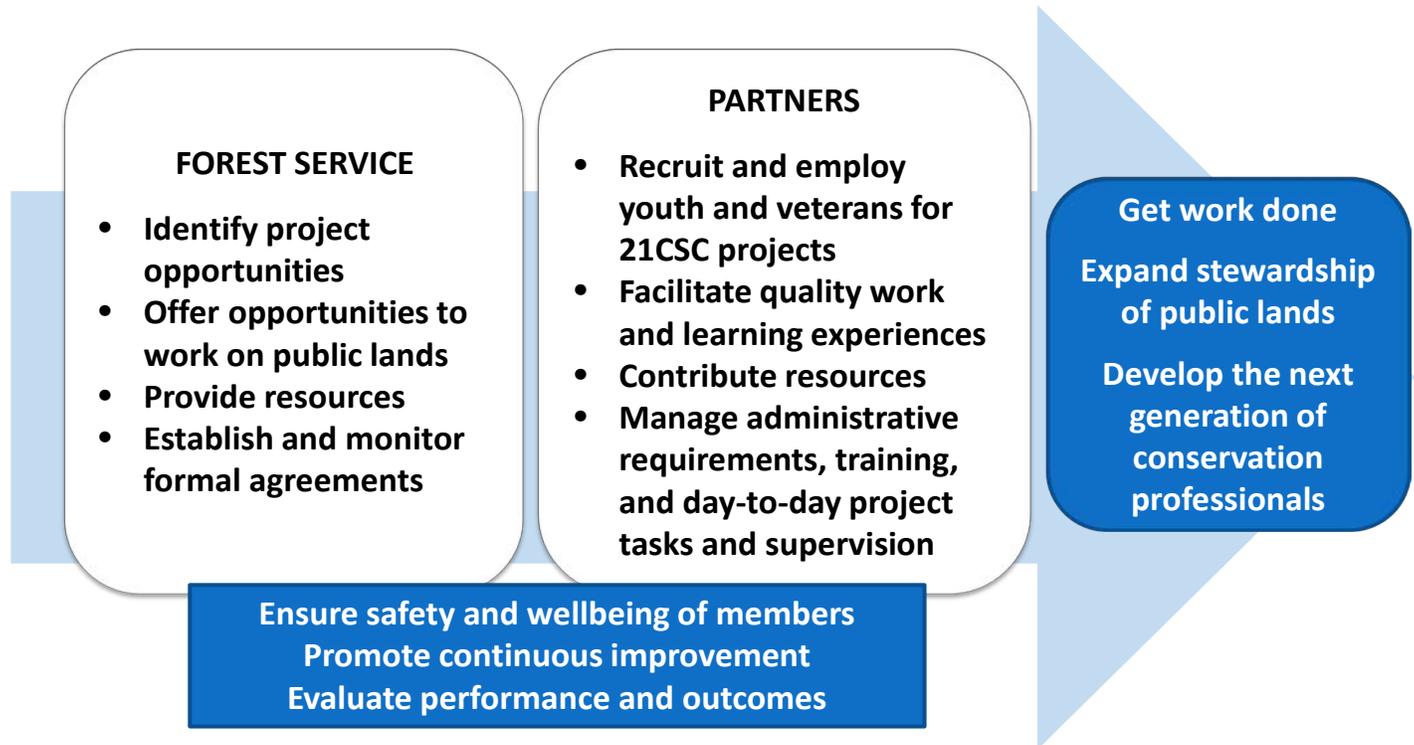
### *Leverage resources and save time*

- Regular maintenance and operations funds can be used to help support 21CSC partnership agreements.
- 21CSC partnerships can be an effective use of limited resources, especially when partners provide crew leaders, vehicles, tools and other project support.
- 21CSC partnerships can provide additional administrative support to the field by:
  - » Recruiting, selecting and hiring participants
  - » Processing participant stipends or payroll
  - » Covering and processing Office of Workers' Compensation Programs claims for non-FS participants
  - » Providing field per diem for field-based crews
  - » Deploying crews with crew leaders (in most situations)
  - » Supervising and managing the day-to-day activities of the crews
  - » Coordinating and conducting work training

### *Develop the next generation of stewards*

- Many 21CSC participants who complete a specified number of hours can acquire non-competitive hiring eligibility after their term of service, which allows them to apply to Merit announcements.

## How does it work?



## How can I begin working with 21CSC?

21CSC involves a number of existing programs and partnerships, including the Youth Conservation Corps, other youth and veteran's corps partnerships, internships with non-profit organizations and academia, and partnerships with Tribal, state, and other federal entities. You can begin by making 21CSC an integral part of your unit:

- Make 21CSC part of your unit's planning process:
  - » Include 21CSC projects in your unit work plans
  - » Determine budget line items for 21CSC projects based on the type of work
  - » Consider 21CSC crews and/or interns for a wide variety of project work
  - » Request PLC non-competitive eligible certificates when filling vacant positions
- Consider strengthening skill sets and/or adding to your internal capacity to manage 21CSC partnership agreements; full-time, year-long Resource Assistants can help manage this work for your unit while you contribute to the agency's 21CSC goals
- Work with your Regional Volunteers & Service Coordinator to share unit 21CSC needs and planning

## What exactly is included under 21CSC?

All agency efforts that enable work and service opportunities for youth and young adults between 15 and 25 and veterans up to age 35 on National Forest System lands and in support of the Forest Service mission. This includes projects operated primarily through partnerships with non-profit organizations, universities, state, county and federal entities such as AmeriCorps, and other institutions, as well as the Forest Service's Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers and Youth Conservation Corps.

## What are the qualifications and skill levels of 21CSC participants?

It varies. Crews consist of young people and veterans from diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds. The same applies to interns. Some have extensive experience working in the outdoors, while others may be experiencing the work for the first time. Some 21CSC partners have specially trained crews that can work on historical preservation, fire mitigation and other projects requiring more specialized skills. Many 21CSC members have certifications in preservation, disaster relief, and other specializations, and are trained by the partner to perform outreach, event planning, interpretive services, and more.

### **How will partnering with 21CSC help me accomplish my work targets?**

Forests are under capacity and budgets continue to decline. 21CSC crews can be an effective option to help get needed work done, especially when 21CSC partners bring additional capacity and resources. 21CSC partnerships also help provide opportunities to engage more diverse young people, providing experiences and exposure to career pathways that young people in both urban and rural areas may not have. 21CSC crews and interns can get large amounts of work done in a wide range of functional areas, and in many instances with minimal oversight from Forest Service staff. Established crews with leaders can reduce or eliminate reliance on agency staff to provide direct supervision of many resource maintenance and restoration projects, freeing them up to do other work.

### **Will working with 21CSC increase the work load for my unit?**

21CSC may temporarily add to your workload as you work with partners prior to field season to outline project work plans and logistics, define expectations and skills needed, if any. With good project planning in collaboration with the partner during the agreement development stage, subsequent monitoring and oversight of the work by Forest Service staff should not be overly burdensome especially with partners who have competent crew leaders. In other ways, using 21CSC as your workforce can also reduce your work load, since partners help carry out certain responsibilities typically handled by a unit, such as recruiting and payroll. The investment made for these types of projects will pay off with better performance and greater crew, partner and agency satisfaction overall.

### **How do I go about working with a 21CSC crew or intern?**

After identifying the partner(s) that are the best match for the work you have, an agreement is established with the help of your G&A staff.

### **What type(s) of agreement are needed to work with 21CSC?**

Participating, challenge cost share and other cooperative agreements are used to codify the relationship between the Forest Service and partner organizations. 21CSC agreements are authorized by the Public Lands Corps Act of 1993 as amended by the Public Lands Corps Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2005 or the Cooperative Funds and Deposits Act of December 12, 1975, Pub.L. 94-148, 16 U.S.C. 565a1-a3, as amended by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008, Pub.L. 110-161. Under these authorities the Forest Service can work with any 21CSC partner with whom we have a shared vision wherein mutual interest and benefit exists. *No contracts are necessary to work with 21CSC.*

### **What are the Forest Service's responsibilities?**

Depending on the work, some projects and internships may require more or even less engagement.

- Identify work that needs to get done and include it in the unit work plan
- Define the parameters for the work
- Provide funding for up to 80% and in some instances 75% of the total project cost
- Establish and monitor formal agreements and oversee the execution of the project work

### **What are the partner's responsibilities?**

Recruit, pay, train, equip and supervise 21CSC crew members to support conservation, stewardship and restoration priorities, facilitate learning and career development, and contribute resources to the total project costs.

### **Featured Project: Utah Conservation Corps and Dixie National Forest**

Salt cedar, or tamarisk, is a non-native, invasive tree that can displace native riparian vegetation by absorbing large amounts of water and leaving salt deposits. Salt cedar can have devastating impacts on wildlife and instream habitat. Beginning in 2013, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and Dixie National Forest teamed up to remove an infestation of salt cedar from Moody Wash on the Pine Valley Ranger District. The Moody Wash has been found eligible for a Wild River Designation and is home to a number of sensitive aquatic species, including Virgin spinedace, Desert sucker, and Arizona toad. Leveraging grant money from Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative and 21CSC, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and national forest partnered with Utah Conservation Corps youth crews to cut down and treat tamarisk with herbicide along 14.5 miles of the Moody Wash. In 2016, the Utah Conservation Corps will continue work to restore Moody Wash's natural balance and enhance biological diversity.



### **Where does the FS funding come from?**

Funding for this work is included in appropriated dollars, which are transferred to each RSA annually and distributed among the forests and other units according to the work plans proposed. Multiple budget lines (BLI) can be used to support this work. Some of the more frequent BLI used in order of frequency are NFRW, CMTL, NFWW, WFHF, NFWF, SRS2, NFTM, NFRR, FDSD, WFPR, NFIM, NFMG, and NFRG. However there are many more also used. Occasionally, the Washington Office will provide matching funds to FS units for 21CSC projects.

### **Do I need to provide housing?**

Typically, housing is not provided for 21CSC crews by the Forest Service unless specifically requested. There are nearly 200 21CSC partner organizations and many other potential partners who are not yet 21CSC members. This network promises accessibility of local partners to most of our forest lands and units, therefore most 21CSC partners are engaged at the local level. Some crews may camp out for projects if necessary, while others may require access to bunk houses if they are available. The agency is encouraging more residential YCC opportunities to increase participation of urban youth in this employment program. In some instances, housing support can be included in the agreement, but this is not the norm. The partner will generally coordinate housing, if needed, in partnership with Forest Service staff.

### **Can I hire 21CSC members if we like their work and have a job that is a good fit?**

Yes, you can. Section 1726 of Title 16 of the United States Code authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to grant members of the Public Lands Corps (PLC) credit for time served with the PLC, which may be used towards future Federal hiring; and provide former members of the PLC non-competitive hiring status for a period of not more than 120 days after completion of PLC service. 21CSC members on these projects will earn a hiring eligibility certification if the partner agreement specifies the PLC and the partner contributes a match of 25% of the total project cost. The PLC hiring eligibility certificate allows the participant to apply to FS Merit announcements. They have to meet the qualifications for the job, and apply to a USAJobs announcement. Veteran preference will be applied. Some 21CSC members who are interns in the Resource Assistants Program will have 2 years to apply to FS Merit announcements after they complete the minimum 960 hours and meet an educational requirement.

### **How can I find a 21CSC partner that's right for me?**

Contact your Volunteers & Service or Partnership coordinator on your forest or regional office. They will be able to help you identify the right partner group to meet your needs. You may also access a complete list of 21CSC member organizations at <http://21csc.org/list-of-21csc-programs/> and see what organizations are operating in your State.



# Contacts: Regional Volunteers & Service Coordinators

National - Washington Office	Pacific Southwest Region (R5)
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Southwestern Region (R3)	Eastern Region (R9)
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Intermountain Region (R4)	Alaska Region (R10)
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**“Wow, this is hands down a fantastic new way of engaging youth in the outdoors, teaching valuable life and professional skills, while accomplishing conservation service.”**  
- Matthew Henry, Natural Resources Specialist, Cherokee National Forest (TN)

**“You really get to see the impact, and to me, that’s what it’s all about. It’s seeing the impact; it’s seeing how you’re bettering not only the environment, but you’re also bettering this trail for future generations.”**  
- Jared Burns, Southeast Conservation Corps

Southeast Conservation Corps