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2014-15 Governors Budget - Conservation Corps

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Mission:

Conservation Corps Minnesota's mission is to provide hands-on environmental stewardship and service-learning opportunities to youth and young adults while accomplishing conservation, natural-resource management and emergency response work.

Statewide Outcome(s):

Conservation Corps supports the following statewide outcome(s).

Minnesotans have the education and skills needed to achieve their goals.

A clean, healthy environment with sustainable uses of natural resources.

Context:

Conservation Corps Minnesota traces its roots to the 1930s Civilian Conservation Corps of 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, the 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 in 2003. In 2010, the organization changed its name to Conservation Corps Minnesota to better reflect its work after launching a smaller model of its young adult program, Conservation Corps Iowa, in Ames.

Conservation Corps Minnesota provides a wide range of service opportunities for young adults, ages 18-25. Nonresidential field crews engage young adults in conservation, natural resource management and emergency response work from February to December; apprentices serve in Soil and Water Conservation Districts throughout Minnesota; Home Energy Squads install energy-saving measures such as weather-stripping and programmable thermostats in Twin Cities homes; and specialists serve in natural resource and energy positions in state and nonprofit offices.

Young adults also serve as youth leaders for programs that enroll teens, ages 15-18, in outdoor service-learning. In 2013, the number of youth enrolled in Corps programs will grow to about 275 — a 58 percent increase from 2011. The Summer Youth Corps unplugs youth from modern intrusions during two summer sessions, each four weeks long; participants spike camp and work outdoors on natural resource projects. The Corps' urban afterschool program, Youth Outdoors, engages at-risk teens in out-of-school educational activities and service-learning projects during fall and spring school semesters. Participants from diverse backgrounds and low-income households earn a stipend while restoring the environment, revitalizing their neighborhoods and leading volunteers.

Conservation Corps Minnesota's goals are to help young people from diverse backgrounds become more connected to the environment, engaged in conservation, involved in community leadership and prepared for future employment. Last year, 515 youth and young adults completed more than 400,000 hours of conservation work such as invasive species removal, habitat restoration, wildland firefighting, energy conservation, erosion control and recreational trail improvements that benefit millions of Minnesota residents. Participants also led almost 6,000 volunteers in neighborhood beautification projects, habitat restoration and disaster response.

Conservation Corps Minnesota has a diverse funding base. Fee-for-service funds more than 60 percent of young adult programs costs, along with government grants and contracts. Youth programs also rely on private grants and contributions for about 20 percent of program costs, covering education and career-training investments.

Strategies:

Conservation Corps Minnesota's strategies are reflected in its motto: "Resources restored. Lives changed." Participants acquire important life skills while completing conservation and habitat restoration projects.

Restoring resources

1. Natural resource conservation: Corps members restore habitat on public lands throughout Minnesota by removing invasive species, conducting prescribed burns, planting native species and containing wildfires. They conserve energy by installing conservation measures in homes.
2. Outdoor recreational access improvements: Corps members build and maintain motorized and non-motorized trails, boardwalks, campsites, park facilities and other recreational structures.

Changing Lives

1. Youth educational curriculum: More than 20 percent of program time is devoted to environmental science education, leadership training and job skills such as resume writing, interviewing and financial management.
2. Work skills for young adults: Participants receive extensive training in tool and equipment use, prescribed burning, wildfire suppression, energy-efficiency methods, GIS technologies, First Aid/CPR, defensive driving, civic leadership and communication.

In addition, corps members lead more than 3,000 volunteers annually in cleaning up parks and riverbanks, restoring habitat and responding to natural disasters such as tornadoes and floods.

Youth and young adults complete projects in partnership with more than 100 organizations, including local governments, Minnesota Departments of Natural Resources and Transportation, Board of Water and Soil Resources, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Forest Service, watershed districts, city parks departments, trail and wildlife clubs and other nonprofits.

Results:

Conservation Corps Minnesota places a high priority on evaluating the effectiveness of its programs and overall organization. Before and after each program term, the Corps surveys youth, parents/guardians and young adult participants to assess its effectiveness at personal and work-skills development. Evaluation results are used by the staff and board to build on strengths and make improvements to services.

Service project performance is measured through daily field surveys, feedback from partner organizations solicited at the end of every project and corps member evaluations. Outputs are submitted by crew leaders bi-monthly. Field surveys are verified for accuracy and entered in an online database with a proven track record for collecting, analyzing and reporting outcomes based on program outputs. The Corps has a long track record of meeting or exceeding its service project performance targets.

Furthermore, Conservation Corps Minnesota is a member of the Corps Network, a national association of service and conservation corps and participates in the Network's Excellence in Corps Operations evaluation process every four years — ranking high in purpose and activities, organization and management, program design, communications and corps member development.

Performance Measures	Previous	Current	Trend
Percent of young adult participants who gained or improved technical skills	98	96	stable
Percent of youth participants who are better prepared for their next job	86	92	improving
Acres of habitat restored or improved	32,038	34,623	improving
Hours of work on recreational access improvements (trails, park facilities, campsites, docks, piers etc.)	80,432	89,843	improving

Performance Measures Notes:

Conservation Corps Minnesota's program and fiscal year follow the calendar year. Current measures indicated above are from the last completed year, 2011, and the previous measure is year 2010. Technical skills and job preparedness are measured by pre- and post-service surveys of Conservation Corps youth and young adult participants. Natural resource accomplishments are measured by field surveys entered in a Survey of Work Accomplishments database, designed for conservation corps nationwide to track service work.

Conservation Corps-Minnesota**Current, Base and Governor's Recommended Expenditures**

(Dollars in Thousands, Biennial Totals)

	General Funds	Other State Funds	Federal Funds	All Funds
Current Biennium Expenditures (FY 2012-13)	\$612	\$980		\$1,592
Current Law Expenditures (FY 2014-15)	\$0	\$980		\$980
Governor's Recommended Expenditures (FY2014-15)	\$910	\$980		\$1,890
\$ Change from FY 2014-15 Current Law to Governor's Rec	\$910	\$0		\$910
% Change from FY 2014-15 Current Law to Governor's Rec	0%	0%		93%

Conservation Corps-Minnesota**Sources and Uses**

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Biennium FY14-FY15		
	General Funds	Other State Funds	Federal Funds
APPROPRIATION	\$910	\$980	\$1,890
SOURCES OF FUNDS	\$910	\$980	\$1,890
EXPENDITURES	\$910	\$980	\$1,890
PAYROLL EXPENSE			
GRANTS, AIDS AND SUBSIDIES	\$910	\$980	\$1,890
USES OF FUNDS	\$910	\$980	\$1,890

Conservation Corps-Minnesota

Governor's Changes

(Dollars in Thousands)

	FY 14	FY 15	FY 14-15 Biennium	FY 16	FY 17	FY 16-17 Biennium
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Conservation Corps Minnesota

The Governor recommends ongoing General Fund support for Conservation Corps Minnesota to provide the required match to federal funds for public lands projects and to pay stipends for young adult corps members

Performance Measures:

Youth develop skills for the job market while promoting a clean, healthy environment with sustainable use of resources.

General Fund	Expenditure	455	455	910	455	455	910
	Net Change	455	455	910	455	455	910
Net All Change Items	General Fund	455	455	910	455	455	910
	Net Change	455	455	910	455	455	910

Conservation Corps-Minnesota
All Funds FTE by Program

	Current	Forecast Base	Governor's Recommendation
Program	FY 2013	FY 2015	FY 2015
Program: Conservation Corps Mn	185.0	111.0	185.0
Conservation Corps-Minnesota	185.0	111.0	185.0