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Executive Summary

The Massachusetts Land Initiative for Tomorrow (MassLI FT) AmeriCorps program was initiated in 2010 by Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust to increase local and regional capacity for land conservation. Communities across the state need to increase land protection and improve land stewardship in order to secure and sustain 1. clean drinking water, 2. farmland for local and healthy food, 3. outdoor recreational experiences and 4. wildlife habitat. These and a host of other environmental and social benefits are threatened by land development and habitat fragmentation, limited stewardship capacity, and weak public support. Twenty MassLI FT AmeriCorps members, based at 8 to 14 regional conservation organizations, will increase, enhance, and expand land conservation activity in Massachusetts by engaging youth, landowners, and the public at large; training community leaders and volunteers; and developing new organizational and community resources, programs, services, and partnerships. MassLI FT-AmeriCorps members serve in one of four positions: seven Land Stewardship Coordinators, four Regional Conservation Coordinators, five Community Engagement Coordinators, and four Service Learning Coordinators. These are full-time, eleven-month positions that run from mid-September to mid-August. Our members' activities fall within the CNCS Capacity Building focus area. The CNCS investment of \$266,000 will be matched with \$311,771.

Rationale and Approach

1.a. Need. The Massachusetts Land Initiative for Tomorrow (MassLI FT) AmeriCorps program addresses community needs for land conservation.

Massachusetts is the third most densely populated state in the country, yet 60% of its land area remains undeveloped. The quality of life and economic vitality of Massachusetts communities depend on maintaining the forests, fields, and natural areas that dominate this land base. Metro Boston, for instance, is one of only four major cities in the country that has not been required by the US Environmental Protection Agency to build a water filtration system because the forests are keeping the water safe to drink. Fresh healthy food from Massachusetts' 7,700 farms depends on maintaining the 515,000 acres of fields and farmland, with places like the Connecticut River Valley among the most productive in the world. The state's rural, suburban and urban parks provide not only habitat for wildlife, but refuges for people to restore health and wellness. Tourism, outdoor recreation, and forestry businesses also depend on the state's land base.

The many benefits state residents derive from the Commonwealth's working and wildlands are

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under threat. The rate of land lost to development in Massachusetts is 22 acres per day, and many of the acres lost include critical farmland, forests, and natural areas. In 1985, 198 of the state's 351 municipalities (56%) had more than 5% of their land in agriculture. By 2005 this percentage had declined to only 39% (Losing Ground Report, Mass Audubon, 2009). Leading academic and government researchers predict the loss of undeveloped lands in the Massachusetts landscape will continue, with more serious impacts here than most other states. For example, in its analysis of the 20 states in the Northeast and Midwest regions, the US Forest Service projected that forest loss from development will affect drinking water quality in Massachusetts more than in every other state besides Rhode Island (Forest Water People report, 2009).

The need for more land conservation is articulated in multiple national, state and local government plans and initiatives, including the Obama Administration's America's Great Outdoors report (2011), New England Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission Report on Land Conservation (2010), Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation Forest Action Plan (2010), and municipal Open Space and Recreation Plans from communities across the state. The need for urgent action to increase land conservation is echoed by New England's 85 leading conservation organizations in their joint Policy Agenda for Conserving New England's Forests: Priorities for 2013.

The Wildlands and Woodlands Vision for Massachusetts Forests (2005) and the New England Landscape (2010, Harvard Forest, Harvard University) has articulated a widely accepted need for protecting 1.5 million additional acres in the state by 2050, or about half the remaining undeveloped land. In Massachusetts, an estimated 76% of these lands are privately owned and primarily in small parcels (Forest Resources of the United States, US Forest Service, 2004). With landowners owning an average parcel size of 17.6 acres (Northern Journal of Applied Forestry, Kittredge, 2008), the number of land conservation transactions necessary to protect 1.5 million acres is daunting. In this context, increased local and regional capacity for land conservation has been identified as an especially important need (Open Space Institute, 2005).

Increasing conservation capacity includes 1) improving public understanding of the societal benefits that undeveloped land provides, 2) increasing landowner awareness of land conservation options and increasing community support for land conservation, 3) providing more training and mentoring for leaders of land trusts, town boards and other organizations with land protection goals, and 4) improving the ability of these public and private entities to effectively steward conservation land, and use the land to reconnect young people and the public at large to nature.

The need to increase public interest in and support for land conservation begins with repairing the

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disconnection between young people and the natural world (Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*, 2005 and *The Nature Principle*, 2011). Children need more opportunities for direct and local experience with nature, and students need more environmental literacy, including knowledge of the link between land conservation and public benefits like clean drinking water and local food. To have long term impacts, there needs to be an increase in local capacity to deliver this kind of education (*Americas Great Outdoors*, 2011).

Community members of voter age also lack basic awareness of the link between land and many important public benefits. As a consequence, they often frustrate the efforts of municipal town board members to advance important natural resources management and land conservation goals (Municipal Board Survey, UMass Amherst Extension, 2010). One important segment of the public, the private landowners who own the vast majority of land in Massachusetts, has a low awareness of their land conservation options (Van Fleet et al. *Journal of Forestry*, June 2012). Yet these landowners will have an accelerating impact on the future of the landscape in the next few years. The average age of landowners in the state is over 60 (National Woodland Owner Survey, US Forest Service, 2006), and many of these landowners will soon be selling or transferring their land. This increases the urgency of raising their awareness of land conservation options and incentives, and the importance of providing landowners with ongoing support to navigate the lengthy steps of land conservation transactions.

In Massachusetts with its strong tradition of municipal independence and its predominance of privately owned lands to be conserved, local and regional land trusts - non-profit charitable organizations focused on land conservation - and local municipal boards (open space committees, conservation commissions, and select boards) play a major role in land conservation. Most municipal boards are all-volunteer, and while Massachusetts has 150 land trusts - second in number only to California - half are all-volunteer. These local boards and land trusts frequently lack the training, funds, number of volunteers, and community support needed to effectively address their town's land protection and stewardship needs (Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions [MACC] personal communication; Municipal Board Survey, UMass-Amherst Extension, 2010; Land Trust Alliance [LTA] Survey of All-Volunteer Land Trusts, 2012). Members of these boards are willing to do more, but they need more support.

1.b. AmeriCorps as an Effective Solution. The MassLIFT-AmeriCorps Program is designed to build the long term capacity of regional land trusts and their partners to support communities with information, training, volunteers, and services needed to protect the most critical farms, forests and

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natural areas, and to secure the public benefits these lands provide. An important goal and end result is an engaged public who value nature, behave in an environmentally sensitive manner, participate in civic life, and support land conservation, thereby advancing the environmental and economic health of their communities.

According to the Open Space Institute's Assessment of Conservation Opportunities in Western Massachusetts (2005), regional land trusts play an "indispensable role" in supporting community-based conservation efforts because of their familiarity with local conservation needs and players, and their ability to facilitate collaborative work, create new partnerships, and leverage funds. For the 2013 - 2016 grant cycle, six regional land trusts will collaborate as our core host sites: 1) Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, lead partner and project applicant, serving 26 municipalities in north-central MA; 2) Essex County Greenbelt, 34 municipalities in northeast MA; 3) Franklin Land Trust, 26 municipalities in western MA; 4) Kestrel Land Trust, 19 municipalities in western MA ; 5) Sudbury Valley Trustees, 36 municipalities in eastern MA; and 6) Wildlands Trust, 33 municipalities in southeastern MA. Additional organizations will be selected as host sites each year based on position availability and their potential to advance the program's land conservation mission and provide our members with a successful service experience.

The 2013 MassLIFT program will support twenty full-time AmeriCorps members, serving for 11 month terms, in one of four positions: Land Stewardship Coordinator (LSC), Regional Conservation Coordinator (RCC), Community Engagement Coordinator (CEC), and Service Learning Coordinator (SLC). The positions differ in their emphasis on land protection, stewardship, outreach, and youth or adult education. Their numbers reflect the dominant local needs in the regions served.

Seven Land Stewardship Coordinators (LSCs) will help land trusts and towns 1) develop new outreach and volunteer support programs for conserved lands, 2) improve existing conservation properties to better serve public access, recreational, or nature educational goals, and 3) improve the long term land stewardship practices of host sites, volunteer land trusts, and town boards. For example, LSCs produce baseline reports which map and document the natural and cultural resources on protected lands so that organizations can effectively monitor and manage those resources.

LSCs also organize volunteer land steward programs to ensure adequate conservation restriction (CR) monitoring and better land management. CRs permanently protect critical natural resources from development while keeping the land in private ownership. Annual monitoring of properties with CRs is legally required to ensure that the land continues to provide important benefits to the community. Local land trusts, municipal boards, government agencies, and other monitors of land

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with CRs frequently have insufficient capacity to meet this need (Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commission and Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, personal communication).

As one example, the LSC serving with Wildlands Trust in 2010 established a new volunteer program (the Trailblazers) to help his host site address stewardship needs on its 26 conservation preserves. The Trailblazers carried out nine trail improvement projects in its first year. For another project, this LSC created trail maps to go with preserve information posted on the Wildlands Trust website. A third project involved improvements and new partnerships for a neglected conservation parcel in Swansea that had been transferred to Wildlands. The LSC engaged townspeople in removing invasive vines, and he coordinated students at a neighboring school to study vernal pools - a threatened ecosystem - and to maintain trails in the preserve.

The four Regional Conservation Coordinators (RCCs) in MassLIFT will build sustained capacity of host sites, local boards and organizations, and volunteers, by helping with several aspects of land protection. RCCs 1) train community volunteers and organizations in strategic landowner education and outreach initiatives, 2) facilitate the completion and implementation of municipal open space and recreation plans, 3) train and assist organizations in land conservation project management steps, and 4) facilitate new land conservation partnerships and initiatives. Along with the LSCs, RCCs provide the free, personalized training for sufficient length of time that volunteer land trust leaders say they need to enhance their skills (LTA, 2012).

As one example, the RCC serving for two years with the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership facilitated a new landscape-scale forest conservation partnership (Americas Great Outdoors report, Goal 8.1d) which involved six volunteer town boards, four non-profit conservation organizations, and a state agency. The member organized partnership strategy meetings, prepared informational materials, trained local volunteer boards in land conservation, and organized landowner outreach events. As a result, 23 landowners with 3,250 acres decided to pursue conservation for their land. Initiative partners were in agreement that without the RCC's capacity building support, the project would not have happened.

Five Community Engagement Coordinators (CECs) will 1) develop organizational capacity to reach new audiences and establish new partnerships, 2) offer programs that bring people outdoors to learn about and appreciate nature and the land, and 2) help organizations secure the resources and volunteers they need for improving their conservation properties to better serve community recreation or nature education goals.

The four Service Learning Coordinators (SLCs) will have a similar approach as the CEC, but with

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a focus on youth. SLCs build long term capacity of host sites to educate and engage young people in service learning, trail building, and ecosystem improvement projects. They help local schools improve their environmental education programs, a need identified by young people themselves (Americas Great Outdoors, 2011), by developing new curriculum and resources such as schoolyard nature trails, biodiversity inventories, and ecological monitoring programs. Over the long term, SLCs inspire and engage these future voters, community leaders and community volunteers in nature awareness, connection to the land, and awareness of the importance of land conservation.

As two examples, in 2011, Groundwork Lawrence, a community "greening" organization serving the City of Lawrence's predominately Hispanic community, hosted a CEC and SLC who helped establish one new community garden and two new schoolyard gardens. The SLC helped develop new activities for youth in an after-school program to grow food, share their produce with people in need, and promote healthy food access at a local farmers market. The CEC helped Lawrence residents build a "hoop house" (simple greenhouse) to extend the growing season in their neighborhood garden. The current SLC is developing a new program for youth to identify and monitor birds in local parks. These youth will, in turn, train more community members to help with this bird monitoring.

1.c. Evidence-informed Activities and Measurable Impacts. In its 2005 Assessment of Land Conservation in Western Massachusetts, the Open Space Institute identified previous experience in land transactions as the "single most important variable" explaining differences in the capacities of land trusts in Massachusetts. Those having more experience were more effective. With training from the land protection specialists who supervised them, our AmeriCorps members serving as RCCs in 2010 and 2011 proved that they could successfully guide volunteers on municipal boards through many of the steps involved in conserving land. They assisted communities with 88 land protection projects, and they left the municipal boards better prepared to carry out future projects. The RCCs also helped towns update and implement Open Space and Recreation Plans. These plans are a first step for municipalities to engage in land conservation initiatives; they evaluate local conservation needs, identify and prioritize future conservation activities, and they qualify the community for state conservation funding. (Out of 350 municipalities in Massachusetts, 154 do not have an updated Open Space and Recreation Plan [MA Office of Conservation Services, 2012].)

MassLIFT members serving as Land Stewardship Coordinators (LSCs) have helped several Massachusetts communities address a common limiting factor to effective stewardship of protected lands - without baseline documentation, towns cannot effectively monitor and enforce conservation restrictions (personal communication, Chris Rodstrum, The Trustees of Reservations). In 2011, seven

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LSCs completed or enhanced baseline information for more than 76 properties in 49 towns. They also conducted trainings for community volunteers serving regional and local land trusts and municipal boards, thus ensuring the ongoing stewardship capacity of groups with limited or no staff.

MassLIFT's Community Engagement Coordinators (CECs) and Service Learning Coordinators (SLCs) have developed both short term and long term community support for land conservation. The service learning activities our members develop for schools and community groups are evidence-informed and based on published research which shows that providing direct contacts and hands-on experiences with nature is the most effective way to promote environmentally conscious behaviors (MA Environmental Education Plan, 2002; Kolmuss and Agyeman 2002, Env. Ed. Res.). The members' capacity-building projects include training and managing volunteers to create new community recreation opportunities on conservation land (e.g. trails), and creating new education and conservation resources such as bird houses and pollinator gardens that increase schoolyard opportunities to learn about wildlife ecology. Our CECs and SLCs have so far created more than 15 community and schoolyard gardens, some for growing food, some for wildlife habitat, and most in urban settings.

All told, in the program's first two years, our AmeriCorps members recruited, managed and/or supported 4,134 community volunteers contributing a total of 21,037 hours of service. LSCs completed natural resource documentation and monitoring for over 21,134 acres of protected land in 91 communities. RCCs assisted 44 municipal boards with landowner outreach, conservation planning, and project facilitation needs, and helped advance the completion of 88 land protection projects. Site supervisors for our 2011 team, gave the program an average rating of 4.66 (N = 44) on a scale of "1" = "not at all" to "5" = "very, very much" for strengthening their organization's capacity for conservation activities such as community engagement, collaboration, land stewardship, and landowner education.

For its second three year cycle, MassLIFT will tailor each member's activities to specific host site and community capacity-building needs. Building on knowledge and connections established by their host site and former members, new members will work with their supervisors to develop a service plan outlining the projects and additional activities they will carry out for their host site and two or more additional organizations. Each member will complete at least six projects (Capacity Building Performance Measure G3-3.13). Each project will have clear and quantifiable goals related to meeting needs for land protection, stewardship, community awareness, outdoor recreation, civic participation and volunteerism, and/or youth learning and service. These projects will be organized to build

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capacity that continues on after the member's assistance ends. Members will also evaluate the effectiveness of their capacity building activities for beneficiary organizations (G3-3.10).

Each member will also be responsible for a set number of volunteers trained (G3-3.5), volunteer hours managed (G3-3.8), and organizations assisted (G3-3.4). Our past members' community events and direct service activities supported the interests of more than 100 agencies, schools, organizations, and community groups each year, though not with the same capacity building goals as we've established for organization we would count in our G3-3.4 performance measure.

For our next three year cycle, we have also established goals for reaching "new beneficiaries" as measured in the CNCS Capacity Building end outcome G3-3.18. Our target for this measure are based on the hundreds of community members who have participated in our members' events in past years, and on the importance of this AmeriCorps program for increasing the community education and outreach capacity of regional land trusts. The program will track as "new beneficiaries": 1) new students participating in our members' environmental education and service learning activities; 2) new volunteers engaged in our members' community service projects; 3) new landowners educated about conservation options; and 4) new community members attending presentations, nature walks and other outreach events organized by our members. To count as a "new beneficiary" these individuals must participate in these activities for at least one hour.

Through ongoing guidance and monthly review of the members' progress reports and data logs, site supervisors and the program manager will keep the program on track to reach performance targets (see performance measures), as they have done successfully in 2010 - 2012.

After three years, the MassLIFT-AmeriCorps program will have implemented 360 capacity building projects and helped at least 130 organizations better meet the land conservation needs of Massachusetts communities. Beneficiary organizations will evaluate the effectiveness of the members' capacity building projects, and at least 80% of the projects will receive high ratings (4 or higher on a scale of "1" = "not at all effective" to "5" "very, very effective"). Over three years, the members will train at least 4,000 volunteers, and these leveraged volunteers will contribute a total of 16,200 service hours to meet local conservation needs. They will also reach 5,400 individuals as new beneficiaries of the program - new community members and volunteers, new landowners, and new students.

1.d. Member Recruitment. To recruit members for our 20 full-time positions, MassLIFT will conduct nationwide outreach that will include announcements placed with more than 100 college career service centers, postings on job-related list-serves, and alerts to other AmeriCorps environmental stewardship programs. The need to diversify the conservation movement is widely recognized, and

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MassLIFT has a responsibility to help address that need, both through our members' community outreach activities, and through our member recruitment. In 2013, we will seek new partners, such as historically black colleges, to help us diversify our applicant pool. To encourage local applications, each host site will announce their position(s) in regional papers and on their own websites. Site supervisors will also use their contacts in local colleges, non-profits and government agencies to encourage strong candidates from within their service area. In our program's first three years, 35-45% of our members came from the region in which they served.

All of our positions require some off-trail field work, often in rough terrain, but our positions also include functions amenable to persons with disabilities. Each year we will place announcements with the Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities (CODS) gateway.

All member applications will be processed by Mount Grace and reviewed by the program manager. Additional reviewers will be sought when practical for further perspective. Site supervisors will have access to all of the applications and reviews, and they will keep each other informed about their interview activity and strong candidates. The program manager will ensure consistent interview processes and complete reference checks for each interviewee. Host sites will offer positions directly, and applicants may choose between sites offering them a position. The program manager will direct and support site supervisors in their member selection, participate in the interview and approval of members who apply to serve an additional year, and coordinate candidate interests and placements. 1.e. Member Development and Training. Our 2013 program will provide members with 180 to 200 hours of training and member development, and service activities to carry out as a team (see 1.g).

Our four-day residential orientation will include a review of MassLIFT's member contract, which covers AmeriCorps policies. Before starting service with their host sites, we will make sure that our members understand what activities are prohibited for AmeriCorps members and their leveraged volunteers. This orientation will provide an overview of land conservation in Massachusetts. We will introduce our members to best practices for volunteer recruitment and management, and to common land stewardship activities such as invasive species identification and removal. We will also introduce them to their position objectives, prepare them to develop service plans with their site supervisors, and engage them in team building and community service activities.

All host sites are expected to have the expertise on staff or otherwise available to train and supervise members in the knowledge and skills they need to successfully carry out their position objectives (see 1.f.). Approximately 80 of our program's member development hours will involve instruction and mentoring by the host site supervisor and staff.

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In addition to their site-specific member development and all-team service activities, MassLIFT members will attend at least four team meetings that include time for members to exchange ideas and help each other address challenges they have experienced in planning and implementing their service activities. These meetings also train members in standard AmeriCorps topics (e.g. Life after AmeriCorps) and topics that vary from year to year based on member interests. Sample topics from our first two years include working with the media, farmland preservation, effective community engagement, diversity and land conservation, and "greening" urban communities. Members will also get peer-to-peer mentoring through visits to other host sites and through our Google groups forum. They will attend and exhibit at the annual Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference, and host sites will support their participation in at least one other conference or skill-building workshop.

1.f. Member Supervision. Members will be paired with a staff person who assumes full responsibility for supervising the member's service activities and reporting. Member training and supervision requires about 8% of a FTE staff person's time. When selecting new host sites and considering host site renewals, we carefully review new supervisor references and current supervisors' performance. Mount Grace will get criminal background checks for all supervisors.

At the start of service, supervisors and members will develop a service plan, which supervisors support through weekly meetings with the member, review of the member's monthly reports, and ongoing mentoring. Supervisors will also support their member(s) through mid-year and end-of-year performance evaluations.

At least one month prior to the service year start, all site supervisors will attend a full day orientation to learn about AmeriCorps history and policies, and MassLIFT systems for member supervision and training, tracking and reporting, exiting, etc. We review all sections of the MassLIFT partner agreement, and confirm understanding of all prohibited activities. The program manager will provide further one-on-one training as needed. She will communicate with each supervisor by email at least one time per month, and check in by phone at least once every two months. She will organize conference calls with site supervisors to ensure the smooth operation of systems such as member recruitment, selection, evaluation, and exits. She will visit each host site at least once a year to meet with supervisors and members separately and together. These host site visits serve both planning and problem-solving purposes. Half-way through the year, each member will complete a program assessment that helps the program manager identify and address areas for improvement, including member supervision.

1.g. Member Experience. The MassLIFT service experience will give AmeriCorps members daily

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exposure to land trust staff and weekly opportunities to meet and work with community volunteers engaged in supporting land conservation. They will learn about the motivations of families seeking to protect their land. They will experience first-hand the challenges and rewards of civic engagement. Near the beginning, middle, and end of their term, the members submit "Great Stories" in which they reflect on how their service has impacted communities and impacted their own lives.

In addition to participating in national service days such as Martin Luther King Day, our members will carry out community service as a team at least two additional times during the year. Members value their identification with AmeriCorps (see 1.i.). At the end of the service year, we will schedule a special member recognition event. In the past, these events have featured a speaker whose life models civic engagement. We also invite AmeriCorps alumni to speak to our members about ways to stay involved with this national movement. The program will continue to use our MassLI FT website, Facebook page, and Google groups to connect with our alumni and encourage their participation in our current events.

1.h. Volunteer Generation. The role of volunteers is important for land conservation. In Massachusetts, volunteers serve on municipal conservation boards, assist local land trusts with stewardship, and deliver programs that help children and adults understand and appreciate the natural world and the benefits that natural areas provide. As dictated by local needs, MassLI FT's 2013 members will instruct community members in environmental science, land conservation procedures, and land stewardship (see 1.b., 1.c.). They will recruit and train new community volunteers to help more organizations and local communities protect land, carry out critical land stewardship tasks, facilitate conservation collaborations, and enhance public understanding of land conservation. Based on our first two years' experience managing this program, we expect MassLI FT members to train, direct, coordinate, manage and/or assist 1,300 - 1400 community volunteers each year.

1.i. AmeriCorps Identification and Branding. MassLI FT is committed to promoting AmeriCorps and our program's AmeriCorps identity. Our Members' service apparel will include the AmeriCorps, Massachusetts Service Alliance (MSA), and MassLI FT logos. Host sites will display these logos and acknowledge AmeriCorps in our office signage, websites, and brochures. Through press releases, and other publicity we will give broad visibility to our members' activities and community impacts. Our program manager, members, alumni, and the Mount Grace Executive Director will promote AmeriCorps through presentations and testimonials given to a variety of audiences.

Organizational Capability

2.a. Organizational Background and Staffing. Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust (Mount Grace

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for short) is the lead partner and formal applicant for this program. Mount Grace was incorporated in 1986 to protect significant natural, agricultural and scenic areas and to encourage land stewardship in North Central and Western Massachusetts for the benefit of the environment, the economy, and future generations. To date, Mount Grace has facilitated the protection of nearly 27,000 acres of land, which is 14.5% of all protected land in a 23-town region in Worcester and Franklin counties. Mount Grace serves 125,000 residents in this region and has 950 members, a 15 member volunteer Board of Directors, and 12 paid staff.

Mount Grace specializes in landscape-scale, multi-level collaborative efforts that increase the efficiency and effectiveness of Massachusetts land conservation efforts. Several of our projects have become models at the state and national level including multi-landowner Forest Legacy projects; the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership, a voluntary collaborative of 50 land conservation entities founded by Mount Grace in 1997; the Red Fire Farm --Farm Access and Affordability Project; and MassLIFT-AmeriCorps. These projects involve coordination of multiple organizations, significant fundraising, and administration of government grants. In addition to successful administration of AmeriCorps grant funds starting in 2010, Mount Grace has managed over \$12.2 million in federal Forest Legacy land conservation funds since 1995.

Mount Grace initiated this multi-site AmeriCorps program in 2010, based on its success over two years of hosting Commonwealth Corps volunteers, a Massachusetts Service Alliance program similar to AmeriCorps. In 2013 - 2016, six regional land trusts, including Mount Grace, will serve as the program's core host sites (listed in 1.b.). All core sites will have had one to three years of experience hosting MassLIFT members and, unlike other host sites, they are expected to remain in the program all three years and build towards hosting two to three positions. They also share land protection as their primary mission, which is not required of our other host sites. All MassLIFT host sites will have a strong community presence, large, active boards, excellent site supervisors, appropriate administrative infrastructure, and development capacity to raise their share of our program's match for the federal funds.

To date, Mount Grace has successfully hired and trained staff; mastered the administrative requirements of MSA and CNCS; annually recruited, selected, trained, and supported 20 members per year at up to 17 host sites (see 1.d and 1.e.); coordinated documentation and reporting by other hosting organizations (see 1.f.); solicited evaluation by members, partners, and collaborators; submitted timely and informative programmatic and financial reports; managed the budget; and met the AmeriCorps program's match-generation and financial record-keeping requirements (see 2.f.).

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Administering the program has required more staff time than was originally anticipated, but we have continually improved our administrative systems to meet program needs.

Since 2010, Dee Robbins has served as the full-time administrator for MassLIFT-AmeriCorps. Dee has an M.S. in Natural Resources Management and Administration from Antioch New England University and worked two years with a regional land trust in New Hampshire before taking on this position. She is responsible for all aspects of the program and she understands AmeriCorps program systems. Dee reports to Jay Rasku, who has been directing the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership (NQRLP) for 5 years, a position that involves coordinating multiple partners and managing multiple grant income streams. Before coming to Mount Grace, Jay worked as an environmental organizer for 10 years. As the Partnership Director for Mount Grace, Jay helps Dee with strategic planning and partner development. Director of Finance and Operations, Sean Pollock, an AmeriCorps alumnus, manages the financial systems with the Program Manager. Lisa Cormier, Office Manager, supports member recruitment, enrollment, and general management with her extensive experience in data management and office efficiency.

2.b. Sustainability. MassLIFT will raise matching funds to supplement the CNCS grant through host site matches which include unrestricted donations, grants from community foundations and other foundations, and interest from endowments. Each 2013 host site will provide a share of the program match, based on the number of full time members serving with the organization and on a per Member Service Year (MSY) share of the program administrative costs. In our 2010 -- grant cycle, funds leveraged to match the CNCS share accounted for at least 50% of project funding, thereby significantly expanding the program impacts and federal investment.

All MassLIFT program host sites are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations dependent on external financial support for their operating costs and land protection funds. The organizations serving as core host sites all have strong track records for securing funding, and each has budgeted annual staff time and funds for their MassLIFT participation. The FY2011 expenses for these six organizations averaged \$757,722 (range = \$160,307 - \$1,087,219). Collectively, their revenues totaled \$5,275,907 of which 18% was grant funding (range = 5-39%) and the rest was from memberships, donations, endowment, and other sources. In the last two years Mount Grace secured \$928,096 in grants to support its land protection projects and other programs. As long as MassLIFT AmeriCorps continues to meet critical community conservation needs, we expect strong host site commitment to the program. Inquiries from new organizations seeking to host MassLIFT members have increased over our first two years. We expect this trend to provide high selectivity and further long-term partnerships for the program

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going forward.

Our training and engagement of community members supports a wide variety of functions necessary for effective land conservation. Members' service activities will provide community leaders, organizations, and volunteers (see 1.b., i.h.) with information, resources, experiences, and skills needed to carry out land protection, stewardship, and environmental education projects. Collaborations initiated or strengthened between the host site and other organizations will also support an expanded and enhanced level of local and regional conservation activity. A good example is the collaboration that the 2011 RCC serving with the Nashua River Watershed Association initiated between local land trusts and open space committees in the towns of Sterling and Lancaster. With this member's assistance, these groups started working together to identify lands important to the protection of the Wekepeke Brook watershed, and they organized a conservation options event attended by 13 of 39 key landowners.

2.c. Compliance and Accountability. The program manager invites annual host site applications and re-applications and oversees in-house and outside host site reviews. She is also responsible for ensuring that members, supervisors, and host sites follow AmeriCorps policies and procedures. Our 2013 host sites will sign a MassLIFT partner agreement, which we review each year at the supervisor training. This agreement, signed by executive directors, covers prohibited activities, member supervision, grievance procedures, drug-free workplace and other AmeriCorps policies, and it clarifies financial commitments and reporting systems established by MassLIFT. The program manager will also review each member's 2013 service plan (see 1.c., 1.f.) to ensure that no prohibited activities are proposed, and every month she will monitor member reports for compliance concerns. Other than one host site's persistent tardiness in providing financial reports, to date the program has experienced no compliance issues. In that case, we denied the host site's renewal. All efforts will be made with at risk host sites to quickly identify, communicate, and resolve compliance issues before a host site or member is removed from our program.

In our first 2½ years, MassLIFT has filled all of our member slots, and each year our program has had a 95% member retention rate. (Each year, we had one member leave early to take a full-time paid conservation job.) In addition 30-35% of our members have returned to serve a second year. To strengthen our retention rates going forward, the program manager will implement a new plan to talk with selected candidate before their final acceptance to reinforce their commitment to serving the full eleven month term.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

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3.a. Cost Effectiveness. Our requested Corporation Cost per MSY is \$13,300. MassLIFT will use all but the administrative-indirect portion of these funds for our member stipends. The 2013 members' living stipend will be \$12,700. Increasing our member stipends is essential to obtaining broad access to the program amongst qualified applicants. Going forward, the program aims to secure additional private funds and alternative ways to support our member's housing needs, but CNCS will remain our main source of funding for member stipends, and the maximum MSY is needed to support the high costs of living common to the regions we serve.

All MassLIFT host sites are 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations dependent on external financial support. Each organization will contribute a match of \$6,000 - \$7,000 per MSY covering a share of the program management costs. Our host sites also spend roughly \$1,500 per MSY in cash expenses for the member's service activities. Host sites include these funds in their operating budgets and raise the funds through private donations and grants. None of these matching funds come from federal sources. Mount Grace's member costs are raised through unrestricted donations and grants from community foundations and other foundations. (See 2.b. for more on matching funds.)

As in our first cycle of funding, the proposed 2013 budget will support a corps of 20 members who accomplish significant, meaningful, and important conservation work with long-term impacts in the communities they serve. Host sites will generate match funds in excess of the minimum required (see 2.b.) to supplement the federal support in recognition and appreciation of their members' services. The full federal contribution means that these match funds can substantially extend the reach and impact of each member's service.

Land trusts have a fiduciary responsibility to maximize the benefits gained from every dollar raised to accomplish their core missions of land protection and land stewardship. Massachusetts remains a rapidly developing state with ongoing land fragmentation and losses of conservation opportunities. The AmeriCorps federal-private partnership serves as a good model for maximizing the impact of every private dollar raised. It is difficult for MassLIFT host sites to justify decreasing our request for the federal share of the program, because it means diverting additional funds away from critical land protection needs.

AmeriCorps members make it possible for regional conservation organizations to protect more land, reach new audiences, develop new programs and partnerships, and generate far more volunteer activity than they could afford and achieve without the members' capacity building service activities. Based on the independent sector values of volunteer time used by CNCS, the dollar value of our 2011 program members' service hours (33,882 hours @ \$21.79/hour = \$738,289 value) taken alone

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exceeded the combined investment of CNCS (\$260,000) and the program costs for the host sites (\$296,108). If one includes the value of the service hours provided by our 2011 members' leveraged volunteers, the funds members raised to purchase project materials (waders, lumber, field guides, plants, etc.) and the programs they developed, the total value added would be significantly higher still.

3.b. Budget Adequacy. We developed our 2013 MassLIFT-AmeriCorps budget from actual costs incurred over the program's first two years with the equivalent number of 20 member slots.

Personnel Expenses. Our 2013 budget for personnel expenses is calculated from the current salaries of the program manager and of the three Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust staff who assist with program development and administration. For site supervisor expenses, we developed an index based on an average of the FTE equivalent salaries of our current set of 20 site supervisors. The average salary for 2013 supervisors is estimated at \$56,391 (N = 20 supervisors). We then multiplied by this average salary by the average proportion of time (8%) that site supervisors commit to MassLIFT activities. This index is relatively high because each member receives one-on-one supervision and development support from a professional land protection staff member. The personnel expenses that we included in the 2013 program budget do not include time contributed by our host sites' administrative staff or executive directors.

Cash Match: Our 2013 grantee share includes member and staff training costs, including travel to and supplies for these trainings. Food expenses for member trainings and our member orientation are covered independently of the grantee share, due to CNCS restrictions on including food costs. The grantee cash match also includes office supplies (e.g. mostly additional computer software), project supplies needed for our member to carry out their service activities. The partner cash match also supports travel required for members to carry out their service activities. Our expenses include funds covering criminal background checks for new supervisors (up to ten expected in 2013) and for 20 new members. We have added funds for the FBI checks required of members and supervisors working with vulnerable populations. This year we have also included funds for additional staff time and potential consultant assistance needed for the program evaluation.

Please see the Budget Narrative for further details.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

MassLIFT AmeriCorps falls within the lower CNCS funding level that requires only an internal program evaluation. The MassLIFT program manager brings six years of experience to this process, based on evaluations that she conducted for two of Earthwatch Institute's student and teacher research expedition education programs. Because of changes made in our program measures and

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design for 2013 - 2016, and the more stringent evaluation requirements going forward, we will also seek help from an outside consultant in adapting our current instruments to work for measures of capacity building.

Our program's current evaluation instruments use both open-ended questions and Lickert Scale ratings with "1" meaning "Strongly Disagree" or "not at all" to "5" meaning "Strongly Agree" or "very, very much." We tailor these instruments as appropriate to the audience and goals. To evaluate our members' service experience and make improvements, the program conducts evaluations two times during the term of service. Members complete a mid-year assessment of the program, including ratings for supervision provided by their host site. In their end-of-service review members again evaluate their service experience, and assess its personal, professional, and its organizational capacity building impacts. We obtain similar assessments from site supervisors of program performance and capacity building gains from their members' service.

Our current program design includes evaluating levels of satisfaction and changes in knowledge gained by participants in our member's educational and training events. We have another post service form with ratings and questions to get community group assessment of the quality and impacts of our members' interventions. Results from these evaluations provide a rough baseline for measuring program improvements in 2013. We have revised these instruments to get effectiveness measures for our member's projects and will test these instruments this year.

Amendment Justification

Not Applicable.

Clarification Summary

We are changing our performance measures in 2013 - 2016 from those we used for our first three years of funding. Our new measures fall within the Capacity Building focus area. Because these measures differ from those we have used in our first grant, our experience meeting previous measures provides inexact comparison for projecting the targets we created for our re-competing. The 2013 program will provide an important test of our new measures, targets, and instruments.

Continuation Changes

Not applicable