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Executive Summary

Three conservation organizations and one veteran service organization will partner in this Veterans Fire AmeriCorps (VFA) Program to field 136 post-911 veterans (44.46 MSYs), who will serve in teams managed by an SCA VFA Manager; and will provide environmental stewardship service to public lands, while they transition to civilian life and increase their employability. Each organization will field its own VFA teams in various sizes-- from five- member crews to twelve- member crews-- depending on a particular public lands conservation project. This program will provide these veterans with career-building training and the opportunity to perform hands-on environmental stewardship service to meet critical conservation needs on public lands: fuels mitigation, fire prevention, fire disaster response and post-fire restoration primarily in Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico and North Dakota. Time of Service: August 1, 2013 through July 31, 2014. Outcomes: 1. Increasing veterans' employability: 136 veterans per year will be trained each year over a three-year period in hands-on wildland firefighting skills while providing environmental stewardship in at least five states. 2. Increasing environmental stewardship: 785 acres per year over three years of restoration of public lands through protection from wildland fires. CNCS focus areas: Veterans and their Families. Environmental Stewardship. CNCS investment the first year of \$580,151 (19%) will be matched with \$1,000,000 (35%) from the USFS and \$1,278, 679 (45%) from VFA Partners for a total Grantee's match of \$2,299,945 (81%).

Rationale and Approach

a. Need: This Veterans Fire AmeriCorps (VFA) program addresses two community issues: unemployment of 2.4 million young veterans and their reintegration into their communities; the need for communities to be safeguarded from wildland fires. This VFA program addresses the concerns of the nation as expressed by President Obama in his recent Veterans Skills to Jobs Act signed on July 12, 2012, which sets forth the employment of veterans and their readjustment to civilian life as a national priority. The VFA fire mitigation services will address the fact that 60% of new houses are built in fire hazard areas of WUI's, and, as the USFS has recorded in the Southwest Region in 2011, there were 99 wildfires with 551,725 acres burned.

The Federal Government has made wildfire suppression a priority. According to the Congressional Research Service report, Wildfire Protection in the WUI, dated January 23, 2012, wildfire funding accounted for nearly half of the USFS budget and roughly 7% of the total Department of the Interior budget in 2010.

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This VFA program is a collaboration of three conservation organizations and one veterans' organization that will meet the needs of unemployed veterans by deploying them as AmeriCorps members, while focusing on their transition from military service to service on public lands. The VFA partners are: The Student Conservation Association (SCA), the Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC), the California Conservation Corps (CCC) and Veterans Green Jobs (VGJ). This VFA program will enhance existing efforts of these collaborating organizations to field more veterans in fire mitigation and environmental stewardship service on public lands.

Young post-911 veterans have been chosen as the population to be served through this VFA program, which combines employment and career skill-building with AmeriCorps service on public lands, in collaboration with the US Forest Service (USFS) and The Bureau of Land Management (BLM). According to the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University, for November 2012, the unemployment rate for 20-24 year old veterans was 28% compared to 7.1% for all Americans. The unemployment of our returning service men and women affects the economic and social well-being of their families, and undermines the well-being of their communities. Returning veterans are finding that their experience and skills obtained in the military does not translate well to employment in civilian life. The structure and mentorship of this VFA program provides a member experience which reflects their military experience and supports these veterans in their transition from military service to civilian employment.

b. AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve Community Problems: This VFA program will serve 136 veterans annually, and the request for 44.46 MSYs in quarter- time and half-time slots, allows VFA flexibility in meeting the needs of veterans to do a wide variety of service projects, increasing their training opportunities, skill development and employment options, which will all have varying lengths of service time. Each organization has requested different slots which will allow individual organizations to provide trainings and projects as needed in serving the educational needs of veterans participating as well as the individual needs of agency public land managers to have crews work in varying lengths of service. For example, SCA requests 40 quarter-time slots (10.58 MSYs), CCC requests 60 quarter-time slots (15.87 MSYs) and SCC requests 36 half-time slots (18 MSYs) to accommodate their particular crew activities: trainings, certification sessions, fire mitigation, tree removal, etc.

This proposal aligns with AmeriCorps service values for a veteran's transition, education and training programs that prepares and qualifies veterans through their AmeriCorps service for professional land management and conservation careers. Rob Griffith of USFS, Region 5 commends the Veterans Fire

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Corps (VFC) program currently operated by the VFA partners as "a national program being implemented to empower veterans to transition to civilian life by leveraging their leadership experience to meet conservation needs on public lands."

VFA partners will adapt the team-based Conservation Corps/AmeriCorps service model as a highly effective means to solve community problems by providing opportunity for 1) Service: A 2009 veterans study, "All Volunteer Force, from Military to Civilian Service", surveyed post-911 veterans, and it recommended that the Corporation for National Community Service implement the Veterans Service Corps (VSC), which they advise will provide "high quality service opportunities for veterans... Including helping prepare the Nation for disaster relief and conserving the environment". 2) Cohort Experience: By organizing veterans in teams with other vets, the cohort provides a safe environment for veterans to share experiences, struggles and knowledge. 3) Structure: The Corps service model provides a structure that most civilian work experiences lack. The structured VFA program provides an important transition between the structure of military and the less structured civilian world. 4) Challenge: The VFA program requires physical stamina and peer support in a non-military setting, with members working in rugged terrain, sometimes camping near work sites in all types of inclement weather.

VFA members will concentrate on one major type of environmental stewardship service projects: Fuels Mitigation, Fire-Prevention, Post-Fire Restoration: Reduce fire hazards by brushing and thinning stands; preparing prescribed burn treatment lines; monitoring, gathering and mapping data. Other activities include: forest thinning, slash pile creation and burning, creation of fire breaks, fire lines, prescribed burns, hazard tree removal and service road clearing.

VFA partners have over 105 years of experience in providing corps teams with hands-on conservation training, including many years of fielding veteran teams. VFA partners have worked together for over five years to support a USFS --Veterans Fire Corps (VFC) program, which is the model used for this VFA program. This VFA program will strengthen this partnership, expand the program and will be the fourth year of a long-term collaboration with VFA partners and the USFS for veterans' conservation training. Moreover, the participation of VGJ, as a veterans' organization that specializes in assisting veterans to obtain employment, enhances their AmeriCorps experience. VFA partners will increase the number of veterans, enhance the program through increased trainings and veterans' employment services, and increase the ecosystem restoration of public lands.

c. Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed and Measurable Community Impact: All VFA projects will have measurable outcomes, and will be evaluated on how the projects impact veterans through their

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service and the public lands they restore. Their team experiences will be evaluated through standard performance measurements of the VFA Partners. The VFA Manager will compile and publish written reports annually or as required to the CNCS and agencies, and will utilize a Texas A & M University external evaluation process.

USFS requires reporting to include basic information, such as total number of members and number of members who have moved into jobs with federal agencies and other employment. It was reported to USFS that over the past two years, the Veterans Fire Corps fielded 312 veterans, with 77 (25%) moving into federal employment. With this VFA program, an increase of veteran readiness for employment in wildland fire to 90% of participants (122) is anticipated.

Performance Measures: The VFA program will address two National Performance Measures and achieve measurable results in Veteran Engagement as National Service Participants/Member Development and Environmental Stewardship. The desired outcome for all AmeriCorps members is enhancement of conservation career opportunities. A secondary intended impact of is fire hazard mitigation, along with enhanced natural resource stewardship.

Veterans and their Families (V2) will be measured by tracking unduplicated numbers of veterans serving as VFA team members, number of service hours, trainings completed, and conservation projects accomplished.

Environmental Stewardship (EN4) will be measured by logging project hours and accomplishments for each team, as well as the specific quality outcomes for each project as determined by the resource specialist/agency staff.

VFA will provide training and opportunities for conservation service leading to readiness for wildland fire employment to a total of 122 post-911 veterans annually (90% of 136). Other impacts anticipated are: increased fire mitigation, increased community economic well-being for veterans and their families, and increased public land restoration. These demonstrable impacts will be reported annually in acres restored/mitigated, numbers of roads restored, number of AmeriCorps members served, trainings received, member service hours performed, number of veterans employed after service, number of veterans ready for wildland fire employment.

This request totals 44.46 MSYs for 136 individual veteran members: 40 quarter-time slots for SCA (10.58 MSYs), 60 quarter-time slots for CCC (15.87 MSYs) and 36 half time slots for SCC (18 MSYs).

d. Member Recruitment: VFA recruitment starts with position descriptions created by VFA staff, in consultation with VFA project's site staff. Recruitment consists of a range of outreach methods from modern to traditional; using on-line social networking to job fairs; e-mail blasts to newspaper ads;

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electronic applications to mailers. Every VFA partner organization has staff available for phone calls and face-to-face interviews with veteran candidates. All VFA partners will post positions their websites and on the online AmeriCorps recruitment system. All VFA partners have staff available for phone calls and face-to-face interviews with veteran candidates.

SCA: SCA's recruitment will be led by SCA staff Mike Maher, Major, US Army (retired). During his 20-year military career, Mr. Maher earned a MA in Public Relations, serving as a public affairs officer. Maher has been the Manager of campus recruiting for SCA for five years.

For SCA, as well as its VFA partners, diversity is a core value. Each year, SCA's Recruiting Team visits more than 200 college campuses to promote SCA's program to students of color, faculty who mentor students of color, and student groups/organizations represented on campus that serve students of color. They visit dozens of minority-serving institutions: Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and schools with over 21% Asian American/Pacific Islander students. SCA staff also regularly outreach to 30,000 contacts in SCA's faculty referral network. SCA uses an alumni database to assist with outreach to its network of over 60,000 SCA alumni throughout the United States.

CCC: CCC has a staff in 7 recruitment offices to initiate and to coordinate outreach and veteran recruitment within regions, with one Recruiter providing recruitment oversight to this VFA project. This network allows for face-to-face interviews and in-person orientation sessions. The existing CCC recruitment system targets outreach to California veterans' organizations and dedicated support from the Army National Guard and California Department of Veterans Affairs.

CCC's has maintained a participant population that reflects the diversity of California. 65-70% of the CCC corps members are African-American, Latino, Asian or Native American. CCC's recruitment staff members are proactive in outreach to community-based organizations and schools in underserved communities to ensure a diverse applicant pool.

SCC: SCC actively recruits members that reflect the diversity of the Southwest. Through its network, SCC will recruit veterans from the Native American community, Hispanic, African American, Asian, women, etc.

VGJ: VGJ has extensive multimedia tools and a CiviCore database management system with over 4000 veterans seeking employment opportunities, with a strong presence in social media of over 11,000 Facebook and Twitter followers. VGJ has a proven network for comprehensive outreach across the nation which is augmented by two full time employees, two AmeriCorps members and one Mission Continues Fellow who focus on outreach to veterans.

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e. Member Training: VFA will provide training and hands-on service-learning conservation experience in teams of veterans led by experienced team leaders. This team model proves to be an effective structure for work productivity and creates a strong sense of community. Veterans will receive quality training with professional staff from USFS and The Department of the Interior (DOI). AmeriCorps Member position descriptions contain the physical requirements and field site activities for all projects, and needed trainings for each project will be fully detailed. The schedules and availability of required trainers/training resources will be confirmed before any project start date is finalized. Partner agency staff will seek opportunities to work directly with VFA members as trainers and mentors throughout the member service-learning terms, in order to evaluate them for their potential as post-service agency hires. VFA partners will prepare VFA members for employment with the USFS Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program, certified by the Department of Labor.

Many of the anticipated on-going and project-specific trainings: Fuels and fire mitigation project VFA members are: 1) instructed in use of instruments/tools to gather fuels and vegetation data, 2) taught how data are used to develop plans for managing vegetated resources, 3) trained on equipment; chainsaws and forestry equipment, 4) taught why fuels projects address public safety. Fire program activities include thinning stands, piling, thinning slash and prepping prescribed burn treatment lines. Certifications include Leave no Trace Trainer Course, CPR/Wilderness First Responder, First Aid/CPR, S-211 Portable Pumps and Water Use, All Terrain Vehicle Operation, S-212/Chainsaw operation, GOL Chainsaw Timber Harvest, S-130/190 Basic Firefighting Training, I-100 Incident Command System Orientation and L-180 Human Factors on the Fireline. Orientation training topics include: Introduction to National Service, Active Citizenship, What it Means to be an AmeriCorps Member, Developing a Service Ethic, Teambuilding, Project Management, Cultural Diversity, Conflict Resolution and Goal Planning. Orientation topics cover organizational, partner agency and AmeriCorps Policies and Procedures: Program Rules (expectations, attendance, conduct, drug-free workplace, prohibited activities, grievances); Personnel Management (timesheets, travel policies, reimbursements, living allowance, benefits) and Member Enrollment (forms, health insurance, childcare, loan forbearance, contracts). Project-focused training includes Service Training (service description, goals and objectives, skills training), Planning Service Projects, Professionalism and Partner Agency Relations.

VFA's risk management protocols ensure that training provided will fully prepare members to safely perform all activities. Before any project is selected, VFA program staff, working directly with agency site managers, outlines the project scope, a Job Hazard Analysis, and a project description, listing

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member tasks, skills and abilities. Medical reviews are done to ensure member health and safety. The Risk Management Project Plan must be completed including emergency response protocols and emergency evacuation procedures before any project is confirmed.

Member orientation and initial service trainings will be done in cohorts and scheduled within the first two weeks of service. At times, these trainings are done in one-week concentrated blocks with training consultants as needed. Certifications are delivered throughout the course of the 12- or 24-week project, with certain ones contingent upon field experience and/or direct field supervisor project evaluations. Most trainings will be conducted at project sites. Direct field supervisors will be selected for experience in project skills; knowledge of veteran's services, human resource development and AmeriCorps standards.

During the initial two weeks of a staff assignment, VFA Partners will provide orientation and program operation training along with a complete overview of AmeriCorps program requirements, policies, prohibited activities and program compliance. VFA staff will attend CNCS-sponsored trainings. All members and program staff will participate in AmeriCorps orientation and training. VFA direct field supervisor's training also includes volunteer recruitment and management, leveraging partnerships within the community and site/project specific trainings. VFA will use the CNCS Resource Center for online courses in Volunteer Management, Leveraging Partnerships for Community Impact and What's Next?: Life After Your Service Year.

f. Member Supervision: VFA staff program managers-equivalents (respectively titled: SCA VFA Manager, SCC Program Director, SCC Program Coordinator, SCC Veterans Coordinator, SCC Executive Director, CCC Program Coordinator and VGJ VFA Program Director) will collaborate with agency partners to create position descriptions inclusive of member activities, and reviewed for AmeriCorps prohibited activities.

As determined by the lead VFA staff, VFA will create an improved conduit for the recruitment and hiring of qualified veterans who meet agency workforce knowledge, skills and ability qualifications. VFA field supervisors, whose titles are SCA Project Leader, SCC Crew Leader, SCC Seasonal Field Coordinator, and CCC Conservationist I are responsible for daily supervision and support of VFA members and for project implementation. VFA partners have a similar supervisory structure, i.e., direct field supervisors manage field crews/AmeriCorps members. Direct field supervisors are supported by their respective organization's regional, state and headquarters staff, who provide a complete range of program support and administrative services. At SCC, for example, the VFA reporting structure is as follows: Crew Leaders report to Project Coordinators who report to Program

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Directors, who report to a Regional Director. CCC's staff are civil service positions equivalent to the SCA and SCA Corps position levels. CCC Conservationist I reports to the Conservationist II (Project Coordinator), who reports to the Center Directors, who report to the CCC VFA state-wide Program Coordinator.

SCA's two Regional Program Directors are responsible for working with partners on revenue generation, contract and agreement creation, assuring member positions are aligned with the AmeriCorps National Direct performance measures, and for facilitating Member's trainings. SCA's Operations Director oversees program growth, quality, risk management and safety, and general operations of SCA's Young Adult Corps program, and is responsible for coordinating financial reporting. The Operations Director also works to standardize SCA protocols and procedures. The two SCA Regional Program Managers manage all operational aspects of the Corps teams in their region, and assists the Regional Program Director in the management of the eight Project Leaders and ensures that outcomes are achieved in a safe and responsible manner.

VGJ will provide one staff member, the Director of Veterans Programs and a VFA veteran's mentor, who will support the VFA program objectives.

Direct field supervisors are interviewed and selected for corps or team work experience, project skill knowledge and AmeriCorps experience. VFA seeks direct field supervisors who are also veterans and have experience with veteran transition, adult teams and veterans' behavioral issues. Background, physicals and driving records are checked. SCA's Project Leader has direct field supervisory responsibilities, collects raw field data and does field --level reporting.

The VFA Manager is responsible for higher-level reporting and project management duties including budget management, internal, client agency and AmeriCorps reporting, and completion of all SCA close-out protocols. The VFA Manager will implement a monitoring system to ensure that high standards of services are offered, as well as providing a high quality member experience. The VFA program will be evaluated through a combination of member evaluations, field leader assessments, site evaluations and project outcome measurements performed by in-house and third party monitors.

CCC reports to the State Resources Agency and its functions are monitored by various state control agencies such as the California Department of Finance.

g. Member Experience: This VFA program will increase veterans' employment skills in wildland fire prevention, mitigation, response, and disaster readiness, while economically stabilizing their families through employment readiness. A Prudential Insurance study of veterans found that 69% of veterans considered "finding a job" the greatest challenge in transitioning to civilian life. Under the study, 46%

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of the veterans stated they needed more education or technical training. This VFA program is customized to provide veterans with the education and technical training for resource management employment.

Education, experiential-learning and training for young veterans is concentrated on fundamental conservation skills and career development services for veterans interested in pursuing further employment opportunities in public land management. VFA members will work on fire and fuels mitigation projects with acres restored and mitigated being tracked. In addition to orientation, skills certifications and trainings, VFA members participate in weekly group discussions designed to maximize each member's success by providing a forum for discussing best practices, an opportunity for input from other members and to address any challenges. These communications are planned and facilitated by each team's direct field supervisor to ensure productive group communication, and to foster team cohesion.

Recently, SCA's Veterans Fire Corps program hired veterans who formed teams of wildland firefighters to help with prescribed burns and brush thinning on the Prescott and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. One veteran noted that the program was a perfect transition:

"It relates to our military history and makes me feel comfortable," said Chris Stacy. For example, wildland firefighting Corps use the Incident Command System created by the military.

The SCA Veterans Fire Corps members received a living allowance, lodging and food along with an opportunity to enroll in the AmeriCorps Education Award program and get extra college tuition or loan support in the future. They completed rigorous training in wilderness first aid, fire ecology, chainsaw use and wildland firefighting, earning red cards that make them eligible for wildland firefighting jobs with the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. This VFA program will be a similar model as used by VFA Partners in fielding Veterans Fire Corps for the past three years.

h. Volunteer Generation: VFA crews will integrate volunteers in cooperation with participating agency partners. For example DOI agencies organize service projects in partnership with groups such as the Sierra Club. VFA members will assist with project set-up and supervision of volunteers. VFA partners can help local communities with outreach and set up of such service events. In the first year, VFA will sponsor three volunteer service days, and will increase volunteer generation in future years.

i. Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification: VFA is committed to recognizing AmeriCorps as a primary partner both nationally and locally. All VFA members will receive training on the ethics of being an AmeriCorps volunteer. Program staff will create and distribute all recruitment, outreach, and orientation and training materials, banners, signs, press releases and

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program calendars. The VFA Veterans Manager will review all materials to assure AmeriCorps' name and logos are included. Members will wear name tags containing AmeriCorps logos during their service, as well as during volunteer events. Members will be issued a hard hat that displays the AmeriCorps logo to wear in the field.

Organizational Capability

Veterans Green Jobs: VGJ is a national nonprofit organization, founded in 2008, whose mission is to connect military veterans with meaningful employment opportunities that serve our communities and environment. By providing green jobs education and career development opportunities for military veterans, VGJ helps veterans to establish new careers in environmental restoration; preservation and sustainability; clean and renewable energy; energy efficiency, hands-on conservation and community outreach. In 2009, SCC partnered with VGJ to launch a series of VFA programs intended to empower veterans to transition to civilian life by leveraging their leadership experience to meet critical conservation needs on public lands. VGJ will offer John Toth, the Director of Veterans Programs and a veterans' mentor, Jared King, who is a US Navy veteran and AmeriCorps member. With a board membership of ten members, VGJ has worked with AmeriCorps for four years.

Southwest Conservation Corps: Founded in 1998, SCC is a 15-year old award-winning conservation organization with four offices in three states and operating in 20 states. With a main office in Durango, Colorado, SCC has four years of experience in operating veterans programming. SCC's mission is to empower individuals to positively impact their lives, their communities and the environment. Each year SCC engages nearly 1,000 individuals in paid service opportunities on public lands. SCC and VGJ piloted the Veterans Fire Corps by operating ten VFC teams in Colorado in 2009 and 2010.

SCC is led by Harry Bruell, CEO and President and has worked with service and conservation corps including AmeriCorps since 1991. SCC staff consists of a Chief Operating Officer who manages the program with SCA's VFA Program Coordinator, serving as SCC VFA Program Lead, and a Grant Coordinator supports the administrative tasks of this VFA program. Reporting to SCC VFA Chief Operating Officer are five Executive Directors, each of whom has four Program Directors and nine Coordinators as support. Kevin Heiner, an Air Force veteran, is Program Director for the SCC Four Corners office. Direct member support and field project supervision is offered by fifteen SCC VFA Crew Leaders, and three Seasonal Field Coordinators. One of its participants, an Army veteran, received the National Corps Member of the Year Award in 2012. The USFS awarded the VFA-SCC team \$924,000 to operate 13 VFA crews, providing training and experience to over 100 veterans from

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2009-2011, with projects in Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. In 2010, BLM awarded an additional \$350,000 for fuels mitigation work in Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. Demonstration projects occurred in the Rocky Mountain NF with more than \$900,000 funded by USFS to operate 13 VFA crews, providing work experience to more than 100 veterans. Results from the 2009 and 2010 VFA crews in Colorado on fuels mitigation and backcountry trail projects are remarkable. The first VFA backcountry trail crew spent 40 days in the backcountry, hiked over 150 miles and cut or cleared over 400 trees from backcountry trails. The VFA crew in fall 2009 completed 10 weeks in the San Juan National Forest, treating 46 acres of critical public lands removing 2,089 trees. Another VFA crew completed 8 weeks of service in spring 2010 in the San Juan National Forest, treating 51 acres of federal public land adjacent to residential areas. The Corps Network- a national association for conservation and service corps - awarded the VFA program one of its "National Project of the Year" Awards in 2010.

California Conservation Corps: CCC was established in 1976 as a state agency with a dual mission of providing critical environmental service and developing the men and women who serve. The CCC's director is appointed by the Governor and reports to the Secretary of the Natural Resource Agency. The CCC adheres to state guidelines and policies for personnel, accounting and financial functions. The CCC is led by David Muraki who began working with the CCC as field staff in 1979 and served in numerous field and administrative roles before moving to California's Office of Volunteerism, where he has overseen AmeriCorps and other programs as Deputy Director for over 15 years.

CCC's organizational structure consists of a Headquarters office (88 positions) and 27 field operation sites (220 positions). CCC's VFA teams will be administered at the headquarter level by the Program Development and Operations Division in Sacramento, headed by Erin Healy, the Direct Crew Supervisor. VFA will be the responsibility of the Special Projects Unit Manager Dana Brazelton, who most recently managed a bond-funded grant program for the State of California Natural Resources Agency, and has had recent AmeriCorps program management experience. Fiscal oversight will be provided by the Chief of Administrative Services, Maria Beruman. A 50% CCC VFA state-wide HQ Program Coordinator will be hired. Qualifications include prior AmeriCorps Program and award administration, grant and multi-site program coordination, management experience and familiarity with national, veterans and community service programs. The CCC's VFA crews will be located in four to six field locations.

The CCC has a well-developed operational and programmatic infrastructure and has operated AmeriCorps Programs since 1994 including a number of nationally recognized programs such as the

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Backcountry Trails and Watershed Stewards AmeriCorps Programs. The CCC first started operating veterans crews in 2010, and currently operates six veterans' crews: one backcountry trail crew working with land management agencies in California wilderness areas, three forestry crews with the USFS, one fisheries crew and one energy conservation crew.

SCA: Founded in 1957, SCA is a 55-year old award-winning national youth conservation organization with seven regional offices operating in all 50 states. SCA's mission, "To build the next generation of conservation leaders and inspire lifelong stewardship of our environment and communities by engaging young people in hands on service to the land" reflects AmeriCorps' ethos of service. SCA has fielded and trained conservation teams for decades providing fire mitigation and outreach, desert restoration, trails restoration, invasive species removal and community programs nationally. Nearly 4,000 SCA members provide nearly 2 million hours of service annually at over 600 sites throughout the US.

A unique feature of SCA is the 24 hour, 7 day a week risk management support services for members throughout their experience with SCA. These on call duty officers continue to monitor and respond to any type of accident and/or injury that takes place while members are serving in the field. A detailed emergency response system has been designed in accordance with the guidelines set by the Association for Experiential Education and other leading organizations in wilderness risk management.

SCA has been publicly recognized by, among others, the White House, US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, and The Wilderness Society. In August 2010, Elizabeth Titus Putnam, SCA's founder, received the Presidential Citizens Medal from President Obama for advancing conservation and environmental education locally and on a global scale. She was the first conservationist to receive this Presidential honor.

SCA is governed by a 30-member Board of Directors, and operates under a committee structure including: Executive, Audit, Board Governance, Finance and Administration, External Relations, Program Quality and Risk Management. SCA's headquarters are located in Washington, DC, with administrative offices in Charlestown, New Hampshire along with six additional regional offices. Located in New Hampshire, SCA's Senior VP of Program Robert Coates, the primary contact for this grant application, will have overall responsibility for this VFA program; and SCA's National Director for Young Adults Programs, Leslie Rimmer, will be secondary contact.

SCA has successfully administered AmeriCorps state-formula and competitive programs in New Hampshire for 20 years, Massachusetts for 18 years, New York for 14 years and in Idaho for three years. In 2010, SCA began a new 30 member national, full-time fixed-amount stewardship

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AmeriCorps program, which still continues. Since 1997, SCA continues to manage one of the nation's largest AmeriCorps National Education Award Programs, placing AmeriCorps members in all 50 states.

VFA Partners: In 2010, SCA successfully collaborated with CCC and SCC with support from VGJ to recruit, train and field two Veterans Fire Corps teams in Arizona, with three more teams in 2011: one in Arizona and two in Idaho; and 3 teams in 2012 in Arizona and South Dakota. In 2012, SCA received \$300,000 from USFS to field three Veterans Fire Corps teams in National Forests in South Dakota and Arizona. In collaboration with USFS, SCA plans to field seven more teams spread over South Dakota, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico in 2013.

VFA partners will recruit a VFA Program Coordinator. The position requires a background in fire, forestry, geography or a related field, six or more years of experience working with agency partners, five or more years of program management experience, with AmeriCorps and veteran experience, as well as BA preferred. SCA will also recruit a VFA Program Assistant whose qualifications will include at least five years' outdoor program, field and supervisory experience, with AmeriCorps and veteran experience, as well as a BA preferred.

VFA lead staff for this project, including SCC's Chief Operating Officer, CCC's state-wide Program Coordinator and VGJ's Director of Veterans Programs; will liaise with SCA's VFA Program Coordinator for issues concerning the members, operations and field projects. SCA's VFA Program Coordinator has lead responsibility for the welfare of the AmeriCorps members, direct field supervisors and management of project sites including risk management, logistics and project outcomes.

VFA lead staff will coordinate AmeriCorps or agency relationships, sustainability, community outreach, issues and opportunities with SCA's VFA Program Coordinator; who has responsibility for AmeriCorps compliance, site agency relations, project site selection, public agency project partner liaison/point-of-contact, evaluation plan, as well as the coordination of VFA program sustainability efforts, publicity and outreach nationwide.

Additional SCA staff are Jarrod Ball, Conservation Corps Operation Director, responsible for overall program quality; Ken Webster, Western Corps Financial Analyst, who will track budgets, billing, expenses and partner contributions; Tobias Bokum-Fauth, Leader Coordinator is responsible for Project Leader placement, clearances, background checks and online systems coordination; and Cynthia Bavaqua, Member Services Advisor, responsible for member processing and enrollment. The budget supports two SCA staff responsible for managing the efforts of all partners. SCA's VFA Program Coordinator and VFA Program Assistant, both full-time SCA staff are tasked with program

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preparation, supervision of training, curriculum modification and development, site project planning, agency liaison, AmeriCorps compliance, site visits and professional development including attendance at all CNCS trainings and conferences.

b. Sustainability: VFA partners contribute to the program by providing regular feedback on the performance of the members and the program. Soliciting feedback on community needs and program performance from all partners will continue to be a primary method of engaging stakeholders, and facilitating sustainability. Stakeholders will play a critical role in implementing the program service activities and continuing to provide resources, projects, member training and recognition opportunities. VFA partners are receiving ongoing requests from federal agencies for these veterans teams, and expects this to increase with more teams fielded through this AmeriCorps funding. This VFA program will also help SCA leverage increased military-based corporate philanthropic and individual donor support sustaining the program into the future.

Planning for VFA sustainability has been a key element, with VFA partners together with the VFAs' land management agency partners forming the backbone of VFA's sustainability plan, which already includes support from public agencies and corporate sources. For instance, in 2011, the USFS provided VFA partners with \$1.5 million in funding to continue this successful program to provide veterans with hands-on employment training opportunities while increasing fire safety to local communities. Corporate donors for SCA's veterans' programs include Sprint, Home Depot, Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase, Prudential, Northrup Grumman and Southwest Airlines. SCA's Partnership Development team will continue to provide direct outreach to other public agencies interested in the VFA in order to sustain it.

c. Compliance and Accountability: SCA VFA staff will create a standard format for each conservation corps partner and implement evaluation tools through data collection and focused surveys to track members as unduplicated service members. It will also act as a central collection point and organize information from each partner in a complete report acting as an external evaluation. VFA will use Texas A & M University as an external evaluator. This evaluation system will be used in conjunction with SCA's standard evaluation process. This process involves a quantitative evaluation, qualitative feedback and demographic information. SCA has incorporated the principals of outcome based evaluation to define specific outcomes. These outcomes will directly correlate to the specific services provided to members, and partner agencies. Current benchmarks include the number and diversity of participants, the amount and quality of conservation service work accomplished, the number of participants who accept leadership roles, and program and partner

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retention. SCA produces an annual report, and creates project reports that track the accomplishments of all Corps, which are made available to agencies. Members will also be asked to complete post-service survey, which will be compiled for reporting. The VFA Program Coordinator will conduct alumni evaluations via a web-based survey, measuring the impact of the program on the members, as well as how they have been able to apply skills learned in their personal and professional lives.

SCA also conducts a web-based program evaluation during the last two weeks of the members' term of service that assesses their perception of the program's overall effectiveness, accomplishment of intended goals, training and resource adequacy, perceived level of impact, and staff support and performance. SCA has engaged the Search Institute, a globally recognized expert in evaluating impact on youth and young adults, on an externally-developed and reviewed evaluation process to be completed by program participants.

SCA AmeriCorps programs have a long history of compliance and accountability, and are audited by an independent firm. SCA has enhanced its position description review procedures to insure compliance with AmeriCorps policies of prohibited activities.

CCC will monitor their teams within their Program and Operations Division. This unit conducts weekly and monthly meetings during which program progress is reported and issues and challenges are identified and addressed. Field sites operating VFA crews will hold monthly conference that allow time for the sharing of best practices and lessons learned. CCC tracks data locally through project accomplishment forms and partner assessment surveys. Member development and volunteer involvement will be tracked with training rosters, pre-post surveys and volunteer logs.

SCC administers comprehensive surveys at entry and at exit to measure participants' own reflections on changes during the program and to measure changes in their perceptions about their lives and their community. Corps Leaders complete daily logs noting changes in corps members and significant accomplishments/issues. SCC reviews these logs as well as conducts regular meetings with Corps Leaders. SCC counts the number of applications that it receives each year. SCC carefully measures participant retention rates and compares rates with national and regional corps averages. SCC sends detailed written Project Sponsor Surveys to each project sponsor, compiles the results, and compares the results against other corps programs. The surveys measure the sponsor's evaluation of the quality, value and impact of the project work. SCC documents and measures specific project outcomes of its programs, such as feet of trail maintained. It compares these outcomes with those from other corps as well as to the original goals of each project.

Operating Sites and Member Service Sites: SCA operates in all 50 states; SCC operates in 20 states;

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CCC operates in 27 field locations across California; VGJ is based in Denver, Colorado with a staff member stationed in California. This project will address the AmeriCorps regulations 45 CFR §2522.475 quality, innovation, sustainability, quality of leadership, past performance, community involvement and the special considerations found in 45 CFR §2522.450 program models, program activities and programs supporting distressed communities. VFA staff will evaluate whether the member experience is a challenging one and whether the position is of sufficient duration to offer real opportunity for skill acquisition that can lead to related employment with partner agencies, as well as a personal sense of accomplishment and community contribution. SCA VFA staff will monitor and track the relationship of project expenses to the VFA budget, and evaluate quality of service to veterans. VFA staff will coordinate with agency staff to match veteran teams with critical projects. VFA staff will match teams with site partners, who have a high level of experience working with corps teams and AmeriCorps members. VFA staff will recruit and match veterans with the work projects that best match individual veteran's interest to insure the highest level of AmeriCorps member experience. VFA staff will choose site partners who will have the highest capacity to offer employment to veterans serving at a particular site. Sites will be organized through current USFS and BLM relationships, with projects to be determined based on critical needs of public land managers, a high quality member service experience and the degree to which the site has capacity to offer employment after service.

Timeline: After site selection, the SCA VFA Veterans Manager will follow up with the state commission in all impacted states. State commission input will be incorporated into the VFA program plan.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

The total CNCS cost per MSY for the proposed VFA program is \$13,049, within the range permitted by CNCS and proportionate to a program designed for adult veterans. At the end of SCA's last complete fiscal year (2012), SCA's total Operating Support and Revenue was \$33,217,845 consisting of \$25,024,258 in program revenue, \$5,782,356 in contributions and private grants, \$2,272,643 in net assets released from restriction, and \$138,588 in Other Income. SCA's current fiscal year budget is \$33,229,503. SCA's organizational goal is to double its budget over 10 years with a goal of increasing from 4,000 to 10,000 young people served annually. The proposed VFA program budget at \$580,151 represents 2% of SCA's budget. Total current SCA funding from the Corporation equals \$2,103,760, comprising 6% of SCA's budget. With the additional VFA program funding, total SCA funding from the Corporation would be 8% of SCA's budget.

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Over the past three years, SCA has received CNCS funding of \$2,103,760 annually for the following programs: \$2,103,760 in AmeriCorps funding as follows: \$393,576, CNCS National Education Award Program (EAP) for SCA AmeriCorps Education Award Program; \$390,000 CNCS Full-time Fixed-amount National Direct for SCA AmeriCorps Stewardship Teams; \$518,922, New York State Commission, Cost Reimbursement State for SCA Hudson Valley and Adirondacks AmeriCorps Program; \$390,000 Volunteer New Hampshire, Full-time Fixed amount State for SCA New Hampshire AmeriCorps National: \$128,101 from Serve Idaho, Cost Reimbursement State, for SCA's AmeriCorps Salmon-Challis National Forest Training Center; \$283,161 from Massachusetts Service Alliance, Cost Reimbursement State for SCA Massachusetts AmeriCorps.

The cost of \$13,049 per MSY for this program is cost effective in addressing the needs of communities for fire mitigation services. In their Conservation Corps Project Analysis, Fall 2012, The National Park Service studied the cost of using Conservation Corps versus the cost of using contractors of National Park Service corps in their cyclic maintenance work. The savings was significant when using conservation corps rather than contractors, with an "average savings of 83% and over \$130,000 per project".

Special Circumstances: This VFA program will serve rural communities which are at risk for fire disasters, and have limited resources for fire mitigation services. Moreover, this project serves post-911 veterans, who have the highest unemployment rate in the nation.

Budget Adequacy: The VFA program cost per MSY of \$13,049 covers approximately 20% of the support for each VFA member, leveraging CNCS funding by an 80% match. The VFA budget adequately supports the proposed program's design and all its activities by providing for strong central and local program direction, coordination and support.

The basis for the VFA budget is the Conservation Corps budget model, which has been tested by the 143-member organizations of The Corps Network, including three of the VFA Partners. This budget has been tested for three years by the VFA partners during their fielding of Veterans Fire Corps teams. The budget provides resources for VFA team-based, service-learning projects through a model that has been tested by SCA for 18 years on AmeriCorps programs of similar size, scope and duration.

VFA Partners have been working closely with DOI and USFS in developing this proposal. This year, the USFS will make available \$4.75 million for fire and fuels mitigation project work in addition to \$3.9 million previously provided last year. VFA partners estimate that approximately \$1,000,000 will have been awarded by USFS to support these teams, and will be available to match the upcoming fall fire season that aligns with this VFA proposal's service window. The DOI has alerted all of its bureaus

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to this VFA program and the opportunity it offers to them as a pipeline for veteran hires and for leveraging CNCS funding.

SCA, this partnership's fiscal agent and lead applicant, has full confidence in the proposed budget. This budget has been prepared in collaboration with the CCC Director, VGJ Director of Veteran Development and SCC CEO & President, in a process that included review and approval by SCA's Vice President for Program, SCA's National Director of Young Adults Program and SCA's Chief Financial Officer. SCA hires the auditing firm Grant Thornton LLP to prepare its annual audits of all its programs and grants, and affirms that all of SCA's programs are in compliance with federal requirements.

VFA provides ongoing service to veterans as well as recruitment and post-program placement. VFA crew members support includes living allowances, benefits, supervision, transportation, tools, gear, equipment, insurance, back-end support and technical expertise. Transportation includes vans to transport crews, tools and equipment to and from field sites. Pre-enrollment costs include member physicals and background checks. Field supplies include camping equipment, camping supplies, occasional housing, field meals and other supplies for backcountry stints. Costs include staff salaries, benefits, staff travel, staff training/professional development, risk management, communications, technology, office supplies, facilities and consulting support. In addition to high member living allowance, the budget provides for high quality member training curriculum; instructional delivery; site/staff training and technical assistance; data collection and reporting for program outputs and outcomes; and third-party evaluation.

Partnerships and Collaboration: Veterans' organizations and land management agencies are active stakeholders and partners in this VFA project. For instance, VGJ has engaged national and local veterans' organizations to help recruit and support veteran participants including: Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Student Veterans of America, and Department of Labor VETS. In California, VGJ and the CCC have collaborated to station a full-time VGJ staff at CCC Headquarters to help promote VGJ programs in California. CCC is also working closely with the USFS Human Resources state office to place VGJ graduates with USFS positions.

USFS and DOI have prioritized assisting veterans in their transition from the military to civilian employment and are actively engaged in identifying and funding projects for the Veterans Fire Corps program that are already managed by VFA partners. This agency commitment has created a steady stream of federal employees that are field-trained and highly skilled. VFA coordination and planning will occur through in-person meetings and regular conference calls with these agencies, and should

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lead to an increase in veterans who are employed in federal land management agencies.

Multi-state Applicants Only/ Consultation with the State Commissions: As of January 9, 2013, SCA contacted all 50 states and the District of Columbia regarding the placement potential for VFA alumni.

SCA currently manages two multi-state programs in addition to the one proposed in this application and regularly consults with State Service Commissions about its programs. As part of this application process SCA consulted with State Commissions in the states where the program intends to operate: CA, CO, AZ, NM and ND. To date all states that responded to our request for consultation expressed support for the program's continued operation. Based on the information gathered during these consultations, the program does not duplicate other programs and addresses states' otherwise unmet needs. As an existing multi-state grantee operating in all fifty states, SCA's existing processes will ensure continued contact with State Commissions over the grant period. Twice annually -- during the application process in December/January and in the summer -- the program distributes information to State Commissions about where members serve locally. SCA's AmeriCorps Manager receives all State Commission communications and coordinates state initiatives and events with SCA's AmeriCorps programs.

Multi-Site Applicants Only Specific Sites: Specific sites for VFA projects have not yet been selected. In previous years, SCA received over 30 applications from veterans for placement at field units and bureaus within the Department of the Interior: from Pearl Harbor for an historic facility restoration project to habitat protection projects in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

N/A

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

N/A

Continuation Changes

N/A