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Executive Summary

The Appalachian Forest Heritage Area AmeriCorps Program: Enhancing Assets to Benefit Communities will have 25 AmeriCorps members who will provide environmental stewardship, capacity building and community development in 16 counties in the highlands of West Virginia. At the end of the 1st program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for public lands improvements and environmental education leading to healthier ecosystems, and capacity building and heritage tourism improvements to strengthen rural communities. The AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 400 volunteers engaged in conservation and community projects. This program will focus on the CNCS focus areas of environmental stewardship and capacity building. The CNCS investment of \$322,500 will be matched with \$228,690, \$85,800 in public funding and \$142,890 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

2a. Problem/Need -- A. Environmental stewardship of at-risk ecosystems.

Environmental stewardship needs are central to our landscape, our economy, and rural communities. West Virginia is the third most heavily forested state, with primarily hardwood forests covering an average of 78% of the land. That percentage is higher in AFHA counties, up to 93.5% in Webster County. (wvcommerce.org/resources/forestry/default.aspx 2013) Public lands managed for public benefit include 919,000 acres of National Forest, 16,550 acres of National Wildlife Refuge, 14 state parks, 5 state forests, plus city, county, and non-profit lands. The wood products industry in West Virginia employs nearly 30,000 and exceeds \$4 billion annually. (West Virginia's Forests-Growing West Virginia's Future. Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Childs, R.A. 2005, College of Business and Economics, WVU. P14). Wildlife associated recreation generates over \$803 million for the state. (West Virginia Statewide Forest Resource Assessment, WV Division of Forestry 2010. p498) The forests of West Virginia contribute to overall quality of life by reducing energy costs, lowering pollution, protecting watersheds from erosion and sedimentation, and sequestering carbon. The central Appalachian Forest served by AFHA is home to wide ecological bio-diversity, due to the confluence of northern and southern ecosystems, and the variety of micro-climates provided by different altitudes and aspects of the mountain slopes. The Southern and Central Appalachians are among the richest temperate areas in biodiversity, with 158 tree species, 255 birds, 78 mammals, 58 reptiles, and 76 amphibians. ("The Appalachians" John Pickering et al, published in Wilderness-Earth's Last Wild Places. 2003) These unique ecosystems of the Appalachian forest are at risk due to

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environmental threats that impact forest ecosystems and wildlife habitats. The ecological impacts associated with climate change, pollution, and acid rain include degradation of trees and shrubs, a loss of resilience to natural stresses, and direct mortality of sensitive animal species. "The potential impacts of climate change on high-elevation species is of particular concern given the high biological diversity harbored by mountain systems," (Predicting Climate Change Extirpation Risk for Central and Southern Appalachian Forest Tree Species, Kevin Potter, W. Hargrove, F. Koch, 2010, forestthreats.org/products/publications) The increasing use of the national forests for recreational activities leads to unmanaged recreation being identified by the USDA Forest Service as one of their highest priority threats. (Four Threats to the Health of the Nation's Forests and Grasslands, fs.fed.us/projects/four-threats, 2006) Overuse of trails and facilities, off-road vehicles, and careless visitor habits all degrade the forest resources, leading to erosion, trash, potential wildfire, and diminished experience for all forest users. Non-native invasive species (NNIS) are a major threat to the health of the forest ecosystems, identified by the US Forest Service as a high priority threat. (fs.fed.us/projects/four-threats) NNIS have had devastating impacts on native flora and fauna, agricultural productivity, recreational opportunities, commercial and urban forest resources, human health, and ultimately entire local economies. Damage from NNIS costs the nation more than \$120 billion per year, plus extensive environmental damages. (Update on the Environmental and Economic Costs Associated with Alien-invasive Species in the United States. Pimentel, D., et al, 2005). Diseases and insects threaten entire tree species, while non-native invasive plants overwhelm native plants and destroy native plant balance in our habitats.

2a. Problem/Need -- B. Environmental Stewardship of community built environment

AFHA's 16 West Virginia counties contain over 200 historic buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places plus 23 historic districts. (wvculture.org/shpo/nr/index.html) The core downtowns of our communities are made up of historic buildings that define the character of that town. A study of abandoned and dilapidated buildings found a massive problem in West Virginia, with one example cited of more than 110 abandoned structures in Richwood, an AFHA town of only 2000 people. (Abandoned and Dilapidated Houses: West Virginia's Eyesore-and Opportunity, Amelia Pridemore, Coalfield Development Corp, 2013, coalfield-development.org/specialreports_abandonedbuildings) "There are many compelling reasons to preserve a structure; it may tell a significant American story, serve as a tangible link to the past, or act as an economic engine within its community. Aside from these cultural and economic values, environmental factors may also weigh in favor of building conservation." (The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse;

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National Trust for Historic Preservation, Frey, et. al. 2011, preservationnation.org/information-center/sustainable-communities/green-lab/lca/The_Greenest_Building_lowres.pdf p15) Historic preservation preserves the environment and reduces energy use because the greenest building is the one already built. Demolition of an old building, hauling debris, and landfill management all use energy. Then it takes energy to manufacture building materials, transport them to a construction site, and assemble them into a new building in its place. A typical Main Street building of 50,000 sq. ft. "represents 80 million BTUs embodied energy. . . Demolition of such a building would result in 4,000 tons of waste. . . Today approximately 25% of the material being added to the landfills is demolition and construction waste." (Recycling Buildings: Preservation & Energy Conservation, Preservation Society of Charleston, 2013, preservationsociety.org/green/RecyclingBuildings.php)

2a. Problem/Need -- C. Capacity building / community development

Rural communities in our central Appalachian area are economically depressed with above average poverty rates and decreasing resource-extraction jobs. The median household income in our area for 2012 is \$34,943 which is 88% of the WV median income, and only 66% of the national median. The poverty rate in our counties averages 17.43% compared to 14.3% nationally. (US Census Bureau, State and County QuickFacts, 2013, quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/54000.html) According to the Appalachian Regional Commission 10 AFHA counties are classed as transitional, 5 at-risk, with one distressed. (arc.gov/research/MapsofAppalachia.asp, 2013) Our area is overwhelming rural with average population density of 33.5 people per square mile. The largest city in the AFHA AmeriCorps service area is our hub of Elkins with 7,480 people.

Without external assistance, most small, rural communities have limited capacity in terms of available people, funds, and skills to effect meaningful change. Communities have rich heritage assets, with unique stories, buildings, collections, and local culture, which could help to support heritage tourism and small business development. But local communities often lack the capacity to develop, present, and promote these opportunities as they struggle with tight budgets, limited staff, and reduced resources even while needs and mandates are increasing. AFHA's 16 counties have 49 museums or historic sites, 10 Historic Landmarks Commissions, and 12 Main Street or ON TRAC (WV program to initiate development using Main Street principles) community development efforts. These are primarily volunteer-driven organizations, as less than ¼ had professional staff, often only part time. (museumsfwwv.org; wvculture.org/shpo/hlc_list.html; wvcommerce.org/people/communityresources/communityrevitalization/default.aspx)

2 b. AmeriCorps Members as Effective Means to Solve Community Problems

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AFHA AmeriCorps program goals have grown out of historical basis of community service, inspired by the original CCC and firmly rooted in AmeriCorps priorities of environmental stewardship and meeting critical community needs. Our program engages in conservation service to protect at-risk public lands while giving opportunities for experience for a new generation of natural resource managers and environmental scientists. Our program teams this environmental focus with direct service and capacity building in disadvantaged rural communities, where members strengthen volunteer efforts, support community development, and build opportunities based on community assets. Members provide vital assistance in capacity building for community organizations through improved volunteer management and supporting volunteers. AFHA AmeriCorps interventions are successful, effective strategies for AmeriCorps members to help address the identified needs, resulting in favorable outcomes for environmental stewardship and community development.

2b. Interventions and Outcomes -- A. Environmental stewardship of at-risk ecosystems.

AFHA AmeriCorps members address needs of environmental stewardship of at-risk ecosystems through interventions of hands-on activities to improve public lands, research or monitoring to inform stewardship decisions, and public education about natural assets and environmental issues.

Hands-on public lands improvements to meet needs of at-risk ecosystems include ecosystem restoration activities to plant native trees and plants, restore land and wetlands, and improve wildlife habitat. Members meet recreation management needs by upgrades to make trails more sustainable, removing debris and safety hazards, and appropriate management of Wilderness Areas. Non-native invasive species (NNIS) treatments of hand-pulling, cutting, or chemical treatments are used in appropriate situations as guided by the land management stewards.

Research and monitoring of wildlife and environmental conditions by AFHA AmeriCorps members provides crucial information for forest management stewards and planners to understand natural systems and to track the impact of threat factors and of the measures instituted to address them. "As we work to manage some of America's most iconic lands, it's critical to know which natural systems are going to be most resilient to large-scale changes like climate change," said Clyde Thompson, supervisor of the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia. "Information from this research can help our management and restoration decisions support the conservation of our nation's heritage." (Scientists Locate Natural "Strongholds" that Could Protect Nature in the Face of Climate Change, The Nature Conservancy, June 4, 2012, nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/westvirginia/newsroom/) Members provide field work and data collection for important scientific monitoring efforts such as water testing, surveys for rare and endangered wildlife and plants,

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mapping and extent of non-native invasive species populations, and evaluating success of hands-on interventions. Members monitor conditions of recreational facilities, visitor impact, and visitor use. Members have assisted with hands-on planting, as well as informing stewardship through mapping, monitoring and research, for red spruce ecosystem restoration, as discussed in Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (CASRI) annual reports for 2011 and 2012. (applcc.org/the-cooperative/organizations/central-appalachian-spruce-restoration-initiative-1) One project combined ecosystem restoration with research to improve outcomes. The member helped to restore red spruce habitat on compacted reclaimed strip mine lands on National Forest land that had not supported tree regrowth for over 30 years. In the first planting, deep ripping to reduce soil compaction gave 90% initial survival rate of about 20,000 red spruce seedlings planted over 90 acres. Within the first year, at least 10% of these were in declining health due to plant nutrient issues. The member's project investigated feasibility and impact of introducing beneficial soil fungi and woody debris loading to improve the health and survival rate of the seedlings. Hundreds of plants treated with various soil fauna treatments were planted in addition to the broadcasting of mulch and large woody debris throughout nearly 100 acres of a restoration site. 35 monitoring sites track the progress of these plants and the recovery of this landscape. This AFHA AmeriCorps project is improving public lands through re-establishing of native red spruce ecosystem while increasing the knowledge base for the Forest Service land management stewards to improve success for ongoing restoration efforts.

Environmental education is a major focus for AFHA AmeriCorps members seeking to increase environmental stewardship. Education supports appreciation of natural resources, especially resources that are at risk, fostering future stewards. People have difficulty protecting something they do not understand. AFHA embraces the opportunity to educate students, visitors, property owners, and public lands users about conservation issues through programs to school and youth groups, public outreach activities, and interpretation materials for forest visitors. Projects have included partnering on "Don't Move Firewood" billboards, outreach booths on endangered species, and interpretive signs, brochures, and exhibits about forest resources and how to care for them. AFHA AmeriCorps interventions of public land improvements, scientific monitoring, and environmental education have come together for invasive species control efforts. Members use recommended NNIS control national strategies (fs.fed.us/invasivespecies/documents/Final_National_Strategy_100804.pdf p1) of education to prevent the spread of NNIS, monitoring for early detection of NNIS populations, rapid response and control efforts that are especially important in populated areas adjacent to forests to limit spread, and native plantings and habitat restoration projects to restore native ecosystems. Members provide field

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data to support scientific research, conduct public outreach and educational efforts, engage public volunteer involvement, and support collaboration efforts, such as the Potomac Highlands Cooperative Weed and Pest Management Area. AFHA members have studied, provided treatment, and educated about using beetles for bio-control of a prevalent invasive weed.

(onewomanweedwarrior.wordpress.com/tag/purple-loosestrife/) Members also have been instrumental in the annual Garlic Mustard Challenge to combat the garlic mustard threat to forestland and wildlife habitat. Research shows that pulling garlic mustard results in more vigorous native plant restoration than when garlic mustard has been cut or sprayed with herbicide, due to the amount of dead garlic mustard root left in the soil, which can leach compounds limiting the growth of other plants even after garlic mustard is dead. Since garlic mustard seeds are viable for 5-7 years, treatment requires at least 5 years. (Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) removal method affects native establishment. Barto, K.E; Cipollini, D. 2009. *Invasive Plant Science and Management* 2:230-236) One project combined education, service learning, and partnerships to increase the effectiveness of garlic mustard control efforts. The member presented hands-on interactive presentations on why NNIS are a problem, NNIS identification, and the use of GPS units to map the location and plot size of NNIS infestations to over 550 fifth and sixth grade students, two science teachers, and twenty adult volunteers in 2012 and 2013. The project culminated in 7 field trips for these students, teachers, and adult volunteers held at two forest recreation areas. Giving these students the opportunity to get outside to implement service learning projects increased their comfort and desire to be in the woods, developed their sense of ownership, and created long-term stewardship partners. They helped the Forest by completing over 50 acres of NNIS inventories and removing 21,000 pounds of garlic mustard. Based on survey of locations pulled by volunteers, garlic mustard populations were reduced 30% after one year, and 45% in the second year. The students' passion for the outdoors is evident in the video they created about garlic mustard at phcwpma.org/educational.cfm.

2b. Interventions and Outcomes -- B. Environmental Stewardship of community built environment
AFHA AmeriCorps members address environmental stewardship of community built environment through intervention strategies to save, rehabilitate, and improve energy efficiency of significant historic public buildings. A Life Cycle Analysis study of 6 building types in 4 American cities found that "it takes 10 to 80 years for a new building that is 30 percent more efficient than an average-performing existing building to overcome, through efficient operations, the negative climate change impacts related to the construction process." (Mike Jackson, *Embodied Energy and Historic Preservation: A Needed Reassessment*. APT Bulletin: *Journal of Preservation Technology* 36:4 (2005)

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cited in The Greenest Building p8) "Reuse and retrofitting for energy efficiency, together, offer the most significant emissions reductions in the categories of climate change, human health, and resource impact . . .(especially) in areas in which coal is the dominant energy source and more extreme climate variations drive higher energy use." (The Greenest Building p 8) These results are significant to mountainous West Virginia, with extreme climate swings and mostly coal-fired power plants. According to the National Park Service, "a historic wooden window with a high quality storm window added should thermally outperform a new double-glazed metal window which does not have thermal breaks" (The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows by John H. Myers, NPS Preservation Brief #9) AFHA AmeriCorps members provide hands-on service to rehabilitate historic public buildings that are listed on the National Register or the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia Endangered list. Member activities include window restoration, insulation, weatherization, roofing, moisture control, brick repointing and plaster repair. Member projects include condition assessments, adaptive reuse planning, volunteer management, and support for stewards of government and non-profit public buildings. Members have restored over 100 windows from 8 different buildings. In an energy efficiency project for the historic Elkins City Hall, AFHA AmeriCorps members restored 56 badly deteriorated historic wooden sashes. Six buildings faced with demolition have been saved with member assistance. The 1902 Darden Mill building was threatened with demolition until an all-volunteer nonprofit group took on saving the building, with substantial AFHA AmeriCorps member assistance. The first floor is now restored, insulated, and ready to open to the public as a heritage museum. AFHA AmeriCorps assistance mothballing a threatened early 20th century school was key to its survival leading to a successful adaptive reuse into low income senior accessible apartments. (c-hopewv.org; pawv.org/success.htm)

2b. Interventions and Outcomes -- C. Capacity building / community development

AFHA AmeriCorps members conserve and enhance community assets to develop tourism attractions and benefit community development for forest communities. A major strategy to improve conditions in rural communities is place-based cultural heritage tourism. "78% of all U.S. leisure travelers participate in cultural and/or heritage activities while traveling which translates to 118.3 million adults each year. Cultural and heritage visitors spend, on average, \$994 per trip compared to \$611 for all U.S. travelers. Perhaps the biggest benefits of cultural heritage tourism, though, are diversification of local economies and preservation of a community's unique character." (Cultural & Heritage Traveler Study, 2009, Mandela Research, culturalheritagetourism.org/resources/research.htm) Donovan Rypkema, an authority on economic impact of historic preservation and community

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revitalization, reported that in Florida, for \$4.13 billion in heritage tourism spending, with 46.7% of all visitors reporting they visited an historical site, less than 7% of these heritage tourism dollars are spent at the heritage sites that attracted them. The primary benefit was retail spending in the community. (The Economics of Historic Preservation, Donovan Rypkema, presentation, Preservation Alliance of WV mini-conference, 2013) Community revitalization efforts based on downtown collaboration and preserving historic assets is a proven strategy through the national Main Street program. In West Virginia, the 12 Main Street communities reported that in spite of slow economic climate and declining public investment, "private investment in Main Street West Virginia communities was up by nearly 40 percent from 2011. Main Street West Virginia communities generated \$15,734,237 in total economic reinvestment in 2012." (Performance Metric Results, Main Street West Virginia 2012, Matthew Wagner, PhD, WV Development Office)

AFHA AmeriCorps members provide intervention to assist economically distressed rural communities through developing community and heritage assets and strengthening volunteerism and capacity of community organizations. Members support community development groups, conduct research by community assessments and surveys, encourage participation, and promote community stewardship. They help communities plan and implement projects based on local assets such as parks, historic buildings, heritage stories, collections, local foods, culture, arts and music, often creating heritage tourism attractions. Member educate through exhibits, signs, brochures, programs, tours, and presentations to provide interpretation and a better visitor experience, assisting sites to be more "visitor ready" and bring in visitors. An example is the Beverly Heritage Center, a small town heritage museum attraction where AmeriCorps members have developed and improved programming for visitors. Members developed a collections policy and protocol for artifacts, trained volunteers to register the facility's collection, and utilized the collection to create rotating exhibits. This encouraged visitation by over 1000 beneficiaries to the exhibits and the community. Assisted by planning support from another AmeriCorps member, and influenced by the success of this tourism attraction, a new artisan cooperative opened in Beverly last year. Another member assigned through Woodlands Development Group helped to revitalize the New Historic Thomas community development organization. She supported the group as they revived the organization, elected officers and board members, approved bylaws, and activated three committees. She worked through logistical and communication challenges, helping to keep everyone informed while maintaining energy and optimism and sustaining community involvement. Projects accomplished during her service were a vacant and dilapidated building survey, design and installation of a Thomas Veterans' and Miners'

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Memorial Park, a picnic area at the riverfront, and planning for a substantial riverfront development. Performance Measures -- Public Lands Improved National Performance Measure reports on direct land improvement activities, with Intermediate Outcome documenting that member interventions contribute to the stewardship needs of the public lands. Volunteer Management National Performance Measure tracks Outputs of managed volunteers and Intermediate Outcome of implementation of effective volunteer management practices. End outcome will show beneficiaries served by members and the volunteers they manage. AFHA Enhancing Assets and Stewardship Member Projects Performance Measure documents member projects in all program areas. Member project interventions provide public education about assets or awareness of issues, provide research or monitoring to inform stewardship, enhance natural or community assets, and assist community development and tourism. Output is projects completed as reported in the member's project report. Outcomes are demonstrated through evaluations by supervisors familiar with the project goals, neutral professional observers, and beneficiaries who participate in the results of the project. These evaluations report project benefits to environment and communities of raised awareness and public stewardship, improved stewardship management, improved sites and assets, and increased participation and visitors.

2b. Member Training

AFHA AmeriCorps member training includes a full week orientation for all members, ongoing team training, and skills training provided by the program and sites targeted to sub-teams. Team orientation starts with introduction to AFHA mission, program goals, National Service, prohibited activities, program rules and guidelines. It includes timesheets, reporting, performance measures, and service projects. Members receive an introduction to each program area, so that they understand their own role as well as broader team assignments. Activities include tours of local communities, discussion of living and working in rural Appalachia, introduction to historic preservation and invasive species, and a naturalist walk through the forest. Skills training includes volunteer management, interpretation, promotion, and CPR/First Aid. Conservation team training includes trailbuilding, GIS mapping, Leave No Trace, and wildfire; historic preservation members learn hazardous materials safety and skills such as window restoration and masonry repointing; and development members learn collection management and working with non-profit organizations. Members participate in training provided by Volunteer West Virginia, which reiterates AmeriCorps orientation to service and prohibited activities, plus Mountain State Leaders leadership and service training, in which members plan and carry out service projects for national days of service.

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2d. Member Supervision

Most AFHA AmeriCorps members are assigned directly to a service site and are supervised by the professional manager. Occasionally, a member may be assigned to two sites in the same community and share responsibilities between those sites. Site supervisors help develop their member's position description, provide supervision, mentoring, and ensure compliance. Conservation members serve directly under the supervision of forest management professionals who are the stewards of National Forest, National Wildlife Refuge, and other public lands. Professionals supervising the community development member service include planning and development professionals with community development programs, and museum professionals with historic and cultural sites. While these managers must focus limited staff time on their highest priority mandates, AmeriCorps members accomplish stewardship goals for the site not feasible without their assistance. The exception to the direct assignment model is for our hands-on team. Five members serve under the direct supervision of our hands-on team supervisor who arranges training, oversees safety and timesheets, and coordinates tasks with the variety of historic preservation and conservation sites for team and individual assignments. Each service site provides professional supervision for the team at that site. Members are mentored by an experienced contractor, and learn to complete skilled tasks.

Members and AFHA staff attend periodic team meetings to share progress, reflection, and to address questions or concerns. Members submit timesheets and supplemental activity logs twice a month. They submit quarterly reports about their activities and report data for their performance measures including public lands improved, volunteers managed, and beneficiaries served. Each member is responsible for one major project, with report and evaluations. Members' evaluation reviews are conducted by their supervisor first quarter and mid-term, and end of term with the Program Director.

2e. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

AFHA AmeriCorps members are issued gray AmeriCorps t-shirts, sweatshirts, polo shirts, AmeriCorps pin and badges. Members wear AmeriCorps identity at all times while performing service. Each site is provided with a sign identifying it as an AmeriCorps service site and prominent display of this sign is verified during site monitoring visits. Members are instructed to identify themselves as AFHA AmeriCorps members serving with their site, and are given recommended language for use in press releases or other media that showcases AmeriCorps, Volunteer West Virginia, and CNCS.

Organizational Capability

3b. Organizational Background and Staffing --

Appalachian Forest Heritage Area (AFHA) has been working toward development of our heritage area

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for twelve years and was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit in 2003. AFHA works in 18 counties and is governed by a 9 member Board of Directors that represents our diverse interest groups. A representative Council ensures all counties and interest groups have input, and provides a resource for outreach and volunteer recruitment. Our AmeriCorps program design was developed in consultation with stakeholders and sub-sponsor partners, and in response to expressed needs within the communities identified in our strategic plan. Not counting the AmeriCorps program grants and program income, AFHA has administered grants and donations totaling more than \$250,000. For the AFHA AmeriCorps program, AFHA Board members provide grant oversight and set policy, and the Board President provides authority over the Executive Director for chain of command, grievance policy, and check signatures. The Finance Committee reviews the financial operations, with the Treasurer reconciling reports monthly. The Audit Committee arranges for annual independent financial review, and reviews the financial statements quarterly.

Executive Director / Program Director Phyllis Baxter has been working with AFHA since its inception in 2001. She has a MA in History with a post-graduate certificate in Public History. She has attended numerous non-profit training workshops plus quarterly Program Director trainings by Volunteer West Virginia. Over a 25 year career in historic preservation and non-profit management, she has extensive experience with grant writing, project direction and implementation including administration, implementation, and evaluation of numerous foundation, state and federal grants. As Program Director for the AFHA AmeriCorps program she has primary responsibility for program recruitment, oversight, and evaluation and is program supervisor for the community development members. Financial Administrator Logan Smith is responsible for administration and bookkeeping for AFHA and the AmeriCorps grant. He has extensive experience with business and non-profit bookkeeping and operates an independent financial services business. He has experience supervising staff for a small business and with historic preservation projects. He has trained as an EPA certified lead-safe renovator to ensure safe work practices for the team members. Mr. Smith is AFHA AmeriCorps direct supervisor for the hands-on team and program supervisor for the conservation members.

3d. Community support

AmeriCorps sub-sponsor sites are chosen by competitive applications approved by the AFHA Board. Sites selected demonstrate needs appropriate for AmeriCorps service, an understanding of the AmeriCorps role and how it is different from an employee role, and the capacity to meet supervision and resources requirements of an AmeriCorps site. All of our sites are located in rural, resource poor communities. Letters of support from a sampling of our sub-sponsors are submitted separately.

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AFHA is active with local and regional partnerships. We partner in Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative and Potomac Highlands Cooperative Weed and Pest Management Area conservation collaborations, with AFHA AmeriCorps members providing significant support services for these efforts. We are active partners with Preservation Alliance of West Virginia, the statewide historic preservation non-profit, and provide mentoring for their new PreserveWV formula AmeriCorps program, including joint training and projects with AFHA and PreserveWV members. We cooperate with other AmeriCorps and VISTA programs in our counties, with joint projects, service days, and networking activities. We work closely with our subsponsor sites, collaborate on projects and promote their activities and successes.

3e. Compliance and Accountability

Program accountability starts with clear policies that have been developed by our organization over the six years of our AmeriCorps program, and periodically revised to improve financial accountability, performance measures, and compliance on prohibited activities. Financially, we follow generally accepted accounting principles and have participated in extensive financial training and compliance monitoring with Volunteer West Virginia. AFHA AmeriCorps program staff monitor members and supervisors through supervision, evaluations, and monitoring visits.

Program compliance depends on strong training for site supervisors. Supervisors are provided with a detailed manual and attend in-person training which emphasizes National Service policies, prohibited activities, and proper member supervision. Site supervisors work with Program Director to develop detailed position descriptions for each member, which delineate goals and objectives, member tasks and responsibilities, and prohibited activities. Site supervisors monitor members' compliance with their position description through daily supervision, reviewing member activity logs and reports, approving timesheets, and member evaluations. Program Director reviews timesheets monthly, monitors the members' activity logs and reports, and conducts final evaluation. Program Director conducts site monitoring visits with each site supervisor and their members, and is always available to supervisors and members to address any concerns or issues and to seek solutions to any problems.

If an issue of non-compliance arises regarding member actions, we follow the progressive disciplinary procedure in the member agreement. Members are expected to satisfactorily improve their behavior and resolve the issue in order to continue in service. If the unsatisfactory behavior continues and can not be resolved, the member will be released for cause. In cases of a conflict between member and supervisor, the Program Director works with them to resolve the conflict. For problems related to site supervisor non-compliance, the Program Director works with the supervisor to correct the behavior.

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If this does not resolve the issue, the Program may ask the sub-sponsor to assign a different supervisor, or the sub-sponsor may be removed from the Program and their member reassigned.

3f. Past Performance for Current Grantees

AFHA AmeriCorps has met or exceeded all performance measure targets in all years. The Enhancing Assets through member projects performance measure results for 2010-11 program year --19 projects completed (target 18), 100% of reviewers reported enhanced heritage or natural assets, and 100% of reviewer reported positive end outcomes of improved environments, awareness, or visitor satisfaction. 2011-12 program year -- 18 projects completed (target 18), 98% of reviewers reported enhanced assets (target 90%), 98% of reviewers reported positive end outcomes. (target 90%) 2012-13 program year -- 20 projects completed (target 18), 100% of reviewers reported enhanced assets (target 90%), 100% of reviewers reported positive end outcome (target 90%).

For Public Lands I improved NPM in 2010-11 we reported 648 acres public lands improved (target 500 acres); 2011-12 program year -- reported 1009 acres public lands improved (target 1000 acres) plus added intermediate outcome that 1009 acres were certified by supervisors as meeting stewardship goals (target 900 acres); 2012-13 program year -- reported 2725 acres of public lands improved (target 1000 acres) with 2197 acres of public lands improved met stewardship goals (target 900 acres) Volunteer performance measure for 2010-11 managed 247 volunteers, and exceeded targets of volunteers recruited, volunteer satisfaction, and repeat volunteerism. Since then we have not had a volunteer performance measure, but we reported 371 volunteers in 2011-12 and 250 in 2012-13. In 2010-11 we also exceeded targets on member leadership and skills performance measure.

AFHA AmeriCorps has had 100% enrollment for all years of our program and have never had less than 90% retention. In 2012-13, we had 100% full-year completion. In 2011-12 we had two members leave uncompleted to take employment, for 90% retention. 2010-11 we had 100% retention, although one member exited for compelling personal circumstances due to illness.

3g. Continuous Improvement

AFHA AmeriCorps follows a multi-faceted program of evaluation and continuous improvements. Supervisors, members, and AFHA stakeholders fill out anonymous surveys to give feedback about measures such as perception of benefits of the program and members' activities, degree of awareness of program accomplishments, and design or organization of program. In addition, members fill out surveys on issues such as training, supervision, and reporting, which have helped us improve our training protocols and team meeting schedules. This feedback is utilized to improve program design, training, supervision, and reporting throughout the year and in planning for the next program year.

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AFHA Board and stakeholders developed a strategic plan through a year-long facilitated process with input from a wide variety of community stakeholders and organizations. The plan identifies needs, challenges, and opportunities, develops strategies to move forward with our mission, and prioritizes objectives. This strategic plan is periodically updated with input from stakeholders and AmeriCorps program participants and beneficiaries, and is implemented through annual workplans. Strategic planning and priorities are integrated into planning for the AFHA AmeriCorps program to ensure that program activities are successfully meeting the needs of our communities.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

The program budget is for 25 full-time AmeriCorps members at a per member service year grant cost of \$12,900 per member. This is \$100 less per MSY than in the previous cycle. A team size of 25 members is needed in order to deliver the service, outcomes, and impacts described in this proposal. This allows for 10 conservation members, 10 community development members, and 5 hands-on team members. This size program provides for a competitive selection of sub-sponsors that need member service and have the capacity to supervise members successfully, with assignments to both new and returning sites. Requests for sites each year significantly exceed this number of slots. Participation in our program is highly effective for our partner sites. In support letters for this application, some sub-sponsors indicated the financial effectiveness of AFHA AmeriCorps for their organizations. The Monongahela National Forest received 9100 hours of AmeriCorps service in 2013 at four different sites, with direct value of \$197,925 and indirect value of over \$100,000 to the Forest. Woodlands Development Group reports that AmeriCorps service involvement last year leveraged over \$106,000. Beverly Heritage Center estimates AFHA AmeriCorps members in the last three years provided approximately \$157,500 in value to non-profit efforts, and helped leverage about \$78,300 in value of community volunteer time. Heart of the Highlands Trail System estimates the 7 miles of sustainable trail built or improved by AFHA AmeriCorps members is worth \$182,000 in value. Matching support from sub-sponsor partners contributes \$3,800 per member and site supervision time averaging \$3000 per direct supervisor, plus travel and expense costs varying with distance and type of activities. Total match of \$228,690 will include federal funds of \$33,400 cash and \$29,000 in-kind; local government funds of \$17,400 cash and \$6,000 in-kind; and non-profit sub-sponsors providing \$46,550 cash and \$24,000 in-kind. AFHA non-profit provides the balance of \$2,288 in cash funds, \$20,040 in-kind services, and \$48,712 indirect costs.

The budget is adequate due to the strong support of sub-sponsors and commitment from AFHA for overhead and staff support. The 41% match exceeds CNCS requirements and covers program costs.

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Evaluation Summary or Plan

Evaluation for the AFHA AmeriCorps program to date has been based on performance measures for the program and continuous improvement of the program design and implementation.

For the upcoming three year cycle, AFHA AmeriCorps will institute more comprehensive evaluation measures. Evaluation will be primarily conducted internally following this evaluation plan, with assistance from key informants (individuals knowledgeable in the subject areas but not directly involved with the program) providing input and review.

Formative / implementation evaluation will examine organizational processes, service delivery, process objectives, and stakeholder understanding of the program in order to improve the program. Data will be collected through surveys of stakeholders, community members, AFHA board members, sub-sponsor representatives, and current AmeriCorps members to assess how well the program operates and areas that need improvement. This will be supplemented with more in-depth interviews with a sampling of supervisors, members, and community representatives, asking questions regarding their experience with the program, what worked well, and what could be improved.

Results of this feedback will be compiled annually, and assessed by program staff, board representatives, and at least one neutral evaluator familiar with AmeriCorps programs. This report will summarize the responses, identify areas of strength and weaknesses, and suggest program improvements to address areas that need improvement. The report will be used to implement program design changes for the following year that are made in response to this feedback. Program operations such as member assignments and position descriptions, recruiting, training, supervision, reporting and member support will all be assessed and improved when feasible based on feedback for implementation evaluation. A summary report at the end of three years will outline the program strengths, areas where program changes have led to improvement, and challenges that persist.

Summative/outcome evaluation will be based on the AFHA AmeriCorps program logic model. Evaluation will investigate questions of whether the program outcomes are being met, if the program activities are a significant factor in producing these outcomes, and if the program is addressing identified needs.

The primary focus area is environmental stewardship through hands-on improvements to public lands, conservation research and education, and rehabilitation of historic buildings. Secondary focus area is community development and capacity building through research and interpretation of

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community assets and issues, heritage tourism improvements, support for community organizations, and volunteer management. Program interventions of hands-on improvements to public lands, enhancing natural and community assets, research or monitoring to inform stewardship, public education about assets and issues, and community capacity building through volunteer management will result in changed behaviors of raised awareness about and more effective stewardship of public lands and community assets, improved community development and increased tourism. Long term outcomes will be meaningful change toward healthier ecosystems with improved stewardship and stronger communities and community organizations with increased opportunities.

Program outputs and intermediate outcomes will be measured by our performance measure tracking and reporting. Data for specific member projects collected through member project reports and evaluation, and member quarterly reports, will help document the results and impact of member activities. Additional medium and long term outcome data will be collected from several sources. Supervisors and sites will report on the outcomes of their member's activities and the impact of those activities on their beneficiaries and stewardship goals. Reports will provide quantitative data for measurable objectives, as well as qualitative reports on activities and results. Collection of objective data such as economic condition or forest health indicators may also be included as indicative, however in most cases these will be affected by so many additional factors it will be difficult to be clear the extent to which these are the result of AmeriCorps actions. Evaluation of changes in behavior or action and changes in condition or status will assess the effectiveness and impacts of member service. Pre and post surveys with community and site representatives will be collected for each member assignment. Personal interviews with organization representatives and neutral key informants will include questions to assess perception of the longer term impacts of member activities. In addition, a broader sample of post-project survey respondents will report on their perception of change. Surveys of site representatives, organization and agency professionals, neutral key informants, and end users such as community members, public lands users, and tourists will provide input on the success of changed outcomes and the degree to which they resulted from AmeriCorps member activities.

At the end of the second complete year of the three-year grant cycle, the Program Director will prepare an evaluation summary report of past AFHA AmeriCorps Program activities with input and review by a neutral evaluator. This will include an aggregate summary of performance on all program outputs and outcomes as documented in our performance measures, an evaluation of longer term outcomes as indicated by data and survey results, reports on implementation evaluation and

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continual program improvement, and evaluation of program success. Analysis will indicate progress over multiple years, and which member activities are most effective towards meeting the outcome goals. Results from this evaluation will be used help to inform process and choices for selection of site assignments and member projects, in order to direct member time towards the types of projects that show the most effective outcomes toward program goals. This report will be submitted and used as reporting for future grant application re-compete cycle. At the completion of the three-year grant cycle, this evaluation report will be updated to include results from all three years of the cycle. This report will evaluate the degree to which our program is successful towards meeting needs of environmental stewardship of at-risk ecosystems and deteriorating historic buildings, and community development and capacity needs for depressed rural communities.

Amendment Justification

NA

Clarification Summary

Response 4/10/14

Budget adjustments:

AFHA is requesting 2 no-cost MSY members added to the 25 members previously requested.

The resulting budget still maintains the same initial request of \$322,500 in grant funds, which will support 25 members at \$12,900 MSY. With the 2 no-cost members added into the total budget, the program MSY cost shows as \$11,944.

Updated totals for sources of matching funds are \$254,922 total which will include federal funds of \$66,800 cash and \$29,000 in-kind; local government funds of \$17,400 cash and \$6,000 in-kind; and non-profit sub-sponsors providing \$46,550 cash and \$21,000 in-kind. AFHA non-profit provides the balance of \$4,000 in cash funds, \$13,075 in-kind services, and \$51,097 indirect costs. Totals under Demographics have been updated. The 44% match exceeds CNCS requirements and covers program costs.

A1. Grant start Date and Member Enrollment Period:

Program start date will be September 8, 2014 and member start date will be September 8, 2014.

A2. Information on volunteer training, especially regarding prohibited activities:

Members will receive extensive training concerning prohibited activities, as well as about training and

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managing volunteers, during their orientation training at the beginning of the service year. In developing volunteer management programs, members will ensure that the volunteer activities planned under these programs do not include any tasks that violate prohibited activities. Volunteer training provided by members will also train the volunteers about prohibited activities that they are to avoid during the volunteer service. Supervisors will receive training about prohibited activities, including that these prohibitions apply to volunteers managed by members, during their supervisor training. Supervisors will provide oversight of members' volunteer management and ensure that planned volunteer tasks and volunteer activities do not violate prohibited activities.

B1. Performance measures:

Performance measures have been modified to account for 2 additional no-cost members in the environmental stewardship focus area. Target numbers for public lands improved has been increased to 2500 acres improved, and 2200 acres certified by lands managers; volunteers managed increased to 425, and stewardship projects have been updated to 25 completed projects, to account for 27 members instead of 25.

For "Enhancing assets and stewardship" performance measure, outcomes description and target has been changed.

Four different outcomes were originally listed in the performance measure fields in eGrants because the form did not allow enough characters to enter them as one outcome. These four outcomes generally align with the four types of member intervention projects, such that for each type of intervention the most likely outcome was described. However, many of the projects will result in multiple outcomes.

Outcome for this performance measure has now been changed to one combined Outcome: "Projects benefit public awareness, participation, stewardship, and/or asset improvements." Additional detail of the type of benefits being measured is now included in the "Instrument Description" narrative field. Target number has been changed to 24 projects, with unit now described as "projects resulting in desired benefits." Each project will be evaluated by 4 reviewers on benefit outcomes accomplished relevant to that project, with each item being rated on a 5 point scale. An average score of 4 out of 5 for all items rated by all 4 reviewers will count as a successful outcome for that project.

C. Strategic Engagement slots:

AFHA AmeriCorps does not reserve specific slots to members with disabilities, and we are not

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requesting additional MSYs for members with disabilities. We do include welcome language for members with disabilities in all of our recruitment materials. In our recruitment we encourage interviews with and selection of members with disabilities who can perform the duties of the position.

D. No-Cost MSYs.

1. AFHA AmeriCorps is requesting two no-cost MSYs serving in environmental stewardship focus area. These no-cost members will be assigned to the USDA Forest Service, Monongahela National Forest for a special initiative focused on ecosystem restoration. Specific interventions will focus on activities such as red spruce tree planting to restore high-elevation ecosystem and non-native invasive species control efforts. Members will participate in significant field activities fall, spring, and summer as well as related educational, research, and outreach projects especially during the winter months. The activities of these members will be congruent with the conservation activities outlined in the application narrative, and will contribute to the "public lands improved" national performance measure.
2. These members will participate fully alongside other team members, and will be managed, monitored, and supported the same as other members. Site supervision and support including service location, project specific training, travel for field activities, and project supplies will be provided by Monongahela National Forest as the sub-sponsor.
3. Cash funds of \$33,400 cash - representing \$16,700 full cost per member (federal grant MSY plus sub-sponsor match) - will be paid by the Monongahela National Forest, utilizing federal funds that are allowed to be used to match CNCS funds.
4. AFHA AmeriCorps program has capacity to include these two additional members in the management of our program.

E. Healthcare Clarification Items for all applicants:

1. Health insurance provider you are proposing to use?

Probably ASRM LLC, our current provider. We will consider others if they offer a better policy that provides Minimum Essential Coverage.

2. How did you select the provider?

Provider was selected by reference from other regional programs that have had success with the company, by careful review of policy, and based on service provided to date.

3. Does your proposed budget for member healthcare provide for Minimum Essential Coverage

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(MEC) coverage, as defined by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), for your full-time members?

Yes, our budget is based on our best estimates of costs to provide adequate insurance to the estimated number of members who generally request insurance coverage

4. If not, what adjustment to your budget is necessary in order for you to provide Minimum Essential Coverage (MEC)?

If costs for MEC coverage policy are different from our current estimates, or if more or fewer members elect coverage, then the budget will need to be adjusted accordingly

5. If you do not have enough information to answer question (4), please explain why not and/or what prevented you from being able to obtain the necessary information.

We are not currently aware of any policy formulated for AmeriCorps member coverage that meets both CNCS and ACA requirements. The policy we have used since the beginning of 2013-14 term does not meet ACA standards, and we have not yet found an acceptable alternative. For the current service term, several of our members have chosen to go on medicaid. For those that selected policies through ACA to have a policy that meets standards, we are subsidizing their cost.

We have been told informally that our current provider hopes to offer acceptable coverage in time for start of the next member term. We continue to work with them and to research other options in order to have an appropriate policy for our members by start of the 2014-15 term.

Continuation Changes

NA

Grant Characteristics