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Executive Summary

Rural Action, a regional, member-based nonprofit, seeks support for twenty-six AmeriCorps members who will build on a highly successful seventh year of the Ohio Stream Restore Corp to restore watersheds, improve natural assets through trails and clean ups, provide environmental education, and promote a regional development and tourism strategy built on these assets across the coal mining region of Appalachian Ohio. At the end of their service year, AmeriCorps members will be responsible for improved, more visible, and cleaner natural sites on public and private lands, stronger partnerships, environmental education connecting students and communities to these assets, and volunteers engaged throughout it all. AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 6500 volunteer hours for regional renewal. This program will focus on the CNCS Tier 2 focus area of Environmental Stewardship. The CNCS investment of \$334,714 will be matched with \$212,390 which includes local, state and federal funds in the amount of \$114,100 and \$98,290 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

a. Problem/Need

In 2009, Appalachian Ohio had a three-year average unemployment rate of 8.4%, compared with 7.5% statewide and 6.6% nationwide. In 2008, Appalachian Ohio had a per capita market income of \$22,294, compared with \$29,344 statewide and \$34,004 nationwide. In 2009, Appalachian Ohio had a poverty rate of 16%, compared to 13.6% statewide and 13.5% nationwide (County Economic Status Fiscal Year 2012: Appalachian Ohio, Appalachian Regional Commission, January 2013, retrieved from http://www.arc.gov/images/appregion/economic_statusFY2012/CountyEconomicStatusandDistressAreasFY2012Ohio.pdf).

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) gives counties designations of distressed, at risk, or attainment. Seven Ohio counties--Adams, Athens, Meigs, Morgan, Noble, Pike, and Vinton were designated as "distressed" by the Appalachian Regional Commission. Nine others were designated "at risk." Between 2010 and 2012, the number of failing counties has increased and traditional strategies of industrial recruitment have not changed underlying economic conditions. Central Appalachia as a whole needs an economic transition away from extractive practices that provide jobs but little long term investment.

Central Appalachia as a whole needs an economic transition away from extractive practices that provide too few jobs and little long term investment. Restoration can be part of an overall portfolio of

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economic transition when it is connected to market based opportunities like local, authentic tourism (sometimes called eco- or geo-tourism).

The eco-tourism industry in the region is just beginning to build and AmeriCorps members are key to helping with that momentum. Eco- or geo-tourism is a subset of the larger Ohio tourism economy. Southeast Ohio contributes only 4% to the overall state tourism economy, but because of the relative size of its economy, it has a significant local impact. Southeast and Appalachian Ohio have the largest outdoor recreation areas, including Ohio's only national forest and numerous state parks and state forests.

According to a June 2010 tourism study produced for Morgan County that also shares regional data, 18,721 jobs in Southeast Ohio are directly and indirectly related to or affected by tourism. All of the southeast Ohio counties listed in the study rely heavily on outdoor recreation, like birding, hiking, fishing, boating, and hunting; an increased focus on eco-tourism builds on an area of strength for the region. Combined economic impacts in the 18 counties studied are as follows: sales: \$1,412,103,107.00; wages: \$352,467,304.00; taxes: \$181,431,608.00.

Jobs in the tourism sector can be created in many different ways, including entrepreneurship and small business opportunities, and livelihood enhancements (extra income opportunities). Jobs that can be created in the hospitality sector are mainly in services and include tour guides and educators, drivers, marketers, and retail operators.

An excellent example is the reopening of Burr Oak and Lake Hope Lodges, along with the renovation at Shawnee State Park, which show the potential for job creation within the various lodges/restaurants and in related entrepreneurial endeavors such as guided bird watching and hikes, bike rental, tours offered through the convention and visitor bureaus and other organizations, expanded partnerships with the state and national parks and Ohio Stream RestoreCorps.

Environmental restoration has restored water quality, fish and fishing habitats, biological diversity in water and on surrounding banks, and created stronger bonds between community members and their streams and adjacent forests. Restoration creates jobs directly, but the bigger opportunity is when restored areas create greater demand for outdoor experiences and communities can plug into those opportunities for their own benefit.

Tourism is a relatively non-technical (as opposed to the sciences required in many restoration activities) livelihood opportunity that communities can build on to alleviate poverty and unemployment. Tourism is only going to be possible in a region with fairly high environmental and cultural/heritage literacy (people can speak to their locale and authentically relate their knowledge

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and experiences living here) and where restored assets can be commodified and controlled by local people. A tourism economy will only be possible where the natural assets are attractive and reflect care and attention by local communities. Orange creeks, while interesting, are dead and cannot compete with healthy waterways for tourism dollars. Restoration makes it possible to have natural assets worth building tourism opportunities around.

b. AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve Community Problems Evidenced Based/Evidence Informed and Measurable Community Impact

The main outcome sought in this proposal is to use AmeriCorps members' enthusiasm, knowledge, and commitment to service to assist the people of Appalachian Ohio to restore and protect Appalachian Ohio's natural assets, connected to a ladder of learning that can create livelihood opportunities for long-term regional economic benefit.

In Appalachian Ohio, livelihoods and access to opportunity are critical needs and environmental restoration without clear economic opportunities is not sustainable. The fundamental condition that needs to be alleviated is joblessness, underemployment, and poverty. In the OSRC theory of change, environmental education and engagement are the drivers of this change, allowing communities to gain awareness of their assets. Once those assets are understood and protected or restored, communities can identify their market based potential. But the process is iterative; a recognition of market based potential can also support protection and restoration. Given our experience and that of our partners, Rural Action sees a clear link to locally authentic tourism developed and guided by communities and students, as the next step in regional renewal and environmental stewardship.

OSRC's main outcomes are:

- * Improved waterways and better managed public and private natural resources;
- * A system of public education around the region's assets and natural history that connects to a ladder of tourism and restoration development opportunities, and;
- * Strong local and regional partnerships sustain a robust, green tourism strategy providing livelihoods and jobs while enhancing and maintaining important regional assets.

The conditions that must be in place to achieve these outcomes are: restored and clean natural systems; access and availability to these natural systems and sites within them; a population educated in its natural and cultural history; the identification and promotion of natural and cultural assets; strong partnerships working for collective impact; and an engaged population that owns the results of this strategy.

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To accomplish these conditions across the coal-impacted region of Appalachian Ohio, 26 members are deployed at 11 sites that reach 17 counties. Activities take place on public and private lands in the southeastern corner of Ohio in the rural Appalachian Ohio counties of Athens, Perry, Muskingum, Hocking, Vinton, Washington, Stark, Tuscarawas, Carroll, Morgan, Lawrence, Meigs, Gallia, Noble, Harrison, Pike, and Ross, an area covering four main watersheds and over 8,500 square miles. These counties were selected for two reasons. First, they represent the larger watersheds of the Muskingum, Hocking River, Raccoon Creek, and Eastern Tributaries, and second, they represent the reach of partners involved in the activities listed in this proposal. This expansion is possible because of the very strong partnerships Rural Action has developed over its 20 year history of natural resource based development and watershed restoration. Existing OSRC partners include the Raccoon Creek Partnership, the Buckeye Trail Association, and the Ohio Hill Country Heritage Area. New partners include Burr Oak and Hocking Hills State Parks, Appalachia Ohio Alliance, the Village of Somerset, the Wayne National Forest, and funding support from the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District and the Tuscarawas County Commissioners. The project begins August 15, 2014 and continues for one year, with an expectation that the program will be supported for another two years.

Skills will be built and achievements met with 26 members: 8 members in watershed restoration; 3 members in clean up and recycling activities including waste audits, assessments and zero waste events; 2 members specifically working on access to outdoor places; 7 members in environmental education in schools and communities; 5 members in locally authentic tourism development on public and private lands; and 1 member providing volunteer engagement and communications capacity building for all OSRC partners.

Specific activities include: monitoring and tracking water quality and conditions; engaging volunteers in all aspects of the OSRC strategy; providing education to communities, schools, and partners about OSRC's strategy using restoration and education for long term rural renewal; providing school and communities environmental education and natural history programs; developing outdoor tourism sites through corridor planning, mapping, trails, and access, and other improvements; providing marketing and event creation support and activities for outdoor sites and tourism assets; creating resources and tools communities can use to implement all or parts of the OSRC strategy; providing networking and training among OSRC partners and local communities to share resources and information in support of OSRC activities.

These activities will be ongoing for a year, full time, with target community members and public officials in small rural towns, school aged youth, teachers, landowners, public lands users, and tourists

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in and adjacent to the region.

25 of 26 members will report directly on the Tier 2 performance measures of EN5 exceeding the 30% threshold of members working on national performance measures. 1 of 26 members will serve as a capacity building member.

AmeriCorps members are uniquely positioned to work with communities at the grassroots and support OSRC's integrated approach by working as cross-program teams and offering fresh perspectives on old problems. Members have a special ability to be "honest brokers" and bring partners to the table and support collaboration. Members educating children and residents help them become more knowledgeable about their assets while exemplifying expertise and service. By supporting tourism efforts, members are getting at the root of the region's problem - too little economic activity controlled by local communities. The members' role recruiting and supporting volunteers in local communities is unparalleled, with goals met or exceeded every year of the OSRC program.

Rural Action has worked since 1991 for sustainable communities, partnering with state and federal agencies, local government, nonprofits, and our members to build programs and projects from the region's many natural and cultural assets. In our theory of change, restoration and conservation must be community-based, connected to the real needs of communities. Research and documentation from many sources like the Coady Institute, Highlander Research and Education Center, and Center for Rural Entrepreneurship shows that community involvement and participation are critical ways to work with our rural communities. Strong results and increasing awareness over the last six years have opened the door to a larger and more robust collective impact strategy that has the potential to engage thousands of students and adults in regional renewal.

While there is a great deal of program documentation on development in rural places and in Central Appalachia, it is difficult to identify evidenced based research that correlates sufficiently with OSRC's combined interventions. The following serve as documentation that these activities, and the strategy as a whole, are evidence-informed. Rural Action's overall approach is well documented in two case studies, Rice, C. and Kuhre, C. (1996) *Rural Action: Participatory Planning for Healthy Appalachian Ohio Communities*. In Michael Murray and L. Dunn (Eds.) *Revitalizing Rural America: A Perspective on Collaboration and Community*, (pgs 189-205), Wiley-Blackwell. A to be published report by Mathie, A., *Edging in to the Mainstream: Rural Action's Influence on Sustainable Development in Central Appalachia*, (Coady Institute, St. Francis Xavier University 2013) is one case study of eleven on citizen led sustainable development.

The impacts of Rural Action's watershed restoration work since 1994 has been well documented in

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The Nonpoint Source Annual Monitoring Initiative, compiled by Ohio University's CE3 Water Program (www.watersheddata.org). Excellent documentation of the economic effect of restoration is to be found in Hansen, E., A. Collins, S. Zegra, A. Hereford, *The Benefits of Acid Mine Drainage Remediation on the North Potomac River*, December 1, 2010, self-published by Downstream Strategies. This report shows the economic impacts of tourism that would be lost if the active remediation (on-going and continuously required treatments) are stopped. The cost of remediation annually is \$321,000. The direct economic impacts are \$2 million with another \$1 million calculated as induced or indirect, making the argument that state investment in restoration will pay for itself in the tourism economy. The two citations that show the economic and leveraged impact of watershed restoration in Ohio are found in a study by the Voinovich School for Leadership and Public Affairs at Ohio University titled, "The Economic Impacts of AML Restoration Investments on Ohio's Economy," (January 2009), and in the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Soil and Water Resources Ohio Watershed Coordinator Grant Program Annual Report, July 2011 - June 2012.

A key driver in OSRC is environmental education which connects students and communities to the region's natural assets and can affect student achievement scores. The following framework explains the approach Rural Action takes. *Place Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities*, by David Sobel (2004, 2013), published by Orion Society, compiles existing research with commentary by the author. Citing a nationwide study by the State Education and Environment Roundtable (Lieberman and Hoody, 1998), Sobel references Environment as an Integrating Context (EIC) learning: "EIC-based learning is not primarily focused on learning about the environment nor is it limited to developing environmental awareness. It is about using a school's surroundings and community as a framework within which students can construct their own learning, guided by teachers and administrators using proven educational practices..."

A citation that connects the environmental education experiences of schools and communities with tourism development is Blum, N., (2008) *Environmental Education in Costa Rica: building a framework for sustainable development?* *International Journal of Educational Development*, 28(3): 348-358. Costa Rica's strategy is one of the best known and documented programs that infuses schools with natural and cultural learning, provides internships and job opportunities, and creates supportive national policies to foster livelihoods and job creation from Costa Rica's natural and cultural assets.

Dan Shilling's book, *Civic Tourism: The Poetry and Politics of Place* (2007), explains the work and

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research behind locally based tourism. The principles of geotourism and much of its framing (another name for authentic, place-based or local tourism), is found at the National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Tourism (www.travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable). For trends in tourism and potential for local communities, a 2003 study on geotourism is a frequent reference for the market opportunities that can shape Appalachian approaches to site development and marketing. Locally documented case studies of programs and projects can be found at our partner's website, Ohio Hill Country's Civic Tourism webzine, www.civictourismwebzine.org.

c. Member Training

With a 15% requirement for training hours, OSRC provides a very robust training program to support the employability of members as well as their success during service. The total member training hours for the 2012-13 program was 3,852. Members complete a four day orientation including program overview of goals and performance measures and a national service overview and review of AmeriCorps goals, prohibitions, compliance issues and benefits. Additional sessions are Appalachian culture and history, volunteer recruitment and retention, how to succeed with local volunteers, OnCorps training, administrative review, professional development goals assessment, and a community tour. Members participate in host site orientation at their assigned sites within the first two weeks of service. All members attend a three-day water monitoring training or training specifically related to their position within their first month of service.

OSRC members follow a set training curriculum of in-house sessions during their service year to ensure continuous learning and skill-building with the goal of building their personal portfolio for employment. Training modules provided by or through Rural Action include: 6 Justice Talking sessions, 3 environmental education modules, 2 recycling and waste stream modules, a community involvement module, MAIS (Macroinvertebrate Identification and Collection) training, civic tourism, and trail building. For personal development, Rural Action offers a personality traits module, diversity module, coping with change module, and 2 Life After AmeriCorps modules. In order to achieve the 15% requirement for training hours, each member will attend external workshops and conferences such as the Ohio Wildlife Diversity Conference, the Ohio Watershed Academy, and Project Learning Tree, Wet, and Wild trainings. These sessions have been selected to increase the knowledge and skills of members with the goal of increasing their employability.

In the 2014-2015 MSY, Rural Action will add training modules in marketing and promotions, entrepreneurship, and small business development to improve members ability to talk and work with

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communities about livelihood opportunities from restoration and tourism development. Rural Action will work with OSRC partner Ohio Hill Country Heritage Area, Hocking College's Business Training Center and Ohio University's Innovation Center to produce these modules.

Additional individualized training is provided on a one-on-one basis as needed or requested. A mid-term and end of term member training survey gauges the success of member training.

Rural Action ensures that members and recruited volunteers are aware of and adhering to the rules regarding prohibited activities through review at orientation of a comprehensive memo of understanding that specifically states prohibited activities. A volunteer agreement also makes the prohibitions clear and any training needed is done at events where volunteers participate. Members and supervisors are instructed to consult the program director if clarification is needed regarding activities. When needed, Serve Ohio will be consulted.

d. Member Supervision

Part of OSRC's success is its high member-to-supervisor ratio, which ensures support, on the job training, and continuous feedback by highly trained and successful program personnel at Rural Action and host sites. Site supervisors will receive training before the member term begins on national service and AmeriCorps in particular, program initiatives within OSRC and member prohibited activities. These are also clearly listed in the Memorandum of Understanding in place with each host site outside of Rural Action and thoroughly discussed with each site supervisor. Ongoing training will occur as prohibitions and provisions are changed throughout the year at supervisor meetings or as needed. If immediate action is required, supervisors will be notified via email.

Each host site supervisor works closely with members on the design, implementation and evaluation of specified activities across targeted areas meeting with members weekly if not daily. Supervisors provide oversight on timesheets, monthly reports and quarterly reports. If problems arise between members or staff, members follow a chain of command to ensure their issues are heard and dealt with. Host site supervisors are the initial contact to assist members in resolving issues. If further action is needed, the program director is available to discuss and address issues. Member-only meetings are held quarterly to discuss items relating to the corps as a whole with the director.

Members complete a 12-week self-appraisal, a mid-term check in with site supervisors, and an end of term evaluation. Support for AmeriCorps supervisors is the responsibility of the program director and is provided one on one and at quarterly supervisor meetings where strategy, goals, issues and concerns are discussed. Supervisors work as a team, coordinating with each other's programs to meet

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overall outcomes. Members are also encouraged to work across activities to support each other, something made easier where supervisors collaborate and share responsibility for the success of all members. The director performs two site visits per year with each site where supervisors and members provide details on member activities, status of hours, training accomplished, goal setting, and member satisfaction. Host sites complete a mid-term and end of term site satisfaction survey. Final decision-making on supervisory issues is the responsibility of the OSRC Director.

e. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

OSRC works to build strong external visibility and group cohesion by reinforcing an identity with AmeriCorps at several levels. First, OSRC members are introduced to the mission of national service, the Corporation for National and Community Service, and AmeriCorps at orientation by discussing the history and legacy of national service, the streams of service, and specifically AmeriCorps. Commitment to AmeriCorps identification is reinforced through wearing of AmeriCorps gear during service and by members identifying themselves as AmeriCorps members at all times. Host site locations receive AmeriCorps window placards identifying them as AmeriCorps sites and name tags are distributed to members identifying them as AmeriCorps assigned to that site. Supervisors and members will receive training on communication guidelines for ServeOhio and AmeriCorps and all media, website and other communications will contain the appropriate logos as required. Members receive training on how to present the OSRC and AmeriCorps "elevator speech" to the public at orientation and throughout the year. To assist in building an overall AmeriCorps identity, members will participate in at least two member gatherings and retreats jointly with other AmeriCorps programs in the region.

Organizational Capability

a. Organizational Background and Staffing

Rural Action has a longstanding relationship with CNCS including administration of a multi-year AmeriCorps*VISTA program (1994 - 2009) and the Ohio Stream Restore Corps program since 2009. Experience with other federally funded grants includes 3 years of funding through AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates and 3 years of NCCC funding. Ohio EPA 319 program and Ohio Department of Natural Resources have supported watershed reclamation for over 19 years.

Rural Action and OSRC partners have worked for the last year to grow the partnerships and capacity needed to implement the OSRC strategy on a larger scale which means reaching more communities and individuals and creating a larger overall impact. This proposal is a substantial

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increase from the current 16 members to 27. Rural Action believes this is possible because the expansion is occurring through partners with the capacity to participate in OSRC and to provide the match and administrative support to Rural Action. Partnership management is key requiring new organizational capacity which will occur as certain director responsibilities are devolved to a capacity building member and an Program Assistant Coordinator. The capacity building member will focus on communications for the program. Tasks outlined include developing a greater presence on social media, assisting with specific project-related fundraising by AmeriCorps members, and building an effective communications strategy to better tell our story. This member will not have a supervisory role with members and will be supervised by the program director.

To add capacity to manage a larger program, Rural Action will apply funds to a Program Assistant Coordinator who may be hired through the Appalachian Transition Fellows (ATF) program or a former national service member. The ATF/Program Assistant Coordinator will coach and support each member with development of professional and educational goals, build a strong corps identity through team building, further develop a comprehensive training program, and help manage key program relationships and partnerships.

The CEO provides strategic planning and management support to key Rural Action staff who in turn manage other staff, interns, volunteers, and AmeriCorps members where appropriate. She coordinates with the Leadership Team (program directors and coordinators) monthly to discuss program outcomes, accomplishments and issues including those of OSRC. Concerns are addressed within this framework and then processed within program teams. Every other month staff meetings are held to update programs on progress, new opportunities, and changes. Cross-program connections are encouraged between all Rural Action AmeriCorps supervisors.

The CEO and program director respectively serve as contact for grant communications with ServeOhio. The Chief Financial Officer provides budget support using QuickBooks.

b. Compliance and Accountability

Compliance and accountability is enforced by setting expectations early on and maintaining close contact with members and site supervisors. Rural Action has experienced very few compliance issues as a result. Compliance monitoring is led by the program director with an annual review by all host site supervisors, Rural Action staff, and leading project partners. If a compliance issue is noted, it is dealt with immediately with both the member and supervisor and, if necessary, ServeOhio is notified. A corrective action plan is developed and implemented with the member(s) and supervisor to ensure

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actions are taken to bring the matter into compliance. If compliance issues remain, both will be subject to a detailed review process and disciplinary action taken.

c. Past Performance For Current Grantees and Former Grantees Only

Ohio Stream Restore Corps conducted an external overall program evaluation covering the time period of 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012. This examined the perspectives and satisfaction levels of all parties involved in the OSRC program -- members, alumni, partners, and staff. It documented what has worked well and identified opportunities for improving program processes in recruitment, retention, member training and development. Improvements needed in more accurate data collection, better member reporting systems to eliminate redundancy, and better training scheduling where revealed. The 2012-13 program incorporated the necessary adjustments to systems prior to start of the year.

OSRC has consistently met or exceeded performance measure targets in the areas of volunteer engagement, environmental education participation, citizen engagement, and water quality sampling. OSRC recruited and trained 6,375 volunteers over the 4 years when members were in service to the program, over double the amount of volunteers targeted for the period. Targets for volunteer hours over that same time totaled 5,900 volunteer hours. A total of 17,019 volunteer hours (target 5,900) were served during that period, almost triple the number of hours projected.

Environmental education participant targets were added to the program in 2010-11. A total of 14,653 environmental education participants were trained through schools and community programs from 2010-11 to 2012-13. In 2013 100% of returning campers could identify Acid Mine Drainage. This information was introduced to campers at the 2012 watershed camp demonstrating that watershed concepts were retained by campers over the course of a year. The Environmental Education program has also assisted over 100 teachers to integrate some type of environmental education in their classrooms since 2010. An increase in Mill Creek Elementary 5th grade science scores can be attributed to working with the Environmental Education program members. Previous science scores for 2009-10 were 69.4% and 71% in 2010-11. In 2011-12 a model program was implemented with the classes and replicated in 2012-13. Both years (2011-12, 2012-13) saw 86% and 87% passage rates, respectively.

Citizen engagement targets were added to the program in 2011-12 and totals exceeded targets for that year and 2012-13. Data shows that 247 (target 150) residents became members of watershed groups and 84 (target 40) teachers incorporated outdoor learning in their classrooms over the time

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period.

Eight AmeriCorps members working in 7 watersheds have produced amazing results over the 2009-2012 timeframe. These include: 4,317 sampling tasks completed by members; 5,727 member sampling hours completed; over 1,500 hours in critical data entered into watershed databases documenting and verifying conditions present in the watersheds. These results are often used to validate the need for treatment project installation to improve stream health. 214.7 stream miles were improved or reclaimed through treatment projects. 10 new treatment projects were installed/or maintained and 8 new fish species were identified in streams previously too impacted to support them.

Impact from zero waste recycling work, added to OSRC in 2011-12, is impressive as well: 12 businesses, organizations, and residents have received waste assessments and are now taking steps to reduce their waste; material recycled or composted, rather than sent to the landfill, at the Nelsonville Music Festival, a major tourism site, has increased from 36% to 89% in 2013 due to member efforts. 1,266 individuals volunteered for dumpsite cleanup resulting in 62 bags of recyclables, 927 bags of trash and 1,570 tires removed from dumpsites in southeast Ohio.

OSRC members have also been instrumental in starting new initiatives or practices that make it possible to connect results to a larger regional strategy and bigger impacts across all program activities. These include:

- * A trail system for Trimble High School to connect students to outdoor learning labs;
- * A bacteria monitoring program in Monday Creek;
- * A volunteer monitoring program for Leading Creek Watershed;
- * The Appalachian Green Teachers Program, connecting teachers to outdoor classrooms and environmental education techniques;
- * The Mud Run Stream Keepers, a volunteer advisory group newly started to improve Mud Run's water quality and volunteer engagement;
- * The development and publication of the "Stories of Leading Creek" book to tell local history and engage community members in the watershed;
- * Installation of the New Straitsville Community Garden in partnership with Perry County Health Department;
- * Installation of a pollinator garden at Alexander Elementary school;
- * Creation and monitoring of vernal pools at the Trimble Community Forest;
- * Bridge and signage renovations to Robinson's Cave, a historic site in New Straitsville Ohio.

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Revitalizing Appalachian communities is a long term goal, but members make concrete improvements that build on area assets and ensure involvement of local citizens in revitalization activities. For example, improvements in New Straitsville such as the community garden and new signs for historic sites have generated hope in the community and in its citizens. The community garden was initiated by a local resident who saw a need for more fresh food inside the village limits. Local people were involved in making the garden happen and are now using it to the benefit of all. Improvements to the site and signage for local historic site Robinson's Cave is part of an overall strategy to increase tourism in the community, a long-term goal of residents. Repairing the bridge to provide access to the actual historic site is significant and involvement by the local history group and others is critical to the success of the strategy. Seeing things happen encourages others to become involved. Without this local buy-in, the goals are not attainable. Zero waste activities have resulted in citizens' involvement in developing an two-county action plan to address recycling and other waste issues with surrounding counties also interested.

OSRC has successfully increased its member retention rate over the past 4 years. The retention rate for 2009-10 was 75%, 2010-11 was 87.5%, 2011-12 was 92.8% and 100% in 2012-13. OSRC's enrollment rate remains at 100% since its inception.

D. Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is addressed in several ways. Both members and host site partners complete surveys at mid-year and end of term to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the program, program communication, cooperation and program satisfaction. The director gathers information via quarterly reports on challenges and successes throughout the year from members, host site supervisors, and other stakeholders. Specific issues, in particular member issues, are documented and advice is sought from the CEO and ServeOhio, if needed, to ensure issues are addressed appropriately and in a timely fashion. Data in the form of surveys, feedback reported on evaluations or recorded in monthly reports, plus results from internal and/or external evaluations are analyzed and used to make improvements to future programming. If something is just not working throughout the program year, steps are taken to make changes to improve it as soon as possible to ensure the program is meeting requirements and reflecting the high standards encouraged by AmeriCorps .

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

a. Cost Effectiveness

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OSRC's cost per MSY is \$12,863. With this application Rural Action has secured 5 new partners to provide match for 6 new members. Our partnership with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources is being expanded to include 2 new members through the Division of Parks.

Rural Action is providing match for 1 new capacity building member and Rural Action's Environmental Education program is adding 1 new member. All partners are providing support costs as a part of their match enabling Rural Action to maintain the cost per MSY at the level of the current year grant.

We have commitments from all partners to secure the match funds of \$211,900 to meet the 38% match requirement for year 7.

Rural Action and all of the partners in this proposal serve low-wealth/low-income communities in very rural areas of Appalachian Ohio with poverty rates exceeding state and national levels. It would be almost impossible to assemble the full time staff to undertake this program, not only because of funding in the Appalachian region, but also because staff tied to organizations and not to a united identity like AmeriCorps, would respond mainly to the needs of their organizations. This program is financially cost effective but may also be the only way to initiate this kind of regional collective impact approach in Appalachian Ohio. For example, AmeriCorps members' face-to-face contact with communities is critical to foster community engagement. The equivalent cost of having 26 community organizers employed by Rural Action at \$15/hour (\$31,200/annual) is \$811,200 giving a 2.57 return per member.

b. Budget Adequacy - will be reflected in eGrants

Combining \$95,308 of CNCS funds and \$30,290 of match funds for a total of \$125,598 is budgeted to operate the program. With the addition of 10 members and 5 partners, and paying all required AmeriCorps member expenses, this budget allows for a staff position to assist the program coordinator increasing Rural Action's capacity to administer the program. The fixed amount for administrative costs allows for financial management and CEO oversight of the program. The AmeriCorps members do not replace any existing employees.

Rural Action has or will be approaching three foundations to support its AmeriCorps program in 2014: The Governor's Office of Appalachia; the Musser Fund; and the CHS Foundation.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

Rural Action completed an external evaluation in 2012-2013, which is attached to this application. Given the program's expansion, process and outcome evaluations are critical parts of Rural Action's

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overall program management and will be used to inform program changes, reinforce areas of success, and celebrate success to partners, funders, and CNCS. Rural Action will collect routine data to generate an internal evaluation referencing the 2012-2013 external evaluation and focusing on member support, supervision and satisfaction; partners satisfaction; progress toward identified goals, overall management, reporting and data collection validity; community involvement, member connections to AmeriCorps, and post-service employability.

Rural Action will engage an external evaluator who will look at whether the OSRC strategy was successful achieving its outcomes: improved waterways and better managed public and private natural resources; a system of public education around the region's assets and natural history that connects to a ladder of tourism and restoration development opportunities, and strong local and regional partnerships sustain a robust, green tourism strategy providing livelihoods and jobs while enhancing and maintaining important regional assets.

This external evaluation will measure achievement in its mid-term outcomes: restoration projects in place; volunteers engaged in OSRC activities; public and private support for OSRC strategies is in place; schools and communities integrate environmental education as a core strategy for learning and regional development; outdoor sites in watersheds improved and used sustainably to attract tourists to the region; partnerships created and strengthened that provide shared strategies and collective impact.

Program evaluation design will include data tracking and collection by members and supervisors, collation of data by the program director, feedback and evaluation by site supervisors and key partners. Internal and external evaluation data collection measures include: watershed data collection sheets for sampling and monitoring activities; volunteer and participant sign-in sheets; pre and post-testing of environmental education activities; OnCorps volunteer reporting; and member observations collected in monthly reports.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

Clarification Request

a. Budget

1. Source of Funds: Please confirm that you have FEMA approval to use the federal Wayne National Forest CERT Program funds as match to this award.

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Our contact at the Wayne National Forest assures us that Forest Service dollars will be used for the AmeriCorps match, not CERT funds since they do not receive allocated funds for CERT. A support letter from the Wayne National Forest will be available upon request.

2. The start date for the program will be August 15, 2014. See budget section.

3. See budget section

b. Programmatic

1. Please provide more information about the specific tasks and responsibilities of the capacity building member. Explain if this member will be taking on responsibilities that were previously held by the director.

General Rural Action communications about the program occurred through organizational staff in the past, however no strategic media plan was implemented specific to Ohio Stream Restore Corps. Use of social media as a resource to inform and engage others is recognized as a significant avenue to reach out to the general population now that rural access to the internet and web has improved in our area. To take advantage of that opportunity and with the expansion of the program to a regional level, a more comprehensive media plan is needed to fully share the real story of AmeriCorps members working in our region. Implementation of that strategy will be centralized through a capacity building member on two fronts- media and communications with a special emphasis on increased social media and coordination of volunteer efforts. The capacity building member will assist in developing an OSRC communication strategy designed to spread the word about Ohio Stream Restore Corps through several communication channels- social media, standard media resources and through our online newsletter, the Rural Rambler and the Rural Action website. Up to this point 90% of communications on Facebook have been posted by specific host sites and not by the program itself. The Capacity Building member will post overall program information on an AmeriCorps OSRC Facebook page and other social media sources highlighting program successes, activities and events. A Rural Action national service alumni page will be added to Facebook as well as a quarterly online AmeriCorps newsletter, all tasks to be completed by the Capacity Building member. Education to legislative offices, local governments and agencies with the OSRC service area will also be the responsibility of this

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member with approval from the program director. Program press releases, contacts with media sources for interviews or articles and other communication tasks will be included in the overall communication strategy responsibilities. Responsibility for volunteer coordination will fall to the Capacity member in coordination with host sites to assist with volunteer recruitment, engagement and data collection practices. Individual host sites have worked with volunteers with good success in the past, however coordination of volunteers through one source should provide better oversight, data gathering and collection for the program.

2. Please explain who the local partners are and how many sites will engage members.

Local partner organizations currently serving as OSRC host sites are as follows: Buckeye Trail Association, 2 members; Ohio Hill Country Heritage Area, 1 member; Raccoon Creek Partnership, 2 members. Rural Action programs serving as OSRC host sites are: Monday Creek Restoration Project, 2 members; Sunday Creek Watershed Group, 1 member; Appalachian Ohio Zero Waste Initiative, 3 members; Environmental Education, 3 members and Huff Run Watershed Restoration Partnership/Mud Run Watershed, 2 members. Proposed new OSRC host sites are: Appalachian Ohio Alliance, 1 member; Wayne National Forest, 1 member; Ohio Department of Natural Resources/Burr Oak State Park, 1 member; Village of Somerset, 2 members; Tuscarawas County Commissioners, 1 member; Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District, 1 member. Two additional members will be added to Environmental Education and 1 capacity building member will be added to the Rural Action Community and Education Center, OSRC's local office. A total of 16 host sites will have 26 members assigned to them. Partnerships with other agencies and organizations not serving as host sites where members are assigned are essential to the success of the program. These include Ohio EPA, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Little Cities of the Forest, Camp Oty' Okwa, Trimble Local Schools, Federal Hocking Local Schools, Athens City Schools, Southern Local Schools, Nelsonville York Schools, Kids on Campus, and many others.

C. Performance Measures

1. The outcome for environmental restoration (OUTCM5083) appears to rely on the reporting of members and supervisors about whether a stream has been improved. Data collection by those engaged in implementing the project are considered a potentially biased source of information. Please revise the description of the instrument to clarify the role that the Ohio EPA or some other external

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expert could play in determining whether a mile of stream has been improved.

Watershed restoration in Appalachian Ohio and throughout Ohio has been developed in conjunction with Ohio EPA and other leading water agencies like Ohio Department of Natural Resources. Watersheds follow protocols set by Ohio EPA and seek to meet Ohio EPA standards. Members and staff are trained in those protocols and sampling techniques and the data is third party verified by the ODNR lab in Cambridge Ohio, the Ohio Department of Mineral Resources, and eventually the Ohio EPA to determine that water quality standards are changing and being met. Training and oversight ensure that the data collected is accurate and verifiable. All improvements to stream quality are verified through the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the Nonpoint Source Monitoring Project report completed by the Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs at Ohio University. Most of the actual data is collected by the watershed groups personnel, chemical water quality data is analyzed by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mineral Resource (ODNR DMRM) Lab in Cambridge, Ohio. Biological data is collected by the watershed groups along with an ODNR, DMRM environmental specialist or someone certified as a credible data collector by the OEPA (often a watershed group staff person) and results are analyzed by the OEPA or Ohio University to derive a qualitative score.

Members and supervisors are reporting on data that has been analyzed by the ODNR or OEPA and OEPA certified credible data collectors supervise the sampling (watershed staff). Quality Assurance / Quality Control measures are taken to ensure sample quality. ODNR and OEPA certify and train most of the supervisors for watershed groups. Sampling is done in accordance with their protocols. Along with these protocols, watershed members attend a two day chemical data collection training immediately after orientation to prepare them for field sampling. Extended field training with OEPA and ODNR staff on sample collection protocols, and completion of the Macroinvertebrate Aggregated Index for Streams (MAIS) training for bug collection are also completed. Through this training , watershed members are considered to be qualified in proper sampling and collection standards. Most watershed members receive certification as OEPA Water Quality Monitoring Credible Data Program Level 1 which certifies them as qualified to conduct water quality sample by the middle of the term.

2. See Performance Measure section

d. Strategic Engagement Slots

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Members with disabilities have served with Ohio Stream Restore Corps in the past and we are open to working with them in the future although no specific recruitment strategy is in place to target that population. Plans to intentionally recruit more veterans for the program this year are underway.

e. MSYs with no program funds attached (No Cost MSYs)

Ohio Stream Restore Corps respectfully declines to participate with No Cost MSYs at this time.

f. Healthcare

1. Please provide the name of the health insurance provider you are proposing to use to insure your AmeriCorps members.

The provider is AmeriCorpsBenefits/BCS

2. How did you select the provider?

It was on a list of approved providers distributed by ServeOhio at our planning grant orientation. After inquiring at other AmeriCorps programs about their choice of health care providers, it was decided that we would use AmeriCorpsBenefits as our provider.

3. Does the proposed budget for member healthcare provide for Minimum Essential Coverage as defined by the Affordable Health Care Act for your full-time members?

The plans offered by AmeriCorpsBenefits provide the minimum benefits required by the Corporation for National & Community Service. However it does not provide the MEC as defined by the Affordable Care Act.

4. If not what adjustment to the budget is necessary to provide MEC?

That information is currently not available although we will be investigating providers through the Health Care Marketplace to see if increased coverage to meet those standards can be found at a competitive cost.

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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.

Time constraints have not allowed us to investigate other options for providing supplementary coverage for members as of yet, but plan to do so this summer.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics