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Executive Summary

Montana State Parks AmeriCorps will host 20 AmeriCorps members who will promote healthy, active and environmentally aware communities by improving the condition of state park lands, enriching educational opportunities, building volunteer capacity, and strengthening community outreach through service in state parks across Montana. At the end of the first program year, the members will be responsible for improving 360 acres of land, delivering 250 education programs to at least 6000 youth and 2000 adults, and facilitate 20 new community partnerships. AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 500 volunteers, who will assist park managers with keeping parks clean, providing educational programs, assisting with public events, and acting as stewards of the natural and cultural heritage for the Montana State Parks system. Members will also be available to respond to disasters as needed. This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Environmental Stewardship EN4 and Capacity Building G3-3.1. The CNCS investment of \$176,161 will be matched with \$190,041 (\$178,041 in state funds and \$12,000 in private funding).

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

a) Problem / Need - Montana State Parks, a division of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, operates 54 state parks in 26 counties and ranks 12th in the country for the most state parks managed. Yet staffing and budget to manage these parks rank among the lowest in the country at 47th and 49th respectively (NASPD, (2012) Statistical Report of State Park Operations: 2010-2012). The park system's goal is to preserve each park's unique natural and cultural characteristics and have a positive impact on the social and economic needs of nearby communities, but our resources are stretched thin. Park Land Improvement: In order for the public to benefit from the outdoor resources offered by state parks, we must ensure parkland is protected, enhanced and restored. The backlog of ongoing maintenance projects in the state park system is estimated to be over \$2 million, which includes weed and erosion control and rehabilitation of trails, grounds, facilities and infrastructure. Coupled with the shortage of staff this presents a significant challenge to keep parks properly maintained. Nationwide, state park systems must be creative in their approach to caring for park resources to ensure that parks are inviting, safe and accessible to the public.

Education and Interpretation: For children, time outside is vital to their development. Yale University's Dr. Stephen Kellert examined the fundamental interconnectedness of people and nature; his research suggests that "play in nature, particularly during the critical period of middle childhood, appears to be an especially important time for developing the capacities for creativity, problem-

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solving, and emotional and intellectual development" (Building for Life; Island Press, 2005 P. 83). Additionally, research shows a link between academic success and outdoor experiences (Munoz, S A., (2009) Children in the Outdoors: A Literature Review, Sustainable Development Research Centre) However, according to a 2010 study of 8 to 18 years olds by the Kaiser Family Foundation, today's teens spend 7 1/2 hours a day watching TV, surfing the Web, social networking and playing video games. A recent Montana State University study of teachers and home educators also showed that only 16% of Montana's students have access to outdoor and nature education programs during the school year (Obery, A., et al (2012) The Scope of Nature and Outdoor Education in Montana). Studies also show that learning loss occurs during the summer gap in academic study. Students suffer loss of more than two months of grade level equivalency in mathematical skills each summer. (Cooper, H., et al (1996). The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A narrative and Meta- Analytic Review, Review of Educational Research 66(3)). Learning loss is particularly acute in lower income students where the opportunities to participate in fee based summer programs are more restrictive. (Alexander, K.L., et al (2007) Lasting Consequences of the summer learning gap, American Sociological Review, 72). With more than 40% of Montana's students considered low income (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2010--11, provisional version 2a.), intervention to provide free and low-cost education based programs throughout the summer is a significant need.

Volunteerism: Volunteer capacity building is an essential component in addressing staffing shortages faced by the state parks system. Over the past two years, Montana State Parks relied on an average of 1400 volunteers and 40,000 hours of service per year, but more volunteer support is needed. Our AmeriCorps program sustains and increases those vital volunteer hours and recruits hundreds of new volunteers each year. A 2010 study conducted by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at the University of Montana showed that 90% of Montana residents demonstrated a preference for the increased use of volunteers at State Parks as a means to fund operations and maintenance of state parks (Economic Impact Survey of Visitors to Montana State Parks, December 2010).

Community Outreach: Although Montana State Parks AmeriCorps can address many of the needs discussed above, many Montanans are not aware of what state parks have to offer. According to a recent study by the University of Montana, only 48% of Montanans recalled seeing or hearing about opportunities available at Montana State Parks (Nickerson., et al (2012) Montana State Parks: Visitor Profile and Media Awareness). More Montanans need access to information on the opportunities

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available at Montana State Parks, including the opportunity for families and children to connect with the outdoors to stay healthy and active. This information would be more readily accessible with the creation and strengthening of community partnerships. Additionally, educating adults and children on the health benefits of being active outdoors is essential to building healthy communities. According to the CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey data from 2010, 61.3% of Montana adults and 22.3% of adolescents are overweight or obese. According to the same study, 44.7% percent of Montanans did not meet the national recommendation for aerobic activity in 2011. The American Public Health Association (APHA) recently published a new policy statement addressing the vital importance of public land. The APHA policy statement reads as follows: "To aid in promoting healthy and active lifestyles,[the APHA] encourages land use decisions that prioritize access to natural areas and green spaces for residents of all ages, abilities and income levels." The APHA also recommends that professionals "raise awareness among patients and the public at-large about the health benefits of spending time in nature and of nature-based play and recreation." Finally, the APHA recommends partnerships between health care providers and "parks departments, school districts and nature centers." (American Public Health Association, American Public Health Association Adopts 17 New Policy Statements at Annual Meeting, November 5th, 2013). The benefits that parks can offer residents are clearly being recognized on a national scale, but we need increased capacity in order for state parks to realize their full potential in serving communities.

b) Evidence Base If funded, AmeriCorps interventions that address improving the condition of park land, enriching educational opportunities, building volunteer capacity and strengthening community outreach will be effective. Currently, our AmeriCorps program engages members from diverse backgrounds to serve in rural, urban and tribal communities to complete project goals. One tenth of our members have been in the "encore" stage of their careers; this age group brings significant wisdom and experience to our program. Our program is also committed to running an inclusive program that is welcoming to members with all abilities. If funded, we will continue to recruit diverse participants to make our program as strong as possible.

Park Land Improvement: In two years, AmeriCorps members have improved 840 acres of park land beginning to address the backlog of ongoing maintenance projects in the state park system. Member projects included erosion and noxious weed control, trail maintenance, tree planting, maintaining historic sites, and other tasks required to keep our parks accessible. Engaging AmeriCorps members in outdoor conservation projects provides a tremendous opportunity for member development; a 2011 evidence based study conducted by Texas A&M University demonstrated that members who

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participate in similar programs "exhibit improved leadership skills, community engagement, and environmental stewardship." (2011 PLSC Evaluation Report). A new organization known as the 21CSC, of which Montana State Parks is a member, was formed to promote environmental stewardship and prepare the next generation of natural resource professionals by providing opportunities to engage in conservation projects. Our program is effective in preparing the next generation of natural resource professionals: over half of our members have secured a job, service opportunity, or education program in the environmental field after their terms.

Education and Interpretation: The best way to cultivate future stewards of our lands and ensure their availability for future generations is to give children and adolescents the opportunity to experience nature. An evidence-based Cornell study of 2000 adults indicate that participation with "wild nature" in childhood such as walking, playing or hiking in natural areas; camping; or hunting or fishing has a significant, positive association with both adult environmental attitudes and behaviors. (Wells; Lekeis (2006) Nature and the Life Course. Children, Youth and Environments 16(1)).

Montana State Park delivers low or no cost programming to a diverse cross section of the population, and we are positioned to be able to reach a high number of youth, including those students who are not among the 16% who currently have access to outdoor education. Through AmeriCorps, our agency has reached a growing number of youth with vital outdoor education and programming. In two years, AmeriCorps members have conducted over 400 programs and directly engaged with over 6500 youth and 3000 adults. Students from 1st through 10th grade participated in educational programs in 2012, with the highest concentration of participants in grades 1-6. In a recent Montana State University study, 91% of Montana's teachers indicated that programs like those offered through State Parks would help promote and enrich their curriculum (Obery & Brody, (2012) The Scope of Nature and Outdoor Education in Montana). In the last two years, 259 teachers completed surveys following state parks field trip programs. 99% agreed that the material was interesting for students. 95% said that programs enhanced student understanding of Montana's natural or cultural history. 98% said that curriculum was appropriate for the grade level.

The U.S. Department of Labor predicts that jobs requiring science, engineering and technical training will increase 34% between 2008 and 2018. The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) has developed goals for a science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) Initiative. OPI states that "Intervention to develop this combination of integrated knowledge and skills will help Montanans to be informed citizens, be stewards of the state's natural resources, improve our social and economic conditions, and compete in the local and global economy." If funded, our members will continue to

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provide teachers the resources they need by providing educational programming using state parks as outdoor classrooms. These lessons support STEM and engage youth in programs during both the school year and summer.

Interpretation and education are critical to the mission of the state parks system because programs and exhibits often inspire visitors to take an active role in the stewardship of park resources. In the first two years of our AmeriCorps program, members collected 1,625 visitor surveys to assess the effectiveness of interpretive services provided by state parks. The surveys indicated a strong appreciation for the programs; in 2013, 92% of interpretive program participants indicated that the program created a desire to participate in additional programs or return to the park. 86% agreed that the interpretive program influenced the "way I think about nature and history in relation to my life," 93% agreed that the interpretive program made them think about the topic in greater depth, and 96% agreed that the interpretive program presented information that they would like to share with others. State park programs are provided at low or no cost and are close to many communities, meaning hurdles often faced by low income families in providing opportunities for their children to access outdoor programming, such as commuting costs and travel time, are overcome. With funding, our AmeriCorps program can continue to reach a greater segment of the population than is otherwise possible.

Volunteer Capacity Building: Our program is effective at building volunteer capacity, which directly contributes to long-term sustainability. In two years AmeriCorps program members have recruited 975 volunteers. In 2012, the first year of the AmeriCorps program, the number of volunteers in state parks increased by 14%, which was essential in addressing staffing shortages. Data collected in our 2013 program year showed that 459 of the volunteers recruited in 2013 had not previously volunteered for state parks. Volunteer capacity building is important in providing benefits to both Montana State Parks and the volunteers themselves. In 2007, the Corporation for National and Community Service published "The Health Benefits of Volunteering". This compilation of scientific research findings supports the connections between volunteering and the benefit to individual health and social well being. The review states that "those who give support through volunteering experience greater health benefits than those who receive support through these activities." In other words, not only do volunteers benefit Montana State Parks, but they benefit themselves even more in the process. Further, the review states that "volunteers report greater life satisfaction and better physical health than do non-volunteers, and their life satisfaction and physical health improves at a greater rate as a result of volunteering (CNCS, ORPD. The Health Benefits of Volunteering; A Review of Recent

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Research, Washington, DC 2007). Between 2000 and 2010, the percent of Montanans aged 65 and older increased by 21.3 %. Evidence based research shows that formal volunteering can moderate the loss of sense of purpose among older adults who experienced the loss of major role identities such as wage earner and parent (Greenfield, E.A., et al (2004). Formal volunteering as a protective factor for older adults psychological well-being. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 59B). As baby boomers hit retirement age, state parks can match volunteers with meaningful opportunities, an attractive option for older adults looking for an "encore" opportunity. If funded, AmeriCorps will continue to strengthen volunteer capacity.

Community Outreach: Exposure to nature and outdoor exercise has significant health benefits such as improved wellness and mental health, reduced stress, and lower blood pressure. Research demonstrates that in order to provide access to nature and outdoor exercise, communities must work together to form connections to parks and outdoor recreation programs. In the 2009 report entitled "Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States," the CDC recommended that "Communities should participate in community coalitions or partnerships to address obesity." Montana State Parks AmeriCorps works to build community connections across Montana. Over our two year history, members have completed nearly 700 community outreach activities, educating the public about hundreds of opportunities in state parks to be outside and active. Members lead hikes, keep kids active and moving at summer camps and Junior Ranger programs, coordinate family outdoor festivals and work alongside volunteers on national service days. In addition, members forge new partnerships and strengthen existing relationships through cooperative volunteer events, innovative educational programming, and other tactics. Members organize community-wide events and help facilitate the sharing of information and resources among groups with similar goals. Montana State Parks experienced its highest peak season visitation ever in 2013, due in part to community outreach activities performed by AmeriCorps. If funded, members will continue to build relationships in the community.

c. Member Training (8 points) Trainings are the backbone of our program. We offer professional training for our members at the beginning of their terms to ensure that they are well prepared to accomplish program goals, and we offer trainings throughout the term to help them prepare for a career or volunteer work in the natural resources field. Our trainings include Member Orientation (January, April, or June), Serve Montana Symposium (March), Certified Interpretive Guide (April), All Member Gathering (June) and Close of Service (August, October, or November). Member Orientation topics include AmeriCorps prohibited activities, member rights and responsibilities, policies

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and procedures, reasonable accommodations, inclusion, grievance procedures, standards of conduct, program mission and goals, member reporting requirements, safety practices, and necessary skills training. The Certified Interpretive Guide training is a 32 hour intensive workshop with an expert in the Interpretation field; members have the opportunity to apply for Certification as an Interpretive Guide (an industry recognized designation) upon completion of the training. All Member Gathering features sessions on Disaster Preparedness, Outdoor Education, Working with Individuals with Disabilities, Volunteer Recruitment and Management, Interpretive Writing, Meaning of Service reflection, and Customer Service. Close of Service includes training on Life after AmeriCorps, securing a career in the natural resources field, using the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, Self-Assessment, and Resume building. Members also individually take part in CPR / AED and First Aid Certification at their host sites. The Program Coordinator hosts a required monthly conference call for members featuring member updates and resource suggestions as well as topics including Prohibited Activities Review, Noxious Weed Identification, Volunteer Generation, Best Practices for Serving in Indian Country, and Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation. By the end of service, each member will have: explored the concept of environmental stewardship and the needs of the local community; developed the ability to articulate the role of parks and recreation in enhancing the health and wellness of a community; developed skills related to providing visitor education, coordinating volunteers and conducting community outreach; obtained new or increased life or employment skills; and gained a greater appreciation and understanding of people from different backgrounds.

The program monitors for compliance on prohibited activities through training at both Site Supervisor and Member Orientation. Members must sign a member agreement and specifically initial their understanding of AmeriCorps prohibited activities. In addition, all members and site supervisors have a binder on site with the updated AmeriCorps prohibited activities listed for easy reference. During monthly conference calls, members and site supervisors are reminded about the importance of avoiding prohibited activities. The program coordinator closely monitors timesheets and monthly reports for any indication of prohibited activities. Generated volunteers receive a group volunteer form with a clear description of the activities they will perform; each volunteer must sign the attachment to the form to signify their understanding of the scope of the activities. Individual longer term volunteers generated by the program have position descriptions detailing the scope of their activities. Both the group volunteer form and the position descriptions are created and vetted by members and site supervisors to ensure the positions do not include prohibited activities.

d. Member Supervision The program conducts a request for proposal and evaluation process in order

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to select strong host sites that will provide strong support and guidance consistent with CNCS requirements. Successful site supervisors provide on-site orientation for members. During this time, members learn about the park and meet with both staff and community partners. Site supervisors coordinate members' initial training, provide daily supervision, and identify external training opportunities throughout the service term. Member supervision takes place at the site level with the support of State Parks program staff. Site supervisors are park managers or rangers with administrative experience, knowledge of parks management, and connections in the local community. Site supervisors are engaged in the member interview and selection process. The effectiveness of supervision is monitored at the state level through member evaluations (completed at mid-term and end-of-term), and through a mid-term site visit conducted by program staff. The results of these evaluations help program staff identify areas of training needed for supervisors and members as well as aid in the site selection process in the future. Site supervisors participate in ongoing training via conference or teleconference calls throughout the service year. During these trainings, the program coordinator provides program updates and technical assistance and promotes information-sharing across sites.

e. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification Our program's name, Montana State Parks AmeriCorps, explicitly identifies the program as an AmeriCorps program. Our website, host site agreements, marketing materials, stationary, position descriptions, and other program materials identify our participants as AmeriCorps members, and host sites display the AmeriCorps logo. Member uniforms and nametags prominently feature the word "AmeriCorps." During orientation, members and supervisors receive training on identifying program participants as AmeriCorps members at all times, including during public speaking events. Participants learn how the program is part of the national AmeriCorps program, as well as its relationship with the other programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Organizational Capability

a) Organizational Background and Staffing A team of people well equipped to handle the complexities of successfully meeting the grant requirements will administer the grant. The organizational structure of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks allows for strong support of fiscal, administrative, and human resource tasks. The State Parks Division serves as lead in administering the grant and is committed to running an inclusive program open to all individuals. Overall program direction is supervised by the parks division assistant administrator with day to day grant management duties performed by the Volunteer / Interpretive Services Program Specialist who in turn supervises the AmeriCorps Program

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Coordinator. The Accounting and Finance (A&F) Division provides fiscal management support. Financial reports are generated using the State Accounting, Budget and Human Resource System (SABHRS). The Chief Accountant, Budget Analyst, Payroll Supervisor, and Payroll clerk oversee fiscal reporting and member living allowance distribution. The Human Resources office provides support and record keeping of criminal history background checks. The division's marketing and outreach specialist assists in advertising AmeriCorps positions. The Volunteer / Interpretive Services Program Specialist and the AmeriCorps Program Coordinator provide member training and support and track member hours and progress toward performance measures. Site supervisors are park managers and rangers who provide direct daily supervision and receive regular guidance from the AmeriCorps Program Coordinator.

Montana State Parks has successfully planned and implemented an AmeriCorps program for the past two years and is well prepared to continue to operate our program well into the future. We have made programmatic adjustments by implementing an electronic time keeping system, adjusted terms and member placements and added training programs. We have adjusted member monthly reports to more fully capture member progress. The department is well prepared to manage the \$167,161 in CNCS funds requested. Annually, the department receives approximately \$21 million in federal grant funding for fish and wildlife management purposes (none of these federal funds can be used to by the state parks division nor will they be used as match for this grant). Additionally, the State Parks Division manages federal grant programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund grant program and the Recreational Trails grant program, both of which require extensive reporting and program oversight.

b) Compliance and Accountability The program ensures compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including prohibited activities, through on-going training and monitoring. At the mandatory member orientation, members must sign the member contract, which includes individual sections including the following topics: minimum qualifications, terms of service, eligibility for a second term, member service description, reasonable accommodations, benefits, code of conduct, release from term of service, grievances, and the harassment policy. Members must initial their acceptance and understanding of each of these items as well as sign the authorization at the end of the contract. Supervisors must sign a host site agreement that documents their understanding of AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including prohibited activities. In addition to these signed documents, the program prevents violations and ensures compliance by providing members and site supervisors with a binder containing updated AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including prohibited

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activities listed for easy reference. During monthly conference calls, members and site supervisors are reminded about AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including the importance of avoiding prohibited activities. Timesheets and monthly reports are closely monitored for any indication of prohibited activities. During site visits, the program coordinator reviews past performance and future project plans for compliance.

In the event that an instance of risk or noncompliance is identified, the program will take immediate action to remedy the situation. The program will disallow any hours that are not in line with our program goals or that violate AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including but not limited to prohibited activities. If a host site is non-compliant, the program will examine member hours for suitability and disallow hours as necessary, identify the root cause of the non-compliance, and take corrective action including transferring the member to another host site and / or utilizing past performance as evidence that a site is not a suitable future host site. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has a clear management and performance review structure in place, so if program staff is in non-compliance with required rules and regulations, corrective action will be taken via the appropriate channels. If an issue of non-compliance on the part of the program arises despite due diligence to conform to all AmeriCorps rules and regulations, the program will take appropriate corrective action including but not limited to issuing addenda to member files, clarifying unclear processes or procedures, documenting the date of the non-compliance and corrective action taken, and adjusting program policies.

c) Past Performance for Current Grantees In our first two program year, AmeriCorps members improved 840 acres of state park land, which greatly exceeds our two year goal of 260 acres. We have collected 1,640 interpretive and educational surveys, which again greatly exceeds our two year goal of 900 surveys collected. Both the acres improved and surveys are measured through monthly logs submitted by members and certified by park managers. In our first year, thirteen park managers certified that the efforts of the AmeriCorps member(s) at their sites resulted in the improvement of park land. In our second year, sixteen park managers certified that the efforts of the AmeriCorps member(s) at their sites resulted in the improvement of park land. This achievement greatly exceeded our anticipated outcome of certification from 10 park managers. In the first program year, 85% of park staff surveyed indicated that they "agree" or "strongly agree" that as a result of the involvement of an AmeriCorps member at their park and the surveys collected, they have a stronger understanding of the wants and needs of visitors related to the educational and interpretive programming in Montana state parks. In our second program year, the percentage increased to 88%. This

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achievement also greatly exceeded our anticipated outcome of 50% of staff responding "agree" or "strongly agree."

Our program has also exceeded internal targets related to the number of interpretive and educational programs and products developed and delivered, the number of volunteers recruited and coordinated by our members, and the number of community outreach activities performed. Overall, our program has exceeded all targets over the last two years, meaning we have been very effective in solving the problems we have identified. Montana's Governor's Office of Community Service (OCS) conducts an annual compliance site review with the program, in which OCS monitors program files and policies for compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations. This year's site review did not detect any areas of weakness or risk. Further, the program has not identified areas of weakness or risk in its service site locations.

Our program reached 100% enrollment during this program year, with 95% retention. An enrolled 900 hour members left the program to pursue employment in the environmental field. We converted the vacated slot to two shorter terms and refilled both of those slots, so we made the best possible use of our grant funds. In order to reach 100% retention in the future, the program plans to further vet applicants' dedication to completing the term of service in the face of a job offer to ensure we are able to recruit members who are completely dedicated to the program for the duration of the service term.

d) Continuous Improvement The program regularly gathers feedback from members and host sites via a series of evaluations completed at midterm and end of term. The program utilizes this feedback to continuously develop our training programs, measuring systems, and other tools. Our performance measures include instruments to document output and outcome data, and these data are used to inform appropriate targets as well as further develop our program goals. We gather information from external stakeholders through our interpretive and educational surveys, and the data from these surveys are compiled into comprehensive reports that help inform the future direction of interpretive and educational programming.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

a) Cost Effectiveness -- The cost per MSY for this program is \$13,297, which does not exceed the maximum cost per MSY, and this amount is a decrease from the previous year. The state parks division budget is comprised of 35% vehicle registration fees; 21% park use fees; 14% accommodations tax, 14% state fuel tax; 13% coal tax; 2% enterprise funds; 1% Federal (federal funds will not be used as match). The proposed total budget for AmeriCorps project represents 2.5 % of the Parks Division total budget and 4.3% of the operational budget for state parks. State Parks has received CNCS

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formula funding support from the state commission in the last 5 years. Non-CNCS matching funds for this program will be \$186,832. The source of this 53% match will be from both state (\$174,832) and private (\$12,000) funds. State funds are part of the state parks division operating budget and approved through the legislative process. The Parks Division administration has committed \$174,832 for the AmeriCorps program in the operating budget for state fiscal years FY 14 and FY15. The division's operating budget must be approved through the legislative process every two years. The division has also requested private financial support from three state park Friends Group organizations in the amount of \$12,000, which each organization has committed to providing. The program will also build partnerships with public and private entities to explore funding opportunities in the future. Mobilizing AmeriCorps members who in turn recruit community volunteers is an efficient, cost effective method to preserve and protect our public lands. An actual example of this is that one member recruited 43 volunteers to plant 600 donated trees over a 1 acre area. Volunteers finished in 4 hours, contributing 172 hours of time. For a typical maintenance crew of three to complete the work, a combined hourly rate of \$44 would be used at 172 hours for a cost of \$7,568. Instead, the AmeriCorps member was able to complete the project at a fraction of the cost by utilizing volunteer time and donated materials. In addition, the project helped spread the word about the park and our AmeriCorps program to the community and enhanced the volunteers' understanding of the impact they can have in land stewardship.

b) Budget Adequacy Non-CNCS matching funds for this program will be \$186,832. After running the program for two years, we have a strong understanding of the resources required to run an excellent program. Members will be placed at state park locations that are equipped with necessary office equipment, supplies and transportation to allow members to complete tasks assigned. In our current program, we are successful in supporting our program design and objectives within budget. We have made adjustments to continually improve our program and to maximize efficiency and effectiveness in supporting the program design and objectives. We have fully described the non-CNCS sources and commitments in the Cost Effectiveness section above. Throughout the year, we will continue to seek commitment from a variety of entities including in kind donations from local businesses for land improvement projects as well as cash support from community partners who benefit from our program's achievements.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

Description of the Intervention:

1. AmeriCorps members will coordinate and implement public land improvement projects to improve

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360 acres of land. Montana State Park high priority lands are restored, protected, and accessible; at least 12 park managers certify that park land has been improved due to the actions of the AmeriCorps members and the volunteers they have recruited; public lands encourage healthy, active, and environmentally aware communities.

2. Members will develop and deliver at least 250 educational programs to at least 6,000 youth and 2,000 adults; members will develop or improve at least 100 educational and interpretive media products and educational programs. Programming will be low or no cost, with a special emphasis on economically disadvantaged counties and tribal communities. Park-based summer programming keeps youth participants engaged in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) topics over the summer. A majority of teachers surveyed "agree" or "strongly agree" that lessons provided by Montana State Parks inspired teachers to adjust their methodology. A majority of parents surveyed "agree" or "strongly agree" that summer youth programming caused their children to be more interested and active in the outdoors. Children and families in communities surrounding state parks demonstrate increased environmental stewardship through an increase participation in outdoor activities and engagement in volunteer opportunities, which leads to healthy, active, and environmentally aware communities.

3. AmeriCorps members will manage at least 500 volunteers at Montana State Parks across the state. Montana State Parks has increased ability to serve the public through improved park land and enhanced education and outreach. Staff members have a better understanding of volunteer practices and community members are more interested in being volunteers. Montana State Parks implements three or more effective volunteer management practices as a result of capacity building activities provided by members and host sites. Communities and individuals engaged as volunteers understand the role they can play in promoting healthy, active, and environmentally aware communities.

4. 20 new or improved community partnerships established through AmeriCorps efforts. New community groups and individuals are aware of the opportunities afforded by Montana State Parks. Montana State Parks effectively partners with new community groups in order to increase State Parks' positive impact in the community; at least 12 site supervisors certify that their sites now have stronger community partnerships through the efforts of the AmeriCorps members. Through effective community partnerships, more individuals participate in state park sponsored programs that encourage physical activity and environmental stewardship, which leads to healthy, active, and environmentally aware communities.

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Evaluation Design (Research questions, research methodology, and the outcomes that will be measured):

We will utilize a Mixed Methods Model in order to conduct our evaluation. This model best fits our capacity, budget, and project scope. We will rely on internal and self evaluation, and we are consulting with an expert in the field in order to ensure our experimental design and methods are accurate and effective.

We will utilize a combination of quantitative and quantitative techniques in our evaluation plan in order to generate the most accurate picture of the effectiveness of our program. We will also incorporate formative and summative aspects to our evaluation in order to ensure that we can both gauge our success and continue to improve our program model.

Our research questions will focus on providing information as to whether we are reaching our desired outcomes, whether our implementation practices are effective, whether we are correctly responding to the context in which our program is set, and whether we are effectively utilizing partnerships and feedback.

Desired Outcomes:

We will measure whether we are meeting our desired outcomes by comparing our reporting data with our goals. This information will be useful in determining whether we set realistic, useful goals for our program objectives.

Effectiveness of Implementation Practices:

We will measure the effectiveness of our implementation practices via follow-up interviews in which we will ask teachers, parents, and volunteers whether their behavior or their children's behavior has changed as a result of our intervention.

Sample questions to parents:

Does your child spend more time outdoors as a result of the intervention?

Has your child implemented newly learned skills (e.g. how to fish) as a result of our intervention?

Sample questions to teachers:

Have you witnessed your students implementing a learned activity as a result of the intervention?

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Have your students' attitude toward STEM subjects improved as a result of the intervention?

Sample questions to volunteers:

What new activities have you engaged in as a result of your participation in the volunteer activity?

What has changed about your beliefs as a result of your participation as a volunteer?

Program Context:

In order to establish whether our program design is appropriate for the context in which it is set, we will continue to ask visitors for feedback about their experiences and whether our offerings at the park meet their needs and expectations. We will also continue to ask members whether their AmeriCorps term provided them with the experiences and skills they were hoping to gain as they continue to develop as professionals.

Effective Use of Partnerships and Feedback:

In order to assess whether we are effectively integrating partnerships and feedback in to our program, we will ask our partners to give us information on how they view our organization and how we can improve as a community partner. We also will continue to evaluate our program each year to ensure that we have incorporated feedback in order to continually improve our program. With each year, we expect our evaluations to provide us with evidence that we continue to improve.

Data Collection Procedures (Types and sources of data, population or sample, and data analysis plan, data management system):

Our short term outcomes are measured through monthly reporting by members. We have developed specific reporting tools to accurately capture our outputs (park land improvement log, participant / school program rosters, evaluation log, volunteer sign-in sheets and position descriptions, and member monthly reports). The intermediate outcomes are measured via the results of surveys: park manager land improvement certification survey, interpretive and educational surveys, Montana State Parks volunteer program manager survey, and site supervisor community partnerships surveys.

In order to measure our program's effectiveness at achieving our overall outcome (promoting healthy, active, and environmentally aware communities), we plan to schedule interviews with program participants, visitors, teachers, and parents. The basic question we will ask is "what changed

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about your / your students' / your child's behaviors regarding the importance of being healthy, active, and environmentally aware?" The answers to that question will get to the heart of the qualitative impact of our program. In order to arrive at answers to that complex question, we will also ask qualitative questions about the activity, such as "which of the topics was most inspiring to you?" or even quantitative questions such as "how many times have you visited this state park?" or "what did you learn today?" A variety of both quantitative and qualitative questions that focus both on the activity and the impact will best allow us to prepare the person we are interviewing to give us helpful and accurate responses to our basic and most important question.

We will utilize our existing reporting tools to measure short-term and medium-term outcomes, and we will continue to use our data management systems (monthly report summaries, survey monkey) to collect numbers of volunteers and participants as well as survey results. We will better illustrate our achievement of our outcomes through one-on-one interviews with representative samples of volunteers, teachers, parents, and program participants from across the state. We will develop a separate form on survey monkey to store all of the data produced from these interviews. Finally, we will hire a consultant to analyze the data and produce a report.

Using the Results:

We will use the results to adjust our program delivery to ensure that we are achieving the long term outcome of creating healthy, active, and environmentally aware communities. We will also use the results to demonstrate our program's effectiveness and impact if applicable, or reassess and adjust our program's activities if the results are not favorable.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

a. Budget clarification items.

Please respond to the following items in the clarification summary field of the narrative and/or in the budget narrative as is appropriate:

1. Section E - Please confirm the uniforms for members and the uniform for the program coordinator have the AC logo.

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* The uniforms for members and the program coordinator do have the AmeriCorps logo.

2. Section I - Please confirm background checks for staff will be completed and indicate how the costs will be covered.

* Background checks for staff will be completed. All staff members have undergone all necessary background checks at this time. If new staff members participate in the program or a staff member has a break in service, the program will utilize additional match in order to complete the required background checks.

3. Section II - B - Please clarify why the FICA for members is budgeted at 5.65% vs. 7.65%.

* The program has been paying the 7.65% for FICA; the 5.65% in the budget narrative was an oversight. During this clarification process, we adjusted the FICA to 7.65%, which means the grantee share will be \$11,157 rather than \$8,240.

The CNCS investment of \$176,161 will now be matched with \$190,041 (\$178,041 in state funds and \$12,000 in private funding).

4. Please provide more information about the Member Service Days included in the program's submitted budget narrative.

* The Member Service Days are National Trails Day, National Public Lands Day, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service.

b. Programmatic clarification items: Please respond in the eGrants narrative field labeled "Clarification Summary"

1. The program outlines that the state park system is experiencing a backlog of ongoing maintenance projects estimated to be over \$2 million. Please describe if and how, in any way, the AmeriCorps program has helped to address this problem.

While the majority of the \$2 million backlog of maintenance projects are beyond the level of expertise that AmeriCorps members can address, members are making an impact on important projects that constitute a portion of the maintenance backlog, including erosion control, timber stand

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improvement, park land improvements, fencing, and historic site protection.

2. Grant Start Date and Member Enrollment Period: Please review your desired grant award start date and member enrollment period start date in the Applicant Info section of your application. In the Clarification narrative field, please enter a statement confirming the desired grant award start and member enrollment period start. It is not permitted for an applicant to re-submit with an earlier start date than previously submitted.

* The grant award start dates are correct.

c. Please make the following changes in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants:

1. For EN4, please describe how the program will confirm that the acres counted under this measure will not be duplicated as per the requirements in the National Performance Measure Instructions for EN4.

* We identify each work site using a unique name, ID code, or GPS coordinates. Members and site supervisors utilize site specific maps to identify project boundaries. Members fill out the "Project Log for Number of Park Acres Improved" each month, and site supervisors initial the log. The program compiles the acreage from each of these project logs and is able to easily identify when the same area is covered by two separate projects by tracking every work site ID and accompanying description for the entire program year. Any duplicate project sites are therefore not counted in our acreage total.

2. For EN4, please provide evidence (e.g., governmental land management improvement plan if it addresses the targeted problem) that the member intervention for improving acres addresses a compelling environmental problem, deficiency, risk, or priority. Please refer to the National Performance Measure instructions for EN4 for the requirements under this measure.

* The Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has a Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan which guides multi level approaches to noxious weed and invasive species vegetation management. The state parks division manages 46,000 acres of land of which over 1,300 acres are infested with noxious weeds. Weeds such as spotted knapweed and leafy spurge have been shown to reduce small and large mammal forage. Weed infestations also modify habitat structure, such as changing grasslands to a forb-dominated community thereby changing species interactions. Biological

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diversity is threatened by weed infestations, as are rare and sensitive native plants. Increased risk of fire, surface runoff and soil erosion has also been linked to weed invasions.

The Statewide Integrated Weed Management Plan includes six components to the management of noxious weeds including: 1) public awareness; 2) prevention and early detection; 3) rapid response and management; 4) restoration and rehabilitation; 5) research and new technology; 6) inventory, monitoring and evaluation.

AmeriCorps members will be active participants in various aspects of the management components identified by the department that address reducing the number of acres infested with weeds.

Montana has a Statewide Trails Plan that identifies goals and strategies for the enhancement of park land. AmeriCorps members will address many of the strategies identified in the Resource Protection section (p.148-150) and Maintenance section (p.156-158) of the plan, and their progress will be measured in acres.

In addition, many parks where members serve have management plans which identify priorities and strategies for park land enhancement. These plans are tiered to the Montana State Parks System Plan titled, 2020 Vision for Montana State Parks, which identifies several program outcomes including Protection and Enhancement of Resources (p. 159). It specifically identifies working toward a state parks program where natural, historical /cultural and recreational resources are enhanced and protected in perpetuity through tracking changes in resource conditions over time.

Montana State Parks AmeriCorps members will therefore directly engage in activities which have been identified as compelling, high priority state parks division program outcomes.

3. Please revise the program's proposed applicant-determine outcome for the EN4 performance measure. As the program is counting improved acres in output EN4, the outcome must be in acres as well (for example, a common applicant-determined outcome for EN4 may be the number of acres improved or restored to required level of quality (such as the natural resource plan), as certified by an appropriate land manager (often the project sponsor)). Programs are not permitted, under this outcome, to measure the project sponsors satisfaction or approval of their work, but rather the condition of the land after the work. Please revise the applicant-determined outcome accordingly.

* We will change the applicant determined outcome to reflect results from the Acre Assessment Feedback Form, which is issued by the program coordinator at the end of the year for completion by every site supervisor. The form asks the supervisor to certify how many of the acres improved by the member at their site were improved or restored to the required level of quality. The form also gives an

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opportunity for the site supervisor to make any comments.

4. Please remove the capacity building performance measure from the application (G3-3.2 & G3-3.3). While volunteer generation and management are important pieces for the program and the program should internally capture the impact, this measure does not need to be reported to CNCS as part of the application.

* The capacity building performance measure has been removed. However, after deleting the performance measure in egrants, the system still asks us to allocate MSY to the capacity building performance measure. We wish to allocate all MSY to performance measure EN4.

d. Strategic Engagement slots Clarification:

1. What percentage of your slots will be targeted to recruiting members with disabilities? What is your program's plan, if any, for outreach and recruitment of members of the disability community?

* Our goal is that 100% of our slots could be filled by members with disabilities. During our RFP process, we will ask our host sites to list locations in their communities where they will advertise the AmeriCorps positions in order to specifically attract applicants from the disability community. We will continue to train our members on building inclusive environments and developing partnerships with individuals and organizations in the disability community, which will result in stronger relationships and better avenues to advertise our AmeriCorps opportunities to the disability community on a statewide level. We also abide by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Equal Employment Opportunity Program Action Plan, which ensures that we do not discriminate in hiring based on many factors including physical or mental disability.

2. In order to increase the number of individuals with disabilities serving as AmeriCorps members, CNCS is offering applicants the opportunity to request additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members with disabilities. The additional MSYs would be funded at the clarification cost per MSY level. Applicants must describe their intent to recruit, engage and retain additional members with disabilities and provide a detailed outreach plan for how these members will be recruited and supported (e.g. established recruitment partners or strategies.) In addition, programs receiving these additional member positions will be required to report specific details on the success of the recruitment, supervision and retention of AmeriCorps members with disabilities in semi-annual progress reports. If you would like to request additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members

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with disabilities, please describe your intent as requested above. Also indicate how many MSYs your program would like to request, the number of slots by slot type, and where the additional members will serve. Add these additional MSYs to your budget.

* We do not request additional MSYs at this time.

e. MSY with no program funds attached Clarification:

* Our program is not equipped financially to accept No-Cost MSYs at this time.

f. Healthcare Clarification Items for all applicants:

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

* Summit America Insurance Services, via the Corps Network

2. How did you select the provider? (for example, direct marketing ,through the Health Insurance Marketplace or other means)

* Direct marketing

3. Does your proposed budget for member healthcare provide for Minimum Essential Coverage (MEC) coverage, as defined by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), for your full-time members?

* No

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

* The necessary budget adjustment is unclear at this time, but we have received indications from the Corps Network that the premium per member would likely be approximately \$200 per month. That increase would necessitate an approximately \$4,000 increase to our budget.

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.

* N/A

g. 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC)

As a 21CSC member organization, please respond to the following in the clarification narrative section:

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As part of the Task Force for Expanding National Service, CNCS and USDA are currently exploring the possibility of supporting additional projects for 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC). The goal is to generate additional service opportunities on USDA National Forests and Grasslands for youth and/or veterans within AmeriCorps by pairing natural resource management needs with 21CSC opportunities. Would your program be able and interested in adding additional slots if selected to be a part of this expanded effort? If so, please provide an estimate of the number of additional slots that you have the capacity to support. This request is solely to get an estimated interest/capacity for growth if the partnership goes forward. There is no commitment at this time to offer the slots nor to use them if they become available.

* We are very supportive of this collaboration and would welcome additional slots if the service opportunities could take place on state land in addition to USDA National Forests and Grasslands. We would accept 6 additional MSY's in the event that the AmeriCorps members could participate in service opportunities on state land, rather than solely National Forests and Grasslands. In the event that the service opportunities were limited to National Forests and Grasslands, our program would request 0 additional MSY's.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics