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Executive Summary

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The Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire, a program of the Southern California Mountains Foundation, in conjunction with its Forest Aid Corps, proposes to enroll 53 AmeriCorps members who will perform wildfire disaster mitigation services on the San Bernardino National Forest to prevent catastrophic wildfires. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for preventing wildfire disasters on the San Bernardino National Forest by reducing drought-related conditions that lead to wildfire disasters. Over 1000 volunteers will also be trained and recruited into the program to assist in disaster services. This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of disaster services. The CNCS investment of \$256,273 will be matched with \$274,148 which is comprised of \$ 226,223 in public funding and \$47,925 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

a. Problem/Need

In 2014, the San Bernardino National Forest was ranked by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA: Drought stricken San Bernardino National Forest ¿ Press Enterprise May 2014) as one of three severe drought-stricken areas at the highest risk for catastrophic disasters, including wildfires, in California. USDA experts warn that with the mean-precipitation dropping under 80 percent of California¿s average, the potential for catastrophic drought-related wildfires is extremely high in the next several years. According to U.S. Forest Service Assessment (2014) hundreds of thousands of acres of forest land and pristine wilderness on the San Bernardino National Forest are now under drought-impacted conditions. These conditions include epidemic levels of tree-killing insects such as the bark beetle (whose presence is on the rise) and an overgrowth of dry fire-intolerant invasive weeds found in canyons and valleys, which have been identified as major fuels for wildfires. In addition, a massive expansion of dry brush, dead vegetation and litter now covers one-third of the forest and wilderness areas; when combined, greatly contribute to an endangered San Bernardino National Forest as a tinderbox just waiting to ignite.

Responding to the anticipated disaster, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack singled out the San Bernardino National Forest as needing ¿additional tools¿ to combat this drought-related disaster and ordered the Forest Service to speed up forest restoration treatments on the San Bernardino National Forest to

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prevent catastrophic wildfires. U.S. Forest Service leaders posit that to prevent wildfire disasters, several problems need to be addressed, including the infestation of the bark beetle. According to Tom Coleman, a Forest Service Entomologist on the San Bernardino National Forest (2014), the Western Bark Beetle thrives under severe drought conditions because they are able to penetrate into trees that are dry. Trees die once they are breached by these insects.

These dead and dying trees increase the incidence and severity of wildfire disasters. The last major drought, a decade ago, left much of the San Bernardino National Forest dead or dying. The Western Bark Beetle killed about one-third of the forest's trees, and during that period, the San Bernardino National Forest saw some of its worst catastrophic wildfires. Coleman believes that thinning trees and removing dead and dying trees will make the forest and wilderness areas less susceptible to wildfires. The Forest Service also reports that the large expansion of drought-related dry brush, dead vegetation and litter is another major problem on the San Bernardino National Forest. Due to a lack of rainfall, over one-third of the forest is now covered by dry brush and dead vegetation; further compounded by litter. All of these elements represent major fuel sources for wildfires. Potentially, it can destroy thousands of acres of pristine forest land and wilderness areas and destroy habitual structures located on or at the edge of the National Forest. According to the Mountain Area Safety Task Force (MAST) and the Fire Safe Council (2014), thousands of acres on the National Forest have accumulated fire fuels such as dry brush, dead vegetation and litter. These fire fuels not only place the forest at risk of a disaster but also the habitual structures on or near the forest, such as power lines, communication facilities, homes, roads, and emergency access roads for residents and firefighters. In response, Gabe Garcia, Front Country District Ranger on the San Bernardino National Forest (2013 San Bernardino Wildfire Community Plan), posits that there is a great need for large-scale forest restoration projects such as creating fire breaks, removing ladder fuels, cutting down dead and dying trees, brushing dry vegetation and clearing litter.

The drought has also created an enormous overgrowth of dry fire-intolerant invasive weeds, such as Spanish Broom, that now cover a large portion of the forest and wilderness areas. According to Forest Service Botanist, Debra Nelson, (San Bernardino Land Management Plan 2013) the lack of rainfall has caused an outgrowth of very dry fire-intolerant, invasive, non-native weeds in hard to reach canyons and valleys located throughout the forest and wilderness areas which render these regions susceptible to wildfire disasters. Nelson believes that greater invasive weed removal treatments

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ranging from hand and mechanical eradication to herbicide applications are critical to preventing drought-related wildfire disasters.

The Forest Aid Corps will address the need for greater drought-related disaster services on the San Bernardino National Forest by training 53 members annually to carry out large-scale forest restoration projects that will impact over 10,000 acres of forestland most susceptible to wildfires in three ranger districts. These districts include the Front Country, Mountain Top and San Jacinto ranger districts. Within these regions, over 5,000 bark beetle infested trees will be cut down; 2,000 acres of dry brush and debris will be removed; 200 miles of trail will be maintained and cleared; fire breaks will be created and over 10 tons of invasive weeds and litter will be removed. Over 1000 volunteers will also be recruited to assist the Forest Aid Corps.

The Forest Aid Corps is designed to engage some of the most disadvantaged young adults in Southern California. Fifty-three young adults will be recruited from local communities within San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. A majority of these members will come from San Bernardino; a bankrupt city which faces disproportionate rates of poverty, crime, and unemployment rates in California. The city of San Bernardino's unemployment rate is 10.5% compare to the National unemployment rate of 5.6% in Dec 2014 (U.S. Census) and according to Forbes Magazine (2015) San Bernardino is ranked the worst city to find a job in California.

b. Theory of Change/Logic Model

Forest Aid Corps members and volunteers will be trained to carry out large-scale wildfire disaster services on the San Bernardino National Forest to improve forest conditions that ultimately will prevent wildfire disasters. The fire disaster training members receive is comparable to the training the US Forest Service carries out for type 2 firefighters. The training is taught by the U.S. Forest Service Fire Academy and it involves rigorous fitness, fire service readiness and tool operations that take place over a six month period.

Prior to the Forest Aid Corps in 2008, the San Bernardino National Forest Service had only one Spanish speaking staff that worked on emergency disaster services. This crippled the Forest Service's ability to communicate with thousands of Spanish speaking people throughout the evacuation of residents during a wildfire disaster. Through the Forest Aid Corps hundreds of disadvantaged young

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adults have gone through the rigorous fire training program and many have entered into the field of emergency disaster services, including filling in the gaps of diversifying the workforce of the local Forest Service by increasing the number of African-Americans, women and Spanish speaking Latinos into the field. In 2012, the Forest Aid Corps won the National Forester's Award for Civil Rights due to the number of racially diverse young adults serving on the San Bernardino National Forest and getting hired onto Forest Service jobs. The Forest Aid Corps also won the Chief's Award which is the highest award a civilian organization can obtain by the US Forest Service for their contributions and service to the National Forest Management System.

The primary goal of the Forest Aid Corps is change the conditions on the forest that place it at risk for wildfire disasters. Members receive training that prepares them to achieve this critical goal. Member training includes learning how to safely work with chainsaws, loppers, mcClouds, Pulaski's, and other tools in fire service. Members are trained to cut thousands of insect infested trees in canyons and pristine wilderness areas with chainsaws as well as cross saws. Members also pull weeds using dozers in hard to reach areas, as well as use mcClouds when brushing trails, removing dry brush and debris, and hauling out thousands of tons of invasive weeds that fuel fire storms.

The Forest Aid Corps was created and designed by a partnership between US Forest Service and the Urban Conservation Corps. In order to maximize the service power needed to reach intended outcomes, the program enrolls two cohorts of AmeriCorps members each year, along with a cadre of volunteers that protect the forest.

The first cohort is comprised of 27 members who are enrolled from October through March to carry out projects that are best done in the winter months. This cohort serves three to four days per week with 10 hour days to perform over 13,850 service hours. The second cohort is comprised of 26 members who are enrolled from April through September. This cohort also serves three to four days per week with 10 hour days to perform 13,850 service hours.

Along with the members, the Forest Aid Corps also recruits thousands of volunteers each year to help meet the intended outcomes. The volunteers serve alongside of the members and provide services that do not need power tools such as hand pulling weeds, picking up trash, taking down illegal fire rings in campgrounds, and brushing trails. The Urban Conservation Corps has a volunteer recruitment

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coordinator that helps recruit volunteers from colleges, schools, businesses, philanthropy groups, and through the local forest service volunteer associations.

The progress of the Forest Aid Corps is monitored by the US Forest Service through quarterly fire hazard assessment reports which determine and measure changes in the conditions on the forest. A Forest Aid Corps training log is also kept to link training activities to outcomes. The impact and effectiveness of the program is also determined by a process and outcome evaluation conducted by Dr. James Fenelon from California State University, San Bernardino.

c. Evidence Base

In most of the United States National Forest System, disaster services are very dependent on a trained workforce of firefighters or Forest Service personnel. The professional skills of fire disaster services are often taught in colleges, universities or specialized U.S. Forest Service training facilities. Under the U.S. Forest Service management system, there exists very stringent standards of wildfire service operations that prohibit volunteers from working with power tools for disaster services. Therefore, very few people are allowed to participate in fire services that require specialize training in chainsaws, removing trees or participating in prescribed burns. Often, volunteers are limited to simply picking up trash.

Due to these conditions, there is a void of studies in the United States that have researched the correlation between training volunteers to serve on a National Forest System and the reduction of wildfire threats as a result of their service. In lieu of external studies, Forest Aid has been collecting its own quantitative and qualitative data for the last five years which supports the validity that volunteers can be trained to perform crucial disaster services at the same or greater level than a trained workforce of firefighters or Forest Service personnel.

Forest Aid Corps is a model program that demonstrates how volunteers can be trained in lieu of the traditional career pathway and can perform effective wildfire disaster services that greatly contribute to reducing wildfire threats on the forest. Within the five years that the Forest Aid Corps has been operating on the San Bernardino National Forest, there has been a decline in wildfire disasters in comparison to the Angeles, Cleveland and in Northern California where wildfire disasters are prevalent. According to California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the hardest hit areas

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for wildfires have been the Angeles and Northern California National Forest (2014).

Although the United States is lacking in research comparable to the model of Forest Aid Corps, Australia has a similar model which has been evaluated. In a 2005 publication entitled, "A Potential Crisis in Wildfire Emergency Response Capability? Australia's Volunteer Firefighters," Dr. Jim McLennan studied the use of volunteers in wildfire disaster services in the Australian Bush. Over a period of time, Dr. McLennan studied over 200,000 volunteers in Australia, in eight states and territories, who performed a wide range of services from removing dead trees to eradicating weeds and brush. Dr. McLennan's most significant finding revealed that over a decade of using volunteers in Australia's Bush, a significant decline in wildfire disasters occurred. This empirical data supports the success of using trained volunteers in wildfire disaster services, similar to the model of Forest Aid Corps.

d. Notice Priority

The proposed program is addressing priorities that are set forth by CNCS commission. The Forest Aid Corps is designed to increase disaster services in Southern California's San Bernardino National Forest. The aim of these disaster services is to create resiliency to wildfire disasters on the National Forest through response and mitigation.

e. Member Training

The Forest Aid Corps member training involves a two-week orientation and an ongoing training program. The two week orientation involves a series of essential program information and introduction to disaster services via verbal instruction by Forest Aid staff as well as providing members with a member handbook. Orientation is held at the Lytle Creek Ranger Station on the San Bernardino National Forest and is taught by a combination of local Forest Service and Urban Conservation Corps staff. Training sessions include 1) the history and mission of the Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire; 2) the history and mission of the San Bernardino National Forest Service; 3) the history of national service; 4) policies, procedures, and prohibited activities; 5) team building; 6) volunteerism and 7) a tour of the San Bernardino National Forest.

Following Orientation, members participate in ongoing weekly disaster service training that is comparable to the training the US Forest Service carries out for type 2 firefighters. The training is

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taught by the U.S. Forest Service Fire Academy and involves rigorous fitness, fire service readiness, and tool operations that take place over a six month period at the Lytle Creek Ranger Station. The ongoing training program includes chainsaw and cross saw use, power and hand tool use, and introduction to wildfire mitigation practices, forest restoration, wildfire recovery and other skills needed in wildland fire service.

Additional trainings held throughout the service term include CPR, first aid and a series of personal and professional development sessions which help members improve their employability, such as: 1) verbal and non-verbal communication; 2) ethics of services and civic responsibility; 3) self-image, behavior and attitude; 4) conflict resolution; 5) building relationships; 6) consensus building; 7) leadership development; 8) employable soft skills; 9) cultural diversity; 10) racial discrimination; 11) civility and humanity; and 12) reminder of prohibited activities.

f. Member Supervision

The Forest Aid Corps has two full-time supervisors that coordinate and manage the service member crews. In addition, the Forest Service assigns a supervisory forester that is responsible for supervising the quality of the service provided by members. The ratio of member supervision is 2:14. At this ratio, young people can learn faster given the consistent attention they will receive from their supervisors.

All supervisors selected to supervise members have a minimum of three years of experience working with conservation type service crews comprised mostly of culturally-diverse young adults. The supervisors will be overseen by an Urban Conservation Corps Director who possess over five years of experience with conservation crews to ensure high quality guidance and effective service. All supervisors participate weekly in meetings to discuss service challenges identified throughout the week. During these weekly meetings the Urban Conservation Corps Director provides guidance, training and role playing to help overcome any service challenges and to provide the supervisors techniques, tools and support, as needed. All supervisors receive leadership staff training every month to ensure that they are able to direct and lead a crew. The leadership training is provided by the Urban Conservation Corps in collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service. Members will always be supervised by staff and are physically present during all Forest Aid Corps project activities.

g. Member Experience

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Forest Aid Corps provides an exciting member experience that last a lifetime. Members are placed in service crews with others who are close in age, who all wear the same uniform, and who all work together as a team. Through service crews, members serve and train together and have the best chance of bonding and making new friendships that last a lifetime. This approach also has a greater impact on civic engagement and connectivity given the members are working toward a group common goal; which in turn, provides a more powerful service experience than if they were alone.

Forest Aid's program design includes a component that allows meaningful discussions among the members and staff. Every two weeks the program supervisors have an oversight-debriefing meeting with the members. These meetings are conducted in an informal environment and in a group setting to discuss civic responsibility and the ethics of service. During these meetings, supervisors and members share the important work they are doing on the San Bernardino National Forest and how they are making a difference by meeting the needs of the community. Members also discuss among themselves their thoughts and perceptions about what they are learning and any challenges they are experiencing.

To enrich the member experience there are continual member appreciation events such as barbecues, breakfast recognitions, and field trips to ensure the members have the best experience. Forest Aid Corps staff reach out to other AmeriCorps programs in the area to connect AmeriCorps members with one another to build esprit de corps in the region.

Member recruitment will occur in the summer of 2015. The first wave of recruitment will be from low-income communities of color, which traditionally is an under-represented population. The Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire has a history of working with non-traditional, culturally diverse young adults, and ex-offenders and very experienced in recruiting and retaining this population. Recruitment flyers will be distributed at churches, community centers and public housing sites inside low-income neighborhoods.

The second wave of recruitment will be drawn from the community at large advertising the AmeriCorps member positions in a variety of places including community centers, colleges, Craigslist and other internet sites, as well as posting at the Urban Conservation Corps. The Urban Conservation Corps headquarters is located in the City of San Bernardino. On the recruitment flyers, people will be

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invited to the Urban Conservation Corps office to complete an application.

To be considered for an AmeriCorps position, candidates will be asked to volunteer for about a week or as needed to determine their commitment to service and ability to perform the services. Candidates at this time will learn what the service projects that will be performed and expectations. It has been the experience of the Urban Conservation Corps that not all applicants are capable of performing fuels reduction work or has the ability to hike for miles at one time. Consequently and prior to being considered, a candidate must demonstrate their level of fitness and commitment to service.

If applicants complete their try-out days and Urban Conservation Corps staff personnel are convinced they have good potential as an AmeriCorps member, the candidate must participate in a panel interview. The panel will be comprised of Urban Conservation Corps staff, Forest Service staff and other partners who will conduct interviews which include asking questions pertaining to the applicant's commitment to service. Based on panel recommendations, candidates may be invited for a second interview; conducted by the same panelists.

Once approved, candidates will be notified if they are being considered for a member position on the Forest Aid Corps program. Candidates will be advised that program enlistment is contingent upon receipt of all required documentation and clearance on the criminal background checks with the State of California, FBI and national sex offender registry. With all documents in order and clearances completed and passed, new members will receive a contract for hire, essential human resource materials, plus an invitation to a program orientation.

h. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

The Forest Aid Corps has a tremendous commitment to AmeriCorps Identification. To ensure that members clearly understand they are representing the prestigious AmeriCorps brand, UCC supervisors clearly delineate and reinforce the brand attributes and values at their oversight-debriefing meeting to reinforce their National Service as AmeriCorps members. To build recognition value and pride within the community as AmeriCorps members, all of the Forest Aid Corps service crews wear the AmeriCorps patch on the right sleeve of their uniform. In addition, the AmeriCorps logo is displayed on their service gear. The Forest Aid Corps also uses social media, newsletters and other outlets to ensure the community can clearly identify the program as an AmeriCorps program. The Forest Aid Corps also has an AmeriCorps banner and flags that are showcased at project sites and at community events where members are serving.

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Organizational Capability

Organizational Capability

The legal applicant on the proposed project is the Southern California Mountains Foundation (SCMF), formerly known as the San Bernardino National Forest Association. The SCMF has an operating budget over 4 million annually in programs and services to promote forest conservation, youth development and volunteerism throughout Southern California public lands. Since its inception in 1993, the SCMF has managed and administered millions in federal, state and local grants and contracts including the U.S. Forest Service; National Parks Service; Department of Labor, Housing and Urban Development; and AmeriCorps State. Most of the federal, state and local grants and contracts have substantial regulations and requirements to be administered.

Under the SCMF the accounting functions are performed by a professional finance manager with fiscal oversight and policy compliance experience including compliance with prohibited activities which would include the AmeriCorps program. The finance manager uses an accrual fund accounting system and software (QuickBooks). Financial activities are tracked using separate funds to record each division's direct expenses along with computing indirect costs. Grant and contract receipts are recorded as revenue in the period in which the services were performed and expenses incurred. The SCMF Executive Director meets with the Finance Manager weekly to ensure proper allocation of resources and availability. For the past five years, the SCMF has been managing and administering an AmeriCorps grant program with great contract clarity and proficiency in administering program provisions and regulations.

The Forest Aid Corps is under the direction and leadership of Sandy Bonilla, the Director of the Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire, program of the Southern California Mountains Foundation. Ms. Bonilla has over 25 years of experience managing large comprehensive federal grant programs. Ms. Bonilla works closely with the Forest Aid Corps Community Partnership that assists in all program planning and development activities; comprised of the local Forest Service, San Bernardino Regional Parks, Cal FIRE, City of San Bernardino and the John Muir Charter School. (50% time of the project)

The Assistant Director of the Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire is Carrie Rios. Ms. Rios

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has over 13 years of experience in municipal government and regulatory programming, volunteerism, and building community partnerships. Ms. Rios responsibilities include the planning, development and implementation of the Forest Aid AmeriCorps program. Ms. Rios oversees the Forest Aid Corps program. (50% time on the project).

UCC Grants and Contracts Manager is Rochell Axelrod. Ms. Axelrod has over three years of experience managing the administrative functions of the AmeriCorps grant. Mrs. Axelrod's responsibilities include grant compliance, reporting, background checks, files and enrollments.

Albert Espinoza is a Crew Supervisor and has over four years of experience in supervising Forest Aid Corps members. Mr. Espinoza's responsibilities include providing crew supervision, quality member training oversight, and acting as a liaison between the UCC and the local Forest Service staff on service project activities. (100% time on the project). Malcolm Cade will be the second Crew Supervisor on the project and has three years of experience serving as an AmeriCorps member and supervisor. Mr. Cade will be 100% of time on the project.

b. Compliance and Accountability

The Forest Aid Corps program is being monitored by finance manager, Karl Hierl, for compliance as a service site and to meet all financial and program grant requirements. Mr. Hierl will address technical assistance needs throughout the duration of the program. Mr. Hierl has over 10 years' experience in federal grant management and will be responsible for budget management, fiscal oversight and compliance with federal regulations and guidelines of the proposed AmeriCorps project.

At the outset of the proposed program, Mr. Hierl will conduct an orientation workshop for key UCC staff and partners to ensure a high degree of working knowledge of all AmeriCorps rules and regulations, all financial and program compliance issues and how they relate to prohibited activities. Mr. Hierl will provide the workshop attendees with a schedule of regular site visits to the Urban Conservation Corps business office and to the service site locations to ensure the program is not at risk for noncompliance. If noncompliance issues are identified, the contracts manager will discuss solutions with the program director and the CaliforniaVolunteers.

c. Past Performance for Current Grantees and Former Grantees Only

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During the past four years, the Forest Aid Corps has met and exceeded all of its performance measurements on the San Bernardino National Forest, such as direct services, member development, strengthening communities and educating the public on fire prevention. Under the direction of the Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire, the Forest Aid Corps program has never under performed at meeting its targets. Forest Aid Corps has always enrolled 100% of its positions each year.

Every six months, the program hires 26 to 27 members and has maintained an average retention rate of 90%. To ensure 100% retention, the Forest Aid Corps has added a member support program that provides wraparound case management services.

In cases where members were separated from the program, the issues were behavioral and/or employment opportunities with the local Forest Service. Only one noncompliance issue exists during the entire years of operation. Bobby Vega, the key AmeriCorps manager, passed away during the 2013-14 program year. This unforeseen tragedy created a lack of general administrative oversight for a few months resulting in 31 members being exited in eGrants over 30 days. The program has since implemented a backup management structure which will prevent this type of oversight from reoccurring. With the exception of this isolated occurrence, the program has a history of meeting all reporting deadlines.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

3. Cost Effectiveness

The Forest Aid Corps budget costs are based on 20.19 MSY. This equates to 53 members at the expanded part-time level of 675 service hours. The proposed budget aligns with all of the components of the program and is sufficient to carry out the program efficiently and effectively with funding for staffing, training, operational support, and evaluation.

The program design is cost effective and the benefits immensely justify the cost by saving taxpayers who bear the high cost of wildfire suppression by preventing infrastructure shut down. The San Bernardino National Forest is uniquely located in an urban center with a major highway and railway running through it. This major highway is called the Cajon Pass that bridges the High Desert communities with the lower urban cities. The Cajon Pass is the only highway and railway passage through the forest that allows freight trains, buses, commercial trucks and cars to move back and forth from one jurisdiction to another. For instance, freight trains that are moving commerce from Los Angeles to Las Vegas must go through the Cajon Pass. Any fires on the San Bernardino National

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Forest within the Cajon Pass will cause the US Forest Service to shut down the roads and railways which impacts the local economy. According to the Disaster Recovery Journal 2013, wildfire disasters either small or large create economic degradation and are disastrous to the local economy in terms of its impact to businesses, infrastructure shutdowns, wages and healthcare costs. In 2011, the Cajon Pass was shut down for one day during a small wildfire that burnt 1000 acres which costs the local economy \$250,000,000 for fire suppression and economic loss (U.S. Forest Service, 2012).

The Urban Conservation Corps (UCC) has raised the non-CNCS resource obligations of Forest Aid Corps through significant assistance from program partnerships and fee-for-services programs. In total, \$266,223 has been raised for Forest Aid Corps for the 2015-16 program year. In addition to funding, Forest Aid Corps has acquired a considerable amount of in-kind contributions such as equipment, transportation, member training, facility use, supplies, staff development training, etc. To further exemplify the cost effectiveness of Forest Aid Corps, the cost per MSY for the 2015-16 program year is less than in prior years.

Budget Adequacy

Each year, the UCC receives funds through the California Conservation Corps Public Resource Code, United Way, Community Development Block Grant (\$30,000), City of San Bernardino, U.S. Forest Service (\$96,223) California State Department of Transportation OHV (\$100,000), John Muir Charter School (\$40,000) and California Recycling. In-kind contributions will be donated by the John Muir Charter School provides rent and utility, Arrowhead Water provides equipment and supplies and the Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire provide additional staff and equipment to support the Forest Aid Corps.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

Program Evaluation Plan

Forest Aid Corps Theory of Change

Goal: The overall goal of the proposed program is to reduce drought related wildfire threats on the San Bernardino National Forest to reduce wildfires by 20% by the end of 2018.

Objectives: To carry out an AmeriCorps program (Forest Aid Corps) that hires and trains 53 young people each year to carry out drought related wildfire & forest restoration services

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Measurable Outcomes:

- Increase member knowledge and awareness of forest restoration
- Increase member knowledge in drought-related wildfire restoration
- Increase member knowledge of essential job and life skills for workplace success
- Increase member skills in forest restoration to carry out drought related wildfire treatment services
- Increase member skills in drought related wildfire restoration practices
- Increase job and life skills for success in the workplace
- Reduce the threats of drought-related wildfire disasters by 20% by the end of 2018.
- Reduced drought related conditions that make the forest/wilderness susceptible to wildfires
- Improve forest health

Evaluation Approach

Forest Aid Corps - Internal Evaluation Plan

The Forest Aid Corps will perform an internal evaluation of the program as required. Dr. Carolyn Eggleston from California State University San Bernardino will perform the evaluation. The costs of the evaluation will be funded through the California State University, San Bernardino.

Below describes a summary of the internal evaluation process. The Forest Aid Corps consist of three major program components, which includes 1) providing services- which provides recovery/restoration services on the San Bernardino National Forest (the beneficiary) 2) member development- which provides training services to AmeriCorps members to increase their skills to achieve the services; and 3) strengthening communities through volunteers recruitment to assist with services.

The internal evaluation plan for each of these components includes the following: Professional Forest Service Foresters using Forest Service Assessment tools will evaluate the drought-related wildfire restoration services that are provided by AmeriCorps members working on the San Bernardino National Forest. In addition, Forest Service staff will supervise the work of the Forest Aid Corps and will complete Progress Reports (instruments) that apply to the Forest Service quality standards to project activities and deliverables. A satisfactory rating indicates that the project activities and

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deliverable have met the Forest Service quality standards and restored forest health at the locations.

Dr. Eggleston will perform the following to evaluate the member development, the strengthening communities component and program design. Regular evaluations will be scheduled to measure service activities and member development.

Pre-Post Test Surveys: During each program interval/session, there will be a pre-post-test survey that will be administered to all AmeriCorps members involved in service and trainings. The pre-post-test instrument will be developed by Dr. Eggleston who will serve as the evaluation specialist on this project.

In addition, an evaluation committee will be organized to assist in the development of the pre-post test instruments including assisting in the development of questions, its reliability and effectiveness as it pertains to cultural appropriateness, age, correct phraseology and length. Evaluation pre-test surveys will be given to members at the start of the program period and will measure member's initial level of understanding of a particular topic, skill level, attitudes and perceptions regarding themselves, others and a particular topic item. The evaluation post-test which will be given to members six months later will ask the same questions to determine any measurable changes in their responses due to their training and service activities.

Process Evaluation:

Dr. Eggleston will be responsible for collecting all key process information using standardized forms that will be developed at the initiation of the first program year. The information will be compiled into monthly reports that will be reviewed by staff and the partnership on an ongoing basis to identify program strengths and weaknesses, problems and needed improvements for achieving the outcomes of the proposed program or technical assistant and training needs. Three types of information will be collected.

(1) Activity Tracking Forms

At the beginning of the year, the evaluation specialist will develop forms to document a description of the service activities to be carried out by AmeriCorps members and volunteers, the expected outcome and targets, the progress each member and volunteers are achieving and the outcomes/ targets

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accomplished. In order to keep track of data, the process data will be entered into an Excel database charting the progress of each participant.

(2) Training Log

A training log will be kept to keep track of the number of trainings that will be conducted throughout the program period, as well as the number of AmeriCorps members attending the trainings. Also, the training log will include the number of training hours each member has completed.

(3) Training Evaluation

Following each of the training workshops, the evaluation specialist will ask participants to fill out the accompanying evaluation form that will rate the content and utility of the workshop. UCC staff will compile the information and integrate the feedback into next round of workshops. - Outcome Measures: The evaluation specialist will conduct outcome evaluation to measure the impact the program has on AmeriCorps members' professional and developmental skills, as well as measure the community's perception of the impact AmeriCorps has on the health of the National Forest as well as the community's awareness of greater volunteer opportunities for service. During the final quarter of each year, the evaluation specialist will conduct surveys with 200 community members/residents including the forest service and surrounding communities.

Forest Service Outcome Measures (Forestry Assessment)

The San Bernardino National Forest Service will lead the evaluation of service accomplishments, outcomes and targets reached, including assessments of the quality and satisfaction of the recovery/restoration projects performed by AmeriCorps members and volunteers.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

RESPONSES FOR THE REVIEW PANEL REGARDING

A. Programmatic Clarification Items:

1. Please clarify what is the legal name of the applicant:

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RESPONSE: The San Bernardino National Forest Association was our former legal name. It has been legally changed to the Southern California Mountains Foundation.

LEGAL APPLICANT NAME CHANGE

To clarify, the San Bernardino National Forest Association legally changed its organization name to Southern California Mountains Foundation in April of 2012. There is no change in the fiscal agent for the Forest Aid program-- only the name of the organization. We've attempted to update our organization name in eGrants but the system does not give us the ability to do so. We submitted a help request to the eGrants Help Desk on 4/17/15 to change our organization name to Southern California Mountains Foundation on the Face Sheet 424 and have been advised by the National Service Hotline to expect a response within 24 hours.

2. Please clarify how volunteers will be aware of, and will adhere to, the rules including prohibited activities, activities and how they will be recruited?

RESPONSE: The Forest Aid Corps/AmeriCorps Program coordinates a Volunteer Program Orientation that covers all of the rules and regulations, including prohibited activities. After the Volunteer Program Orientation, all volunteers sign a behavioral contractual agreement stating that they are aware of the rules, as well as activities that are prohibited under the Forest Aid Corps/AmeriCorps Program. The orientation is for all people associated with the Forest Aid Corps /AmeriCorps program from its members to the volunteers that serve alongside of members.

The Southern California Mountains Foundation (the legal applicant) has a volunteer coordinator position that recruits volunteers for all of its programs including the Forest Aid Corps from the general public. This volunteer coordinator is located at the Big Bear Discovery Center in the heart of the San Bernardino National Forest. The Big Bear Discovery Center has over 1 million visitors each year to the forest and the agency has over 700 volunteers. More specifically, the Forest Aid Corps/ AmeriCorps program (in addition the Big Bear Discovery Center) recruits members and volunteers from the Urban Conservation Corps Program (with over 100 members), the John Muir Charter School (with over 60 students) and from public housing, churches and community centers

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throughout San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. The Forest Aid Corps/ AmeriCorps program uses social media, community presentations, radios, public television and the local papers to announce positions with Forest Aid Corps.

3. Please clarify what the wraparound case management services are as part of member support programs and how this will support member retention.

RESPONSE: The Urban Conservation Corps has case management services that are offered to all corpsmembers, including AmeriCorps members. Under case management, each member has a counselor/career planner that helps them develop an individual transition plan and is design help members with retention. For instance, AmeriCorps members have case managers that help with life after AmeriCorps and helps them enter into jobs, higher education or technical training. These support services help with member retention because counselors are available to assist in reducing barriers or problems that may cause members to quit the program such as childcare, health, domestic violence, transportation, household problems, etc. Wraparound case management is also the component that helps identify issues before it becomes a problem with members.

b. Budget Clarification

Please respond to the clarification items in the Budget Narrative section of the application unless otherwise indicated.

1. Funding is extremely competitive and limited this year. Having a low costs per member service year (MSY) is a competitive advantage. Applicants submitting with a low cost per MSY will receive higher priority funding. Please consider decreasing the application's proposed cost per MSY by revising the CNCS share of the budget or provide a compelling explanation for why the costs /MSY cannot be decreased. CNCS will review both the individual costs per MSY and the aggregate costs per MSY after the clarification period and may elect to make further decreases in costs per MSY and/or may be only able to partially fund applicants.

RESPONSE: We have reassessed our budget and have determined that we are unable to absorb a lower cost per MSY at this time. The proposed costs per MSY from the CNCS share helps support the

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high cost of operating a disaster mitigation program. For instance, the nature of the services provided under the Forest Aid Corps program accrue a higher costs to implement because of its potential for injuries.

For instance, members in the Forest Aid Corps use power tools, large chainsaws, cut hazardous trees and walk on uneven rough terrain for miles. Members are subjected to harsh weather and hazardous conditions on the National Forest. Due to this type of service, the workers compensation insurance is extremely high in comparison to other AmeriCorps programs that are located in classrooms. This year alone the workers compensation costs doubled. With the drought conditions in California and the high potential for wildfires, the crews will be serving prior to and after wildfires.

C. Performance Measurement Clarification

1. Please consider incorporating Economic Opportunities Performance Measure 02 and 03 into your program design/performance measures based on statements included in the Theory of Change/ Logic Model sections of the logic model.

RESPONSE: We've opted not use to use Economic Opportunities Measures 02 and 03 to capture job and life skills changes for our members because this is not the primary intervention of our program design. That said, our program will continue to provide extensive support to lower socio-economic members and we'll continue to track our impacts on these members internally through self-nominated measures.

2. Please explain why the program has not selected National Performance Measures in the Environmental Stewardship focus area instead of an applicant determine measure. If the program is able to meet the requirements for the environmental stewardship performance measures, please replace the existing applicant-determined with an environmental stewardship performance measure. Regardless of which type of performance measure is used, ensure that the performance measure includes more information on how and what kind of information will be collected by the described instrument, please describe what a completed wildfire forest restoration project typically encompasses and how it determined as complete by the UCC Conservation Manager.

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RESPONSE: There are no current national outcome measures at this time that fits the need of the Forest Aid Corps.

The Forest Aid Corps is a disaster mitigation program that reduces wildfires on the San Bernardino National Forest through wildfire forest restoration projects in high need areas as identified through a yearly Forest Management Plan.

Wildfire forest restoration projects are coordinated service activities that are planned out by the local forest service ranger district. The project activities typically encompass a goal, objectives, timelines, acres targeted, a treatment strategy and the administration of a PRE & POST TEST type of instrument called the (PRE-POST TEST) HAZARDOUS REDUCTION MONITORING SURVEY.

The PRE-Hazardous Reduction Monitoring Survey is administered by a professional forester on the ranger district. The instrument is designed to capture the present hazardous condition of a targeted geographical area that is at high risk for wildfires.

At the start of a project, the forester will assess the geographic area and will list all of the present conditions that are considered hazardous threats that may cause a catastrophic wildfire. Hazardous threats include excessive dry brush, litter, dead and dying trees, overgrown invasive weeds, etc. For example, the forester while completing the pre-survey will list a number of service activities that need to be performed in the targeted area such as removing 20 acres of dead and dying trees or eradicating 15 acres of invasive weeds.

At the end of the project, the forester will return to the project location and conduct the POST-Hazardous Reduction Monitoring Survey. The POST Hazardous Reduction Monitoring Survey is designed to capture the TREATED hazardous conditions in the targeted geographical area and determine if the hazardous threats are removed and if the treatment service met all Wildland Fire Prevention Treatment standards.

The POST Hazardous Reduction Monitoring Survey that the forester uses to evaluate completed projects has a set of standards for wildland fire prevention treatment that must be met in order to validate that the hazards are no longer a threat. These standard policies were established by the

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Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior to insure that the best research practices are being used in the field. The forester (forest service staff) makes the determination if a project is completed and met all required standards.

3. Please clarify if the outcome statement should include the following word, highlighted in bold: The number of drought related wildfire forest restoration projects that reduce the threats of wildfires.

RESPONSE: Yes, it should include projects.

D. Strategic Engagement Slots

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

RESPONSE: The Forest Aid Corps does not set aside slots for members with disabilities. However, historically about 20% of our members are people with disabilities. The Forest Aid Corps Program out reaches to the Center for Individual Development (CIP). The CIP is the largest program center for people with disabilities in San Bernardino County. The Forest Aid Corps is proud to of its record of hiring people with disabilities and make reasonable accommodations to allow them the opportunity to participate in the program. The Forest Aid Corps Program historically enrolls people with disabilities into the program including people with hearing impairments, high functioning Aspergers syndrome, physical impairments, Post Traumatic Stress Disorders, and mental health, as well as learning difficulties.

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 costs per MSY level. Applicants must describe their intent to recruit, engage and retain additional members with disabilities and provide a detail outreach plan for how these members will be recruited and supported (e.g. established recruitment partners or strategies). In addition, programs receiving additional member positions will be required to report specific details on the success of the recruitment,

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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 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. Also adjust your performance measure targets, MSY allocations, and executive summary to reflect these additional members.

RESPONSE: The Forest Aid Corps/AmeriCorps will not be requesting additional MSYs for people with disabilities.

E. MSY with No Program Funds Attached Clarification

RESPONSE: The Forest Aid Corps/AmeriCorps will not be requesting No-Costs MSYs.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics