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Executive Summary

Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa is requesting a \$397,440 grant to engage 69 AmeriCorps members in habitat restoration, trail building and disaster response for community health, safety and well-being. AmeriCorps field members will operate in 4 to 6 person teams based in Ames, Des Moines and Council Bluffs, Iowa; Springfield, Missouri; and Rochester and Mankato, Minnesota. Members will begin their service in February and end in December. Teams will travel throughout Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wisconsin and Illinois to conduct service projects with federal, state, local and nonprofit partners. Member activities will build organizational capacity of project partners to restore natural habitat on public lands, improve water quality and increase access to outdoor recreation in the Midwest and respond to disasters nationwide. Each year of the project, 15,000 acres of vital habitat will be restored; 400 miles of trails or waterways will be created or improved; and 69 members will be trained, equipped and available to respond to disasters. The CNCS investment will be matched with \$1,919,360.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

PROBLEM/NEED: DEGRADED ECOSYSTEMS: Habitat restoration is a critical community need throughout Midwest prairie, oak savanna, wetland, and forest habitats. Before European settlement, tall grass prairie stretched from Canada to Texas and dominated the landscapes of western and southern Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, eastern North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and northern Missouri. However, native prairies and oak savannas, which are critical for preventing soil erosion, protecting water quality, and maintaining healthy ecosystems, are being depleted by residential development, agriculture and the spread of non-native invasive species. Iowa is the most biologically-altered state, with less than one-tenth of 1% of its original 30 million acres of prairie remaining. (Smith, USFWS, 2012)

Throughout the 20th century, fire suppression and prevention activities have led to a significant decline in fires, with a corresponding degradation of habitat due to increased encroachment of invasive plant species. Rare grasslands are being overrun by invasive, exotic plants that outcompete native plant species to create monocultures, which are uninhabitable by wildlife, create unstable soils and allow nutrient leaching into groundwater and pollution runoff into lakes and streams. Native prairie root systems reach 5-15 feet in depth, allowing excess water and nutrients to be absorbed and drawn deep into the soil. In contrast, the shallow-rooted invasive shrubs and grasses allow rainfall runoff similar to concrete, washing soil and chemical pollutants into nearby waterways. Runoff,

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containing nitrogen and phosphorous, contaminates water bodies, jeopardizing aquatic species and compromising drinking water.

Wetlands are also vital to water quality as they filter pollutants out of surface and ground water by using up excess nutrients, trapping sediment and recharging groundwater supplies. The US EPA estimates that only 40 to 50% of the Upper Midwest's original prairie pothole wetlands remain. (EPA 2012) Impaired, polluted waters cannot support healthy aquatic life or outdoor recreation. 2010 EPA surface water reports showed that more than 75% of Minnesota and Iowa waters are impaired and more than 50% of assessed waters are impaired in Illinois, South Dakota, Nebraska and Wisconsin (WI data is 2006). (www.epa.gov/waters/ir)

THEORY OF CHANGE: RESTORE NATURAL HABITATS AND IMPROVE WATER QUALITY:
Corps staff and teams are highly experienced in restoration practices, including prescribed burns, invasive species and tree removal, erosion control, and native planting. 69 members based in Minnesota, Iowa and Missouri, will improve over 15,000 acres of native habitat in the Midwest.

Tall grass habitats are most efficiently restored by fire, which has been a natural part of the ecological process since long before soils were tilled. Red Card certified members will conduct prescribed burns on 9,000 acres of habitat to inhibit the growth of invasive woody cover, such as buckthorn, western red cedar and honeysuckle, while stimulating growth of native grasses, wildflowers and shrubs. Members will help reestablish prairies by removing 5,500 acres of invasive plants and seed 1,200 square feet with native tall grass perennials with long, deep roots that capture pollutants and keep soils from washing away during heavy rains. To improve water quality, members will install 2500 square feet of rain gardens, plant 10,000 native trees and plants, stabilize 55,000 square feet of shoreline and install other water and soil retention practices adjacent to rivers, lakes and wetlands that trap sediments, nutrients and bacteria to prevent runoff pollution.

The Corps has a strong track record of implementing best practices in partnership with public agencies, nonprofits and volunteers. After expanding our AmeriCorps program to Iowa in 2009 we entered into federal cooperative agreements to serve the Northern Great Plains and Heartland regions of the National Park Service and the Great Lakes - Big Rivers Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Corps implements a roving team model that can be efficiently mobilized to give members opportunities to restore and manage critical native habitats anywhere in the Midwest. As a result of these agreements the Corps is expanding into Missouri in 2015.

By revitalizing distressed habitat through the methods described above, members are helping restore what was once the most prevalent ecosystem in the Midwest, ensuring that prairie habitat remains to

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support native plants and wildlife. By completing shoreline restoration, installing rain gardens and controlling erosion near impaired waters, members are improving water quality for habitat, consumption and recreation for future generations.

PROBLEM: PEOPLE DISENGAGED FROM THE OUTDOORS: Nationwide, outdoor recreation is in decline. After some 50 years of growth after World War II, nature-based recreational activities have decreased since the 1990s. If this trend continues, the future of outdoor recreation and the protection of natural and cultural resources may be in jeopardy, since people disconnected from the outdoors have less commitment to protecting our natural resources (MNDNR Parks and Trails: Directions for the Future 2011). As children and adults disconnect from outdoor recreation in favor of electronic media and entertainment, physical inactivity is reaching dangerously low levels. Less than a third of all high school students get 60 minutes or more of daily physical activity and over half of adults do not engage in enough physical activity to provide health benefits.

(www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/data/facts.html)

The Center for Disease Control (CDC), recognizing the need for outdoor facilities to encourage physical activity, designed a Health Impact Assessment toolkit in 2014 for community planners to evaluate and consider parks and trails in promoting healthy lifestyles. "The closer a person lives to a park or trail, the more likely they are to walk or bike to those places; and if they can walk or bike, research suggests they are more likely to use it. Unfortunately, lack of access, because of distance or dangerous routes, can create a barrier to healthy choices," according to Arthur Wendel, MD, MPH, head of CDC's Healthy Community Design Initiative. Therefore, to overcome barriers to the outdoors and increase its appeal, it is vitally important to build more and better recreational trails and unobstructed waterway trails.

THEORY OF CHANGE: CONNECTING THE PUBLIC TO THE OUTDOORS: The key to connecting people to the outdoors is through enhancing public recreational opportunities. Recreational trails and waterways are gateways to outdoor recreation and it is critically important that they are improved and expanded to remove barriers and make outdoor recreation more accessible. Trails that are desirable and protected from traffic, noise and pollution, will increase the public's engagement and interest in the environment, as well as provide opportunities for quality physical activity.

69 members will improve trail infrastructure by building or maintaining 100 miles of trail through brushing, grading, and step installation and improve 300 miles of waterways by clearing snags and debris. In addition, members will recruit, train, equip and lead volunteers in trail maintenance and

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river cleanup, create access points to improve accessibility, and distribute public outreach materials to encourage safe use of recreational trails and waterways.

By building and improving trails and waterways, member's service will improve access, safety and enjoyment of outdoor recreation activities, thereby increasing community participation, citizen connection to the outdoors, appreciation for the environment, and protection of natural resources. "People who engage with nature are more likely to have an appreciation of the natural world - and to want to support and maintain it for future generations." (MNDNR Parks and Trails: Directions for the Future 2011).

PROBLEM/NEED: LACK OF TRAINED VOLUNTEERS FOR DISASTER RESPONSE: When disaster strikes a community, specific emergency management and nonprofit organizations automatically respond according to a pre-established plan. Each of these designated organizations has a specific role to play in ensuring an effective response to and recovery from the disaster. Yet one element within the present system continues to pose a challenge: managing spontaneous, unaffiliated and untrained volunteers. (FEMA.gov/managing spontaneous volunteers)

States often turn away spontaneous volunteers or direct them to an established agency already organized in volunteer management on disaster. Given the lack of resources available at the federal, state and local levels, the successful integration of citizen involvement in an emergency management setting is imperative to prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of disasters. Volunteers can be the most valuable resource, but only when they are trained, assigned and supervised within established emergency management systems. (National Leadership Forum on Disaster Volunteerism, 2002)

THEORY OF CHANGE: TRAIN AMERICORPS MEMBERS FOR DEPLOYMENT TO DISASTERS: The Corps will train 69 members to serve in highly-functional teams that can quickly mobilize to respond to local and national disasters. Members are organized in fully-equipped teams with transportation, supplies and support infrastructure to sustain a long-term presence and have disaster training and leadership experience to manage spontaneous volunteers. All members trained and readied for deployment will voluntarily place themselves on an availability list, demonstrating that they are enthusiastic, committed to a deployment and prepared for adverse service conditions.

Members receive training and certification in the function and utilization of the National Incident Management System: Incident Command System, and are familiar with Emergency Operations Center functions, enabling them to effectively and efficiently transition into needed response and recovery roles. Members will receive basic trainings in initial response, volunteer and donations

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management, damage assessment, shelter operations, search and rescue, mucking and gutting, logistics management and mold remediation. When deployed to a specific disaster, the Corps will prepare members with just-in-time trainings to give them the necessary skills to carry out deployment-specific technical tasks.

The Corps has strong relationships with local, state and federal Emergency Management Agencies and a Disaster Response Cooperative Agreement in place with CNCS Disaster Services Unit. Since 2005 the Corps has deployed nationally to 10 mission assignments with the DSU from tornados in Florida to floods in Alaska to hurricanes in New York, operating volunteer reception centers, mass care shelters, and donation warehouses, and mucking and gutting homes devastated by disaster. The Corps has a 30 year history of fighting wildfires with the MN Interagency Fire Center and is a member of the MN Incident Command System. The Corps has the experience and resources available to provide top quality training for members to increase the resources available for emergency managers to carry out deployment responsibilities and engage spontaneous volunteers.

EVIDENCE BASED: The Corps is presenting moderate to strong evidence that interventions by AmeriCorps members, including prescribed burning, invasive species removal and stormwater best management practices, are proven and effective in attaining 21CSC goals of restoring public lands and waters.

To support the efficacy of prescribed burning utilized by members to restore prairie and oak savanna, University of MN researchers are conducting a long-term study at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve to evaluate native prairie plant species diversity in various fire frequency gradients, entitled "Shocks to the system: community assembly of the oak savanna in a 40-year fire frequency experiment." (Cavender-Bares, Reich, 2012) Prescribed burning research started at Cedar Creek in 1964. In 1984, 15 permanent burn plots were established, 4 were added in 1995, and Corps members established 7 additional burn units in 2006. To conduct this study, 300 hectares were divided into 19 management units, and each was assigned a burn frequency ranging from unburned control plots to high frequency plots burned 7 to 8 times in a decade. Post-burn data measured the plant diversity of each plot, including species richness and phylogenetic species variance. Fire frequency study results showed that the higher the frequency of fire, the greater the plant diversity, species richness, resource-conservative leaf traits, and phylogenetic lineages. In contrast, the unburned plots had the least diversity. This study provides strong evidence that prescribed burning carried out by members is an effective tool to restore native habitat.

To support the efficacy of invasive species removal utilized by members to restore habitat, University

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of MN, Dept of Forest Resources studied the effectiveness of invasive species removal techniques in eliminating prolific invasives such as Buckthorn in the study "Shifts in plant community composition following removal of invasive species" (Roth, 2014). Four sites with 12 - 6x6 meter plots each and 3 survey points per plot, were established, 3 of which were control plots. Buckthorn removal was conducted by Corps members in fall 2011 using three different methods: weed-wrenching, cut-and-paint, and basal bark herbicide application. Baseline data was collected in late summer 2011 for each study plot prior to treatment and post-treatment plot surveys took place twice in 2012 and twice in 2013. The study determined that the best management practices implemented by members were 99% effective, leading to increased herbaceous cover and herbaceous diversity compared to the control plot. This study proves that members role in removing invasive species increases cover and plant diversity which has positive effects on nutrient cycling, flowering, growth and survival of flora, fauna and overall ecosystem health.

To support the efficacy of stormwater reduction interventions utilized by members to reduce polluted runoff into lakes and streams, the Natural Resources Research Institute conducted a three-year watershed study entitled "Duluth Residential Stormwater Reduction Demonstration Project for Lake Superior Tributaries" (Kleist; Brady; Schomberg, 2011). Researchers paired test and control study 2-block street sections, within the Amity Creek watershed that flows into Lake Superior, to measure stormwater flow into storm sewers. Corps members installed best management practices, planting 250 trees and installing 22 rain barrels, 5 rain gardens, and 2 swales on treatment streets. Results of the study showed that, for small to moderate rainfall events, there was about a 20% greater runoff reduction on treated streets than on control streets. In addition, pre- and post-study surveys showed that neighborhood participants in the treatment group increased their knowledge of stormwater issues by about 10% and the percent who agreed that property owners should take at least some responsibility for stormwater runoff increased from 66 to 83%. This study provides evidence that member activities improve water retention, resulting in reductions in pollutants and sediment entering surface water.

NOTICE PRIORITY: Environment 21CSC - Our organizational mission and the proposed program align with 21CSC goals to provide service, training, education and employment opportunities to young people, in order to protect, restore and enhance public and tribal lands and waters as well as natural, cultural, and historical resources and treasures. Our proposed program goals, to restore 15,000 acres of natural habitat and build and maintain 400 miles of recreational trails and waterways, align with the 21CSC goal of increasing public access and use while spurring economic development and outdoor

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recreation with high-quality, cost-effective project work. We will help to build America's future by participating in the development of a generation of skilled workers, educated and active citizens, future leaders, and stewards of natural and cultural resources, communities and the nation.

Disaster Services - With state and federal public agency partnerships and cooperative agreements, extensive staff experience in disaster deployment, standardized training in response leadership, the ability to deploy quickly with a team-based model, transportation and equipment at the ready, and the Corps proven versatility and commitment to disaster response and recovery efforts, the Corps is uniquely poised to train and deploy members to assist communities in need.

MEMBER TRAINING: Members begin the service term in their local community, touring the placement site and local project sites from the year before, then convene for a week-long orientation highlighting national service, AmeriCorps policies and Corps procedures. Natural resource professionals lead orientation sessions on conservation ethics, sustainable trail maintenance, invasive species, forest and prairie restoration, and water quality to put member service into a greater framework. Personal development training in leadership, team dynamics, communication, conflict resolution and diversity prepares members for service in a team setting. After orientation, members receive technical skills training to prepare them for service projects, such as power and hand tool use, trail building, rain garden installation and shoreline erosion control, plant and tree identification and invasive plant removal. Members earn certifications such as defensive driving, CPR and First Aid, a Red Card for wildfire suppression, prescribed burning and a Pesticide Applicator's License.

Up to 15% of the program term is dedicated to standardized personal and technical skill development to prepare members for service per the member training plan: 40 hours of orientation, 80 hours of technical skill training, 40 hours of wildfire training, 40 hours of region-specific project training, 40 hours of environmental education, and 20 hours of "life after AmeriCorps" education. Corps trainings are assessed through post-training evaluations and improved by partnering with experts such as American Red Cross, Aerie Backcountry Medicine, MN DNR, Safety Council and National Park Service. According to a post-training evaluation, 99% of members agreed training prepared them for service.

Prohibited service activities are listed in the member manual and service agreement, posted on the Corps resource webpage, included on partner contracts, and addressed in a rules and discipline presentation during orientation with a 'check for understanding' at session end.

MEMBER SUPERVISION: To best support field teams based throughout the Midwest, the program is divided into regions each with 3 onsite management staff, supported by the administrative

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headquarters in St. Paul. Regional Managers, Assistant Regional Managers and Field Coordinators oversee operations of 6 to 8 teams in their geographic area and are responsible for program planning, project coordination, and member supervision, evaluation, training, and support. Each team is composed of 1 Team Leader and 3-5 Team Members, with the leader serving as a liaison between regional staff and the team, communicating project logistics, required tools and equipment, training needs and safety concerns. Team Leaders serve with Team Members to complete all habitat restoration projects and help members achieve personal and program success through teamwork and service learning, leading project debriefs, service reflection and on-site education. Leaders report to regional staff daily after debriefs and staff visit each team at project sites a minimum of once per month to assess safety, skill development, and member experience. Member satisfaction is assessed through monthly sounding board conference calls, bi-annual member performance evaluations, and bi-annual program evaluations. In addition, all members convene quarterly for regional training, education days, mid-term retreats, and graduation.

Regional staff receive training and AmeriCorps policy reminders during bi-weekly staff conference calls on timely topics including member health insurance updates, changes to the medical screening or criminal history check process, progress on the public land hiring authority, and chainsaw training curriculum additions. Formal training is incorporated into quarterly staff meetings. Last grant period, regional staff participated in an excel webinar to improve data management, attended an Innovative Partnership training by a business college professor to improve staff contracting for partner support, learned about human resources management from an employment lawyer, and attended environmental workshops to stay current with best management practices.

MEMBER EXPERIENCE: Most members serve in the Corps because they have a deep interest in the environment, outdoor recreation, and disaster response. This interest, combined with extensive technical skill training, hands-on experience restoring habitat, and exposure to land management agencies and natural resource professionals, prepares members for employment in public land management and disaster response careers. A survey taken 6 months after members completed service terms showed 15% secured employment in their desired field and 36% returned to serve another AmeriCorps term. The remainder went on to continue their education.

Through orientation, mid-term workshops, on-going education, and service projects, members develop resource- management skills to improve the environment as they serve their community. At Corps-wide orientation, members learn the history of national service and discuss civic engagement to better understand how personal choices impact the environment and broader community. At region-

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wide mid-term events, members attend conservation and civic leadership workshops, share service highlights, evaluate the program, and take refresher safety courses, while reconnecting over campfires and celebrating accomplishments. Throughout the term, team leaders facilitate discussions on water and land management, carbon footprints, and how to mobilize citizen response to disasters. Near program end, members engage in a "life after AmeriCorps" workshop on job seeking, resume writing and interviewing, and job shadow an environmental mentor for a day. Program alumni serve on a panel to provide guidance on applying for jobs, college or graduate school and natural resource professionals present on navigating the federal and state online application systems.

Members serve with community partners, volunteers, teams from other service sites and members from other Conservation Corps to build esprit de corps. For example, in 2014, 20 members presented at the Audubon Society Invasive Species Workshop, educating landowners about invasive species management. 20 members led City of Rochester citizens in a tree planting in partnership with RNeighbors, a community nonprofit. 55 members participated in Project AWARE, cleaning up the Big Sioux River in partnership with the Iowa DNR and 300 community volunteers. 12 members deployed to Detroit to muck out flood damaged homes, serving alongside AmeriCorps members from Hoopa TCCC, AmeriCorps St. Louis, Texas and Washington Conservation Corps. And all members pledged to "get things done for America" as part of the MN and IA State Commissions ceremonies to mark AmeriCorps' 20th anniversary.

With the Corps targeted recruitment plan, more than 65% of participants are from the community in which they serve. In rural areas, recruitment techniques include newspaper postings and press releases highlighting service of recent Corps graduates, tabling at job fairs and community events, outreach to organizational partners and posting fliers. By recruiting members from the communities in which they serve, providing trainings that increase understanding of social and environmental issues, and engaging members in local service projects with community volunteers, the Corps fosters a deeper sense of service and empowers members to remain civically engaged after their term. More than 90% of graduating members reported that they are more aware of environmental pressures in their communities, 88% feel they are a more effective communicators and community facilitators, and 78% indicated that they will continue to volunteer with community organizations.

COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION: Members are informed of AmeriCorps status at application, educated at orientation, and engaged through AmeriCorps special events. The AmeriCorps logo is included on all recruitment postings and public media and service applications include essay questions about familiarity with national service and dedication to term completion.

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AmeriCorps stipend and education award benefits are highlighted during the interview, listed on hiring factsheets, and presented at Corps-wide orientation. Members engage in AmeriCorps special events, such as the 20th Anniversary celebration, Public Lands Day, and Earth Day, engaging in local projects with community volunteers. Members are issued uniform shirts, hats and sweatshirts with the AmeriCorps logo and wherever members serve, the logo is prominently displayed on fleet vehicles, print materials and offices to educate and promote AmeriCorps service.

Organizational Capability

ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCE & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: Built on the tradition of the 1930s Civilian Conservation Corps, Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa provides hands-on environmental stewardship and service-learning opportunities to youth and young adults while accomplishing conservation, natural resource management and emergency response work. The Corps has provided natural resource training and service opportunities to young people for almost 35 years, operating as a state agency with the DNR from 1981-2003 and as a nonprofit from 2003 to present.

The Corps continues to build on this strong foundation, striving to learn more, evaluate processes, improve procedures and expand service opportunities. To keep Corps staff educated and engaged on a national level, Corps staff representatives attend The Corps Network conference and the Corps Rendezvous, a grassroots conference for program-level staff who operate similar 21CSC programs throughout the nation. To ensure continuous improvement, the Corps re-applied and was awarded Excellence in Corps Operations (ECO) status in 2010, following evaluation of operating procedures, policies, programs, staffing, management, and governing structure. The Corps Network's review team identified strengths in organizational management, particularly in managing remote sites, and in communication plans, program operations consistency and fostering a corps community. The Corps has been a 21CSC member organization since 2013.

The Corps has established long-term relationships with more than 120 partners, such as state departments of natural resources; workforce and economic development centers; U.S. fish and wildlife, forest and national park services; county conservation boards and city parks and recreation departments; trail clubs and volunteer groups; schools, universities and environmental learning centers. Partners have a vested interest in restoring their public lands with cost-effective labor, while engaging future environmental leaders; the Corps and project partners work cooperatively to identify projects that provide the best community benefit and the best member experience. According to a support letter from a MN DNR partner, "AmeriCorps members promote the value of national service in our communities, both through their hard work and dedication to conservation, and their positive

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interaction with community members and volunteers. We need the environmental and civic leadership of AmeriCorps members and I am proud of their dedicated service to our state."

STAFFING: The Corps is overseen by a 17-member board of directors and an Executive Director who leads 31 full-time staff. A 5-member management team implements and monitors organizational policies and provides strategic direction, financial management and grant administration, oversight and compliance. 24 program staff directly manage 600 youth and AmeriCorps members and 7 administrative staff provide financial management, human resources support, communications and outreach, member accomplishment reporting and recruitment activities.

Tim Johnson-Grass, Program Director, will administer the program with assistance from Candice McElroy, Program Manager, who serves as the AmeriCorps site administrator. The Program Director and Manager oversee regional staff operations, maintain member files, develop member trainings and educational curriculum, track service accomplishments, update policies and safety and risk management procedures, which all are administered centrally at Corps headquarters in St Paul MN. Five regional program staff will directly supervise the 69 program members, working jointly to design training using best practices and planning service projects with community partners to ensure adherence to AmeriCorps policies and a positive member experience.

AMERICORPS & FEDERAL FUNDS EXPERIENCE: The Corps has 12 years of experience managing AmeriCorps and other Federal grants, with staff highly proficient at operating remote sites, training members, managing service projects, and administering grant requirements. In 2004, Conservation Corps Minnesota became a Corps Network sub-grantee of a 3-year Rural Response National grant, receiving \$538,200/year for 46 MSY to engage in disaster preparedness and response. In 2008, a \$365,400/year National grant enabled us to launch Conservation Corps Iowa. In 2011, with a third year National expansion grant, we increased MSY in Iowa and Minnesota, extending habitat restoration to surrounding Midwest states. In 2009, with a CNCS Clean Energy \$104,000 grant, we launched a home energy conservation program. In addition, the Corps has received Minnesota and Iowa State competitive and formula funding for youth and energy conservation programs since 2010. In addition to more than 200 state, local and non-profit agreements annually, the Corps manages 14 federal cooperative agreements to conduct member activities with the USFS, USFWS, NPS the Bureau of Reclamation and CNCS DSU.

COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY: With over a decade of experience managing CNCS and other federal, state, and local grants, we have in place adequate staffing, policies and procedures to administer the full-time fixed grant program with centralized systems for financial, administrative

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and program management to ensure grant compliance. AmeriCorps enrollment and exit forms, manuals, service agreements, and member position descriptions, with prohibited service activities listed, are developed and updated by the Program Director and Manager and disseminated at orientations to ensure members fully understand service activity limitations. Processes such as criminal history checks, member enrollment and exit in eGrants, hour tracking and stipend payment, and field accomplishment data tracking is centralized, administered by Corps headquarters staff, who stay current on processes via CNCS webinars and The Corps Network conference calls. Policies and procedures are reviewed annually and updated if needed. The Corps' time-keeping, accomplishment tracking and financial systems have a proven track record of compliance and accountability and able to code, track, and report on different Corps funding streams and separate programs. These processes and systems have consistently met or exceeded CNCS requirements. If any violation were discovered it would be immediately reported to CNCS and activities suspended until a corrective action plan is approved.

Staff are co-located with teams and serve as direct supervisors for all members; no members are placed with sub-sites. However, project partners serve as supervisors on the project site, providing site orientations and project-specific skill training. Corps staff select project partners that have extensive experience in public land management and an understanding of AmeriCorps national service. Corps staff review project logistics, site supervisor roles and responsibilities, prohibited service activities, communication structures and safety protocols with partners prior to project start and conduct site visits to ensure policy compliance and a quality member experience. The Corps only enters into agreements to conduct a range of habitat restoration, public safety and access enhancement and disaster response activities to ensure members are only performing assigned non-prohibited service activities. Union notification and non-duplication, non-displacement and non-supplementation requirements are included in partner service agreements.

PERFORMANCE TARGETS MET AND EXCEEDED: As a National Direct grantee, the Corps met or exceeded EN4 and EN5 performance targets each year of the current grant to date with 2013 and 2014 performance measures as follows. In 2014, members improved 13,686 acres of public land habitat (goal was 12,000) and members built or improved 432 miles of trail and rivers (goal was 250). In 2013, members improved 17,087 acres of public land habitat (goal was 12,000) and members built or improved 323 miles of trail and rivers (goal was 250).

ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION: The Corps has a 100% enrollment rate for National Direct, enrolling the full 55 MSY in program years 2013 and 2014. Retention rate increased from 97% in

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2009 to 100% in 2010, but dropped to 93% in 2011. In this current grant, member retention was 89% in 2014 and 95% in 2013. To maintain a high retention rate in future years, the Corps will continue to practice honesty in recruitment, ensuring that only members truly dedicated to outdoor habitat restoration and disaster response work with availability for out-of-town assignments are invited to serve. The Corps communicates the physical requirements of natural resource projects, benefits and stipend rate, team-based model, and camping requirements to applicants pre-hire with the "Final Considerations" document, which is reviewed during the interview and at orientation. In addition, the Corps established Facebook communities to connect program applicants with alumni ambassadors and completed "day in the life" videos highlighting natural resource management work, project partners, team dynamics, and spike trips, posted to the Corps website for recruitment purposes.

CONSULTATION WITH STATE COMMISSIONS/STATE SERVICE PLAN CONNECTION:

Consultation has taken place with ServeMinnesota, Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service (ICVS), and the Missouri Community Service Commission (MCSC). All state commissions are supportive of member service activities and roles. The Corps' focus areas and member activities directly relate to the State Commission's service plans through the education, environment, community safety and disaster objectives. For example, the ICVS plan outlines a need to expand service opportunities in communities and public lands to improve the environment and to support programming that ensures public safety during emergencies and natural disasters. In 2015, the Corps will double the number of our National Direct AmeriCorps members operating in Iowa. ServeMN and ICVS have objectives to improve existing services and programs, funding programs with high retention rates, quality member training, sustainability, diverse funding, and quality disaster preparedness and response delivery, all of which are areas the Corps excels at delivering.

Budget/Cost Effectiveness

The Corps is requesting 69 MSY at a fixed amount cost of \$5,760 per MSY. The cost is an expense vs. partner-support calculation based on current program expenses, projected revenue and previous experience securing funding. The average expense incurred for a full-time member is \$33,000, of which \$25,800 or 75% is covered by partner support, state, individual donations and foundation grants. The Corps has successfully raised funds and in-kind support from a variety of non-federal sources and has established itself as a strong, expanding nonprofit, more than doubling its overall budget in the past 6 years. The Fixed-amount grant is necessary to leverage non-CNCS funds from five main sources: 65% from partner support through service projects with nonprofits and public agencies; 20% from Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment funds to protect, enhance and restore

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natural habitat, parks and trails, lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater; 5% from natural resource license and user fees to carry out service projects to enhance trails, parks and wildlife habitat; 4% from NPS Exotic Plant Management Heartland Network (Missouri) grant to protect enhance and restore public lands and enhance user experience; 6% from charitable grants, donations and in-kind contributions.

COST-SHARING INCREASE: The Corps is requesting \$3,560 less per MSY than the previous grant request. The Corps has successfully expanded and enhanced its program in the past three years of the National Direct grant and has established a diverse spectrum of support and partnerships. Because of our proven record of performance, project partners have increased confidence in our service and have greatly expanded their partnerships. The program has added efficiencies allowing for greater revenue generation while maintaining fee-for-service rates at a consistent level over the past 3 years.

BUDGET ADEQUACY: The total budget is projected to be \$2,316,800, which is adequate to carry out the proposed activities and meet accomplishment goals. The CNCS share is \$397,440 and grantee share is \$1,919,360. The program budget includes member orientation and training, staff salaries and benefits, member stipends above the minimum and below the maximum amounts required, health insurance, criminal history checks, workers compensation, liability insurance, office leases, purchase and maintenance of tools and safety equipment, vehicle leases, insurance and fuel, and staff travel to CNCS events.

The Corps has successfully developed a cost-effective operational structure that delivers highly-quality services to address community needs by using program strengths and strategic partnerships. 93% of organizational revenue is spent directly on programming. Our budget is appropriate for environmental service programs committed to quality and safety. It reflects a strong emphasis on member training and support, which is essential to member's success during and after their year of service.

The Corps' accounting and financial policies and procedures have earned high ratings in every annual audit since 2003. We have sound written financial policies that include separation of duties and financial controls and regular reporting. The Board of Directors finance committee reviews Corps revenue and expenses monthly.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

EVALUATION PLAN

The Upper Midwest's public lands are being overrun by invasive species that decrease biodiversity, adversely affect wildlife, create unstable soils and allow nutrient leaching into groundwater and

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pollution runoff into lakes and streams. Poorly maintained trails are negatively affecting visitor experience and ultimately results in decreased visitation. State and federal land management agencies charged with maintaining these public resources suffer from shrinking budgets, which contribute to an ever increasing list of backlog maintenance projects.

PAST RESEARCH AND EXISTING EVIDENCE

Multiple studies exist on the impact of environmental corps programs on participants (e.g., Duerden, et al., 2013; Education Northwest, 2013). Each evaluation provided strong evidence for the impact of the corps experience on participants' community engagement, environmental engagement, teamwork, leadership, communication skills and grit. Emerging research demonstrates the efficacy of conservation work to provide broader social, health, and economic benefits. The primary relevant conservation activities conducted by corps are improvements to public lands and trail stewardship.

Research suggests links between land improvement activities like those conducted by corps and many long-term community and ecosystem impacts. Improving public parks and habitats is associated with increased ecosystem services, improved biodiversity, and environmental health (Benayas et al., 2009; Suding, 2011). Controlling invasive species has major financial implications for many economic sectors (Pimentel, et al., 2005) and can also positively impact outdoor recreational activities (Eiswerth, et al., 2005; Julia, et al., 2007). Conservation activities can ensure that publicly accessible ecosystems remain healthy in light of high human contact (Alessa et al., 2003). Numerous studies have also indicated how poorly maintained trails negatively influence the quality of recreation experiences and decrease visitation (Roggenbuck, et al., 1993; Vaske, et al., 1993). When trails are built and maintained properly, they have the potential to produce direct economic benefits through visitor expenditures on equipment, food, transportation, and lodging (Moore, et al., 1994).

THEORY OF CHANGE, LOGIC MODEL & OUTCOMES

Relevant to the evaluation, there are two primary long-term impacts associated with corps activities. First, improving public parks and habitats promotes ecosystem health. Second, improving trail conditions increases the quality of trails, leading to higher accessibility and usage and enhanced visitor experiences. While measuring the long-term impact of these activities lie outside the scope of a program evaluation, key antecedent mechanisms will be evaluated as program outputs and outcomes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE EVALUATION

1. Do projects focused on improving, protecting, and restoring public parks and habitats improve visually assessed ecosystem health?
2. Do projects focused on improving or constructing trails improve the visually assessed quality of

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trails?

STUDY COMPONENTS

A standardized form will be used to document project outputs, including numbers of acres/miles improved and characteristics of improvements (Project Years 1-3). Improvements will also be photographed and geocoded. Using a quasi-experimental design, the following research questions will be addressed.

RQ1: DO PROJECTS FOCUSED ON IMPROVING AND RESTORING HABITATS IMPROVE VISUALLY ASSESSED ECOSYSTEM HEALTH?

Working with corps staff, the evaluation team will develop a visual assessment tool informed by existing instruments (e.g., Rangeland Health Evaluation Summary Worksheet [Pyke et al., 2002]). Principles of engaged evaluation (e.g., CDC, 1999), suggest developing practical tools relevant to project goals can provide more accurate and useable information. Visual assessments provide systematic moment-in-time measures of observable indicators associated with ecosystem health. Measures will focus on assessing key indicators of ecosystem health including soil erosion, species composition and mortality, and presence of organic litter. Instruments will be developed in both paper and online (via mobile application) formats. Pilot testing will occur prior to implementation (Project Year 2).

Projects scheduled for treatment will be the population and a census approach will be used. The evaluation team will provide trainings on the use of assessment tools and protocols to establish reliable observations (Project Year 2). Trained observers will assess plots at scheduled projects at the beginning (Project Year 3) to determine baseline levels of habitat health and again at the end of the project to determine level of improvement. Follow up observations of all plots will be used to determine maintenance of improvements.

Assessment scores will be standardized and indexed to calculate a visual health score for each plot. Pre and Post scores will be compared using repeated measures analyses (e.g., ANOVA, linear mixed models) with relevant controls. Evaluating maintenance of improvements at baseline, project completion, and follow up will be conducted using linear growth models.

RQ2: DO PROJECTS FOCUSED ON IMPROVING OR CONSTRUCTING TRAILS IMPROVE THE VISUAL QUALITY OF TRAILS, INCREASE USAGE OF TRAILS, AND INCREASE VISITOR SAFETY?

Working with corps staff, the evaluation team will develop a visual trail quality assessment tool informed by existing instruments (e.g., EAPRS [Saelens, 2006], Recreation Trail Scorecard [Wilkerson

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& Whitman, 2009]). Measures will focus on assessing key indicators of quality linked to visitor experience and ecosystem health (e.g., presence of social trails, erosion, water/mud, hazards, and barriers). Pilot testing will occur prior to implementation (Project Year 1).

Projects scheduled for treatment will be the population and a census approach will be used. The evaluation team will provide trainings on the use of assessment tools and protocols to establish reliable observations (Project Year 1). Trained observers will assess projects at the beginning to determine baseline levels of trail segment quality and again at the end of the project to determine level of improvement (Project Year 1). Follow up observations of all trail segments will be conducted to determine maintenance of improvements (Project Year 2).

Assessment scores will be standardized and indexed to calculate a visual quality score for each project area. Pre and Post scores will be compared using repeated measures with relevant controls. Evaluating the maintenance of improvements at baseline, project completion, and follow up will be conducted using linear growth models.

EVALUATION TEAM QUALIFICATIONS

Our evaluation team is led by co-investigators Dr. Michael Edwards of NC State University and Dr. Mat Duerden of Brigham Young University. Dr. Edwards currently serves on the evaluation team for a Community Transformation Project, funded by CDC and NC Dept. of Public Health. He is also leading a project co-funded by the CDC and National Park Service aimed at identifying metrics for the contribution of parks and trails to public health goals. Dr. Edwards has presented on evaluation methodologies at the American Evaluation Association national conference and published articles related to his evaluation work in the Journal of Adolescent Health, American Journal of Health Promotion, and Journal of School Health. Dr. Duerden has conducted evaluations for over 10 years with specific focus on youth serving agencies including non-profits and governmental organizations. He has published articles related to his evaluation work in the Journal of Environmental Psychology, Journal of Extension, Journal of Youth Development, Leisure Sciences, and Journal of Park and Recreation Administration. Drs. Edwards and Duerden have co-led multiple conservation program evaluations for the Public Lands Service Coalition, and the Corps Network since 2010.

ESTIMATED BUDGET

The evaluation budget covers a three-year period. Costs are based on a collaborative evaluation approach that includes between 10-15 conservation corps. Costs are shown in aggregate for implementing the full evaluation plan across all participating corps.

NC State faculty salaries are \$14,000 and include time spent in evaluation design, supervising

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instrument development, creating and delivering training protocols, consulting with corps during data collection, data analysis, and reporting.

\$54,000 is included for a three-year stipend for a doctoral level research assistant with expertise in natural resources management to manage this project, supervise pilot testing, and coordinate training, data collection, and analysis. Additionally, a total \$18,279 is required for educational expenses for the GA for three years.

Fringe benefits (30% for faculty; 15% for GA) total \$12,300 for the three-year period.

Research expenses, including costs to field test assessment tools, develop application software for assessment protocols, and creative time for training modules and materials is \$15,000.

Travel is \$12,000 and includes two trips to the Corps Network Conference for project PI and GA to meet with corps and report evaluation progress and field training travel expenses.

A sub-contract with Brigham Young University is calculated at \$21,000 for three years. The sub-contract includes faculty time, student time, fringe benefits, and relevant travel.

Direct Costs: \$146,579

Indirect Costs at 26%: \$33,358

TOTAL EVALUATION COST: \$179,937 / 10 CORPS = \$17,994 PER CORPS

APPLICANT IS REQUESTING AN ALTERNATIVE EVALUATION APPROACH IF REQUIRED --
SEE AMENDMENT JUSTIFICATION SECTION

Amendment Justification

REQUEST FOR ALTERNATIVE EVALUATION APPROACH (IF DEEMED NECESSARY)

The unique structure and targeted impacts of conservation corps programs (e.g., improvements to public lands and trails), requires the implementation of a rigorous, alternative evaluation approach. This request outlines the reasons necessitating an alternative approach.

EVALUATION CONSTRAINTS FACED BY THE PROGRAM

The scope of the proposed evaluation focuses on specific environmental impacts of corps efforts. While the evaluation design focused on performance measures EN4 and EN5 will incorporate a rigorous pre-test/post-test design and comparisons across sites will be possible using control variables, randomization and the development of control groups of sites is not feasible. Corps work is directed by the priorities and needs of land managers as opposed to corps administrators. The purposeful designation of work sites based on land management priorities prohibit the inclusion of a valid control sample in the evaluation design. Since external partners (e.g., Forest Service, Bureau of Land

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Management, etc.) select the projects and sites where conservation corps programs conduct their work, randomization of work sites is not administratively possible. Additionally, comparison work sites would need to be matched to treatment sites based upon specific baseline physical and ecological conditions. Sites (e.g. land plots or trail segments) that have comparable conditions would likely receive similar priority for selection for improvement and timing of improvements. Thus, we would not be able to include a comparable site as a control.

WHY THE PROPOSED APPROACH IS THE MOST RIGOROUS OPTION FEASIBLE

The proposed evaluation approach employs a rigorous pre-test/post-test design and the development of rapid visual assessment tools to collect systematic observation data of ecosystem health and trail quality. This design has been proposed by leading experts in the assessment of natural resources impacts at NC State University. The proposed evaluation design and tools will produce data appropriate for statistical analyses of change (e.g., ANOVA, linear mixed models) and accordingly rigorous assessments of the impact of conservation corps programs' impacts. This proposed innovative scientific approach would also result in the collection of baseline ecosystem health and trail quality data necessary to develop research in this area.

HOW THE PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE APPROACH WILL HELP CONSERVATION CORPS PROGRAMS BUILD THEIR EVIDENCE BASE

Once program evaluation protocols are implemented established, this will not only provide relevant data for program design, but will allow future research projects that may be able to use randomization and comparisons, including the use of geo-visualization data collected at baseline. The development of the rapid visual assessment tools will also allow conservation corps programs to continue to collect their own objective impact data which will represent a significant advancement in current internal corps impact assessments.

Clarification Summary

4/16/15 SECONDARY CLARIFICATION:

ADDITIONAL CLARIFICATION:

The Corps has revised its request to a reduced amount of \$397,440 maintaining the number of MSY at 69 at a rate of \$5,760 per MSY. The executive narrative, the budget narrative and budget sections have been revised to adequately explain this revision throughout the application.

4/13/15 CLARIFICATION:

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This application is under consideration for a grant in the amount of \$495,000, 55.00 Member Service Years (MSYs), 55 slots, at \$9000.00 cost per MSY. If the application is being considered for an amount less than the request (funding, MSY, and/or slots), please revise the Executive Summary, budget, and performance measures as necessary to reflect the amount for which the application is under consideration.

CLARIFICATION -- PLEASE NOTE THE NUMBER OF MSY AND THE AMOUNT PER MSY IS INCORRECTLY LISTED IN THE CLARIFICATION REQUEST. THE REQUEST IS FOR 69 MSY FOR \$7200 PER MSY.

A. Programmatic clarification items:

1. Please confirm that AmeriCorps members serving as Team Leaders will not supervise other members. Please describe the processes by which members and team members will know and understand policies related to prohibited supervision.

CLARIFICATION -- Team Leaders will NOT supervise Team Members, but serve alongside Members to complete all habitat restoration projects, coordinate daily crew operations, monitor safety, maintain tools and equipment, and help members achieve personal and program success through teamwork and service learning by leading project debriefs, service reflection and on-site education. Both Team Leaders and Members are directly supervised by Corps Program Managers who provide regional training, set up service projects and communicate logistics, evaluate performance, and manage personnel issues. Leaders report to regional staff daily after the team debriefs. Staff visit each team at project sites a minimum of once per month to assess safety, skill development, and member experience and conduct discipline and member management as needed.

During Orientation, Team Leaders receive training in leadership and motivation, learning the stages of team development, different learning styles and leadership types, and debriefing and motivation tools. During these sessions, Program Staff communicate the following role clarification: "The Team Leader is a Corpsmember level AmeriCorps position. Team Leaders may not discipline other AmeriCorps members. While Leaders may provide guidance, facilitate crew meetings, motivate, and uphold safety, all policy violations and disciplinary action must be directed to and handled by the Regional Program Manager." This role clarification is reinforced through scenario-based training at Orientation -- Leaders run through scenarios about safety, service project coordination, and Team management, discussing what is an appropriate allowable response versus prohibited

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supervision/circumstances that require action by Regional Staff. This role clarification is also outlined in the Team Leader position description, which is signed by the Leader at program start, and further outlined in the Leader and Member manuals.

B. Budget Clarification

1. Fixed amount applicants should enter the total dollar amount of funds that are used to run the program, other than CNCS share, in the "Other Revenue Funds" field of the Funding/Demographics section of the application.

CLARIFICATION -- Other Revenue: \$1,820,000 was listed in this section at time of application.

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

CLARIFICATION -- The Corps is requesting 69 MSY at a fixed amount cost of \$7,200 per MSY, which is \$6,230 less than the CNCS allowable maximum of \$13,430. The request of \$7,200 is \$1,800 less per MSY than the previously awarded grant cycle. The Corps has already decreased its cost per MSY in its original request anticipating the limited amount of funding available. The Corps will be implementing a combination of budget reductions and revenue increases to make up for the reduction in grant funds per MSY.

C. Performance Measure Clarification

1. Per the National Performance Measure requirements for EN4 and EN4.1, programs should count each acre that is treated only once during the program year and only count acres that are actually treated. Please explain how the program will ensure unduplicated counts of each acre treated.

CLARIFICATION -- It is rare for members to re-treat acres of habitat more than once per year, so the likelihood of duplicated counts is very small. However, given the possibility, the Corps has added a step in its data collection process to mitigate this. The process works as follows: When contracting, Program Staff assign each project a unique identifier or five digit activity code that is inputted into the

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Corps project database with associated project partner organization, land manager project host name, and public land/park on which service will be completed. When service activities are conducted under that contract, Team Leaders complete field surveys called a Survey of Accomplished Work (SAW) report in partnership with the land manager, inputting the assigned activity code, legislative district where service was conducted, natural resource service activity, and corresponding number of treated acres. When entering the data, the Team Leader must also answer a yes/no question regarding whether or not the project site has been treated previously within the calendar year. Field surveys are verified for accuracy, submitted and entered in our Efforts to Outcomes or ETO online database with a proven track record for collecting, analyzing and reporting outcomes based on program outputs. When running reports from the database, results are queried for all "no" answers to the duplicated acres question answered by Team Leaders, thereby ensuring that only the unduplicated acres are counted toward EN4 Performance Measure outputs.

2. Per the National Performance Measure requirements for EN4.1, it is possible that the number of acres assessed by the land manager as having been improved in accordance with their natural resource plan is less than the total number of acres treated. Please provide a justification and explanation that the program will only count those acres that have been improved based on assessment from the land manager.

CLARIFICATION--Following the completion of each project, Regional Corps staff email a post-project evaluation to the land manager soliciting a count of number of acres improved in accordance with their natural resource plan. The total number of acres treated will be inputted by Program staff from Surveys of Accomplished Work (SAW) prior to emailing the evaluation to the land manager with the following question posed: "Of the X number of total treated acres on which service activities were conducted, indicate the number of acres where improvements accomplished had a direct positive effect on water quality and/or habitat in accordance with your natural resources plan." The Corps will only report EN4.1 acres listed as improved by land managers from returned post-project evaluations.

3. Per the National Performance Measure requirements for EN5 and EN5.1, programs should count each mile that is treated only once during the program year and only count acres that are actually treated. Please explain how the program will ensure unduplicated counts of each mile treated.

CLARIFICATION--It is rare for members to re-treat miles of trails or waterways more than once per

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year, so the likelihood of duplicated counts is very small. However, given the possibility, the Corps has added a step in its data collection process to mitigate this. The process works as follows: When contracting, Program Staff assign each project a unique identifier or five digit activity code that is inputted into the Corps project database with associated project partner organization, land manager project host name, and public land/park on which service will be completed. When service activities are conducted under that contract, Team Leaders complete field surveys called a Survey of Accomplished Work (SAW) report in partnership with the land manager, inputting the assigned activity code, legislative district where service was conducted, natural resource service category and activity, and corresponding number of treated miles. When entering the data, the Team Leader must also answer a yes/no question regarding whether or not the project site has been treated previously within the calendar year. Field surveys are verified for accuracy, submitted and entered in our Efforts to Outcomes or ETO online database with a proven track record for collecting, analyzing and reporting outcomes based on program outputs. When running reports from the database, results are queried for all "no" answers to the duplicated miles question answered by Team Leaders, thereby ensuring that only the unduplicated miles are counted toward EN4 Performance Measure outputs.

4. For Performance Measure EN4.1, please define what is considered improved regarding the program model. For Performance Measure EN5.1, please define what is considered improved regarding the program model.

CLARIFICATION--EN4.1: In the program model, improved is defined as an acre of public land on which a natural resource activity was conducted that contributes to the partnering land management agency's resource plan. For example, acres are considered improved due to increased plant biodiversity if the service activity of invasive species removal and/or planting of native trees has been conducted. Similarly, acres are considered improved due to reduced sediment erosion if the service activity of rain garden installation or slope stabilization has been conducted.

EN5.1: In the program model, improved is defined as a mile of trail or waterway on which a natural resource activity was conducted that contributes to the partnering land management agency's resource plan. For example, miles of trail are considered improved due to increased accessibility and usability if the service activity of trail brushing or hazard tree removal has been conducted and miles of waterways are considered improved due to increased safety if the service activity of tree snag removal has been conducted.

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D. Strategic Engagement Slots

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?

CLARIFICATION--The Corps has a 30 year history of successfully engaging persons with disabilities in its programs and has recruiting strategies, community connections, and program accommodations to effectively engage this population. The Corps' Summer Youth Program, which operates in Minnesota and is currently funded through the State Commission, has programming and service projects to accommodate persons with disabilities, specifically deaf or hard-of-hearing youth. Unfortunately, the National Direct Program is not currently able to accommodate persons with physical disabilities given the essential functions of the AmeriCorps field positions. Team Leaders and Members operate chain saws and other power equipment, suppress wild land fires, operate off-road motorized vehicles, and backpack into remote project sites on foot. The Corps' National Direct program has piloted engaging Summer Youth Program hard-of-hearing alumni members, but it has been determined that the safety risks are too great for the member and fellow team to continue engaging hard-of-hearing participants.

2. Intent to recruit disability applicants

CLARIFICATION--The Corps will not be requesting additional MSY to be filled by AmeriCorps members with disabilities for the reasons described above.

E. MSY with No Program Funds Attached Clarification:

CLARIFICATION--The Corps does not wish to request No-Cost MSYs at this time.

Continuation Changes

Grant Characteristics