



Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 11-12

Western Conservation Corps

A. BACKGROUND

1. Western Governors recently launched a “Get Out West” Initiative with a goal “to get families and children outdoors and enjoying the grandeur of the West.” Among the Initiative’s goals are to, “improve the availability and accessibility of open lands and waterways in the West for outdoor recreation by encouraging public-private partnerships, volunteer efforts, and good stewardship among users.”
2. The population in the West is projected to grow nearly twice the national average over the next 30 years and recreation is the fastest growing use of federal, state and private lands. Aside from the impacts of growth, public lands also face a myriad of environmental assaults including: drought (18% of the western U.S. in drought compared to just 6% a year ago); wildfires (over 7 million acres burned since the beginning of 2011); and invasive and noxious weeds (44 million acres of public lands in the West are already impacted and invasive weeds are spreading at about 2,400 acres per day on western federal lands).
3. Conservation Corps in the West currently employ young people in land stewardship and disaster response activities in partnership with local, state, and federal agencies. In addition, Corps provide youth with access to high quality alternative education and job training and provide youth with AmeriCorps Education Awards. There are currently 35 Conservation Corps serving more than 12,000 youth annually in the West.
4. Conservation Corps are helping address:
 - a. The incredibly high youth unemployment rate that currently stands at over 18%
 - b. The \$25 billion of backlogged maintenance and resource management needs on public/tribal lands and waters
 - c. The disengagement of youth from the great American outdoors
 - d. Obesity, especially youth obesity which is high and increasing
 - e. The need for future natural resource, outdoor industry and land manager employees
 - f. Youth poverty rates which are at 45%
5. The US House of Representatives passed the bi-partisan, non-controversial Public Lands Service Corps Act in 2010. The reintroduced bill (HR587, S896) has support from the Majority and Minority leadership on the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands and has bipartisan co-sponsors in the Senate.
6. The National Park Service Chief of Maintenance conducted an analysis on Conservation Corps that found that using a Conservation Corps resulted in a 44% cost savings for the NPS in addition to the benefits of engaging young people.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors urge Congress to pass the Public Lands Service Corps Act of 2011 (S896, HR587), a bipartisan, non-controversial bill to engage young people through Conservation Corps to address significant natural resource issues in the West.
2. Western Governors urge the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to identify and encourage opportunities to engage Conservation Corps to meet Departmental needs on public lands in a cost effective manner.
3. Similarly, Western Governors pledge to look within their own State public land agencies to identify and encourage opportunities for engaging Conservation Corps as a cost effective means to meet operational needs of public land agencies.
4. Western Governors recognize Conservation Corps as essential partners in meeting ongoing demands for natural resource management needs and as effective workforce and career development programs for young people.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. WGA shall post this resolution to its Web site to be referred to and transmitted as necessary.
2. WGA is directed to monitor progress toward achieving the policy objectives specified in this resolution and to report its findings to the Western Governors on a regular basis.