



To: House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Republican Staff;
Aniela Butler (Aniela@mail.house.gov), Brandon Miller
(Brandon.Miler@mail.house.gov), & Terry Camp (Terry.Camp@mail.house.gov)
Date: July 19, 2021
Subject: Hybrid Oversight Hearing titled “Examining the Potential for a Civilian Climate Corps”

The Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands will hold a hybrid oversight hearing titled “Examining the Potential for a Civilian Climate Corps” on **Tuesday, July 20, 2021 at 3:00 p.m. EDT** in room 1324 Longworth Hearing Room and online via Cisco WebEx.

Member offices are requested to notify Terry Camp no later than **Monday, July 19, at 4:30 p.m. EDT**, if their Member intends to participate. Submissions for the hearing record must be submitted through the Committee’s electronic repository at HNRCDocs@mail.house.gov. Please contact David DeMarco (David.DeMarco@mail.house.gov) or Everett Winnick (EverettWinnick@mail.house.gov) should any technical difficulties arise.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- New proposals calling for a federal Civilian Climate Corps are vague, duplicative, and far too expensive. Much of this work is already being accomplished by private corps networks or existing public-private partnerships.
- Instead of creating an entirely new federal bureaucracy, Congress should instead focus on ways to encourage the private sector to enhance existing corps programs and focus those corps programs on more actively managing our federal lands.
- Leveraging private funding rather than taxpayer money and targeting future corps work on important activities like rebuilding trails, addressing deferred maintenance, and conducting active forest management projects could create a win-win solution that bolsters rural economies and improves the health of our public lands.



II. WITNESSES

- **Mr. Tate Watkins**, Research Fellow, Property and Environment Research Center [*Republican Witness*]
- **Ms. Tonya Gayle**, Executive Director, Green City Force
- **Mr. Chas Robles**, Corps Director, Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps
- **Mr. Scott Segerstorm**, Executive Director, Colorado Youth Corps Association
- **Ms. LaJuan D. Tucker**, Environmental Program Coordinator, Wildlife Austin Program & The Austin Nature Preserve System, City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department

II. BACKGROUND

History of the Civilian Conservation Corps

President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Civilian Conservation Corps on April 5, 1933, with the goal of putting millions of young people to work on environmental projects on public lands.¹ The Civilian Conservation Corps arose out of President Roosevelt’s “New Deal” to provide economic relief and job opportunities during the Great Depression. Over the course of nine years, the Civilian Conservation Corps employed three million men primarily between the ages of 18 and 25 using federal money to work on projects aimed at the “conservation and development of the natural resources of the United States.”² Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees were recruited, hired, and trained by the federal government; worked under federal supervision; lived in government-run camps; and received stipends paid with federal funding.³ By 1935, it was estimated that the work completed by the Civilian Conservation Corps pushed the advancement and development of forests and parks ahead by two decades.⁴ The Civilian Conservation Corps also planted over three billion trees and conducted construction projects in more than 800 parks across the nation.⁵

Existing Corps Programs

Despite the end of the Civilian Conservation Corps program, other federal corps programs continue to employ people to engage in conservation work, including the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) and the Public Lands Corps (PLC). The YCC engages young people aged 15-18 for 8-10 weeks over the summer to work on conservation-related projects on federal lands and waters under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).⁶ By contrast, the PLC is a job training and employment program for young adults (aged 16-30 or up to 35 for military veterans) to engage in projects administered by selected agencies within DOI, USDA, and the Department of Commerce.⁷ In addition to these federal

¹ History.com Editors, Civilian Conservation Corps History.com (2010), <https://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/civilian-conservation-corps> (last visited Jul 15, 2021).

² Mark K. DeSantis, Biden Administration Proposes New Civilian Climate Corps Congressional Research Service (2021), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11654> (last visited Jul 15, 2021).

³ *Id.*

⁴ The Evolution of the CCC, PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/civilian-conservation-corps-evolution-ccc/> (last visited Jul 13, 2021).

⁵ *Id.* at 4

⁶ *Id.* at 5

⁷ *Id.* at 5

programs, there are also a litany of private corps programs that engage in conservation work at both the federal and state level.⁸

The federal corps programs are comparatively smaller in scale than the original Civilian Conservation Corps and vary in design, location, and scope of work. In general, these programs offer participants, commonly referred to as corps members, a variety of benefits in exchange for their service.⁹ These benefits can include a wage stipend, housing, classroom training, experiential and environmental education, professional support services, and post-service education awards.¹⁰ Under the YCC and PLC, agencies generally do not administer corps programs; instead, they typically partner with locally based, nonfederal corps organizations (sometimes referred to as sponsoring organizations).¹¹ These organizations are primarily responsible for the recruitment, hiring, and management of participants. In some cases, agencies may be authorized to recruit, hire, and manage corps members directly for agency-specific projects on federal lands.¹²

President Biden’s Civilian Climate Corps Proposal and the Future of Conservation Corps

During his presidential campaign, President Joe Biden released his “Build Back Better” plan which, among other issues, included a proposal to spend billions of dollars to establish a “Civilian Climate Corps” (CCC) in which workers would be tasked with several objectives including “conserving our public lands” and “addressing the changing climate.”¹³ Although the plan contained few specifics, it did state that the new climate workers would be tasked with using “science-based techniques to thin and sustainably manage our forests, making them more resilient to wildfire and enhancing their carbon intake and habitat integrity.”¹⁴ The Build Back Better plan also advocated for corps members to plant “millions of trees to help reduce heat stress in urban neighborhoods..... remove invasive species; improve wildlife corridors; build hiking and biking trails and access to other recreational amenities: and reinvigorate landscapes and seascapes.”¹⁵

On January 27, 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 14008, titled “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad,” in which he directed the Secretary of the Interior, in collaboration with the Secretary of Agriculture and other agency heads, to create a strategy for a CCC “within existing appropriations.”¹⁶ The order directs that the CCC should “aim to conserve and restore public lands and waters, bolster community resilience, increase reforestation, increase carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protect biodiversity, improve access to recreation, and address the changing climate.”¹⁷ The Biden Administration also recommended that \$10 billion be invested in the CCC initiative as part of their March 2021 American Jobs Plan proposal.¹⁸ The

⁸ The Corps Network, Members by State, <https://corpsnetwork.org/members-by-state/>.

⁹ *Id.* at 5

¹⁰ *Id.* at 5

¹¹ *Id.* at 5

¹² *Id.* at 5

¹³ <https://joebiden.com/clean-energy/>

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ President Joseph R. Biden, Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad The White House (2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/> (last visited Jul 15, 2021).

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ FACT SHEET: The American Jobs Plan, The White House (2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/31/fact-sheet-the-american-jobs-plan/> (last visited Jul 15, 2021).

Biden Administration’s initial fiscal year (FY) 2022 discretionary budget request for DOI included \$200 million for the initiative.

The Biden Administration has yet to release its strategy for how the proposed CCC would be implemented or how this new program will interact with the existing corps or federal workforce programs. Proposals by previous administrations to establish or increase corps participation in conservation-related work have primarily focused on utilizing existing public-private partnerships and the existing corps infrastructure. For example, the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) initiative put forward by the Obama Administration that was aimed at expanding opportunities and funding for youth employment and training on public lands.¹⁹

In addition, several bills have been introduced in the 117th Congress to either establish a CCC or increase corps participation on public lands and waters more broadly. These proposals vary widely in scale and concept, with some calling for the establishment of a new, federally operated CCC and others looking to bolster the existing conservation corps model with additional federal funding or support.²⁰ One proposal likely to get attention at the hearing is H.R. 2241, the “Civilian Climate Corps Act of 2021,” sponsored by Chairman Neguse. This bill provides a blank check to establish a new CCC. The bill, which directs that the CCC shall “be carried out in partnership with a qualified youth service or conservation corps,” does not delineate how those partnerships will occur or what specific activities will be authorized for the CCC.

Outstanding Questions and Remaining Uncertainties

Although many have equated new CCC proposals to the previous Civilian Conservation Corps, decades of new public and private youth and conservation programs have complicated the landscape for establishing an entirely new conservation corps. While some of the goals of the proposals are admirable (i.e. actively managing our overgrown, fire-prone forests), most proposals are lacking critically important implementation details or allocate too many taxpayer resources for duplicative programs already being implemented by the private sector. As an alternative to creating an entirely new CCC, Congress can continue to encourage public-private partnerships and allow the private sector to innovate and continue existing, successful corps programs. Bills like the Trillion Trees Act, sponsored by Ranking Member Westerman, and the Forestry Education and Workforce Development Act, sponsored by (Ranking Member Russ Fulcher), are just two examples of proposals that don’t rely on new taxpayer money and instead support conservation corps by expanding the eligible activities of existing corps programs to help improve the health of our nation’s forests.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 5

²⁰ *Id.* at 5