

**STATEMENT**

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**BEFORE THE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS, PARKS AND WILDLIFE  
APRIL 2, 2009  
REGARDING  
H.R. 1612, THE PUBLIC LANDS SERVICE CORPS ACT OF 2009,  
AMENDING THE PUBLIC LANDS CORPS ACT OF 1993**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on H. R. 1612, the Public Lands Service Corps Act of 2009.

**INTRODUCTION**

We think that H. R. 1612 is a timely amendment to the Public Lands Corps Act of 1993. The Nation's forests and grasslands are unique and special ecosystems that the Forest Service manages to meet the needs of present and future generations. These lands yield abundant sustainable goods and ecosystem services for the American people. The National Forest System lands, managed for multiple-use, sustained-yield is indeed a place for the Public Lands Service Corps participants to learn and practice an array of conservation, preservation, interpretation and cultural resource activities, and take advantage of outstanding and unique educational opportunities. Indeed, in West Virginia, Arizona and in scores of other states the, Forest Service has benefited greatly from the services of the Public Lands Corps project work on National Forest System lands.

**PUBLIC LANDS SERVICE CORPS ACT OF 2009**

The Forest Service, while not a prolific user of the 1993 Act, would be better positioned to increase its use of the Corps under H.R. 1612. We believe the expanded authority of that would be provided by H.R. 1612 will improve the Act by removing the authorization of appropriation ceiling and increasing our ability to engage young men and women in performing critical work for the Nation.

The Department strongly supports H.R. 1612. This bill would strengthen and facilitate the use of the Public Land Corps (PLC) program, helping to fulfill the vision that Secretary Vilsak has for promoting ways to engage young people across America to serve their community and their country. While we are strongly supportive of H.R. 1612, there

are a few areas where we would like to suggest some changes. We will commit to work with the committee and to provide our recommended changes to you in writing in the near future.

By including conservation education, service learning, training and promoting the value of public service in addition to “shovel work,” we are likely to be able to increase our use of Public Land Service Corps in a variety of program areas. The expanded authority can give us new tools to engage young people in a variety of professional careers including resource management, green jobs, visitor and interpretative services, conservation education, media production and business skills. This authority will further assist the Forest Service in providing opportunities on a continuum of outdoor experiences from appreciation to employment. It will support understanding of scientific principles to enhance environmental literacy—the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions and become engaged citizen stewards. This investment will assist us in our work to provide quality settings, services, and programs that maximize the benefits of our public lands for the ever-changing needs of Americans, now and into the future.

This amendment is timely and welcomed. Evidence shows that children today are growing up increasingly disconnected from nature. They are gravitating away from developing personal connections to their forests and grasslands. Researchers report that the gap between kids and nature, the “nature deficit disorder”, has far-reaching and negative implications for the health and well-being of our Nation’s children and the future stewardship of public lands and natural resources. Along with responding to climate change and forest water yield and storage, the Forest Service is also addressing the issue of “reconnecting people with nature” especially our children. History will judge the conservation leaders of our age, including our own leadership in the Forest Service, by how well we inspire our Nation’s youth to accept the mantle of conservation and natural resource management for posterity. Through this amendment, young people will have the opportunity to connect with public lands and the natural world and increase their understanding of the value of trees, forests, grasslands and the conservation management of public lands. Corps members will gain the knowledge, skills or inspiration to seek careers in natural resource management as well as making informed decisions relevant to forests and grasslands in their role for mitigating the looming challenges of climate change and prospective water shortages. The Public Land Service Corps can be invaluable in our efforts to nurture and to grow the next generation of conservation stewards and resource professionals, who will have to address and meet these sustainability challenges.

Forests and grasslands are the natural backyards for many communities throughout the United States. The Forest Service is uniquely placed to link people with forests and grasslands in order to strengthen the economic health of communities over the long-term. The Forest Service’s programs provide federal leadership in technical and financial assistance to landowners and resource managers to help sustain the Nation’s forests and protect communities and the environment from wildland fires. Conservation Education helps people of all ages understand and appreciate the Nation’s natural and heritage resources and how to conserve those resources for future generations.

Forest Service technical and financial assistance help bring communities, groups and businesses together to create diversified economic and social activity built on forest resources management and conservation. Community-based partnerships, of which the Public Lands Service Corps is an example, offer the flexibility and capacity building for finding long-term solutions to vexing natural and cultural resource challenges. Cooperative and Urban Forestry programs help communities become more economically self-sufficient by improving competitiveness and offering service learning and employment opportunities through stimulating markets for more diverse natural resource management, use and conservation.

National Forest System lands are located in 42 States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. These lands and our infrastructure of trails, roads and recreation facilities provide opportunities for solace and solitude, challenge and risk, hunting and fishing and outlets for physical and mental fitness. They connect society to the natural world. However, many of our sites and much of our land base and infrastructure is in need of restoration or repair and maintenance. For example, we currently have an estimated \$280 million backlog in deferred trail maintenance work. The Public Lands Service Corps can assist the agency by addressing this backlog.

The Forest Service is fully committed to the advancement of young people through a variety of conservation projects, training, and service learning and conservation education. Along with the Bureau of Land Management, we can provide participants with an understanding of the agency's history and training on multiple-use and sustained-yield management of natural, cultural, historic, archaeological, recreational and scenic resources. Our mission, *"To sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations,"* can only be achieved by educating future generations and training the future public and private land managers. In turn, they will promote the value of public service and continue the conservation legacy of natural resource management for the United States.

The Forest Service has in place offices to play a key role in the coordination of the Public Lands Service Corps through its National Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers program and other staff. The Forest Service National Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers would likely be the coordinating office for Public Lands Service Corps in the Forest Service.

The broader definition of natural, cultural and historic resource work under the amendment is beneficial to the Nation's forests and grasslands as it provides for a wide variety of different types of work across diverse landscapes. This expansion enhances the Forest Service ability to instill in a new generation of young men and women, including those from diverse backgrounds, the desire to seek careers in natural and cultural resource stewardship and public service by allowing them to work directly with conservation professionals in land management, agencies. This would promote public understanding and appreciation of the mission and work of the federal land, coastal and ocean management agencies.

Our history of program delivery through Forest Service Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers and conservation education centers for training young people has been a vital tool in reaching more than 6 million youth of all ages. We appreciate the flexibility of the expanded authority in section 205, which would authorize the use of residential facilities. The Forest Service Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers have the institutional capacity to operate residential facilities successfully. However, there are a number of implementation issues that need to be considered in establishing new residential conservation centers. These include the costs of operating and maintaining the facilities, potential liability issues, and questions about the impact on contract and labor laws. We would like to work with the committee on addressing these types of issues.

The U.S. Forest Service has been operating residential Civilian Conservation Centers for more than 40 years through the interagency agreement with the Department of Labor Job Corps Programs. The 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act authorized the Forest Service to operate six additional Job Corps Centers formerly run by the Bureau of Reclamation in addition to our 22 residential Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers.

Because the Forest Service has a long history of successfully operating residential centers, our employees have extensive experience with the unique opportunities and challenges found in youth training programs. With our partners, we can confidently leverage our resources and expand our ability to develop a well-trained and responsible workforce in natural resources and business. Youth will participate in community service and restoration and stewardship projects, leadership and self-government programs, recreation and team-building and independent living skills training.

The bringing together of diverse backgrounds, ages, cultures, education and training skills provides the participants with multi-cultural experiences and develops awareness and sensitivity for other people and cultures that would not be available in a non-residential program. Residential centers also create the need for a structured behavior management program to ensure the health and safety of students and staff.

## **DEFINITIONS**

The amendment would increase the opportunity for Public Lands Service Corps members to leverage their education and work experience in obtaining permanent full-time employment with Federal agencies.

We respectfully suggest that the Forest Service Job Corps at Civilian Conservation Centers be recognized as an entity that may carry out appropriate natural and cultural resources conservation projects. This recognition would clearly link the work and training of the Forest Service Job Corps at Civilian Conservation Centers with projects that assist in the management of the National Forest System.

## **CONCLUSION**

H.R. 1612 The Public Lands Service Corps Act of 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee this concludes my prepared statement. I am happy to answer any questions that you or Members of the Committee may have.