



**2019 Public Lands Service Coalition  
Partnership Impact Evaluation  
Interim Report**



# 2019 Public Lands Service Coalition Partnership Impact Evaluation Interim Report October 27, 2020



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## Acknowledgements

Participating Public Lands Service Coalition corps and The Corps Network funded this evaluation, with leadership from Montana Conservation Corps. We also thank all corps and crew members for their time and dedicated efforts in developing, testing, refining, and implementing this evaluation.

**Cover photos** Clockwise from left: 1. Manual tree removal, American YouthWorks, Texas Conservation Corps, Austin, TX. 2. Trail work, American YouthWorks, Texas Conservation Corps, Austin, TX. 3. Group work photo, American YouthWorks, Texas Conservation Corps, Austin, TX.

# Executive Summary

Working in a partnership model, conservation corps engage AmeriCorps members to provide land management agencies with resources that support community engagement [Engagement], a dependable workforce that balances high quality work with reduced agency costs [Efficiencies], and enhance the ability of public land agencies to provide for conservation and visitor recreation [Enhancement].

The overall aim of the proposed evaluation is to examine the impact of participating AmeriCorps conservation corps programs on hosting agencies' capacity. The primary outcome-related goals are to determine, ultimately through quasi-experimental post-hoc comparison group design, whether there is evidence that conservation corps' host partners demonstrate higher levels of engagement, efficiency, and environmental stewardship than similar non-hosting agencies.

The AmeriCorps conservation corps programs contributing to this impact evaluation include: American Conservation Experience, Colorado Youth Corps Association, Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa, Conservation Legacy, Delaware State Parks Veterans Conservation Corps, Kupu Hawaii, Montana Conservation Corps, Northwest Youth Corps, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps (NM), the SCA, American Youthworks (TXCC and LACC), Utah Conservation Corps and The Corps Network.

The primary research questions and outcomes are:

1. Do corps partnerships increase partners' capacity to engage communities compared to non-host agencies as indicated by perceived higher levels of engagement and higher hours of volunteer engagement?
2. Do corps partnerships increase partners' efficiency compared to non-host agencies as indicated by fewer organizational resources committed to trail/habitat work and higher perceived quality of trail/habitat work?
3. Do corps partnerships increase partners' natural resource enhancement compared to non-host agencies as indicated by increased miles of trails improved/created and acres of habitat improved?

Baseline partner surveys were distributed via Qualtrics in September-October, 2019. Surveys were designed to examine the differences between USFS and State Parks units that used conservation corps AmeriCorps programs to conduct trail and habitat work and those that use alternative methods (e.g., agency crews, volunteer groups, contractors) during the previous year and identify differences in relevant outcomes during the project period.

A total of 218 respondents completed the Wave 1 electronic survey in 2019. After removing those individuals who did not identify as either a current United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service or a current state park employee (n=18), our resulting sample population consisted of 200 respondents. These respondents represented both USDA Forest Service (n=102, 51% of resulting sample population) and state parks units (n=98, 49%) in nearly equal proportions.

Conservation corps were identified as important partners for land management agencies, primarily in tasks related to trails, invasive species, and fuels management. **Land management agencies who reported partnering with conservation corps were able to accomplish a significantly higher percentage**

**of planned trail and fuel management work than agencies who did not partner with corps.** Land management **personnel who partnered with the Corps created or maintained 30% more of the trail miles they planned** to accomplish in comparison to Personnel not working with Corps.

**Land management personnel who partnered with the Corps completed 42% more of the fuel-acres work they planned to accomplish in comparison to personnel not working with Corps.** However, agencies partnering with corps reported accomplishing less percentage of invasive species management goals in comparison to non-partners. Land management personnel who partnered with the Corps completed 47% less of the invasive species management work they planned to accomplish over the past year in comparison to personnel not working with Corps.

In terms of contributions to partners' organizational capacity, land management personnel perceived corps partnerships make a substantial contribution to resource enhancement. **Conservation corps' contribution to resource enhancement was rated the highest among all partner types.** Conservation corps were also perceived to make a moderate contribution to community engagement and considerable contribution to agency efficiency.

Participants were also asked to rate the partners they had worked with over the last year in terms of overall quality. Quality was assessed on a 0.0-5.0 scale (similar to giving 'star' ratings on Amazon). Land managers perceived the quality of work performed by corps to be high (4 out of 5 stars), second only to community groups. In terms of agency resources required to manage partnerships, managers suggested that corps required considerable resources from their host before they arrive, moderate resources once they are on-site, and few resources after their work is complete. Based on the effort, quality and impact analyses presented above, a cost-benefit analysis was computed to explore the relationships between these two concepts. **Corps were perceived as highly contributing to their hosting agency's goals, to perform high-quality work, and to require moderate resources or effort from agency hosts.**

Participants were next asked who would complete the work of their existing personnel and partners if these entities were no longer available to accomplish their currently assigned tasks. In many cases, it appears paid staff would be called upon to complete the work currently being performed by others. In other cases, this work would simply go 'undone' (i.e., the participant reported that the work being performed by that partner would or could not be replaced and so would not be completed). **Corps were the most "irreplaceable" partner type identified by respondents** with 33% of the sample suggesting that work would not be completed if not performed by corps partners.

Finally, participants were able to provide comments about what they perceived to be barriers to engaging more fully with Corps partners. The comments generated by land management personnel in the sample population were analyzed and cataloged into four general categories: (1) funding; (2) communication; (3) agreement processes; and (4) training. Communication about how to set up agreements and recruit Corps members could be effective in overcoming perceived barriers to forming Corps partnerships in state parks and national forests.

This preliminary report provides baseline evidence of positive impacts to land management partners by Conservation Corps in relation to other types of partner organizations. Corps were particularly valuable in assisting partners with achieving trail and fuel management goals leading to higher levels of resource enhancement in comparison to other partner types. Conservation corps were also seen as a valuable partner in terms of providing high quality work while requiring fewer agency resources to manage.

# Public Land Management Personnel Survey Wave 1 Results



In the fall of 2019, researchers at North Carolina State University and Western Kentucky University surveyed public land management personnel (i.e., state parks and national forest employees) whose work includes trail and/or habitat management tasks. Personnel shared their perceptions on agency effectiveness, community engagement, and their work with and without partners.

	<p><b>Grading their own agency</b></p> <p>Survey participants graded their own park or district in three areas: community engagement, resource enhancement, and agency efficiency. Personnel responded on a grade-type scale where an "A/4" indicated high levels of achievement and an "F/0" low achievement. Overall, public land management personnel graded their agencies as a "C" average in all three of these areas (efficiency = 2.32; engagement=2.36; enhancement = 2.14)</p>	<p><b>C+</b></p>
	<p><b>More trail work accomplished</b></p> <p>Wave 1 survey participants estimated the volume of trail mileage they had planned to manage over the past year and the total number of miles where work was accomplished. This data shows that management was implemented on 68% of trail miles personnel had planned to manage over the year when they worked with Corps, but only 38% for personnel engaging other types of partners.</p>	<p><b>30%</b> more trail miles improved with Corps</p>
	<p><b>More acres managed</b></p> <p>Wave 1 survey participants estimated the volume of habitat acreage they had planned to manage over the past year and the total number of acres where work was accomplished. This data shows that management was implemented on 72% of acres personnel had planned to manage over the year when they worked with Corps, but only 30% for personnel engaging other types of partners.</p>	<p><b>42%</b> more fuel acres improved with Corps</p>
	<p><b>Increased partnership engagement</b></p> <p>In the wave 1 sample, 99% of participants reported working with at least one partner &amp; 90% reported working in two or more partnerships over the past year. Trail work was the most commonly reported partnership task. Youth corps, "friends of..." groups, individual partners, and local groups were the most common types of partnerships.</p>	<p><b>99%</b></p>
	<p><b>Cost-benefit of partnerships</b></p> <p>Survey participants estimated the the amount of effort required to initiate and maintain partnerships and rated the overall quality and benefit of their partnerships. Based on this data, we computed a cost-benefit analysis of the various partnership types reported revealing, that for participants in Wave 1, "friends of..." groups, individuals, national groups, local groups and youth corps provided the greatest benefit at the lowest cost.</p>	<p><b>4.0</b> out of <b>5.0</b> ★★★★☆</p>
	<p><b>Who participated</b></p> <p>200 public land management personnel participated in the Wave 1 survey, representing units from across the United States. Participants included district rangers, park managers, recreation technicians, and volunteer coordinators. Most (84%) reported worked in public land management for five or more years.</p>	<p><b>200</b> respondents</p>

# Evaluation Procedures

Previous evaluations have provided strong evidence of environmental corps programs' impacts on members' community and environmental engagement, leadership, communication skills and grit as well as enhanced recreational access, reduced fire risk, and improved ecological conditions for native species. The emerging focus of corps programs is their ability to increase organizational capacity and provide added value to public land agencies. Capacity building refers to activities that expand the scale, reach, efficiency, or effectiveness of organizations.

Working in a partnership model, conservation corps provide land management agencies with resources that support community engagement [Engagement], a dependable workforce that balances high quality service (work) with reduced agency costs [Efficiencies], and enhance the ability of public land agencies to provide for conservation and visitor recreation [Enhancement].

Two important land management partners for conservation corps are the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service (USFS) and state park systems. This evaluation will focus on the ability of conservation corps to enhance the capacity of these two organizations.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE EVALUATION

The overall aim of the proposed impact evaluation is to examine the outcomes of participating corps programs on hosting agencies' capacity. The primary outcome-related goals are to determine, ultimately through quasi-experimental post-hoc comparison group design, whether there is evidence that conservation corps' host partners demonstrate higher levels of engagement, efficiency, and environmental stewardship than similar non-hosting agencies. The primary research questions and outcomes are:

1. Do corps partnerships increase partners' capacity to engage communities compared to non-host agencies as indicated by perceived higher levels of engagement and higher hours of volunteer engagement?
2. Do corps partnerships increase partners' efficiency compared to non-host agencies as indicated by fewer organizational resources committed to trail/habitat work and higher perceived quality of trail/habitat work?
3. Do corps partnerships increase partners' natural resource enhancement compared to non-host agencies as indicated by increased miles of trails improved/created and acres of habitat improved?

Baseline partner surveys were distributed via Qualtrics in September-October, 2019. Surveys were designed to examine the differences between USFS and State Parks units that used AmeriCorps conservation corps programs to conduct trail and habitat work and those that use alternative methods (e.g., agency crews, volunteer groups, contractors) during the previous year and identify differences in relevant outcomes during the project period. Outcome measures were to key organizational capacity

variables identified in partner interviews or adapted from Olsen, Cooper, and Viola's (2016) CNCS-sponsored evaluation of Habitat for Humanity's National Service Program. Primary measures include:

- Perceptions of capacity (Three items measuring how well respondent believes agency is accomplishing goals related to engagement, enhancement, and efficiency)
- Documentation of community engagement (One item requesting entry of agency hours worked with volunteers)
- Documentation of resource enhancement (Three items requesting entry of the number of trail miles and habitat acres scheduled for maintenance and number actually maintained in the past 12 months)
- Documentation of partnership level (Three items to identify the percentage of miles/acres improved worked on by identified partners)
- Perceptions of partners' role in agency outcomes (Three items per identified partner to record perceptions of contributions of partners to outcomes)
- Perceptions of work quality (11 items per identified partner adapted from SERVQUAL measures directly related to contracted services)
- Resource commitment (One item per identified partner to document resources required for training/oversight for three project stages - pre-work, on-site work, post-work).

## Sample Population

A total of 218 respondents completed the Wave 1 electronic survey. After removing those individuals who did not identify as either a current United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service or a current state park employee (n=18), our resulting sample population consisted of 200 respondents. These respondents represented both USDA Forest Service (n=102, 51% of resulting sample population) and state parks units (n=98, 49%) in nearly equal proportions. Participants reported a variety of personnel positions within these units, such as District Ranger, Park Manager, Recreation Technician, Public Affairs Officers, and Volunteer Coordinator. The majority of respondents (84%) had been working within their current agency for more than five years while, overall, the time participants had spent in their current position was lower (56% had been in their current position five or fewer years, 44% more than five years). About two-thirds (67%) of participants were male, about a third (29%) female, and a few participants (n=7, 4%) did not respond to this item. The majority of the sample population (86%) described their race/ethnicity as white, with others responding as Hispanic (n=8, 4%), Black (n=3, 2%), Asian (n=3, 2%), and/or Native Alaskan, Indian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander (n=4, 2%). Some (n=17, 9%) preferred not to respond to this item and respondents were able to select multiple descriptions of race/ethnicity (so, for this item, the total percentage may exceed one hundred). For a complete listing of the sample population descriptive statistics, see Table 1. Over half (60%) of participants reported working with a youth corps over the past year. Respondents representing all ecoregions of the United State participated in the survey (see Figure 1).

**Table 1. Sample population descriptive statistics for Wave 1 of the Public Land Management Personnel survey.**

<b>Item</b>	<b>% (n)</b>
<b>Unit:</b>	
<i>USDA Forest Service</i>	47% (102)
<i>State parks</i>	45% (98)
<i>Other*(removed from sample population)</i>	8% (18)
<b>Position**:</b>	
<i>District Ranger</i>	15% (29)
<i>Park Manager</i>	19% (37)
<i>Rec. Tech or Manager</i>	12% (23)
<i>Regional</i>	5% (9)
<i>Wildlife</i>	3% (5)
<i>Others (e.g., Volunteer Coordinator, Public Affairs)</i>	46% (92)
<b>Years with current agency</b>	
<i>Less than 1 year</i>	1% (2)
<i>1 year</i>	1% (2)
<i>2 years</i>	2% (5)
<i>3 years</i>	3% (6)
<i>4 years</i>	6% (11)
<i>5 years</i>	3% (7)
<i>6-10 years</i>	13% (26)
<i>11-20 years</i>	40% (79)
<i>More than 20 years</i>	31% (61)
<b>Years in current position</b>	
<i>Less than 1 year</i>	6% (12)
<i>1 year</i>	7% (15)
<i>2 years</i>	8% (16)
<i>3 years</i>	12% (24)
<i>4 years</i>	14% (27)
<i>5 years</i>	9% (17)
<i>6-10 years</i>	21% (41)
<i>11-20 years</i>	17% (33)
<i>More than 20 years</i>	6% (11)
<b>Gender:</b>	
<i>Male</i>	67% (134)
<i>Female</i>	29% (58)
<i>Prefer not to say</i>	4% (7)
<b>Race/ethnicity***:</b>	
<i>Asian</i>	2% (3)
<i>Black</i>	2% (3)
<i>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</i>	-- (1)
<i>Hispanic</i>	4% (8)
<i>Indian/Native Alaskan</i>	2% (3)
<i>White</i>	86% (171)
<i>Other</i>	2% (3)
<i>Prefer not to say</i>	9% (17)

\*For these analyses I only selected those identifying as SP or USFS personnel (n=200). This results in 51% state park-affiliated and 49% USFS-affiliated respondents.

\*\*There are a variety of positions that could probably be refined into more coherent categories than the quick analysis presented here.

\*\*\*Total percentage may exceed 100 as respondents could select multiple categories.

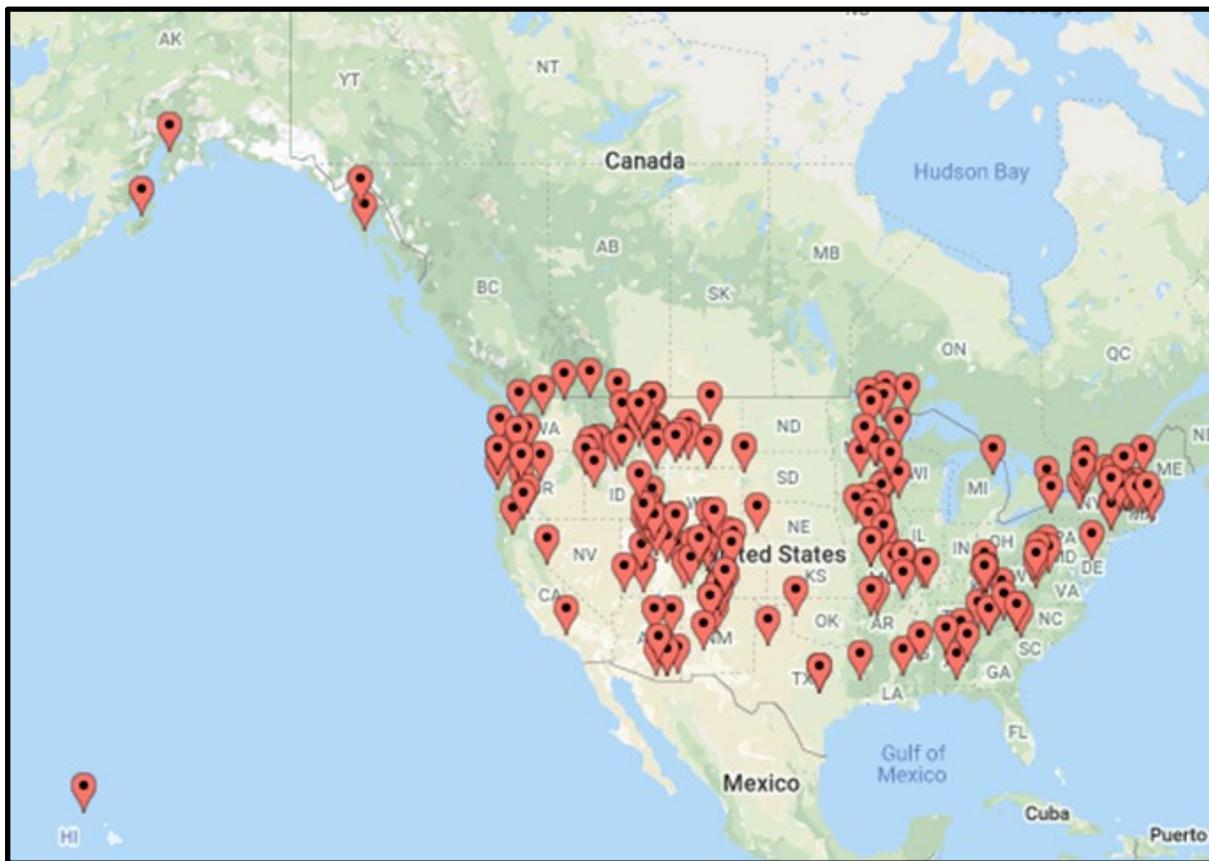


Figure 1. Geographic distribution for participants in the Wave 1 Public Land Management Personnel survey.

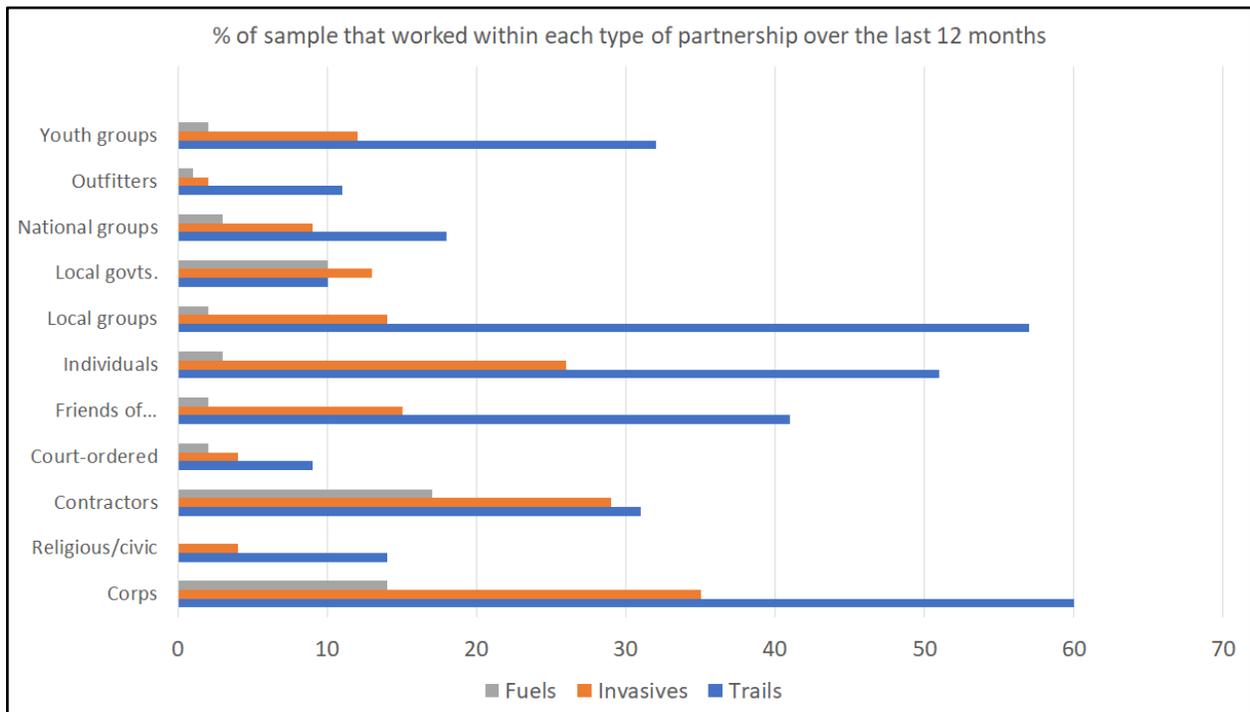
## Results

### Reported Partnerships

Participants reported working with a diversity of partners over the past year (2018-2019), with the highest proportion indicating partnerships with Corps, contractors, “Friends of...” groups, individual volunteers, and local groups (e.g., local civic organizations). Participants were also asked to specify the type of work performed by each partnership (see Table 2, Figure 2). Trail work was the most common task for, followed by invasive species management. Fuels management was the least common partnership task, although Corps, along with contractors, were the most likely partners to be contributing to fuels management tasks.

**Table 2. Work completed by various types of partners, as reported by survey participants.**

Over the past year, these groups completed work related to...	Trails % of sample (n)	Invasive mgmt. % of sample (n)	Fuels mgmt. % of sample (n)
Paid employees	81% (162)	70% (14)	49% (98)
Corps	60% (119)	35% (70)	14% (28)
Religious & civic groups	14% (28)	4% (8)	---
Contractors	31% (61)	29% (57)	17% (33)
Court ordered community service	9% (18)	4% (7)	2% (4)
Friends of... groups	41% (81)	15% (29)	2% (4)
Individuals	51% (101)	26% (51)	3% (6)
Local/regional groups	57% (114)	14% (28)	2% (3)
Local governments	10% (20)	13% (25)	10% (19)
National groups	18% (36)	9% (17)	3% (5)
Outfitters & guides	11% (21)	2% (3)	1% (2)
Youth groups	32% (64)	12% (23)	2% (3)



**Figure 2. The proportion of the survey participants engaging with partners to complete work tasks over the last 12 months.**

**Corps were among the most frequently reported partnership types by participants in the Wave 1 survey.**

...

**Corps partnerships were also the most likely to help agency partners complete tasks related to trails, invasive species, and fuels management.**

## Work Accomplished: Trails

On average, participants reported that they had planned to manage 91 miles of trail over the past year (range: 0-1,468 miles). Overall, 56 miles of trail (range: 0-600 miles) or 62% of the planned mileage was actually managed over the past year with 49 of those miles, on average (range: 0-600), managed in collaboration with one or more partners. On average, for respondents who reported working with a youth corps, 34 miles of trail were completed specifically with the assistance of a corps partner. Further, respondents who reported working with a conservation corps completed more (68%) of their planned work than those respondents who did not engage corps partners (38%). See Table 3.

**Table 3. Trail work accomplishments reported by survey participants.**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Full Sample Mean (Min.-Max.)</b>	<b>Personnel working with Corps Mean (Min.-Max.)</b>	<b>Personnel not working with Corps Mean (Min.-Max.)</b>
Trail miles planned for management	91 (0-1,468)	105 miles (0-1,000)	60 miles (0-1,468)
Trail miles managed	56 (0-600)	71 miles (0-600)	23 miles (0-538)
Trail miles managed with partners	52 (0-600)	56 miles (0-600)	42 miles (0-1,350)
Trail miles managed with Corps partners		34 miles (0-600)	

**Land management personnel who partnered with the Corps created or maintained 68% of the trail miles they planned to accomplish. Personnel not working with Corps accomplished 38% of their planned trail work.**

## Work Accomplished: Fuels

Participants reported that, over the last year, they planned to manage an average of 2,270 acres for fuel loads (range: 0-250,000 acres). The actual number of acres managed for fuels was about 57% of that which was planned, 1,292 acres on average. Of the average acres managed 45% were managed with the help of some partner. Agency personnel working with Corps had, on average, more fuels management planned and accomplished than personnel not working with Corps. On average, agency partners reported managing 282 acres with the help of Corps, 10% of the total, average acres. Personnel not engaging Corps accomplished less, overall, and relied more heavily on other partner types to accomplish fuels management tasks.

**Table 4. Fuel acre management accomplishments reported by survey participants.**

Item	Full Sample Mean (Min.-Max.)	Personnel working with Corps Mean (Min.-Max.)	Personnel not working with Corps Mean (Min.-Max.)
Acres planned for management	2,270 (0-250,000)	3,816 acres (0-75,000)	3,761 acres (0-90,000)
Acres managed	1,292 (0-30,000)	2,748 acres (0-30,000)	1,135 acres (0-30,000)
Acres managed with partners	584 (0-30,000)	595 acres (0-30,000)	696 acres (0-30,000)
Acres managed with Corps partners		282 acres (0-10,000)	

**Land management personnel who partnered with the Corps completed 72% of the fuel-acres work they planned to accomplish. Personnel not working with Corps accomplished 30% of their planned fuels management work.**

## Work Accomplished: Invasive Species

In terms of invasive species management, participants reported that, on average, they had planned to manage 4,273 acres (range: 0-90,000) over the last year. On average, about 60% of their planned work was accomplished and of that accomplished work, 28% of the acres managed were done so in tandem with the assistance of one or more partners. While personnel working with Corps had more planned work, these participants reported accomplishing less than a quarter (23%) of this invasive species management. Personnel engaging with partners other than Corps relied heavily on partnerships (i.e.,

partners completed 80% of the invasive species management work for non-Corps partners) to accomplish 70% of their planned work related to invasive species.

**Table 5. Invasive species management accomplishments reported by survey participants.**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Full Sample Mean (Min.-Max.)</b>	<b>Personnel working with Corps Mean (Min.-Max.)</b>	<b>Personnel not working with Corps Mean (Min.-Max.)</b>
Acres planned for management	4,273 (0-90,000)	2,337 (0-250,000)	1,477 (0-35,000)
Acres managed	2,594 (0-75,000)	533 (0-20,000)	1,037 (0-30,000)
Acres managed with partners	737 (0-30,000)	251 (0-10,000)	821 (0-30,000)
Acres managed with Corps partners		129 (0-8,200)	

**Land management personnel who partnered with the Corps completed 23% of the invasive species management work they planned to accomplish over the past year. Personnel not working with Corps accomplished 70% of their planned invasive species management work.**

**Findings from the Wave 1 survey reveal that, for the sample of agency personnel responding, Corps make the greatest impact in trails management and fuels management.**

...

**One area for continued growth for Corps partners is to provide additional assistance to agency partners aiming to manage invasive species, including setting feasible goals around the acreage that can be managed for invasive species.**

# Perceptions of Capacity Building and Impact

## Perceptions of Engagement, Enhancement, Efficiency (3 E's)

Participants were asked to ‘grade’ their agency in terms of how well their state park or Forest Service unit was performing in three areas: community engagement, natural, cultural, and/or recreation resource enhancement, and overall efficiency. On average, participating personnel graded their agency/unit as a “C” average in all three areas (see Table 5). However, participants also reported that these elements (engagement, enhancement, and efficiency are *very important* functions of the agencies they work for (see Table 6).

**Table 5. Mean scores and standard deviations of perceived grade of agency capacity**

	Engagement Grade	Enhancement Grade	Efficiency Grade
Mean* (SD)	3.26 (0.81)	3.14 (0.78)	3.32 (0.72)

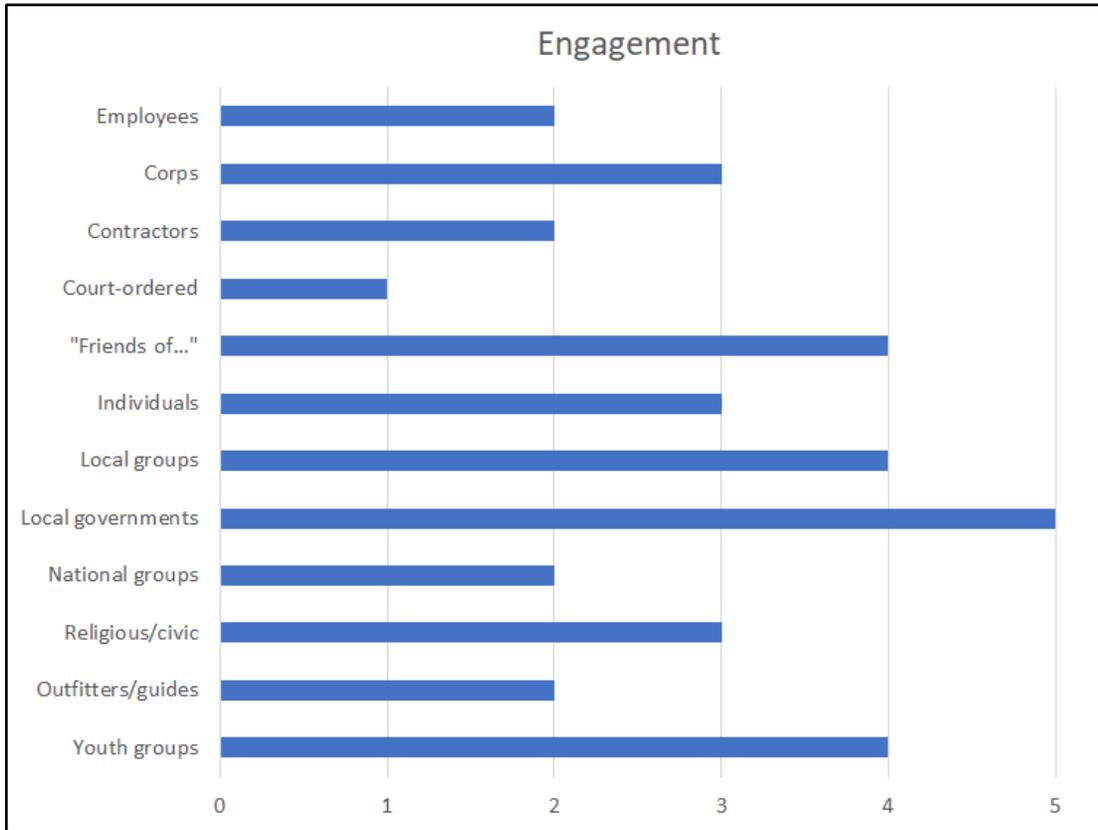
**Table 6. Mean scores and standard deviations of the importance of various program outcomes for public land management personnel.**

Item:	Mean (SD)
Community engagement	4.11 (0.96)
Agency efficiency	4.06 (0.97)
Recreation and/or resource enhancement	4.19 (0.90)

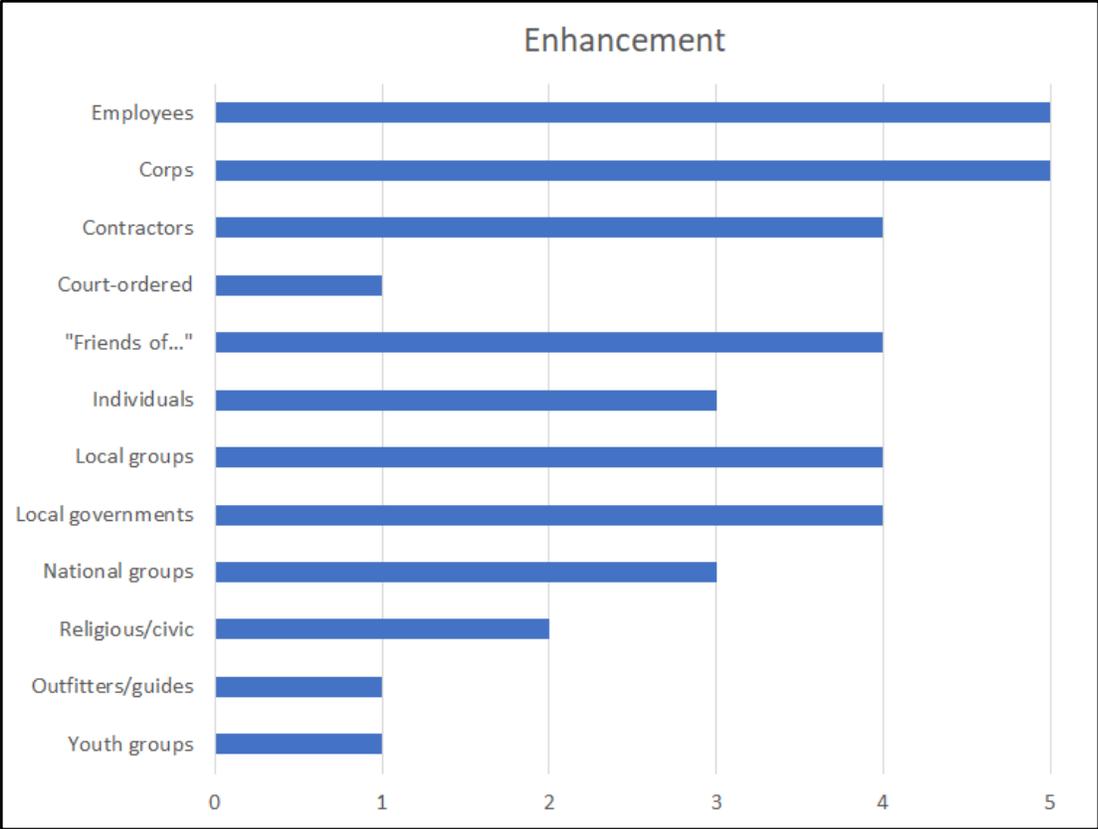
Scale: 1= not at all important; 2= slightly important; 3=moderately important; 4= very important; 5=extremely important

Previous research (e.g., Duerden, Edwards & Lizzo, 2015) demonstrates that partners can be key in enhancing how well agencies are performing in these areas. When asked to rate their partners’ contributions to engagement, enhancement, and efficiency, personnel reported that many partnerships made moderate to substantial contributions (see Figures X-X). For community engagement, local governments, local groups, youth groups, and “Friends of...” groups were among those partnership types to make the most substantial contribution. For resource enhancement, Corps were the only partner type top-rated, along with the agency’s own personnel. Corps, along with paid contractors, “Friends of...” groups, and local governments were also reported as highly contributing to agency efficiency.

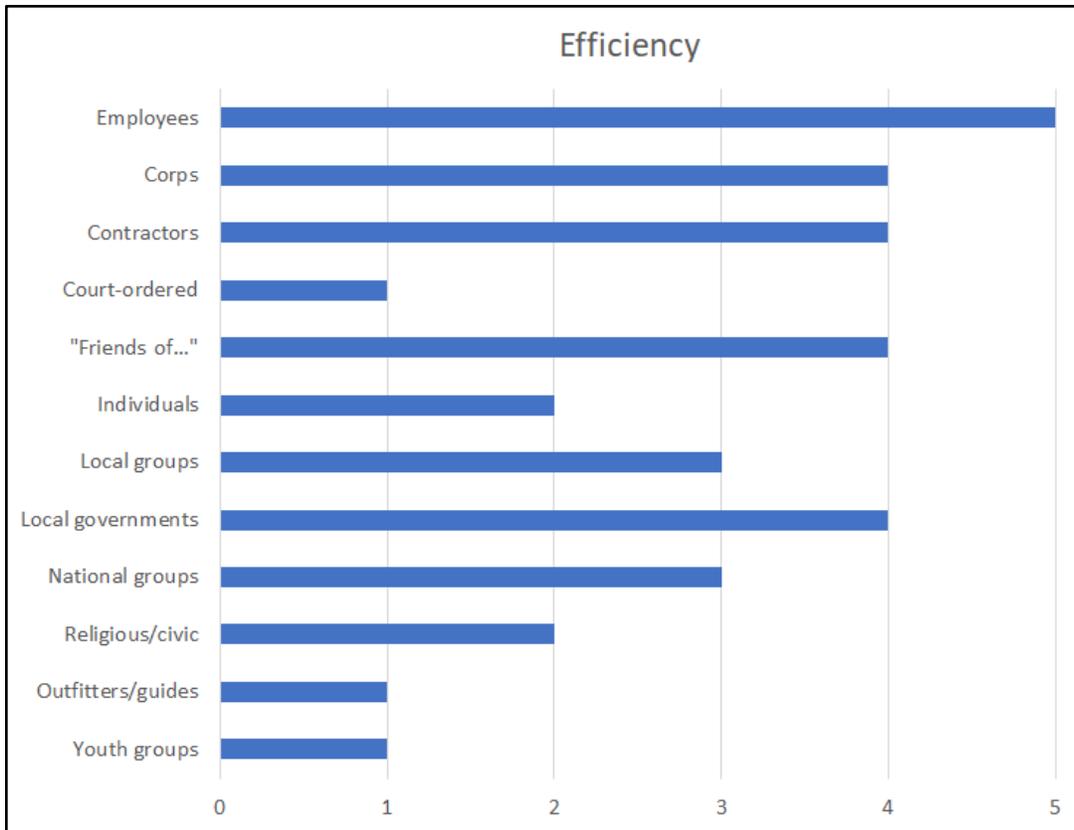
**Corps partnerships made a *moderate* contribution to community engagement, a *substantial* contribution to resource enhancement, and a *considerable* contribution to agency efficiency.**



**Figure 3. Contributions to community engagement by various partnership types.**  
 Scaled used: 5 = Substantial Contribution, 4 = Considerable Contribution, 3 = Moderate Contribution, 2 = Little Contribution, 1 = No contribution



**Figure 4. Contributions to resource enhancement by various partnership types.**  
 Scaled used: 5 = Substantial Contribution, 4 = Considerable Contribution, 3 = Moderate Contribution, 2 = Little Contribution, 1 = No contribution



**Figure 5. Contributions to agency efficiency by various partnership types.**  
 Scaled used: 5 = Substantial Contribution, 4 = Considerable Contribution, 3 = Moderate Contribution, 2 = Little Contribution, 1 = No contribution

## Perceptions of 3 E's and Overall Impact

To further explore the contributions partners make on their hosting agencies' ability to engage the community, enhance resources, and be efficient, scores for these individual areas of contribution were summed to create an "overall impact" score for the various partnership types reported by personnel. Figure 6 below illustrates these scores for a select few partner types. Corps were most similar to "Friends of..." groups and contractors in terms of their overall impact on their agency host. Youth groups is an example of a partner that highly contributes in one area but not others. Finally, court-ordered community service partners illustrate partners that are low contributors across the board, and therefore, in their overall impact to the agency with which they partner. This demonstrates that

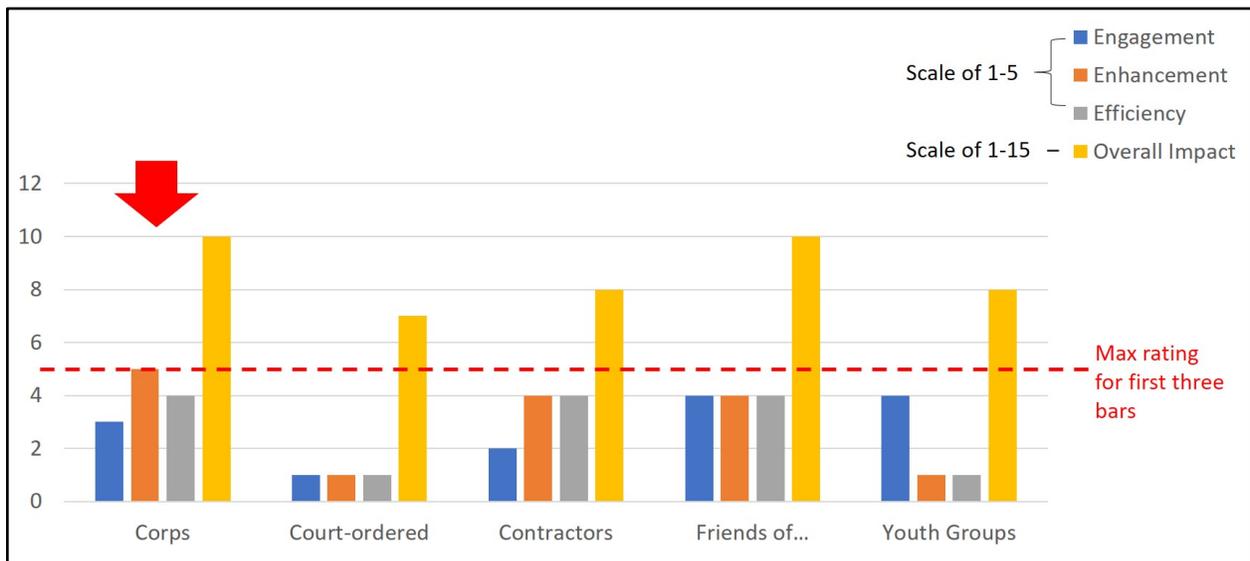


Figure 6. Personnel perceptions of five different partnership types, in terms of contributions to community engagement, resources enhancement, agency efficiency, and overall impact.

**In some cases the benefit to the partner may be greater (e.g., court-ordered community service) than the benefit to the agency host. While other partnerships, such as Corps, are more balanced in terms of having an equal, positive benefit on both the partner members and the hosting agency.**

## Perceptions of Partner Quality

Participants were also asked to rate the partners they had worked with over the last year in terms of overall quality. Quality was assessed on a 0.0-5.0 scale (similar to giving 'star' ratings on Amazon). Overall, personnel ranked their own paid agency employees and partnerships with local community groups providing the highest quality of work. Local governments and Corps partners received the next highest, overall, rating followed by "Friends of..." groups and national partners (e.g, The Nature Conservancy, the International Mountain Biking Association, etc.). Outfitters and guides, religious groups, and court-ordered community service were perceived, by the sample of survey participants, to offer the lowest quality work for the agency.

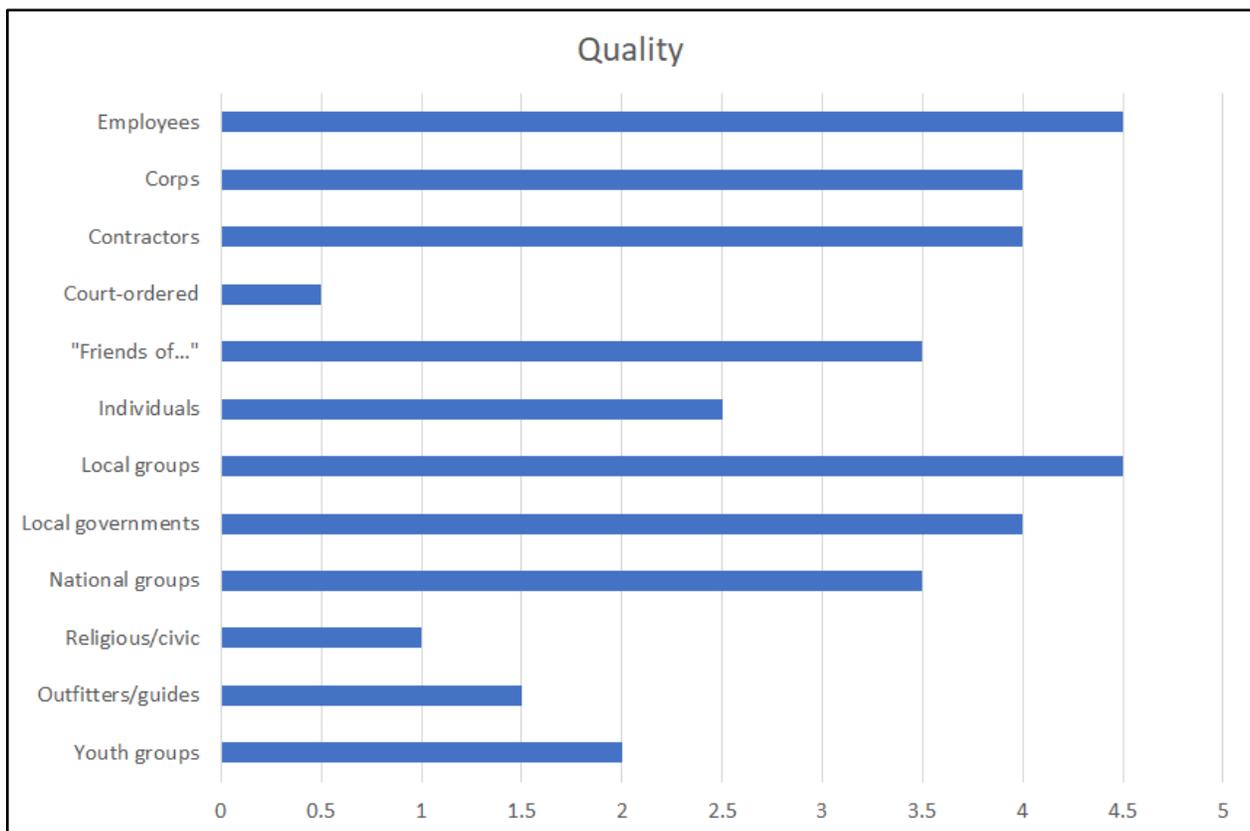


Figure 7. Average quality ratings of distinct partnership types, as reported by Wave 1 participants.



**Corps are perceived as performing high quality work by their agency (state park and USDA Forest Service) hosts.**

## Perceptions of Effort

Public land management personnel participants were also asked to assess their level of effort in coordinating the partnerships they engage. Effort was operationalized as three distinct categories: the “pre” effort of recruiting, marketing, setting up, providing advanced training, or otherwise dealing with partners before they arrived on site to complete work; “on-site” effort including training on-site and leadership, management and oversight provided by the agency personnel on-site; and “post” effort including documentation, reporting, evaluation, and/or recognition that occurred after the partner had departed from completing on-site work. Personnel rated the effort they put forward on a five-point, Likert type scale with response options of: 1= *No resources*, 2= *Few resources*, 3= *Moderate resources*, 4= *Considerable resources*, or 5= *Substantial resources* were required by the personnel in either the pre, on-site, or post partnership context.

Figure 8 below illustrates how a few select partnership types were assessed in terms of pre, on-site, post, and overall effort (overall effort being the summed value of the preceding three measures). In this example, youth groups and “Friends of...” groups were rated as requiring more effort from agency personnel (a 10 and 10.5 respectively out of a possible 15-point scale). Corps and court-ordered community service partners were rated similarly in terms of effort (a 9.5 on the 15-point scale) and contractors, in this example required the least effort or resources from agency personnel (a 7.5 on the 15-point scale).

**Corps require: *considerable* resources from their agency host before they arrive, *moderate* resources once they are on-site, and *few* resources after their work is complete.**

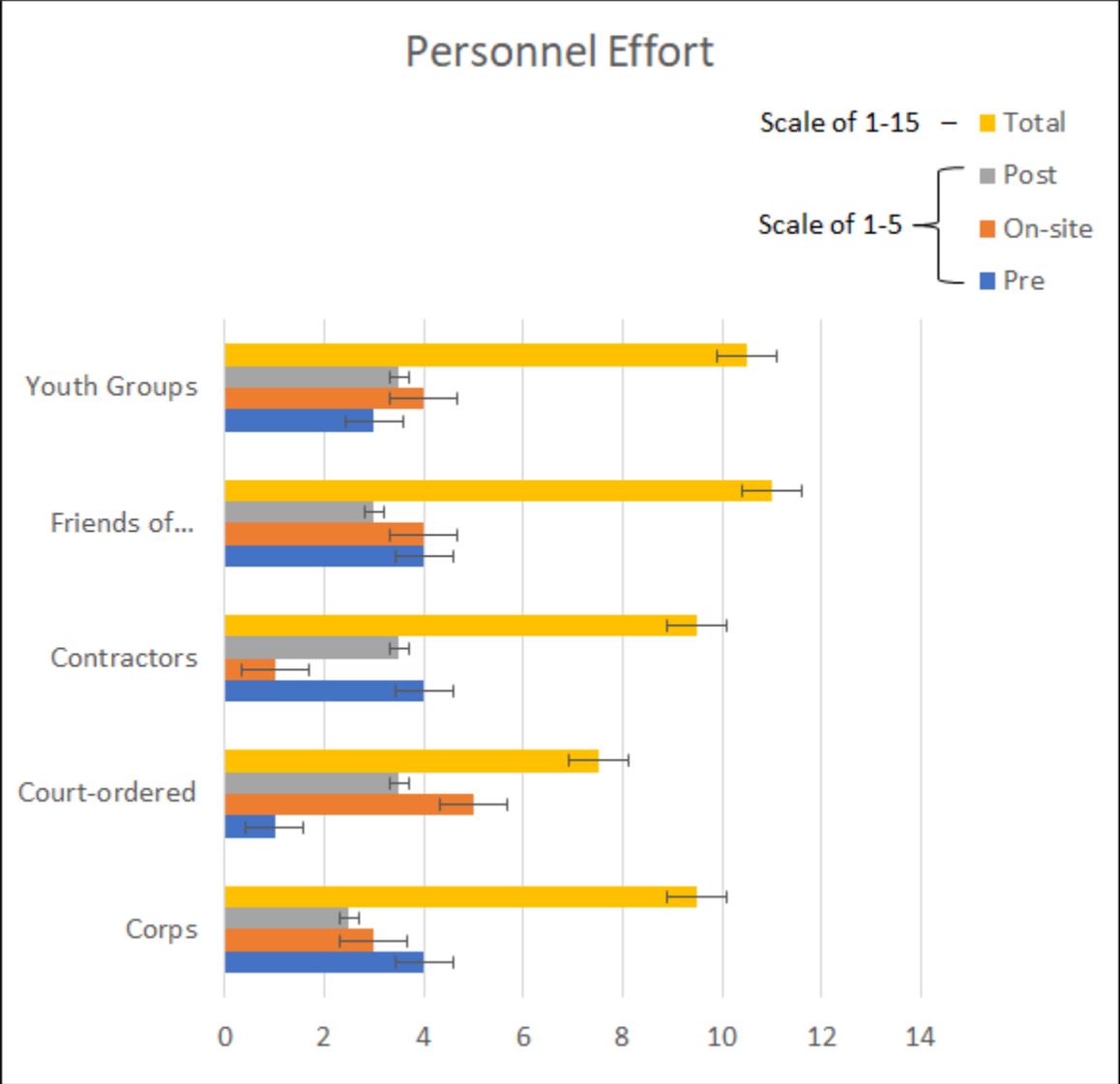


Figure 8. Land management personnel perceptions of effort association with various partnership types.

## Cost-Benefit Analysis

Based on the effort, quality and impact analyses presented above, a cost-benefit analysis was computed to explore the relationships between these two concepts. The total impact score was multiplied by the mean quality score, this product was then divided by the total effort metric to produce a final “cost-benefit” quotient. Cost-benefit values could range in value from 0 (low benefit for the cost) to 5 (high benefit for the cost). As illustrated in Figure 9 below, partner types exemplifying a valuable cost-benefit ratio (all ranked above a 4.0) include ‘Friends of...’ groups, individual volunteers, national groups, and Corps. Contractors, local governments, and outfitter and guides were perceived to have a moderate cost-benefit ratio, and religious groups, court-ordered community service groups, and youth groups to have the poorest cost-benefit relationship.

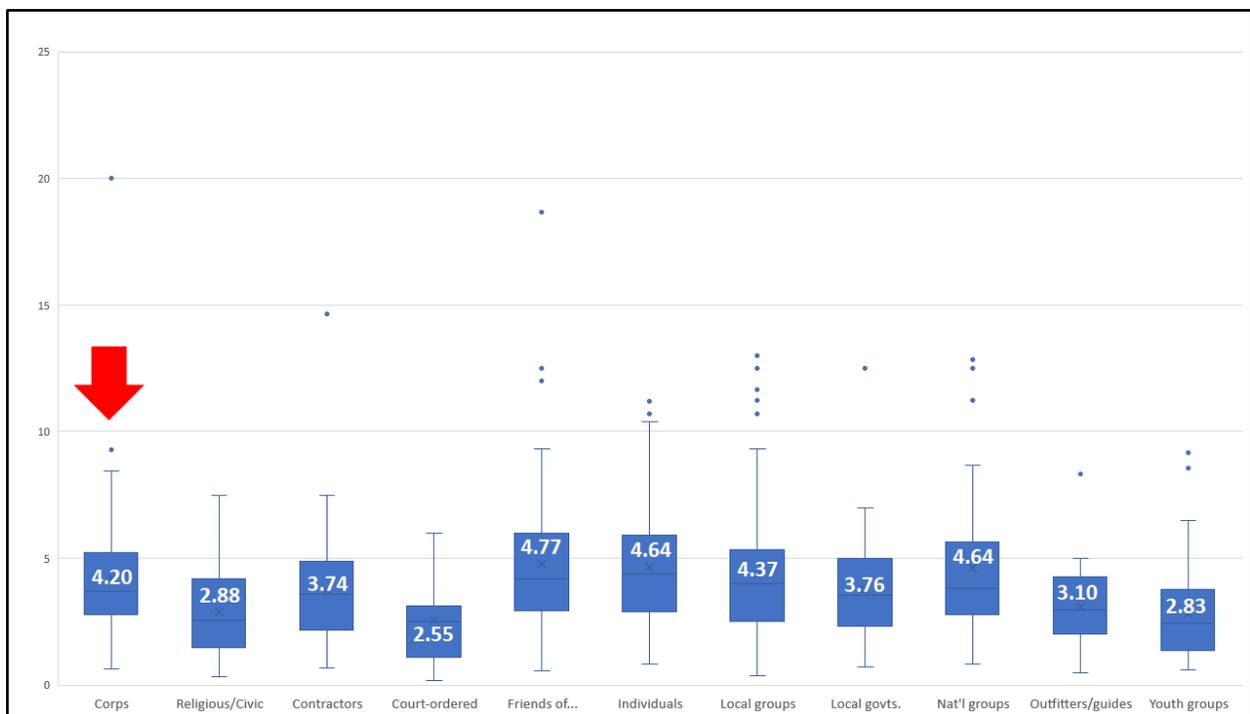


Figure 9. The outcomes of a cost-benefit analysis for various types of partners engaged by land management personnel.

**Corps are perceived as highly contributing to their hosting agency's goals, to perform high-quality work, and to require moderate resources or effort from agency hosts.**

...

**This results in an ideal cost-benefit ratio where costs (effort/resources) is lower and benefits (type and quality of work performed) is high.**

## “Undone Work”

Participants were next asked who would complete the work of their existing personnel and partners if these entities were no longer available to accomplish their currently assigned tasks. In many cases, it appears paid staff would be called upon to complete the work currently being performed by others. In other cases this work would simply go ‘undone’ (i.e., the participant reported that the work being performed by that partner would or could not be replaced and so would not be completed). It was reported that either paid personnel would be used to replace other paid personnel, Corps, contractors, individual volunteers, and the work of local groups or that the work of these groups would be left ‘undone’ through their absence.

**Table 7. Land management personnel’s perceptions of who would replace personnel or partners if they were no longer available to complete previously assigned work.**

If the entities below did not exist, the work they do would be completed by:	<b>Paid Staff</b> <i>% of sample (n)</i>	<b>Another Partner</b> <i>% of sample (n)</i>	<b>Would not be completed</b> <i>% of sample (n)</i>
Paid employees	35% (69)	11% (21)	58% (115)
Corps	35% (70)	23% (45)	33% (66)
Religious & civic groups	5% (10)	5% (9)	8% (16)
Contractors	30% (60)	12% (23)	28% (55)
Court ordered community service	4% (8)	4% (7)	6% (12)
Friends of... groups	18% (36)	7% (14)	27% (53)
Individuals	32% (63)	11% (22)	29% (57)
Local/regional groups	27% (54)	14% (27)	32% (64)
Local governments	9% (18)	8% (15)	9% (17)
National groups	5% (10)	9% (17)	14% (28)
Outfitters & guides	2% (3)	1% (2)	9% (18)
Youth groups	13% (26)	12% (23)	17% (34)

Note: respondents only reported how a partner would be replaced if they worked with that partner type over the past 12 months (so rows may not add to 100%) and respondents could select more than one option (i.e., would be replaced by paid employees AND other partners) therefore row totals may exceed 100%.

**Corps were the most “irreplaceable” partner type identified by respondents with 33% of the sample suggesting that work would not be completed if not performed by corps partners.**

## **Barriers to Corps Partnerships**

Finally, participants were able to provide comments about what they perceived to be barriers to engaging more fully with Corps partners. The comments generated by land management personnel in the sample population were analyzed and cataloged into four general categories: (1) funding; (2) communication; (3) agreement processes; and (4) training. The funding barrier was commonly described as a deficit from the agency/host side of the partnership. Personnel stated that they “*wish we had bigger budgets to use more crews*” and that they would like to “*increase our agency resource (e.g., staffing, funding) to support Corps efforts.*” Communication barriers included challenges in agency-corps communication and in agency-member recruitment. One participant stated that “*better communication between both parties [Corps and agency] related to expectations, training, and resources sharing*” was needed. Another commented that, “*there is always room for improving communication and outreach efforts to get more youth interested and engaged.*” Related to barriers to agency-corps communication, was a perceived barrier related to the agreements process, specifically, agency partners found the agreement process to be difficult to navigate and inefficient. Personnel stated that “*the Grants and Agreements portion of working with conservation corps has been a stumbling block*” and a need for “*increased efficiency in [the] agreement process.*” In terms of training barriers, personnel felt that the Corps themselves lacked the necessary training, for example: “*conservation corps need more training,*” and that there needed to be “*more consistency in training and implementation [of Corps],*” and, that they as agency hosts needed better training, specifically “*more training or information on how to hire a crew.*”

**Communication about how to set up agreements and recruit Corps members could be effective in overcoming perceived barriers to forming Corps partnerships in state parks and national forests.**

## Conclusions

In general, conservation corps were identified as important partners for land management agencies, primarily in tasks related to trails, invasive species, and fuels management. **Land management agencies who reported partnering with conservation corps were able to accomplish a significantly higher percentage of planned trail and fuel management work than agencies who did not partner with corps.** However, agencies partnering with corps reported accomplishing less percentage of invasive species management goals in comparison to non-partners. Further research may be needed to understand this relationship, but it may also identify an area of growth for corps or an area to increase communication related to goal setting and management methods in comparison to other types of partners.

In terms of contributions to partners' organizational capacity, land management personnel perceived corps partnerships has making a substantial contribution to resource enhancement. **Conservation corps' contribution to resource enhancement was rated the highest among all partner types.** Conservation corps were also perceived to make a moderate contribution to community engagement and considerable contribution to agency efficiency.

Land managers perceived the quality of work performed by conservation corps to be high (4 out of 5 stars), second only to local community groups. Overall, land managers reported that managing the work of conservation corps required considerable agency resources prior to work commencing and moderate resources on-site. However, in comparison to other partner types, the amount of agency resources required post-work was lowest for conservation corps. **Overall, corps partnerships were perceived as having an ideal cost-benefit ratio for land management agencies – where costs (efforts and resources) were low and benefits (type and quality of work performed) is high.** Corps were also perceived to be the most “irreplaceable” partner category, with 33% of the sample suggesting that planned work would not be completed if not performed by corps partners.

This preliminary report provides baseline evidence of positive impacts to land management partners by Conservation Corps in relation to other types of partner organizations. Corps were particularly valuable in assisting partners with achieving trail and fuel management goals leading to higher levels of resource enhancement in comparison to other partner types. Conservation corps were also seen as a valuable partner in terms of providing high quality work while requiring fewer agency resources to manage.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – References

Duerden, M. D., Edwards, M. B., Lizzo, R. (2015). Participant impact of the conservation corps experience. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership*, 7(1), 35-47.

## Appendix 2 – Survey Instrument

Public Lands & Partnerships - Personnel Perceptions

Start of Block: Intro

### **Public Lands & Partnerships - Survey of Personnel Perceptions**

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. The intent of this survey is to understand the perceptions of agency personnel who work to varying degrees (or not at all) with agency partners, such as Youth Corps, volunteers, and contractors, to complete trail and habitat tasks. As a public agency employee, your participation in this study will help improve the knowledge of how partnerships influence public land management agencies' ability to engage with nearby communities, complete resource & recreation management tasks, and run as efficiently as possible.

Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to exit the survey at any time. All data will be confidential; any potentially identifying information (agency name or location, or position title) will not be reported with your responses. There are no known risks for participating. An optional incentive (\$15 electronic Amazon gift card) is offered for those who complete the survey that will take you to a separate form (to protect anonymity of survey responses). If you elect to accept this incentive you will do so through a prompt at the end of the survey where you can provide an e-mail address to which the gift card will be delivered. Participation will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

For more information or questions please contact:

Mike Edwards, Assoc. Professor  
Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management  
North Carolina State University  
mbedwards@ncsu.edu

**Q1 In your current position, do you work for:**

- a State Park system (1)
- a National Forest system (2)
- Some other agency (not a state park or national forest) (3)

**Q2 What is your official position title?**

*(e.g., Partnership coordinator, Recreation Technician, Park Manager, etc.)*

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Page Break

Throughout this survey we would like you to consider each question in relation to your current position and the primary tasks you are involved with on a day-to-day basis. *Your ratings should reflect your feelings towards the scope of activities for which you are responsible.*

### **Perceptions of Capacity**

In this section we'd like you to consider, and rate, your capacity to achieve organizational goals related to community engagement, agency efficiency, and resource or recreation management and estimate your program's capacity (the scope for which you are responsible) to complete work targets. Specifically, we would like you to "grade" the extent to which you perceive you are able to accomplish programmatic goals related to (i) community engagement, (ii) resource enhancement, and (iii) the efficiency of your program or area of responsibility.

**Q3 Based on your experience, how well are you able to accomplish goals related to community engagement** within your program area or area of responsibility? (for example, connecting with community members, educating the public, or raising awareness about the agency)

***In answering these questions, please considering the following grading scale:***

*A: you are accomplishing the right amount of community engagement currently*

*B: you are accomplishing almost the right amount of community engagement*

*C: while your doing some community engagement, you believe there is room for improvement D: community engagement efforts are limited, there is great room for improvement*

*F: you do not currently feel that you are meeting your goals for community engagement*

*\*Grade slider\**

**Q54 Based on your experience, how well are you able to accomplish goals related to resource enhancement** within your program area or area of responsibility? (for example, building and maintaining trails or managing for invasive species or forest fuels)

***In answering these questions, please considering the following grading scale:***

*A: you are accomplishing the right amount of resource enhancement currently*

*B: you are accomplishing almost the right amount of resource enhancement*

*C: while your doing some resource enhancement, you believe there is room for improvement*

*D: resource enhancement efforts are limited, there is great room for improvement*

*F: you do not currently feel that you are meeting your goals for resource enhancement*

*\*Grade slider\**

**Q5 How efficient is your program or area of responsibility?** (for example, at reducing the cost of getting work done or effectively accomplishing goals with fewer resources)

***In answering these questions, please considering the following grading scale:***

*A: Extremely efficient*

*B: Very efficient*

*C: Moderately efficient*

*D: Slightly efficient*

*F: Not at all efficient*

*\*Grade slider\**

**Q6 Over the past 12 months, how many miles (best estimate) of trail managed by your program or area of responsibility were:**

*Please enter a number in each block below. If none, enter "0"*

Scheduled for repair, maintenance, or creation (i.e., new trails)

Actually repaired, improved, or created

Repaired, maintained, or created with the help of partners

**Q7 Over the past 12 months, how many acres (best estimate) of land managed by your program or area of responsibility were:**

*Please enter a number in each block below. If none, enter "0"*

Scheduled for invasive species maintenance/management

Actually maintained/managed for invasive species

Maintained/managed for invasive species with the help of partners

**Q8 Over the past 12 months, how many acres (best estimate) of land managed by your program area or area of responsibility were:**

*Please enter a number in each block below. If none, enter "0"*

Scheduled for maintenance/management for forest fuels

Actually maintained/managed for forest fuels

Maintained/managed for forest fuels with the help of partners

End of Block: Intro

Start of Block: Benefits & Quality

**Perceptions of Roles, Benefits & Quality**

In this section, we would like you to consider who is completing work in your program area and their roles, how they benefit your program/agency, and the quality of work they deliver.

**Q9 Over the past 12 months, who has completed work for your program area or area of responsibility related to:**

*Check all that apply.*

	TRAILS (1)	INVASIVE SPECIES MGMT. (2)	FUELS MGMT. (3)
Paid agency employees			
Conservation corps (e.g., SCA, AmeriCorps, Youth Conservation Corps, Job Corps, etc.)			
Religious or civic groups (churches, Rotary, Elks, etc.)			
Paid contractors/concessionaires			
Court-ordered community service/prisoners			
"Friends of..." group			
Individuals (campground hosts, volunteers)			
Local/regional groups (hiking, equestrian, biking, hunting clubs)			
Local governments			
National groups (IMBA, Sierra Club, etc.)			
Outfitters/guides			
Youth groups (4-H, Scouts, etc.)			

***Carry Forward Selected Choices from "Over the past 12 months, who has completed work for your program area or area of responsibility related to: Check all that apply."***

Q10 Below are categories of individuals, groups, and organizations that you identified as completing trail and habitat work for your program area. Please respond to the following sets of questions related to your perceptions of these individuals, groups, and organizations.

**To what extent have the partners you work with contributed to these three outcomes over the past 12 months?**

*Community Engagement: connecting with community members, educating the public, raising awareness*

*Agency Efficiency: reducing cost of getting work done, effectively accomplishing goals with fewer resources*

*Resource/Recreation Enhancement: effectively managing and maintaining habitats and trails, providing opportunities to visit, addressing maintenance backlogs*

*5 = Substantial Contribution, 4 = Considerable Contribution, 3 = Moderate Contribution, 2 = Little Contribution, 1 = No contribution*

	Community engagement	Agency efficiency	Recreation/resource enhancement
Paid agency employees			
Conservation corps (e.g., SCA, AmeriCorps, Youth Conservation Corps, Job Corps, etc.)			
Religious or civic groups (churches, Rotary, Elks, etc.)			
Paid contractors/concessionaires			
Court-ordered community service/prisoners			
"Friends of..." group			
Individuals (campground hosts, volunteers)			
Local/regional groups (hiking, equestrian, biking, hunting clubs)			
Local governments			
National groups (IMBA, Sierra Club, etc.)			
Outfitters/guides			
Youth groups (4-H, Scouts, etc.)			

***Carry Forward Selected Choices from "Over the past 12 months, who has completed work for your program area or area of responsibility related to: Check all that apply. "***

**Q11 Using the stars below, how would you rate the quality of work provided by the following entities over the past 12 months?**

*For example, 5 stars indicates the highest level of quality. Please note that you may assign half stars.*

- Paid agency employees
- Conservation corps (e.g., SCA, AmeriCorps, Youth Conservation Corps, Job Corps, etc.)
- Religious or civic groups (churches, Rotary, Elks, etc.)
- Paid contractors/concessionaires
- Court-ordered community service/prisoners
- "Friends of..." group
- Individuals (campground hosts, volunteers)
- Local/regional groups (hiking, equestrian, biking, hunting clubs)
- Local governments
- National groups (IMBA, Sierra Club, etc.)
- Outfitters/guides
- Youth groups (4-H, Scouts, etc.)

Page Break

**Carry Forward Selected Choices from "Over the past 12 months, who has completed work for your program area or area of responsibility related to: Check all that apply. "**

**Q12 Now, we would like you to consider: if, within the next year, the following individuals, groups, or organizations did not exist, who would complete those tasks they are currently performing?**

*Think about this generally, such as **who is most likely to** or **who would the majority of the time**. Choose the response(s) that best describes how the work these partnerships complete would be replaced.*

	Be completed by paid staff (1)	Be completed by another partner (2)	Not be completed (3)
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- Paid agency employees
- Conservation corps (e.g., SCA, AmeriCorps, Youth Conservation Corps, Job Corps, etc.)
- Religious or civic groups (churches, Rotary, Elks, etc.)
- Paid contractors/concessionaires
- Court-ordered community service/prisoners
- "Friends of..." group
- Individuals (campground hosts, volunteers)
- Local/regional groups (hiking, equestrian, biking, hunting clubs)
- Local governments
- National groups (IMBA, Sierra Club, etc.)
- Outfitters/guides
- Youth groups (4-H, Scouts, etc.)

Page Break

**Carry Forward Selected Choices from "Over the past 12 months, who has completed work for your program area or area of responsibility related to: Check all that apply. "**

**Q13 Over the past 12 months, how much agency resources (consider financial, human, and time resources) were required to provide training and/or oversight for the following individuals, groups, or organizations?**

*"Pre" work consists of completing preliminary paperwork, identifying work projects, and securing personnel/partners.*

*On-site work consists of the actual on-the-ground management of programs/services.*

*"Post" work consists of reporting requirements, evaluations, etc. that must be completed after the work is finished and/or on a regular (e.g., annual) basis.*

5 = Substantial Resources, 4 = Considerable Resources, 3 = Moderate Resources, 2 = Few Resources, 1 = No Resources

	"Pre" work					On-site work					"Post" work				
	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
											(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

Conservation corps (e.g., SCA, AmeriCorps, Youth Conservation Corps, Job Corps, etc.)

Religious or civic groups (churches, Rotary, Elks, etc.)

Paid contractors/concessionaires

Court-ordered community service/prisoners

"Friends of..." group

Individuals (campground hosts, volunteers)

Local/regional groups (hiking, equestrian, biking, hunting clubs)

Local governments

National groups (IMBA, Sierra Club, etc.)

Outfitters/guides

Youth groups (4-H, Scouts, etc.)

Page Break

End of Block: Benefits & Quality

Start of Block: Effort & Recognition

**Q14 In your opinion, how important are partnerships in providing the following benefits to your agency?**

Extremely important (1)	Very important (2)	Moderately important (3)	Slightly important (4)	Not at all important (5)	Not sure (6)
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**Community engagement** - connecting the agency to the community, serving as a type of PR, or raising awareness about the agency

**Agency efficiency** - increasing capacity and reducing the costs of getting work done

**Recreation and/or resource enhancement** - providing services that improve the recreation infrastructure and ecological integrity of the public land

**Q15 To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your administrative unit's (state park, ranger district) partnership approach?**

Strongly agree (13)	Agree (14)	Neutral (15)	Disagree (16)	Strongly disagree (17)
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We have more projects to do than our current available partners can handle.

We do not have enough partners to meet the work we need to accomplish.

We have access to many potential partners, but don't have time to solicit them.

We would benefit if there were one coordinating group who could facilitate our work with all other partners.

We find it more efficient to work with organized groups who bring more resources and skills to the table than individual volunteers or informal groups.

**Q16 Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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I work with partners to further my natural resource conservation efforts.

I work with partners to build trust and enhance community support of agency decisions.

The emphasis that agency leaders have placed on partnerships has influenced me to work with partners more.

I work with partners primarily to obtain the synergy (i.e., combination of skills and resources) needed to accomplish specific program tasks and projects.

Working with partners is an expected job responsibility.

End of Block: Effort & Recognition

Start of Block: CorpsSpecificQs

**Carry Forward Selected Answers from "Over the past 12 months, who has completed work for your program area or area of responsibility related to: Check all that apply. "**

**Q17 You indicated that you work with conservation corps, which corps specifically have you engaged with in relation to trails management *in the past 12 months*?**

---

Carry Forward Selected Answers from "Over the past 12 months, who has completed work for your program area or area of responsibility related to: Check all that apply. "

**Q18 Which corps specifically have you engaged with in relation to habitat management *in the past 12 months*?**

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**Q53 Earlier we asked you to report your best estimate of trail mileage and acres maintained for invasive species or forest fuels. Now, we would like you to consider how much (miles, acres) of this work was done with the help of the Conservation Corps that you have worked with over the past year.**

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Mileage/Acres estimate (1)

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Miles of trail repaired, maintained, or created with the help of Conservation Corps specifically  
Acres maintained/managed for invasive species with the help of Conservation Corps specifically  
Acres maintained/managed for forest fuels with the help of Conservation Corps specifically

Carry Forward Selected Answers from "Over the past 12 months, who has completed work for your program area or area of responsibility related to: Check all that apply. "

**Q19 Is there anything you'd like to add about the “value added” your agency gets by working with conservation corps?**

*By "value added" we want you to think about all aspects of work, including but not limited to your ability to meet programmatic goals and targets, as well as your aspects of job satisfaction.*

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Carry Forward Selected Answers from "Over the past 12 months, who has completed work for your program area or area of responsibility related to: Check all that apply. "

**Q52 Is there anything you'd like to add about potential improvements that could be made between your agency and the conservation corps?**

*Potential improvements could be communication, training, resources in-print or on-line, etc.*

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End of Block: CorpsSpecificQs

Start of Block: Demographics

Q21

**Demographic Items**

Your responses to the following items will allow us to make comparisons based on spatial, temporal, and demographic items.

Q22 **Gender:**

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

Q56 **In what ethnicity and race would you place yourself (check all that apply)?**

Ethnicity:

- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino

Q23 **Race:**

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Hispanic
- Some other race, ethnicity, or origin
- Prefer not to say

**Q24 Years with current agency:**

▼ Less than 1 year (1) ... More than 20 years (9)

**Q55 Years in current position:**

▼ Less than 1 year (1) ... More than 20 years (9)

**Q25 Postal code of work station:**

*Of the park, district, or forest office you typically work out of in your current position.*

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Page Break

Lastly, if you know of anyone else working in trail and habitat management at any state park or USDA Forest Service unit that may also want to participate in this survey opportunity please provide their email addresses below and we will follow up with them individually.

Thank you!

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We appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey. As a thank you, we are offering \$15 Amazon gift cards (electronic gifts cards with a redemption code sent directly to your email). If you are interested in receiving this incentive for your thoughts & time, answer yes below. You will be directed to a separate form for submitting your e-mail address (so that it is collected separately from your responses here).

Yes (4)

No (5)

End of Block: Demographics

