

# The U.S. Forest Service Job Corps 28 Civilian Conservation Centers

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**Abstract**—In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson laid out his plan for the Great Society. His vision for America was one in which all segments of society could participate equally. To this end, the Economic Opportunity Act, which created Job Corps, was passed. The Job Corps program provides economically disadvantaged youth, ages 16–24, with the academic, vocational, and social skills needed to pursue long-term, productive careers at 124 Job Corps Centers nationwide. Among these, 28 Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers (JCCCCs) are operated on public lands under an interagency agreement between the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service. Dating back to the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) of the 1930s, the Forest Service has a history of involvement with employment programs with a rich legacy of land stewardship. The Forest Service, which played a principle role in establishing and operating the depression era CCC, took a central role in designing the Job Corps program. JCCCCs are associated with national forests or grasslands and they span seven Forest Service regions, 22 national forests and grasslands and 18 states with a capacity to house, educate, and train over 6,200 enrollees. JCCCCs have a unique conservation mission and provide academic education and practical training in work-based learning to conserve, develop and manage, and enhance public natural resources and recreation areas, or to develop community projects in the public interest. The talents of JCCCC students are enlisted in a diverse array of Forest Service programs, although they are most widely known for their program contributions in urban forestry, hazardous fuels reduction, construction, and firefighting. Approximately 80% of all Job Corps students obtain jobs, enlist in the military, or go on to further education. JCCCCs conserve and develop human resources as well as the nation's abundant natural resources. Forest Service Job Corps is a flagship program in the agency's mission of "Caring for the Land and Serving People."

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## Introduction

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Since the founding of the Forest Service over a century ago, there has rarely been a time when the agency has not been involved with a jobs training program built on the idea of natural resource conservation. Job Corps, Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Accelerated Public Works Program (APW), Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) and Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) are just a few such Forest Service programs that serve people and natural resources alike.

The Job Corps program provides economically disadvantaged youth, ages 16–24, with the academic, vocational, and social skills needed to pursue long-term, productive careers. Today, there are 124 Job Corps Centers nationwide, the majority of which are operated by private contractors and non-profit organizations. Among these, 28 Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers (JCCCCs) are operated on public lands under an interagency agreement between the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service. The Forest Service operates 28 Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers (JCCCCs) that are associated with national forests or grasslands and span seven Forest Service regions, 22 national forests and grasslands and 18 states (table 1) with a capacity to house, educate, and train over 6,200 enrollees. JCCCCs provide academic education and practical training in work-based learning to conserve, develop, and manage public natural resources and recreation areas, or to develop community projects in the public interest. The talents of JCCCC students are enlisted in a diverse array of Forest Service programs, although they are most widely known for their program contributions in urban forestry, hazardous fuels reduction, construction, and firefighting. Forest Service Job Corps students have fought forest fires, planted trees and grass, improved wildlife habitat, and built or maintained recreation facilities and miles of hiking trails. JCCCCs conserve and develop human resources as well as the nation's abundant natural resources. The Forest Service Job Corps program is a flagship program in the agency's mission of "Caring for the Land and Serving People."

## Role of the Forest Service in Designing Job Corps

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The year 2009 marked the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of President Lyndon Johnson's special message to Congress proposing

**Table 1**—Forest Service Job Corps associated Forest chart.

<b>Civilian Conservation Center</b>	<b>National Forest/Grasslands</b>	<b>Forest Service Region</b>	<b>State</b>
Anaconda	Beaverhead-Deerlodge	1	Montana
Angell	Siuslaw	6	Oregon
Blackwell	Nicolet	9	Wisconsin
Boxelder	Black Hills	2	South Dakota
Cass	Ozark and St. Francis	8	Arkansas
Centennial	Boise	4	Idaho
Collbran	Grand Mesa, Uncompaghre and Gunnison	2	Colorado
Columbia Basin	Okanogan-Wenatchee	6	Washington
Curlew	Colville	6	Washington
Flatwoods	G. Washington & Jefferson	8	Virginia
Frenchburg	Daniel Boone	8	Kentucky
Fort Simcoe	Wenatchee	6	Washington
Golconda	Shawnee	9	Illinois
Great Onyx	Daniel Boone	8	Kentucky
Harpers Ferry	Monongahela	9	West Virginia
Jacobs Creek	Cherokee	8	Tennessee
Lyndon B. Johnson	Nantahala	8	North Carolina
Mingo	Mark Twain	9	Missouri
Oconaluftee	Nantahala	8	North Carolina
Ouachita	Ouachita	8	Arkansas
Pine Knot	Daniel Boone	8	Kentucky
Pine Ridge	Nebraska	2	Nebraska
Schenck	Pisgah	8	North Carolina
Timber Lake	Mount Hood	6	Oregon
Trapper Creek	Bitterroot	1	Montana
Treasure Lake	Cibola NF/ Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands	3	Oklahoma
Weber Basin	Uinta-Wasatch-Cache	4	Utah
Wolf Creek	Umpqua	6	Oregon
<b>28 Centers</b>	<b>22 Forests &amp; Grasslands</b>	<b>7 Regions</b>	<b>18 States</b>

“A Nationwide War on the Sources of Poverty.” To this end, the Economic Opportunity Act, which created Job Corps, was passed. Dating back to the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) of the 1930s, the Forest Service has a history of involvement with employment programs with a rich legacy of land stewardship. The Forest Service, which played a principle role in establishing and operating the depression era CCC, took a central role in designing the Job Corps program.

JCCCCs were intended to help solve two of the country’s most serious problems: unemployment and resource degradation. In 1964, almost 30 percent of the two million young people entering the nation’s workforce were school dropouts. Without training for employment, many undoubtedly would have ended up on public assistance or in the crowded justice system. Job Corps is as relevant today as it was in 1964. Currently, an estimated 30 percent of America’s youth do not graduate from high school and 40 percent of high school graduates are unprepared for work or higher education. The Forest Service is responsible for managing and protecting the National Forest System, which includes 155 national

forests and 20 national grasslands, totaling 193 million acres of land. Forest Service Job Corps was a new opportunity to conserve and develop human resources as well as the nation’s abundant natural resources. Students and graduates of the Forest Service JCCCCs are integral to the success of the agency’s mission of “Caring for the Land and Serving People.”

At its inception, Job Corps was designed exclusively for young men who needed to complete basic education and develop skills and work habits necessary to find and hold jobs in the mainstream of society. Upon enrolling in a JCCCC, youth were assigned to camps on national forests and other public lands to perform natural resource conservation work, including planting trees, installing water systems, building recreation facilities and small erosion control dams, constructing roads, trails and firebreaks, fighting wildfires, and much more. The JCCCCs continue the positive tradition of the depression-era CCC and reflect the continuing American belief in the beneficial effects of healthy outdoor work in a natural environment on youth raised in poverty.

An early JCCCC orientation guide, addressing “The Outdoor Environment” reflects this belief:

Working and living in the outdoors, close to nature, often brings a beneficial effect to the individual—in his attitude, outlook, and philosophy, even in his mental and physical health. . .people of all ages seek out nature and natural surroundings for change, refreshment, recreation, and meditation (USDI n.d., p. 13).

For the majority of Job Corps students, JCCCCs are their first exposure to the “great outdoors” of our nation’s forests and grasslands. Forest Service JCCCCs still incorporate a nature-based curriculum that builds self esteem through connection with the natural world, along with discipline to overcome life’s obstacles, critical thinking, problem solving and team building skills (Russell and others 2000). For example, at the Schenck JCCCC on the Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina, Job Corps students have improved the national forests of the Southern Appalachians with road and trail building, construction of recreational facilities, soil erosion control structures and tree planting. Students built both the ranger station and the visitors center in what is known as the “Cradle of Forestry.” The Schenck JCCCC forestry program prepares its students for careers in natural resources, providing basic concepts of timber, fish and wildlife, soil and water, recreation management, and environmental restoration.

Job Corps helped me develop into being a leader. I look forward to completing the Advanced Forestry Program. I want to work for the Forest Service and at the same time honor my Navajo identity and be a positive, constructive role-model for my people.

—Schenck JCCCC student, Advanced Forestry Program

## Forest Service Job Corps Today \_\_\_\_\_

The Forest Service has a strong commitment to making the Job Corps program an integral part of the core mission of the agency. Job Corps is a program of opportunity that incorporates environmental justice in its truest sense. JCCCC students are a diverse snapshot of our nation and reach across the spectrum of race, gender, and ethnicity. They are the citizens that are, all too often, missing from our national conversations about the environment.

Not only has Job Corps been an integral part of Forest Service history, it is an invaluable resource that has produced past and present Forest Service leaders, including district rangers, forest supervisors, and regional foresters. JCCCCs are an excellent opportunity for USDA employees to gain leadership skills, advance their careers and serve as mentors to help our nation’s young people. The Forest Service is facing critical shortages in workers. JCCCC students reflect our nation’s ethnic diversity, and recruitment of these students for permanent jobs strengthens the Forest Service in its mission to serve all Americans.

## Forest Service Job Corps Education and Training \_\_\_\_\_

One of America’s greatest challenges is youth who have dropped out of school with no opportunities to move into the workplace, military service, or institutions of higher learning. Job Corps’ education, training and individualized attention, discipline, and support in a residential setting provides structure and security that are often lacking in students’ home environments.

Every year, an additional 2.2 million youth leave school insufficiently prepared for economic independence. Their inability to participate in America’s economy makes these young men and women more likely to live in poverty, receive public assistance, be incarcerated, unhealthy, divorced, and/or single parents to the next generation of high school drop-outs (Bridgeland 2006). The substantial economic investment in Job Corps is recouped in the form of the conservation of public natural resources, construction of public facilities, reduced dependence on social welfare programs, and long-term career growth for Job Corps students. Today, unlike the all-male centers of the past, all JCCCCs are co-educational and offer non-traditional vocational training to females. The majority of JCCCC students come from low-income communities, both urban and rural, who are seeking pathways to prosperity.

After finishing high school I wanted to go to college. However, I was unable to attend due to lack of financial funding. . . I stumbled across an application for Job Corps. . . My experience with Job Corps has profoundly changed the course of my future.

—Blackwell and Schenck JCCCC graduate, Welding and Advanced Fire Management Training Program

The typical Job Corps student has not completed high school, reads slightly below the eighth grade level, is from an economically disadvantaged family, has never had a full-time job, and is between 17 and 19 years old. Thirty-two percent of all Job Corps students come from families on public assistance. Approximately 76% of JCCCC students are male and 32% of JCCCC students are African-American, 55% White, 8% Hispanic, 3% American Indian and 3% Asian Pacific Islander.

JCCCCs are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, with two-week training breaks twice each year. Job Corps is a self-paced program and lengths of stay vary. Students who have not succeeded in traditional academic settings benefit from Job Corps’ small class sizes and hands-on, self-paced approach. Students who meet the economic criteria and enroll may obtain a high school diploma or a general equivalency diploma (GED) and receive vocational skills training. Education departments at Job Corps centers offer a broad-based program providing training to students at all levels who are preparing to take the GED test. Subjects include reading, mathematics, writing skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, computer literacy, consumer education, work attitude, health, parenting, intergroup relations, English as a Second Language, and driver education.

The average length of stay is approximately 8 months for all students and approximately 12 months for graduates. Students may remain enrolled in Job Corps for up to 2 years, with an optional third year granted to students who qualify for advanced training. The length of time students are enrolled in Job Corps correlates with their post-program success. Students who remain enrolled longer are more likely to complete a vocational training program, attain a high school diploma or GED, and learn more employment skills. Those students who leave Job Corps prior to completion do so for a variety of reasons, including personal or family issues, an inability to adjust to Job Corps residential living, becoming homesick, or for medical or disciplinary reasons. Job Corps strictly enforces a zero tolerance policy for drugs, alcohol, and violence.

JCCCCs offer hands-on training in over 30 vocational trades, including cement masonry, welding, business technology, painting, carpentry, bricklaying, food service and culinary arts, wildland firefighting, and forestry (table 2).

**Table 2**—Current Vocational Training offered on Forest Service Civilian Conservation Centers.

✓ <b>Business Technology</b>	✦ Office Administration
✓ <b>Construction</b>	✦ Bricklaying
	✦ Carpentry
	✦ Cement Masonry
	✦ Construction Craft Laborer
	✦ Electrical
	✦ Facilities Maintenance
	✦ Floor Covering
	✦ Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning
	✦ Heavy Equipment Operations
	✦ Landscaping
	✦ Material Handler
	✦ Painting
	✦ Plastering
	✦ Plumbing
	✦ Welding
✓ <b>Culinary Arts</b>	
✓ <b>Environmental</b>	✦ Forestry Conservation & Firefighting
	✦ Advanced Forestry
	✦ Advanced Fire Management
	✦ Urban Forestry
✓ <b>Health Occupations</b>	✦ Nurse Assistant Home Health Aide
	✦ Pharmacy Technician
	✦ Medical Office Support
✓ <b>Information Technology</b>	✦ Computer Networking /CISCO
	✦ Computer Technology
✓ <b>Mechanical</b>	✦ Automotive Technology
	✦ Heavy Construction Equipment Mechanic
	✦ General Service Technology
	✦ Heavy Truck Driving
✓ <b>Security &amp; Protective Services</b>	

Every Job Corps student participates in work-based learning as part of their vocational training. JCCCCs have rigorous performance measures and accountability standards and centers are evaluated on criteria such as the number of students who obtain employment, and graduates' average starting wages. Compared to their peers, young people who attend Job Corps are less likely to be on public assistance and less likely to be involved in criminal activities. (Schochet and others 2001). During a typical stay in the Job Corps program, students improve their math skills by 2.4 grade levels while their reading skills improve by 2.6 grade levels. Approximately 80% of Job Corps graduates obtain jobs, enlist in the military or enroll in higher education. After completing their education and training, Job Corps graduates return to their communities as productive workers, consumers, community leaders, and entrepreneurs.

## Life at Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers

During a Job Corps student's first few weeks, they learn about life on-center and focus on personal responsibility, social skills, and career exploration. Job counseling departments provide both individual and group counseling to aid students in setting realistic goals, evaluating their attitudes and interests, and developing social skills and character traits important to the working world. A Career Development Period represents the bulk of time enrollees are on-center, during which students learn vocational, academic, and employability skills.

During my stay at Harpers Ferry JCCCC, I received my GED and class 7 forklift certifications. I achieved a TABE score of 614 in reading and 585 in math. . .

—Harpers Ferry JCCCC graduate, Brick and Block Masonry Training Program

Following graduation, in the Career Transition Period, center personnel work with Job Corps graduates for up to 12 months providing transitional services and follow-up support in areas such as finding housing, healthcare, and/or transportation to and from work.

Learning leadership, personal accountability, and responsibility are integrated into all JCCCC activities. Job Corps teaches students to be a part of, and contribute to, the communities in which they live through public service. Job Corps students lend their time and talents to local service projects, often in partnership with community based organizations such as the American Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity. Service-learning projects integrate Job Corps students' vocational and educational curricula with activities that allow students to put their training into practice. The millions of dollars of construction and rehabilitation projects that JCCCC students conduct on their centers, in their surrounding communities, and on national forests and grasslands help students make the link between academics, their vocational trade, and the environment around them. Job Corps students volunteer thousands of hours to help maintain the health and diversity of our national forests and grasslands. Students conduct work that enhances wildlife habitat, revitalizes wildfire-damaged landscapes, restores

watersheds, and improves recreational resources for the benefit of all Americans. For example, students from the Timber Lake JCCCC recently spent a day restoring a denuded riverbank adjacent to the Clackamas River on the Mt. Hood National Forest (fig. 1), and students from the Anaconda and Pine Knot JCCCCs participated in “Operation Reclaim” on the Shasta-Trinity and Six Rivers National Forests to clean up abandoned Drug Trafficking Organization marijuana sites that pose a public safety risk and directly harm the environment.

As first responders during local, state, and national disasters, JCCCC students also assist during unexpected emergencies, including those caused by wildfires, floods, hurricanes, and tornados.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in Little Rock, Arkansas, asked the Cass JCCCC Heavy Equipment trade to help with search and recovery in the Ozark and St. Francis National Forest.

I would have never thought that I would be in a position to help in something so important.

—Cass JCCCC student, Heavy Equipment Training Program

JCCCC students often work during their enrollment and after graduation in Forest Service programs such as forestry, hazardous fuels reduction, firefighting, and conservation restoration. Students work as dispatchers, computer data

entry clerks, technical specialists, heavy equipment operators, mechanics, drivers, and carpenters, all of which are critical components of modern resource management and restoration.

Traveling from forest to forest, my supervisors and instructors helped me understand what life was like in wildfire and prescribed fire and the purpose behind them. My instructors taught me . . . to develop professionalism during both work and off-work hours.

—Schenck JCCCC student, Advanced Fire Management Training Program

## Job Corps for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The Forest Service Job Corps program addresses two of the most important issues facing America: natural resources conservation and job skills training. A new “green” Job Corps curriculum will help train underserved youth for jobs in the emerging green economy and enhance the unique conservation mission of the JCCCCs. The JCCCCs are uniquely poised to become a foundation of America’s “Green Job Corps.” Their vocational trades are easily modified to integrate “green” skills. Most green jobs are traditional blue collar trade jobs—such as carpenters, welders, electricians, and plumbers—with a green adaptation to reduce consumption.

The new direction will promote public service, sustainable lifestyles, and vocational skills training that will enable Job



**Figure 1**—Timber Lake Job Corps JCCCC students help restore a denuded riverbank adjacent to the Clackamas River on the Mt. Hood National Forest (photo credit: Keith Riggs, USDA Forest Service Washington Office of Communications).

Corps students to compete for green jobs that will revitalize local economies in rural communities across America. The green curriculum will expand job opportunities through a new, energy-efficient focus in the traditional trades that will prepare Job Corps graduates to build green, energy efficient homes and renewable energy plants, enhance our natural resources and prepare students in numerous other ways to apply green skills to new and traditional vocations.

JCCCCs have the capacity and skills to operate as “mobile corps” and travel to remote locations and students experience work-based learning in real-time construction settings. JCCCCs have a proud history of erecting Forest Service structures. In northern Wisconsin, it is difficult to locate a ranger station or visitors center that was not built by the Blackwell JCCCC. Recent Job Corps projects include retrofitting the Challenge Visitor Center on the Plumas National Forest, refurbishing Adirondack shelters in the Cranberry Backcountry on the Monongahela National Forest, demolishing and rebuilding the Camino Real Ranger District office, and restoring Grey Towers, Gifford Pinchot’s ancestral home.

Within the last year, Job Corps students have worked with wildlife biologists in the Monongahela’s high-elevation red spruce forest to install hundreds of nest boxes to track the population of rare West Virginia northern flying squirrels, participated in a massive eradication of marijuana cultivation sites on the Shasta-Trinity and Six Rivers National Forests, and completed a streamside restoration project on the Clackamas River to enhance the spawning areas of native salmon on the Mt. Hood National Forest.

Future Forest Service projects range from forest and ecosystem activities to the rehabilitation and weatherization of 50-plus-year-old Forest Service facilities and developed recreation sites, hazardous fuels projects, and woody biomass conversion projects.

I take pleasure in talking about “green” living (sustainable operations), both because it interests me and because it is good for the environment. I helped Timber Lake JCCCC receive their “Green Team” award and the “Green Team Challenge” award from Mt. Hood National Forest in 2009.

—Timber Lake JCCCC student, Business Technology Training Program

Job Corps students are making our Forest Service facilities and operations sustainable, lowering its operating costs, reducing its carbon footprint, restoring terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, and training students with the necessary skills for green jobs. The Job Corps program is developing workers with the leading-edge technical and conservation skills that are needed to build a green economy while building themselves a more prosperous future.

## Conclusions

Forests and grasslands are a national treasure. JCCCCs are building a cadre of young people whose education and skills are being used in natural resource conservation projects that are restoring America’s national forests and grasslands. The Job Corps program helps ensure that none are left behind, and provides a solid foundation for economically disadvantaged youth to reach their potential and succeed both in their communities and careers. The work that occurs each and every day by Forest Service Job Corps students and staff showcases our nation’s wise and continuing investment in the conservation of America’s natural resources—not just our land, but our young people’s lives.

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*The content of this paper reflects the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the information presented herein.*

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