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The YCC Program...do youths benefit?

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A YCC enrollee conducts cabin restoration work in Crawford, Nebraska.

For decades, American youths have been attending outdoor summer programs sponsored by various organizations such as YMCA, YWCA, Outward Bound, church groups, and government agencies. The Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) has been a program of particular interest to several federal and state natural resource agencies.

YCC, created as a pilot program in 1970 by the U.S. Congress, focuses on:

- 1) accomplishing needed conservation work on public lands;
- 2) providing gainful employment during the summer months for youths aged 15 to 18 years; and
- 3) increasing the environmental understanding of these youths about our nation's natural, historic, and cultural resources, and the principles of wise resource management.

The YCC program is administered by the USDA Forest Service, and several natural resource bureaus within the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Because of its tremendous success and popularity during its first two years of operation, funding was increased, YCC was made a "permanent" program, and federal matching funds were provided to operate projects by state and local units of government on non-federal public lands. Enrollment and federal funding peaked in the late 1970's.

<u>Calendar Year</u>	<u>Number of Enrollees</u>	<u>Millions of Federal \$'s</u>
1971	2,676	2.5
1972	3,495	3.5
1973	3,510	3.5
1974	9,813	10.0
1975	13,984	13.2
1976	23,114	32.0
1977	37,381	60.0
1978	46,000	60.0
1979	39,495	60.0
1980	33,900	54.8
1981	17,368	26.0
1982	2,171	3.6
1983	6,438	10.0

From 1971 through 1981, participants were paid the minimum wage to spend 30 hours per week performing conservation work on public lands, and they contributed 10 hours per week for environmental education activities. (Most summer camps run for six or eight weeks.) During the early years of the program, camps were either residential (participants lived at camp five or seven days per week) or nonresidential (participants commuted daily from home). Today, most camps are nonresidential, and the youths are paid for 40 hours of work per week, about two of which are devoted to environmental education.

Early evaluations of the program's success

The 1970 enabling legislation required systematic evaluations to determine the effectiveness of the program during its pilot years. The summer 1971, 1972, and 1973, programs were evaluated by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (ISR). Dr. B.L. Driver, who worked as a member of this research effort and is now a researcher with the Rocky Mountain Station in Fort Collins, Colorado, says, "Those studies focused on the overall success of the program, how satisfied different types of enrollees were, which types achieved the greater gains in environmental awareness, and which types of camps and program operations were most effective."

The results of this research were credited with influencing the congressional decisions in 1972 and 1974 to expand the YCC and change its status from a pilot to a permanent program.



These workers are helping construct a hunter access parking lot in Nebraska.

