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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.

Calendar Year	Number of Enrollees	Millions of Federal \$'s
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.*



## Studies of possible long-term benefits

As YCC grew in size, program administrators became more interested in tracing the long-term benefits. For this reason, they decided, in 1978, to fund a 5-year program of research to evaluate possible long-term benefits of YCC participation. That research was conducted between 1978 and 1983 as a cooperative effort between the Rocky Mountain Station and Colorado State University, under Driver's supervision.

Before long-term benefits could be measured, it was necessary to first determine which types of benefits might possibly be related to YCC participation. This was accomplished by four separate studies:

- 1) A mail questionnaire survey was made of 581 YCC camp staff and 27 program administrators to obtain their perceptions of possible long-term benefits.
- 2) Other possible benefits were identified by a literature review of studies on the benefits of summer youth programs similar to YCC.
- 3) In addition, the literature in developmental psychology related to value and behavior changes in teenagers was reviewed to glean possible benefits related to social integration, career, orientation and similar processes.



*Planting alternate strips of browntop millet and sunflower seeds on the Tuskegee Ranger District, Alabama.*

- 4) These three efforts produced a long list of possible beneficial changes in the YCC enrollees' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior. The research team pared the list to about 50 possible benefits which most likely would be influenced by YCC participation. Questionnaires were developed to tap each of the remaining benefit themes and were included in a pilot study of 600 former enrollees and 600 parents of

former enrollees in the 1974 to 1977 YCC programs. They were asked to rate the degree to which they perceived YCC participation had influenced that change. The results showed that many benefits were positively attributed to the YCC program. In addition, over 97 percent of the former enrollees and parents responded that they liked the program, and over 90 percent reported a positive general opinion of it.

The results of these studies were then used as a basis for a more systematic study. That study consisted of mailing follow-up questionnaires to 1,000 randomly selected enrollees and 1,000 parents of enrollees in the 1979 program, and to a control group of 800 unsuccessful applicants to the 1979 program, and 800 "unsuccessful" parents of such. The parents were asked to respond with reference to their son or daughter who had been an enrollee in, or unsuccessful applicant to, the summer 1979 program.

Mailings were made at 9 months and again at 26 months after the end of that program to measure perceived beneficial changes in the enrollees' and unsuccessful applicants' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors.

The mail questionnaires included scales to measure 36 different benefits. In a separate study, enrollees and parents were not informed that the research was being done to evaluate the YCC program. This was to test for any "halo" effects (exaggerated positive responses) which might be caused by the positive attitudes most enrollees and parents held toward the program.

## What was found?

Responses to both questionnaires were good, with a 74 percent response rate for each. No halo effects were found, which increases confidence that the benefits reported were not exaggerated by the enrollees or parents.



The findings from the first questionnaire (9 months after the end of the 1979 program) showed that participants realized several of the 36 possible benefits. Most of them would be expected from the program. For example, the program placed youths from all socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds together to work and learn in a natural environment, with the objective of completing well-defined work goals through a group effort. Consequently, YCC participants learned more about conservation, environmental problems, and natural resource management than did the unsuccessful applicants in the control group. In addition, the enrollees scored higher on benefit scales related to learning to work more efficiently, getting involved with a group effort, and accepting and getting along with persons of other races. They also learned more about using handtools in a correct and safe manner, and developed more confidence in their ability to find and hold jobs.

Responses by parents of enrollees and unsuccessful applicants showed the same pattern of greater benefits for the enrollees. However, parents of those enrollees also reported additional benefits, such as increased natural resource ethics, planning and/or organizing work, work efficiency, motivation, willingness to help at school, and personal honesty.



*YCC assisted in a pheasant habitat project in Nebraska.*



The findings from the second administration of the questionnaire (26 months after the program ended) showed basically the same pattern in perceived benefits as the 9-month questionnaire did. However, further evidence of benefits was found on a set of questions concerned with respondents' hobbies and daily activities. Parents of enrollees reported that their youths were participating in sports, athletics, or exercising; in activities involving nature appreciation; in outdoor recreation activities; and in organizations concerned with environmental issues, with a significantly greater frequency than reported by parents of nonenrollees.

### Who benefitted how?

Respondents were categorized by their age, sex, ethnic background, family income, population of home community, and other characteristics. Then, tests were performed to discern differences between the enrollees and unsuccessful applicants within each of these categories. These analyses permitted conclusions to be drawn about what type of youth benefitted and in what ways.

The results are interesting. First, particular types of enrollees did benefit in different ways, compared to the same types of unsuccessful applicants. For example, female enrollees who came from cities with 50,000 or more population, reported considerably higher benefits related to interest in environmental problems, understanding of conservation, tool skills and safety, and willingness to help at school, than did their counterpart unsuccessful applicants.

Another example showed that white enrollees from the same size cities were more interested in school than unsuccessful white applicants.

Equally significant were the findings that the magnitude of difference between particular kinds of enrollees and unsuccessful applicants increased greatly over those found when comparisons were made overall for each of these two groups without differentiation by socioeconomic and other characteristics. For example, all of the differences in the overall mean scores were 0.6 or less (on a 7-point response format). However, many of the differences ranged from 0.7 to 1.1 when the subgroups of enrollees and unsuccessful applicants were compared.

Enrollees from residential camps were compared to those from non-residential camps to see if the benefits differed. They did; a statistically significant difference between these two types of enrollees was found on 12 of the 36 possible benefits. Most relate directly to what one would experience in a residential camp setting, such as pride in personal work, planning and organizing work, increased knowledge of tool skills and safety, motivation, healthy diet, and others.

Finally, analyses were made on the differences between different enrollee groups.

Results indicated that female enrollees showed higher interest in conservation than did male enrollees. Similar data showed that white enrollees showed higher tool skills and safety benefits than non-white enrollees, while non-whites showed slightly higher benefits for personal conservation action than did whites.

### Value of the findings

The size, funding, and overall administration of the YCC program has changed since the 1979 evaluation. Therefore, these findings cannot necessarily be generalized to the current program. Nevertheless, they are useful for several reasons:

1) they document the type and magnitude of benefits created and nurtured by the YCC program for over 10 years;

2) this documentation will be a useful point of reference, as other federal and state youth conservation work programs are being considered. One example is the recent proposal in the U.S. Congress to create a large American Conservation Corps (ACC). The Congressional Record documents that reference has already been made to the YCC long-term benefits research in support of the ACC;

3) the results showed clearly that enrollees having different socioeconomic and demographic characteristics received different types of benefits. This information will be useful in developing similar programs;

4) results of the YCC research have also been used to enhance inferences about the likely benefits of other youth programs such as private youth camps.

The YCC program has created support and enthusiasm in enrollees, parents of enrollees, YCC camp staff, and program administrators; it has been one of the most positively accepted federal programs. It is unlikely that all of its benefits will ever be measured. Nonetheless, research has shown considerable lasting benefits of many kinds for its young participants.

(The 1984 YCC program will operate only on Federal lands administered by the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Congress (P.L. 98-146) earmarked not less than \$10 million of other appropriations within the three agencies' budgets for high-priority YCC projects. No line item YCC funds were appropriated. Minimum funding levels are almost equal for each of the three agencies).