



Los Valles Youth Programs – Summer 2010 Report

Introduction/Summary

The Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) Los Valles Region partnered with local communities to engage over 100 youth in conservation programs during the summer of 2010. SCC Los Valles' youth programs provide 4-week service opportunities for high school and middle school students in five counties throughout South-Central Colorado. Participants gain valuable work and life skills while completing important community service and conservation projects on public lands. In 2010, SCC Los Valles youth crews completed 44 weeks of work which included: 10.6 miles of trail maintenance and construction; 153 bags of weeds and invasive species removed; and 883 bags of trash picked up. Crews also completed eight hours of education each week on a variety of local environmental topics.

In 2010 the SCC Los Valles youth programs budget exceeded \$200,000 and was supported by generous funding from the Xcel Energy Foundation, Conejos County, Costilla County, Saguache County, Chaffee County, the Town of Buena Vista, the Buena Vista School Dist., the Monarch Community Outreach program, Lake City DIRT, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, and the Corporation for National & Community Service.

Program Descriptions

Community Corps High School Program – 2010 marked the 6th year of SCC's Community Corps program in South Central Colorado. Four counties participated to help SCC engage 80 local high-school students between the ages of 14 and 18. Crews consisted of 10 crew members and 2 adult crew leaders. Each crew met daily, Monday through Friday, for four weeks to complete 32 hours of project work and eight hours of education each week. Participants were paid a wage of \$7.50/hour as well as a \$100 completion bonus for missing no more than two days of the program. The following counties partnered with SCC Los Valles to run Community Corps Programs in 2010: Conejos County (40 crew members); Costilla County (20 crew members); Chaffee County (10 crew members); and Saguache County (10 crew members).

Learn & Serve Middle School Program – After receiving a grant from the Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS), SCC launched its first Learn & Serve Summer of Service program for middle school students. Local youth entering 6th – 9th grade were eligible to



participate on 4-5 week day crews and complete a variety of environmental service-learning projects throughout their community. Participants were unpaid but, upon completion of 100 service hours, they did receive a \$500 education award from CNCS to use towards future academic endeavors. The Los Valles region piloted two Learn & Serve programs in 2010: one in Chaffee County (15 crew members); and one in Lake City/Hinsdale County (11 crew members). Crews were supervised by adult crew leaders as well as assistant youth crew leaders.

Program Dates

Crew Leader Training: June 1 – June 4

Session 1: June 7 – July 2 Session 2: July 5 – July 30

Los Valles * Four Corners * Sonoran Desert

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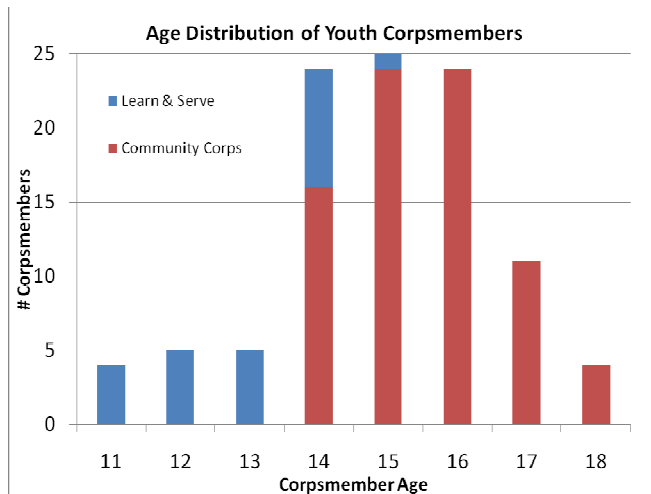
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Participants

Crew Members: The SCC Los Valles youth programs engaged a total of 107 corpsmembers. The overall male to female ratio among members was 1.74 : 1. Although SCC strives to maintain a 50/50 gender balance, several communities simply did not generate interest from enough female applicants to fill 50% of their crew member positions. Corpsmember age ranged from 11 through 18 with the average falling around 15-years-old. The Learn & Serve program allowed SCC to serve a whole new population of youth under the age of 14, as shown in Figure 1 below. SCC was also able to serve a number of disadvantaged youth: more than 50% of



participants qualified for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) based on annual household income. TANF eligible members received work-preparation kits which included back-packs, waterbottles, sunscreen & bug-spray.

Overall crew member retention and program completion was 93%. Behavioral issues led to three corpsmember terminations and several Learn & Serve members were unable to complete their full term of service.

Crew Leaders: A total of 16 crew leaders and assistants were engaged to supervise youth crews throughout the region. The crew member to leader ratio never exceeded 5 : 1 and was closer to 3 : 1 for Learn & Serve Crews. The smaller ratios helped ensure that crews had adequate supervision to remain safe on the project site and that corpsmembers received sufficient attention during teambuilding and education activities. Five leaders had previous experience with SCC programs and all had experience working with youth in some capacity. Fifty percent of the adult leaders were between the ages of 21 and 27 while the other 50% were age 30 or over. Three assistant crew leaders – local high school students between the ages of 16 and 18 – worked alongside the Learn & Serve Crews.

Youth Crew Leader Training

In 2010 SCC conducted its first youth crew leader training in Salida, CO. The four-day session was an information-intensive review of policies, procedures, risk management, crew dynamics and education expectations. Crew leaders participated in a number of group activities to build rapport with co-leaders, prepare education sessions and organize logistics. Ten of the 16 youth crew leaders attended the paid training and significant improvement in the clarity of expectations and quality of communication was apparent with the leaders who were present at training. In the future, SCC Los Valles hope to expand this training even further to help prepare youth crew leaders for Community Corps and Learn & Serve Programs.





Projects & Accomplishments

In total, the Los Valles youth crews completed over 15,000 hours of service work throughout five local communities. Approximately one-third of those hours were spent on trash pick up during which crews collected and disposed of 883 bags of garbage from county roads, campsites and other public recreation facilities. Crews also collected 153 bags of weeds from parks, trails and waterways and removed invasive species including: Canada thistle, Cheat Grass, and Black Henbane.



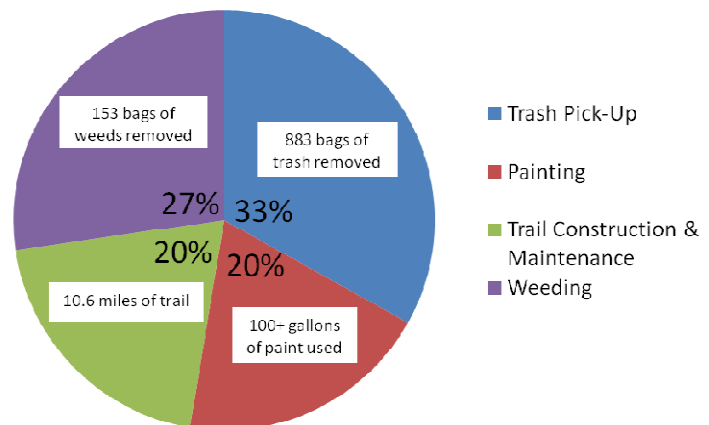
The Costilla and Conejos Community Corps both completed several community clean-up projects at local churches, cemeteries and municipal properties within their county. The Saguache Community Corps crews completed several landscaping and trail construction projects in the Town of Crestone and the Lake City Learn & Serve Crew joined volunteer groups to complete erosion control and trail maintenance projects throughout their community. This year the Conejos Community Corps partnered with Colorado

Preservation Inc.'s HistoriCorps program to complete a unique historic restoration project at the Forest Service's River Springs Work Force Center. The crew spent two weeks cleaning, repairing and painting the ranger dwelling and offices at River Springs which were originally built by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Crews also completed over 30 days of work on trail maintenance and construction projects which is nearly three times as much as in previous years. Most notably, the Chaffee County Learn & Serve and Community Corps crews partnered with the Salida Mountain Trails organization to complete several miles of new trail construction on hiking and mountain biking routes in the Arkansas Hills Trails system. These trails connect downtown Salida with an expansive network of recreational opportunities on surrounding BLM and Forest Service lands.

Project Type	Total
Hours of Work	15,488 Hours
Trash Pick-Up	51 Days
Trash Pick-Up	883 Bags
Painting	30 Days
Painting	106 Gallons
Painting	42 Bridges
Trail Construction & Maintenance	31 Days
Trail Construction & Maintenance	10.6 miles
Weeding	42 Days
Weeding	153 Bags

Youth Crew Project Type





Education and Corpsmember Development

Community Corps: Education and skill development is an integral part of the Community Corps program. Before joining a crew every corpsmember completes a short application and an in-person interview with an SCC recruiter to gain job skills and professional development. They experience the hiring process – often for the first time – complete tax forms, and are paid bi-weekly on an hourly wage. During the program corpsmembers gain a variety of skills including proper tool usage and conservation work skills as well as teamwork and leadership development.

High School crews also dedicate four days exclusively to education for a total of 32 service-learning hours during each session. A number of guest speakers, field trips and research opportunities gave crew members a chance to actively learn about a variety of topics including: community engagement, local history, plant ecology, local wildlife, watershed restoration, local recreation, and life skills. Field trips included visits to: Cottonwood Lake; St. Elmo; the Kerber Creek Mining Reclamation Area; the Shumei Center in Crestone; the Hooper Hot Springs; the Saguache Fire House; Great Sand Dunes National Park; the Alamosa Fish Hatchery; the Manassa Pioneer Festival; and the Costilla Biodiesel Plant.

Individual Crew Member evaluations were completed by Crew Leaders at the end of each session to assess Corpsmember Development in relation to SCC's crew member competencies which include: Communication, Organization, Professionalism, Teamwork, and Leadership.



Learn & Serve: The middle school program education curriculum was embedded more in the day-to-day activities and schedule of the Learn & Serve Crews. Corpsmembers generally participated in one to two hours of structured education each day and were also given time for reflection and journaling several times per week. Topics were often focused on the local ecology of the work place and included: species identification; habitat restoration; and energy, land and water conservation. Project and community partners were encouraged to help facilitate education topics and several guest speakers included representatives from the Forest Service, Salida Mountain Trails, Play Green Events, Trout Unlimited and others.

Learn & Serve Crew Leaders completed individual evaluation forms for each Crew Member on competencies including: Teamwork, Conflict Resolution, Communication, Self Confidence and Work Skills. Learn & Serve Crew Members also completed a Pre and Post-Program survey to self-evaluate qualities such as: community involvement; goal setting; teamwork; and environmental awareness. Overall, crew members rated themselves most highly on “accepting other for who they are” and corpsmembers showed positive changes on their degree of “caring for the environment” and “becoming a leader when necessary.”





Program & Project Partners

SCC worked closely with a number of local organizations to provide meaningful service and education opportunities for our youth crew members. Many thanks are due to the following program and project partners: Chaffee County (Bob Christiansen, County Administrator); the Town of Buena Vista (Roy Gertson, Public Works Dept.); the Buena Vista School District (Robert Crowther); Salida Parks, Open-Space & Trails (Donna Rhodes); Salida Mountain Trails (Rickie Redland, Larry Kovacic); Chaffee County Fairgrounds (Jim Mick); Neighbor to Neighbor (Connie Cole); Trout Unlimited; the Monarch Community Outreach program; Saguache County Road & Bridge Department (Elvie Samora); Costilla County Commissioners (Crestina Martinez); Conejos Department of Social Services (Maria Garcia, Matt Medina); Conejos County Road & Bridge Dept (Igles Lucero, Waldo Madrid); Valle del Sol Community Center (Julie Gomez); HistoriCorps (Jonas Landes); Lake City DIRT (Kristie Borchers); the Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS); and the Xcel Energy Foundation (Shanda Vargas, Kathy Worthington).

SCC would also like to thank the dedicated Crew Leaders and Corpsmembers whose commitment to service made all of these projects possible.

THANK YOU!

