Military Veterans in Natural Resources Management: The Veterans Fire Corps Model

9th University Education in Natural Resources Conference
Session: Natural Resources Student Pipeline

Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO
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Dr. William W. Doe III
CEO, Veterans Green Jobs
1895: Distribution of Regular Army Troops

NUMBER OF TROOPS IN GARRISON

- 1 to 500
- 501 to 1000+
1850 – 1900: Military Lands in the Civil/Indian Wars Era

1886-1916: The U.S. Cavalry patrolled and protected newly created National Parks, to include Yellowstone, Yosemite and Sequoia

Abram Wood
U.S. 4th Cavalry,
Superintendent, Yosemite NP

Troop F, U.S. 6th Cavalry
Yosemite NP
1909

U.S. 4th Cavalry Camp
Yosemite NP
1890’s

Fort Collins, CO: 1864-65

Photos from Fort Collins Local History Archive, http://history.fcgov.com/
Modern-day Military Training Activities
Military Landscapes - Western U.S.

- Fort Huachuca, AZ
- Fort Hunter Liggett, CA
- Fort Lewis, WA
- Fort Carson, CO
The Environmental Ecology of Military Lands

• Military lands in the U.S. represent diverse ecosystems from arid to tropical, with diverse flora and fauna, as well as vast cultural resources
• Proportionally, 80% of military land area is west of the Mississippi River
• Contiguous land areas range from thousands of acres to millions of acres – 30 million acres total
• Military land managers are responsible for natural and cultural resources management and stewardship using ecosystem management approaches
Veterans Green Jobs

Mission: To engage, transition and connect military veterans with meaningful employment opportunities that serve our communities and environment.

San Luis Valley Opns

Veterans Programs

Denver Opns

Serving Veterans – Serving Communities – Serving the Environment

4/6/12

501 (C)(3) Non-profit
The Veterans are coming ....back to our universities and our communities, as they have been coming for decades...full circle.

A New Generation of Veterans – Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom

A Legacy and Connection back to other Veterans – on campus and in the community
Veterans in Society

- Living Veterans (WWII – present):
  - Over 23 million
  - 40% Age 65 or older
  - 80% Caucasian

- Total # of service veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan:
  - Over 2 million
  - Approximately 48,000 wounded total from both conflicts

- Unemployment rates
  - Overall veteran population = 12% (comparable to overall pop.)
  - Veterans Ages 18-24 = 30% (higher than overall pop.)

- Homeless veterans – approximately 20% of total population

- Clinically diagnosed Post-traumatic stress syndrome – 13%
Who are student-veterans?

- Distinct from Army and Air Force ROTC cadets
- Distinct from Active-duty, Reserves and National Guard service members attending school
- Have completed military service and discharged from one of the 5 Branches of the Armed Forces: *Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, Navy*
- May or may not be receiving partial or full GI Bill benefits
The Post 9-11 GI Bill

Dollars Paid to Colleges and Universities Under Post-9/11 GI Bill, 2009-11 (Total $4.43-billion)

- Private nonprofit: $1.08-billion
- Public nonprofit: $1.68-billion
- Private for-profit: $1.65-billion

Note: Dollar amounts do not add up to total because of rounding.

Sources: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration

The Post 9-11 GI Bill

Institutions Enrolling Largest Number of Veterans Under Post-9/11 GI Bill, 2009-11

- U. of Phoenix (online) 11,614
- Ashford U. 6,463
- U. of Maryland University College 4,983
- American Public U. System 4,929
- American InterContinental U. 3,482
- Florida State College at Jacksonville 2,853
- Tidewater Community College 2,809
- Kaplan U. 2,736
- U. of Phoenix (San Diego) 2,667
- DeVry U. 2,623

Sources: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration

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Military-Veteran Friendly Campus

G. I. Jobs polled 7,000 colleges and universities nation-wide
  o Developed 2011 list of Military-Friendly Schools defined as those in the top 15% in the nation
  o View results at

http://www.militaryfriendlyschools.com/
What opportunities do S-V bring?

- Life experiences and combat experiences working 24/7 under harsh conditions
- Perspectives on other cultures
- Motivation to learn and get on with their lives
- Peer leadership skills
- Maturity and sense of purpose
- Sense of service to nation and to home communities
Veterans Fire Corps (VFC)

- VFC empowers Veterans to **transition** to civilian life by leveraging their leadership experience to meet pressing conservation needs on public lands.
- Veterans Fire Corps, a collaborative initiative of Veteran Green Jobs (VGJ) and existing Conservation Corps.
Service Transition

• Build beneficial habits

• Facilitate continued community service.

• Being part of something bigger than oneself creates a similar sense of commitment and engagement.

• Open pathways to permanent employment
VFC Pathways

• Many veterans seek positions outdoors, that provide structure, adventure and allows veterans to work with their hands.
• The NPS, USFS and BLM are ageing workforces that need new leaders
• Veterans are encouraged to enter higher education
Partnering with Conservation Corps
VGC Program Areas

200 Veterans/Year and Growing !!!!!

Corps Partners

Southwest Conservation Corps

Nevada Conservation Corps

California Conservation Corps

Student Conservation Association

Montana Conservation Corps

Rocky Mountain Youth Corps

Utah Conservation Corps

States

Colorado

California

New Mexico

Arizona

Nevada

Utah

Montana

Wyoming
“American forests, minerals, water, clean air and wildlife are natural resources of the citizens of the United States. Their protection is our nation’s preservation.”
Fire Mitigation

- Reduces danger of forest fires by cutting ladder fuels and creating fire breaks
- Veterans earn certification in chainsaw and fire fighting
- Allows them to become red carded to fight wild land fires
VGJ’s Role

• Work with new corps to start veteran programs
• Educate corps staff on veteran demographic
• Assist with outreach and recruitment of veterans
• Support veterans in the field with veteran issues and information on benefits
• Help veterans find jobs after the programs

• Work with federal agencies to fund additional projects
• Promote VFC programs online and in the media
Program Results

• 44 of 62 participants (70%) found related employment or are still engaged in the VFC program.

• 23 graduates secured positions in the USFS, NPS, BLM, CA State Parks and/or local fire departments.

• Overall: 230 Veterans employed (120 with SCC, 50 with CCC, 10 with SCA and 50 with other Corps).

• Approximately 50% of VFC graduates continuing in natural resources/wildfire field programs operating in 2011 in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Wyoming.

• 235 acres thinned, 1,519 slash piles created, 1,680 hours spent on prescribed burn assignments.
Funding

• Total federal investment (including crews for 2012 and 2013) to date of $5M, including approximately $4M USFS, $900K BLM and $100K NPS.

• The California legislature devoted $681K to support more crews in 2011.

• AmeriCorps provides Education Awards and some support to many of the VGC programs.

• The WalMart Foundation supported initial development of VGC in 2008 and 2009 through grants to VGJ.
National Awards and Recognition

• National Corpsmember of the Year Award. Mike Bremer, VFC graduate. The Corps Network. February 15, 2012

• National Project of the Year Award. The Corps Network. February 9, 2010.

• Partner of the Year Award. Regional Forester Honor Awards. US Forest Service Region 2. October 27, 2010.
Mike Bremer, US Army Infantry – OIF

2012 Conservation Corps member of the Year

"When I returned from Iraq with the Army Infantry, I felt like I lost all meaning and purpose in life and I had trouble finding meaningful work. My Corps experience gave me new purpose and a valuable new skillset. I received incredible training and experience alongside other veterans who had similar experiences – we were all looking for a new life after war.”
Major Press


• The Daily Courier. “Burning To Serve: Veterans get wildland fire training to help transition back to civilian life.”

• Fire Management Today. “Veterans Fire Corps Helps Vets Transition into the Civilian Workforce.” November 2011
VETERANS FIRE CORPS HELPS VETS TRANSITION INTO THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE

Amy Foss
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Harry Bruell, President and CEO, Southwest Conservation Corps (Durango, CO)
Questions & Discussion

WE WANT YOU
To Help Build a Green America

veteransgreenjobs.org