

THE VETERANS FIRE CORPS

THE VETERANS FIRE CORPS (VFC) is a collaborative initiative of Conservation Legacy, run in partnership with state and federal agencies including the National Park Service, the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and AmeriCorps. The VFC aims to engage recent era Veterans on priority hazardous fuels projects while developing the next generation of wildland firefighters.

The Veterans Fire Corps successfully addresses two needs— veterans looking for support in successfully transitioning from military to civilian life and land management agencies who need highly qualified, well trained employees and key wildfire remediation projects accomplished. VFC builds upon the knowledge, leadership experience and training of the women and men who served in the armed forces, refocusing their mission to protecting our public lands from the threat of wildfire.



OVERALL ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

93 Veterans Fire Corps members and leaders served

142 Miles of public land treated, improved, or maintained

10,083 Acres improved, including Rx burns

56,216 Project work hours completed

*Accomplishments listed to date; several crews are still completing 2018 service terms

IMPACT

Conservation Legacy programs have successfully engaged over 400 veterans through VFC programming since Southwest Conservation Corps supported the inaugural program in 2009.

Veterans joining the program receive a living stipend, training and support while gaining on the ground experience working on projects varying in length from twelve weeks to six months. VFC crews are mobilized on thinning projects, pile burning, prescribed burns, and, at times, initial fire attack. Federal agencies engage the VFC crews to complete hazardous fuels reduction projects as well as assist with prescribed burn assignments, direct fire response, deferred maintenance projects and disaster response.

The VFC focuses on transitioning graduates into employment as wildland firefighters, while encouraging outdoor stewardship and enabling veterans to gain the benefits of being outdoors for physical and mental health.

Project partners consistently express a high degree of satisfaction with the quality of work and productivity of Corps. A total of 99.6% of federal land management agency partners say they would work with Corps again.

Studies engaged with the effectiveness and return-on-investment from Veterans Fire Corps programs found the following outcomes:

88% of participants said the Veterans Fire Corps provided training and skills necessary for successful post program employment,

23% increase in sense of purpose amongst participants,

97% of Veterans Fire Corps members surveyed in 2017 indicated that the program assisted them in adjusting from military to civilian life, and

95% of Veterans Fire Corps members surveyed in 2017 indicated that the VFC prepared them for entry-level employment in wildland fire.



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VFC AND THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE | 2018

In 2018, Conservation Legacy programs placed 16 recent-era veteran crew members and crew leaders in positions on two crews with the Veterans Fire Corps through a pilot program with the National Park Service. Conservation Legacy has a long history of successful veteran engagement through programs that provide the on-the-job experience of project work on public lands, working tirelessly to support veterans in their transition into employment within the civilian sector. Continuing to evolve and adapt programming to serve the veteran population would not be possible without the partnership and support of the National Park Service.



2018 VFC NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PROJECT WORK

ARIZONA CONSERVATION CORPS

The inaugural Arizona Conservation Corps Veterans Fire Corps crew has been working to protect homes and reduce fuel load and the chances of catastrophic wildfire at National Park Service units in Arizona and Utah. The crew has been performing prescribed burns, introducing fire back into ecosystems where historically fire has been a natural occurrence. By reducing fuel loads and re-introducing low intensity fire, the crew is helping to protect life, property and the natural environment that we all enjoy. The crew will continue to work through the fall of 2018.

SOUTHWEST CONSERVATION CORPS

The Veterans Fire Corps crew of Southwest Conservation Corps has been working on fire/fuels mitigation projects that will contribute to wildland urban interface buffer zones between the National Park and private lands in order to reduce the potential spread of wildfire in the future. The crew has been working in National Park Service units in Colorado and New Mexico. As the crew moves further into their season they will continue working primarily on fire/fuels mitigation projects such as thinning and fire break creation, as well as assisting in prescription fire efforts to help reduce the chance of large fire events.



NPS PARKS SERVED:

Aztec Ruins National Monument
Bandelier National Monument
Bryce Canyon National Park
Chiricahua National Monument
Coronado National Monument
Mesa Verde National Park
Rocky Mountain National Park
Saguaro National Park
Tumacacori National Monument
Valles Caldera National Preserve



“I was immensely impressed with the crew’s positive attitude. They have displayed the hunger, drive, intelligence and openness for endless improvement; the basic ingredients of every great iconic firefighter.”

–Doug Watry, Fuels Specialist
Rocky Mountain National Park

This experience has been incredibly valuable for our VFC members. It has instilled a sense of purpose and camaraderie as well as built up the experience and understanding needed to move towards a career in wildfire. Veterans Fire Corps crews have historically provided a dedicated, effective and efficient work force mutually benefiting both participants and partners.

Conservation Legacy is extremely enthusiastic about the opportunity to grow its partnership with the National Park Service to expand opportunities for veterans to serve on public lands.

The support from the National Park Service and other partners in this effort have been remarkable. Conservation Legacy is humbled to continue to learn and grow together and to continue to provide capacity at the local level to engage veterans in an opportunity of continued service.

2018 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE VFC PROGRAM

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE: ARIZONA CONSERVATION CORPS



CALBERT TSO

"It feels good to put in some work now where I'm from, here in Arizona. It feels good to help people around me."

Through this job, I've met a lot of people. If I decide to go into a career in wildland fire, then these connections will help me out a lot. This job will help you get your foot in the door. I'm fortunate to have the fellow crew members that I have. We work really well together. We all clicked right away. Almost all of us are combat vets. We're all about the work, so there's no one that's slacking. We're all hardworking. There's never a dull moment. Every day is a good one. I'm fortunate to have the crew that I have. Traveling, getting to see new places—if you want that kind of experience this is the place to do it."

PETER BROGDON

"It's taken me a long time for me to find something like this. It's really awesome. I had a full time job before this. I was making good money, but I was so unhappy. Once I found this job, I didn't miss the other one."

I've gotten connections everywhere I've worked this season. At any given time, we can use them as references. And they know us, so if they're hiring, we will find out and we can apply for their jobs and they know who we are. It has established that rapport.

I'm doing this for my state, I'm doing it for my country. I'm serving all over again. I know there are a lot of veterans out there who are looking for something to put themselves into that means something."



MICHAEL FROGNER

"I had no idea the amount of jobs that exist outside or the amount of career paths that this job could lead to. It's definitely given me direction for my career and what I want to do with my life. For the last 11 months, I've made so many connections and networked with so many people that now, when I apply for jobs I have so many resources I can use. It's just been an amazing experience."

I would 100% recommend this experience. It's completely changed my life. Whether you want to get into fire or just want to get into a career field in the outdoors. So many people respect Arizona Conservation Corps and the work that we do. It looks great on a resume. It just opens so many doors."

JOSH MOORE

"I like being outside, I like the hard work, and I really wanted to get into fire, so this program has been the perfect opportunity."

This position with Arizona Conservation Corps has definitely solidified my desire to get into wildland fire. I'm trying to get on a hand crew and this was an opportunity to do the work and see what it was like, and see if I can keep up with it. I definitely can, so it's pushed me further to pursue a job in fire.

It's definitely helped me network. I'd absolutely recommend this experience to other vets. It adds a lot to your resume. You get a lot of experience with a variety of tools, and you get to meet a lot of professionals in the field so it's a great networking opportunity."

