

THE TRAIL AHEAD: INNOVATION IN THE CORPS MOVEMENT WITH **WYOMING WOMENS FIRE CORPS**



A Collaborative Wyoming BLM fire mitigation project by Southwest Conservation Corps and Montana Conservation Corps Crews

The Wyoming Womens Fire Corps Program is a unique opportunity to develop a collaborative solution to several needs. First and foremost, more women are needed in wildland firefighting. Only 11% of permanent wildland firefighting jobs in the USFS are held by women and BLM faces similar statistics. Wyoming and many other western states have large tracts of land that are potential habitat for endangered species. This particular project addressed sage grouse habitat that needs to be restored through the removal of encroaching conifers, which requires hours of chainsaw work on the ground with a hand crew—perfect physical training for a future wildland firefighter. Corps provide access for young adults interested in physical conservation work and are able to provide the basic training needed for them to be successful in future careers.

This project was new in that it was the first time MCC and SCC put together an all female crew with a set purpose. That purpose brought in applications at three for every slot within the short two week window it was posted. The project is incredibly replicable and relevant, and through feedback from partners and participants, we have already begun to make improvements for next year. This model could easily be adapted in many communities across the country, with various land management agencies, as we have seen from the interest from applicants.

The crew participated in orientation, S-130/190 and S-212 trainings and were dispatched on a 14-day fire assignment in California on the Orleans Complex. Most of their work has been fire fuels reduction in Wyoming, as well as some prescribed burning. Their season ran from

August to November, 2017, and they are earning 300-hour Ameri-Corps Education Awards.

Our organizations have strengthened relationships with communities in Wyoming. Our crews have increased their capacity to respond to wildland fire, complete prescribed burns and tackle a backlog of habitat improvement while training a new cadre of women for careers in wildland firefighting and land management agency jobs. MCC and SCC plan to continue this effort to support women in the northern Rockies with their efforts for getting into careers in wildland firefighting.



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CREW MEMBER AND PARTNER TESTIMONIAL:

"After this season I think I want to join a hand crew. I would really like to spend a few seasons in the fire world. I'm hoping that we can continue to get more women excited about fire and confident that it's actually something they can do."

"Shout out to all the Native women out there, you can do this—I say go for it, I'm having the time of my life."

"THE 16 OF US MAKE UP 90% OF THE WOMEN HERE. IT'S DEFINITELY EYE OPENING."

"I just really would like to continue my journey in the world of fire. I really enjoy it. The hard work and the reward that it brings me."

"I think this has been a really good educational opportunity and I've learned a lot about the fire world."

"It was a lot of different agencies—state, federal, the conservation corps—coming together to sponsor this. We needed rigs, tools, packs, training—everything, and there were a lot of people putting a lot of time in throughout the summer to make this possible."

"This is able to bring women from all over the country together to see that this is an opportunity."

"My favorite experience was coming up on a spot fire, getting to see the flame and kinda just goin' at it. It's a lot of hiking, it's a lot of dirty work."

"For women who are thinking maybe I can't do this, you totally can. You just have to have the determination and the willingness to put in a lot of hard work and sweat."

