



AmeriCorps Wildland Firefighter Training

The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy is a national collaborative effort to bring a broad cross-section of stakeholders together to address wildland fire management challenges. The Strategy directs wildland fire planning activities and has three primary goals: restore and maintain landscapes, develop Fire-Adapted Communities, and improve wildfire response.

Activity	Impact
# AmeriCorps members trained in wildland firefighting since 2007	410

AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) is a residential, national service program for men and women between the ages of 18-24. The program aims to build leadership skills and strengthen communities by partnering to achieve community-based service projects.

One skillset several AmeriCorps members are receiving at the Atlantic Region AmeriCorps campus (Baltimore, Maryland) is wildland firefighting training. The training provides valuable hands-on and team-building skills for volunteers while also fulfilling regional prescribed burn objectives and national wildfire needs. Since 2007, 410 AmeriCorps members have completed the program.

A 2013 Corps member, Erin Foley, shared, "Before my experience with the NCCC fire program, I knew little about prescribed burning as a form of land management."

AmeriCorps Wildland Fire Training

All national AmeriCorps members participate in a 10 month program, assisting various organizations accomplish their missions. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)-Region 5 manages both wildfire and prescribed fire to achieve their mission of reducing wildfire threats and improving wildfire-prone habitat. More often than not, the need for skilled firefighters outweighs the availability. For this reason, in 2007, the USFWS partnered with AmeriCorps to develop a wildland firefighter training program for Corps members.

All Atlantic Region Corps members are presented an informational session on the NCCC Wildfire Program. The selection process begins when a Corps member writes a letter expressing interest in being a firefighter. All interested members must then pass an Arduous Duty pack test (walking 3 miles with a 45 pound pack in 45 minutes or less). The approximately 30-35

Success stories highlight regional wildland fire accomplishments that support implementation of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy in the Southeast. The stories demonstrate how the Southeast is improving its "fire resiliency" through technology, education and outreach, forest management, collaboration, and more. Success stories also serve as a model for other communities to follow.

members who pass the test will go on to participate in a week-long training taught by USFWS, The Nature Conservancy, and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. The training includes lectures in the morning and field exercises in the afternoon. Many group exercises involve problem-solving wildland fire challenges. With successful completion of this training, Corps members receive their red card, or license to be on the fire line, and are deployed across the country as needed.

AmeriCorps Firefighters in Action

Following training, corps members are split into groups of eight, carrying out 6-8 week missions over the next 10 months of their service agreement. Typically, the first group of 8 is deployed to the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia to assist with spring prescribed burning across Virginia, Maryland, and New England. During the wildfire season later in the year, volunteers are deployed across the country. Occasionally, volunteers assist on large national fires while other volunteers participate in training opportunities. In 2016, seven Corps members were deployed on a 20-person handcrew to the Pioneer Fire in Idaho while others attended the Mid-Atlantic Wildfire Training Academy in Morgantown, West Virginia.

A 2016 AmeriCorps volunteer firefighter, George Tabet, describes his experience on the fireline:

“Wildland firefighting has been a thrilling opportunity to participate in something complex and worthwhile. It has been inspiring to work on fire lines with dedicated firefighters willing to put themselves in danger and be surrounded by people who aren’t afraid to work hard and get dirty.”

AmeriCorps members are shared among various agencies and non-profits that utilize prescribed fire, including the USFWS, The Nature Conservancy, the US Forest Service, state forestry agencies, and other non-profits such as the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests. The AmeriCorps firefighter training program provides a ready pool of available firefighters, enabling agencies and organizations to achieve burn objectives through increased firefighter capacity.

Building Future Job Skills

While deployed, Corps members are exposed to firefighting procedures utilized in the federal system. As a result, upon graduation, AmeriCorps members can apply for federal firefighting positions at the GS-3 or GS-4 level. Several graduates of the wildland fire training program continued a second year of service in AmeriCorps, serving as a team leader in the wildland fire program.

The Atlantic Region AmeriCorps campus remains in contact with thirty wildland fire program graduates, all of whom have chosen a career in



MidAtlantic Academy, June 2016. Credit: AmeriCorps



Mop-up on Pioneer wildfire, Idaho. Credit: Steve Hubner, US Fish and Wildlife Service



NCCC fire crew heading to Idaho. Credit: Steve Hubner, US Fish and Wildlife Service



NCCC fire crew on Pioneer wildfire, Idaho. Credit: Steve Hubner, US Fish and Wildlife Service

fire or natural resources following their AmeriCorps experience. The wildland fire program not only provided training for a career in natural resources, but also introduced young adults to the importance of caring for the natural environment.

“My experience with the NCCC fire program inspired me to pursue additional emergency response trainings. Following my experience with the NCCC fire program I became an EMT and received training as a fire 1 structural fire fighter, both of which I am able to use to volunteer and serve my community. Before NCCC I had never had the chance/ opportunity to discover a skillset within emergency response.” Erin Foley, 2013 Corps member.

“Wildland firefighting opened my eyes to new career opportunities that I had not been previously aware of. From environmental management to disaster response, wildland fire training gave me a breadth and depth of knowledge that I could not have gotten elsewhere and given me practical experience to apply to jobs in many different career areas. Wildland fire training showed me the practical side to land management and how the challenges of terrain and natural disaster can affect land management policies.” George Tabet, 2016 Corps member

“Fire training has had a huge influence on my career choices. When I went into Americorps I wanted to go into IT work or sound production for movies. Now I work for the National Park Service as their forestry technician.” Justin Brammer, 2012 Corps member.

This successful project supports two national goals of the Cohesive Strategy, improving wildfire response and maintaining and promoting resilient landscapes.



NCCC fire crew on a prescribed fire in Virginia. Credit: Steve Hubner, US Fish and Wildlife Service

Additional Resources: AmeriCorp YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2T_ooxo4IL4

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Partners: US Fish and Wildlife Service, AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps, Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, The Nature Conservancy, and other non-profits utilizing prescribed fire, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Department of Forestry, Old Dominion University, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Eastern Virginia Rivers National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Patuxent Research Refuge, Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests



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