



# AmeriCorps & Returning Veterans

## SPOTLIGHT ON VETERANS CONSERVATION CORPS



*William Allen convinced his mother to sign the age waiver allowing him to*

join the Marine Corps when he was 17. He served four years in Japan and California, teaching classes of up to 300 Marines how to survive a chemical attack. When he separated from the military in 2011, he found himself stuck cleaning cars, working in kitchens, and struggling to find a sense of purpose.

After a couple years, William enrolled in school. It was during a summer break in Washington that he had a realization. “While spending time hiking, camping and trail running, I discovered the outdoors wasn’t just a place I wanted to visit. I wanted a job where I would be outside in the woods every day.”

William eventually found an opportunity to learn wilderness firefighting skills serving as an AmeriCorps member with the Veterans Fire Corps (VFC), which is part of the Arizona Conservation Corps.



“This program has helped me find the sense of purpose I lost after exiting the Marine Corps; it’s given me the foot in the door I was looking for,” said William. “For vets who find themselves working jobs that don’t hold a candle to what they did when they were in the military, I’d say there’s a good chance this kind of work will provide the structure and sense of accomplishment that fills you with that pride again.”

AmeriCorps programs like the Veterans Fire Corps provide young adults and recent veterans with the opportunity to serve our country, advance their education, and obtain in-demand skills. Serving in crews or individual positions, AmeriCorps members spend up to a year performing meaningful projects that address conservation and infrastructure concerns, wildfires and natural disasters, outdoor recreation access, and a range of other issues. Through their service, they gain work experience building trails, conducting prescribed burns, managing habitats, helping disaster-stricken communities, and performing various other service-oriented tasks.

Veterans who serve through AmeriCorps also benefit communities and our public lands and waters. Programs partner with resource management agencies to complete improvement and backlogged maintenance projects in a timely and cost-effective manner. **A study commissioned by the National Park Service demonstrated the agency saved an average of 65 percent on project costs when partnering with conservation corps programs.**

AmeriCorps programs that engage veterans in conservation work are a win-win: They improve public lands and communities; they help state, local and federal governments save money on disaster response and infrastructure-related projects; and, most importantly, they promote healing and help veterans leverage their skills and connect to the places they fought to protect.