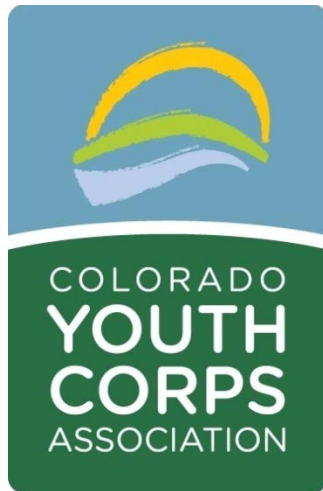


# American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Colorado State Forest Service Success Story

## High-Priority Forest Restoration and Fuels Mitigation Grant



The Colorado Youth Corps Association is a statewide coalition of 10 accredited youth conservation corps whose goal is to create productive and active citizens by offering participants environmental education, life skills and job-readiness training.

The Youth Corps traditionally works with federal land managers on trail and conservation projects, but in recent years, corps organizations in Colorado expanded their programs to include saw crews. This summer, five youth corps provided the labor for fuels mitigation projects in six Colorado State Parks. State parks and Colorado State Forest Service personnel provided technical expertise and project coordination, and FireReady, Inc., provided risk-management assessment services and technical expertise. The Colorado Youth Corps Association provides statewide grant management and coordination, and the Colorado State Forest Service ensures the projects meet grant expectations.

Work began in June at Pearl Lake State Park and Steamboat Lake State Park in Routt County – the first two projects to use a youth corps saw crew. Sylvan Lake State Park in Eagle County and the State Forest State Park in Jackson County followed in July. Each of these parks is dealing with the aftermath of the mountain pine beetle epidemic in lodgepole pine. Recently killed trees with reddish-brown needles are easily consumed by fire. Trees with a gray cast have a lower fire risk, but rot in the tree base and roots pose a safety risk to park visitors. Corpsmembers addressed both issues.



In Golden Gate Canyon State Park, just west of Golden, the mountain pine beetle population is expanding at a moderate rate and park personnel are taking a proactive stance towards treatment.

In Dolores County, the continuity of dense Gambel oak is a fire concern at Lone Mesa State Park. Corpsmembers removed oak adjacent to a fire access road.

Each youth conservation corps operates somewhat differently, but all corps members participating on saw crews are 18 to 25 years old and are trained to operate chainsaws. In addition to earning wages, corpsmembers can earn high school or college credits and an AmeriCorps Education Award to pay for college, trade school or student loans.



When the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps crew began work at Pearl Lake, only two of the 10 people knew each other. For the next three months, they worked in the campgrounds at Pearl Lake and Steamboat Lake State Parks. The crew often was in the limelight of park visitors who befriended them with cookies, extra provisions, kind words and letters. The crew cooked, ate and camped together. Weekends included grocery shopping and a refreshing shower. Some members recently graduated from college; Cameron has a degree in anthropology, and Kerry a degree in geography.

For Jeff, the best part of the job was cutting down trees; for Jon, it was meeting people; and for Jake, it was working outside.



The Western Colorado Conservation Corps, based in Grand Junction, had a 12-member crew that cut dead trees adjacent to a popular trail in Sylvan Lake State Park. The crew camped during the week, but went back to Grand Junction on weekends. After working in tamarisk for a month, the crew was excited to be in the forest.

“It’s really cool being the leader,” said Dennis Quinn, a seasoned sawyer with a geography degree. He discovers what motivates individual crew members and then tries to match the task to the person. “The challenging part of the job is keeping track of everyone,” Quinn said. Six of the crew members worked together last year, which made his job easier. “It’s a fun job.”



Jason “Willy” Gurath and Sean Flores were co-leaders for the Southwest Conservation Corps crew that worked in Lone Mesa State Park. Both leaders have chainsaw and conservation corps experience. Flores attended college, but was not enjoying what he was studying, so he took some time off and discovered that the outdoors was where he needed to be. “If work gets monotonous, I just look up at the scenery,” Flores said with a smile.

Gurath and Flores have complementary leadership styles. Together, they talked through issues and enjoyed their roles. “It’s working out great.” Both leaders discovered the SCC job opportunities while surfing the web.