



# United States Department of the Interior

## NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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Washington, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

[As amended by Memorandum dated March 3, 2025]

### DIRECTOR'S ORDER #26: YOUTH PROGRAMS

Approved:   
Director

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#### I. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this Director's Order is to:

- Provide direction to National Park Service personnel who work with youth programs such as the Youth Conservation Corps, Student Conservation Association, Job Corps, curriculum-based education programs such as Parks as Classrooms, and youth Volunteers-in Parks and the Public Land Corps.
- Provide guidance and support for parks to design local youth programs in partnership with other organizations.
- Provide encouragement to park managers and other NPS personnel to operate such programs and to engage in partnerships with state, local, and non-profit youth programs who operate such programs.

Youth programs have been an integral part of the NPS for over 40 years. The needs of youth are expected to become more complex, requiring greater creativity and collaboration between

government and others who have the capability to serve youth. The term “youth programs” covers a variety of park-based programs as well as formal Service-wide programs and partnerships between the NPS and non-profit organizations, businesses, and other government agencies.

Through youth programs, the Service has unique opportunities to help young Americans understand the importance of protecting and preserving the cultural and natural resources protected within the national park system. In addition, by reaching out to young people from different social and economic backgrounds, the Service provides special opportunities for young Americans who might not otherwise have the chance to visit or work in a park. For example, many of America’s youth who come from urban environments do not have access to parks located in remote rural areas. Thus, many youth programs have made it a priority to make parks more accessible to this segment of our population.

## **II. AUTHORITY TO ISSUE THIS DIRECTOR’S ORDER**

The authority to issue this Director’s Order is found in 16 USC 1 through 4 (the NPS Organic Act), and the delegations of authority contained in Part 245 of the Department of the Interior Manual.

## **III. YOUTH PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the National Park Service youth programs are to:

- Engage America’s youth in developing a life-long awareness of, and commitment to, our national parks.
- Involve youth in the protection of our natural and cultural resources through a variety of creative means and endeavors that enhance the relationship between the NPS and young Americans.
- Educate youth about the NPS mission through formal and informal methods.
- Train and prepare young people so that they may qualify for jobs and careers in the NPS.
- Acquaint youth with the NPS and prepare them for possible jobs and careers in the Service.
- Promote a variety of park visitors and staff, in terms of social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.
- Provide the NPS with valuable assistance and additional labor to address deferred maintenance and other essential park projects.

## **IV. PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS**

### **A. National Youth Programs**

The NPS works with more than 22 organizations to ensure that young people receive high quality supervised education when participating in programs in our national parks. Some of the most familiar programs are the Youth Conservation Corps, Student Conservation Association, Job Corps, conservation corps affiliated with the Public Lands Corps, the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts.

(1) **Youth Conservation Corps (YCC).** Public Law 93-408 (16 USC 1701-1706) established the YCC in 1971 as a summer program for young men and women from different social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. The program's objective was to place them on work crews in national forests, wildlife refuges, and national parks. To enroll in the YCC program, the participants must be between 15 and 18 years of age. Almost all YCC programs administered by the NPS are non-residential. Programs that are residential are responsible for housing, transportation, and all other expenses associated with programs' administration. Any costs incurred due to injury or illness of a Corps member while not on the job is the responsibility of the Corps member or their family. At present, the NPS is mandated by Congress to devote \$2 million of its annual budget to the YCC. Program information is available through the regional youth program coordinator and the youth programs website at [www.nps.gov/youthprograms/](http://www.nps.gov/youthprograms/), through the Youth Programs Bulletin Board on Lotus Notes; the Inside the NPS website, and the YCC handbook. The YCC handbook can be obtained from the regional Youth Programs Coordinator or the NPS Youth Programs program officer in Washington, DC.

(2) **Student Conservation Association (SCA).** The SCA and the NPS have worked together since 1957 to provide internships and volunteer opportunities in cultural and natural resource management and interpretation. Each year Congress directs the NPS to contribute a portion of its annual funds to the SCA and SCA volunteers provide one million hours of conservation service to our national parks. In this process, SCA works in collaboration with the NPS to place hundreds of high school and college students in hands-on conservation service positions throughout the park system. SCA does all of its hiring and sends interns to national parks so that the park and the intern benefit from the experience.

(3) **Job Corps.** The NPS and Job Corps, a Department of Labor program, have collaborated since the program was created as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, a component of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." The mission of Job Corps is to provide young adults (ages 16-24) with job training skills in areas such as carpentry, painting, building maintenance, landscaping and business clerical skills. Job Corps was created for the purpose of providing young adults with the opportunity to learn job, social, and important life skills so that upon graduation, they might enter the civilian world with the particular skills necessary to be productive members of society.

There are two ways that parks may utilize the Job Corps:

**a. Job Corps Centers.** There are 3 Job Corps Centers affiliated with national parks. Great Onyx is located in Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky, Oconaluftee is located in the Great Smoky Mountains in North Carolina, and Harpers Ferry is located next to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. The NPS manages all three Job Corps Centers under an interagency agreement with the Department of Labor. This interagency agreement merges the strong preservation mission of the NPS with the powerful job training objectives of Job Corps.

Youth employed at the Job Corps Centers are trained and perform work at the three affiliated parks. The Centers provide excellent job training for young people as well as opportunities that might lead to full time employment with the National Park

Service. After completing training at a Job Corps Center, graduates may be eligible for employment in parks through the student temporary employment program (STEP) or the student career employment program (SCEP). Both of these programs provide youth with an opportunity to seek out parks interested in hiring Job Corps Center graduates. Park personnel staff, superintendents and division chiefs should contact program staff at the Washington Office and use their assistance to recruit a Job Corps student or access the Job Corps Website at <https://www.jobcorps.gov/>.

b. In addition to the three Job Corps Centers, Job Corps offices are located in many communities. Job Corps may offer opportunities for parks to train or employ youth from their local area. Parks interested in working with local Job Corps offices should contact a Youth Programs Coordinator at the Washington Office or access the Job Corps website at <https://www.jobcorps.gov/>.

**(4) *Public Land Corps (PLC)*.** PLC was authorized by the National Community Service Trust Act of 1993, P.L. 103-82, and was funded for the First time in 1998 under the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. PLC was established to develop relationships between the NPS and non-profit organizations under which youth conservation crews would be trained and managed to perform work on deferred maintenance projects in national parks. All participating young adults must be between 16 and 25.

The PLC serves the following important societal objectives:

- Educating youth about the importance of preservation and conservation of public lands.
- Providing parks with excellent deferred maintenance assistance.
- Facilitating the relationship between the NPS and non-profit partners in the field of conservation.
- Assisting the NPS in its effort to reach out and attract a variety of audiences to the parks.

**(5) *Boy Scouts of America*.** The Boy Scouts of America and the NPS have been working together under a memorandum of understanding since 1971. The relationship has required that the NPS take an active role in representing itself at the Boy Scouts National Jamboree, an event that celebrates the accomplishments of scouts from throughout the nation, and which takes place every four years. At each Jamboree, the NPS sponsors a booth to promote the relationship between the two entities.

One NPS/Boy Scout activity of special note is called “Service to America.” It is a collaborative effort between the NPS, Eastern National and the Boy Scouts of America, under which Boy Scouts participate in service projects in the parks. In order for Boy Scouts to participate, troop leaders must access the website, [www.servicetoamerica.org](http://www.servicetoamerica.org). From that site they can select a park and register their troop for a project.

**(6) *Girl Scouts of the USA*.** The NPS and the Girl Scouts of the USA work in a collaborative effort to introduce young women to conservation opportunities, internships and outdoor recreation activities in national parks. The NPS is committed to helping foster the relationship between Girl Scouts and the parks through the “Linking Girls to the Land” program. The program is designed to introduce young women to conservation and

recreational opportunities in national parks so that they might gain a thorough understanding of how the NPS operates, the NPS mission, opportunities to pursue a career in the conservation field, and the merits of a career in public service. “Linking Girls to the Land” regional workshops take place at parks or other locations where NPS staff present information to scout leaders and parents on the different employment, internship and volunteer opportunities for young women.

The Girl Scouts also have a “Service to America” partnership with the NPS in the same manner as the Boy Scouts. Girl Scout troop leaders may seek out volunteer opportunities for their troop by using the Service to America website, [www.servicetoamerica.org](http://www.servicetoamerica.org). Girl Scout leaders must call the park and make arrangements for their troop to participate in a project.

## **B. Education Programs**

The NPS works with local schools and youth organizations to provide young people with formal and informal educational opportunities in our National Parks. Parks as Classrooms is one example of innovative education programs in the parks. Parks as Classrooms has been successful at providing students with curriculum-based educational programs that link park resources with school curriculum. For example, a colonial era historic site might form a Parks as Classrooms partnership with school districts teaching revolutionary war curriculum.

For more information on education programs, consult Director’s Order #6, the Youth Programs Division website at [www.nps.gov/youthprograms/](http://www.nps.gov/youthprograms/), or the Parks as Classrooms website at [www.nps.gov/interp/parkclass.html](http://www.nps.gov/interp/parkclass.html).

## **C. Partnerships and Funding**

The key to producing high quality youth programs in the National Park Service is funding and forming partnerships. The following information may be helpful in the process of obtaining funding and finding partner organizations to develop or implement youth programs.

**(1) *The National Association for Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC).*** Created in 1985, NASCC is a primary partner in the youth conservation field. NASCC’s mission is to create a clearinghouse of information and fundraising sources for youth programs. In addition, the Conservation Corps affiliated with NASCC spends a significant amount of time teaching young people skills such as discipline, confidence and teamwork. The skills acquired through their conservation corps experience can be applied to their lives long after their NASCC service has ended.

Many of the Conservation Corps affiliated with NASCC were created in early 1980’s when funding for the Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) and Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) was reduced. The founders and current employees of these corps apply many of the same concepts and philosophies of the original federally managed conservation corps in the day to day operations of their current programs. Aside from federal funding, corps receive their funding from state and local government, foundations and corporations.

Since its inception, NASCC has been responsible for helping to raise money, develop contacts in Congress, and assist other federal, state, and local civic agencies develop

strategies, attain funding and assist existing and emerging corps. Presently, there are over 120 NASCC-supported corps spread throughout 31 states that collaborate with public land agencies helping to preserve and maintain the integrity of our natural resources. NASCC may be contacted by calling them at 202-737-6272, accessing their website at [www.nascc.org](http://www.nascc.org) or through the WASO Youth Programs Division.

**(2) *Local and Regional Partnerships.*** Parks frequently develop youth programs locally. They may be based on informal agreements, volunteer agreements, or cooperative agreements with local schools, social service agencies, scout groups or other youth-focused organizations. Park youth programs can be simple such as hosting trash clean up day for a local Cub Scout troop, or more complex, such as a program involving a conservation corps in important restoration work in a park.

Parks have used many strategies to reach out to communities and initiate youth programs and partnerships. Some effective strategies are to:

- Develop relationships with local schools and non-profit organizations.
- Assign a staff person to develop and coordinate youth programs.
- Establish a Parks as Classrooms or another curriculum-based educational program with the local school district.
- Establish a resource management crew comprised of youth from surrounding communities, schools, and other appropriate sources.

**(3) *Funding.*** Funding is a primary concern for any park interested in hosting or supporting youth programs. Below are some examples funding sources.

- ***YCC.*** At present, the NPS is mandated by Congress to spend \$2 million of its appropriated budget for Youth Conservation Corps programs. Of this amount, each region is allocated a fixed dollar amount to be applied toward the Youth Conservation Corps programs within the region. It is the responsibility of the regional youth coordinator to contact all parks in their region when the funding is available and provide guidance on how to apply for it. Similar to PLC projects, parks interested in applying for YCC funds must submit their request through the Project Management Information System (PMIS). Program performance criteria and general guidelines on how to request information can be found in the comprehensive project call section on the NPS's budget web page.

It is the responsibility of the regional youth coordinator to ensure that park staff work closely with local schools and youth organizations to advertise YCC positions and recruit young adults to participate. This should be done the previous Fall to provide adequate time to generate a sufficient pool of applicants. Due to the popularity of the jobs, YCC participants are selected via a lottery process at the regional or park level.

- ***PLC Funding.*** Parks may apply for PLC projects through the annual comprehensive project call from the Washington Office. Park staff applies by using the PMIS. When the PMIS application process is completed, the proposals are reviewed at the regional and Washington levels for approval. To be considered, proposals must include a breakdown of the total cost of the project and meet other existing criteria established by the PLC review



board. The review board consists of representatives from the NPS, NASCC, and SCA. The non-profit partner must match funded PLC projects with their own funding or in-kind services. Furthermore, it is at the park's discretion whether to contribute in other ways, such as lending tools or providing additional technical assistance. Parks can apply for and use PLC funding to enhance their existing YCC program. However, PLC funding cannot be used as a substitute for the existing prorated share already set-aside for the YCC. For more information on PLC, contact the Youth Programs Division at 202-565-1079, or the regional youth program coordinator. For information on PMIS, contact the regional PMIS coordinator.

- ***Fee Demonstration.*** The NPS has agreed to set aside a percentage of revenue from the 20% Recreational Fee Demonstration Program funding source for PLC projects conducted in national parks. All PLC projects must feature a collaboration between a non-profit organization and the NPS. Each PLC project must be directly related to deferred maintenance projects in national parks. Parks that do not collect fees and parks that generate less than \$2 million annually are eligible to apply for the 20% funding for their park's respective PLC program.
- ***80% Fee Demonstration, 70% and 30% NPP revenue.*** Parks may also to use their 80% fee demonstration source, as well as the 70% revenue derived from their National Parks Pass Sales and the 30% Service-wide National Parks Pass fund, as funding sources.
- ***Fundraising and Donations.*** See Director's Order #21, Donations and Fundraising, which establishes a framework for NPS employees engaged in fundraising activities.
- ***Other sources.*** In general, other funding sources accessible through the PMIS system may be used, as long as the projects on which the youth work meet the funding source criteria.

## **V. RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **A. WASO Youth Programs Division**

The Youth Programs Division will:

- Manage, coordinate and evaluate the SCA, YCC, PLC and Job Corps programs.
- Serve as a clearinghouse of information and perform public relations for matters pertaining to NPS youth programs. Produce a website ([www.nps.gov/youthprograms/](http://www.nps.gov/youthprograms/)), an electronic bulletin board, a brochure and other publications highlighting the value of youth programs.
- Help connect NPS personnel with youth employment opportunities, new ideas, and partners that will assist the Service with current programs and in its efforts to establish new ones.
- Serve as a liaison and facilitate relationships between the parks, private corporations, and non-profit organizations that serve youth.
- Produce all manuals and brochures pertaining to information and technical guidance of youth programs conducted within the national park system.
- Produce all Management Policies, Director's Orders and reference manuals pertaining to NPS youth programs.

## **B. Regional Offices**

- Ensure that parks work with local schools and community organizations to recruit enrollees into the YCC program, and conduct a lottery by which the YCC enrollees are selected.
- Facilitate the relationships between parks, non-profit organizations and cooperating government agencies.
- Inform park managers about youth program operations and organizations seeking to partner with the NPS.
- Support park managers in their efforts to implement youth programs.
- Coordinate and assist in the preparation of park project submittals.
- Coordinate annual budget requests.
- Compile annual reports.
- Secure and track funding.
- Provide operational and administrative assistance to parks that require it.
- Encourage park managers to seek out partnerships with schools and school districts that serve varied segments of the American population.

## **C. Parks**

Individual parks are often in the best position to understand, solicit, and act upon the educational or other youth needs of youth in their surrounding community. Parks are responsible for the following:

- Appropriately publicize opportunities and accomplishments of youth programs in the park.
- Determine local community and park needs where youth education and training are concerned.
- Incorporate youth programs with park planning and resource protection goals.
- Provide volunteer or job opportunities to youth that will allow them to gain job skills and experience while teaching preservation values.
- Ensure that all applicable Department of Labor and OSHA Safety regulations and requirements are followed, all applicable age restrictions relating to the operation of machinery or equipment are enforced, and any required parental approvals are obtained.
- Document and properly evaluate youth programs. Keep accurate records of all work accomplished in accordance with program requirements.
- Supervise all youth programs taking place within the boundaries of their respective parks.
- Actively seek partnerships with friends groups, non-profit organizations and other organizations interested in collaborating to introduce youth to the national parks.
- Ensure that each young adult participating in a youth program is familiar with the rules and guidelines pertaining to behavior while working in a NPS youth program. Have an effective plan of response in case a young person is hurt or becomes ill while they are participating in a program. Inform parents and other entities that share responsibility for the youth's participation in the program about all matters pertaining to health coverage and Government liability.



## **VI. FURTHER REFERENCES**

### **A. Reference Manual 26**

Detailed procedures and direction on many of the topics in this Director's Order can be found in the Youth Programs Reference Manual #26.

### **B. Director's Orders**

The following Director's Orders will be particularly helpful in starting and managing youth programs in parks:

- #6: Interpretation and Education
- #7: Volunteers in Parks
- #20: Agreements
- #21: Donations and Fundraising
- #92: Human Resources

### **C. Websites**

The following websites provide more detailed information on specific programs. The Youth Programs site also includes links to websites that have been established at the regional and park levels.

<u><b>Name of Site</b></u>	<u><b>Site Address</b></u>
Youth Programs Division	<a href="http://www.nps.gov/youthprograms/">www.nps.gov/youthprograms/</a>
National Association of Service and Conservation Corps	<a href="http://www.nascc.org/">www.nascc.org/</a>
Boy Scouts of America	<a href="http://www.bsa.scouting.org/">http://www.bsa.scouting.org/</a>
Student Conservation Association	<a href="http://www.sca-inc.org/">http://www.sca-inc.org/</a>
Wonderful Outdoor World	<a href="http://www.livablecommunities.gov/toolsandresources/ic_wow.htm">http://www.livablecommunities.gov/toolsandresources/ic_wow.htm</a>
Girl Scouts of the USA	<a href="http://www.girlscouts.org/">http://www.girlscouts.org/</a>

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