

Kennedy School CC Constructs Two New Trail Bridges

Two makeshift trail bridges composed of boards, branches, and logs had collapsed into Crawfish Creek, making them look more like washed-out beaver dams than proper bridges. Enter the Kennedy School Conservation Corps, and within two days they had both been replaced by sturdy new structures.



Before: The old trail bridges had collapsed into their streambeds.

Kennedy High School, located in Cottage Grove, Oregon, is widely recognized for taking a hands-on approach to education. Their Conservation Corps is regularly called to work on a variety of projects in the Cottage Grove Ranger District of the Umpqua National Forest, both over the summer and on Fridays during the academic year. Funded in part by Title II of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, KCC is one of many programs designed to provide employment opportunities for local citizens while supporting projects that improve, repair, or restore facilities and resources on public lands.



After: A job well done. Kennedy School Conservation Corps crew members with a trail bridge they constructed. Back row, from left (standing on bridge): Casey Daytona Finch, Ashley Parks, Crew Leader and KCC Director Matt Hall, Marcus West, Chance Smith (in sunglasses). Front, from left (standing on streambed): James Rook (with shovel) and J.J. Peters.

Although there's a lot of superficial joking and teasing among the students, they also work very hard at their jobs. Crew member Casey Daytona Finch explained that as part of her test for acceptance into the program, she had to demonstrate her physical fitness by walking three miles in under 45 minutes. It's the same test that wildland firefighters take, except that KCC applicants are not required to carry a pack.

Casey displayed her newly acquired skills working with power tools by drilling screws to fasten wooden planks onto the new trail bridge support beams. Before getting into the KCC program, Casey said that she had been earning money as a waitress. She enjoys the opportunity to work outside in the forest for her new job, and says the hard labor "makes me feel like I really earned [my wages]."

Crew member J.J. Peters graduated from Kennedy High this year (the program is open to youth between the ages of 15 and 24). He has worked on the Conservation Corps for three years and wants to continue doing Forest Service work in the short term. He is saving the money he earns to go to college, and hopes to go to medical school and become a surgeon. Despite the banter between the crew members, J.J. obviously takes pride in their camaraderie and teamwork. "This is the best crew there is," he says.

Crew Leader and KCC Director Matt Hall enjoys mentoring the kids and helping them prepare for life after high school. “It’s very rewarding for me to know that the students I work with have learned about the forest and gained important experiences from these jobs. These projects provide the students with job experience, build their working skills, improve their confidence, and increase their knowledge of the forest and forestry careers.”

Whenever possible, Hall ties in the crew work he directs with practical lessons in things like forestry, power tool use, and work ethics. This educational component is in fact a structured part of the KCC curriculum. At the end of each work day, the crew gathers so members can share one thing they’ve learned and another they appreciate.



From left: Casey Daytona Finch, J.J. Peters, Crew Leader Matt Hall, Ashley Parks, and Recreation & Minerals Technician Melissa Swain of the Umpqua NF, who led the project.

Project Stats: Kennedy School CC

2012 T2 funding: \$32,000
 Total T2 funding: \$146,918
 Employs: Kennedy School CC
 Project type: Forest Health Improvement
 Partner: Oregon YCC
 Years awarded: 2009—2012

2012 projects:

- Trail Bridge Construction
- Trail Brushing and Tread Work
- Downed Tree Bucking
- Landslide Clearing
- Slash Piling
- Campground Maintenance
- Footbridge Maintenance
- Weed Pulling For Scotch Broom
- Greenhouse Weeding/Cleaning
- Roadside Noxious Weeds

The KCC actually operates two separate crew programs: The first runs on Fridays during the academic year; students who participate earn course credit and a \$375 scholarship for each trimester they complete. The other runs for six to eight weeks during the summer holidays and rewards students who participate with course credit and a minimum wage salary. In a town with few paying work opportunities for youth, this is a very desirable job, and students must maintain a 90% class attendance and complete homework assignments regularly in order to be eligible.

“The teachers use the attendance and assignment completion requirements to entice students to accomplish academic work and improve attendance,” explains Hall. “In the past these qualifications have encouraged some students to complete work necessary for their timely graduation from high school.” Though the paychecks may seem more appealing in the short term, the program also helps the young crew members earn something even more valuable: a diploma.

See <http://www.slideshare.net/USForestService/kennedy-school-youth-conservation-corps-at-the-umpqua-national-forest> for a time-lapse slideshow of the trail bridge project.

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 2012



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