



**MONTANA
CONSERVATION
CORPS**

Tools for Living. Experience for Life.

A Strategy to...

Ensure Relevance...

Cultivate Resilience...

Foster Wellbeing...

2024-2028



MONTANA CONSERVATION CORPS

A Strategy for Relevance, Resilience, and Wellbeing

BACKGROUND

Founded in 1990 with a mission to inspire young people through hands-on conservation service to be leaders, stewards of the land, and engaged citizens who improve their communities, MCC continues to deliver transformational experiences for young adults and teens while adding to an impressive legacy of conservation, including 25,000 miles of trails improved and over a million trees planted.



In 2023, MCC engaged 600 corps members in 400,000 hours of service learning. Their accomplishments are staggering! 2,400 miles of trails improved; 6,062 acres treated for noxious weeds; 971 acres of wildfire fuels reduction; 118 miles of fencing improved for wildlife. Yet, for all their productivity, our corps members' greatest achievement remains their personal story of development.

I learned to dig deep on long days that seemed to never end and how to use my voice in a way that empowers me and others. I learned how to build myself up to do challenging things and the importance of becoming an active citizen and a steward of the land and planet we all occupy and enjoy. But most importantly I learned that I still have much to learn.

SHIFTING TRENDS

2023 marked the final year of MCC's post-pandemic "Strategy for Recovery and Renewal." During these three years, and in the face of shifting labor markets, growing concerns about the climate crisis, and increasing anxiety and mental health needs for the younger generations, MCC demonstrated the value of its programs to provide meaningful work, a sense of belonging, and experiences that foster hope and a sense of purpose for emerging adults. Under the strategic plan, MCC implemented changes in its staffing structure and adopted technology solutions to strengthen efficiencies and build organizational capacity. MCC was able to develop a modest reserve fund while significantly boosting net assets for greater financial resiliency. Tribal partnerships were reestablished with the Blackfeet Nation to grow a Piikuni Lands Service Corps, and MCC relaunched its youth programs to engage Montana adolescents. Prolific federal funding from the Great American Outdoors Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and Inflation Reduction Act has created extensive project and program development opportunities.

Yet, while MCC has excelled in many ways in recent years, internal and external currents in societal and organizational conditions indicate a need to evolve and respond to changing circumstances. For example, soaring housing costs undermine member wellness and resilience, impacting our recruitment and retention. The impacts of drought and changing weather cycles demand innovative conservation solutions. Increasing wildfires and smoky air impact our members' health and safety. Shifting post-pandemic labor markets have likewise impacted recruitment and retention, and created new expectations from employers. The pervasive crisis in mental health among young people demands new strategies to support our staff and corps members. MCC is not immune from these trends, and must adapt its operations and programs to meet the needs of our participants, employees, and environment.

PRIORITIZING A CULTURE OF CARE

In 2023, the MCC Board of Directors initiated a planning process to assess current conditions, identify organizational priorities, and define strategies for ongoing success. Through this process, MCC articulated a guiding principle to inform decisions. To ensure the continuing vitality of the organization, MCC's culture and operations will prioritize the wellbeing of staff and members in service of our mission and conservation partners.

By centering the wellbeing of our most valuable resource – our people – MCC will strengthen our programmatic, operational, and financial resiliency, and ensure we remain relevant and profoundly impactful in the lives of our participants and for the needs of our conservation partners.



GROUNDING IN OUR HERITAGE AND VALUES

OUR VISION: Resilient and skilled leaders taking action for a better world.

OUR MISSION: Inspire young people through hands-on conservation service to be leaders, stewards of the land, and engaged citizens who improve their communities

OUR COMMUNITY:

- **We care** - At MCC, we center relationships and strive for excellence in building a community where everyone experiences safety, belonging, and validation. Authentic connection enables us to relate across differences, build empathy, cultivate wellbeing, and lean into challenges together.
- **We empower** - MCC instills hope and purpose in young people. MCC is a catalyst for personal development where corps members may cultivate self-efficacy and resilience, develop a growth mindset, and learn work and life skills that help them thrive and grow as leaders in all their communities.
- **We conserve** - Conservation connects us to the land and to the legacy of corps. We work to improve our lands and communities, conserving resilient landscapes that may adapt to changing conditions. We serve so that all people may positively experience these lands. Our place-based learning fosters a commitment to the land and to our communities.
- **We honor** - We acknowledge the many indigenous peoples with ties to the lands on which we serve, and we recognize their continued presence, sovereignty, and stewardship. We respect the history of and continued stewardship by all the people and agencies who live and work here.
- **We serve** - We believe in service as a strategy for personal development and community action. Through service, we foster compassion and learn skills for life. We are committed to serving our colleagues, corps members, project partners, and communities.
- **We lead** - We believe that anyone can be a leader and that leadership can be learned. It starts with self-knowledge, but encompasses the whole team. As leaders, we create positive change, regardless of our position of power.
- **We work for quality results** - We work hard and persevere, yet value a culture of well-being and balance. We proudly roll up our sleeves to get things done. We strive together for personal and organizational accomplishment, learning from mistakes and pushing through challenges.



OUR STRATEGY AND PRIORITIES

CORE STRATEGY: MCC will thrive and best serve our stakeholders and natural resources by cultivating a culture that prioritizes the wellbeing of our staff and corps members.

1. HEALTHY PEOPLE

MCC will reduce barriers to service for corps members, supporting their housing needs, mental health, and sense of belonging while offering transformative experiences that connect them to leading-edge conservation action and impact. We'll cultivate a culture of care that supports a healthy and resilient staff. We will center the wellness and ongoing professional and personal development of our employees so that they may thrive and meaningfully impact our corps members' lives.

OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Support basic needs and resources for corps members, including housing, stipends, gear
- 1.2 Sustain our staff with competitive pay, professional development, and leadership within MCC
- 1.3 Increase access to mental and physical health resources for staff and members
- 1.4 Foster organization-wide collaboration
- 1.5 Cultivate belonging and respect for all across our community

2. RIGHT-SIZE OPERATIONS

MCC's systems center people and contribute to a sense of community, while fostering efficiency and capacity, and promoting healthy relationships. Our operations enable top quality, sustainable programs and a resilient organization.

OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 Develop org. structures & staffing for high quality programs that reduce overwhelm
- 2.2 Embrace new technology and information systems to foster efficiency and collaboration
- 2.3 Youth programs are staffed and funded for sustainability, safety, quality and growth
- 2.4 Collaborations with tribal partners empower a native-led Indian Youth Service Corps
- 2.5 Plan for succession and transitions of key leadership positions

3. PHILANTHROPIC EXCELLENCE and COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

MCC will develop a lean and effective development team to raise funds for program priorities, and steward relations with stakeholders. MCC will cultivate community support and awareness, develop partnerships for leading-edge conservation, and sustain strong support from AmeriCorps.

OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 Create a lean but effective Development Team with expertise and capacity
- 3.2 Steward a cadre of core donors and grants to sustain \$1M+ in annual philanthropic support
- 3.3 Facilitate activities and local projects to enable stakeholder engagement and MCC visibility
- 3.4 Develop opportunities for leading edge conservation service while sustaining core partners
- 3.5 Sustain strong engagement with AmeriCorps

2024 ACTIONS

1. HEALTHY PEOPLE

- Reduce barriers to service for corps members and cultivate a culture of care for an energized and resilient staff

OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Support basic needs and resources for corps members, including housing, stipends, gear
- 1.2 Sustain our staff with competitive pay, professional development, & leadership within MCC
- 1.3 Increase access to mental and physical health resources for staff and members
- 1.4 Foster organization-wide collaboration, awareness, accountability and compassion
- 1.5 Cultivate belonging and respect for all across our community

2024 ACTIONS		LEAD
Increase staff pay and corps member stipends (targeting \$15 min. by '25)		Wendy and E-team
Enhance current housing offerings and pilot additional low cost solutions		Bobby, Bryan, RD's for local options
Streamline housing resource communications in onboarding, website		Caleb & Jessica
Explore feasibility of private/public land leases for MCC-managed basecamps		Jono
Maintain temporary relief fund and boot/gear fund resources		Brad
Upgrade Member Assistance Program to Premium offering		Wendy
Increase wellness education and resources		Bobby & Wellness Committee
Revise Compass to bolster staff agency and enhance relevance to member experience		Stacey and PM's
Launch Wellness and Culture Committee with across-MCC staff representation		Ashley & Bobby
Prioritize supervisor training and development		Stacey & PPP Team
Budget for professional development for all staff, and ensure time for training		Wendy, Stacey, and Managers
Facilitate opportunities for cross-team communication, socialization and learning		PPP Team
Enact wellness and dignity for all strategy for org culture, member experiences, community resources		Stacey & Culture Committee
Assess feasibility/safety of affinity crews with partners		Stacey & RD's
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS for 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Member retention rate is >92% 2) 85% of members indicate satisfaction with their housing situation 3) Annual Staff Survey: Net Promoter Score is >50% (excellent) 4) 80% of staff report satisfaction with their professional development 5) 90% of staff report fair rate of pay and equity within MCC (79% on '23 survey) 	

2. RIGHT-SIZE OPERATIONS

- Embrace systems to foster MCC community, facilitate efficiency, and enable high quality, sustainable programs.

OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 Develop org. structures & staffing for high quality programs that reduce overwhelm
- 2.2 Embrace new technology and information systems to foster efficiency and collaboration
- 2.3 Youth programs are staffed and funded for sustainability, safety, quality and growth
- 2.4 Collaborations with tribal partners empower a native-led Indian Youth Service Corps
- 2.5 Plan for succession and transitions of key leadership positions

ACTIONS		LEAD
Balance regional and IP program sizes around staffing capacity		Wendy and Stacey
Implement new receipt tracking systems		Tina & Angela
Deliver “same-size” youth program – focus on systems & capacity, vs growth		Ashley M.
Invest in Youth Program leadership (Dir. level position with 12-month YPM)		E-team, Ashley
Assess need and feasibility of satellite office in ID or WY		Bobby & RD’s
Cultivate leadership for ongoing development of Piikuni Lands Service Corps		Stacey & Joe
Improve infrastructure for staff training and onboarding		Aimee, Bobby, Stacey, Wendy
Investigate frameworks for staffing and org structure development (Mike K.)		Jono & E-team
Develop succession planning and transition guidance for senior-level positions		Jono
Define staffing, program and operations thresholds to work towards 2028 Right Size/MCC Community character goal		E-team
Research and select a Learning Management System to core training needs		Stacey, Wendy, Aimee
Revise onboarding matrix for new positions		Aimee & Hiring Supervisors
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS BY 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) 85% of staff agree they have a manageable and reasonable workload 2) Framework for Right Size/MCC Community Scale 3) Youth program is dependably funded and staffed, with resources to grow 4) MCC is supporting tribal partnerships on 3 reservations 5) 80% of new staff (<2 years) agree on the Staff Climate Survey that they were effectively oriented and supported during their onboarding with MCC. 	

3. PHILANTHROPIC EXCELLENCE AND COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

- Cultivate robust philanthropic support enhanced by community engagement.

OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 Create a lean but effective Fund Development Team with expertise and capacity
- 3.2 Steward a cadre of core donors and grants to sustain \$1M+ in annual philanthropic support
- 3.3 Facilitate activities and local projects to enable stakeholder engagement and MCC visibility
- 3.4 Develop opportunities for leading-edge conservation service while sustaining core partners
- 3.5 Sustain strong engagement with AmeriCorps

ACTIONS		LEAD
Hire and orient a new Director of Philanthropy		Jono
Adapt systems and staffing (communications, admin, data) to support fund development capacity		Jono and Wendy
Continue core development activities (Give Big, Great Fish, Annual Appeal, grants) to exceed \$500,000 minimum budget goal for grants and donations		Jono and DoP
Develop plan to increase fundraising goal by \$100K in 2025		New DoP
Pilot one new “community-based” project in at least one region		Jono and RD (Amanda)
Catalog drought mitigation and emerging needs conservation projects to establish baseline		Bobby and Bryan
Cultivate innovative partnerships for leading-edge projects and diverse member service opportunities – including BDA work, historic preservation, forest stewardship		Bobby, Bryan and RD’s
Recruit new board members from under-represented constituencies (Women, tribal, young adults, LGBTQ+, Missoula, Helena, philanthropy enablers)		Board Governance Comm. & Jono
Secure recompetite AmeriCorps grant with increased cost per member		Jono
Pilot AmeriCorps external impact evaluation to develop evidence for MCC impacts		Bobby
Engage with The Corps Network and Public Lands Service Coalition to guide creation and implementation of conservation strategies and national policy		Jono
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS by 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) MCC has a functioning, resilient, and sustainable fund development team raising \$1M+ for support of youth, tribal, and corps member resources 2) Board has 3+ members from each community with diverse representation 3) At least 1 high-profile community-based project in each region 4) 20%* increase in drought resiliency projects (*need to verify 2023 baseline) 5) Continued AmeriCorps funding as a vanguard program within the AmeriCorps Environmental Stewardship portfolio 	



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