

# Participant Stretch Routine and Fitness Plan

## OVERVIEW

Working a season with MCC can be physically and mentally challenging. You often work long hours in harsh conditions doing physically challenging manual labor.

To help with this, MCC has designed and implemented a stretch routine that every crew completes at the beginning of each workday. It has resulted in a large decrease in common injuries. The protocols are listed on the following pages. Please read through it carefully, as we do not want you doing these poses incorrectly. We will thoroughly go through this together at the beginning of the season as well.

**We recommend starting the stretching routine now.** It will start to build some of the physical fitness that is needed for your term of service, provide some structure to your day-to-day life, and provide mental clarity and dedicated time each day to check in with yourself.

**Additionally, we suggest that you begin to build your fitness before you arrive.** This will help you be more prepared, be more comfortable with the work, and limit injuries that can be caused by over-exertion.

- Any fitness activity that you can do before the season will help, whether that is just getting out for a hike, heading to the gym, doing bodyweight exercises at home, or just going for more walks during the day. One of the best ways to prepare is simply putting some weight in your backpack and hiking/walking regularly.
- If you are someone who needs a little more structure, we have found an exercise program that fits the type of work that we do. The program is called the *ELK FIT Program* and was originally created for backcountry hunters. The combination of hiking and manual labor that we perform is a very similar physical activity. It's a 12-week program that combines cardio and body weight exercises to prepare your body for the upcoming season. If you are less than 12 weeks away from the start of the program, that's okay! Getting started now will still help, and you can also shorten each phase by a week or so if needed. This is not necessary to work for MCC, but it is highly encouraged.

**If you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach out to your Program Manager for help, clarification, or guidance.**

## STRETCH PROTOCOL

The morning stretch routine that MCC members and staff follow has been developed by professionals who specialize in movement science. The sequence of movements was designed to warm up specific areas of the body that are most at risk for injury. Research supports that an appropriate, specific warm-up prior to labor-intensive work decreases the incidence of work-related injuries and decreases the cost associated with lost work time. Injury prevention is our goal and after one year of implementing this stretching routine MCC reported a ~40% reduction in overall work-related injuries compared to the previous year.

While the flow of this routine incorporates yoga poses, it is not intended to be a yoga practice nor does it follow a specific lineage. These stretches were picked because they benefit the muscles we use. If there are other stretches that individuals prefer to perform (“I like this flow better than the one MCC asks us to do”), there is ample time before or after the work day to perform additional stretches or a yoga practice outside of the established stretch circle. Modifications are provided for more difficult stretches but otherwise, alterations to the routine are discouraged.

### **Dynamic Warm Ups: Complete prior to Dynamic Stretching, on “Partner Time”**

- All the Dynamic Warm-Ups should be completed within 5 minutes.
- Dynamic Warm-Ups do not need to be completed “fast”. The slower they are completed, the better form used, and the better the “wake up”.
- Dynamic Warm-Ups must begin with jumping up and down, loosely, for 30 seconds.
- There are eight required dynamic warm-up moves. The eight dynamic warm-ups may be completed in any sequence, but you must complete them all, as they are designed to wake-up different areas of the body.
- Each exercise should be conducted for 30 seconds total, rotating between extremities as needed.

### **Dynamic Stretching: Complete immediately after Dynamic Warm-Ups, on “Partner Time”**

Follow the flow exactly as written. Utilize position modifications provided for stretches that exceed your ability or cause discomfort to joints. If you find yourself struggling to properly obtain one of the stretches, reference the middle column for additional cues. Do your best to maintain a neutral spine, engage the correct stabilizing muscles, and focus on your breath during the stretches. Mindfulness is a key component to completing the stretches correctly.

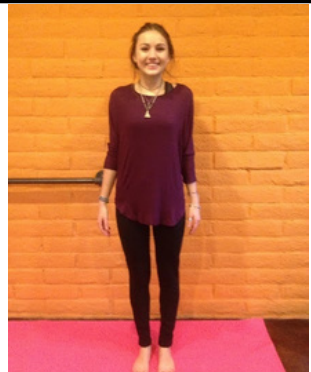
## MORNING STRETCH ROUTINE

Practice this routine at home to prepare your body and be ready for your first hitch!  
Remember: Accuracy over speed. Slower is more effective in waking up the body.






### Dynamic Warmup:

1. Begin by jumping up & down to loosen your body for 30 seconds.
2. Then, do the following dynamic warm-ups for 30 seconds for each move. Switch extremities where necessary. Complete all moves within 5 minutes.
  - a. Hackysacks
  - b. Butt Kicks (don't let back arch or ribs flare)
  - c. Leg Swings, Forward & Back (practice leading w/ heel, then leading with toe)
  - d. Leg Swings Side to Side
  - e. Hip Circles (switch up directions)
  - f. High Knees (don't let your back round)
  - g. Arm Crosses (don't let ribs flare too much)
  - h. Shoulders Swings (palms back)






**Dynamic Stretching:** Do the stretches below for 20 minutes.

Stretch	Intention and Cues	Image
1. Jump & Land Naturally	Indicate the beginning of focused stretching. Notice how you land and what needs to shift to attain Mountain Pose.	
2. Mountain Pose Three Breaths/30 Seconds Total	Initiate 3-4 breathe cycles to establish crew timing. Distribute weight evenly on the ground, find a neutral spine, engage the pelvic floor, and make yourself taller. Palms should be open, facing forward. Complete a body scan to assess how you feel.	

# MONTANA CONSERVATION CORPS

Stretch	Intention and Cues	Image
<p align="center"><b>Upper Extremity Nerve Flossing:</b></p> <p>Stretches 3-7 present a nerve flossing flow. There are five positions. Move between each position using your breathing to guide you. Keep a neutral spine, correct bracing sequence, and breathing in all poses. Complete a total of three circuits.</p>		
3. Prayer Hands: exhale	Should feel in wrists, forearms, hands, and shoulders. Keep shoulders relaxed. Elevate elbows and spread fingers to enhance stretch. Round your spine and bow down to your hands for one full breath.	
4. Shoulder Stretch: inhale	Should feel in your shoulders, not your back. Keep shoulders relaxed, away from the ears, elbows can slightly bend, keep chin parallel to the ground.	
5. Nerve Floss (Median Nerve Glide): exhale	Exhale as you press palms away from torso, straight elbows, finger tips up. Shoulders relaxed.	
6. Nerve Floss( Radial Nerve Glide): continue to exhale	Tuck your thumb into your palm then roll each finger over it to make a fist, roll palms down.	
7. Chest Stretch: inhale	Should feel in your chest (pectorals), not your arms. Stay in neutral spine to feel this opening up your chest. You should not feel pain in your lower back. If you do, reestablish a neutral spine.	

## MONTANA CONSERVATION CORPS

Stretch	Intention and Cues	Image
8. Forward Fold for three breaths/20 seconds total	Should feel in your hamstrings, not your back. Keep a neutral spine as you bend forward. Lead with the chest and hinge at the waist. You can modify it by bending knees or placing your hands on your legs.	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Plank/Up Dog/Down Dog Flow:</b></p> <p>Stretches 9-11 represent a “flow”. There are three positions, held for three breaths each, and the cycle is repeated three times. Go at your own speed while maintaining a three-breath cycle that is comfortable for you. Assume child’s pose when you’re done and wait for everyone to finish the flow.</p>		
9. Plank for three breaths/20 seconds total	Should feel in your core, not your lower back. Focus on neutral spine, correct bracing sequence, and making yourself taller/longer. If you cannot maintain these principles and breathe easily, perform the move on your knees. Focus on form and breath	
10. Up Dog for three breaths/20 seconds total	This is a gentle backbend, using your arms for support. Keep arms aligned with shoulders. Move slowly to feel each vertebra versus hinging at one segment. Picture a headlamp on your chest that you are trying to shine out in front of you. Keep legs engaged, squeeze glutes, knees lifted off the ground from quad engagement.	
11. Down Dog for three breaths/30 seconds total	Should be felt in your hamstrings, calves, and shoulders. Shift weight backward, leading with butt, and keep knees slightly bent to achieve desired results. The goal is a straight back and a neutral spine. You may straighten your legs and drop your heels as your hamstrings lengthen.	
12. Child’s Pose	Assume only after completing three cycles of Plank/Up Dog/Down Dog. Ok to have knees wide. Gently stretches spine back, hips, and quads.	

# MONTANA CONSERVATION CORPS

Stretch	Intention and Cues	Image
8. Forward Fold for three breaths/20 seconds total	Should feel in your hamstrings, not your back. Keep a neutral spine as you bend forward. Lead with the chest and hinge at the waist. You can modify it by bending knees or placing your hands on your legs.	
<b>Transition into Lunges:</b> Return to standing in the following order. Begin in Child's Pose, keeping hands on the ground and rise to Down Dog, step forward into Forward Fold, stand straight into Mountain Pose, move back into Down Dog, lower into Plank, and step forward into Lunge.		
14. Simple Lunge and Lunge Twist: take three breaths in simple lunge. Twist to the left and take three breaths, then repeat on the right side.	Should feel in hips and upper torso, not in lower back. Keep pelvis level. Front knee should be above your foot. Both hands should be on ground prior to the twist, "inside" the feet. Switch forward foot to plank to transition sides. Maintain neutral spine and pelvic floor. Work to lengthen body and become "taller".	
<b>Transition out of Lunges:</b> Return to standing in the following order. Begin in Child's Pose, keeping hands on the ground and rise to Down Dog, step forward into Forward Fold, stand straight into Mountain Pose, move back into Down Dog, lower into Plank, and step forward into Lunge.		
16. Chair: three breaths/30 seconds total	Should feel in glutes, calves, and upper torso, not in lower back. Keep shoulders down and relaxed, may need to bend arms. Feet just wider than hips. Focus on neutral spine and pelvic floor. Arms and shins should be parallel.	
17. Transition to completion	Conclude the stretch session in the following order: complete a Forward Fold to release your back, then return to Mountain Pose for three breaths. Done!	



## SUGGESTED FITNESS PROGRAM

The *ELK FIT Program* is designed for hunting, but applicable to the work we do. Please use Google if you are unsure how to do one of the movements. This program is structured in three phases. We recommend exercising three days a week for 45 minutes. Each phase should take 4 weeks, for a total of 12 weeks for this program.

**Beginners:** Use body weight and resistance bands to complete the exercises.

**Advanced:** Add 25-45 lbs. in your pack with either a sandbag or weight plate.

### Phase 1:

Whether it's your first time out west or you're a seasoned pro, phase 1 will challenge your body and increase your stamina. You'll begin building your foundation with the 16 exercises and 20 minutes of cardio, focusing on either distance, elevation, or high-intensity interval training (HIIT).

### Phase 2:

Taking the same 45-minute, 3-day-a-week approach, you'll now be implementing "rest-pause" sets. A rest-pause set requires you to push to failure for 3 sets with a short rest period in between, usually 30-60 seconds. You'll decrease in reps per set, but the stamina gains and lean muscle growth will be worth the effort. Remember that each day still starts with 20 minutes of cardio, focusing one day on distance, the next on elevation, and one on a HIIT cardio regimen. Remember to keep pushing and challenge yourself.

### Phase 3:

We saved the best for last - Phase 3 is the final and the most challenging stage of the Program. It keeps the same staple exercises but decreases the rest interval. Each exercise will be broken down into 8 sets. Each set is performed for max reps in 20 seconds with 10 seconds of rest in between. As soon as the rest period is over, you'll go right back into the next set.

## PHASE 1 - 3 days a week for 4 weeks

### Day 1: Lower Body - 4 sets of 20 reps each

Start Day 1 off with 20 minutes of cardio for distance. Go as far as you can!

1. Squats
2. Step-ups (10 each leg)
3. Bulgarian split squat (10 each leg)
4. Lunges (10 each leg)
5. Calf raises (4 sets x 30 reps each leg)
6. Tic-Tac-Toes (10 each leg; works the abs)

### Day 2: Upper Body - 4 sets of 20 reps each

Start Day 2 off with 20 minutes for elevation. Get as high as you can!

1. Bent over rows
2. Push ups
3. Shoulder press
4. Tricep dips
5. Good mornings
6. Weighted sit-ups

### Day 3: Core - 4 sets x 30 seconds

Start Day 3 off with 20 minutes of HIIT for distance or elevation (1 minute normal, 1 minute high intensity).

1. Planks
2. Side planks (both sides)
3. Leg lift hold
4. Hill climbers



## PHASE 2 - 3 days a week for 4 weeks

### Day 1: Lower Body - 3 sets to failure [rest 30-60 seconds]

Start Day 1 off with 20 minutes of cardio for distance. Go as far as you can!

1. Squats
2. Step-ups (each leg)
3. Bulgarian split squat (each leg)
4. Lunges (each leg)
5. Calf raises (each leg)
6. Tic-Tac-Toes (each leg)

### Day 2: Upper Body - 3 sets to failure [rest 30-60 seconds]

Start Day 2 off with 20 minutes for elevation. Get as high as you can!

1. Bent over rows
2. Push ups
3. Shoulder press
4. Tricep dips
5. Good mornings
6. Weighted sit-ups

### Day 3: Core - 3 sets to failure [rest 30-60 seconds]

Start Day 3 off with 20 minutes of HIIT for distance or elevation (1 minute normal, 1 minute high intensity).

1. Planks
2. Side planks (both sides)
3. Leg lift hold
4. Hill climbers

## PHASE 3 - 3 days a week for 4 weeks

### Day 1: Lower Body - 8 sets x 20 seconds [10 s. rest between]

Start Day 1 off with 20 minutes of cardio for distance. Go as far as you can!

1. Squats
2. Step-ups (each leg)
3. Bulgarian split squat (each leg)
4. Lunges (each leg)
5. Calf raises (each leg)
6. Tic-Tac-Toes (each leg)

### Day 2: Upper Body - 8 sets x 20 seconds [10 s. rest between]

Start Day 2 off with 20 minutes for elevation. Get as high as you can!

1. Bent over rows
2. Push ups
3. Shoulder press
4. Tricep dips
5. Good mornings
6. Weighted sit-ups

### Day 3: Core - 8 sets x 20 seconds [10 s. rest between]

Start Day 3 off with 20 minutes of HIIT for distance or elevation (1 minute normal, 1 minute high intensity).

1. Planks
2. Side planks (both sides)
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