

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 8746

To establish a Restore Employment in Natural and Environmental Work Conservation Corps in the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 12, 2020

Mr. RUSH introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, and in addition to the Committees on Agriculture, Energy and Commerce, and Transportation and Infrastructure, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To establish a Restore Employment in Natural and Environmental Work Conservation Corps in the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Restore Employment
5 in Natural and Environmental Work Conservation Corps
6 Act” or the “RENEW Conservation Corps Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSES.**

2 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

3 (1) as a result of the Coronavirus Disease 2019
4 (COVID–19) pandemic, more than 40,000,000 peo-
5 ple in the United States have filed claims for unem-
6 ployment benefits since March 2020, which is a level
7 of unemployment not seen since the Great Depres-
8 sion;

9 (2) investments in fish, wildlife, and habitat
10 restoration and outdoor recreation infrastructure
11 generate as many as 33 jobs per \$1,000,000 in-
12 vested, as demonstrated by the American Recovery
13 and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Public Law 111–5;
14 123 Stat. 115);

15 (3) the outdoor recreation economy—

16 (A) generates \$887,000,000,000 in eco-
17 nomic activity each year, which is 2.2 percent
18 of the gross domestic product of the United
19 States, according to the Bureau of Economic
20 Analysis; and

21 (B) was one of the fastest growing sectors
22 of the United States economy before the
23 Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID–19) pan-
24 demic;

25 (4) the Federal Government and State and local
26 governments and agencies have many “shovel-ready”

1 projects and green infrastructure maintenance back-
2 log projects that would improve the quality of life,
3 outdoor experiences, and access to outdoor recre-
4 ation opportunities of people of the United States on
5 completion of the projects;

6 (5) many facilities and natural resources lo-
7 cated on dedicated conservation land are in disrepair
8 or degraded and in need of labor-intensive rehabili-
9 tation, restoration, and enhancement work that can-
10 not be carried out at existing staffing levels;

11 (6) enhancing and maintaining environmentally
12 and recreationally important land and waters
13 through the participation of unemployed individuals
14 in the United States in a conservation corps could—

15 (A) provide critical employment, education,
16 and skill development opportunities to the indi-
17 viduals;

18 (B) prepare the individuals for permanent
19 jobs in the conservation field; and

20 (C) benefit the economy and environment
21 of the United States; and

22 (7) existing networks of conservation corps are
23 in place but need additional resources in order to
24 scale up the activities of the conservation corps to

1 meet growing deferred maintenance needs on public
2 land.

3 (b) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this Act are—

4 (1) to employ, during the 5-year period begin-
5 ning on the date of enactment of this Act, a total
6 of 1,000,000 people in the United States in dedi-
7 cated conservation land projects to support the
8 growing backlog of deferred conservation land
9 projects;

10 (2) to expose Participants to public service
11 while furthering the understanding and appreciation
12 of the Participants of the natural and cultural re-
13 sources of the United States;

14 (3) to stimulate interest among Participants in
15 conservation careers by exposing the Participants to
16 conservation professionals in land management
17 agencies; and

18 (4) to build on the existing network of con-
19 servation corps organizations working across the
20 United States while providing for expanded partici-
21 pation in urban centers.

22 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

23 In this Act:

24 (1) CORPS.—The term “Corps” means the Re-
25 store Employment in Natural and Environmental

1 Work Conservation Corps established by section
2 4(a).

3 (2) COUNCIL.—The term “Council” means the
4 National Council on the Restore Employment in
5 Natural and Environmental Work Conservation
6 Corps established under section 6(a).

7 (3) ELIGIBLE LOCAL AGENCY.—The term “eli-
8 gible local agency” means a unit of local govern-
9 ment, land trust, or similar conservation nonprofit
10 organization.

11 (4) ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANT.—The term “eligi-
12 ble participant” means an individual who—

13 (A) is 16 years of age or older at the time
14 the individual begins the term of service as a
15 Participant; and

16 (B) is a citizen or national of the United
17 States or lawful permanent resident alien of the
18 United States.

19 (5) ELIGIBLE PROJECT.—The term “eligible
20 project” means any of the following:

21 (A) A project to plant trees.

22 (B) A project for the restoration and man-
23 agement of wildlife habitat.

24 (C) A project to control invasive species.

1 (D) A project for the conduct of prescribed
2 burns.

3 (E) A project for the restoration of
4 streams, wetlands, and other aquatic eco-
5 systems.

6 (F) A project to monitor water quality in
7 streams and lakes.

8 (G) A project to assist with the conduct of
9 fish and wildlife surveys.

10 (H) A project for the construction or main-
11 tenance of trails, bridges, campgrounds, picnic
12 shelters, or other recreational amenities for use
13 by the public.

14 (I) A project for the construction or main-
15 tenance of parks and playgrounds.

16 (J) A project to restore brownfield sites
17 (as defined in section 101 of the Comprehensive
18 Environmental Response, Compensation, and
19 Liability Act of 1980 (42 U.S.C. 9601)) in
20 urban areas.

21 (K) A project to construct rain gardens,
22 grass waterways, pollinator gardens, or green
23 schoolyards.

24 (L) A project for the development of urban
25 gardens and farms.

1 (M) A project to plant native grasslands.

2 (N) A project to provide environmental in-
3 terpretation or outdoor education.

4 (O) Any other project determined to be ap-
5 propriate by the Secretaries.

6 (6) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term “Indian Tribe”
7 has the meaning given the term “Indian tribe” in
8 section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Edu-
9 cation Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304).

10 (7) PARTICIPANT.—The term “Participant”
11 means an eligible participant enrolled in the Corps.

12 (8) PROGRAM PARTNER.—The term “Program
13 partner” means—

14 (A) a State or Indian Tribe administering
15 a program for eligible projects or a grant pro-
16 gram under subsection (a) or (b) of section 5,
17 as applicable; and

18 (B) an eligible local agency carrying out el-
19 igible projects under section 5(a)(3)(B).

20 (9) SECRETARIES.—The term “Secretaries”
21 means the Secretary of Agriculture and the Sec-
22 retary of the Interior, acting jointly.

23 (10) STATE.—The term “State” means each of
24 the several States, the District of Columbia, the

1 Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and any other terri-
2 tory or possession of the United States.

3 **SEC. 4. RESTORE EMPLOYMENT IN NATURAL AND ENVI-**
4 **RONMENTAL WORK CONSERVATION CORPS.**

5 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established in the
6 Department of the Interior and the Department of Agri-
7 culture the Restore Employment in Natural and Environ-
8 mental Work Conservation Corps program under which
9 Participants shall carry out—

10 (1) eligible projects administered by the Secre-
11 taries under this section; and

12 (2) eligible projects administered by Program
13 partners under subsection (a) or (b) of section 5.

14 (b) PARTICIPANTS.—

15 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Corps shall consist of—

16 (A) eligible participants who are enrolled
17 in the Corps by the Secretaries; and

18 (B) eligible participants who are enrolled
19 in the Corps by Program partners.

20 (2) REQUIREMENT.—In enrolling eligible par-
21 ticipants in the Corps under paragraph (1), the Sec-
22 retaries and Program partners shall ensure that
23 Participants reflect the demographics of the area in
24 which the Participants are carrying out an eligible
25 project.

1 (c) TERMS AND COMPENSATION.—

2 (1) TERM.—Participants shall serve for a term
3 of at least 12 weeks, but not more than 1 year.

4 (2) COMPENSATION.—

5 (A) WAGES.—Participants shall be com-
6 pensated at a wage rate that is appropriate for
7 the type of work performed by the Participant,
8 but not less than \$15 per hour (to be increased
9 each year based on increases in the Consumer
10 Price Index for the year).

11 (B) EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.—If a Par-
12 ticipant completes at least 1 year of service in
13 the Corps, Participants shall be eligible for—

14 (i) an educational credit that may be
15 applied toward a program of postsecondary
16 education at an institution of higher edu-
17 cation that agrees to award the credit for
18 participation in the Corps; and

19 (ii) not more than \$5,500 in tuition
20 assistance to the Participant for purposes
21 of continuing education.

22 (d) TRAINING; APPRENTICESHIPS.—The Secretaries
23 and Program partners shall—

1 (1) ensure that Participants are provided at
2 least 2 weeks of training during each term of the ap-
3 plicable Participant; and

4 (2) provide curricula to Participants that im-
5 prove the future job prospects of Participants, in-
6 cluding through making available to Participants
7 registered apprenticeships and other professional li-
8 censes or certifications.

9 **SEC. 5. STATE, TRIBAL, AND LOCAL FUNDING PROGRAM**
10 **FOR ELIGIBLE PROJECTS.**

11 (a) APPORTIONMENT TO STATES.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—For each fiscal year, subject
13 to paragraphs (2) and (3), of the amounts made
14 available for apportionment to the States for that
15 fiscal year under section 7(2), the Secretaries shall
16 apportion—

17 (A) $66\frac{2}{3}$ percent among States based on
18 the proportion that—

19 (i) the number of unemployed individ-
20 uals in each State, as determined based on
21 the most recent data available; bears to

22 (ii) the total number of unemployed
23 individuals in all States as so determined;
24 and

1 (B) $33\frac{1}{3}$ percent among States based on
2 the proportion that—

3 (i) the population of each State; bears
4 to

5 (ii) the population of all States.

6 (2) MINIMUM APPORTIONMENT.—No State
7 shall receive an apportionment under paragraph (1)
8 for a fiscal year in an amount less than
9 \$42,000,000.

10 (3) USE OF FUNDS.—Of the amounts appor-
11 tioned to a State under this subsection for a fiscal
12 year—

13 (A) 50 percent shall be used by the State
14 to administer a program for the conduct of eli-
15 gible projects by Participants enrolled in the
16 program by the States; and

17 (B) 50 percent shall be used by the State
18 to administer a grant program in the State
19 under which the State provides grants to eligi-
20 ble local agencies in the State for the conduct
21 of eligible projects by Participants enrolled by
22 the eligible local agencies.

23 (b) TRIBAL PROGRAM.—For each fiscal year, the
24 Secretaries shall apportion, in accordance with a formula
25 established by the Secretaries, amounts made available

1 under section 7(3) to Indian Tribes to administer a pro-
2 gram for the conduct of eligible projects by Participants
3 enrolled in the program by the Indian Tribe.

4 (c) USE OF FUNDS.—Of the amounts provided to a
5 Program partner for the conduct of eligible projects under
6 this section, the Program partner—

7 (1) may use not more than 20 percent for ad-
8 ministrative costs of administering and carrying out
9 eligible projects (including costs of recruiting and
10 hiring individuals to carry out eligible projects);

11 (2) may use not more than 14 percent to pro-
12 vide continuing education to individuals admin-
13 istering or carrying out eligible projects;

14 (3) may use not more than 8 percent for the
15 cost of equipment and supplies for eligible projects;
16 and

17 (4) shall use the remainder of the amounts for
18 the costs of salaries of individuals administering or
19 carrying out eligible projects.

20 (d) REALLOCATION.—Any funds made available to a
21 State or Indian Tribe under subsection (a) or (b) that are
22 not obligated by the State or Indian Tribe at the end of
23 the third fiscal year beginning after the fiscal year during
24 which the funds were made available shall be withdrawn
25 from the State or Indian Tribe and reallocated by the Sec-

1 retaries to other States and Indian Tribes on the basis
 2 of need, as determined by the Secretaries, and in amounts
 3 that the Secretaries determine would best accomplish the
 4 purposes described in section 2(b).

5 **SEC. 6. NATIONAL COUNCIL ON THE RESTORE EMPLOY-**
 6 **MENT IN NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL**
 7 **WORK CONSERVATION CORPS.**

8 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of the Interior,
 9 the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Commerce,
 10 the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agen-
 11 cy, the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality,
 12 the Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Chief
 13 Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and
 14 Community Service, and the Assistant Secretary of the
 15 Army for Civil Works, through the execution of a memo-
 16 randum of understanding, shall establish a National Coun-
 17 cil on the Restore Employment in Natural and Environ-
 18 mental Work Conservation Corps.

19 (b) MEMBERSHIP.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Council shall be com-
 21 posed of—

22 (A) the Director of the Bureau of Indian
 23 Affairs;

24 (B) the Director of the Bureau of Land
 25 Management;

- 1 (C) the Commissioner of Reclamation;
- 2 (D) the Chief of the Natural Resources
- 3 Conservation Service;
- 4 (E) the Director of the United States Fish
- 5 and Wildlife Service;
- 6 (F) the Director of the National Park
- 7 Service;
- 8 (G) the Administrator of the National Oce-
- 9 anic and Atmospheric Administration;
- 10 (H) the Director of the Office of Surface
- 11 Mining Reclamation and Enforcement;
- 12 (I) the Chief of Engineers;
- 13 (J) the Chief of the Forest Service;
- 14 (K) the Director of the Office of Personnel
- 15 Management;
- 16 (L) the Administrator of the Environ-
- 17 mental Protection Agency;
- 18 (M) the Chair of the Council on Environ-
- 19 mental Quality;
- 20 (N) the Chief Executive Officer of the Cor-
- 21 poration for National and Community Service;
- 22 and
- 23 (O) other members that the signatories to
- 24 the memorandum of understanding under sub-

1 section (a) determine to be appropriate for
2 membership on the Council, including—

3 (i) the Secretary of Labor;

4 (ii) the Secretary of Education;

5 (iii) the Secretary of Health and
6 Human Services;

7 (iv) the Secretary of Housing and
8 Urban Development;

9 (v) the Secretary of Transportation;
10 and

11 (vi) the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

12 (2) CHAIR.—

13 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Council shall select
14 a Chair of the Council from among the mem-
15 bers of the Council described in subparagraphs
16 (A) through (M) of paragraph (1).

17 (B) TERM.—The Chair of the Council
18 shall serve for a term of 1 year.

19 (c) ANNUAL MEETING.—The Chair of the Council
20 shall convene annual meetings of the Council during which
21 the Council shall conduct an assessment of—

22 (1) the Corps; and

23 (2) eligible projects carried out by the Corps.

1 **SEC. 7. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

2 There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out
3 this Act \$55,800,000,000 for the period of fiscal years
4 2021 through 2025, of which—

5 (1) 37.5 percent shall be made available to the
6 Secretaries to carry out eligible projects under sec-
7 tion 4(a)(1);

8 (2) 57.5 percent shall be made available to the
9 Secretaries for apportionment to States under sec-
10 tion 5(a); and

11 (3) 5 percent shall be made available to the
12 Secretaries for apportionment to Indian Tribes
13 under section 5(b).

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