



the greenway

Guardians Of The West

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Message from the President

LIDIA SOTO-HARMON, PRESIDENT AND CEO



THIS YEAR HAS PRESENTED SIGNIFICANT AND UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES for the Student Conservation Association, particularly surrounding our funding. I know the uncertainty weighs heavily on our staff, program participants, and our long-standing partners. While we continue to work tirelessly to navigate these financial shifts and secure a stable future, I would like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude for your ongoing support.

Your generosity has been a major driver behind the work we do every day. With your support, we have been able to continue much of our programming this year despite massive cuts, including millions in urban forestry grants and AmeriCorps funding. From powering local conservation efforts through Urban Green programs, supplying essential work gear to crews out in the field, to helping launch exciting new programming for next year, you have been a critical lifeline.

On the cover

SCA Crew Leader Kabir Bagchi makes his way through the Los Padres National Forest in California. The SCA's 2025 Los Padres National Forest Backcountry Trails Crew spent the spring brushing and treading the Vicente Flats Trail to create a safer trail for the public. The 11-person crew restored approximately 1.5 miles of densely overgrown sections of the trail, which overlooks the Pacific Ocean. Based at the Vicente Flats Campground, the hike in was roughly 5 miles long with nearly 2,000 ft. of elevation gain from the trailhead.

PHOTO: NATHAN TUCKER

Like you, we have also had partners step in to help, such as Friends of the Smokies, who donated crucial funding that allowed SCA interns to keep working at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park during the longest federal government shutdown in U.S. history. And when AmeriCorps funding was lost, cutting the season short for a crew working in Washington, the Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge in Nampa, Idaho, brought them on for a two-week project.

Even with this assistance, a hard road remains ahead. We know that the necessary funding for critical conservation programs remains at risk. Without reliable support today and into the future, thousands of young people will lose the opportunity to preserve and protect our cherished public spaces and miss out on becoming the future conservation leaders we need.

We know that this work is important to you. With you by our side, we can continue to push forward to ensure young people can continue to serve while having transformative experiences. Investing in youth conservation service is good for the land, good for the economy and good for our country.

During this season of gratitude, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for your commitment to our mission and the communities we serve. On behalf of all of us at the Student Conservation Association, we wish you joy, peace and warmth as you spend time with loved ones during the holidays. Thank you for making a difference!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lidia Soto-Harmon".



Program Roundup

ACROSS THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST, our crews worked hard this summer to enhance our national forests. Despite significant challenges this year, program participants continued to show up with unwavering dedication to protecting our public lands.



Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, Washington Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge, Idaho

The SCA's Invasive & Restoration Team spent most of the summer season surveying for invasive species, conducting invasive species control, and implementing native plant materials projects in Washington. Due to AmeriCorps funding cuts, the season was cut short. Thanks to another partner, the crew was able to work on a project at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge in Nampa, Idaho, where they spent two weeks removing old signs and posterboards from trailheads, parking areas, and boat launches across the refuge and installing new ones.

Kootenai National Forest, Montana

Throughout the summer, the Trout Creek Trail Crew focused on keeping nearly 53 miles of trails passable at the Kootenai National Forest, which borders Canada and Idaho in the mountainous terrain of the Northwest corner of Montana. Meanwhile, the Eureka Crew worked out of a different part of the forest where roughly 20 miles of trail needed repair following recent wildfires and blowdown events that left the area unsafe. To help address the shortage of seasonal Forest Service employees, a third crew in the forest, the Libby Backcountry Crew, was tasked with maintaining roughly 58 miles of wilderness trails. The crews primarily used chainsaws, crosscut saws and other hand tools to clear back thick brush and remove fallen trees from the trails. The result: more easily accessible trails with wider corridors, improved tread, and fewer logs to crawl over while hiking.



Off the Grid, On the Front Lines:

Meet the SCA Crews Protecting Idaho's Wild Side

FOR NEARLY TWO DECADES, members of the SCA's Idaho Corps have worked alongside federal and state agencies in the Gem State to deliver essential land management services. This year, the program was cut a month short and was almost eliminated due to the cancellation of AmeriCorps funding.

The Idaho Corps is one of the SCA's many grueling programs and was made up this year of three teams that worked on a variety of service projects throughout the season, including fence construction, assembling beaver dam analogs (structures) to restore vital habitat in and around streams, trail maintenance, historic preservation, fuels reduction, invasive species management and more.

The Salmon-Challis National Forest covers more than 4.3 million acres in east-central Idaho. Remote and rugged, corps members primarily lived off the grid and spent significant time camping in both backcountry and front-country locations.

"The first practice hitch was hard. My tent leaked, I was freezing, and I had to sleep in a work truck. I tried not to complain or act like I was miserable, but I was miserable," said crew member Joey Scharmer, 20, of Grantville, Pennsylvania. "I never went camping before. If I didn't take a job like this, I wouldn't have learned this skill. Ever since that first camping experience, it has been great."

Once finished with homeschooling, Scharmer took the second plane trip of his life and arrived in Idaho brimming with anticipation. He spent the majority of his time with the Corps working with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) constructing jack fences and other wire fencing to prevent cattle intrusion.

"This is the kind of job where you learn way more about yourself in a short amount of time. It shows you the value of being part of a team, the value of good communication, and that you can be independent while still being yourself," he said. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and without [donors], I would not be able to be here doing this. There's an Idaho-shaped patch sewn onto my heart now."

The teams complete multiple hitches, or blocks of work, for anywhere from 4 to 12 days at a time, depending on the project. Following their service, corps members emerge with real-world experience, which helps them develop a strong base of knowledge and skills, enabling them to become professional-level field staff for conservation organizations across the governmental, non-profit, and private sectors.

"It's an adjustment, but you figure it out. It definitely increased my tolerance for being outdoors. This taught me that I could live in the woods off the grid and I would be okay," said crew member Megan Brown, 23, of Bel Air, Maryland. "I always

“There’s an Idaho-shaped patch
sewn onto my heart now.”

CREW MEMBER JOEY SCHARMER



loved being outdoors and enjoying the weather. I did not want an office job, and I like working with my hands. I feel as if I'm making a difference doing what I love to do and am passionate about."

In addition to building fences, Brown assisted in creating beaver dam analogues to mimic real ones to enhance a local stream. Having graduated from the University of Maryland last year with a degree in Atmospheric & Oceanic Sciences, she is interested in working with the National Park Service researching the impact of wildfire smoke.

"It's a tough world in conservation now with all the budget cuts. But it means a lot to me that I am helping a little bit to solve [environmental] problems. It makes me feel alive because I know that what I am doing is important," Brown said. "Working in conservation has changed my career path and brought things into perspective. Thank you to everyone who helps out. It means a lot."

The crew's leader, Nathan Tucker, 24, of Norman, Oklahoma, first joined the SCA as a crew member with the 2024 Los Padres Fire Recovery Crew. During a second term of service with the 2025 Los Padres National Forest Backcountry Trails Crew, he was tapped to lead crews with the Idaho Corps.

After graduating from the University of Oklahoma with a degree in public relations, he worked in marketing while assistant coaching swim at OU when another coach told him about the SCA.

"The rest is history. My Dad always took me hiking as a kid and was my main influence for developing a love of the outdoors. I've always been active, swimming, jiu jitsu and hiking," Tucker said. "I've learned that I am much more adaptable than I thought I was. I had routines and was very set in them, and was sometimes afraid to veer off from that. But the unpredictability of this job has allowed me to be at peak performance no matter where I am."



Although Tucker is unsure of his future career path, he said he wants to work with more conservation crews, travel more, and see more places.

"The SCA changed the literal course of my life and the work that I am doing. I'm so grateful and happy that I get to be here and do these things even in the moments when it's challenging," he said. "I feel I am where I am supposed to be. I can't wait to see what happens next."

Stand For Conservation.

Young people are ready to protect our public lands, but their efforts are still at risk of being canceled. We couldn't do our conservation work without you.

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GulfCorps Starts Fall Season, Expanding Gulf Restoration Efforts

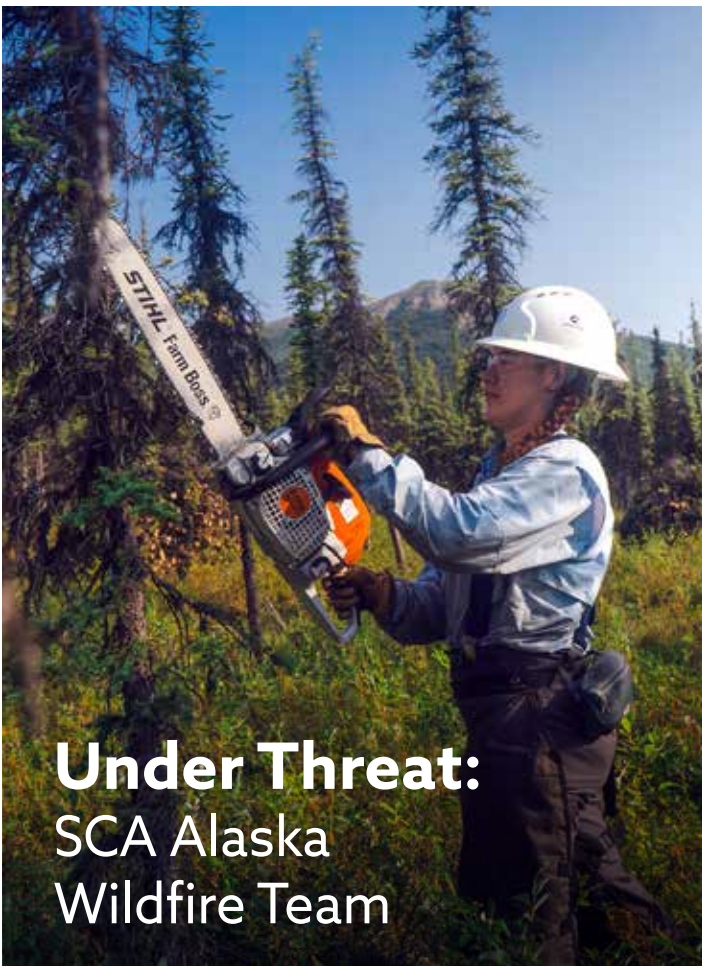
THIS FALL, GULFCORPS kicked off another season beginning with orientation at Camp Beckwith in Fairhope, Alabama. This essential restoration program is dedicated to restoring and conserving habitat along the Gulf through job training opportunities for young adults in local coastal communities.

Funded through the RESTORE Act, GulfCorps was launched in 2017 under the leadership of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Student Conservation Association (SCA) and The Corps Network (TCN). The program was developed to restore habitats damaged by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, while also supporting the economic recovery of the Gulf states.

Program participants serve in all five Gulf states, including SCA GulfCorps members stationed in Alabama and Texas. Throughout the region, GulfCorps members complete a wide range of project types, including planting native vegetation, removing invasive species, restoring shorelines, assisting with prescribed burns, and other similar activities. Over 600 people have been enrolled in GulfCorps, completing a total of more than 500,000 service hours. Over 32,000 acres of habitat have been improved by GulfCorps members.



PHOTO: © BLUE ROOM PHOTOGRAPHY



Under Threat: SCA Alaska Wildfire Team

STAFF RECENTLY LEARNED the SCA Alaska Wildfire program is under threat due to the restructuring of the federal wildland fire initiatives within the U.S. Department of the Interior.

While the total impact of the restructuring on the SCA's overall wildland fire programming is not yet known, without this funding, the SCA's ability to provide critical job opportunities, workforce training, and environmental stewardship could be in jeopardy.

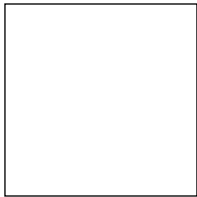
The SCA launched its Alaska Wildland Fire Teams in 2022 alongside the NPS to increase the workforce in efforts to combat the growing wildland fire crisis. The SCA also offers additional fire programming, including the Wildland Fire Academy, Integrated Fire and Recreation Program, National Park Service Structural Fire Protection Program and the Table Rock Fire Crew Program, which went from training to the front lines earlier this year to help the U.S. Forest Service in South Carolina battle some of the nearly 175 wildfires that had spread across the region.

Now more than ever, we need you by our side. Your support today can ensure that this much-needed work continues uninterrupted.



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The Student Conservation Association (SCA) is the largest provider of hands-on environmental conservation programs for youth and young adults whose lives are transformed while they protect and restore natural and cultural resources across the country. Founded in 1957, the SCA is committed to building the next generation of conservation leaders dedicated to the lifelong protection of the environment and the communities we serve.

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ALUM SPOTLIGHT:

Julia Taboga

JULIA TABOGA always considered herself an indoors person. That all changed at the start of her sophomore year in high school when her guidance counselor told her about a school-year program with the Student Conservation Association.



“I do orchestra and a lot of art stuff. I was never really a nature person,” said the then high school senior. “It just seemed really different to me. First job-wise, it seemed like something that you wouldn’t find anywhere else.”

She applied, and before long, Taboga was a member of the 2023 Charles County Resilience Authority Youth Tree Corps program offered through Urban Green Washington, D.C. Throughout the school year, the crew was tasked with planting and maintaining local native trees.

She enjoyed the experience so much that she signed on to join a summer crew and then returned for another school year crew the following winter. In early December 2024, Taboga’s crew participated in a tree-planting at her high school, where 481 native seedlings were planted in a single day.

Taboga repeatedly stepped outside her comfort zone during her time with the SCA. She engaged in public speaking opportunities, staffed tables for the SCA at public events, connected with other conservationists, and even met Maryland Department of the Environment Secretary Serena McIlwain.

“No matter what you’re into, the SCA is going to find something for you,” she said. “I’m just really grateful for the experience. I feel like it truly did change me as a person.”

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