



February 14, 2011

Dear Colleague,

As planning begins, and resource allocation decisions are made for youth summer programming for 2011, the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA), Interior (DOI), and Labor (DOL) encourage workforce and public lands management agencies to strengthen partnerships that will expand meaningful work and learning opportunities for low-income youth and young adults on Federally-managed public lands.

The USDA Forest Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Parks Service at DOI, and the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) at DOL (hereinafter, the Departments) share common goals around career development for young people. These goals include giving low-income youth opportunities to gain valuable work experience, provide service to their nation, and contribute to much needed work projects on public lands. The Departments also believe that providing youth exposure to careers in conservation, preservation, and resource management helps to develop the future workforce on our public lands.

### **Background**

In an effort to realize these shared goals, the Departments implemented a pilot project during the summer of 2010 that aimed to increase work experience opportunities for youth served by the publicly-funded workforce investment system, by placing them in conservation corps, internships, and other summer employment opportunities at national parks and forests, grasslands, conservation areas, historic sites, and tribal lands. Building on the initial efforts of this pilot, the Departments would like to encourage the public workforce investment system and public land management agencies to work together to explore partnership opportunities and ways to leverage resources to increase employment opportunities for low-income youth and young adults during the summer of 2011 and beyond.

The youth labor force – 16 to 24 year-olds working or actively looking for work – grows sharply between April and July each year, with July typically marking the peak of summer youth employment. Unfortunately, the current recession has eliminated many employment opportunities for youth. According to DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics, the proportion of young people employed in July 2010 was 48.9 percent, the lowest July rate on record since this data was first collected in 1948. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act) provided approximately \$1.2 billion in additional

funds for Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) Youth Program activities, with an emphasis on summer employment, placing over 330,000 youth in employment during the summers of 2009 and 2010. With Recovery Act funds nearly expended, states and local areas seek to identify mutually beneficial partnerships that will help provide meaningful work opportunities for our nation's youth and young adults.

Work experience opportunities help young people develop valuable skills, and serve as critical stepping stones on the path to a career. Work experience opportunities on public lands, in particular, can provide youth with an education about natural resources and conservation, can teach them to be good stewards of public lands and resources, and can provide a career pathway into land management, conservation, and other green jobs sectors.

Land management agencies and the land itself can benefit from increased employment of youth on our public lands, especially to address the backlog maintenance issues many agencies face. For example, the USDA Forest Service estimates a backlog of \$5 billion in deferred maintenance projects, and the National Park Service has a backlog of more than \$10 billion. Backlog maintenance projects can be valuable, hands-on work experiences for young people while providing exposure to career pathways in the areas of conservation, preservation, and resource management. As youth learn about the potential career pathways in these occupations, those who are interested can help meet the imminent demand for skilled workers as approximately 40 percent of DOI employees and 35 percent of USDA Forest Service employees are eligible for retirement in the next four years.

### **Partnership Opportunities**

Through WIA, ETA allocates funds to states to provide local workforce investment agencies resources to deliver a comprehensive array of services that focus on assisting at-risk and disadvantaged youth, ages 14 to 21, to attain educational and skills training, participate in post-secondary educational training, and secure employment with career and promotional opportunities. Local workforce investment agencies can provide training and employment services, including work readiness, career guidance, skill assessments, case management, supportive services, basic skills and literacy training, and occupational training. They also can provide summer employment opportunities, work experience, leadership development opportunities, and mentoring.

DOI manages some of the most unique cultural landmarks of the United States, from Yellowstone National Park and the Martin Luther King Jr. Historical Site to the 553 wildlife refuges, and 17 conservation areas that stretch across every state in the country. In addition, DOI oversees one-fifth of the nation's land mass, and is strategically positioned to provide employment opportunities that directly benefit the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the communities in which our young people live.

Similarly, the USDA Forest Service manages lands that are of immense ecologic, social, cultural, and economic importance, including 155 national forests and 20 grasslands in 44 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. These lands provide clean water, clean air, important cultural and historic sites, economic opportunity, and beautiful places for

people to connect to the outdoors. In addition to operating 28 Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers, the Forest Service provides thousands of youth with training and work opportunities related to natural and cultural resource conservation each year.

Common Program elements that the workforce investment system and land management agencies are poised to provide in a partnership to increase work opportunities for youth on public lands include:

- ▶ **Meaningful work experience** through subsidized employment, conservation corps, or internship opportunities to introduce and reinforce the rigors and rewards associated with holding a job, as well as to develop skills necessary for successful employment such as communication, interpersonal, leadership, decision-making, and project management. USDA and DOI can provide meaningful work experiences such as trail maintenance and construction, energy efficiency audits, environmental restoration, cultural/historic preservation and interpretation, restoring fish habitat, native plants, and eco-systems, removing invasive species, and wildlife monitoring.
- ▶ **Resources to pay for youth wages** in a subsidized work experience/summer job. Through WIA, local workforce investment areas can support wages for youth engaged in WIA summer employment opportunities when funding is available. USDA and DOI can either directly hire youth through various hiring authorities, including the Youth Conservation Corps, or they can partner with a youth serving organization via the Public Land Corps hiring authority.
- ▶ **Supervision** to help youth receive high quality work experience and training, and to ensure safety on the job. USDA and DOI can provide supervision through experienced team leaders and program staff, volunteer coordinators, rangers, and youth conservation partners, among others, while workforce investment agencies can work to maintain on-going contact with land management supervisors to provide support and technical assistance throughout the work experience.
- ▶ **Career pathways** leading to future employment in land and resource management occupations. Workforce investment agencies can support youth while in a work experience by assisting in the development of career goals and pathway options. USDA and DOI can match youth with mentors in related careers, share information on various career pathways that align with their goals in the areas of natural/cultural resource management, and connect them to the Youth in the Great Outdoors Web portal, <http://www.doi.gov/whatwedo/youth/index.cfm>, where they can find information about relevant jobs in related fields.

Partnerships among workforce investment and land management agencies can be developed in a number of ways. For example, state or local workforce investment agencies can conduct outreach and provide case management and support to youth, while land management agencies provide quality supervision and wages to hire youth in paid work experiences in summer or year-round opportunities. Land management agencies

also can provide supervision for a crew or corps and reimburse workforce investment agencies for youth wages at the end of the summer or at the completion of a project. It is possible for workforce investment agencies to pay wages for youth engaged in WIA summer employment opportunities, when funding is available, while land management agencies provide the work experience and supervision. Other partnership models can be developed to support unpaid internships, work experience or service learning opportunities. While we recognize that resources are tight across all agencies, the Departments encourage workforce investment and land management agencies to be creative and innovative as they leverage capacity and resources for the purpose of providing youth and young adults with meaningful work experience on public lands.

### **Contact Information**

We encourage as many states, local areas, and land management agencies as possible to take advantage of the youth employment opportunities made available through these partnerships and reach out to the appropriate contacts to develop partnering strategies. In order to facilitate the development of partnerships, we have provided contact information for land management and workforce investment agencies across the country.

To find the agency nearest you, please see the contact information on the attached lists. Attachment A is a list of contact information for ETA's six regional offices, all state workforce investment agencies, and local workforce investment boards across the country. Attachments B and C are contacts for Agencies and Bureaus at DOI (Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service) and USDA (Forest Service).

For questions about WIA programs in your region, please contact the appropriate ETA Regional Office (see attachment A).

For national contacts at DOI and USDA, please see below:

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Youth in the Great Outdoors, Office of the Secretary  
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[Nathaniel\\_Hawley@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Nathaniel_Hawley@ios.doi.gov)

USDA Forest Service  
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201 14<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
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Sincerely,

(signed by Jane Oates)  
Assistant Secretary Jane Oates  
Employment and Training Administration  
U.S. Department of Labor

(signed by Rhea Suh)  
Assistant Secretary Rhea Suh  
Policy, Management and Budget  
U.S. Department of the Interior

(signed by Harris Sherman)  
Under Secretary Harris Sherman  
Natural Resources and Environment  
U.S. Department of Agriculture