

21st Century Conservation Corps for Our Health and Our Jobs Act

The impacts of COVID-19 on our health and our economy, combined with high levels of drought throughout the West, create unprecedented wildland firefighting challenges in 2020 and may hurt numerous rural people and economies across the country. Those who are at increased risk for adverse health effects due to wildfire smoke exposure -- people who suffer from heart or lung diseases, like asthma -- now suffer the double whammy of also being particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. Rural communities, already on the front lines of fire risk, are experiencing unique threats to their people and economies during the pandemic. The crisis quickly brought the outdoor economy to a halt. Many forest workers, despite their essential work, were laid off and others, like outfitters and guides, are losing work during their busy season.

As Congress considers future COVID-related stimulus legislation, it must include federal support for wildfire prevention and preparedness to protect the health and safety of communities, as well as relief and job creation measures for rural economies that rely on public lands and outdoor recreation. In a time when our health is on the line, the importance of clean water and clean air in America's rural communities cannot be overstated.

The 21st Century Conservation Corps for Our Health and our Jobs Act:

- Provides an additional \$3.5 billion for the U.S. Forest Service and \$2 billion for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to increase the pace and scale of hazardous fuels reduction and thinning efforts, prioritizing projects that are shovel-ready;
- Establishes a \$7 billion relief fund to help outfitters and guides with the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Department of the Interior special use permits -- and their employees -- stay afloat through the truncated recreation season;
- Establishes a \$9 billion fund for qualified land and conservation corps to increase job training and hiring specifically for jobs in the woods, helping to restore public lands and provide jobs in a time of need;
- Provides an additional \$150 million for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, the flagship program for community forest restoration and fire risk reduction;
- Provides \$6 billion for U.S. Forest Service capital improvements and maintenance to put people to work reducing the maintenance backlog on National Forest System lands;
- Provides \$500 million for the Forest Service State and Private Forestry program, which will be divided between programs to help facilitate landscape restoration projects on state, private, and federal lands, including \$100 million for the Firewise program to help local governments plan for and reduce wildfire risks;
- Provides \$10 billion for on-farm water conservation and habitat improvement projects;
- Provides full, permanent funding for the bipartisan Land and Water Conservation fund; and
- Provides \$100 million for land management agencies to purchase and provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to their employees, contractors, and service workers.