



USDA Forest Service Integrated Strategy for Youth

*Implementing the Forest Service's mission by developing the
next generation of conservation stewards and leaders*

May 5, 2015



The Forest Service mission is to, “Sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.”

A Vision for our Nation’s Forests and Grasslands

Our Nation’s forests and grasslands nurture every youth’s connection with nature and their understanding of natural resources, and provide opportunities for conservation service and employment to ensure the next generation cares for their public lands.

Today’s youth¹ will be tomorrow’s conservation stewards and leaders.

Our vision of our work with youth is a future where all America’s children, no matter where they live, have the opportunity to learn about—and love—our Nation’s forests and grasslands. A future where many partners join hands to ensure that youth have the opportunity to experience nature, to understand the natural world and its broader connections, and to gain the tools and experience needed to care for the land. A future where all Forest Service employees play a role in reaching youth and are supported by Forest Service leadership and resources.

This future nurtures an environmentally literate society, a constituency that cares about the management of public lands and waters and engages in their future, and a skilled and committed Forest Service workforce that reflects the face of America.

Our work today with engaging youth is critical to the health of our Nation’s forests and grasslands, the continued vibrancy and relevancy of the Forest Service, and ultimately, to the health of American society.

"If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in."
- Rachel Carson -



¹ The Forest Service considers “Youth” from childhood through young adult (18 to 25 years old, including veterans up to the age of 29).

Strategic Roadmap

Building on our long tradition of working with youth in natural settings, and addressing contemporary resource and societal needs, we will focus our youth engagement efforts around the following five strategic goals.

1. Strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones that reach all America's youth and engage them in conservation education, service and employment opportunities.
2. Develop and nurture opportunities for all youth to engage in conservation service and investigate career opportunities in natural resource management.
3. Build knowledge about natural resources, conservation and stewardship of our Nation's forests and grasslands by developing and implementing effective, standards-based, contemporary conservation education programs that reach all America's youth.
4. Build lifelong connections with nature through outdoor recreation opportunities, and provide place-based experiences of nature.
5. Build capacity within the Forest Service and with our partners to plan, support, implement, evaluate and integrate youth engagement opportunities across America.

“Perhaps the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of a land ethic is the fact that our education and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land.”

-Aldo Leopold, 1949, Sand County Almanac -

Guiding Principles

Our work with youth is guided by the following principles:

- **Collaboration:** We recognize that many entities are addressing this challenge and that we cannot meet it alone. Much of our youth engagement work will be accomplished “through the hands of others” and we will nurture existing partnerships and cultivate new ones in both the private and public sectors. We collaborate and partner within.
- **Reaching Youth:** We reach young people where *we* are, on the Nation's forests and grasslands, and in urban and community forests. We reach young people where *they* are in towns and cities, rural communities, schools and neighborhood green spaces. We reach young people by appropriately using contemporary social media and technology. We ask youth how *they* want to be engaged and keep pace with generational and technological changes.
- **Shared Responsibility:** We understand that engaging youth is a core Forest Service responsibility, across all Deputy and program areas. We provide consistent support and resources to field units, where the majority of engagement with youth and partners occurs.
- **Service and Career Pathways:** We will ensure diverse pathways to service and employment within the Forest Service to reach the next generation of public land stewards and leaders. We create career ladders to help young people successfully gain employment in the Agency through entry-level positions.

- **Conservation Education:** We use the Nation’s forests and grasslands as opportunities to teach about fundamental environmental processes. We establish a sense of place across a variety of educational disciplines, employing the best educational practices based on science and technology and established educational guidelines. We help connect young people to a broader sense of place across a global system.
- **Lifelong Learning:** We emphasize life-long learning and engagement. Young people will have a continuum of outdoor and stewardship experiences—beginning with awareness and connection, and moving through information, knowledge, and skill-building, to action, stewardship, and leadership. They can pass this knowledge and commitment to the next generation. We engage families knowing that youth will be more consistently engaged if their families are too.
- **Youth Leadership:** We believe that young people can contribute to mission accomplishment, develop marketable skills for careers in natural and cultural resources, and be the next generation of public lands stewards. We nurture their interests with meaningful service tied to our mission.
- **Continuous Improvement:** We are committed to monitoring and evaluation; we understand our impacts and continuously improve our efforts. We ask youth if we are meeting the mark.
- **Celebration:** We acknowledge and celebrate internal and external efforts and accomplishments.

Why is a Youth Strategy needed?



Empowering youth and preparing them for effective stewardship of our Nation’s resources are among the most urgent conservation priorities of our time. Decisive action now will help guide the future of our public lands for our Nation and its citizens; during a time when America’s population grows more urban and diverse. Too many of our youth grow up with too few opportunities to connect with the natural world. The important role that our Nation’s forests and grasslands, urban forests, rural areas, and community green spaces play in fostering healthy, sustainable communities has never been more clear or more critical. In this environment, there is an increasing risk of a generational loss of the conservation ethic and a loss of the appreciation of the value of natural resource stewardship, service and careers.

The Forest Service has a long tradition and history of working with youth—from the Civilian Conservation Corps, to Job Corps, to the Youth Conservation Corps and Young Adult Conservation Corps, to Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl, to establishing the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) program, and the More Kids in the Woods and Children’s Forests initiatives. Although our collective

efforts reach more than 4 million youth each year, they are often inconsistently implemented across the Agency. Through a concerted and collaborative effort, there are even greater opportunities to engage millions more youth nationwide. To achieve the outcomes that we desire, we need to coordinate, integrate and support our youth engagement efforts across the Agency – in every deputy area and at every level of the Agency. In focusing on the following priority goals and outcomes, we will be able to maximize and leverage our investments and impacts with youth.

Strategic Goals and Outcomes

Goal 1: Emphasize Partnerships and Collaboration

1. Strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones that reach all America's youth. Engage youth in conservation education, service and employment opportunities.

To effectively reach all youth, we must work through the hands of others. Our most successful efforts will come from bringing together the ideas and experiences from diverse sets of partners committed to engaging youth. This change in mindset, from being solely "doers" to chiefly "collaborators", will require leadership vision, a cultural shift, and the nurturing of new skills. Our peer partners will help us set our course, and accomplish our shared goals. Our partnerships must be strategic, focused and sustainable over the long haul. Our partnership and community engagement efforts will create greater awareness of our Nation's forests and grasslands, employ new technologies and media, and modernize existing partnerships while reaching out to serve and engage a broader array of youth than we have traditionally reached.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

-Margaret Meade -

Key outcomes of this goal include:

- Youth in America have the opportunity to experience and learn about nature and natural resource conservation through the coordinated efforts of diverse and robust partnerships.
- Federal land management agencies collaborate on youth engagement efforts to provide effective, comprehensive and contemporary outreach to youth.
- Youth engagement efforts with our key strategic agency partnerships are strengthened and other partners are encouraged to embrace youth engagement as a core mission.
- New, non-traditional partners help the Forest Service employ new technologies and contemporary approaches to reach youth where they are and in ways that are relevant to their lives.
- More resources are invested through partnerships and in partnership with field units engaging more youth in more areas of the Nation. Partnerships are cost-effective and should place an emphasis on engaging as many youth as possible, through quality programs.
- Forest Service employees and our partners have the skills and resources needed to build and manage effective, sustainable partnerships to engage youth.



Goal 2: Ensure Conservation Service and Career Pathways

2. Develop and nurture opportunities for all youth to engage in conservation service and to investigate career opportunities in natural resource management.

Engaging young people and returning-veterans to protect, restore, and enhance America's Great Outdoors is an Administration and Forest Service priority. The Forest Service relies on effective partnerships that leverage the experience and expertise of employees; Federal, State, tribal, and local governments; local and non-profit conservation and youth corps; Job Corps; and veterans' programs. We contribute to 21CSC's goals to: Build America's future—develop natural and cultural resources stewards; Put Americans to work—provide training and employment opportunities; and preserve, protect and promote America's greatest gifts—increase public access to and use of public lands.

"The time is always ripe to do what is right"

-Martin Luther King, Jr. -

Key outcomes of this goal include:

- *Conservation service and employment opportunities develop valuable life and work skills, help connect youth to the land, nurture conservation leadership, and accomplish meaningful "work on the ground."*
- *Conservation service and employment opportunities reach underserved youth, including economically-disadvantaged youth, and youth of color.*
- *Diverse partners, including Federal, State, and tribal governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in partnership with the Forest Service, work together to provide youth conservation leadership opportunities and opportunities to investigate natural resource careers.*
- *Job Corps participants graduate with strong natural resource understanding and skills, awareness of career opportunities with the Forest Service, and viable avenues to explore employment with the Forest Service.*
- *Diverse youth enter the Forest Service through the Public Land Corps (PLC) non-competitive hiring authority.*
- *Forest Service "face" mirrors the demographic face of the Nation by more aggressively using recruitment programs and hiring tools. We also look internally, reaching out to returning or new temporary employees who mirror the face of the Nation.*



Goal 3: Provide High-Quality, Contemporary Conservation Education

3. Build knowledge about natural resources, conservation and stewardship of our Nation's forests and grasslands by developing and implementing effective, standards-based, contemporary conservation education programs that reach all America's youth.

We will strengthen our conservation education efforts by aligning them with key national education needs and focusing them on Department and Agency priorities such as water, resource restoration, and healthy ecosystems. We will embrace innovation and contemporary approaches in our education efforts by working with the education community, social media and technology, and all staff areas to reach diverse audiences and a variety of learning styles. Building capacity for key outreach programs will be a critical ingredient for effective delivery. We will engage with other Federal and State agencies responsible for educational curricula to collaboratively develop conservation learning in school systems.

"Children the world over have a right to a childhood filled with beauty, joy, adventure, and companionship. They will grow toward ecological literacy if the soil they are nurtured in is rich with experience, love, and good examples."

-Alan Dyer, "A Sense of Adventure"-

Key outcomes of this goal include:

- *American children, no matter where they live, have the opportunity to learn about natural resource conservation and their Nation's forests and grasslands.*
- *Youth develop a personal connection with nature and a personal conservation ethic through their experiences with Forest Service sites, Forest Service personnel, partners, and conservation education programs and materials.*
- *Forest Service contemporary conservation education efforts align with, and support, Department and Forest Service priorities, including water, resource restoration, and fire management, among others.*
- *Forest Service formal conservation education efforts align with, and contribute to, key national education priorities including STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), common core standards and others.*
- *Place-based education is used as a way to teach a sense of, and a love of, place.*
- *Conservation education uses our national forests and grasslands, rural areas, urban and community forests, experimental forests, historical sites, and administrative sites as "living, learning laboratories" for exploration and discovery.*
- *Formal and non-formal educators understand natural resource issues and conservation and are well-equipped to deliver effective, high-quality conservation education.*
- *Youth have lifelong opportunities to learn, and are provided with a continuum of experiences that spans from discovery, to awareness and connection, to knowledge, to action.*

- *Conservation education efforts are experiential, contemporary, and culturally- and generationally-relevant.*
- *Young people are reached where **they** are. We write where they read, we talk where they listen, and we are there where they gather. We invite young people to meet us and be a part of who **we** are, providing positive role models and examples as professional conservation stewards.*
- *Evaluation and assessment informs Forest Service conservation education program implementation and ensures that efforts effectively meet educational goals. Conservation education programs are continuously refined and improved. We seek feedback from educators and educational professionals and evaluate how we can best serve their needs as they partner with us to deliver conservation education.*



Goal 4: Build Connections with Nature

4. Build connections with nature through outdoor recreation opportunities, and providing place-based experiences in nature.

Nurturing a young person's connection with "place" — whether in a national forest or grassland, urban forest, or a community green space — will be a focus of our youth outreach efforts. Recreation on national forests and grasslands, other Federal lands and waters, State and private forests, and urban and community forests, promotes the well-documented benefits of an active lifestyle and spending time in the outdoors. We will continue to provide exceptional settings for outdoor recreation. Our youth engagement work will help young people and their families experience their

Nation's forests and grasslands, develop recreational skills that will last a lifetime, and provide service opportunities for them to care for these lands. Recreation builds strong connections with nature through Interpretive Services and Youth, Volunteer and Hosted Programs. State and private forests will promote youth connections with nature through the various State and private forest settings across the Nation. These recreational and place-based efforts will serve to introduce and inspire youth to form a personal conservation ethic and a lifelong connection to the land and resource stewardship.

*"If you don't know where you are, you don't know **who** you are."*

- Wendell Berry -

Key outcomes of this goal include:

- *Forest Service will promote the many locations for diverse types of physical activity and support the benefits that our youth gain by spending time in nature.*
- *Forest Service will highlight and support recreational opportunities, build capacity among employees and other professionals, and align our efforts to national initiatives.*
- *Forest Service will provide opportunities for youth to become aware of, understand, and connect with our national forests and grasslands, rural areas, urban and community forests, and community green spaces by proactively reaching out to the public to help them identify and locate public lands and nature nearby.*
- *Forest Service will work in a boundary-less manner to promote the concept that nature extends from their backyard, to our local parks, to the "wild" of our Nation's forests and grasslands, and to other public wild lands.*
- *Forest Service will focus on developing a sense of place, a connection to the land, and an awareness of the importance of nature experiences to health and well-being.*



Goal 5: Build Capacity for Youth Engagement

5. Build capacity within the Forest Service and with our partners to plan, support, implement, evaluate and integrate youth engagement opportunities across America.

While the Forest Service accomplishes a great deal in youth engagement across the Agency, increased focus on coordination, strategic alignment with Department and Forest Service priorities, sustainable funding, strategic field capacity, and clear direction on agency resources, accomplishments and assessment, can greatly strengthen our efforts and impacts. We will work across deputy areas, and from ranger district or lab, to national headquarters, to implement a flexible, financially-sustainable, and responsive youth engagement strategy that guides the Forest Service efforts across the Nation in providing youth opportunities in new and effective ways to accomplish our goals. We will align our efforts with key Department and Forest Service priorities, such as water, resource restoration and youth employment. We will develop performance metrics, set performance expectations, and identify sustainable funding. We will recognize exemplary work, celebrate all efforts, share successful models, and champion capacity-building opportunities for our employees. We will develop and implement ways to effectively assess our work, and we will use these findings to continuously improve our efforts.

Key outcomes of this goal include:

- *Forest Service youth engagement efforts are strategic, coordinated, integrated, supported, and implemented broadly across the Agency.*
- *Transparent national programs of work are made with clear investments, accomplishments and measurable outcomes.*
- *Forest Service employees in all deputy areas have the resources, training and leadership to support and implement effective, strategic youth engagement efforts.*
- *Agency employees and partners—including youth—participate in a growing youth engagement “community of practice” to share information, build coalitions and identify best practices in youth engagement.*
- *Leadership expectations and consistent performance metrics support effective strategic planning and prioritization of youth engagement efforts. Enhance field capacity as appropriate to help engage youth and support partners working in partnership with the Forest Service.*
- *Youth engagement efforts are formatively evaluated and assessed, including seeking out feedback from youth (both participants and those yet to engage), to ensure that our efforts are targeted and effective at achieving intended outcomes, and are continuously refined and improved.*
- *Comprehensive and accurate accomplishment reporting allows the Forest Service to assess our work and to “tell our story” to internal and external audiences. Our reporting systems are effective and easy to use, to minimize the burden on the field and our partners, yet accurately report what is occurring on-the-ground.*

Implementation

Each year, comprehensive youth efforts across all deputy and program areas, reach more than four million youth and engage more than a thousand partners. While the preponderance of youth investments and accomplishments occur at the field-level, each organizational level of the Forest Service has a vital role to play in the effective, coordinated delivery and assessment of these resources.

The Agency is committed to working with partners and communities at all levels to realize the goals of this Strategic Framework. While our strategy will remain flexible, our commitment to engaging the next generation of conservation stewards will remain steadfast as we accomplish our goals in new and effective ways.

Goal	Options to Achieve Goal
<p>1. Strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones that reach all America’s youth and engage them in conservation education, service and employment opportunities.</p>	<p>1.1 Promote at least one additional service partnership with a nontraditional partner to engage urban and underserved audiences and organizations that work with diverse constituencies by the end of fiscal year (FY) 2016 in each region.</p> <p>1.2 Ensure that all new and existing partnerships are cost effective and sustainable, and are maximizing youth engagement opportunities. Establish partnership rubric and funding guidelines to ensure that the majority of funding is going to engage youth.</p> <p>1.3 Increase our use of social media and technology, and leverage partner and agency capacity and flexibility with these media to reach youth, their families, and educators.</p> <p>1.4 Strengthen, formalize, and share information with the Forest Service community of practice, about key service-wide partnerships with leading national youth engagement NGO partners.</p> <p>1.5 Continue to develop the network of Children’s Forests as a convening force for broad partnerships focused on youth engagement. Identify funding support for sustainability and expansion of this network.</p> <p>1.6 Build connections with USDA sister agencies’ youth education programs (e.g. 4-H, Farms to Schools to Forests) and with other Federal agencies engaging youth.</p> <p>1.7 Implement at least two dialogue/youth focus groups, in cooperation with partners and the Agency, with diverse populations to gather information on how to best engage and involve youth by the end of FY 2016 in each region.</p>

Goal	Options to Achieve Goal
	<p>1.8 Strengthen work with key Forest Service partners that are currently implementing successful youth engagement efforts, such as American Forest Foundation’s Project Learning Tree, National Wild Turkey Federation, Prince William Network, Wildlife Forever and others.</p> <p>1.9 Collaborate with strategic partners such as the National Forest Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Environmental Education Foundation and others to match and mirror our youth strategy to build strong identity, momentum, advocacy around youth programs, and to leverage resources in support of this work.</p> <p>1.10 Build capacity among employees and partners with partnership skills, and grants and agreements processes. Specifically develop a youth engagement partnership and agreement desk guide, and offer training by the end of FY 2016.</p>
<p>2. Develop and nurture opportunities for all youth to engage in conservation service and investigate career opportunities in natural resource management.</p>	<p>2.1 Leverage service, youth, and Job Corps relationships to deliver effective and contemporary youth programming. Work with Job Corps partners and agency personnel to explore interdisciplinary approaches to provide broad exposure to career possibilities; and fire training expansion.</p> <p>2.2 Promote Public Land Corps non-competitive hiring authority; hire 100 Forest Service employees annually through PLC non-competitive hiring authority by 2019. Specifically in FY 2015, hire 20 qualified participants through this authority.</p> <p>2.3 Strengthen relationship with Job Corps. (Promote Green Jobs, full spectrum of career opportunities in a multi-use agency, life skills, etc.). Continue to work with Job Corps on conservation education curriculum designed for their students.</p> <p>2.4 Employ up to 20,000 youth annually through youth and veteran’s employment programs and YCC by 2019. In FY 2015 employ 10,000 youth and veterans on conservation projects ~15% increase, includes 1,400 YCC participants ~ 30% increase from FY 2013 levels. Hire 20 youth and/or veteran participants in permanent Forest Service positions. To support this goal, the Regions/Stations/Area will expand partnerships, leverage private resources, and identify essential work that can be accomplished by 21CSC partner organizations versus force account temporary employees and contracts where feasible.</p>

Goal	Options to Achieve Goal
	<p>2.5 Create career pathways to attract and hire youth using existing recruitment programs and hiring tools (e.g. Federal Pathways Internship Programs, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences, Indigenous Alliance, Public Land Corps, Schedule A, etc.). Include outreach to existing temporary Forest Service employees who are interested in natural resource careers and who also represent the diversity of the Nation.</p> <p>2.6 Develop career ladders with entry-level positions as a base, so that young people can best compete for positions for which they qualify.</p> <p>2.7 Identify, market, and communicate pathways for employment by integrating partner programs in succession-planning.</p> <p>2.8 Expand use of YCC and internship programs to provide natural resource career exploration and gateway employment opportunities. Ensure agency employee participation in youth programs, to model and expose youth to agency natural resource professional careers.</p> <p>2.9 Strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones with educational institutions, State and Tribal governments, and NGOs focused on developing youth conservation stewards and supporting natural resource career investigations. Specifically, in FY 2014 expand 21CSC organizations members to 120. Also, through the 21 CSC program conduct webinars and training to build capacity to administer and ensure results-oriented partnerships.</p> <p>2.10 Support our employees actively engaging and spending time with youth, so youth can meet Forest Service employees first-hand and hear how and why they chose careers in natural resources. Encourage mentoring, positive role-modeling, and getting out on-the-ground with young folks so that a young person can meet a "real ranger" or "fire fighter" for the first time.</p> <p>2.11 Re-build field capacity so that Forest Service employees have the expertise to not only train/assist partners with technical skills, but also to create career ladders that allow young people to pursue job opportunities in natural resource careers. Specifically, increase resource assistants/interns to build capacity of local units to support partnership outreach and implementation, and develop and monitor conservation partnerships and projects.</p>

Goal	Options to Achieve Goal
<p>3. Build knowledge about natural resources, conservation and stewardship of our Nation’s forests and grasslands, by developing and implementing effective, standards-based, contemporary conservation education programs that reach all America’s youth.</p>	<p>3.1 Align Forest Service formal conservation education priorities and programs around the Nation’s critical education needs – e.g. STEM, education standards.</p> <p>3.2 Emphasize experiential, placed-based conservation education aligned with Forest Service and Department priorities, including water, integrated resource restoration, and the relationship between healthy ecosystems and healthy people.</p> <p>3.3 Work with education partners, institutions and governing State agencies to include conservation education as a core requirement in educational standards.</p> <p>3.4 Identify and promote conservation education best practices that are contemporary and culturally- and generationally-relevant, and that provide a continuum of educational opportunities across lifespan and landscapes to help develop future conservation stewards.</p> <p>3.5 Provide networking opportunities, training and professional development for Forest Service staff and community educators, working with partners and building on programs such as Forest For Every Classroom and GreenSchools!</p> <p>3.6 Conservation Education and Research and Development will continue to produce publications for children based on Forest Service research. In 2015, at least four new journals targeting middle school students will be produced, one reader series for first grade students, and three monographs, including two produced to honor the Wilderness Act 50th Anniversary.</p> <p>3.7 Increase by 5 percent by the end of FY 2016 over FY 2015 levels, the outreach to military families by participating in conservation education events designed specifically to provide conservation education hands-on activities for military families.</p> <p>3.8 Build on previous outreach to Hispanics, African Americans, and girls through the “Discover the Forest” campaign and continue to design social marketing campaigns to target non-traditional audiences with messaging and information to connect these groups to nature, and our Nation’s forests and grasslands and urban and community forests.</p> <p>3.10 Develop and archive on-line by 2016, at least one Distance Learning Adventure that provides conservation education and nature learning through webcasts, webinars, and online education resources aligned to standards.</p>

Goal	Options to Achieve Goal
	<p>3.11 Continue to strengthen and expand programming for underserved populations through partners such as Head Start and Girl Scouts. Additionally, through partnerships with organizations such as Envirothon, EnvironMentors and Outdoor Nation, Conservation Education programming helps to provide a pathway to careers in the natural resource fields for underserved high school and college students.</p>
<p>4. Build connections with nature through outdoor recreation opportunities and provide a placed-based experience of nature.</p>	<p>4.1 Expand communications about recreation and educational opportunities through social media, websites, print and web-based materials, webinars, and video technology, to promote and increase tourism on National Forests and Grasslands and to provide support for state, private, and community-based partners of the Forest Service.</p> <p>4.2 Promote Forest Service facilities that provide outdoor recreation opportunities, including natural play space for youth, and encouraging community engagement.</p> <p>4.3 Engage at least one community to plan parks, natural areas, and open space in FY 2016 in each region. Promote appropriate nature-based recreation improvements and connectivity to our Nation's forests and grasslands and urban and community forests where possible.</p> <p>4.4 Make access to nature easy, convenient, and safe in order to develop a sense of place and caring for nature. Work with partners and local communities to help provide access.</p> <p>4.5 Work with partners to identify and widely-publicize grant programs for community and school yard habitat projects; and programs that connect youth with healthy outdoor recreation (e.g. Green Schools!, ClimateChangeLIVE, Fruit Tree Planting Foundation, Outdoor Nation, People's Gardens). Explore avenues to match the interest and programming capacity of local partners and agency personnel with the resources available in local and national grant programs.</p> <p>4.6 Regional staff will implement at least two place-based events (in addition to already scheduled events (such as National Fishing Day and International Migratory Bird Day) to introduce and engage youth and their families to nature immersion experiences on national forests and grasslands.</p> <p>4.7 Work with communities and partners to develop strategies for getting youth outside in nature. Coordinate efforts to ensure compliance with agency policies (e.g., outfitter/guide permits).</p>

Goal	Options to Achieve Goal
<p>5. Build capacity within the Forest Service and with our partners to plan, support, implement and integrate youth engagement opportunities across America</p>	<p>5.1 Formalize a unified Forest Service national leadership structure focused on youth efforts, representing all Deputy Areas and comprised of: (1) Youth Alliance Directors (Conservation Education; Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources; Watershed, Fish, Wildlife, Air, and Rare Plants; National Partnership Office; Job Corps; Tribal Relations; Fire and Aviation; Office of Communications; Wilderness & Wild and Scenic Rivers; and Research and Development); and (2) Youth Alliance Working Group to provide staff support.</p> <p>5.2 Develop agency-wide youth strategy implementation plan across deputy areas, including a corporate budget strategy, leadership expectations, and performance metrics and accomplishment reporting, that demonstrates the new and effective ways we are accomplishing our goals. Specifically, starting in FY 2016 and in each fiscal following, the Forest Service’s budget project guidance will link to accomplishments identified in the National Strategy for Youth.</p> <p>5.3 Develop and finalize a cohesive, unified communications /identity/branding developed by the Youth Alliance for Forest Service youth programs and initiatives by the end of FY 2016.</p> <p>5.4 Build and nurture Forest Service community of practice, and build employee and partner capacity to learn, innovate, and share effective youth engagement strategies and programs. The Youth Alliance will organize and host an Agency-wide youth engagement seminar/meeting by the end of FY 2016.</p> <p>5.5 Work with Forest Service across deputy areas and with partners to develop youth engagement evaluation and monitoring tools.</p> <p>5.6 Report all action items through the database of record for each program area. Confirm consistent access to relevant databases by reporting staff. This reporting will be done in a reliable and consistent manner across all program areas.</p> <p>5.7 Establish national and regional awards for youth engagement excellence, and produce yearly accomplishment reports. The Youth Alliance will establish this award in FY 2016.</p>

APPENDIX A: Historical Frame for Youth Engagement

Why is a Youth Strategy needed?

Too many of our children grow up with too few opportunities to connect with the natural world. The important role that national forests and grasslands, urban forests, and community green spaces play in fostering healthy, sustainable communities has never been more clear or more critical. In this environment, there is an increasing risk of a generational loss of a conservation ethic and of an appreciation of the value for natural resource stewardship, service and careers. To address these risks, we need:

- An agency-wide cohesive youth strategy that addresses programs and outcomes, conservation education and service activities, and youth and employment (including veterans) in conservation; and
- An agency-wide unified messaging strategy on youth outreach, conservation education, service and employment.

How will the Youth Strategy help the Forest Service?

The climate is changing in unprecedented ways, casting doubt on the future reliability of our natural resources, while our population continues to grow.

Forests will be key. We must *act* to help forests adapt to the inevitable changes. But no matter what we do, change will continue. Future generations must understand the connectedness of systems, be prepared to cope with changes in our climate and demographics, as well as changes in the amount, quality, and distribution of water on the land.

Yet there are worrisome signs that the next generation will not be prepared. On average, youth from ages 8 to 18 spend more than 7 hours a day involved with electronic media; by contrast, they spend about 30 minutes in unstructured outdoor activities. Youth have fewer opportunities to get outdoors, to explore surrounding forests and fields, to get up close and personal with nature. Where then will they find the caring and understanding they will need to become good stewards of the land?

The Forest Service's National Strategy for Youth will build on our long tradition of working with youth in natural environments. We will strengthen our support and diversify our portfolio of programs to actively support opportunities for youth outreach, conservation education, service, and employment in conservation by doing our work in new and effective ways to accomplish our goals. We will encourage innovation and seek out new partnerships and collaborations that will help us expand our sphere of influence into urban areas and underserved communities, leverage the expertise of the private sector and new resources, and leverage the skills and expertise of our employees.

The Forest Service's youth strategy is a high agency priority. Staff across all deputy areas will be accountable for contributing to the development and support of the next generation of public lands stewards and leaders.

How will it help our Partners?

The "deliverables" of this strategy will provide our partners and the American people, "results that matter" in demonstrating real outcome measures, promoting sustainable communities, and facilitating partnerships that foster conservation and citizen stewardship.

The Forest Service connects with youth and families by nurturing partnerships that reach broad audiences, including new and underserved groups. Projects support pathways to education and to natural resource careers for youth. Projects improve access to outdoors and incorporate the arts growing a network of Children's Forests and building capacity for collaboration across the Agency and its community of partners.

Background

A history of engagement

The Forest Service supports an active network of youth programming that engages youth, families and communities in activities that connect them to nature—from interagency, nationwide, year-round programs that reach the largest number of youth—to smaller events that are designed to address local needs. Collectively these programs reach more than 4 million Americans annually and engage thousands of partners. These programs are delivered by every deputy area and at all levels of the Forest Service.

For example, total projected 2012 spending was more than \$28 million; a little more than three dollars per individual reached (9,053,070). The majority of funding for working with youth is allocated from R/S/A program budgets. The majority of resources (about 64 percent) targeted Service and Career Pathway Opportunities in keeping with the emphasis in recent years on youth and veteran employment and 21CSC priorities. The most cost-effective investments are made in Communications and Outreach that is comprised primarily of online resources for children and families: funding commitments of \$8,384,000 are reaching at least 8.6 million individuals and likely many more. Forest Service Signature Events and Signature Programs are expanding outreach nationwide and strengthening the capacity of local units to connect children to the outdoors and promote learning. *(Taken from 2012 strategy/outreach report)*

Investments in Forest Service signature programs such as More Kids in the Woods, Children's Forests, and Discover the Forest.org have resulted in leveraged resources from the R/S/A and external partnerships. Expanded support for special events such as National Fishing Day, National Get Outdoors and Public Lands Days, Outdoor Nation youth summits, National Pollinator Week, International Migratory Bird Day, NatureWatch, Pathways, PLC, Job Corps, and 21CSC have increased the number of youth engaged and increased awareness about Forest Service opportunities.

An important component of Forest Service youth programming is the focus on underserved and urban populations. Recognizing the changing demographics of our nation, the Forest Service is reaching out to historically underserved populations. As the country's population has shifted to more urban environments, the Forest Service has also scaled up programming oriented to an urban audience. Programs meet children and families where they are, and encourage them to come out and enjoy the Nation's public lands.

Building on the Forest Service historic commitment to conservation and environmental stewardship, youth programming is strengthening pathways to employment, promoting volunteerism, building awareness and understanding, and reconnecting youth with the outdoors. Along with the priorities proposed in the youth Strategy, the Forest Service is on track to expand youth engagement and demonstrate impact.

APPENDIX B: Roles & Responsibilities

Organization and Operational Approach/ Roles & Responsibilities

The following section outlines the roles and responsibilities at each level of the Forest Service that will lead to coordinated, effective youth outreach and employment.

Washington Office (WO): The WO will ensure that program direction to field units—where the preponderance of decentralized spending is invested for youth programming—will result in a sustainable infrastructure to strengthen youth engagement outcomes. To achieve an environment that will support high-quality programming, the WO will provide leadership to:

1. Advocate allocation of resources to sustain existing, high-impact programs at the R/S/A levels.
2. Develop consistent performance measurements or metrics for youth outreach and employment work and collect annual accomplishments as a coherent, agency-wide effort that demonstrates the new and effective ways we are accomplishing our goals.
3. Champion effective evaluation and assessment of youth outreach and employment efforts by developing objective evaluation tools and protocols that help to continuously refine and inform our efforts.
4. Support and strengthen existing national partnerships as well as look for new opportunities to expand our network of partners across the Nation.
5. Lead Forest Service-wide initiatives, such as *Discover the Forest.org* and GreenSchools! that support and enhance place-based youth outreach across the Agency.
6. Tell our story! Work at the national level to communicate our youth outreach and employment accomplishments in an effective and strategic manner to both internal and external audiences.

The Youth Alliance (YA): Comprised of national directors engaged in youth efforts across the Agency, the Youth Alliance serves as the primary point of contact, both internally and externally, for Forest Service Youth Programs. The Youth Alliance works collaboratively with each deputy area to support Forest Service youth outreach, conservation education, service and employment initiatives and coordinates with the USDA, our Federal partners, the Administration and external partners in the non-profit and for-profit sectors. The Youth Alliance provides leadership to the integration of youth outreach, education, service, and employment strategies across multiple program areas, for budget and strategic planning, and for performance reporting and accountability. The Youth Alliance coordinates the development and implementation of clearly defined goals, performance metrics and reporting requirements, operational policies and procedures, and support the partnership outreach necessary for the Forest Service to accomplish program goals in new and effective ways.

The Youth Alliance Working Group (YAWG): will consist of staff-level program leaders, managers and coordinators in offices throughout the Agency (including regional and forest field units) that are involved with the youth outreach, conservation education, service, and employment initiatives.

Region/Station/Area (R/S/As): The R/S/As have the primary responsibility to prioritize and support youth engagement programs that are responsive to the R/S/A's resource and community needs, and the R/S/A organizational capacity. While overall program direction and coordination is provided by the WO, decisions on program implementation will be made at the R/S/A-level aligning with broad, national strategic direction for youth engagement. Regional foresters and Station and Area directors will prioritize youth investments and ensure that R/S/A efforts are coordinated, strategic, high-quality, accountable, and integrated across disciplines

R/S/As will engage with the WO to ensure that national direction is responsive to the needs of the field. R/S/As will lead on R/S/A-wide initiatives that have broad applicability across their area of responsibility. R/S/As will also provide direct support and capacity-building opportunities to Forest/Lab/District implementers.

Forest/Grassland & District: The forests/grasslands, labs, districts, and other "field units" are the primary implementers of the Forest Service youth outreach, conservation education, service, and employment efforts. They are where the direct connection with youth, their families and the community primarily takes place. These field units can best design and implement place-based youth outreach opportunities, and can best engage with partners to successfully implement projects. Their field-perspective and experience is invaluable to the strategic, forest-wide youth initiative. Their input will be sought and valued by the R/S/As and by the WO.

Field units are responsible for implementing high-quality youth engagement efforts that are prioritized and supported at the R/S/A-level. They are also responsible for completing accomplishment reporting and appropriately assessing and monitoring their impacts. They are encouraged to participate in capacity-building opportunities, be an active part of the Forest Service youth community of practice, and engage in dialog about national youth policies and strategies.