



# Biden Administration Proposes New Civilian Climate Corps

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On January 27, 2021, President Biden issued [Executive Order 14008](#), “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.” Among its various provisions, the order directs the Secretary of the Interior, in collaboration with the Secretary of Agriculture and the heads of other relevant agencies, to submit a strategy to create a Civilian Climate Corps Initiative “within existing appropriations.” The order further directs that such an initiative should “aim to conserve and restore public lands and waters, bolster community resilience, increase reforestation, increase carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protect biodiversity, improve access to recreation, and address the changing climate.” In March 2021, the Biden Administration included a recommendation for a \$10 billion investment in the Civilian Climate Corps Initiative as part of the White House’s [American Jobs Plan](#) proposal. The Administration’s initial topline [FY2022 discretionary budget request](#) for the Department of the Interior (DOI) included \$200 million for the initiative for the next fiscal year; additional funding information may be made available later.

Although some stakeholders have [likened the proposed](#) Civilian Climate Corps to past federal employment and service corps programs, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), it is not yet clear how and in what form the Biden Administration plans to implement this initiative. The CCC was a federal employment and job training program operating from 1933 to 1943, which put to work 3 million unemployed young men on projects aimed at the “conservation and development of the natural resources of the United States” ([50 Stat. 319](#)). CCC enrollees were recruited, hired, and trained by the federal government; worked under federal supervision; lived in government-run camps; and received stipends paid with federal funding.

The Biden Administration’s proposal for a Civilian Climate Corps could mirror the Depression-era CCC approach, or it could resemble a contemporary model for federal corps programs. Many of today’s federal corps programs are comparatively smaller in scale than the original CCC and vary in design, location, and scope of work. In general, these programs offer participants—sometimes referred to as *corpsmembers*—a variety of benefits in exchange for their service. These benefits can include a wage stipend, housing, classroom training, experiential and environmental education, professional support services, and post-service education awards.

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The two primary federal corps programs related to conserving and restoring public lands and waters are the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC; [16 U.S.C. §§1701-1706](#)) and the Public Lands Corps (PLC; [16 U.S.C. §§1721 et seq.](#)). The YCC engages young people (aged 15-18) for 8-10 weeks over the summer to work on conservation-related projects on federal lands and waters under the jurisdiction of DOI and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). By contrast, the PLC is a job training and employment program for young adults (aged 16-30 or up to 35 for military veterans) to engage in projects administered by selected agencies within DOI, USDA, and the Department of Commerce (DOC). Under the YCC and the PLC, agencies generally do not administer corps programs; instead, they typically partner with locally based, nonfederal corps organizations (sometimes referred to as *sponsoring organizations*). These organizations are primarily responsible for the recruitment, hiring, and management of participants.

In some cases, agencies may be authorized to recruit, hire, and manage corpsmembers directly for agency-specific projects on federal lands. For example, the [Job Corps](#) program ([29 U.S.C. §§3101 et seq.](#)), administered by the Department of Labor (DOL), includes a conservation component. Of the program's 121 residential centers, 24 are Civilian Conservation Centers administered by the U.S. Forest Service within USDA. Students aged 16-24 live at these centers, and their job training focuses on conserving, developing, or managing Forest Service lands. The YCC and PLC statutes also authorize agencies to administer their own corps programs; in practice, most partner with nonfederal corps partners.

The federal government provides support and funding to organizations that sponsor individuals to work on conservation efforts in other ways. For example, sponsoring organizations may receive funding through AmeriCorps grant programs to support their work recruiting and engaging corpsmembers for conservation projects. [AmeriCorps](#) (formally known as the Corporation for National and Community Service) is an independent federal agency that supports a wide range of national service programs and projects, including conservation-related work. Agencies also may allocate a portion of their annual appropriations—at the agencies' discretion or at Congress's direction—for projects on federal lands and waters carried out through corps partnerships. For YCC and PLC projects, agencies enter into cost-share agreements with organizations and cover a percentage of the project costs, which could include corpsmember stipends, housing, or other associated costs.

The Biden Administration has not released its strategy for how the proposed Civilian Climate Corps would be implemented or how such an initiative would interact with the existing corps programs or federal workforce programs. Prior administrative proposals to establish or increase corps participation in conservation-related work have relied on public-private partnerships and the existing corps infrastructure to meet their goals. For example, in 2012, the Obama Administration established the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) as a broad interagency initiative aimed at expanding opportunities and funding for youth employment and training on public lands. The 21CSC Federal Advisory Committee, tasked with developing recommendations for how best to implement the 21CSC program, specified that unlike the original CCC, the 21CSC should be [“operated primarily by non-federal partners.”](#) Following the Biden Administration's announcement, some [stakeholders proposed](#) the new program take a hybrid approach, combining funding and support for local corps organizations with federal agencies directly administering some program activities, similar to the original CCC approach.

Some Members of Congress have put forth [proposals](#) for establishing a Civilian Climate Corps, as well as bills aimed at increasing corps participation on public lands and waters more broadly. These proposals vary in scale and concept, with some calling for the establishment of a [new, federally operated climate corps](#) and others looking to bolster the existing conservation corps model with additional federal funding or support. For a brief overview of some of the bills introduced in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, see CRS Report R46513, *Federal Conservation Corps Programs: Options for Congress in Response to COVID-19*, by Mark K. DeSantis.

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