

# CINNABAR FOUNDATION

## Montana Conservation Corps

*“Conserving Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas”*

For twenty-five years, Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) has been inspiring and empowering youth and young adults through hands-on conservation service and education to be leaders, stewards of the land, and engaged citizens who improve their communities.



At the core of its training program are five objectives: to instill an ethic of volunteer service and civic responsibility; strengthen communication and team-building skills; enhance competencies to be leaders and contributing team members; increase knowledge of the natural environment; and inspire an enthusiasm for the benefits of hard work and quality results.

Operating out of four Montana regional offices — Kalispell, Missoula, Helena and Bozeman — MCC provides young people and veterans opportunities to work on important on-the-ground

projects on public lands throughout Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, and North and South Dakota. These projects involve fuel reduction, watershed and native grassland restoration, habitat enhancements, trail work, and invasive weed management. Volunteers and community partners are also involved in community service projects that benefit local food banks, senior centers, museum, schools and community gardens.

### MCC PROGRAMS

MCC offers programs for middle schoolers, teenagers, and young adults through its *Youth Expedition* and *AmeriCorps* programs. Participants learn what it means to be an engaged citizen, a steward of the land, and an environmental leader.

- *Youth Expedition* provides volunteer experiences for Montana teens ages 15 to 17 that range from one to four weeks.
- *AmeriCorps Field Program* is designed for young adults ages 18 and up and makes available a variety of positions ranging from 300-hour (3-month) to 1700-hour (9-month) terms of service. Both programs offer opportunities to work, serve, and learn in some of Montana’s wildest places while developing fundamental communication, team building and technical field skills.

MCC's conservation goals are accomplished on "hitches," which range from front-country day projects to backcountry projects that typically span 6 to 10 days. While on a hitch, MCC crews work to fulfill a conservation goal as well as interact with project partners, including a variety of land management agencies. Project partners include government agencies, other nonprofit organizations, schools, and foundations. The breadth of partner organizations give MCC participants invaluable educational and networking opportunities, especially for those interested in pursuing a conservation career.

## **CINNABAR'S ROLE AS A FUNDING PARTNER**

The Cinnabar Foundation has been a funding partner with MCC since 2013. Thus far, MCC has received \$18,000 in grant support for its habitat enhancement projects in wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas.

In 2016, Cinnabar is helping MCC support 40 youths who will provide 3,200 hours of conservation service on projects in several Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). These lands, which are undeveloped and retain their primeval character and influence, have been designated as WSAs to preserve their natural conditions and their ecological, geological, educational, historical, scientific, and/or scenic values. It is the responsibility of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to oversee the 517 WSAs that encompass roughly 12.6 million acres of land located throughout the western states and Alaska; Montana alone has 39 WSAs, spanning nearly 450,000 acres.

The Cinnabar-supported projects were conducted at four sites:

### **1) Shenon Creek, Bell Canyon, Little Water Canyon/Timber Butte, Muddy Creek, and Dyce Creek**

These WSAs provide critical habitat for grizzly bears, Canada lynx, and sage-grouse. Work at this project site focused on areas that are consistently violated during big game hunting season. MCC crews concentrated on constructing vehicle barricades on unauthorized vehicle routes, installing signage, and obscuring routes to alleviate potential pressures these areas might otherwise experience in the future.

### **2) Pryor Mountains WSA and the Wild Horse Range**

The Pryor Mountains WSA and Wild Horse Range is home to free roaming mustangs that were introduced in the 1600s. This is an area of critical concern for habitat restoration. MCC crews de-commissioned and constructed blockages on unauthorized vehicle routes, which when illegally traveled pose threats to the wild horses that inhabit the area as well as disturb nesting birds and wildlife. Additionally, crew members surveyed fence line and documented sage grouse mortality.

### **3) Bear Trap Canyon Wilderness Area**

In 2012, the Bear Trap Canyon Wilderness Area, one of four units of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, was stricken by a devastating wildfire that burned over 15,000 acres. A major infestation of noxious invasive weeds resulted. MCC crews spent two weeks in the Bear Trap Canyon Wilderness Area treating over 300 acres for noxious weed infestation along the Madison River. This project's goal was to restore natural vegetation communities.

#### 4) Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument

The last project is part of a larger one that concentrates on rehabilitating native plant life through the removal of noxious weeds. MCC crews spent two weeks at the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument worksite removing invasive plants, taking inventory of riparian areas for infestations of salt cedar, and closing roads so wildlife and other sensitive plant species can thrive.



As MCC crews complete conservation projects such as these, they learn far more than vital conservation issues and practices. They discover the incredible potential that exists within themselves to make an enduring impact.

To learn more about Montana Conservation Corps, visit [www.mtcorps.org](http://www.mtcorps.org).

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