

Models of Implementation Crews at Work in PNW Restoration

The work of ecological restoration cannot happen without competent, skilled workers at all levels of project planning, implementation, and follow up. Across the Pacific Northwest and beyond, practitioners in this field utilize a variety of different crews and staffing strategies to accomplish their aims. Here, we describe a few implementation and maintenance crew structures that groups around the region currently employ to restore ecosystems.

All information compiled in this article comes from program websites (linked below) and/or personal communications with program managers.

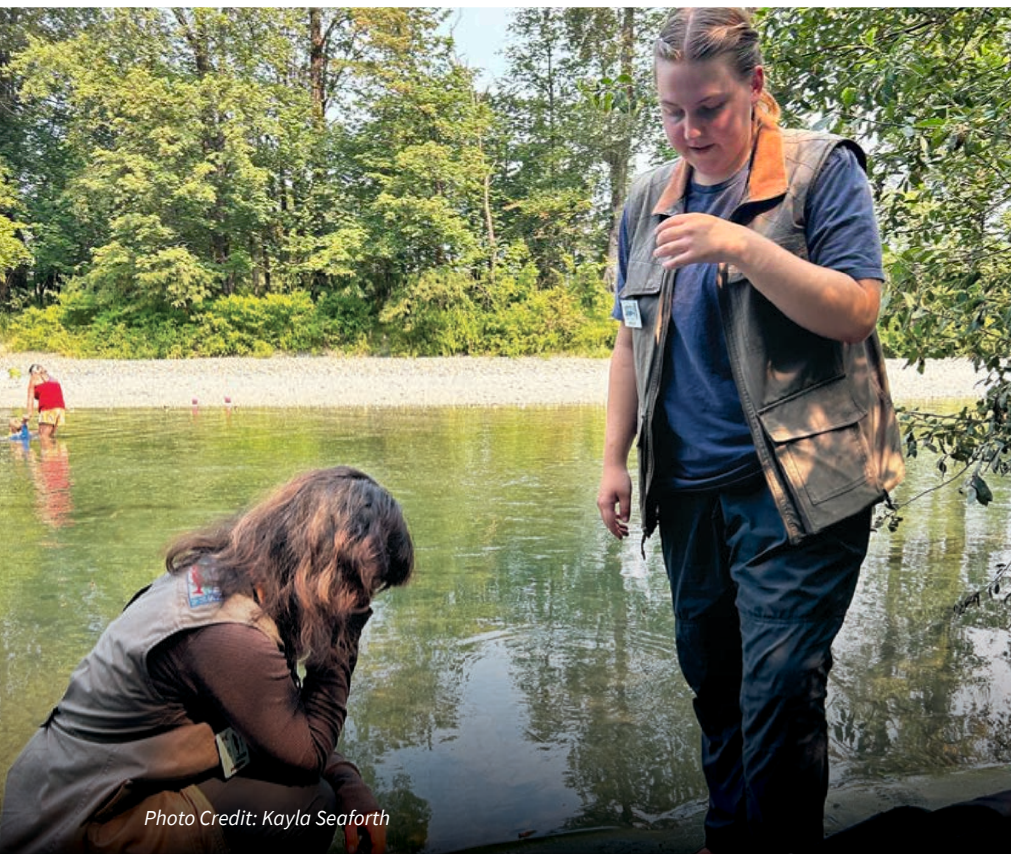


Photo Credit: Kayla Seaforth

The Conservation Corps Model

In this model, crews are contracted to work for a sponsor agency or organization for a dedicated period of time. These crews are often made up of young adults who are hired to build technical skills, and almost all of their time is spent doing field work. These crews are available to either be hosted by an organization or agency year round, or on a project specific basis, but are coordinated by a centralized (often state government) agency.

The examples below are meant to illustrate different ways a conservation corps can take shape, and are not exhaustive of the conservation corps programs at work in the Pacific Northwest. Other programs include [EarthCorps](#), [Northwest Youth Corps](#), [Dirt Corps](#), and more.

Washington Conservation Corps

PROGRAM GOAL

Washington Conservation Corps is an AmeriCorps program that supports young adults and military veterans as they jumpstart their careers in the environmental field.

CREW SIZE & STRUCTURE

- 5 AmeriCorps members and 1 WA Ecology staff supervisor
- Crews can be sponsored by a single partner for the full 11 month term or can serve with multiple sponsors on a week-by-week basis
- Crews are coordinated by the Washington Department of Ecology

FUNDING STRUCTURE

- Cost-share model*
- Full-time crews: 75% partner 25% WCC
- Spike crews: 75% partner 25% WCC + per diem and housing

**Environmental Justice projects are not subject to cost-share requirements. The Climate Commitment Act (CCA) funds EJ, living allowance increases and affinity group spikes, among other things*

CREW RESOURCES

1 truck, hand and power tools, 120 hours of training in field and leadership skills per crew member each year

LENGTH OF CREW MEMBER TERM

- 11, 9, and 3 month positions; crew contracts with permanent sponsors can last up to 11 months and be renewed annually
- Smallest requestable time is 1 week
- Crews operate on 4 day x 10 hour per week, or occasionally an 8 day x 10 hour “spike schedule”. The crew year runs from October - September, annually.

CREW MEMBER DEMOGRAPHICS

18-25 years old and/or military veterans

PROJECT TYPES

- Instream large woody debris placement, bank stabilization, or fish-barrier removal project field support
- Livestock exclusionary fence construction
- Manual and chemical invasive-species suppression and removal
- Native species installation and maintenance
- Trail, boardwalk, bridge, and infrastructure improvements, such as campgrounds and picnic shelters
- Wetland creation or restoration
- Wildlife structure installation
- Wildland fire mitigation, including thinning and fuels reduction

EQUITY BENEFITS

Beginning in 2022, Environmental Justice crew time became available to eligible organizations with no cost-share requirement. During the 2022-23 service term, crews completed 97 projects for 14 partners through this program, which provides no cost-share time to 501(c)(3) nonprofits and governmental organizations, including tribal governments. State and federal agencies are not eligible. Eligible projects must be habitat restoration or trail projects that positively impact vulnerable communities and take place in areas with disproportionate environmental burdens, in rural counties, or economically distressed counties.

MEMBER BENEFITS

In an 11 month term, members receive 3, 40 hour training blocks plus on the job training, college credits, health insurance, GED reimbursement, an education award following their service term, and mental health, food, and child care assistance.

Members are issued a living stipend of \$2,882/month. Members living in high cost of living counties receive an elevated living stipend of \$3,136/month

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Washington State

PROGRAM SIZE

2024-25 service year:

- 272 members
- 100 project sponsors
- 52 field crews
- 12 individual placement positions

APPLICATION WINDOW FOR PROJECT SPONSORS

Requests for crew time open the winter prior to the beginning of the crew year (i.e. if crew time is desired between October '25 & September '26, submit application in Winter '24/'25)

Washington Service Programs and the Climate Commitment Act

Green service AmeriCorps programs like the Washington Conservation Corps (WCC), EarthCorps, CivicSpark, and the Student Conservation Association, got a recent boost thanks to the Washington Climate Corps Network (WCCN). WCCN was formed during the 2023 legislative session to distribute funds from Climate Commitment Act derived revenues to existing climate related workforce development programs, with an emphasis on supporting projects that address climate change and seek to minimize harm in overburdened communities throughout the state. The Climate Commitment Act authorized Washington's new "cap-and-invest" program, which places a declining cap on the state's largest polluters, and requires them to purchase allowances

for each metric ton of their air pollution. The first auction was held in February 2023, and many programs including the WCCN have benefitted from auction revenues since.

The WCC has utilized this funding to increase member stipends, expand the number of environmental justice projects they complete at no cost to the sponsor organization, and build opportunities for peer support among members who are neurodivergent, have or currently serve in the military, and who belong to the BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities.

In 2023, the legislature approved \$7.545 to support the WCCN. More than half of this comes from the Climate Commitment Account, and the rest was provided as match from the federal AmeriCorps program. In addition to

the funding provided to WCCN, the legislature has appropriated over \$2.1 Billion of CCA revenue in things like energy efficient equipment rebates, home weatherization, projects that seek to reduce health disparities, tribal capacity grants, projects to improve air quality in overburdened communities, utility bill assistance, projects that seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in overburdened communities, and improvements to urban tree canopy cover. For information on the impact of the CCA on northwest tribes, see this [article](#) from Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Chairman, Ed Johnstone.

This year, a ballot initiative to repeal the Climate Commitment Act was defeated. This is good news for the WCCN and the many other important projects and programs that the Climate Commitment Act supports.



Photo Credit: Kayla Seaforth

Oregon Conservation Corps

PROGRAM GOAL

1. Reducing the risk of wildfire
2. Assisting in the creation of Fire-Adapted communities
3. Engaging young adults in workforce training

CREW SIZE & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Funding is coordinated by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission of Oregon. The Office of Workforce investments manages requests for applications and determines awards – however, the grantees/partners do all of the hiring and training of staff as well as the management, and implementation of on the ground work. Each partners' structure may look slightly different from the next.

Most crews have a general 4:1 youth participant to adult staff ratio, and many organizations run more than one crew at a time.

Funding Structure Oregon Conservation Corps is primarily funded by State dollars determined in Legislative sessions and supplemented by private donations & fundraising. OCC does not currently have “continuous service level” funding, which means that it is reconsidered each biennium during the long legislative session. This year, OCC funding was not included in the HECC's Agency Request Budget, so IF OCC gets funded it will be because Legislators or the Governor seek to include its funding in the upcoming budget for 2025-2027.

OCC grant awards average around \$1 million dollars per grantee currently, to be spent over 2 years.

CREW RESOURCES

Grants can fund purchase of tools and large equipment, staff time and training, as well wrap around support services for participants. This is flexible, and determined by grant applicants.

LENGTH OF CREW MEMBER TERM

Some programs operate in conjunction with national AmeriCorps grants and have more traditional 12-18 week models of service. Other programs will keep their participants on as long as needed to support their career advancement. For some people, this process is 6 months, for others it may be over a year. OCC as a program tries to be flexible to accommodate a wide range of needs.

CREW MEMBER DEMOGRAPHICS

16-26 years old

PROJECT TYPES

- Fuels reduction
- Defensible space creation around structures and critical infrastructure
- Prescribed burns
- Community education/outreach

EQUITY BENEFITS

The request for applications calls on potential grantees/partners to refer to HECC's Equity Lens as they consider their work. Many grantees/partners are already in positions where they are community hubs or otherwise serving people in their communities. Grantees/partners consider equity as they try to narrow down requests for treatment.

MEMBER BENEFITS

Minimum wage or higher, some receive AmeriCorps education awards, opportunities to receive certificates related to first aid, chainsaw operation, wildland firefighting, incident management and more.

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Oregon, treatments are limited to areas within the Wildland Urban Interface

PROGRAM SIZE

In the inaugural year, over 500 young adults participated in OCC, and over 200 additional jobs were supported with OCC funding.

APPLICATION WINDOW FOR PROJECT SPONSORS

The upcoming application window will likely open November 2024-February 2024



"I know way more now than I ever thought I would about fire ecology and how to adapt to new things—it was like a light switch, almost—learning how to adapt to new places and experiences. It has opened my eyes to so many more positions in the workforce."

—Alex, Lomakatsi Crew Member, funded by OCC



"After getting this job, I've been able to get on my feet, get everything stabilized in my life, and go to college."

—Rosie, member of crew funded by OCC



"Homeowners are really receptive. They're happy to see us working and making their land more fire-wise."

—Ethan, member of crew funded by OCC

The Paired Education-Field Work Model

This model pairs the technical skills one may gain on a conservation corps-type crew with formal education, often in the form of a certificate through a partner college or university. In this model, participants balance time between field work and class time. All of the programs highlighted below have been developed in the last 1-4 years as a response to the need for well trained workers in the field of ecological restoration, beyond the entry level, and new programs in other watersheds are being developed to meet local needs every year.

New Program Underway: Tribal Stewards Program

With funding from NOAA, and in partnership with five tribes, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) will administer a program to provide culturally relevant workforce training for tribal students. In a press release, SBCTC said “The Tribal Stewards Program will involve training faculty to better serve Tribal students, integrating Tribal natural-resource knowledge into college workforce programs, and recruiting and supporting more Tribal students. The programs will be available both on campuses and Tribal lands, creating opportunities for Tribal students to enter natural resource careers and serve Tribal communities.”

Six colleges will partner with five tribes to develop programming:

- Peninsula College with the Makah Tribe.
- Grays Harbor College with the Quinault Indian Nation.
- Green River College with the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe.
- South Puget Sound Community College with the Squaxin Island Tribe.
- Spokane Community College and Wenatchee Valley College with the Colville Confederated Tribes.

Additional collaborating organizations include employers, The Evergreen State College, the NOAA-affiliated University of Washington Climate Impacts Group, and the Office of the Washington State Climatologist.



Photo Credit: Island Conservation Corps

Islands Conservation Corps

PROGRAM GOAL

The Islands Conservation Corps combines academic coursework and hands-on ecological restoration to cultivate the next generation of land stewardship professionals that understand the history and modernity of conservation from the ground up.

CREW/COHORT SIZE & STRUCTURE

A crew of 9 first year members, led by 5 second year members and one field supervisor. Crew members work an average of 30 hours a week in the field and take classes on Friday and evenings.

FUNDING STRUCTURE

Cost-share with project sponsors, grant funded projects, Americorps, tuition assistance through Western Washington University.

CREW RESOURCES

Transportation to project sites, hand and power tools, chainsaw training

LENGTH OF CREW MEMBER TERM

10 months, September - July annually

CREW MEMBER DEMOGRAPHICS

Under 36 years old

PROJECT TYPES

- Riparian and upland planting
- Fuels reduction
- Defensible space creation around structures
- Noxious weed removal
- Trail building
- Fence building
- Ecological management planning

EQUITY BENEFITS

\$700/ month equity enhancement per month for members who made less than \$30,000 the year before.

MEMBER BENEFITS

Monthly stipend of \$1600, plus \$400 in rental assistance, healthcare, and education award

Ecological Restoration Certificate with credits that can be used toward B.A. or M.A. at Western Washington University

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

San Juan County

PROGRAM SIZE

15 field crew members

APPLICATION WINDOW FOR PROJECT SPONSORS

April - June annually

Restoration For All Pilot Program

Edmonds College, Latino Educational Training Institute (LETI), and Snohomish Conservation District

PROGRAM GOAL

Restoration for All at Edmonds College is a technical workforce certificate program focusing on the Latinx community; certificate support is provided by the Latino Educational Training Institute. The program is designed for participants to gain the training needed for a habitat restoration-based career, in addition to advancing the knowledge base of individuals who already have experience in landscaping, horticulture, and construction by educating them on restoration practices. The Latino Educational Training Institute (LETI) and Snohomish Conservation District are also involved in the pilot phase of this program.

CREW/COHORT SIZE & STRUCTURE

- Class (Human Ecology 201/202/203): Up to 22 students each quarter. Each quarter offers all three course levels as a mixed class.
- Paid internship: one quarter-long internship for 2 – 4 interns is offered per year in the fall quarter. The internship is currently offered as a 30 hour per week, 10 week internship. One crew lead position (seasonal position) and up to 4 interns per internship. Interns operate as a field crew to maximize efficiency with Spanish – English translation and intern learning objectives.

Interns are employed by LETI and hosted with the Snohomish Conservation District. Snohomish Conservation District is currently the only organization sponsoring an internship with the current NOAA funding; it is possible that the program will be able to offer interns to other partners as part of the 3-year pilot program, but as of fall 2024, the partners are working to pilot the internship at Snohomish CD before expanding.

FUNDING STRUCTURE

The three-year pilot program is currently funded by a NOAA Coastal Habitat Resilience Grant for Underserved Communities (2023 – 2026).

INTERNSHIP CREW RESOURCES

Interns will be paid a stipend that is set to a competitive wage for the restoration labor market (field technician). Interns will receive field gear that remains with them post-separation to address one of the barriers to entry into this field (work boots, work clothing including pants, shirts, hats, rain gear). Interns will also receive some coaching for job seeking and applications and will have the opportunity to network with potential future employers through project site tours and a possible employer panel.

LENGTH OF CREW MEMBER TERM

The 10-week internship aligns with the Edmonds College fall quarter for each academic year.

CREW MEMBER DEMOGRAPHICS

None to provide at this time.

PROJECT TYPES

Riparian and wetland habitat restoration (planting, maintenance, vegetation monitoring); beaver coexistence; exposure to fish passage construction and public works construction habitat restoration projects;

EQUITY BENEFITS

The internship is structured to address some of the known barriers to entry for Latinx community members to enter the workforce including competitive stipends and field gear. The pilot internship is also focused on uncovering and identifying solutions to other known and unknown barriers that prevent Latinx individuals from entering the habitat restoration workforce. LETI provides strong support to the students in developing application materials, understanding and obtaining work authorization documents, and address other barriers.

MEMBER BENEFITS

Paid internship 2024 internship pay: stipend that provides \$20.00 per hour; crew lead paid \$27.69 – \$29.70 per hour.

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Snohomish County, Washington

PROGRAM SIZE

- Class: 22 students per quarter
- Internship: one crew lead and 2 – 4 interns per quarter when the internship is offered

APPLICATION WINDOW FOR PROJECT SPONSORS

N/A

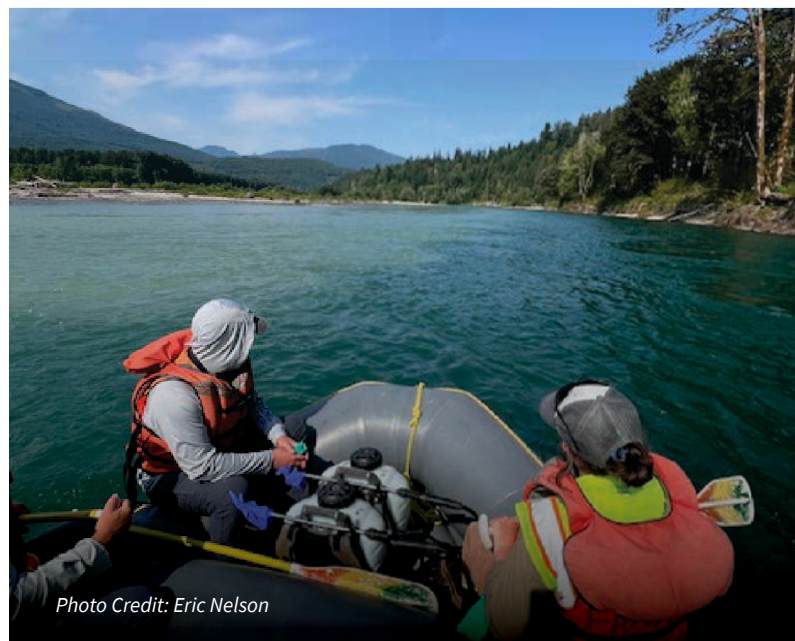


Photo Credit: Eric Nelson

NSEA and Western Washington University Certificate Program

PROGRAM GOAL

Students engage in courses to learn the current environmental issues in fisheries habitat and research while also participating in hands-on practicum work through paid internships with the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA).

CREW/COHORT SIZE & STRUCTURE

There are two certificate options Salmon Enhancement: Community Education Certificate and Salmon Enhancement: Habitat Restoration Certificate which have different course requirements. We hire one cohort of students pursuing both certificate types based on need for the summer/fall program seasons.

FUNDING STRUCTURE

Students are responsible for all tuition costs associated with certificate. Internship hours with NSEA are paid minimum wage with funding provided by federal state and local grants.

CREW RESOURCES

Interns are provided with training, tools, supplies, and PPE to carry out work assignments.

LENGTH OF INTERN TERM

8 credits, or approximately 240 hours of work. This can be done as a summer quarter intensive or spread out across summer and fall quarters. Coursework is done concurrently with internship and 15-19 credits are needed to earn the certificate.

PROJECT TYPES

- River user education and outreach
- Water quality sampling
- Trash cleanup
- Volunteer work party leadership
- Youth salmon education

EQUITY BENEFITS

Certificate programs have been developed with Career Connect Washington's equity principles in mind, and seek to expand career training opportunities to historically underrepresented students.

MEMBER BENEFITS

Paid intern hours, hands on learning opportunities

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Whatcom County

PROGRAM SIZE

Spring - Fall 2024: 5 students

APPLICATION WINDOW FOR PROJECT SPONSORS

N/A: all work is intended to serve NSEA habitat restoration and community outreach programs



"I took a water quality class last quarter at Western so measuring all this water quality data has helped me solidify everything I've learned, and [I'm learning] how to apply it to habitat for salmon. Doing outreach in general has given me a lot more confidence in talking to the public, and having conversations about salmon."

- Maddie W. NSEA Summer/Fall Intern



"Outreach is mostly about building long lasting relationships, so that people trust you and can continue to engage in conversation about what matters to them. Maybe [they] don't care about salmon, but [they] care about [other elements of the river], and they're all interconnected."

- Mer P. NSEA Summer/Fall Intern



"One thing that I think is really valuable is how the certificate program connects real world environmental work with academic courses. We have a lot of students that come through our internship program, and they realize how difficult it can be to explain some of those hard science concepts that tell you there's a problem or that describe some environmental issue, to the general public who hasn't received that same education."

- Sarah B. NSEA Stewardship Program Manager



"I think that this program is really good for finding ways to engage with people in a way that's meaningful for them, especially with how diverse our audience is. As these interns continue on into the fall, they'll work very closely with fourth graders, which lets them connect with a younger audience whose perspectives of the world are forming. That's another way we teach about watersheds and start instilling those values of stewardship and environmental protection early and building that place based connection."

- Avery G. NSEA Stewardship Coordinator

The Staff Crew Model

When an organization commits to hosting a staff crew, the crew members are hired directly by the organization on a part or full time, and temporary or year round basis, depending on the needs and resources of the organization. This model tends to allow for more institutional knowledge transfer, and can offer better job support for crew members like higher pay, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. This model also tends to be much harder to fund because of the project specific nature of restoration work.

In addition to the programs below, we have featured other staff crews in previous issues of treeline. Find articles about the Olympic Peninsula based [10,000 Years Institute crew](#), [Lomakatsi Restoration Project](#), and more on our [website](#).



Photo Credit: Kayla Seaforth

Mason Conservation District

PROGRAM GOAL

Provide year-round labor to complete riparian habitat restoration, enhancement, and maintenance projects for the Conservation District

CREW SIZE & STRUCTURE

5 - 10 crew members supported by 1.5 FTE to coordinate

FUNDING STRUCTURE

Funded by multiple grants including: Washington Conservation Commission, Salmon Recovery Funding Board/Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration, Washington Department of Agriculture, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Floodplains by Design, and occasional interlocal agreements / contracted work.

CREW RESOURCES

Brushcutters, backpack sprayers, planting shovels, vehicle, ORV, small non-motorized watercraft, hand tools, PPE, wheelbarrows, planting bags

LENGTH OF CREW MEMBER TERM

Full-time, year-round (not term limited)

EQUITY BENEFITS

Annual boot and clothing stipends are offered to MCD employees.

MEMBER BENEFITS

Full time position, benefits (sick leave, vacation, healthcare, PERS retirement), opportunities for training and career growth

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Mason County – unless contracted by another district to conduct work in their jurisdiction.

PROGRAM SIZE

1 crew; size fluctuates depending on available funding ~ \$1million annually



Photo Credit: Latino Educational Training Institute (LETI)

The Contract Crew Model

In this model, the crews are managed by independent businesses and hired by project sponsors on a project to project basis. These crews often require little training or oversight by the watershed group compared to other models, because the business takes on the responsibility for training and managing their employees and providing transportation and equipment. For this reason, crews may be more costly on a per-person hour

basis, but typically provide high quality, reliable work that can be lower cost at the project level. While several restoration contractors serve the PNW, responses to our inquiries were limited owing to the busy summer and fall seasons, so information is limited to the contractor highlighted below. For more on an Oregon based contractor, check out our previous feature on [R. Franco Restoration](#).

Northwest Habitat Management

MISSION STATEMENT

Northwest Habitat Management works with landowners to restore and maintain native habitat throughout the North Puget Sound region.

CREW SIZE & STRUCTURE

5-8 member crew, including crew lead & owner operator

FUNDING STRUCTURE

Fee for service model

CREW RESOURCES

Transportation to/from sites, tools, herbicide & licensed applicators, crew management and training, equipment rentals, personalized PPE, GPS and mapping

LENGTH OF CREW MEMBER TERM

- Full-time, year-round (not term limited)
- Mix of seasonal and year round employees and part and full time schedules, partnerships with other contractors

PROJECT TYPES

Riparian planting, weed control, herbicide application, site prep and maintenance, weed management plans, management plans tailored to conservation plans, thinning, adaptive and experimental management practices

CREW MEMBER BENEFITS

Bonus and pay bump for herbicide applicators license, regular raises

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Snohomish, Skagit, San Juan, Kitsap and Whatcom counties

PROGRAM SIZE

One 5 - 8 person crew

LEAD TIME NEEDED TO HIRE CREW

Dependent on type of project and time of year



Photo Credit: Island Conservation Corps