

# Maine Conservation Connection

## Maine Conservation Corps



### October 2013



Maine Conservation Corps  
124 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0124  
1-800-245-JOBS (in Maine)  
207-624-6085

[corps.conservation@maine.gov](mailto:corps.conservation@maine.gov)  
<http://www.maine.gov/doc/parks/mcc>

### Field Team Update

The Fall Field Team has finished up their service for the 2013 season! They have completed projects in state parks (Baxter, Vaughan Woods, Androscoggin Riverlands, Grafton Notch, Wolfe's Neck), on public lands (Nahmakanta, Cutler, Pineland), as well as on the Appalachian Trail, on Haystack Mountain, and in Camden, Bath, Yarmouth, Rangeley, and Orono.



## Environmental Educators Finish Service

The following MCC Environmental Educators will be finishing up their terms of service in November.



**Janet Gorman**



**Bri Benvenuti**

**Janet Gorman** of Media, PA, and **Bri Benvenuti** of Seven Valleys, PA, each served 1700 hours at the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Wells. Here's a short message from Janet:

"The past eleven months have gone by too fast. I am so grateful for the experiences I have had this year at Rachel

Carson National Wildlife Refuge. From coordinating volunteers to removing invasive species around rare plant sites, I was afforded the opportunity to merge several of my passions. Maine Conservation Corps was a rewarding and full experience; thank you to everyone that helped make me a better person than I was eleven months ago!"

Now that the program is over, I plan on living in Maine and working locally while applying to graduate schools. My hope is to be in school next fall, studying restoration ecology and the biology of invasive plants. Until then, I will be saving money and planning a trip to the Pacific Northwest next summer."

**Priscilla Seimer** of Harpswell, ME served 900 hours at Ferry Beach State Park in Saco and Wolfe's Neck Woods State Park in Freeport.

**Kathryn Nemmer** of Hamburg, NY served 1700 hours with the Maine DEP in Augusta, and **Rebecca Stanley** of Castleton, NY served 1700 hours with the Maine DEP in Portland. Here's a short message from Becca:



**Katie Nemmer**



**Becca Stanley**

Over the past year at the Portland Department of Environmental Protection I

have learned a lot. At the beginning and end of my term I used ArcMap and GIS to create Biomonitoring sampling maps, watershed summary maps, and delineate wetlands. I also experienced the trials, tribulations, and successes of data management and entry.

Once field season rolled around I spent my days outside exploring the rivers, streams, and wetlands of the Androscoggin River Basin. I got to perform both macroinvertebrate and algae sampling in streams and wetlands and I saw and learned the names of all kinds of crazy aquatic critters! Not to mention, I got to be a part of the dream team, also known as the Biomonitoring Unit (Jeanne, Beth, Leon, Tom, and Carolyn)!

During my time at DEP I also got to guest star on some field work with the Air Bureau, Bureau of Remediation and Waste, the Lakes Monitoring crew, and Bacteria sampling with fellow DEP AmeriCorps member Katie Nemmer! I also made it out of the office to volunteer at the Friends of Cobbossee Watershed Nature Day Camp and a few other environmental education events such as Bug Maine-ia and Feathers Over Freeport!

Along with finishing up my AmeriCorps term at DEP, I am currently working part time at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute teaching 5th and 6th graders about the Gulf of Maine with their LabVenture program. I plan stay in Portland and continue to work at GMRI after my AmeriCorps term is over.

## **Environmental Stewards Finish Service**

**Sam Purdom** of Staunton, VA is serving 900 hours at Mount Blue State Park in Weld. He will finish his service in December.

**Timothy Jones** of Portland, ME served 900 hours at Viles Arboretum in Augusta.



**Jennifer Clark** of Ithaca, NY served 900 hours at Wolfe's Neck Woods State Park in Freeport.

**Kelsey Sizer** of Kingwood, TX served 900 hours at Sebago Lake State Park in Casco.

**Michael McDonald** of Ellington, CT served 900 hours at the Bigelow Preserve.

**Wesley Ham** of Acton, ME served 900 hours at Vaughan Woods State Park in South Berwick.

## **Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator Finishes Service**

The MCC's Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator, Amber Hardy, has finished her 1700 hour term of service. Here is a short message from Amber:



**Amber Hardy, left, poses with a volunteer**

“I served a 900 hour term as an Environmental Educator last summer and LOVED it. Coming back for another term was a foregone conclusion! Having a science background, I looked at the EE positions starting in January. I love field work and working with data, so I would have been very happy and comfortable doing any of them, but I wanted to hone some areas where I thought I was lacking, particularly communication, office, and

people skills. This was really an opportunity I could not have hoped for in the private sector, or anywhere for that matter. No one hires a candidate who openly admits to deficiencies in areas like interpersonal skills, even if they have had success with that person in the past. I am so grateful to Mick, Jo, and the other MCC staff for allowing me this chance for so much professional and personal growth. I am still every bit as enthusiastic about this program as I was last November.

As I have muddled through learning unfamiliar protocols, tasks, and manners, my writing skills saved me many times. As someone who wants to be liked, the outreach portion of the job was especially difficult. It was very hard sometimes to make those calls to folks who don't necessarily want to hear what I have to say, or may not care! At first the neutral outcomes of my efforts were discouraging, but now I feel much more comfortable with asking people for things and the more awkward aspects of leadership. My self-confidence has increased a hundredfold thanks to Jo's patient encouragement. I couldn't have asked for a better supervisor.

I had the opportunity to organize some cool events, like the day of storytelling with the “CCC Boys”. I got to film a TV spot about the MCC. I got to see my writing in the papers. I met politicians and went hiking with community service mucky-mucks. I worked with volunteer managers from across the state, most of whom had 10 or more

years of experience doing this kind of work. I've worked with volunteers from all walks of life, from prison inmates to high school kids to immunologists. All of it has been humbling and educational and provided networking opportunities beyond anything I imagined back in January. Along the way I hope I have helped the MCC bring in support from the communities where we work, through communication and outreach or through encouraging and rewarding volunteerism.

I plan to attend graduate school in the very near future. My service in the MCC is no small portion of my resume! But even more important than that, MCC has been instrumental in a huge amount of increased confidence and personal growth for me over the past year. I can't say "thank you" enough.

## **Reflections from a Veteran Community Leader**

MCC Veteran Community Leader Dylan Cookson has been serving with the MCC since February. Here's something he wrote about the service he has been performing and what it has meant to him:

"It feels good to be a part of something of Historical significance. This



**Dylan Cookson relocating freshwater mussels**

year I have the privilege of being a part of two such things. This year is the first year that the Maine Conservation Corps has had a Veteran Community Leader Program. The future of this program will be directly impacted by the decisions and experiences that we all have made this year. With any luck my own little contributions will positively impact some future volunteers to the program.

I also have the fortune of being assigned to the Penobscot River Restoration Trust. It is an unprecedented multi-party collaboration between public and private agencies that will significantly impact the character of the Penobscot River for future generations. By opening up fish-ways and re-balancing power generation this project has set a precedent for other cooperative partnerships elsewhere. With any luck the future will be one with abundant renewable electric power and lots and lots of fish."

## **Recent Events**

### **Blaine House Conference on Volunteerism**

MCC Members attended the 2013 Blaine House Conference on Volunteerism at the University of Maine in Orono on October 15<sup>th</sup>. The Blaine House Conference is hosted by the Maine Commission for Community Service.

## **Alumni**

### **Aaron Mathias, Field Team 2009**

#### **What initially drew you to the MCC?**

A friend of mine from Ohio was chosen for trail training in the winter of 2009 and she told me how awesome Maine was and how much fun she was having at MCC. Also, I wanted to get out of Ohio for a little while and do something different.

#### **What was your favorite part about serving with the MCC?**

One of my favorite parts about MCC was getting to work in every part of the state and getting to experience all the beauty that makes Maine a really unique place. I also enjoyed meeting all the great people who become a part of the program and I still have lasting friendships because of MCC.

#### **What was your favorite project/favorite place you served?**

I was fortunate enough to have a wide variety of projects that were all great in their own way. But, getting to spend the fall of 2009 working in Acadia National Park was an experience I will never forget and cherish the rest of my life.

#### **How did your time with the MCC affect your career/life path?**

Well seeing as I never really had a set career path before MCC, it certainly did change the way I think about careers. I have been doing more seasonal jobs since MCC and I really like doing that. I am still trying to find where I want to end up and MCC helped me start evaluating what I want in life.

#### **If you could give any advice to current or future MCC members, what would it be?**

I want them to live in the moment when they are in MCC. It is truly a special time that you will remember and have stories from for the rest of your life.

### **What have you been up to since MCC?**

In 2012 I moved back to my home state of Ohio and got a job in late January working as an electrician, although I had no experience in the field. I did that job for about 3 months and then I caught wind of a landscaping job and hopped on board for some outdoors work. We built this ridiculous patio for these very wealthy folks. It took us four and a half months to complete and was quite the experience. Then in January of this year I decided to move to Montana. I was lucky to find a warehouse job to hold me over until I found a crew leader position with the other MCC (Montana Conservation Corps)! I took a position as a crew leader for their Veterans Green Corps out of Billings. I start this next Monday and I am excited for a new adventure!

### **Andrea Simoneau, Field Team 2009**

#### **What initially drew you to the MCC?**

When I was in college, my major was history. I remember one class specialized particularly in the Great Depression, which, as we all know, gave rise to the original Civilian Conservation Corps. I remember being fascinated by the concept of the government sending men out into the woods to conserve the natural resources. I wished that such a thing still existed, and was thrilled to learn that in fact the CCC still lives on through the Maine Conservation Corps. Unsure of the type of work that it entailed, I checked out MCC's website. I saw that it was no different than the type of work I'd had to do on our farm as a kid, plus a lot of hiking, and therefore figured I could do it. I immediately applied.

#### **What was your favorite project/favorite place you served/ What was your favorite part about serving with MCC?**

During my tenure in the MCC, I served most of my time in Baxter State Park. I loved that mountain Katahdin even before I'd served with them, and was thrilled at the chance to get to know the mountain better than I already did. It is easily my favorite place in the state of Maine (and I grew up in Maine), and I was honored to be giving back to that spot by helping to maintain the trails. I loved maintaining the paths through the forest to open the way for other people to enjoy nature as I do, so they may go forth and make their own efforts to conserve our natural resources. I loved the physical challenge of the work as it pushed me to new physical strength, while simultaneously teaching me the smart, safe way to work to avoid injury to myself and to others. Even though I was a "greenhorn" when I came to the MCC, I had very patient, loving teachers who went out of their way to keep morale high and make the workday as safe and fun as possible, some of whom still work for MCC (I'm looking at you, Krista Rogers) and who taught me skills that continue to serve me to this day, both in my career in trail work and in my everyday life of interacting with people. I even got Koke'e Resource Conservation Program doing the morning stretch circle routine during my time there, complete with

"question of the day". MCC taught me not only how to be an effective, efficient and skilled trail engineer, but also made me a more empowered, confident person and significantly improved my ability to interact with other human beings in very close quarters. Maine Conservation Corps, in short, made me a better worker and a better human being.

### **How did your time with the MCC affect your career/life path?**

I took a short break from conservation (like three months) and moved to the city immediately after MCC. After one month in the suburbs of Boston, I longed to return to the forest and sought conservation work through websites that were recommended to me by MCC staff and partners. Pro tip: Pay attention to those conversations, they might land you a job in the future. I landed a job through trailbuilders.org with The Wellness Coalition in New Mexico, and spent a year doing trail work in the Gila National Wilderness. After that, I moved to Hawaii sort of on a whim, faltered a bit and had to move back to New Mexico. Also important pro tip: Timing is important in this field. Know when to apply, and what regions of the country are open for trail work at what times of the year. After doing customer service in New Mexico for almost a year, I landed a job with Koke'e Resource Conservation Program on Kauai, and spent six months doing invasive species control. Another pro tip: Be open to doing conservation stuff besides trail work. Conservation is a very broad term for any type of work, field or office, which works to conserve natural resources. Both Student Conservation Association and The Nature Conservancy are excellent organizations that specialize in all types of conservation. Be willing to broaden your skill set. And now, because of all this combined experience, I was able to land a job with Pono Pacific LLC, a great company that does all types of conservation work from invasive species control to protection of native plant areas (which is very important here in Hawaii as a lot of our plants are threatened to extinction by invasive plants and animals) to trail crew. Currently I am serving on a trail crew on Kauai, doing tread maintenance on the old trail from Ke'e Beach to Kalalau Valley. I have been very blessed to be able to remain in the field of conservation, and it is due in large part to Maine Conservation Corps getting me started and teaching me the skills I needed to be a more attractive candidate in the field.

### **If you could give any advice to current or future MCC members, what would it be?**

Keep trying, do your best every day, keep your ears open for opportunities, and never, ever lose sight of why you do what you do. Consistently finding conservation work can be frustrating, as much of it is seasonal and all of it can be competitive. There are times you will be employed by people who are less awesome than Maine Conservation Corps (MCC, I've found in my travels, is one of the most highly-regarded conservation corps in the conservation world, and for very good reason). Trail work in itself is challenging, physically and mentally. You will be wet. You will be hungry. You will be cold and/or hot. You will not always get along with your crew. I remember a time when I asked one of my fellow MCCers out of frustration "How are you so cheerful all the time? This work is



HARD!" He smiled and responded with something to the effect of: "Look at where you are. Look around you at the beauty. Even when I'm having a crappy day, I stop, I look at the mountain, and I remember why I do what I do. How many other people get to do what we do?" That advice has stayed with me for the past three years. Whatever your motivation is for doing trail work, hold on to that, even through the times when you're looking for more conservation work. Let your desire to conserve the natural resources, to be part of nature, drive you through your hard times, both while you're employed in conservation and when you're not. Always keep trying, never give up. If you want conservation to be your career, always persevere. And even if you leave the field, always keep with you the empowerment you gained through your time with MCC. You are doing things that most people can only dream of, can only fantasize about being awesome enough to do. This will help you through daily life too. I can't tell you how many obstacles in life I have faced down by telling myself "Well, this is bad, but I can do this, I've stared down bears/slept in snowstorms/smashed rocks into oblivion/etc etc all the other insane things I face in the wild every day." After that, normal life doesn't seem so hard.

To learn more about the MCC, visit the MCC website:

[http://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/get\\_involved/conservation\\_corps/index.shtml](http://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/get_involved/conservation_corps/index.shtml)



*This material is supported by a grant to the Maine Commission for Community Service from the Corporation for National and Community Service under Corporation for National and Community Service Award 06AFHME001-003. Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Commission or the Corporation or the AmeriCorps program.*