Empowering Tomorrow’s Leaders—Today

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In commemorating a century of the National Park Service, it is natural to look back at this remarkable legacy. It is also imperative that we look forward.

As *The Green Way* arrives in your mailbox, SCA is hosting a Youth Leadership Summit with the National Park Service to develop new and effective strategies for positioning parks as relevant and desirable career options for America’s Millennials. The takeaways from this three-day session will assist the Park Service in fostering a younger and more inclusive workforce that is more reflective of the population as a whole, and will draw from SCA’s practice of utilizing online learning to reach larger numbers of young people for whom technology is a way of life.

The summit will complement already-impactful SCA initiatives including our NPS Academy career prep program, and our Centennial Volunteer Ambassadors are developing new park advocates through community outreach and service.

At the same time, SCA is building new generations of stewards beyond places like Yellowstone and Yosemite. As you’ll see in these pages, SCA has just been appointed to run Pennsylvania’s new statewide conservation corps, on the heels of partnering with the State of New York to conduct its new youth corps. This is part of an intentional plan to expand youth service and job opportunities by forging new partnerships with state resource management agencies.

This strategy also extends to nonprofits. Our new alliance with Girl Scouts of the USA will generate new and improved outdoor experiences for thousands of urban, suburban and rural girls, parents and volunteers, and we will share the lessons from these pilot projects with other large youth serving organizations (see more on Page 7).

Additionally, at the World Conservation Congress in September, SCA will participate in a special panel hosted by Interior Secretary Sally Jewell. We will also lead a presentation on the influence of immersive, nature-based experiences in nurturing a conservation ethic in youth at the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s #NatureForAll Pavilion.

I recently traveled to meet with Alaska Native crew members and conservation interns stationed across that vast state, and all spoke passionately of their SCA adventures, felt excitement with the new friendships they had made, and shared tales of accomplishing things they’d never attempted before. It was a vivid reminder that our national parks, forests and wildlife refuge systems offer a natural setting for personal exploration, discovery and growth for teens and young adults.

As we celebrate the NPS centennial, SCA is preparing for another milestone—our 60th anniversary in 2017—which will bring even further advances in our ongoing mission to empower youth through service and stewardship and equip them to thrive in their daily lives.

Thank you, as always, for your enduring support.
The Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps (above) began protecting in-state lands and waters in July thanks to a new, multi-year partnership between SCA and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. SCA is initially managing five teams in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Wilkes-Barre and Johnstown before the program goes statewide later this year.

The PA Outdoor Corps follows an earlier collaboration with the State of New York’s Excelsior Conservation Corps, as SCA partners with a growing number of state agencies to expand service and career opportunities for youth across the country and protect even more of our natural and cultural resources.

Following a successful pilot program in 2015, Pittsburgh City Parks and Allegheny County Parks will field a total of 28 SCA park rangers this summer to offer a more accessible presence to park visitors.

AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National and Community Service have renewed funding for SCA and will make nearly $2.5 million available for AmeriCorps education awards to help members pay for college or retire student loans.

Award-Winning Performance

SCA’s Washington, DC program has received the Coalition for Recreational Trails’ National Achievement Award for a highly technical bridge installation at Rock Creek Park. SCA crews constructed a total of four wooden footbridges, ranging from 54’ to 30’ in length, over flood-prone streams. Coalition judges credited the crews with enhancing public safety and access while also protecting sensitive ecosystems.
Every August, the Outdoor Retailer show draws 50,000 industry leaders to Salt Lake City, UT. Each one of them understands that if young people continue to drift away from nature, sales of camping gear, Camelbaks and Clif Bars will eventually crater. That’s why this year, the summer show will introduce the first Outdoor 30 Under 30, billed as “the outdoor industry’s brightest young minds.”

SCA alumnus CJ Goulding is among this up-and-coming cluster. Currently a lead organizer with the National Leaders Network, CJ devotes every day to introducing young people to the magic of nature. “To be part of the process where someone grows into a more confident version of him or herself while connecting with the land—that’s such a unique opportunity,” he states.

It’s also a scenario that mirrors his own. CJ’s SCA journey includes an Alternative Spring Break in the Great Smoky Mountains, leading crews in Seattle city parks, and both participating and mentoring in SCA’s NPS Academy, a job training program with the National Park Service. These various experiences “played a role in changing my life,” he says, and now he is changing others’ lives.

“SCA brought me back to the central ideas of humanity, the core themes of community and connection, and how to use that power to influence change,” CJ says. “In the conservation world, that’s rare. And it excites me.”

Alfonso Orozco is another SCA alum on the 30 Under 30 list, and he is also working to introduce others to nature. A Jackson, Wyoming-based coordinator with Latino Outdoors, Alfonso focuses on entire families as, culturally, Latinos are more likely to recreate in larger, related, multigenerational groups.

“I want the outdoors to become a way of life for all Latinos,” he says, “and if we focus solely on singular outdoor experiences, this goal becomes harder to achieve…If we want to continue to protect our public lands, we must work towards engaging everyone in the decision-making process, otherwise it goes from ‘Parks for All’ to ‘Parks for Some.’”

The heightened traits displayed by CJ and Alfonso—selflessness and collaboration, a consciousness of a larger world, and a sense of obligation to the greater good—were among those identified recently in a study examining SCA’s impact on participants. Over a three-year period, experts at The Search Institute, an international authority on what youth need to succeed, discovered that SCA generates what Search calls a “constellation of 21st century skills” that fuel continuous growth and help youth thrive. In the words of one researcher, “It is unusual to see statistically significant differences between pre- and post-program survey results across such a wide range of youth development outcomes.”

Some of the points along this spectrum affirmed decades of observation: a deeper connection to the natural world, an increased sense of stewardship, a greater interest in outdoor careers. Yet focusing only on these conservation-related virtues would miss the forest for the trees.

Search also found that SCA service generates improved self-confidence, critical thinking, perseverance, teamwork, communication and more—skills social scientists rank as critical to lifelong success. SCA is not only building new leaders for parks and forest—these are leaders for the world at large.
Seven years ago, while in high school, Claire Finn of Davis, CA joined her first SCA crew at Inyo National Forest. “I was just fifteen,” she recalls, “but in that moment, I knew it was super-impactful and the further out I get from that experience, the impact just grows.”

Claire signed on for a second crew the following summer, then majored in biology at Macalester College, and now she’s an SCA Centennial Volunteer Ambassador at Yosemite National Park, building Yosemite’s volunteer base.

“I often think about where I’d be without SCA,” Claire states. “That first crew, that team attitude, that sense of accomplishment—for a teenaged girl to go out and do trailwork?! I felt so strong, so much more confident. I vowed then and there that I wanted to give that experience back to other youth, to see that same transformation happen to them.

“My Yosemite internship allows me to continue getting youth outside. National parks will always be an important part of my career whether I am working for them or with them.”

As revealing as the research is, if you want to gauge SCA’s effect on young volunteers, just ask their parents. They’re the ones who first see the difference, often from the moment their returning child walks through the door.

Nicole Steele of Brooklyn, NY says after just a single SCA crew, her son, Marquise, grew “more mature, more responsible… Whereas before I had to constantly stay on his back, he’s a lot more motivated now.”

This summer, Marquise, 17, is serving at the National Parks of New York Harbor (so is his 15-year old sister, Zipporah), and Nicole says her son’s enhanced leadership skills are on full display. “He really understands what it takes to succeed in a group,” she states. “He builds friendships with people from different cultures, he’s learned how to be responsible for the people next to him. He wants everyone to work together, be efficient and get things done.”

Sam Willner’s mom, Ruth, has similar things to say about her son. Sam has done four SCA crews—two in New York, one in California and most recently at Glacier National Park. “At each step, he became more focused, more responsible, and more comfortable being him,” she says. Sam concurs.

“I was moving away from my potential,” says Sam, who starts classes at Bard College in late August. “But SCA taught me how to draw motivation.”

In an age when outdoor opportunities for young people are dwindling, SCA is providing influential new pathways to forge a stronger environment and bolster the capacities of a new generation. These young people will not only lead our national parks into their second century…but they will lead our nation into the future. Boldly, confidently, effectively and cooperatively.

“It’s going to be great to start the school year with the memory of working on a mountaintop,” says Sam. “You don’t learn a lot about risk and reward in academics, but you sure do with SCA.”
A “Charitable IRA” gift can provide security for SCA’s future.

The charitable tax break for donations from IRAs was made permanent at the end of 2015. Often referred to as the Charitable IRA provision, those over 70 ½ can now make tax-free gifts up to $100,000 from an IRA account to charitable organizations like SCA at any time during the year. Such gifts also count toward any required minimum distribution. Many SCA donors have taken advantage of this tax-wise form of giving.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON GIVING FROM RETIREMENT PLANS GO TO: thesca.org/giving-plan.net, send an email to: giftplanning@thesca.org, or call 888-722-9675 x2024
SCA and Girl Scouts of the USA have just entered into a national partnership to expand and improve outdoor experiences for Girl Scouts, parents and volunteers. With support from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, over the next two years, SCA will launch pilot outdoor internship programs at five Girl Scout councils across the United States and host Girl Scout summer conservation crews at national parks.

“At Girl Scouts, we strongly believe outdoor experiences provide opportunities for girls to discover, connect, and take action in ways that serve to build courage, confidence, and character,” said Anna Maria Chávez, CEO of Girl Scouts of the USA. Partnering with SCA, she adds, “will supplement our ability to offer these immersive experiences which expand girls’ understanding and curiosity about the natural world and beyond, while fortifying their leadership skills.”

According to the Girl Scout Research Institute, about 60 percent of girls do not enjoy regular outdoor exposure through scouting programs. To address this, SCA interns will work with the Girl Scouts of Alaska, Girl Scouts-Arizona Cactus-Pine Council, Girl Scouts of Greater New York, Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan, and Girl Scouts of Western Pennsylvania to develop outdoor and conservation activities for girls, organize service opportunities for family and community members, and assist the councils in increasing girl and volunteer participation levels.

“As The Green Way goes to press, ten Girl Scouts from the five councils above are completing work on a trail project in Shenandoah National Park (above). “We replaced a worn stone staircase with a series of wooden steps,” notes SCA Crew Leader and Gold Girl Scout Gabie Perkins.

“The Girl Scouts have a great program, including many practical skills and leadership training, but they don’t do a lot of backpacking, for example. So the Scouts’ curriculum and SCA’s are really complementary.”

To maximize the insights gained through these innovative pilot programs, SCA will apply relevant learnings to new relationships with other large youth-serving organizations.
IN LATE JUNE, SCA ALUMNA LIZZY CORLISS of Vashon, WA began a 150 day, north-to-south trek of the Continental Divide Trail to secure the Triple Crown of Thru-Hiking, following conquests of the Pacific Crest Trail in 2014 and the Appalachian Trail last year. We spoke with Lizzy—or Laugh Track, as she is called on the trail—just before she laced up her boots.

SO, WHAT’S AHEAD?
Somewhere between 2,200 and 3,100 miles. The CDT is only 70% complete. Snow and other factors will influence four or five alternative routes, which generally run 10-to-80 miles each. It’s like, choose your own adventure!

YOU SOUND READY...
It was a little bit of a roller coaster getting used to the idea but I’m very excited. It can be totally addictive out there. You’re on a different plane than back in society. It’s like nothingness and everything-ness all in one.

YOU’VE SAID THIS HIKE IS PARTLY FOR SCA...
Yeah. I want to pay it forward. SCA and nature have given me so much already. While I have the freedom to disappear from normal life—I’m a seasonal county parks employee—I want to give back instead of being the one who gets all the giving.

WHERE DID YOU DO SCA?
Crater Lake National Park in 2010. That’s where I met my first thru-hiker. A big, bearded, smelly, sweaty yet endearing character. There was a spark in his eyes. He’d returned to nature. He joined our crew for lunch and shared his story, a ribbon of experiences miles and miles long.

HOW DID YOU GET YOUR TRAIL NAME?
Our second day on the PCT, we were sun-baked, probably a little dehydrated, and I was drinking red Gatorade. Someone said something funny, I burst out laughing and Gatorade flew out of my nose. That’s when I heard: “You are now officially Laugh Track.”

WE HOPE YOU ENJOY MANY LAUGHS ON THE CDT.
Thanks. It’s gonna be a hoot!

» FOLLOW LIZZY ON HER HIKE AT THESCA.ORG/CDT