



SPECIAL EDITION: SCA Members in Their Own Words



More than 200 SCA members spent their summer restoring national parklands damaged by Hurricane Sandy.

Sandy Crew Clicks, Then It's On With the Fix

In May, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell appointed SCA to lead a Hurricane Sandy recovery program at the National Parks of New York Harbor, in partnership with the City of New York. Since then, more than 200 SCA members have restored habitats, repaired facilities, and removed tons of storm-tossed debris from Gateway National Recreation Area, where one park official says many sites are now in better shape than they were before Sandy. SCA Crew leader James Coyle's blog offers a glimpse at how Gateway—and local high school students—changed over a long, hot summer.

There is a moment on every crew where everything seems to “click.” It is not something that happens all at once but when you recognize it, it is unmistakable. You can see it in the way the members greet you and their fellow crew members in the morning. It is visible in the way they go about completing their tasks, or how they react to new challenges when they arise.

I am happy to say that over the course of this past week my crew had our “click.”

Early on, we were tasked with clearing debris out of a building that had barely been touched since the storm. It was a small rectangular structure located in what was once a Nike missile site. The garage doors on both ends had been beaten in by sand and water, and were stuck about a quarter of the way up. The entire interior was full of sand and a thicket of debris including four aluminum canoes and a mini-catamaran.

Removing this imbroglio took an incredible amount of team-work, patience, and thinking. We had to strategically remove each piece of flotsam in careful order to undo the tangle and provide access to the next layer of detritus. Because the doors were so bent out of shape, we had to take everything out through the windows. Amazingly, we were able to get everything separated and out in only a few hours.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Shining Sons and Daughters

Nature is a superb source of inspiration, but young people serving in nature may be even more uplifting.

As we count down the final days of summer, SCA is pleased to present our second annual "in their own words" edition, featuring the moving, first-hand accounts of SCA members in the field.

I've had the good fortune to meet hundreds of SCA volunteers over the past few months. Our Page 1 story offers insights from our Hurricane Sandy restoration team at The National Parks of New York Harbor. At the kick-off to this special initiative, I spoke with Aurelia Casey, a 19-year old from Staten Island.

Aurelia had served with SCA the summer before and said the experience changed her life, prompting her to study environmental science. Then she endured another life-changing episode: Hurricane Sandy. Although her family's home survived the storm, many of her friends and neighbors were not so lucky. "You just don't wake up in the morning expecting to lose everything you had before," she said, and that's why she came back to SCA this summer, to help her community heal.

At the closing ceremony to SCA's NPS Academy at Grand Teton National Park, students there were sky-high over the summer internships and the prospect of graduating to employment with the National Park Service. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell also attended, spending time with each of the graduates and stating she was inspired by their example.

I hope the tales here will brighten your day and provide an additional return on your generous support of SCA. Thank you.

Sandy Crew Clicks *continued from page 1*

Our main project was to deconstruct two large boardwalks which had broken away during Sandy and were pushed up against the remnants of a sea wall. We were also tasked with removing sections of rusted old fencing which were slowly sinking into the sand. This area proved to be a difficult worksite as it was heavily affected by the tides, which would wash over much of the site, and it was also relatively remote.

The students quickly worked out a system to disassemble the boardwalks and carry out the debris to a location where park maintenance workers could remove it. Although the work was hard, the students enjoyed it as it provided an interesting challenge. It was a phenomenal moment for my crew—not only in the amount of work we completed, but in the way all the members came together as a team and as friends.

Last week was dominated by a heat wave which not only required us to work more cautiously, but forced us to cut our work short for three consecutive days to prevent any heat related injuries. Despite the oppressive temps and humidity, group morale stayed high. I could definitely sense them being more open and enthusiastic, and could see them getting to know one another better.

On Friday, we got to work with one of the other SCA Sandy Recovery Crews from Jamaica Bay and with a team from the Jamaica Bay and Rockaway Beaches Restoration Corps at Frank Charles Park in Queens, which is another portion of Gateway National Recreation Area. The event was attended by the press, which was nicely gratifying and showed that the work we were doing has real importance.

What really topped off the event was the ice cream we received afterward. I can't imagine a better reward.

Read more from SCA's Sandy teams and watch videos, see news coverage at thesca.org/sandy.

Volunteer Spotlight: Jason Dydynski

Among the hundreds of young people serving on SCA's Sandy recovery team this summer was 18-year old Jason Dydynski of Moore, OK. Just weeks earlier, Jason's hometown was devastated by a powerful tornado. That, he says, was the start of his journey to New York.



When the tornado first struck, I volunteered at church every day for two weeks, handing out donated food and clothing. Just a block from my house, it was total devastation. So many of my friends lost their homes.

[Yet] we in Moore were so blessed that people wanted to help us. People from across the country, from all over the world, were helping my town: sending supplies and donations, even though many didn't even know where Oklahoma is. I wanted to take up that spirit. By volunteering to help New Yorkers recover from Hurricane Sandy, I've helped some of the people who were helping us in Moore.

Helping Commuters Breathe Easier

by Karrie Kressler, SCA Green Cities Fellow

I started seriously bicycling only recently when I moved to Pittsburgh—a heck of a place to start, considering all the hills here. Pittsburgh is a very multimodal city. To get from Point A to Point B, you have your pick of car, bus, train, incline, and perhaps someday, even a zip line. If you choose to bicycle or walk, as I do, you're not alone. Pittsburgh is 5th in the nation when it comes to commuting by bike and foot.

But which streets have the best air quality? And which have the worst? To answer these questions, the SCA Green Cities Sustainability Corps created the Bike Air Monitoring (BAM) project. It's funded by a grant from Google and is part of GASP's (Group Against Smog and Pollution) Athletes United for Healthy Air Campaign, which works to educate and empower athletes to fight for clean air. The BAMs made their debut last year with many volunteers riding many miles, and now we're sending them out for another round of data collection.

BAM units consist of one air quality monitor and one GPS, strapped to the bike's handlebars. The monitors measure particulate matter (PM): tiny pieces of soot, dust, and chemicals floating in the air, while the GPS tracks the rider's location. We get readings for PM10 and PM2.5, the particles' sizes in microns. PM2.5 and smaller are particularly dangerous since it's the ultrafine particles that can get into the blood, particularly with people who are active outdoors, since they breathe deeply and rapidly.

All of the information from the monitor and the GPS are combined to create a colorful map of readings. Thanks to the help of University of Pittsburgh's Computer Science Department, we've been able to mold our data into an interactive tool. Users are able to map how to get to and from locations, adjusting for time of day and time of year, to find the healthiest route. Biking is a workout, and a benefit to one's health. I'm working to make sure it stays that way.



Karrie with a BAM unit on her bike in Pittsburgh.



HOW TO SUSTAIN SCA'S ONGOING RECOVERY EFFORTS

Join SCA's Partners in Conservation Program and provide ongoing, monthly support of our members in the field. Your sustained support ensures that SCA can quickly mobilize our hard-working volunteers to the parks and green spaces hardest hit by natural disasters and weather calamities.

To explore the many benefits of monthly giving, visit thesca.org/action.



Three of four SCA Veterans Fire Corps graduates remain in conservation.

Veterans Continue Their Service with SCA Fire Corps

In collaboration with the US Forest Service, the SCA Veterans Fire Corps trains recent military vets for careers in wildland firefighting and natural resource management. The program employs a familiar, regimented structure to assist participants' back to civilian life, which routinely tests those returning from combat.

Here are the personal reflections of three veterans on their Corps experience, beginning with Erik Morinaga, a 26-year old former Marine who led combat forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. While serving with SCA at Bighorn National Forest in Wyoming, he had the opportunity to join a Hotshot crew in Colorado just as disaster struck another Hotshot team in Prescott, AZ.

The Wyoming Hotshots welcomed me with open arms. My day-to-day work included protecting homes, reducing fire fuels, and containing active wildfire with fire lines and back burns.

We hiked up steep terrain with 50 pounds of gear and constructed fire line around the active burn on its mid-slope then turned the fire's edge and went upslope with our line. After two more days of containment we left that fire and headed for Del Norte, Colorado to assist with the 0% contained West Fork Complex Fire.

We began with structure protection of a half dozen farm houses by using chainsaws and digging tools on nearby trees and shrubs. Later that afternoon, the fire crested the ridge, so we lit our own fire to combat it and were able to contain the fire and save the structures.

The following morning we were tearfully informed of the loss of comrades in Arizona. Our team leadership felt they would not be operating at 100% and the safe decision was to return to Wyoming for mourning before undertaking hazardous operations once again.

The best thing about the Hotshots is the brotherhood (and sisterhood, there is one female on the crew). You work 16-hour days together, stink together, laugh together, and suffer together. It was a testing and grueling environment but they have offered me a position next season.

Six-year Army veteran Charlie Watts, 25, of Canton, TX, was part of the US surge in Iraq:

The Veterans Fire Corps out of Bighorn National Forest, Wyoming recently voted me onto the Bighorn Engine 641, which deployed to the West Fork Complex / Papoose Fire near Del Norte, Colorado. It has been both the most interesting and educational experience I've had since leaving the Army last fall.

We were sent to the southwest side of the West Fork Fire and primarily checked structures and ensured that the fire did not jump Highway 160. After about a seven-shift rotation on night shift, we were sent to a dam in order to protect the local communities' main power supplier. On the final day, we mopped up in the Papoose fire. There, I was able to operate the chainsaw, the foam canister for the engine pump, and cold trail [follow a partially-dead fire].

I would highly recommend this program to veterans who are interested in conservation or simply want to be a part of a team again. Should the opportunity present itself, I would be more than willing to go back out on a fire. It was a great experience.

Adam Rogers of Honeoye, NY, a veteran of the Multi-National Security Transition Command in Iraq, was assigned in July to a 20-person hand crew in Cascade, ID:

Our crew had one small spot fire on Day Three in which we tasked out three individuals sent by helicopter. Overall it was a great experience even though we did not see as much fire as most of the crew would have liked. In our down time we conducted fuels management work and endangered species mitigation.

The key to being successful during the assignment, which is called a "roll," is to be flexible, in good physical condition, and hard-working...and most of all work with a lot of great men and women who share a common duty.

Watch interviews with Veterans Fire Corps members at thesca.org/veterans.

Corps members find comfort in the program's military-like structure.





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To request your complimentary copy today, contact Hugh Montgomery at hmontgomery@thesca.org or phone 603-504-3241.



Out in Bear Country

by Apoorva Mahajan, NPS Academy Intern, Grand Teton National Park

Around these densely forested parts of Wyoming, the bear is king. When a shutterbug or intrepid hiker asks about the whereabouts of a certain large mammal, it is the bear they seek. And when a family of four asks much the same question with palpable trepidation, it is the bear they seek...to avoid.

Grizzly or black, the bear commands our attention, if not our utmost adoration.

Before coming to Grand Teton National Park, my bear encounters were limited to zoos and wildlife preserves. I had certainly never seen one in the wild, au naturel. So when I first saw a bear in Grand Teton, I finally understood what all the fuss was about.

Majestic, awesome, and mighty, the bear I saw through my binoculars was indeed the stuff of legend and lore. Even from a distance, I could see the beast for what it was: a veritable force of nature, with a ferocity not far beneath its self-possessed calm. As I looked on, the bear did an about-face and wandered back into the thicket from whence it came, disappearing no sooner than it had appeared.

As an Interpretation Intern, I give a number of talks and presentations, one of which was a bear program I gave the day after I saw my first bear. As short as my talk was, it informed and inspired the crowd, which later peppered me with questions. The bears, however, were the ones that did the real talking, for without their endless capacity to inspire as an emblem of the park, there would be nothing for visitors to see and for me to say.

To me, the bear's true appeal lies in its near humanity. Playful and childlike one second, vindictive and violent the next, the bear...ultimately exemplifies that timeless duality of nature, the only law the land knows: ever at an uneasy rest, and never at total peace with itself.

Read more of Apoorva's Grand Teton adventures at followme.thesca.org.



Monique (second from right) says national parks “can open up all sorts of interests, ambitions and aspirations.”

The Power of Open Spaces

by Monique Dailey, SCA Youth Program Manager, Washington, DC

The following is excerpted from The Huffington Post.

Growing up in the Petworth section of the District of Columbia, I was 10 years old before I saw my first real park. I didn't realize at the time that it would be my salvation from the drugs and violence that were ravaging my community. It would have been preposterous then to think that within 16 years I would be running youth programs in parks throughout the metropolitan area—and offering the same extraordinary opportunities that I had to countless others.

A neighbor introduced me to the Student Conservation Association (SCA), an organization with which I have been associated ever since. Through SCA, I became a Junior Ranger in the National Park Service and then a volunteer at the Rock Creek Park Nature Center doing puppet shows. At 15, I was sandbagging creek beds and maintaining trails with SCA. I stayed involved while at Theodore Roosevelt Senior High School, participating in one local SCA crew and another at Salmon Challis National Forest in Idaho, volunteering in SCA's Conservation Leadership Corps Program, and interning in SCA's DC office.

When I applied for college, I had 750 volunteer hours with SCA and a glowing recommendation—more than enough to make up for the disadvantages of growing up in an underserved community. Mary Baldwin College trusted SCA and saw a conservationist in Petworth, too. I led SCA crews at Dumbarton Oaks Park and served in three internships with the EPA before joining the Peace Corps. Today, I run environmental education and service programs for more than 1,300 SCA and commu-

nity members throughout the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland and northern Virginia.

In all settings—urban, suburban, and even rural—I see the power that open public spaces have on residents of all ages: letting children enter into their own magical worlds of play, helping adults find reflection and inspiration, and enabling older residents to avoid isolation from the broader community.

For children in urban areas, it's perhaps most important of all. A park provides—as it did for me—the first opportunity to leave a community of concrete, to get away from a sometimes oppressive environment, and to develop a sustainable relationship with a green space. That opportunity can open up all sorts of interests, ambitions, and aspirations that never before seemed possible.

One of the highlights of my still-young career was planting trees on Earth Day several years ago at Kenilworth Park and Aquatic Gardens with President Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, former President Bill Clinton, Vice President Joe Biden and Dr. Jill Biden. I joined 11 other SCA volunteers and was magically paired with Michelle Obama. Some may have considered the event a publicity stunt, but for me it was a chance to highlight the importance of urban park spaces, the need for stewardship, and the magical world that I always knew existed in our nation's parks.

Read the full Huffington Post column at thesca.org/newsroom.

Falling in Love with Nature

by Cristina Shoffner, SCA Intern

Growing up in Chevy Chase, Maryland, the “kid’s corner” of our garage contained a shiny blue butterfly net, several empty Smuckers jars, and some plastic magnifying glasses pulled from children’s books on insects. I vividly remember our family trips to see the blue Teton mountains, the red rocks of Bryce and the postcard-worthy panorama of Yellowstone. When I fell in love with the national parks, I fell in love with nature.

Earlier this year—during my Spring Break at the University of Michigan—I had the chance to return to Grand Teton National Park in northwestern Wyoming, not as a tourist but as a member of NPS Academy. A partnership between the National Park Service and SCA, NPS Academy introduces college students from diverse backgrounds to professional opportunities in the Park Service.

It was stunning to experience Grand Teton in the winter. I had remembered the park as hot and somewhat crowded; now it was cold and the wildlife outnumbered the people. The National Park Service experts’ passion for open public space was obvious.

I returned to the University of Michigan, where I am pursuing an environmental degree, more determined than ever to pursue a career in conservation and to be a vocal advocate for



“I returned to Grand Teton but not as a tourist.”

our nation’s parks. Those parks reflect the majesty of America and they deserve our support and ongoing commitment.

This summer I had the opportunity to continue my experience with NPS Academy as a risk management intern and invite you to join me in supporting our national parks. We can visit them: simply showing up in the attendance figures demonstrates support. We can volunteer. We can give whatever we can financially to organizations that augment the resources of individual parks, and we can provide financial support to national entities like SCA that introduce new generations to park conservation.

I know I’ll be filling those empty Smuckers jars in our Chevy Chase garage with coins and dollar bills to help support our national parks.



WHY HELP SCA RESTORE AND REBUILD AMERICA’S PARKS?

When Hurricane Sandy swept through the Eastern Seaboard last October, it not only knocked out power lines and flooded homes—it also ravaged nearly 70 national park units—destroying wildlife habitats, dumping tons of debris, wiping out trails, visitor centers and park offices.

SCA has a long and successful track record of spear-heading conservation recovery projects. But the value of this work goes far beyond the parks themselves. It extends to the young people who are doing the work—many of them local residents who, in working to undo environmental damage, become more powerfully connected to their communities.

“It is extraordinary to see the difference a single team can make in only a day, let alone over the course of an entire summer.” - New Jersey native James Coyle, SCA Crew Leader

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The American Institute of Philanthropy and Charity Navigator rank SCA among America's top conservation charities for fund-raising efficiency.

SCA is a nationwide conservation force of college and high school volunteers who protect and restore America's parks, forests, and other public lands. SCA's active, hands-on approach to conservation has helped to develop a new generation of conservation leaders, inspire lifelong stewardship, and save our planet.

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Adversity, Growth, Adieu

by Jon Whiting, North Mississippi Complex Refuges Intern

Well, the final week of my internship has come and gone.

These 10 weeks in "Sippiland" have been challenging and rewarding, and I am grateful to SCA, the Career Development Intern Program, and US Fish and Wildlife Service for this experience that's helped me grow as a person and become substantially less likely to freak out every time I see a snake slithering through the water.

I mean, I've conquered my fears of timber rattlers, red swamp crayfish, three-toed Amphiuma, box turtles, Southwestern bats, and many others. I had never touched any of those before in my whole entire life.

I've learned the hard way that I'm not allergic to poison ivy, and pretty much lost the feeling in my elbows from being bitten by so many mosquitoes, horseflies, pretty much any insect with, um, teeth...

From the minnow trapping to preserving a historical landmark, I've grown a good deal from this boggy summer. Figuring out my dream job (professional blogger) came from all the thinking and writing I've been doing since I started here.

But the biggest thing I got out of this summer was the growth of my character. Through adversity, I stuck to the values and morals my parents bestowed upon me. And there was a good



the GreenWay

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feeling when my supervisors congratulated me on keeping up the good work. It sometimes hardly seems like work because I'm having fun over half the time.

See more from Jon and many other SCA volunteers at followme.thesca.org.