

U.S. Forest Service - Civilian Conservation Centers

A Successful Youth Job Training Program Under Threat of Extinction

In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps was established to employ thousands of Americans during the Great Depression. In 1964, the Civilian Conservation Centers (CCC's) opened to partner with Job Corps, a program administered by the Department of Labor (DOL), to provide job training and placement to America's higher-risk youth. Currently, the U.S. Forest Service (under the Department of Agriculture (USDA)) operates all 25 CCC centers.

While funding for the CCC is codified in law and appropriated through the Job Corps program at DOL, the mission of DOL Job Corps and the Forest Service CCC's are very different. DOL Job Corps centers are staffed by contractors in largely urban areas, and the CCC's are staffed by Forest Service employees who integrate the Forest Service mission into CCC job training programs. The CCC's serve a dual purpose: 1) Like the Forest Service, they care for the health of our national forests, and 2) They provide essential job training opportunities to at-risk youth in rural communities near or in national forests.

Since 1964, the CCC's evolved to offer career vocations and the technical education needed to get jobs in fields of high demand. The program serves as a major deterrent to youth homelessness, youth unemployment, and entry into criminal justice or mental health systems. In short, **the CCC program creates gainfully employed American taxpayers. Over 80% of CCC graduates go on to community college, full employment, or the military.** To help offset the cost of the program while teaching at-risk students about work ethic and teamwork, CCC students deliver millions of hours of trail maintenance, forest firefighting, and disaster recovery support that save taxpayers millions of dollars each year. This is unique to the CCC's and not offered at DOL Job Corps centers. For example:

- In 2018, 3369 students (of approximately 5000 total CCC students) served on the frontlines for forest fires providing the equivalent of 360,000 hours of service during the height of the fire season, **saving the U.S. taxpayer more than \$6,300,000.**
- In 2017, 3393 students served on the frontlines for forest fires providing 485,000 hours, **saving the U.S. taxpayer more than \$8,335,000.**
- In 2017, students also provided 5,000 hours of support in response to Hurricane Harvey. They also contributed 14,000 hours treating 35,000 acres of prescribed fire to prevent forest fires, and 10,000 hours of forest restoration work; **saving the U.S. taxpayer more than \$493,000.**

The mission of the Forest Service is engrained within the core of the CCC mission. All of these services to taxpayers will be lost if CCC's are closed or transferred to private contractors or other entities. Plus, with disasters getting worse each year, now is not the time to reduce responders for wildfires, hurricanes, and floods.

(continues...)

The Bizarre Disconnect within DOL and USDA Leadership

Democrats and Republicans in Congress broadly recognize the benefits of the CCC's as an effective youth training and employment program. It is also recognized as a taxpayer friendly and cost-effective program in the long-term because it directly contributes to tax revenue. Oddly enough, the CCC's are under attack by DOL Secretary Acosta and USDA Secretary Perdue. Both secretaries have openly made false claims regarding efficiencies and effectiveness of the CCC's (see below), and both secretaries have remained silent on why, after 86 years of operation, they want to immediately cease operations without a plan or impact statement. Whether the issue is political or ideological in nature, or whether a personal benefactor stands to gain from the CCC's demise, remains unknown.

On May 24, 2019, without warning, Secretaries Acosta and Perdue released a [statement](#) reporting that all 25 CCC's will cease to operate by the end of September. The leadership of the U.S. Forest Service that oversees the CCC program was as surprised as everyone else. It appears the U.S. Forest Service was not consulted about, nor did it provide input into, the DOL/USDA decision to close the centers. According to the Secretaries' statement, all CCC's will be transferred to DOL in September with nine centers closing permanently upon transfer. The statement went on to suggest that the remaining 16 centers 'may' be operated by contractors or other nondescript entities. Excerpts from the May 24 statement:

- DOL and USDA Disconnect: 16 centers "will be replaced by new contract operators or a partnership."
 - ✓ **Reality:** To suggest it is possible to convert 25 staffed and operating centers from federal to private or non-federal entities by September is pure fantasy. In addition to the legal requirements of land use transfers, a legitimate procurement process takes more time, as does an operational transfer.
 - ✓ **Reality:** Reading between the lines, DOL is planning to close all 25 centers permanently. This is why they used the word "may" regarding the outsourcing of the remaining 17 centers. There is no plan to outsource.
 - ✓ **Reality:** DOL zeroed-out all 25 CCC's budgets entirely three years in a row.

- DOL and USDA Disconnect: "This action creates an opportunity to serve...at a lower cost to taxpayers."
 - ✓ **Reality:** U.S. Forest Service (federally staffed) CCC's train students at a lower cost than DOL private centers. From 2010 to 2017, cost per student a CCC center was \$6181 to \$13,705 less than DOL centers. This is an average cost of \$31,323 per CCC student versus \$41,175 per DOL student.
 - ✓ **Reality:** This is a taxpayer savings of \$410 million from 2010 to 2017.
 - ✓ **Reality:** If the annual return on investment (ROI) is calculated to include the revenue return to taxpayers for student services provided as first responders, forest and trail maintenance, and community improvement projects—as much as \$10 million per year, the cost per student lowers.

(continues...)

- DOL and USDA Disconnect: “This action creates an opportunity to serve a greater number of students at higher performing centers...”
 - ✓ **Reality:** Between CCC and DOL center performance, CCC centers score higher on average. Of the 125 total centers operating under Job Corps, 18 of the 25 CCC’s rate in the top half of all centers. Just seven CCC’s rate in the bottom half (bottom half = 63 centers).
 - ✓ **Reality:** Four of the five centers with the highest graduate employment rates were at CCC centers, and 16 of the 25 CCC’s were in the top 10 of at least one of Job Corps employment performance measures in PY 2017.
 - ✓ **Reality:** Regarding serving ‘a greater number of students,’ DOL persistently fails to ensure both CCC and DOL centers operate at full capacity. This is a result of DOL mismanagement and does not represent a lack of candidate interest in the program. If DOL fulfilled its legal obligation to ensure full operating capacity, the cost per student would plummet and the annual ROI from CCC’s will rise.

The Facts Behind the Decision to Close the CCC Centers

In March 2018, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) published a Special Report covering the mismanagement of Job Corps under DOL, which includes corrections to inaccuracies included in the FY 2019 DOL budget request regarding the CCC’s. In the report are corrections to false claims regarding CCC performance, cost, mission alignment; and how the Forest Service CCC’s excelled and overcame chronic DOL mismanagement. A complete copy of the report is available at SavetheCCC.org.

In addition, the DOL/USDA decision to close all CCC centers by September means:

- 1,100 people who staff the CCC’s from rural and small communities will lose their jobs, unnecessarily, and with very little warning.
- Rural communities will suffer, heavily impacted by the loss of jobs, revenue loss, and the cessation of rural community improvement projects.
- More than 4,000 young adults annually will lose the opportunity to participate in the Forest Service CCC program, and current CCC students will experience interruptions or relocations in their training or will not finish regardless of what DOL may claim. Logistically it is an impossibility.
- The American taxpayer will pay more and at a higher rate to hire additional personnel for surge capabilities for response to fires and natural disasters.
- An immensely successful 55-year-old program that provides real-world opportunities (e.g. firefighting, trail maintenance crews, etc.) for at-risk youth to learn critical job and teamwork skills is lost forever.

(continues...)

The CCC's Need Your Help Today!

If you are a Member of Congress:

1. Support legislation to immediately stop the CCC closures.
2. Sign on to a bipartisan letter circulating in the House (Rep. DeFazio (D-OR) and Rep. Newhouse (R-WA)) and Senate (Sen. Merkley)
3. Challenge the unilateral decision by USDA and DOL to close the centers without any credible evidence backing this decision, and in doing so, usurp rightful input from Congress and other stakeholders.
4. Visit your local CCC center in your state.
5. Sign the online petition (see link below).
6. File comments against the closure in the Federal Register (see below).

If you are a state or local official, or live or work in a community affected by the closures, or simply support a proven job training program for at-risk young people:

1. Contact your senators and representatives to ask them to stop the closures, and refer them to the SAVEtheCCC.org website for more information.
2. Contact state and local officials to request that they reach out to Congress to support the effort to stop the closures.
3. Sign the online petition (see below).
4. File comments against the closures in the Federal Register (see link below).
5. Send a letter to Congress (see below)

Important Links

[Download this information and more for meetings or to pass on to others](#)

[Download a CCC fact sheet from the U.S. Forest Service](#)

[Download the 2018 NFFE Special Report](#)

[To file comments in the Federal Register](#)

[To send a letter to Congress](#)

[To sign the online petition](#) (through the NFFE portal)

[To sign the online petition](#) (through The Corps Network portal)