

**Questions for the Record by Democratic Members**  
**Questions from Representative Porter**

1. Please briefly describe some of the efforts the Corps Network is engaged in to expand disability access on public lands.

The Corps Network and its member Corps help increase access to and expand recreational opportunities on our public lands for people of different abilities in several ways. First, several of our member Corps partner with the federal land and resource management agencies, like NPS and USFS, to conduct accessibility surveys of specific parks and forests to compile databases of accessible trails, campgrounds, picnic areas and other recreational facilities that are accessible to people with different abilities. Second, some Corps work with federal land management partners to complete projects, like multi-use and multi-sensory boardwalks and trails, and accessible campgrounds and picnic areas, to provide people of different abilities with more and a wider variety of opportunities to access and enjoy outdoor recreation. And third, Corps provide opportunities to young people of different abilities to work on a variety of conservation and outdoor recreation projects, be designing accessible projects, using adaptive equipment, and providing specialized support services.

In 2009, with support from the Mitsubishi Foundation, TCN partnered with three Corps (The Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa, Operation Fresh Start in Wisconsin, and the Utah Conservation Corps) to pilot crews made up of differently abled Corpsmembers. Some Corpsmembers were wheelchair bound, some were blind, some were deaf or hard of hearing and others suffered from mental illness. By intentionally selecting and developing appropriate projects, utilizing adaptive tools and equipment, and providing supportive services, these Corps were able to successfully engage Corpsmembers with different abilities in substantive conservation and outdoor recreation projects. The partners developed an “Inclusive Crew Toolkit” so other Corps and partners would replicate the model to engage other young people with different abilities.

<https://thecorpsnetwork.knack.com/members-only-resource-library#project-and-program-related-technical-resources>

2. How would The Corps Network spend funding dedicated to increasing disability access?

The Corps Network could use funding dedicated to increasing disability access to update and promote the use of the “Inclusive Crew Toolkit” and to build out our existing Training and Technical Assistance department to help more Corps and federal land management partners implement more inclusive crews and complete more accessible projects to provide additional opportunities for young people of different abilities to engage in conservation and outdoor recreation service.

In addition, funding at DOI and USFS could be designated specifically for projects designed to increase and improve accessibility to outdoor recreation for people with disabilities. Those funds could go to Service and Conservation Corps to conduct accessibility surveys; compile inventories and create databases of accessible trails, campgrounds, and other recreational facilities at various National Parks; and to build more ADA compliant and all-sensory trails, campgrounds, and recreational facilities. It could also be used for projects that are done by Inclusive Crews, such as the American Sign Language crew at Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, New Mexico. In addition, funding could be used to increase the capacity of Service and Conservation Corps to develop and complete accessible projects and to engage Corpsmembers with different abilities. For example, it could be used to train Corp staff in ASL and on disability issues in general. It could be used to acquire adaptive tools and equipment and to provide support services, like translators. It is important to note that projects designed to increase accessibility and/or to engage Corpsmembers with disabilities are generally more expensive than other projects.

3. Are there any National Parks that Corps Network considers to be a model with regard to disability access? What are these National Parks doing that others could learn from?

Because The Corps Network does the majority of its work – advocacy, fund development, training and technical assistance – in Washington, DC, rather than in the field, we rely on our partners at NPS for information on specific parks. Here is their response to the question above:

“All NPS units have some accessible features, and it is rare that NPS units don't have basic accessibility such as accessible parking or restrooms. Many of the larger and highly visited parks are well-known for general accessibility in their developed areas, such as Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Grand Canyon. While there are no parks that NPS would point to as "leaders" in this space, this is because the parks are so unique that we tend to focus more on the distinct accessible experiences that are available. Throughout the system as a whole, there are numerous parks with accessibility highlights. For example:

- Mammoth Cave has an accessible cave tour and a newly completed accessible outdoor trail.
- Sleeping Bear Dunes has a campground that meets accessibility requirements close to a recently installed accessible kayak launch.
- Apostle Islands has an island with a boardwalked trail system leading to accessible campsites.
- Grand Teton recently completed a project to provide access to the lake itself at Jenny Lake.
- The White House, Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad, and Gateway Arch all have state-of-the-art accessible visitor center experiences for blind visitors.
- Golden Gate National Recreation Area has accessible trails at Muir Woods, accessible beaches at Muir Beach, and an accessible campground at Kirby Cove.”

For additional information of the accessibility of various parks and recreation facilities contact:

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4. Under the Trump administration, the Department of the Interior politicized the grants and cooperative agreements, from which the Corps Network gets some funding. Changes to the way grants and cooperative agreements were reviewed resulted in reduced funding and cancellation of many specific Corps projects. Do you know whether these policies affected funding for projects to improve access to parks for people with disabilities?

The short answer is that most, if not all, Corps projects with DOI were delayed as a result of the new review process implemented on December 28, 2017. Additional levels of review caused some projects to be delayed by weeks or months and in some cases even canceled or postponed to the following year. Some of these projects were intended to increase access for people with disabilities and others were intended to engage people with disabilities in the projects themselves. One example of such a project was an American Sign Language (ASL) Crew that Northwest Youth Corps was hoping to run in 2017. Because the task agreement for the project was held up at DOI as a result of the review process, Northwest Youth Corps had to secure funds from the National Park Foundation and other philanthropic sources in order to implement the project.

5. How can Congress support the Corps Network and its partners to increase access to public lands for Americans with disabilities?

Congress could designate funding at NPS and the other federal land management agencies specifically for projects designed to increase access and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation to people with disabilities and for projects that are designed and completed by people with disabilities. As mentioned above, these projects tend to be more expensive than other projects. In addition to the funding for the project itself, Corps engaging young people with disabilities need funding to provide special tools and equipment for the project work, and special services and support for the Corps members. For example, Corps need assistance with funding for interpreters for members of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) community to participate in Corps programming. By providing adequate support for interpretive services, DHH Corpsmembers can provide insight and feedback during and after service with a federal land management agency. This feedback can help agencies deepen their understanding of barriers to accessibility as well as increasing their understanding of Deaf Culture.

Corps need consistent funding for these projects. They put work and effort in to building relationships with the disability community but because the funding is not consistent, they cannot promise that there will be further projects. It goes year to year and with no guarantee of that yearly funding. Making sure that the funding for these projects is not put into the traditional funding models. Do not make this funding subject to match requirements. It needs to be separate funding, allocated just for the specific needs for these projects.

The Corps Network could use additional funding to expand its Training and Technical Assistance Department to include a greater focus on accessible project work and engaging Corpsmembers with disabilities.