

Testimony of LaJuan Tucker, Environmental Program Coordinator City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department, to the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands On “Examining the Potential for a Civilian Climate Corps”



My name is LaJuan Tucker and I am an Environmental Program Coordinator with the City of Austin’s Parks and Recreation Department’s Natural Resources Division. I manage the Wildlife Austin program and assist with land management of the Austin Nature Preserve System. I thank you for the invitation to share with you information about the City of Austin’s Austin Civilian Conservation Corps (ACCC--pronounced “A triple C”). I hope my testimony proves valuable for your discussions about the potential of a federal Climate Conservation Corps.

Before I begin telling you about our program, the City would like to thank you for the passage of the bipartisan Great American Outdoor Act. We hope that as you consider creating a Civilian Climate Corps, you will build on that legacy.

In May of last year the Austin City Council passed [Resolution No.20200507-61](#) creating ACCC. We did not use federal funds for this effort but instead collaborated across multiple departments who were willing to allocate their resources to programs that align with ACCC because of the value it adds to the communities we all serve. The ACCC provides training, certifications, and experience towards climate and sustainability-related careers to Austinites who have been economically impacted by COVID-19. Participants not only receive an opportunity to re-enter the workforce but to learn workforce skills for fast-growing industries. The ACCC establishes job pipelines through a variety of programs, from low-barrier work to advanced training, which allow residents to enter at many points and achieve their career goals. To date, ACCC has created 100 opportunities for residents through 11 new programs in collaboration with 8 City of Austin departments and 9 community organizations. Our current projections show us that within the next two years we could see the number of people employed under this program triple in size. The programs are diverse, ranging in scope from mitigating the impact of floods and wildfires to public land. Those who were economically devastated by the pandemic regain employment, learn a new and growing work skill all while the entire community benefits from their hard work.

The ACCC has enabled the City to provide for a swift response to community needs and the customization of a community-driven workforce development program. Work placement and development through the ACCC program includes the participation on one of ACCC teams or an apprenticeship path. Both models place a focus on developing skills that will prepare these individuals for career ladder opportunities. For example, one of our current teams is working in an area that suffered a flood disaster in 2013. The community was devastated both through the

loss of life and infrastructure where more than 500 homes were destroyed. The floodplain has since been converted into parkland on which the ACCC is working with the community. Recruitment for this team involved reaching out to the local community so those closest to the impacts of flooding were the first to benefit from the position created by ACCC. Another of our teams is being trained and onboarded currently to help implement wildfire protection. The dryness of the Texas heat creates challenges for the City to maintain a high level of safety for our residents. Wildfire protection offer a defensible space that assists in wildfire mitigation and offer an area for fire suppression in the response to a wildfire event so that if a catastrophic wildfire were to occur, there will be space along the boundary between the wildfire and homes where fire fighters can defend community assets. Individuals employed under ACCC not only learn these workforce skills, they add to our public safety efforts.

ACCC serves as a real-life example of how investing in programs such as this benefit the economy, the environment, and the people we all seek to serve. The ACCC is positioned to provide residents in need with immediate income and job placement, while also building their work skills that will enable them to qualify for conservation and sustainability-related job fields. We feel fortunate to have had the local resources to implement such a program in the City of Austin and appreciate your work towards considering creating a model that could provide support and a federal partnership to other cities, including Austin. Programs like ACCC are a great way to not only assist communities most impacted by catastrophic events to recover but to protect and improve public lands to the benefit of all residents' enjoyment and safety, while also providing individuals with pathways to conservation and sustainability-related jobs. Again, I thank you for this opportunity and hope my testimony proves valuable for your discussions about the potential of a federal Climate Conservation Corps. Thank you for your leadership and I look forward to answering your questions during today's hearing.