



2020-2021 Maryland Veterans Conservation Corps Annual Report



Program Dates: September 2020 - September 2021

Crew Leader(s): Tyler Ulery, Calvin Ogburn (January 2021 – Present)

Program Manager(s): Lauryn Stalter, Anthony Peters (March 2021 – Present)

Program Assistant: Tiffany Hergett

Maryland Park Service Director of Conservation Corps: Fred Banks

Maryland Park Service Deputy Director of Conservation Corps: Luke Terrell

SCA Agreement Number: 00026513

Executive Summary



The mission of SCA is to build the next generation of conservation leaders and inspire lifelong stewardship of our environment and communities by engaging young people in hands-on service to the land. SCA was founded in 1957 by Liz Putnam, a college student who believed that the passion, talent, and hard work of young people could be a force for tackling the challenges facing America's public lands. Today SCA provides opportunities for thousands of young people to develop conservation values and explore pathways to green careers, strengthen their leadership skills, and deepen their sense of responsibility to others and to the world. Young people emerge from SCA with fuel for their continuous growth and with a sense of empowerment to take action for the issues that they care about, in conservation and beyond. SCA nurtures thriving youth and thriving landscapes.



Often described as “small, but mighty” the Maryland Veterans Conservation Corps (MVCC) is a crew of military veterans with over 20 years of collective military experience who were able to apply their sense of teamwork, diligence, and expertise toward accomplishing the Maryland Park Service’s (MPS) goals. With the assistance of the SCA and MPS, the MVCC has been capable of proving their worth within the MPS by taking leadership over important projects and seeing them to completion. The MVCC has been able to leave a positive footprint within the MPS by their efforts and dedication towards bettering the MPS and the environment they work within.



Program Overview

The mission of the Maryland Veterans Conservation Corps is to empower veterans and engage them in conservation service work on public lands.

This highly qualified team receives training, certification, and on the job experience within the Maryland Park Service to complete park operations, maintenance, and conservation projects within the parks.

Being in the MVCC is a full-time, paid, year-round position with benefits. Members have the opportunity to network with other professionals in the natural resource management field and develop skills to enter the conservation or park operations workforce.



Training



The MVCC receives training in several areas in order to lead and assist on technical conservation projects on public lands.



Comprehensive First Aid/CPR/AED	Wildland Firefighter	Chainsaw Use and Care
Environmental Education and Interpretation	Trail Construction and Maintenance	Basic Tool Use and Safety
Basic Carpentry	Small Watercraft Safety	Pesticide Applicator Certification

Program Structure

The MVCC is a team of five military veterans – four Members (Project Specialists), and one Leader (Project Lead). The team is based in Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary (MWS), located in the Southern Maryland Recreational Complex (SMRC) within the Maryland Park Service (MPS). Started originally at Point Lookout State Park, the MVCC was relocated to MWS in early 2020 where it thrived and grew, tackling major projects throughout the Old Line State.



Program Scope

The MVCC completed projects in 25 state parks or properties throughout the state of Maryland, including:

- Patuxent River State Park
- Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary
- Cedarville State Forest
- Smallwood State Park
- Seneca Creek State Park
- Gunpowder Falls State Park
- Susquehanna State Park
- Sandy Point State Park
- Tawes Garden
- Patapsco Valley State Park
- Wye Island State Park
- Calvert Cliffs State Park
- Spice Creek NRMA
- Huntington NRMA
- Indian Creek NRMA
- Nottingham NRMA
- King's Landing NRMA
- Hall Creek NRMA
- Janes Island State Park
- New Germany State Park
- Hollowing Point Boating Facility
- Point Lookout State Park
- Chapman State Park
- St. Mary's River State Park
- Rosaryville State Park



Meet the Team



Josh Kozak

Hometown: Kansas City, Kansas

Quote: “These mountains we carry we’re meant to climb.”

Josh Kozak entered the program almost halfway through the season, but in those eight months he grew both personally and professionally and became an integral part of the MVCC. Originally an Arabic linguist in the Air Force, Josh had no experience or background in natural resource management or conservation, but when he left the service, he knew that environmental stewardship was a career path he wanted to pursue. Taking college courses during his time in the program, Josh not only successfully completed his first undergrad year at the University of Maryland Baltimore College, but also made great contributions and impacts to the MVCC and the MPS. Using the bluebird boxes he helped build and install at Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary, Josh went on to write a paper on the blue bird population in the area, being able to apply field work and academic analysis to an ecological topic.

Meet the Team



Nick Gray

Hometown: Bel Air, Maryland

Quote: “Everything is beautiful. And nothing hurts.”

This was Nick Gray’s second year with the MVCC and he has stepped up to serve in several leadership roles on different projects throughout the State. Before he joined the MVCC, he served at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington DC as a Psychiatric Technician for the US Army and when he left he wanted to continue that sense of service. He was able to apply the hard skills he gained during his first year with the MVCC when he was selected to lead a National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) crew on a boardwalk reconstruction project at Susquehanna State Park, a position he would have been otherwise hesitant to take in years prior. But because of his successes there, he was again selected to lead a Maryland Conservation Jobs Corps (CJC) crew during the summer at Sandy Point State Park. These leadership opportunities pushed Nick to challenge himself and gave him a sense of empowerment and self-discovery. As a result, Nick is coming back for another year, willing to apply all he learned toward new endeavors.

Meet the Leader



Calvin Ogburn

Hometown: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Quote: “Sometimes a bridge on a trail is just a bridge. But sometimes it’s not.”

Calvin was born in Seoul, South Korea to American Diplomats and as a result spent most of his life overseas before attending The George Washington University in Washington, DC. Under an Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) Scholarship, Calvin commissioned into the US Army Field Artillery in 2012 where he served for seven years with units in South Korea, Colorado, and Oklahoma. While in the Army, Calvin earned his graduate degree through the University of Oklahoma before separating from the Service in 2019. From there, Calvin sought to continue his service in the natural resource management field, specifically with the Maryland Park Service where he started as a Seasonal Ranger at Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary. From there, Calvin was encouraged to become the Team Lead for the Maryland Veterans Conservation Corps where he is currently working, having the honor of continuing to lead the finest the nation has to offer.

Conservation Impact

Through SCA, young people have the opportunity to complete meaningful work that makes a positive impact on the world around them. SCA projects make tangible and positive impacts to the land, protecting and restoring parks and public lands, educating visitors about conservation, and increasing access to urban green spaces.

The MVCC's goal was to serve the Maryland Park Service by completing projects that created cohesion between the park user and the natural world. Through environmental stewardship, the MVCC spearheaded many improvement projects which aimed to amplify park user experience and restore the surrounding natural environment.

A pivotal and major project for the MPS, the MVCC was charged with serving as the coordinating, planning, and executing entity to overhaul over ten miles of trails at Cedarville State Forest. With the collective efforts of their sister organization, the Maryland Conservation Corps (MCC), the MVCC and seven other crews successfully brought a failing trail system back to operating levels over a period of three months during the stark Maryland winter. In the Spring, they tackled another major project at Wye Island Natural Resource Management Area wherein they restored a trail that included the construction of a 400-foot wooden bogwalk. They also taught and mentored the Maryland's Conservation Jobs Corps (CJC), which is a program hosted by MPS and the SCA for at-risk youth during the summer, in the construction of three massive wooden bulletin boards at Smallwood State Park.



Summary of Accomplishments

- 12 people provided outreach and education
- 4 acres (PLO), Approximately 1400 acres (SMRC) of land improved
- 40 hazardous trees felled
- 75 fallen trees bucked and removed
- 30 native trees planted
- 30 native plants planted
- 50 contractor-sized bags of invasive species removed
- 88440 feet of trail improved
- Structures built or maintained:
 - 7 Bridges
 - 10 Bulletin Boards
 - 1 Roof (GP)
 - 3 Buildings (Merkle)
 - 2 Buildings (Rosaryville)
 - 1 Building (Milltown)
 - 2 Buildings (Patapasco)



Conservation Impact



The MVCC leading a training session to Gunpowder's Maryland Conservation Corps at Cedarville State Forest on how to build a bulletin board.



Project Lead Ogburn applying the final roof caps on a bulletin board the MVCC built at Nottingham Natural Resource Management Area.

Conservation Impact



Project Specialist Gray using a level and jig the MVCC developed to ensure Wayfinding signs remain in accordance with Maryland Park Service standards.



Project Lead Ulery bucking up a fallen tree that dropped across a trail at Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary.

Conservation Impact



The resident Computerized Numerical Control (CNC) expert, Project Specialist Kozak used the machine to rout out life-sized bird wingspans for Sandy Point State Park's new Nature Exhibit.



Project Specialist Gray and Kozak carrying Wayfinding sign and drill auger in a remote part of Cedarville State Forest. Many of the Wayfinding signs required hand transport of materials and equipment in many parts of Maryland State Parks as vehicle access is difficult.

Conservation Impact



Project Specialist Kozak bucking up a felled tree in support of a major clearing operation at St. Mary's State Park's dam spillway to allow better water flow in the event of a flood.



Project Lead Ulery and Project Specialist Gray constructing a 20-foot long, 6-foot wide, equestrian rated wooden bridge at St. Mary's River State Park.

Conservation Impact



The MVCC was often tasked with being the lead planning, coordinating, and executing unity for major projects, especially when its sister organization, the Maryland Conservation Corps, would have several crews join in on the project. This was taken following the construction of a 400-foot wooden “bogwalk” at Wye Island Natural Resource Management Area with the assistance of the Tuckahoe, Susquehanna, and Gunpowder MCC crews.



The MVCC conducting an Advise, Train, Lead, Assist mission with Seneca Creek State Park staff at Patuxent River State Park in the construction of a 16-foot long, 6-foot wide, equestrian rated wooden bridge.

Conservation Impact



Project Lead Ogburn and Susquehanna MCC Crew Member Jessica lead the way on a trail reroute at Cedarville State Forest.



The MVCC demonstrating the correct usage of the griphoist device at Cedarville State Forest.

Making Connections



The MVCC offers many leadership opportunities throughout the year. Project Specialist Gray was selected to assist in leading a National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) in the reconstruction of a 600-foot boardwalk at Susquehanna State Park.



The MVCC led several volunteer events throughout their service year to include the first ever Veterans and Military Volunteer Day. Maryland Trails Planner Dan Hudson (far right) often joined to share his institutional knowledge. This photo was taken at Cedarville State Forest, where volunteers helped finish a 1.5 miles reroute of major trail.



Project Specialist Kozak and Project Lead Ogburn holding a training session for a Conservation Jobs Corps crew at Smallwood State Park in the construction of a bulletin board.



Participant Impact

In every SCA experience, participants complete projects that solve real conservation challenges and see the tangible results of their labor. Through this work they learn how to conserve resources and protect the planet, learn why their conservation work projects are critical to that effort, and discuss with teammates and leaders what they could do to address environmental issues after SCA; including exploring possible careers in conservation or green jobs and discussing their academic and career goals. SCA experiences provide participants with opportunities to lead their peers, engage in problem-solving, conflict resolution, and group decision-making, and ultimately reflect on the ways the experience is impacting them.



From felling trees, to painting blazes on trails, to building 20-foot wooden bridges, the MVCC can confidently say they had a positive and lasting impact on Maryland's public lands and one just has to visit to see the amazing impact they were able to achieve. Throughout their time with the MPS, the MVCC had the opportunity to undergo most of the training that permanent MPS Rangers go through: basic and S212 Chainsaw, Wildland Firefighting, Trail Training, Interpretation Training, Search and Rescue, Emergency Medical Responder, and Small Craft Water Safety. This doesn't include the countless on-the-job training and experiences the MVCC members gained as well, such as tractor and excavator operation or project planning and management.



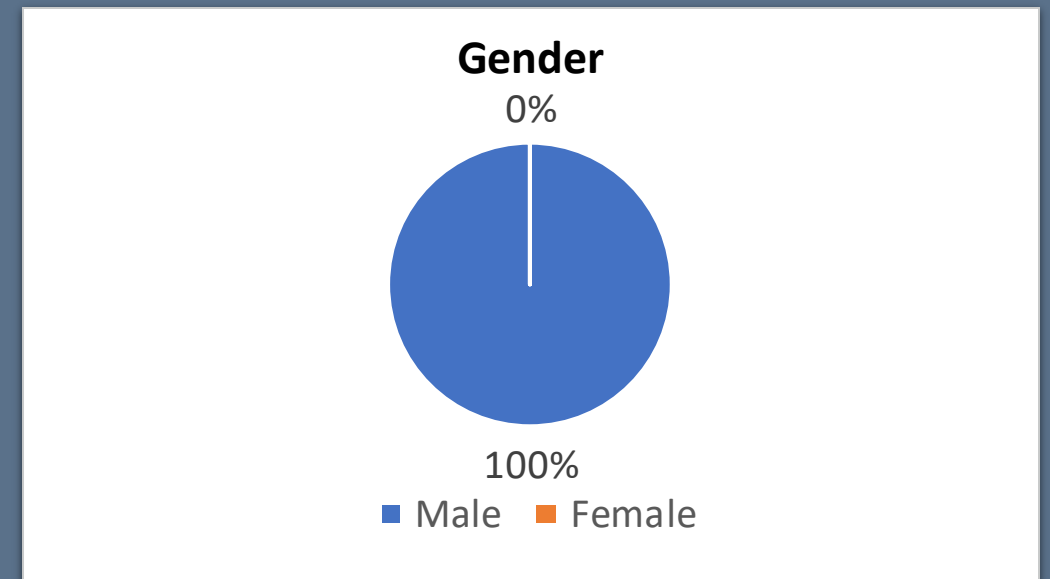
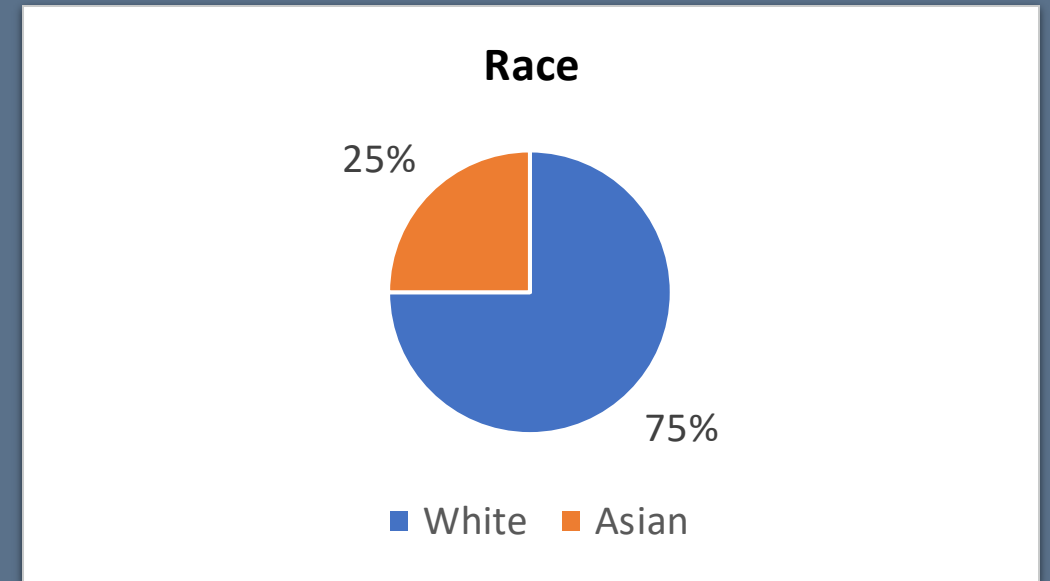
Participant Impact

In just one year, each MVCC member can not only look back and see the hard skills they've gained, but also the incredible, positive impact they made. Members also make lasting friendships with other members as well, with many coming back to volunteer with the MVCC on projects.



Demographics

Average Age: 29 years old



Acknowledgements

from the MVCC Project Lead

The VCC could not have accomplished what it has without the efforts of a dedicated support staff. A huge thank you to Lauryn Stalter, Anthony Peters, and Tiffany Hergett at the SCA for providing dependable support and unwavering encouragement to our team. Another big thanks goes out to Danny Jones, Keith Edelen, and Rob Jones with Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary staff. They were integral to getting the VCC on its feet and making sure we had what we needed to finish projects safely and efficiently. Thank you as well to Luke Terrell, Fred Banks, and Sara Marcinak with Maryland State Parks, as they were devoted to keeping us in the loop and made us feel welcomed and cared for as a crew.

