



# CORPS NEWS

# Washington Conservation Corps

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Photo: Kevin Farrell

## State Legislature Expands Puget SoundCorps

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The 2012 Washington State Legislature provided \$13 million dollars in funding to Puget Sound Corps projects, expanding the WCC. These new crews are dedicated to Puget SoundCorps projects, the bulk of which are located on State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) land.

Fourteen crews and a coordinator were added in October, along with a logistical support position. This spring brought a dozen new seasonal crews and a temporary Coordinator assignment for Crew Supervisor, Rob Crawford.

These crews have been working to clean up Puget Sound beaches, install native plant species in urban areas, reclaim land previously used for mining operations, restore in-stream habi-



Crew members haul a creosote-treated log to the helicopter staging area on Lopez Island, November 2011

Photo: Lisa Kaufman/DNR

tat, and control noxious weeds.

Nick Mott, WCC Section Supervisor, explains, “This new funding illustrates that our program is a cost effective force for creating jobs for young adults who have been disproportionately affected by the recession in Washington.”

The expansion of Puget SoundCorps projects brings the WCC roster up to 356 members—the largest the program has been in its 30-year history. With humble beginnings of just three crews in 1983, the WCC now consists of 65 crews and 26 Individual Placements.

Learn more about our Puget SoundCorps program at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/wcc/psc.html>

## Walking Streams: Salmon Spawning Surveys

By Casey Costello, 2011-2012 Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group Individual Placement



Top: Culvert that was replaced  
Bottom: Skagit Fisheries staff stand on the new bridge

One of the most rewarding and critical aspects of restoration projects are results. Results ensure continuation of funding, without which, projects would not be possible. One of the primary ways that Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG) demonstrates results is through spawning surveys.

The two main goals in SFEG's mission statement are to restore salmon habitat and to do so involving the community, whenever possible. The achievement of these two goals simultaneously breaks down the separation between society and the environment. The two cease to be seen as separate entities and their interdependence is more easily understood.

SFEG recruits community members to survey streams throughout the watershed for salmon. These volunteers survey all five species, count live and dead fish, report redd numbers, track pre-spawn mortalities, and tally water conditions. The assimilation of the data contained in these reports is one of the major ways SFEG gauges the success of their restoration efforts. The equation is a simple one: if, over time, the numbers and species composition of wild salmon occurring in headwaters throughout the region are improving, then the restoration program is successful. In the world of grants, funding, and public opinion, it comes down to numbers, unfortunate as that may be. For SFEG, sinking or swimming, so to speak, depends on the success of projects, defined largely, by the results of these surveys.

One of the three streams assigned to the WCC Individual Placement is Alder Creek. Alder is an unassuming little creek when passed over going 60 mph on highway 20, East of Sedro-Woolley. However, every two years, this stream is engulfed in a tide of pink salmon straining and stressing every inch of the way upstream with a peppering of Coho charging their way through. There was a massive culvert in this stream a few years ago about a quarter mile upstream of

where highway 20 crosses over. This culvert created a step that was so severe, no salmon could make the jump. Year after year, surveyors would hike up and around the culvert, hoping for a pink or coho sighting, only to be disappointed. A few years ago, SFEG received funding for a removal project and replaced the culvert with a bridge. After the bridge was in place, results were expected - and needed.

I was aware of this as I started my first trek of Alder Creek. Almost immediately, the flurry began. Counting fish, marking redds, clipping the tails of the deceased, checking for pre-spawn mortality, tracking everything with the 'write in the rain' that was wrong for writing with pens - all the while trying to keep my footing as I hiked upstream. The salmon were everywhere. We made our way upstream and under highway 20. The new bridge was close and, as we arrived, there were no more fish. The current time and total count were marked as we stood under the bridge - knowing the significance of finding more fish up from this point. As I stepped out from under the bridge, straining and stressing my eyes every inch of the way, awaiting the flash of a tail or familiar ripple on the water's surface in hopeful anticipation. I saw nothing.

With each step, the consternation increased. My survey partner was perfectly calm—he had hiked this creek in recent years and was sure we would find plenty of fish. I was not. Each step felt like a hundred feet. After a hundred feet of nothing, I finally saw a tailfin whip. Then another, and another. After a few more bends in the stream, there were salmon darting up and down, collecting in eddies, and swirling through the foaming turbulence that defines their freshwater world.

Results. They are what counts. They keep funds rolling and projects running. They are what allow restoration to continue. On that day, from the SFEG bridge up the half mile to the reach break point, we counted 464 Pink salmon, 1 Coho salmon, and innumerable pink salmon redds.

*"Results...  
Are what allow  
restoration to  
continue."*

Learn more about Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG) at: [www.skagitfisheries.org](http://www.skagitfisheries.org)



# The International Brant Monitoring Project

By Leah Hall, 2011-2012 Padilla Bay Education Assistant (2012-2013 MTSG Field IP)



Photo Courtesy: <http://brantfestival.bc.ca/conservation/monitoring/>

For those of us living in Washington, it would be a stretch to describe our winters as tropical. However, for waterfowl and shorebirds hailing from the tundra of Northern Canada, Russia, and Alaska, it is balmy down here. One bird that enjoys wintering in northwest Washington is the brant goose.

As fall ends, these birds - up to 150,000 of them - congregate at Izembek Lagoon on the Alaskan Peninsula. They feed there and wait for a low-pressure system to aid their migration south. When the right pressure system arrives, the majority of the brant population will migrate to Baja, Mexico. This flight is 3,000 miles, takes 60 to 95 hours, and the birds fly non-stop at an average rate of 60 miles per hour.

A relatively small portion of the population, numbering in the thousands, takes a shorter trip south. It is this group of geese that the staff at Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve has the good fortune of monitoring. This population includes members of a rare sub-species of brant, called Western High Arctic "Gray Belly" Brant. These are some of the rarest geese in the world, with a total population of less than 10,000. They breed in Canada's Parry Islands and winter almost exclu-

sively in Puget Sound.

Brant choose their wintering grounds based on the availability of eelgrass - a tall, highly productive sea grass. Brant are one of the few animals that feed directly on eelgrass. With its shallow, flat, and muddy bottom (allows the whole bay to empty at low tide), Padilla Bay has nearly 8,000 acres of eelgrass.

Because they have specific habitat requirements, the brant population is very vulnerable. The International Brant Monitoring Project helps protect and track these rare birds. The project includes students, concerned citizens, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Estuarine Research Reserves, who monitor brant through field observations and counting the brant along the Pacific Flyway. Participants then document their observations and share them via an online database.

I spent the first half of the 2011-2012 service year leading this program at Padilla Bay. The



Students monitor brant geese at Padilla Bay

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## Stories From The Field



**WCC deployed 55 members and staff on wildfires in summer and fall 2012; 8 of whom were military veterans. In total, the WCC provided nearly 11,000 hours of assistance on 7 wildfires through Central and Eastern Washington. Photo: Russell Greer**

### Veterans in the WCC

In fall 2011, The WCC formed a partnership with the Washington Departments of Natural Resources, Veterans Affairs, and the United States Forest Service to create new opportunities for recently returning military veterans. While military veterans have always been able to serve in the WCC, the State Legislature amended our founding legislation to enable waiving of our age limitation (18-25 years old) for military veterans.

In addition, the WCC expanded to include 5 AmeriCorps crews specifically for veterans to work on Puget SoundCorps projects through the 2012 Jobs Bill. In October 2012, these positions expanded, providing further opportunities for military veterans.

Service in AmeriCorps and the WCC allows military veterans to gain new skills in the environmental field and prepares them for civilian employment post-AmeriCorps. The story on the following page is from Phil Hansen, Crew Supervisor of our first all veteran crew. This crew spent the bulk of their time on urban forestry and habitat restoration. In addition, they responded to marine debris cleanup on our coast and to wildfires in Central Washington.

Of the 5 original members on this crew, 3 returned for the 2012-2013 service year, with Junior Fuimaono returning as a crew supervisor.



**Initial all-veteran Crew (L to R): Ole Stene, Ryan Peterson, Sam Dobberteen, Phil Hansen (Supervisor), Junior Fuimaono, & Aurelio Elliott clear marine debris**

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## A Helping Hand

By Phil Hansen, Veteran Crew Supervisor

In March 2012, the WCC's Veteran crew was working hard, as usual. The project at hand was with Metro Parks at Titlow Beach in Tacoma. We had been grubbing blackberries for three days and were working into the fourth. The weather was especially miserable that week – heavy rains and temperatures hovering in the mid 30s to lower 40s.

I could tell my crew was facing burnout so I asked Mary Anderson with Metro Parks if there was another project in need of some help to break up the monotony. She explained that mulching was also needed. The mulch was a quarter of a mile away, at the bottom of a hill. Luckily, an electric John Deer gator was available to make the work more efficient.

We began the new project straightaway, filling the gator, a few wheelbarrows, and hauling them up the hill. The crew rotated between loading, driving the gator, and spreading the mulch. Things were going well for the first hour, but then the gator battery died.

Almost immediately, the rain increased in intensity. I could see the look of despair amongst the crew, as if all motivation was being washed away with the rain.

We took a quick break to discuss our options. After a few suggestions, Elliott jokingly suggested we could ask a construction crew across the creek if we could use their heavy equipment. At first, I laughed, but then thought it would not hurt to ask. I ran over and spoke to the site supervisor.

As I walked in the door, I noticed a US Marine Corps hat on the supervisor's head. I knew if anyone would help us, a fellow veteran would. I explained that we were a WCC crew comprised of recently returning military veterans with equipment out of commission. He smiled and explained that his work crew was waiting for the rain to let up since they could not install drainage pipes in the downpour. He asked his crew if they were interested in helping us. Two of them jumped up and walked out to warm up their machines. A few minutes later, a Bobcat and a backhoe were coming around the creek.

I guided them to the mulch pile explaining that any help would be great, but we did not expect them to



Members of the Veteran Crew pause to take a snapshot in the rain.

clear the whole pile. The two operators explained that they would do what they could in such bad conditions. The WCC veteran crew smiled as the cavalry came to help, a renewed sense of purpose came over us all and we were working hard to keep up with the pace of the heavy equipment. Load after load came up the hill and the rain continued to pour from the sky.

Just over 2 hours later, the entire mulch pile was up the hill and spread over the site. When the work was complete, we thanked the drivers and they went back to their side of the creek. Mary soon returned and brought donuts for the crew. I think she pitied us, with the terrible weather and difficult work. We all thanked her and told her we were in need of more mulch. Mary looked confused. We explained the help we had and she was pleased with the work accomplished and laughed at our creativity.

The day was over and our work was finished, but the crew felt we owed our helpers something more than thanks. Before we headed home, we took the donuts to the men who helped us, thanked them again, and shook hands. While driving back to our lock up, the crew reflected on the many instances we had to deal with similar circumstances in the military. Each of us had stories of our inner MacGyver, using creativity and ingenuity in solving the many curve balls that life throws our way.

Finishing the day, the crew had a look of content – satisfaction with the work done and the appreciation expressed to our help across the creek.

### MacGyver Moments:

Do you have a story of using some ingenuity to get things done in the WCC?

Email your story to: [wcc.update@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:wcc.update@ecy.wa.gov) for inclusion in our newsletter



By: Adrienne McColl, WCC King County Crew

In late November, a motley King County WCC crew had the opportunity to work on an atypical project with Paul Adler (might-be superfluous ecologist with King County Department of Natural Resources, Water and Land Resources Division). The crew hiked into a site on Deer Creek in Duvall where a beaver dam had blown out earlier that month. The blowout caused a torrent of water, earth, and woody debris that rushed downhill. It flooded an essential road that connects the properties located above to the main roads and took out the guardrails in the process. Additionally, the debris continued downstream where it inundated a private property.

The goal of the project was to install a device called a “beaver deceiver”. It consists of a pipeline that runs through the dam. A wire cage fits over the inflow upstream, preventing beavers from building inside the pipe. The contraption relieves the pressure that would otherwise build up on the upstream side of the dam. Even while the beavers build a dam, the beaver deceiver maintains the water at a lower level.

Upon arriving at the dam site, it was very clear that the dam was far below its previous maximum height. Wood littered the sides of the creek bed. Trees upstream from the dam still bore marks from where the waterline sat weeks before. Over 10 feet higher than where it was the day we arrived. Adler explained that the hope was to reach a happy medium, somewhere between those two extreme water levels. A level that would provide sufficient protection for properties and roads while simultaneously providing adequate habitat for the resident beaver population.

The crew rapidly assembled the beaver deceiver, resting the pipeline on top of the razed dam, with the expectation that a dam on top would no longer expose the mechanism. Unfortunately,

because the project came together on short notice, the available pipeline was too rigid and would not successfully maintain the desired water levels long term. It could not bend enough to account for the elevation differences between the desired water level upstream and the creek bed below the dam.

Although not ideal, it did address the immediate concern and would help prevent another debris torrent. Later in December, Adler returned with another King County WCC crew to switch out the equipment with a flexible pipeline that would successfully navigate the elevation change. We hope that this will provide a long-term solution for coexistence.

The continuing goal of this project and others like it is to find a compromise in which the needs of people and wildlife both have value. It was an incredibly enlightening and interesting experience for everyone on the crew to see firsthand how those negotiations are handled and to play a part in implementing the agreements. We all learned a lot and enjoyed the uniqueness of this project.



The unintentional culprits.

Image courtesy: <http://wsm.wsu.edu>

Lower right:  
King County  
crew installing a  
beaver deceiver  
in Deer Creek.



## The Building of a Boardwalk

By Shawn Zaniewski, WCC Crew Supervisor

The Auburn Environmental Park Interpretive Boardwalk is a 1,200 linear foot raised walkway, constructed through a wetland located directly adjacent to the junction of highways 18 and 167. This wetland helps to control storm water runoff from the impervious surfaces of the expanded highways. The purpose of the boardwalk is to teach the importance of wetlands, explain the history of the area, and give residents of this urban area a gateway to a “semi-natural” location to enjoy.

My crew had the good fortune of being chosen for constructing this new boardwalk, in an urban oasis. After countless, long looks at extensive blueprints and several pre-construction site visits, we were excited and ready to break ground. We knew it was going to be tough, but I do not think any of us, including myself, had the slightest idea of exactly what we were getting into.

To demonstrate the size of this task, below are the amounts, and dimensions, of the materials used:

- 24 Linear Feet 6x6 lumber
- 56 Linear Feet 6x12 lumber
- 936 Linear Feet 4x12 lumber
- 1,520 Linear Feet 2x8 lumber
- 1,580 Linear Feet 2x4 lumber
- 3,540 Linear Feet 4x4 lumber
- 9,270 Linear Feet 2x12 lumber
- 17,070 Linear Feet 2x6 lumber
- 270 diamond pier footings
- 1,080 10 foot steel pins
- Hundreds of post caps, post bases, hangers, clips, and anchors
- 1,000+ joist hangers
- Several hundred pounds of screws, bolts, and nails

Numbers alone do not capture the blood, sweat, and tears that went into this project. At times in the WCC, it seems the numbers are the highest priority to sponsors and our office, but numbers do not tell the story. They do not convey the countless hours spent standing below the infamous Pionjar, pounding in pin after pin. Just the thought of it brings back the taste of exhaust in my mouth.

The numbers do not illustrate mornings spent loading, then unloading, pallet after pallet of lumber and brackets. It says nothing of the days when we would finally

get the Pionjar bit fixed, just to break it again before the day or the footings were completed.

There were days when we would carry 60-pound footings, through thigh high mud, then have to



**After months of working in mud, the ground dries and a boardwalk begins to take shape.**

align and pin them two feet underwater. The best part about this stage of the project was that it took place in December, requiring us to break through the ice first.

The numbers do not show the tattered hands from hammering for hours. The sore backs from packing materials from the staging area to the work site. Nor the bloody fingers from the learning curve that comes with swinging a hammer.

Another thing the numbers do not capture is the camaraderie that developed by taking turns on the Pionjar, driving 1,000 plus pins into the ground. They do not show how each person took over as motivator, right in the moment of need, as if on cue. The numbers do not show the confidence and proficiency that grew after days of doing the same thing repeatedly. They do not show the friendships built with other crews, as more people joined us to help meet the deadline.

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*“They do not show how each person took over as motivator, right in the moment of need, as if on cue.”*

### Special Thanks

Thank you to David Coffey, Phil Hansen, Darrell Borden, Dale Rahier, my crews (2011-2012 and 2012-2013), Jered Pomeroy, who worked on this project throughout the tour. Also, Sean Montgomery, who volunteered for 3 weeks before joining our program, and Jake Hanson, who volunteered in his spare time.



Teaching a session on environmental education, the girls draw pictures of the benefits of trees.

Sarah Everstine completed a year with the WCC as an Assistant Supervisor with the Redmond crew. Before joining WCC, she earned a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Washington State University.

Upon finishing her WCC service, she continued a second AmeriCorps term as an IP with Global Visionaries, an international youth development non-profit based in Seattle. This position involved working with high school students in a yearlong

leadership program, which culminated in a month long service trip to Guatemala.

While in Guatemala, Sarah worked with coffee farmers, planted Macadamia trees, and coffee plants. She also worked on a reforestation project and learned how sustainable development truly works.

After returning home, Sarah decided community development was of interest to her. She began the year long application process for the Peace Corps and in April of 2009 - she began her two-month language and cultural training. In May, she became an environmental education/community development volunteer. Sarah began her work in a small village of about 500 people at the base of Toubkal National Park in Southeast Morocco, 65 kilometers away from Marrakech..

During her time in the Peace Corps, Sarah taught

environmental education at rural schools and began a partnership with the Ministry of Water and Forests for an eco-tourism project. Additionally she started a sustainable weaving cooperative for the women and girls of the community, utilizing local plants and roots. The women were able to dye wool they sheared from their sheep to match the traditional vibrant colors of Berber carpets. The community also brought running water to the village and started a literacy program with Sarah's help.

Upon returning home, Sarah wanted to continue in the community development field but in her home community. In September of 2011, she joined the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in the Spokane Field Office as a Management Analyst. In this position, she conducts outreach to residents who need housing including our veterans, and works with local tribes on culturally relevant development projects. She is also the president of the Inland Northwest Peace Corps Association working to "bring the world back home." As president, Sarah coordinates get-togethers for returned and future volunteers, plans speaking engagements, and arranges volunteer events with local service organizations.

Sarah credits her AmeriCorps service for instilling a sense of community involvement, a passion for the environment, and a love for working with volunteers. "In Redmond we pulled a lot of Blackberry bushes, but we also worked with a lot of passionate and dedicated volunteers who were really able to get things done."



After a village-wide trash pick-up, Sarah leads a session on the importance of not burning plastics.



## Networking in the WCC Program

By Natalie Tacconi, 2011-2012 Assistant Supervisor

While I was a member in the WCC program, I was given the opportunity to ride along with the Marine Water Quality Monitoring Team from the Washington State Department of Ecology. Within the Puget Sound and along the coast, there are forty monitoring stations separated by region and each week they sample about 10 stations. The regions include North Sound, Central Sound, South Sound and the coast - by way of seaplane. In addition, once a month, during flight, they capture images of the surface conditions of the water. Looking for various blooms, oil slicks, or debris; though this did not happen the day I rode along. In the cockpit, we sampled North Sound, stopping at Port Townsend, the San Juan Islands, the Georgia Strait, and Bellingham - among other locations. Most of the monitoring happens through an automated system. Several containers drop to the bottom of the water, and each container has a program to open and collect a water sample from various depths. The team measures salinity, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, and fecal matter, along with other criterion. After the 10 stations, we flew to Olympia to drop off the samples. As we flew from station to station and then down to Olympia, I witnessed the stunning views of our state from a unique perspective. Mount Baker kept a watchful eye on us around North Sound, and passed off the duty to Mount Rainier as we made our way south. Once over Elliott Bay, we saw massive blooms of bright orange plankton that contrasted the cool blue water. I was able to snap some photos of the bloom with several backdrops - Seattle's iconic skyline, the Bainbridge Island ferry terminal, and the tip of Alki Point. I was featured in the team's monthly report as a volunteer, and they even chose to publish a few of my photos. At the end of the day, we touched back down at the seaplane base, but not without making a few more contacts first! The pilot connected me with other pilots who exclusively explore GIS applications.

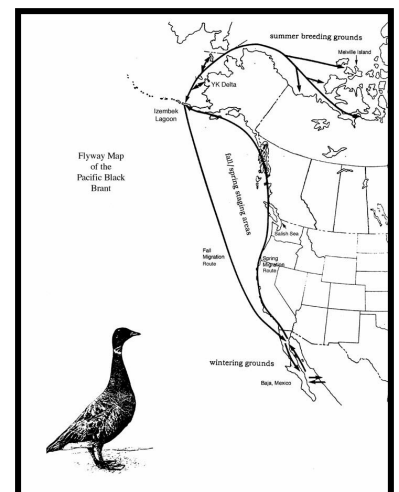
Talk to your supervisors, sponsors, or WCC coordinators if you need help making connections. I assure you, there is someone in your WCC community who can point you in the right direction.

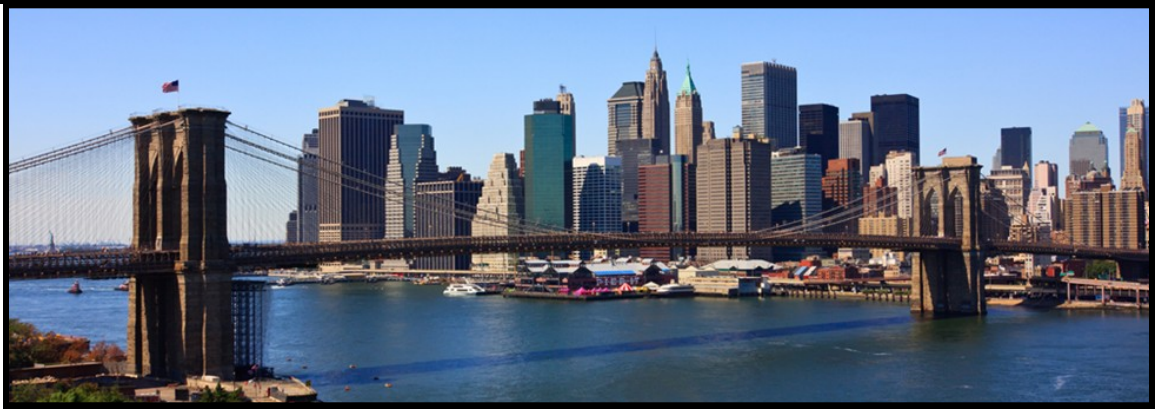


## Brant, Continued

program runs from October through May - the typical months to spot brant in northern Washington. This involved working with a local middle school, where I took three students from the sixth grade class out every week to monitor brant. On these trips, we travelled to locations around Padilla Bay where I taught them how to use a spotting scope to find and identify brant. They then wrote a final observation, including the number of brant seen, their location, weather conditions, the actions of the brant, and information on other birds we were able to identify. This information appears in an online database and project listserv members receive an email.

This project is a great way to teach kids about the natural environment and allows students to be a part of data collection that is used in the scientific community. You can check out the website at <http://www.padillabay.gov/brant/> or come to Padilla, Birch, Samish, or Fidalgo Bays to see the adorable brant goose yourself. They should be around until late April or early May; then they will be heading north to make some goslings.





*“ - teams are already having a powerful impact helping hundreds of Sandy survivors put their homes and lives back together.”*

*-National Service Blog*

## Hurricane Sandy

### New York and New Jersey

Intro by Mari Novak, Department of Ecology Individual Placement

**Hurricane Sandy** struck land in the United States on October 29, 2012. This “Frankenstorm” affected the entire East Coast, from Florida to Maine, severely damaging areas in New York and New Jersey. In a swift and efficient response to the hurricane, eight WCC crews drove across country to an unprecedented disaster set in one of the most populous cities in the country.

In total, the WCC deployed 22 WCC supervisors and 109 AmeriCorps members who responded to Hurricane Sandy providing 43,704 hours of service to communities in New York and New Jersey over the course of 5 months.

During the first deployment, WCC crews worked alongside other conservation corps from around the country to run emergency shelters across the five boroughs of New York City. Crews monitored hallways and sleeping areas, distributed clothing and food donations, and comforted residents who needed support.

As replacement crews arrived, the WCC switched gears and traveled down through New Jersey to establish Volunteer Reception Centers and begin the tough work of cleaning up. WCC crews led teams of volunteers through damaged homes, tearing up floorboards, drywall and insulation, at the risk of exposure to toxic mold after the flood. Five months later, all the crews were home and ready to share their stories.

## Nisqually Crew Member Recalls Rewarding Experience

By Josh Coulter, Nisqually Crew Member

Our crew, from the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, was selected for the second round of relief deployment. We were cautioned that the work would be difficult and would include working with mold, hazardous chemicals, and other dangerous substances. Our excitement to aid in the recovery of the eastern coast would not be stifled by these warnings. Within a few days we were on a plane headed east. On November 30<sup>th</sup> our plane landed in New Jersey, where we met with the WCC crew that would be heading back from the first deployment. When asked about their experiences, each of them had a smile on their face and could only speak of how amazing their time had

been. This only bolstered our crew’s enthusiasm. At the airport, our crew leads briefed us about what to expect during our deployment. We then departed for the location in Garden City, New York that we would call home for the next three weeks.

The house we came upon was an old military housing unit. Despite its age, the house had already begun to feel cozy and would soon be a beautiful sight after a hard day’s work. The majority of the crew shared a bedroom with a smaller adjoining room off to the side. We could have put two beds in each room, but as a joke disguised as an excuse to make the room feel more comfortable, we pushed the four beds together, side by side. This took up the full

*“They spend most of their time outdoors; you have lots of new-growth beards, some ZZ Top-length beards.”*  
*- New York Times*



width of our room, leaving the side bedroom empty. Giggles exploded from our room like a 12-year-old's sleepover party. The sleeping situation became normal and went unchanged throughout our stay.

Our main base was a small fire station out of which a non-profit, Jewish disaster relief organization titled NECHAMA had been operating. They processed and scouted houses that needed assistance, and then coordinated volunteers along with the organization's team leaders to work on the homes. NECHAMA didn't waste time getting our crew or other volunteers out in the field. Soon they gave us the option to become team leads, which we all took advantage of at least once.

This disaster relief organization stocked our crews with equipment required to work on the houses struck by the hurricane. The speed, organization, and preparedness of NECHAMA made them easy to work with. Volunteers and AmeriCorps branches from all over the United States came to help people in need. We met volunteers ranging from the local area to all the way from Canada. We even met a group affected by Hurricane Katrina who wanted to reciprocate for the relief they received during their disaster.

Most homes we worked on had floodwater flow through their main level at about three feet high. This water also flooded into the basements of houses unlucky enough to have them. Having a basement meant not only damage to the entire basement itself, but also to the foundation of the home. Being the second deployment meant we were working in these houses two months after the storm hit. This two month period was more than enough time for mold to start advancing on the interior of the homes.

In order to work in these conditions, crews wore rubber gloves under our work gloves, Tyvek suits, respirators, hard hats, and eye protection. When we arrived at the houses, our job was to help the home owners with the first few steps on the path to recovery from the storm. We helped by clearing out material that

may have been contaminated with mold to prevent further damage, and to provide a clean slate for the contractors to start rebuilding. We assisted low income households and people who needed help with the physical work. Each house seemed irreparable, but after hours of prying, carrying, scooping, and removing, a new light would shine on the cleared-out rooms. Almost every day we were able to clear a house, and if we worked fast enough, start on a new one.

The home owners made the work the most rewarding. Some tried to help with the work. Others would sit with us when we took breaks and joked with us. When our job was done you could hear the thankfulness in their words and see it in their eyes. A few of the people we worked for cried with joy at the work we had been doing. One of the elderly ladies took all of our names so she could say prayers for us, and another wrote down our e-mails so she could send us pictures of the house when it is fully repaired. The time spent with the people in need and with the volunteers from all around made our three weeks in New York, not only an experience that will further our careers, but an experience that we will carry in our hearts for the rest of our lives.



**Satellite FEMA map of New Jersey used in the Brigantine Island, NJ Volunteer Reception Center.**



**WCC caravan headed towards the East Coast.**

## Boardwalk Continued

When it comes down to it, numbers are important. They are essential for funding to hire the crews to do these fantastic jobs. There is no doubt they have their place, but for the people who worked on this project tirelessly for months on end, it was not about numbers. It was about the skills learned, the friendships made, and the memories that will last forever.

We did finally finish the boardwalk and it looks beautiful. From the hidden underside braces to the bright green mesh rails, it is sharp. It is something that anyone who had a chance to work on should feel proud. It

Question and answer from Alyssa Pun, Whitney Rogers, Emily Chilton, and Daniel Vladu, part of the King County WCC crew first deployment.

**Walk us through your various work assignments throughout the month. What did you do at each site?**

**Alyssa:** “After 5 days of driving across the country we finally reached NYC in the evening. We headed to Brooklyn Technical High School to help run a shelter that had about 300 people, roughly 220 were from adult special needs facilities, and the others being general public. We were immediately put onto night-shift working as hall monitors, making sure facility clients did not leave their area. As well as making sure everyone who came into the shelter was screened, while doing general tasks such as moving cots or getting supplies for whoever was managing.

After we closed the shelter, we went to a shelter on Staten Island at a Jesuit retreat center to take the place of another WCC crew so they could have a day off. The work there was pretty relaxed, mostly cleaning. After that, we helped close down another shelter, and then we moved to Long Island, where there was a donation redistribution center. We helped move things around the warehouse and organized donations. After a few days of that, we were sent to Coney Island to help deliver supplies in areas that had not had power in weeks.

For our last bit of work on disaster relief, we worked with Operation Gut & Pump. We worked clearing out flooded basements, sometimes they had not been pumped out yet. Gutting out damaged parts of the home, which sometimes meant taking out everything from the floors up to the walls.”



**Daniel, what was your reaction to finding out you'd be stationed at your old high school (Brooklyn Technical High School)?**

**Daniel:** “I was like, is this seriously happening? It's so weird - [my crew] is seeing a part of my life that

they were never expected to see. Really weird and really cool. I actually wasn't that helpful showing people around, I didn't remember where everything



was!”

**Was there anything that actually surprised you during your deployment?**

**Whitney:** “Another thing that surprised me was how much the AmeriCorps members from every program grew. Young adults with no training took on the responsibilities of seasoned professionals, and they excelled. Randy [Ladowski] became a serious administrative leader, when he is usually the happy-go-lucky guy who jumps on any chance for fun irreverence. Emily, who appears quite introverted, made unbelievably strong personal connections to shelter residents old and young. These changes happened in a matter of days, not even weeks. I knew AmeriCorps was made up of great people, but I had not known just how fantastic everyone was.”

**Are there any individual stories or people that have especially stuck with you since returning?**

**Whitney:** “One particularly strong memory is from when we were checking in on folks who lived in buildings where the water and electricity had gone down in the storm. When I knocked on one woman's door, she came out and chatted with me. She was dearly grateful that her losses from the storm had been relatively minor; others had lost so much more, she said. Yet she was having a hard time, and I thought she might be trying to hold up through a lot of personal pain. So, I acknowledged her wonderful perspective, then noted something like, “But it must be pretty rough for you, too.” She choked up, and I opened my arms to give her a hug. She cried on my shoulder for just a couple seconds. Small moments like that demonstrate the kind of impact we wanted to have – doing any task that needed to be done, with humanity. That's something I think AmeriCorps is particularly well situated to do.”

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**Photos: Lower Left, crews remove debris from houses in Rockaway, NY. Upper right, crews remove muddy and damaged washing machine from a home.**

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