



SOUTHEAST CONSERVATION CORPS

A program of Conservation Legacy

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Southeast Conservation Corps Intern Selected by The Corps Network as 2022 Corpsmember of the Year

Aaron Conner to Receive One of Four Awards Granted Nationwide

Chattanooga, TN — Aaron Conner, a member of Southeast Conservation Corps' Veterans Fire Corps crew, will be recognized by [The Corps Network](#), the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps, as a 2022 Corpsmember of the Year.

The Corps Network presents the [Corpsmember of the Year Award](#) on an annual basis to young adults chosen from among the approximately 25,000 individuals who serve in [member organizations](#) of The Corps Network every year. The Corpsmembers of the Year are young people who, through their term of service in a Corps, have demonstrated personal growth, outstanding leadership skills, and a sincere commitment to helping their community. All winners of the Corpsmember of the Year Award are nominated by their Corps.

Before joining Southeast Conservation Corps (SECC), Aaron worked several civilian jobs, went to college for Geography and Urban Planning, and served nine years with the Army National Guard. After his deployment to the Middle East in 2019, Aaron sought a post-service career path that would be challenging physically and mentally. He wanted to find a sense of comradery, purpose, and accomplishment, which led him to SECC's Veterans Fire Corps (VFC) crew.

Serving as a Wildland Firefighter proved challenging and fulfilling, allowing him to find new ways to tackle problems, face his own psychological hurdles, and meet people from all walks of life. Though he was offered wildland firefighting positions with resource management agencies, Aaron chose give back to his fellow veterans and is continuing to serve with SECC as a Crew Leader in 2022.

Aaron believes that more fire crews are needed across the country to fight the growing issue of wildfire. These fires affect air quality, natural resources, and threaten homes and lives. To do this, he believes more awareness and outreach is needed, particularly in the veteran

community. “Now is the time to become more active in our communities,” says Aaron, “to take up the mantle of civic leadership, and to advocate for environmental stewardship.”

Southeast Conservation Corps is one of more than 140 member organizations of The Corps Network. As defined by The Corps Network, [Corps](#) are local, state or national programs that engage young adults (generally ages 16 – 25) and veterans (up to age 35) in service activities addressing conservation and community needs. Through a term of service that could last from a few months to a year, Corps participants – or “Corpsmembers” – complete meaningful projects while gaining job experience and developing in-demand skills.

“The Corpsmembers of the Year are role models. These are young people who have earnestly invested their energy in civic engagement. Their personal stories and accomplishments are an inspiration to other young adults and veterans serving in national service programs across the country,” said Mary Ellen Sprenkel, President and CEO of The Corps Network. “Today’s Corpsmembers represent the skill and potential of a new generation of conservation and community leaders. As our country looks to establish a Civilian Climate Corps initiative, we must turn to bright, hardworking people like Aaron for guidance. Thousands of Corpsmembers help strengthen communities across the country every year, but this award celebrates those who have gone above and beyond. The Corps Network is humbled to engage with such inspiring people as Aaron Conner and Southeast Conservation Corps.”

“SECC is thrilled that Aaron is being recognized for his dedication to his veteran community and to land stewardship,” said Brenna Kelly, Director of Southeast Conservation Corps. “His passion for veteran engagement and wildland firefighting is palpable and inspiring. We are honored that he has chosen to continue his professional career path with SECC in 2022!”

The four 2022 Corpsmembers of the Year will be honored at The Corps Network’s annual national conference, taking place virtually April 4 – 6, 2022. The theme for the event is “We Are the Civilian Climate Corps: A CCC for a New Generation.” For more information about the conference, please visit corpsnetwork.org/conference. For more information about Southeast Conservation Corps, please visit southeastconservationcorps.org.

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SOUTHEAST CONSERVATION CORPS

Southeast Conservation Corps (SECC) operates conservation service programs throughout the Southeast that focus on empow-ering young people to cultivate compassion, responsibility and grit through community service, hard work and environmental stew-ardship. SECC is focused on connecting local youth to the natural environment through service learning, personal development and recreation. SECC offers a variety of opportunities, including a youth mountain biking program, Trips for Kids Chattanooga, and a variety of Conservation Programs for youth and young adults.

CONSERVATION LEGACY

Conservation Legacy provides support for local conservation service programs under the leadership of a national organization, delivering high quality programming in communities across the country to produce enduring impact through local action. In 2019, Conservation Legacy engaged over 2,400 youth, young adults and veterans in conservation, restoration and community development projects and contributed 1.3 million hours of service to public lands. Conservation Legacy programs engage participants on diverse conservation and community service projects that provide opportunities for personal and professional development and meet the high priority needs of public land managers and community partners. Working in close collaboration with partners across the country, Conservation Legacy advances goals of increasing opportunities in conservation, stewardship, national service and workforce development.

THE CORPS NETWORK

The Corps Network, the national association of Service and Conservation Corps, provides leadership and support to over 140 Corps across the United States. Through advocacy, and providing Corps access to funding opportunities and expert guidance, The Corps Network annually enables approximately 25,000 Corpsmembers to strengthen communities, improve the environment and transform their lives through service. To learn more about The Corps Network, visit corpsnetwork.org.