Prepping Public Lands for Prime Time

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AS I WRITE TO YOU, WOLF PUPS ARE EMERGING FROM THEIR YELLOWSTONE DENS, peregrine falcons are nesting along Acadia’s cliffs, and Yosemite’s waterfalls are building toward their annual crescendo.

America’s public lands are humming to rhythms of spring.

Although some SCA volunteers have seized a head start (see Page 4), other signs of the season are the loaded backpacks and trusted boots standing by the door, waiting for summer service assignments to begin. For some young people, it’ll mean boarding a plane for the first time; for others, transferring between two busses and walking another five blocks to a local park.

Yet no matter where they’re going or how they’ll get there, their experiences this July and August will shape them for years to come.

As SCA volunteers carve a new trail or replant a declining habitat, they literally change the world. At least a small part of it. And when, as Urban Treehouse educators in Washington, D.C., they help a fourth grader see her place in the outdoors, they change a life.

Thousands upon thousands of young men and women, from all walks of life, will soon set off on these and other missions nationwide. Cumulatively, their impact on the land will be substantial. And as they gain experience, hone skills, and build confidence, they will advance along a proven path of enduring leadership and stewardship.

Much as with nature, there is also a cadence to conservation service. A beat that, with your support, has been reliably constant throughout SCA’s 63 years. Listen carefully and you’ll hear it on the wind…and discover it is tuned to the heartbeats of young volunteers whose work ensures we may long be inspired by the splendors of nature.

BRUCE PUTNAM, 1930-2019

Bruce Putnam, husband of nearly 27 years to SCA Founding President Liz Putnam, passed away in March following an extended illness. A strong advocate for the environment and democracy, Bruce was a prominent figure within SCA as a former board member, President’s Council member, and regular companion of Liz’s as she travels on behalf of SCA. We share our condolences with Bruce’s family and all who knew and cherished him.
SCA Volunteers Earn National Awards

The Public Lands Alliance (PLA) recently presented SCA with its 2019 Partnership Award. PLA cited the efforts of SCA interns who replaced a fish pass in Alaska’s Tongass National Forest to support a self-sustaining coho salmon population. The “legacy” project involving two generations of SCA volunteers was featured in last summer’s edition of The GreenWay.

GulfCorps, a collaboration with NOAA, The Nature Conservancy, SCA, and other corps programs, has been named Project of the Year by The Corps Network. GulfCorps will engage 300 underserved young adults in restoring coastal areas impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, while training participants for employment in the region’s growing restoration economy.

In addition, the National Recreation and Park Association has recognized SCA’s Chicago crews, Friends of the Forest Preserves, Audubon Great Lakes, and others with its Innovation in Conservation Award for hands-on service to the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

Major Grant for Urban Crews

The JPB Foundation has awarded SCA a three-year, $3 million grant to further expand and strengthen crew experiences for high school students in cities nationwide. After funding SCA’s capacity-building efforts for the past two years, JPB’s new support will enable SCA to remove the barriers preventing urban youth from engaging in green jobs, and develop new professional pathways to help these often-underrepresented teens and young adults enter the conservation workforce.

New Chair, New Address

SCA alumnus Bob Unsworth (Chaco Canyon, NM; 1978) was named chairman of the SCA board of directors at its spring meeting in Washington, DC. Unsworth, a principal and director with Industrial Economics, Inc. in Cambridge, MA, succeeded Margie Brown, retired president/CEO of Cook Inlet Region, Inc., an Alaska native corporation.

Also note SCA’s national headquarters is moving in late May to 4601 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 900, Arlington, VA 22203.
**Prepping Public Lands for Prime Time**

**AS SUMMER APPROACHES, THOUGHTS OFTEN DRIFT TO OUTDOOR ESCAPES: A WEEKEND IN THE WOODS OR MAYBE AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF PARK-HOPPING.** To ensure your visit is the richest and safest possible, legions of SCA volunteers set out months ago to perform scientific research, prepare educational programs, rebuild hiking trails, and more.

These young stewards not only want to protect our natural wonders—they want to showcase them.

To achieve their objectives, many are dedicating up to a year of their lives to conservation service. The sacrifices involved are substantial, yet each individual contends the rewards are even greater. They know an investment in the land is an investment in a more sustainable world, and serving with a cadre of peers and professionals only maximizes the returns on one’s efforts.

As you prepare for your next adventure, we look at some of the young SCA leaders whose adventures have already begun, at their motivations and discoveries, and at what drives their focus on something far bigger than themselves.

**RED ROCK READINESS**

Situated in southeastern Utah, The Maze is the least accessible and most demanding of Canyonlands National Park’s four districts. It takes hours in high-clearance, low range, 4WD vehicles to just reach formations like Chimney Rock and The Doll House. Hikers must navigate labyrinthine canyons, hazardous slickrock, and scorching expanses not prone to mercy.

You can see why Cody Allinson calls patrolling this region his “dream job.”

Cody, a 23-year old Montana State University graduate, began his Maze hitch in February, alternating among multi-day backcountry watches, assisting visitors in their trip planning, and leading interpretive tours of rock art in Horseshoe Canyon.

“Spring and fall are our busiest times of the year,” Cody points out. “It’s too hot to enter the canyon in summer. The air temperature is 100 degrees but the rocks radiate at 140. It’s a death sentence to go in there.”

At the Hans Flat ranger station, Cody verifies visitors have the supplies and skills needed to properly conduct their journeys.

If doubts arise, he’ll try to steer them toward a less strenuous itinerary. “Legally, we can’t refuse anyone entry,” he notes, “but we use ‘verbal judo’ to suggest they reconsider.”

On patrol, Cody chats with anyone he encounters, confirms all is good, and looks for signs of trouble such as vehicle breakdowns. On his last tour, he found a key road obstructed by a rockslide. When necessary, he also responds to search and rescue calls. In a place where self-sufficiency is a prerequisite, Cody feels right at home.

“I come from a town with 600 people, where all we have is the outdoors,” he shrugs. “I’ve done my share of solo trips.”

A proverbial “man with a plan,” Cody is positioning himself for a career with the National Park Service. Prior to SCA, he completed the Park Ranger Training Program and obtained his EMT certification. His time at Canyonlands will only add to his qualifications. “Originally, I was thinking NPS law enforcement,” he says, but his interests have shifted since to “educating the public about the value of our resources [and] ensuring the safety” of those who enter the wild.

“Whether assisting with trip planning or providing medical assistance, we act as a filter, preparing those who aren’t prepared. And I’m fine with shouldering this responsibility.”

**THE PAST IS A PRESENT TO THE FUTURE**

In many parks, the front lines consist of experts in forestry, geology, wildlife, and similar fields. In others, the top spots belong to architects, archaeologists, and archivists. The National Park Service manages more than 140 historical parks and historic sites, and keeping them in era-accurate shape is an ongoing endeavor.
coast is...well, there's no such thing as a typical day. The 23-year old from nearby Fort Pierce began a 12-month biology internship in January, and so far she's worked in reptile care, visitor education, partner relations, event planning, ATV training, and fire management, among other activities.

“Making sure the waters are clean is how we can protect hundreds, probably even thousands, of wildlife species.” Hanna Innocent

Like the other interns interviewed for this article, Hanna appreciates that her role has many facets. “I am on a mission to get a better grasp on exactly what I want to study in graduate school,” she explains. “The most rewarding aspect to date is animal handling, especially when school kids come in. They get really excited and interested in exploring.”

Hobe Refuge is one of the region’s most active sea turtle nesting areas, meaning Hanna will soon add night beach patrols and guided tours to her responsibilities. “Sea turtles are huge here,” she notes. “I'll also be conducting loggerhead surveys, shorebird surveys, and coordinating monthly beach clean-ups.”

Hanna intentionally took an internship close to home to focus on her primary career concern: water quality. “I grew up at the beach and, in Florida, the ocean and wetlands like the Everglades are very important ecosystems,” she says. “Many species rely on specific water levels and water cycles to survive. We've also had issues with runoff.”

Lake Okeechobee, the state’s largest body of fresh water, lies 40 miles west of the refuge. Its overflow, laden with chemicals and fertilizers, in recent years has fouled Florida shorelines with a toxic algae likened to “rancid guacamole.”

“It’s led to major fish kills and harmed a lot of other marine wildlife,” Hanna states. “Even inhaling its fumes has caused some people to get sick.

“My career interests have always been in conservation. They’ve changed from wanting to save specific animals to researching what makes them behave in certain ways and indirectly saving them through their habitats. Here, making sure the waters are clean is how we can protect hundreds, probably even thousands, of wildlife species.”

Cody, Henry, and Hanna are just three of the thousands of SCA members protecting our natural and cultural treasures with SCA this year—and their service is only made possible through your continued generosity. Thank you for making their efforts—and their dreams—a reality.
Leaving a Legacy

After earning a degree in international studies from the University of Virginia, **Greg Ehrensing** spent more than three decades traveling the globe while working in the oil industry. An avid hiker and orienteerer, Greg harbored a deep love of wilderness and trails. When the native Californian passed away last summer at the age of 59, he made sure to leave a generous bequest to SCA.

His brother, Keith, says “Greg made a friend wherever he went” and it is not hard to imagine him seeking out SCA volunteers as he traversed his beloved Pacific Coast Trail. A long-time SCA supporter, Greg was intent on providing a legacy for young people to protect, restore, and enjoy the outdoors as he did so fully throughout his life.

Greg was planning to retire and pursue his passion for travel full time when illness struck, forcing him to cancel a planned float trip down the Yukon River. He confided to Keith he was even considering becoming a cook for a river outfitter.

Now Greg’s family and friends hope his example of giving back to the land will inspire others to include SCA in their philanthropy and estate planning to ensure young people will have the ongoing opportunity to give back to the world themselves.

Greg recognized the transformative power of the SCA “continuum”—a series of mutually reinforcing experiences that routinely lead participants to lifelong stewardship and service. Greg’s bequest establishes his own continuum, allowing young people to follow in his footsteps and forge a more sustainable planet for all. SCA honors Greg’s memory by installing him in the Liz Putnam Legacy Society.

Earth Day+

From Seattle to Fort Lauderdale, SCA activated more than 1,000 volunteers through SCA Earth Month service initiatives in April. Participants planted 75 trees in Chicago’s West Chesterfield Neighborhood, completed numerous high-impact projects at the Friends of Governors Island’s First Annual ShinDIG, and replanted portions of South Side Park in Pittsburgh, among other events. We also commemorated Cesar Chavez Day with Union Bank and Chavez’s grandson, service-learning advocate Anthony Chavez, by restoring Cesar E. Chavez Park in Berkeley, CA.

SCA is grateful to Earth Month national sponsors American Express and Southwest Airlines, and to local project partners and the employee volunteers at MUFG, the National Park Foundation, and Nestlé.
TYLER LAU HAS 10 SCA ENGAGEMENTS ON HIS RESUME INCLUDING LEADING AND/OR SERVING ON TEAMS IN ALASKA, ARIZONA, AND SOUTH CAROLINA. Among the qualifications on that same resume, he lists “extensive backpacking experience.”

Yes, you could say that.

Last December, Tyler became only the tenth person on record to complete the “Triple Crown” of hiking in a single calendar year. That’s the Appalachian, Continental Divide, and Pacific Crest Trails—some 8,000 miles—all in less than 365 days.

“The most challenging part,” he says, “was the mental aspect of hiking alone in less than ideal weather for much of the Appalachian Trail. You really need to be mentally prepared for challenging stretches.”

Tyler, whose trail name is Prodigy, is also the only person of color to complete the three trails in one year. That’s part of what drove the SoCal environmental educator.

“One thing that has always struck me is the lack of diversity in a lot of the fields I’ve had the pleasure of working in,” Tyler states. “I want to help change that image and the status quo.”

With each step of his adventure, Tyler raised awareness as well as funding for a Montana-based nonprofit that promotes inclusion in the outdoors.

“This wasn’t just about me,” he explains. “When I thought about how fortunate I was to live in the outdoors, breathe in the outdoors, walk in the outdoors, it brought it back to reality and I knew I couldn’t stop.”

One of Tyler’s favorite SCA moments occurred during his time with our New Hampshire AmeriCorps program. On his final day as a guest instructor to local 4th graders, every student and teacher presented him with a signed card expressing their appreciation. “It means a lot to help inspire the next generation of conservation leaders,” he says. “We are all stewards of this planet and it’s up to us to continue that and help others find their calling.”

In the meantime, Tyler will continue to focus on matters of equality. “We have a lot of work to do to make the outdoors more inclusive, more diverse, and more accepting,” he says. “It’s up to us to take that first step together.”

The Prodigy, by filmmaker Lewis Rapkin, chronicles Tyler’s accomplishments. See it at thesca.org/prodigy

By planning for your future, you can help secure theirs...

Learn about charitable options that enable you to make a legacy gift to SCA while possibly enjoying valuable tax, estate planning and financial benefits for yourself and your loved ones. Visit SCA’s new and detailed charitable planning website at plannedgiving.thesca.org.
Joshua Tree Intern Makes Up for Lost Time

VALERIE GRIFFIN’S SCA INTERNSHIP Runs through October and Already She’s Looking Forward to the First Job Interviews that Follow. “If someone asks how I’ve responded to stressful situations,” she notes, “I’ll be ready.”

Last fall, Valerie took on the new role of volunteer coordinator at Joshua Tree National Park. She quickly learned as much as she could about desert wildlife, native vegetation, and local cultural resources. At the same time, she set out to earn the trust of the Joshua Tree staff and community, and develop volunteer projects and appreciation strategies.

Then the federal government shut down. “That was definitely a bummer,” Valerie states. “I wasn’t allowed to communicate with our volunteers.” Still, she credits them with stepping up to aid damage mitigation during the shutdown. By the time government operations resumed, however, all of Valerie’s earlier planning was largely obsolete “because park priorities had completely changed.”

So, once reinstated, the intern shifted her attention to reconnecting with volunteers, thanking them for their assistance with the initial clean-up, and developing plans for the new and unanticipated conditions. Within weeks, Valerie was directing long-time volunteers on key projects as well as college students helping out over Spring Break. She also supported staff across the park managing sudden backlogs.

“I’m proud of the work I’ve done here, creating this entire position from scratch, adding to our volunteer hours and making volunteer life better, helping coworkers by taking huge projects off their backs—I think already I’ve made some important contributions,” she says. “I’ve developed personally and professionally a lot.”

On top of that, over the five-week shutdown, the Minnesota native learned how to surf. Later this year, Valerie will try to catch a career wave with the National Park Service. “I’ll definitely be applying for a government job,” she says. “The NPS mission really fits who I am and what I want to do.”