

EcoCorps makes impact in Manistee National Forest

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MANISTEE COUNTY – Natural areas in Manistee County are more accessible than ever, thanks to the work of SEEDS EcoCorps.

Formerly known as the Youth Conservation Corps, the SEEDS EcoCorps program provides trades training for young adults interested in conservation-related careers, according to the nonprofit's website.

The EcoCorps program is a division of SEEDS, a nonprofit organization formed in 1999 to "implement local solutions to today's global challenges at the intersection of ecology, education and community design," according to a SEEDS press release.



Through the program, EcoCorps employees gain experience with historic preservation, parkland improvement, trail building, habitat restoration, small scale construction and reforestation.

Between 2019 and 2020, EcoCorps crews worked to enhance trails at several popular public access sites in the Manistee National Forest, including Sawdust Hole River Access, the North Country Trail and Suicide Bend.

EcoCorps workers constructed a new puncheon and repaired a rotting flight of stairs at the Sawdust Hole site in Brethren and reconstructed a fish slide at Suicide Bend off the Manistee River in Norman Township.

Crew members also worked alongside volunteers from the North Country Trail Association and Spirit of the Woods Conservation Club to help improve sections of the North Country Trail.

SEEDS EcoCorps director Jennifer Flynn said the sites were selected in collaboration with other conservation groups.

"We collaborated with the U.S. Forest Service staff, the Manistee National Forest district staff to determine what was most appropriate and what their needs were," Flynn said. "We talked through what would be great learning opportunities and also a great need for folks to get out and access the recreation opportunities in Manistee County."

The work was funded with grant money that was provided by the National Forest Foundation the National Park Foundation, and the Minger Family Endowment Fund of the Manistee County Community Foundation.

The nonprofit organization will continue its work on the North Country Trail system this fall, at other sites in the National Forest and throughout the state, Flynn said.

"We're going to continue doing work with the Spirit of the Woods volunteer group, with the North Country Trail association ... through this fall," Flynn said. "We are also looking to do some work to improve fitness opportunities for young adults and connect them with further recreation opportunities in the county in 2021."

In addition to forest work, EcoCorps crews also helped support recycling efforts in Manistee County.

"EcoCorps crew members demonstrated how to maximize the quality of recyclables brought to be recycled and assisted in conducting a recycling outreach survey which will be used to inform further public education about recycling in Manistee County communities," the press release read.

The recycling service was made possible through a grant by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE).

SEEDS EcoCorps is searching for additional projects this fall and next year. Interested landowners looking to collaborate are encouraged to contact the SEEDS office in Traverse City for more information at (231) 947-0312.

Manistee residents, especially young adults, interested in outdoor jobs this fall or next summer can find employment opportunities posted on the SEEDS website at www.ecoseeds.org.