



VYCC AND PARTNERS RECEIVE TOP U.S. FOREST SERVICE AWARD FOR CREATING A CULTURE OF INCLUSION

VYCC's American Sign Language (ASL) Youth Crew Recognized as a National Model

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Llu Mulvaney-Stanak, VYCC Marketing & Communications Director
802-434-3969 ext. 100 || Llu@VYCC.org

WASHINGTON, D.C, December 7, 2018 – Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) was honored, alongside partners from the Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests (GMFL) and the Lexington School for the Deaf, in receiving the U.S. Forest Service Chief's National Honor Award for Excelling as a High Performing Agency. This recognition was for successful efforts to diversify opportunities in Vermont, including developing American Sign Language crews combining young adults who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing on conservation projects over the past two summers.



Kathleen Atkinson, Regional Forester, Forest Service Eastern Region, Breck Knauft, Executive Director of VYCC, Alyssa Weisenstein, ASL Crew Leader, and Holly Knox, District Recreation Program Manager at awards ceremony.

Photo credit: U.S. Forest Service.

Print-ready photo available by request.

Partners were recognized for creating an integrative Youth Corps experience for young people who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing. VYCC and partners developed an integrated, residential, work-immersion experience in-line with the VYCC's traditional youth conservation program. The model pairs crew members and two leaders proficient in American Sign Language (ASL). Launching this model in partnership with the Green Mountain National Forest allowed these youth to directly contribute to improving public lands, to learn about the Forest Service, and to gain valuable job skills, all while exploring the region's diverse natural areas.

In receiving the award, Breck Knauft, Executive Director of VYCC said, "to the Crew Members on our ASL crews, we're here accepting this award because of you. Because of your hard work, your commitment to service, your commitment to making the world a better place, and your commitment to yourselves. If you can endure a month of rain and bugs and mud, you can do anything! Never forget that."



“It is an incredible honor for our partnership efforts to receive this award. Equally fulfilling is knowing that we have the ingenuity, persistence, and can-do relationships that have resulted in introducing youth from a variety of backgrounds to their public lands, careers in natural resource management, and environmental stewardship ethics,” said Holly Knox, Recreation Program Manager for the GMFL.

More info about The Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests (GMFL) Inclusivity Initiative:

GMFL’s Inclusivity Initiative is unique in its targeted approach to help underrepresented communities, particularly people who are Deaf/hard-of-hearing, gain skills and experiences in the natural resources field. Its success stems from recruiting underrepresented young people and incorporating them into existing programs like the VYCC. The ASL Crew expanded a long-standing VYCC/USFS partnership, adding to the thousands of hours of natural resource project work contributed by previous crews while increasing urban youth participation and accessibility to projects on the Green Mountain National Forest.

For more info contact: Holly Knox, District Recreation Program Manager || hknox@fs.fed.us || 802-767-4261 ext. 5530

More info about VYCC:

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps is a 501c3 nonprofit youth development organization with a mission to teach young people personal responsibility through meaningful work that connects us to the land, community, and one another. For more than 30 years, VYCC has instilled the values of personal responsibility, hard work, education, and respect for the environment in young people. VYCC Corps Members, young adults 15-24, work, live, and learn together in small groups, completing priority conservation and agriculture projects throughout Vermont under the guidance of highly trained Crew Leaders. www.vycc.org

More info about the U.S. Forest Service Chief’s Honor Award for Excelling as a High-Performing Agency

This award recognizes major accomplishments in ensuring an effective business environment by developing practices and procedures that improve customer service, efficiency, human resource management, communication, and administrative facilities management or ensure financial and performance accountability.

For more info contact: Sonja Beavers, National Publications Editor 202-205-1421

###END###