

**US Forest Service Proposal to the US Agency for International Development  
Establishment of a Youth Conservation Corps  
Amman, Jordan  
October 27, 2011**

I. Background

Jordan is endowed with tremendous natural beauty and incredible biodiversity given its relatively small size and location in the Eastern Mediterranean. Population growth, prolonged years of drought, extensive agricultural development in the Jordan valley, excessive grazing and deforestation in the uplands have all contributed to Jordan's current state of tenuous water security. Global climate change models largely predict that the eastern Mediterranean will experience hotter temperatures and longer periods without rain in coming years, a phenomenon that will exacerbate the challenges to managing Jordan's water resources. The Government of Jordan is seeking to address its water security concerns by lobbying for international support for the construction of the Red Sea – Dead Sea Canal/Desalination project. Meanwhile, little attention has been given to landscape level interventions, such as forest and watershed management, vegetation restoration projects and grazing management.

Though engineering and infrastructure solutions may ultimately play a role in addressing the water crisis, landscape level watershed restoration interventions would be prudent given the severity of the problem. Ecologically appropriate vegetative restoration projects would provide myriad environmental services to Jordan, particularly in important watersheds. Increased vegetative cover in specific sites, whether trees, shrubs or grasses, would help to hold soil in place, increase infiltration of water into the soil and provide safer and more consistent releases of water with reduced sediment load into Jordan's reservoirs and aquifers. Current forest management practices, grazing activities and urban expansion all contribute to widespread degradation of watersheds, sedimentation of reservoirs and loss of precious water to evaporation.

In addition to the challenges associated with water security, Jordan also struggles with a very large population of underemployed youth. Save the Children, an international NGO working in Jordan since 1985, reports that 60% of Jordan's population is under the age of 25, while 70% of Jordan's youth who are one year out of school are still unemployed. The people of Jordan are one of its greatest assets. They are well educated and highly motivated. Despite this, young graduates have tremendous difficulty obtaining work in their field of study. The Government of Jordan employs significant parts of the population through its military and police. Many of these employees are eligible to retire after 17 years of work, then go on to operate small businesses, such as small grocery stores in villages and towns. There are few alternatives for employment beyond military, police and education positions in rural Jordan. Jordan's youth often feel stifled and limited by the career opportunities available to them.

Though Jordan faces the combined daunting challenges of water security and underemployed youth, there is a potentially tremendous opportunity to address both in a way that would provide many benefits the Jordanian public over the long term. The US Forest Service (USFS)

proposes a large-scale partnership with the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in Jordan to establish a youth conservation corps. The initiative would capitalize on the great assets in Jordan, its well educated and highly motivated youth, to help address one of its greatest national challenges, water security. The establishment of such a youth conservation corps would provide youth an opportunity to serve their country in a meaningful way, while also developing new skills in the environment sector and potentially stimulating growth opportunities for careers in the environment. It would open up a significant alternative to the police, military and education sectors as career options while also raising national awareness of environmental issues and reversing the trend of watershed degradation in critical areas.

The initiative would also add value to the development of democratic processes in Jordan. Environmental awareness in Jordan, though not integrated into school curriculum nor visible throughout many regions in Jordan, shows great promise as a populist movement and as a way to develop civic engagement and democratic processes. The recent campaign to halt deforestation on a proposed military training center in northwest Jordan is a compelling example, as well as the popular movement several years ago to stop deforestation in Dibbeen, Jordan, where a proposed tourism-housing development project was threatening to degrade some of the last remaining contiguous stands of Aleppo pine forests.

The US Forest Service has been working in partnership with the US Agency for International Development in Jordan for over a decade to help organizations to improve capacity of the management of Jordan's natural and protected areas. The USFS is committed to working in Jordan on these issues over the long-term at whatever scale feasible. The agency's International Programs includes three program managers who worked extensively with Jordanian youth while serving in the Peace Corps in recent years. The agency is well suited to work with USAID and implementing partners to design a lasting and sustainable youth conservation corps. Throughout the Forest Service's decade of work in Jordan, it has developed strong credibility and partnerships within the environmental sector. These partnerships will be invaluable in establishing such an initiative.

The initiative is inspired in part by the United State's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a depression era public relief program that sought to address both unemployment and the need for conservation work across the country. Though short-lived, this program was one of the most successful government works programs in the history of the country and its legacy of trails, trees, visitor infrastructure, bridges and dams are still widely in place and well appreciated by the American public today. The CCC worked on flood control, reforestation, range management, forest management and protection, recreation development, wildlife conservation and emergency response. CCC paved the way for several similar programs, like the Student Conservation Association, Youth Conservation Corps, Americorps, Peace Corps and Teach for America. Each of these are similarly valuable public service initiatives ongoing today that offer value lessons and models that would be of strong consideration for the proposed initiative in Jordan.

Beyond the Forest Service's history in Jordan, the agency itself has a long history of managing volunteers for the Civilian Conservation Corps and its legacy programs. Today, the Forest

Service manages all domestic Job Corps Conservation Centers in the United States. The Agency has a wide range of expertise that enables it to successfully develop and manage meaningful activities for conservation corps work crews. Forest Service lands were set aside over a hundred years ago to safeguard the nation's water and timber resources. Its mandate is to manage these resources for multiple uses (including conservation, watershed protection, grazing, timber production, visitor recreation) to benefit the greatest number of the American people while also ensuring that the resources will be available for future generations. Accordingly, the Forest Service must retain a diverse array of expertise, lending itself readily able to provide technical advice and direction for the proposed Jordanian youth conservation corps. Finally, the Forest Service has strong experience managing large-scale initiatives overseas in partnership with USAID.

The following is a brief conceptual outline of framework components for the initiative:

II. Goal: to establish a youth conservation corps and utilize this corps to increase resiliency and productivity of critical watersheds in Jordan.

A. Objective One: Establish a youth conservation corps in Jordan.

The Forest Service will work with partners to establish the youth conservation corps (YCC) in Jordan beginning by heavy consultation with appropriate ministries and civil society organizations, such as Youth and Social Development, Environment and Agriculture, and NGOs such as the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, Al-Shejera Society, the Hashemite Fund and others. The YCC project will work with partners listed above in a collaborative way to identify target geographic areas for intervention based on environmental criteria and partner institutions.

The USFS/YCC will establish a well-functioning administrative body to develop training programs and manage the logistics of such a large-scale endeavor. It will develop competitive criteria for recruiting staff, trainers/work crew leaders, and volunteers and will launch a media campaign to describe the role of the initiative to the public. The YCC will design training programs, train crew leaders, design volunteer training and work programs.

The Forest Service will formally register the project in Jordan with the goal of eventually transitioning into an independent operating body once the project ended. The YCC would work with the Government of Jordan and others to provide long-term sustainable financing for the program upon its completion. It would evaluate successes and failures and determine where best to house the institution for the long-term.

B. Objective 2: Utilize the YCC to restore important watersheds and increase watershed resiliency.

YCC staff will work with stakeholders to establish work categories, potentially to include: forest culture, range and grazing management extension, monitoring, reforestation and re-vegetation, elementary education and outreach on underlying thematic areas, litter control, tourism/protected area site development.

YCC will work with partners in Jordan to identify critical watersheds and determine the greatest threats to watershed health in those areas. This criteria will be overlaid with social information, particularly related to where dynamic communities, societies, NGOs or municipalities within those critical watersheds show interest and leadership in hosting and collaborating with YCC volunteers. The specific work projects will be tailored to the conditions at each site relative to both environmental and social factors. It is possible that each site will host a suite of volunteer work crew assignments. Training may be delivered intermittently to ensure that volunteers are actively engaged and learning appropriate skills to effectively do their job.

YCC will ensure that the program will fit the Jordanian context and that both young men and women will both be able to participate by addressing gender related considerations. YCC will identify a model for managing work crews in residential settings, conducting effective training and ensuring that work programs are well designed and enable volunteers to make meaningful contributions.

YCC will select, hire and train crew bosses who demonstrate leadership potential, undergraduate degrees in related areas. The YCC will develop a competitive volunteer recruitment strategy that would seek to employ very recent college graduates on one year assignments. These volunteers would be paid a living wage, would receive extensive training, and would reside in a project area for nine months to a year on their work assignment. Volunteers and work projects will be highlighted through media campaigns to raise awareness of environmental issues, raise the profile of the program, and celebrate the contributions that the volunteers are making to Jordanian society.

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