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Colorado Youth Corps Association Honors 10 Corpsmembers

Awards Ceremony Celebrates Youth Work Experience and Commitment to Colorado's Natural Resources

Feb. 1, 2016, DENVER, Colo. – This morning, the [Colorado Youth Corps Association \(CYCA\)](#) honored its 2015 Corpsmembers of the Year at the annual Youth Corps Awards Ceremony, held in the Colorado State Capitol's Old Supreme Court Chambers. Representing all corners of the state, the 10 young people were recognized for their outstanding contributions to corps' work on land, water and energy conservation projects last year. The event was followed by a celebratory brunch at the Warwick Hotel.

During the event, two of the recognized corpsmembers – Claire Morrissy of Mile High Youth Corps and Alli Gunther of Larimer County Conservation Corps – offered personal testimonies about youth corps and its impact on them. After the ceremony, State Representative Jeni Arndt of House District 53 acknowledged the corpsmembers on the floor of the House of Representatives.

The 2015 Corpsmembers of the Year are:

Berenice Amezcua's two years with Mile High Youth Corps-Southern Front Range marked her transformation from a timid young woman to a confident chainsaw operator. Early in her corps experience she thought about quitting many times. But she persevered when she considered the community her crew was protecting from wildland fire: "The best choice I made my first season was not quitting." Berenice is training to become a firefighter and is pursuing her associate's degree. "I have learned that we are all much more capable than we believe ourselves to be. Not only have I seen this in myself, I have seen this in all the corpsmembers this past year."

Garrett Flint joined the Steamboat Springs Community Youth Corps to learn more about "how human interactions with nature can be used in a good and positive way to benefit the community." During his term he maintained an outstanding work ethic, attitude and leadership skills that were the very best on his crew. Garrett's strongest contribution to his crew may have been his selflessness, never hesitating to lend a helping hand or an encouraging word to a fellow crew member. After high school he plans to attend college and possibly study to become a marine biologist and build on his love of fishing.

Brody Fullmer joined Western Colorado Conservation Corps to gain outdoor experience and give back to his community. Brody always made an effort to help his fellow crew

members, whether by lifting heavy objects on the worksite, providing guidance to teammates, or simply lending a hand on the duties around camp. Brody described his experience with Western Colorado Conservation Corps as rewarding and life-changing. Brody earned two AmeriCorps Education Awards during his term, for a total of \$3,643, which he will use to attend college to obtain his Emergency Medical Technician certificate. His ultimate career goal is to become a firefighter.

During **Alli Gunther's** term with Larimer County Conservation Corps, she became a mentor to fellow corpsmembers. She began the season with strong concerns about how she would integrate with the crew, but her time in the corps helped her overcome her fears and anxieties: "I spent all day outside, and began to feel a sort of calm I had never felt before, and I felt proud of myself and the work that I was doing. LCCC gave me a lot of perspective that helped me become a better person overall." Alli plans to return to the corps world next summer, and will attend Fort Lewis College to pursue environmental studies.

Walker Henry originally joined Southwest Conservation Corps-Four Corners to serve on a backcountry trail crew while fulfilling school requirements. His crew was tasked with working on the Continental Divide Trail, and he greatly impressed his crew leaders with his work ethic and sense of humor. A Fort Lewis College graduate, Walker pursued his interest in learning more about the use of chainsaws for conservation projects, and received his certification in felling trees. He believes that conservation corps can bring young adults back to what matters, and give employment opportunities to many who have not had the privilege of exploring public lands.

Kelly Kramer completed her third term with Rocky Mountain Youth Corps in 2015. One corpsmember described her as "always looking out for the safety, well-being and morale of our whole crew." As a crew leader, she successfully managed 10 people in the backcountry for 18 weeks, with a skill set that includes technical trail building and extensive experience with the Leave No Trace ethic, backcountry travel and group management, and conflict resolution. Kelly wrote that her experience "changed my life, the way I interacted with people and the way I viewed myself. I have more self-confidence after taking on leadership roles and my communication skills have really developed into a tool for success."

Dalton Morner spent his first term with Weld County Youth Conservation Corps learning the ropes and beginning to gain confidence; when he returned in 2015, the staff noticed an impressive amount of personal growth. Dalton had transitioned from an inexperienced member to a clear leader. Dalton accrued nearly 900 hours of time operating a chainsaw, and kept a vigilant eye on individual and crew safety, ensured the security of vehicles and equipment, and kept the crew on task. Dalton was grateful for his professional training: "The corps provided me with opportunities to receive certificates that I would have never thought I would be interested in."

Claire Morrissy was an alumni mentor in Mile High Youth Corps' Conservation Program. Her many notable achievements included developing technical trainings, improving logistical tracking systems and completing a new safety manual. She also cultivated new project partnerships, including a successful restoration project with HistoriCorps. Claire has a unique ability to build genuine relationships, invest in the experiences of her teammates, and model an admirable approach to service and professionalism. Her colleagues noted that she "naturally inspires others to care for their work and work hard." Claire believes that

“humor combined with compassion and an open mind can enable us to find solutions to many of our problems.”

Jenna Nielson consistently went above and beyond her call of duty throughout her term at Boulder County Youth Corps. Her leadership and teamwork skills were particularly exemplary in helping new corpsmembers integrate onto her team. Jenna paid close attention to safety and always communicated well with teammates. When deployed to remove vegetation from a dam, she pointed out the safest routes for her crew. She also stepped in to assist her assistant team leader when a fellow corpsmember sprained her ankle. Jenna is grateful for her experience, saying, “I learned skills in youth corps that I can take with me and use for the rest of my life, and had fun doing it.”

Loren Russell, a member of the National Guard, served on Southwest Conservation Corps-Los Valles’ Veteran Fire Corps for over five months. He worked on prescribed burns to reduce the threat of devastating wildfire. He excelled at the technical skills of running a chainsaw, and became a powerful role model by taking care of his fellow crew members. Loren had some prior outdoor experience, but the notion of camping and working in the outdoors was new. He said, “I have never had an opportunity to spend this much time outside and be impacted by the environment as I have been this year.” Loren is applying to wildland fire crews and pursuing additional education in forestry.

Scott Segerstrom, CYCA’s executive director, said, “These corpsmembers are some of the most outstanding leaders in Colorado. Each of them worked hard to become better leaders and citizens, and this honor is richly deserved.” He added, “These young people answered a call to serve their state on our public land, and millions of Coloradans will benefit from their efforts.” Segerstrom also highlighted youth corps’ many accomplishments across Colorado in 2015. A [full list of accomplishments](#) is available in CYCA’s January newsletter.

Thousands of young people gain jobs, job training, life skills, college scholarships, and high school and college credits through their work with youth corps. This year, those efforts will grow substantially with the help of a \$1.39 million grant CYCA received from AmeriCorps in May 2014. CYCA used the funds, administered through the [Serve Colorado, the Governor’s Commission on Community Service](#), to support its Youth and Vets for Colorado AmeriCorps program in 2015. CYCA enabled 326 youth corps members to participate in 2015 alone, and youth corps provided \$1.2 million in AmeriCorps Education Awards to 683 youth, young adults and veterans. The grant remains the largest in the state AmeriCorps commission’s portfolio, and with it, CYCA aims to serve 346 members in 2016.

About Colorado Youth Corps Association

The Colorado Youth Corps Association (CYCA) is a statewide coalition of ten accredited youth conservation corps that engage and train youth, young adults, and military veterans on land, water and energy conservation projects. Youth corps is a proven strategy for engaging young people in service to their communities and stewardship of their environment while cultivating valuable skills to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Learn more at www.CYCA.org.

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