5 EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

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Enhancing educational opportunities and job training for local residents is the high-level goal for the education theme. The focus is on engaging and educating youth, young adults, and transitional workers through many avenues, including K-12 schools, after-school programming, colleges and universities, volunteer programs, internships, and conservation corps opportunities. Top priorities include expansion of conservation corps activities within Parkway communities and integrated curriculum development for all levels of education. (Note: Educational programs and related activities for Parkway visitors are nested in the Visitor Experience theme.)

Two strategies, Youth Conservation Corps and Curriculum Development, had designated action teams that included experts in all levels of education to provide guidance in these areas and fast-track the strategies.

EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 YOUTH CONSERVATION CORPS

Support and grow youth conservation corps opportunities to provide job skills to younger workers and address Blue Ridge Parkway corridor needs.

12-MONTH GOAL:

Formalize and streamline a work development pipeline of needed projects and partner organizations for youth conservation corps engagement.

KEY STEPS:

- Identify common gaps in training, skill development, and experience for employment in natural resources, tourism, and other key sectors.
- Work with conservation corps programs, job corps, schools, and other entities to identify opportunities to fill those gaps, while also addressing Blue Ridge Rising Action Plan priorities (e.g., trail building, water quality protection).
- Identify communities, land managers, and other partners interested in hosting conservation corps and other workers.
- Secure and distribute funding (e.g., a grant program) to help conservation corps organizations and other partners carry out these activities.

Examples of Youth Conservation Corps Programs:

- Conservation Corps North Carolina: www.corpsnc.org/
- Appalachian Conservation Corps (Virginia): www.appalachiancc.org/
- United States Youth Conservation Corps: www.nps.gov/subjects/youthprograms/ycc.htm

Conservation Corps North Carolina trail crew.

CONSERVATION CORPS NORTH CAROLINA

Conservation Corps North Carolina (CCNC) engages motivated young adults, ages 15-30, to complete impactful conservation service projects, such as trail construction or maintenance and habitat improvement.

5.2 CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Encourage universities, community colleges, and K-12 systems within the gateway communities to develop and expand hospitality management and natural resource conservation programs, courses, and curricula. For K-12 systems, create curriculum-based lesson plans and activities to establish the Blue Ridge Parkway as an outdoor classroom.

12-MONTH GOAL:

Inventory and create a resource guide of all existing and relevant curriculum and programs for K-12, community colleges, and universities in the Blue Ridge Rising region. Identify gaps, and develop related solutions.

KEY STEPS:

- Determine criteria for inclusion in the education resource guide.
- Identify the types of information to be collected about educational programs.
- Conduct inventory of education programs, and create a regional resource guide.
- Identify gaps to be filled, and develop related strategies.

Examples of Curriculum Development:

- Virginia Museum of Natural History (Virginia): https://www.vmnh.net/education
- Lees-McRae College Outdoor Recreation Management program (North Carolina): www.lmc.edu/academics/programs/outdoor-recreation-management/index.htm
- Southwestern Community College, Outdoor Leadership (North Carolina): www.southwesterncc.edu/career-technologies/outdoor-leadership

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Virginia Museum of Natural History's education staff instills a love of science in young people by providing outreach in Virginia schools, science classes for homeschooled students, summer camps, and fun activities at festivals.

5.3 SECOND TIER

UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

Establish and support new and existing outdoor and cultural events and resources in gateway communities targeting underserved populations. This strategy complements the Inclusive Engagement strategy in Chapter 6.

5.4 ADDITIONAL CALL TO ACTION

COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Increase awareness within the gateway communities, especially frontline service workers, of the Parkway and other nearby tourism resources. Employees in the hospitality sector (lodging and restaurants) often engage with Parkway visitors and have the opportunity to provide suggestions for recreation opportunities and businesses to visit within the gateway communities, so that visitors have a more positive experience and/or extend their stay. These businesses often have high turnover in sta□, making it both challenging and necessary to educate these workers on a regular basis.