The ACES Program - Putting the Power of Experience to Work

In the past few years, many land management agencies have acquired the authority to enter into a Master Agreement with non-profit organizations to provide workers with unique or special skills over the age of 55, to expand the agency’s capacity in an efficient and flexible way.

The programs under Department of Agriculture, (both U.S. Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service) are called the Agricultural Conservation Experienced Services (ACES). Programs under the Department of Interior are called Experienced Services Programs (ESP). All of these agencies have agreements with a few non-profits. National Older Workers Career Center (NOWCC) is a common nonprofit to all of these agencies.

We want to increase awareness of this program within the Forest Service and many other agencies that can benefit from this innovative work force. These are challenging times to accomplish agency missions using new and effective tools may be a significant benefit. Please help spread the word.

Natural Resources Conservation Service has been operating this program successfully for 10 years. The Forest Service has been operational for about 3 years and the Bureau of Land Management for more than a year, while the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife service are just getting started.

The Forest Service’s objective in implementing the ACES program is to meet agency critical needs to complete conservation related work, by filling employment gaps, mentoring and training less experienced agency employees and to complete short-term surge work.

The Forest Service administers the ACES Program through Master Agreements with two non-profit partners, National Older Worker Career Center and Senior Service America, Inc.

The ACES program was piloted in 2017, based largely off the ACES program that was already being utilized by the NRCS. The pilot was
focused solely in Forest Management and had an initial investment of $1M provided by the Washington Office to jump-start program utilization.

Based on the success of the pilot program, the program was expanded in early 2018, with the signing of a new five-year master agreement that allows the expansion of ACES to all eligible program areas. This expansion enables broader program utilization, providing additional means to expand Agency capacity in critical program areas.

To date, 80 project agreements have been executed by the Washington Office, Job Corps, Research Stations, Forest Products Lab, and Regional, Forest and District units across the nation. In 2020, approximately $9M has been obligated to ACES agreements for nearly 200 program enrollees.

ACES enrollees work to support a variety of Forest Service programs, including Forest Management, Engineering, Geology, Lands, Hydrology, Archeology, Recreation, Special Uses, Range Conservation, Research Science, Forest Planning, and Fire management.

Are you interested in exploring these jobs? Do you know others who would be great fits? In your contacts with Forest Service personnel, do you think they know what ACES can do for them? Consider mentioning ACES of a way to get work done!

To find more information on the ACES Program, please visit https://www.fs.fed.us/working-with-us/aces-program. Or contact Becki Lockett Heath who is working for NOWCC as a Program Consultant, for the Forest Service ACES Program bheath@nowcc.org.