

A Program Assessment of the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps

A study commissioned by the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation
Report prepared by Andrew J. Mowen, Ph.D. and Angelica Brill

July 2023



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Dear Reader:

In the spring of 2022, two questions were posed concerning the well-regarded Pennsylvania Conservation Corps (PAOC): What were the successes of the program and where is there room for growth? The PAOC was in the middle of its sixth season, hosting more than 1,000 participants during its tenure. The timing seemed right to explore the answers to those questions.

With support from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, Dr. Andrew Mowen, a professor within the Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management program at Penn State, was contracted by the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF) to complete an independent review of the PAOC program. Angelica Brill was hired to assist Dr. Mowen as a research associate. The Center for Land Use and Sustainability at Shippensburg University provided additional support through the creation of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps to highlight existing data, such as the location of PAOC crew members, Pennsylvania demographics, and the spatial distribution of projects completed.

The work of the study consisted of surveys, interviews, and data analysis. What you find in these pages are reflections of those who have participated in the program and those who have worked with the program in various professional capacities. The study highlights the successes of the program and the opportunities for its growth and change.

I would like to thank the Richard King Mellon Foundation for their support and for the PAOC Program Managers for entrusting PPFF with coordinating and managing this independent review.

We look forward to the continued growth and success of the PAOC made possible through the input of the hundreds of people who participated in the surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Yours in the Outdoors,

Marci Mowery
President

Acknowledgements

The study and report authors would like to thank the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and their partner organizations (e.g., the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry (L&I) and the Student Conservation Association (SCA)) for their cooperation during this research project. Thanks also to the Richard King Mellon Foundation, which funded this work. Finally, we would like to thank the 185 youth POAC members and the more than 100 DCNR managers and foresters who took the time to share their feedback and perspectives through surveys and focus group discussions.



Executive Summary

Study Background, Purpose, and Description

The purpose of this research was to systematically gather, review, analyze, and interpret data and report on the evaluation, delivery, successes, challenges, and opportunities of the PAOC as it relates to its stated program goals. The goal of this study was to provide evidence for PAOC partners and stakeholders to inform future program operations and decisions.

This multi-faceted study sought to answer several broad questions related to program goals and used a mixed methods approach involving online surveys, qualitative in-depth interviews, and focus groups of PAOC alumni and lead stakeholders (e.g., DCNR, SCA, PPFF) as well as analyses of existing reports, documents, media files, and program statistics. It assessed PAOC outcomes such as:

- Job readiness, employment, workforce development, and acquisition of new skills
- Enhanced knowledge and expertise related to natural resource stewardship
- Diversification of job training opportunities, mentorship, and positive environmental experiences
- The fit of PAOC work with state parks and forests project needs
- The quality and preparation of PAOC work crews

From these studies, several key findings emerged that help to form the basis for program evaluation and recommendations for the future. For example:

- ▶ A majority of PAOC alumni (59%) reported they were working full- or part-time, with roughly half of those working at a public/government agency (56%) and working within the environmental field (49%).
- ▶ Trail rehabilitation/construction (52%), carpentry and building construction (15%), and natural resource protection/invasive species management (15%) were the top three primary projects that PAOC members worked on during their fieldwork.
- ▶ Being introduced to new people with a shared passion for conservation/outdoor recreation (94% agree/strongly agree), enhanced leadership skills (86% agree/strongly agree) and being educated on issues facing conservation and outdoor recreation (90% agree/strongly agree) were the top outcomes of PAOC participation. PAOC members were less likely to report that their PAOC participation gave them connections that helped them to get a job (52% agree/strongly agree).
- ▶ In terms of skill development due to PAOC participation, fieldwork (65% a great deal) and problem-solving skills (42% a great deal) were highly rated while customer/visitor service skills were less likely to be reported (17% a great deal).
- ▶ A majority reported that the PAOC improved their ability to work as part of a team (57% a great deal) and their leadership experience (45% a great deal).
- ▶ A majority felt that PAOC participation helped them better understand daily responsibilities and knowledge regarding careers at DCNR or in the environmental field, and there was a moderate to strong interest in pursuing such a career.
- ▶ PAOC members rated their PAOC experience overall (81%), with their crew leaders (75%), and via PAOC training and skills building (77%) as very good or excellent. They were less likely to rate follow-up engagement and communications after the experience (41%) as being very good or excellent.
- ▶ In their open-ended comments, PAOC alumni reported their favorite part of the experience was working with other people, being in the parks and forests, and having new experiences. Their suggestions for improving the program related to better planning for site visits and work tasks, improving crew preparation prior to site visits, improving career pathways through the PAOC program, and creating a more inclusive and welcoming space.
- ▶ State park managers and district foresters were surveyed about their PAOC experience; they agreed that PAOC crews and leaders exhibited very good or excellent professionalism (63%) but were less likely to rate the quality of their work as very good or excellent (49%).
- ▶ State park managers and district foresters agreed or strongly agreed that their staff was prepared to work with PAOC crews upon site arrival (91%), that the PAOC work resulted in cost-savings (75%), and that their staff investment with PAOC crew and leaders was well worth their time (73%). They were less likely to agree or strongly agree that the PAOC created additional work for their staff (55%) and that PAOC projects were useful, but not critical, for the needs of their state park or forest (36%).
- ▶ In their open-ended comments, these managers appreciated PAOC members' good energy and attitude, the support the PAOC gives to their staff's workloads, the new opportunities being provided to PAOC members, and the good hiring pipeline created by the PAOC program.

Executive Summary

Areas of Program Strength and Impact

The PAOC program has grown in its enrollment, reach, and impact since its inception, weathering the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and now embarking on its eighth season, with more than 20 work crews spanning different parts of the state and including specialty work crews. The communications and working relationships between partner organizations and key staff appear strong. There is also evidence from the surveys and interviews that the PAOC creates a pipeline to conservation jobs and it provides members with new skills and experiences related to work ethics and responsibilities. On the developmental side of things, the PAOC program has had a strong impact on youth and young adult teamwork and leadership development, has provided a better knowledge of conservation career opportunities and conditions, and has generated personal benefits related to health and a sense of self-efficacy.

By all accounts, the PAOC should be considered a high-quality, model program that has thrived due to leadership support, the efforts of key partners, and the hard work of PAOC youth and young adult crews. PAOC members appreciated learning new things and having new experiences while enjoying the beauty of the outdoors. PAOC member surveys and focus groups indicated they felt supported during their experience, were empowered to make decisions, and most importantly felt they were allowed to make mistakes to learn and grow from them. DCNR and SCA offer a good complement of training opportunities for PAOC members, and they conduct annual assessments of the PAOC program – both in terms of activities and projects accomplished, but also end-of-season evaluations and feedback from PAOC members.

However, a statewide program such as this requires extensive coordination and communication. This program would benefit significantly from increased human capital. Hiring dedicated personnel to manage operations and field coordination could better address program concerns and lead to an increased number of crews and program participants, which in turn would further strengthen the conservation workforce throughout the state. There are some promising developments that are happening in this area. For example, new DCNR PAOC program staff members are being hired to address operational needs, but more could be accomplished with additional staff hires, particularly regionally at the site coordination level.



There are many program strengths that should be recognized and continued (e.g., program design, training offered, focus on teamwork, empowerment). However, this study also sought to help partner members sustain and improve upon what they have built. What follows are a series of researcher-generated recommendations based upon consistent themes and data that crosscut the different studies completed as part of this overall assessment. Some of these recommendations are short-term, specific steps while others are more long-term strategic efforts to improve upon program outcomes and reach. Partner members (i.e., DCNR, SRC, L&I, PPFF) are encouraged to work collaboratively to refine and pursue these steps. Other stakeholders such as local and state policymakers and officials are encouraged to assist PAOC partners in supporting the long-term sustainability of this program through partnerships, technical assistance, and funding.

Members of the American Sign Language Inclusion crew enjoying themselves on a recreation day.

Executive Summary

Recommendations for the Future

Diversity and Inclusivity

One thing mentioned consistently throughout the surveys, focus groups, and interviews was that the PAOC needs to increase the diversification of its members and leaders. This could be diversifying in terms of race, gender, sexual identity, or in other ways. The demographic profile of PAOC participants has fluctuated year-to-year but has remained less than 20 percent non-white (12 percent in 2021). Creating a more representative profile is admittedly difficult work but could be bolstered through:

- Form strategic partnerships with minority outdoor recreation and conservation groups.
- Initiate targeted hiring of PAOC team leaders who represent the profile of non-white and/or non-male PAOC members.
- Address any perception of racism, sexism, ageism, etc., immediately when present.
- Utilize the GIS maps to expand target recruitment areas.
- Create Help/Tip Line for HR Concerns and Conflict Resolution.
- Provide further DEI/CR training to crew leaders.
- Host listening sessions with underrepresented groups to better understand what would make the program attractive.
- Consider English as a Second Language programs as areas for recruitment.
- Manage generational issues through education and training.



PAOC crew taking an educational hike on the Hemlock Trail in Laurel Hill State Park.

Sustainable Funding and Long-term Planning

It is important to identify a more sustainable funding model to support long-term PAOC planning and investments. This was mentioned throughout stakeholder interviews, and it is important to have a longer funding horizon to account for activities and initiatives. The program would be assisted by funding directed toward additional DCNR staff positions whose purpose would be to help coordinate PAOC projects and logistics by region. With a longer funding and planning horizon, it is advisable to conduct a multi-partner strategic planning effort to set the direction for the PAOC over the next five years.

Types of Work Performed and Its Connection to the Larger Conservation Community

It is important to work on diversifying the types of work performed, both in terms of project scope and complexity. This includes:

- Provide PAOC crews with work toward “signature projects” beyond routine maintenance to provide a greater long-term “connection to place” for PAOC alumni and their families.
- Expand educational content related to PAOC projects to allow participants to learn from the projects they are working on and see where those projects sit within the larger scope of conservation.
- Convey to PAOC crews the value of what they are doing even if it seems like busy work (e.g., trimming trails).
- Increase networking opportunities with DCNR staff and local conservation/recreation professionals – work to maintain these connections post-experience; consider other professions that support conservation and professional associations (Example: PA Association of Environmental Professionals).
- Advance site-project planning – matching crew capacity, time availability, and skills to project needs – PAOC crews may be able to stay at a site longer, engage with staff more deeply, and see the bigger impact of their work.
- During interviews, set expectations concerning schedule and time commitments.
- During interviews, set expectations on the projects performed.

While not a widespread concern, some PAOC members also expressed a desire for a quicker and more direct manner to receive assistance for human resource concerns related to conflict resolution and the work environment. One strategy would be to create a confidential tip line to help resolve PAOC crew member concerns.

Executive Summary

Recommendations for the Future

The Post-PAOC Experience – Increased Communications and Clearer Job Pathways

There are opportunities to enhance the post-PAOC experience including increased communications, connections, updates, and pathways to job opportunities (e.g., through social media, alumni events, reunions) and more direct pathways to DCNR employment (e.g., allow credits to be earned toward job positions and increase DCNR job postings on the PAOC alumni lists).

The PAOC experience provides valuable leadership, people, and hard skills, and (with sufficient funding) there are opportunities to provide additional experiences for youth participants (e.g., teaching outdoor recreation skills, having conservation conversations, discussing policy issues, self-care).

Several PAOC members also expressed a desire for expanded certifications and training. These could include invasive species management, arboriculture, trail work, chainsaws, and leadership, among other training. Several PAOC alumni wanted to receive such training as part of the planning effort prior to their deployment for the upcoming season.

Other thoughts include:

- Connect crew members to non-profit conservation organizations or to the Conservation Volunteer Program to farther develop leadership and conservation knowledge, skills, and network.
- Utilize diverse networks to discuss career opportunities.
- Consider a 3–4-month program targeting college students for summer employment.
- Explore the idea of an apprenticeship program.
- Explore opportunities for college credit or certification programs.



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Section I

Introduction



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Section I – Introduction

Program Description

The Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps (hereafter referred to as PAOC in this report) is a youth and young adult employment and enrichment program established in 2016 to better engage youth in the state’s workforce. The PAOC is managed by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) in cooperation with the Student Conservation Association (SCA), a national conservation jobs organization. Financial support comes from the DCNR, the Pennsylvania Department of the Labor and Industry Reemployment Fund, project partners, and private contributions made through the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF).

The stated goals of the PAOC are to help protect and restore public lands and waters, while providing young people with the knowledge and expertise to be good stewards of natural resources. According to annual PAOC reports, the program is intended to lead to career pathways and family-sustaining wages by providing hands-on professional development opportunities for youth and young adults as they complete resource management projects in parks, forests, and other public lands.

The PAOC seeks to accomplish these goals through experiences that connect young adults with job opportunities relating to the outdoors and the environment and provide training in work skills necessary for future successful employment. In addition to hands-on job skills, the program provides environmental education in resource management, environmental issues and topics, and recreation skills. PAOC members are also provided with workforce development training and materials during their period of employment. The program has a strong focus on leadership and teamwork development and focuses its training and activities around personal development and growth.



Over the past few years, the PAOC has grown in its enrollment, scope, and reach, including the six-week youth and 10-month young adult programs, which include specialized crews (e.g., American Sign Language crew, roving trail and resource crews, and a cultural resource crew) (PAOC Annual Report, 2022). Annual work seasons for the youth crew run between July and August, and the young adult crews between February through December. Members earn \$15.00 per hour with access to employer-sponsored healthcare and benefits. The PAOC also allows its members to receive certifications and training in areas such as pesticide application, chainsaw safety, Wilderness First Aid, and Red Card Wildland Fire Certification (PAOC Annual Report, 2022). PAOC projects occur throughout the state and program locations are tied to population centers (e.g., Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Wilkes-Barre, Wellsboro). PAOC program leaders (Mike Piaskowski of DCNR and Ted Miller of SCA) provide annual reports of program statistics and end-of-season surveys of PAOC participants. These and other program statistics are discussed further in Report Section II – Assessment of Existing Records and Data.

Section I – Introduction

Project Description

Since its inception, several annual reports, websites, videos, and news stories have reported on the activities and accomplishments of the PAOC. As the program enters its eighth year, there is a desire among partners (e.g., DCNR and PPFF) to conduct a broader, multi-year, systematic assessment of program activities, milestones, and outcomes – including PAOC alumni and organizational partner members. In September 2022, PPFF commissioned Dr. Andrew Mowen, a professor within the Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management program at Penn State, to conduct this research, working with the assistance of PPFF staff member, Angelica Brill, as research associate.

The purpose of the research was to systematically gather, review, analyze, and interpret data and report on the evaluation, delivery, successes, challenges, and opportunities of the PAOC as it relates to its stated program goals. The purpose of this study was to provide evidence for PAOC partners and stakeholders to inform future program operations and decisions. As such, Dr. Mowen was also asked to analyze results and provide a series of recommendations for the future of the PAOC.

This multi-faceted study sought to answer several broad questions related to program goals and used a mixed methods approach involving online surveys, qualitative depth interviews, and focus groups of PAOC alumni and member stakeholders as well as analyses of existing reports, documents, media files, and program statistics. Specifically, through PAOC member and alumni surveys (Section III of this report) and focus groups (Section IV of this report), it sought to understand to what extent PAOC participation has led to the following:

- Job readiness, employment, workforce development and acquisition of new skills?
- The pursuit of subsequent education or other skills-based training?
- Enhanced knowledge and expertise related to natural resource stewardship?
- Diverse job training opportunities, mentorship, and positive environmental experiences?

In addition to these questions, program participants were asked their perspectives regarding ideas for program content, process, and improvement.

To document the extent the PAOC is achieving outcomes from the perspective of various organizational stakeholders (e.g., DCNR, L&I, SCA, PPFF, etc.) this study included surveys of DCNR state parks and state forests leaders (Section V of this report) as well as in-depth interviews with key partner employees at DCNR and SCA. These staff were asked about the PAOC's impact on, and challenges associated with:

- State parks and forests (and local) infrastructure projects and their fit with existing needs
- The pathways to DCNR's, other state agencies' and other partners' staffing complements
- Engagement of, and future opportunities with, underserved audiences in conservation
- The quality and preparation of PAOC work crews

Finally, a review of PAOC activities using existing documents and program statistics was conducted to better understand program growth, impact, and challenges (Section II of this report).

What follows are the findings from the five main research efforts: review of existing data and reports, PAOC member and alumni survey, PAOC member and alumni focus groups, DCNR state park manager and district forester survey, and key partner staff in-depth interviews.

Section II

Review of Existing Data and Reports



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Section II – Review of Existing Data and Reports

The first part of this program assessment involved a review of existing records and reports compiled by SCA and DCNR PAOC personnel. SCA provided an updated list of members (which was used for subsequent surveys) as well as their end-of-year surveys completed by PAOC members. DCNR provided program statistics compiled since the inception of the PAOC program. Project and PAOC member data (e.g., numbers, demographic characteristics, project types) were entered into spreadsheets, tables, and figures to illustrate key program statistics and trends over time. In addition to these tables and figures, individuals at Shippensburg CLUS developed several GIS maps to illustrate project coverage across Pennsylvania. Finally, key program milestones were reviewed through the annual reports provided by DCNR PAOC personnel. What follows is a summary of key program statistics over time. This data serves not only as a basis for assessing program impact and health but also as a source of information to triangulate with other aspects of this study (e.g., member surveys and stakeholder interviews).



A PAOC crew on a waterfall hike.

PAOC Enrollment and Membership Characteristics (2016-2022)

According to existing PAOC documentation, 1,039 people have participated in the PAOC youth and young adult crews since its inception in 2016. Annual reports were reviewed to document program participation by year and by key demographic characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and gender. The program had experienced rapid growth up until 2018 and then generally declined in enrollment since that time. The COVID-19 restrictions had a significant impact on program numbers and recovery, but there is evidence of recent program growth. Regarding key demographics, the percentage of non-white participants began very high and then declined significantly as a percentage up until 2022, when that percentage rebounded to a reported 28 percent, which included “choose not to identify” as a response option (Table 1). The percentage of female participants has ranged from a low of 33 percent to a high of 46 percent (Table 1).

Table 1. A summary of PAOC enrollment and demographic trends

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021	2022
# Participants	50 Y	129 Y	164 Y	160 Y	0 Y	70 Y	89 Y
	10 A	52 A	88 A	86 A	61 A	58 A	51 A
% Non-white	68	34	26	17	14	12	28
% Female	41	46	38	33	46	39	37

Y=youth, A=young adults, *COVID-19 restriction canceled youth programs this year

Section II – Review of Existing Data and Reports

PAOC Projects by Type (2016-2022)

Looking at the project reports from 2016 until 2022, as provided by DCNR, one can see that the most projects that were done were in the trail rehabilitation and construction category (620) (Table 2). The second most common project was natural resource protection/invasive species management (170) (Table 2). Alternatively, projects that had to do with amphitheater rehabilitation (8), roadway construction (9), or dams (14) were among the least frequently completed projects (Table 2).

In terms of years, 2022 (n=390) had the greatest number of projects, closely followed by 2018 (n=333) (Table 2). On the other hand, the first year of the PAOC in 2016 (n=55) had the least number of projects, closely followed by the COVID-19 restriction year in 2020 (n=173) (Table 2).

Table 2. Types of Projects by Category and Year

Project Type	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Trail Rehabilitation and Construction	23	92	110	97	55	86	157	620
Natural Resource Protection/Invasive Species Management	10	20	23	23	18	26	50	170
Campground Rehabilitation and Construction	9	34	42	14	12	19	24	154
Carpentry and Building Construction	1	35	29	14	11	7	50	147
Other Projects - Visitor Amenities	2	12	25	25	22	15	33	134
Community Park Maintenance and Construction	1	0	4	9	15	8	14	51
Historic Preservation	1	8	15	7	6	2	7	46
Boating Facility Installation and Maintenance	1	12	2	4	7	10	9	45
Fencing Installation and Maintenance	3	9	13	4	3	7	4	43
Native Plant Installation	0	5	6	7	7	7	5	37
Other Projects - Landscaping	0	4	9	2	4	5	1	25
Streambank Restoration	3	7	4	4	2	6	2	28
Forest Nursery Support	0	1	11	1	0	3	8	24
Habitat Management	0	3	8	1	4	3	5	24
Community Tree Inventories	0	1	9	10	0	1	0	21
Hiking Trail Amenity Construction	0	4	6	3	2	2	4	21
Boundary Line Work	0	5	3	2	3	1	3	17
Forest Stand Maintenance	0	4	1	11	0	1	0	17
Crop Tree Release/Branch Removal	1	3	6	6	0	0	0	16
Miscellaneous Projects	0	2	3	2	0	2	7	16
Other Projects - Dams	0	4	0	2	2	1	5	14
Parking Lot/Roadway Construction	0	7	1	0	0	1	0	9
Amphitheater Rehabilitation	0	1	3	0	0	2	2	8
Total	55	273	333	248	173	215	390	1,687

Section II – Review of Existing Data and Reports

GIS Mapping of PAOC Participation Across Pennsylvania

PPFF contracted with Shippensburg University to create Geographic Information System (GIS) maps based on the zip codes of past PAOC participants. This first map is based on the number of projects per zip code. Both the zip codes and the number of projects were provided by DCNR. Looking at the map, it is evident that the projects largely center in the northcentral region of Pennsylvania, with some other projects scattered toward the south and east (Figure 1).

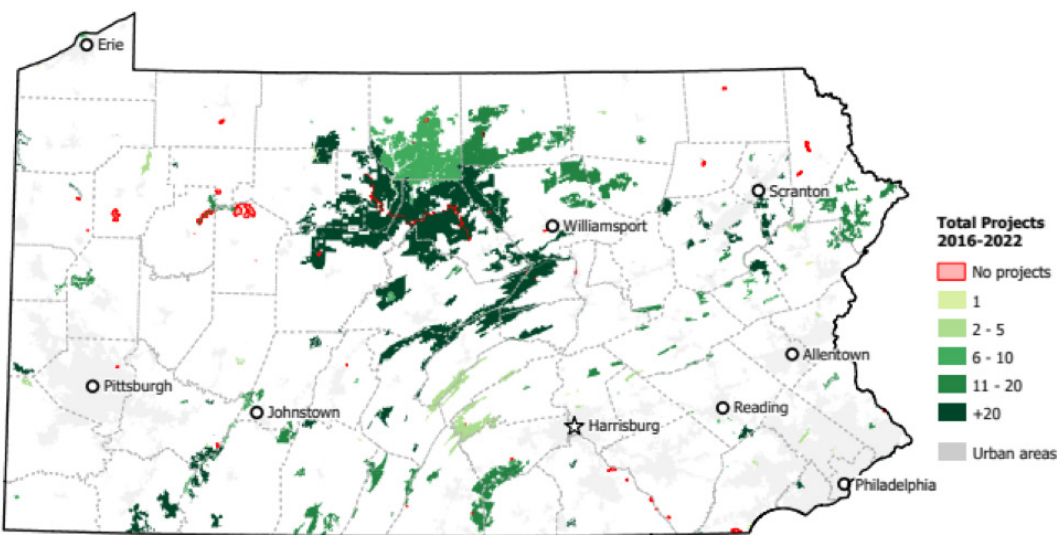


Figure 1. Total projects per state park/forest

The state parks/forests that have had the most PAOC projects (top 10 units in terms of project numbers) are shown in Table 3 below. The majority includes state forests, with a few state parks represented (Table 3).

Table 3. Total Projects per State Park/Forest (top 10 most active)

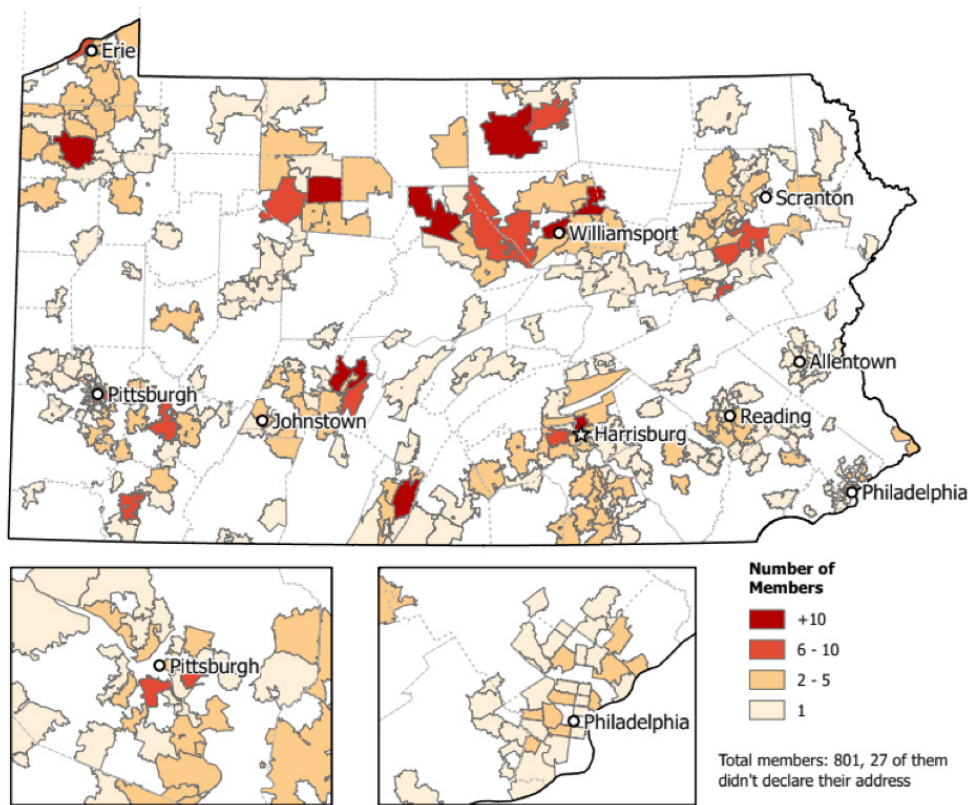
State Park/Forest	N
Gifford Pinchot State Park	50
Sproul State Forest	47
Pymatuning State Park	46
Bald Eagle State Forest	42
Forbes State Forest	40
Raccoon Creek State Park	39
Elk State Forest	37
Cornplanter State Forest	36
Moshannon State Forest	34
Parker Dam State Park	34

Of the parks and forests shown in the map in Figure 1, 26 of them never had a project completed by a PAOC crew. The list of state parks (SP) and forests (SF) that have never had a PAOC project is included on the right.

State Park/Forest

Allegheny Islands SP	Patterson SP
Big Elk Creek SP	Prompton SP
Buchanan's Birthplace SP	Prouty Place SP
Bucktail SP Natural Area	Salt Springs SP
Chapman SP	Samuel S. Lewis SP
Clear Creek SF	Sand Bridge SP
Colton Point SP	Simon B. Elliot SP
Denton Hill SP	Susquehanna SP
Fowlers Hollow SP	Susquehanna Riverlands SP
Laurel Mountain SP	Susquehannock SP
McCalls Dam SP	Upper Pine Bottom SP
Milton SP	Varden Conservation Area
Mont Alto SP	Vosburg Neck SP

Section II – Review of Existing Data and Reports



The map in Figure 2 shows the total number of members per zip code. This map shows that PAOC crews have come primarily from the northern tier of the state, around bigger cities such as Erie, Williamsport, and Scranton. It appears that there is a lack of PAOC participants around Allentown, as well as the western part of Pennsylvania.

Figure 2. Total PAOC members per zip code

Figure 3 illustrates the percent ethnicity based on a PAOC member’s home zip code. It overlays this data with percent ethnicity across the entire state. While the PAOC had strong representation in predominantly non-white zip codes around Philadelphia, and generally surrounding urban areas such as Erie, Pittsburgh, Johnstown, and Harrisburg, there is additional opportunity to draw from predominantly non-white zip codes, particularly in the southeastern and northeastern parts of the state.

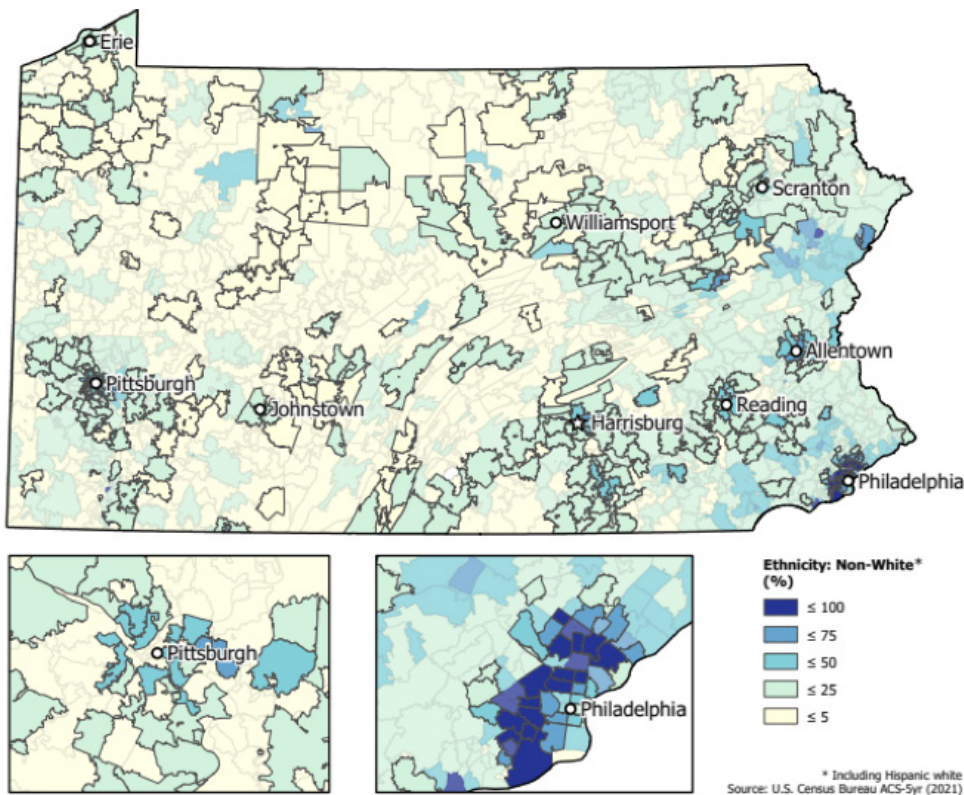


Figure 3. Ethnicity of PAOC members per zip code

Section II – Review of Existing Data and Reports

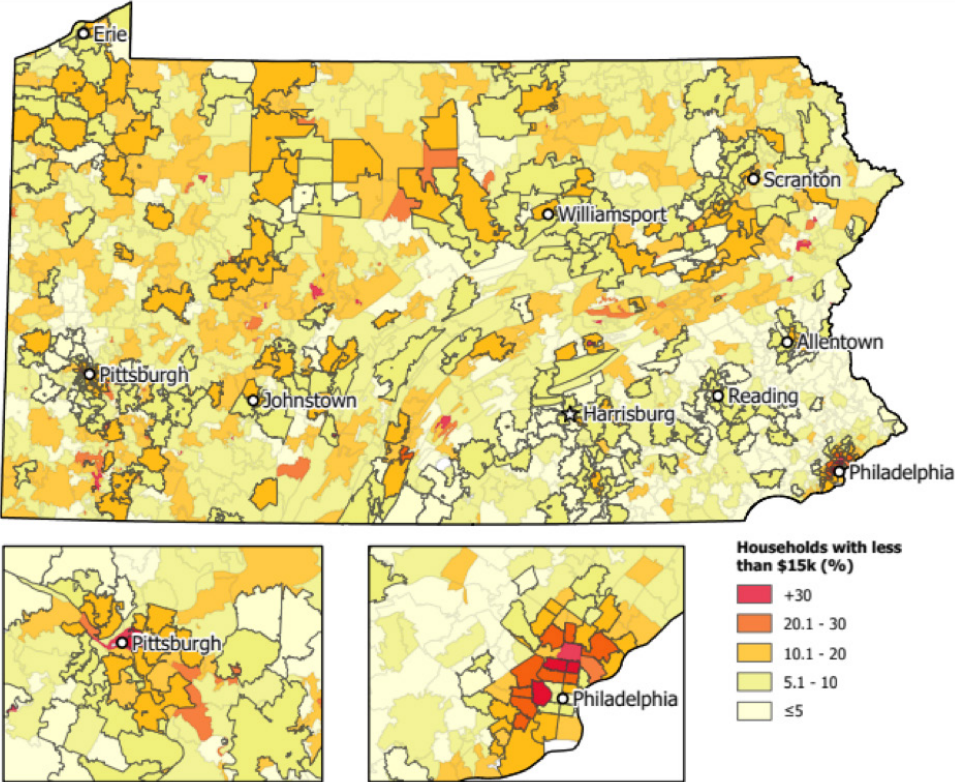


Figure 4 shows a map of all households that have less than \$15,000 in income. The polygons (i.e., zip code areas) with the bolded, outlined edges show from where the PAOC participants are coming. The map shows there are participants who are being drawn from more impoverished areas, but there are opportunities to expand into other places with underrepresented populations. This could include areas north or south of Johnstown, as well as areas north of Allentown.

Figure 4. PAOC participants coming from households with less than \$15,000 income

Figure 5 illustrates PAOC participant zip codes and overlays that with per capita income across the state. This mapping displays good program coverage of low-income areas across the state, particularly around Philadelphia, but there are opportunities to extend the program into low-income rural areas.

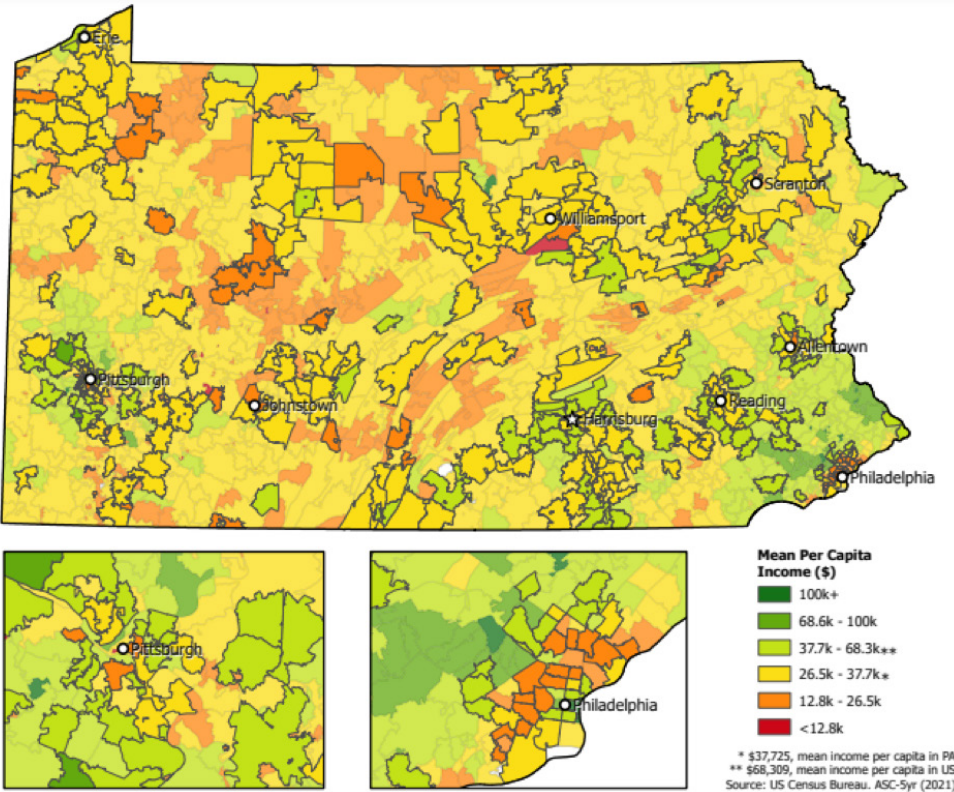


Figure 5. Mean per capita income across state

Section III

PAOC Member Survey



PENNSYLVANIA
Parks & Forests
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Section III – PAOC Member Survey



Methods

A 10 to 15-minute online survey was distributed to all participants of the PAOC program since its inception in 2016. An email contact list of past PAOC members was provided by the SCA. This list was edited to remove incomplete information (i.e., no email address) or duplicate entries. An invitation describing the purpose of this study, a request for participation in a voluntary and confidential survey, as well as other information pertaining to participant rights, was sent to 760 PAOC members on December 7, 2022, along with a link to the Qualtrics survey. Several reminder emails were sent to survey non-participants over the course of two weeks and the data collection period concluded on December 16, 2022.

After accounting for invalid email addresses and refusals, the final valid sample size included 712 PAOC members. Of these individuals, 185 completed all or portions of the survey for a final response rate of 26 percent. As an incentive to participate, PAOC members who completed all or part of the survey and who provided updated contact information received a \$15 gift card. If the PAOC member was under 18 years of age, space was provided prior to the first question in which to obtain parental or guardian consent and signature. While several PAOC members were youth at the time of their PAOC experience, only 8 percent of respondents were under 18 at the time of the survey distribution.

The survey gathered a range of information based on key issues identified in project scoping (working collaboratively with DCNR's lead PAOC staff member) as well as through a review of other conservation and youth workforce development programs and reports. For example, respondents were asked about their PAOC role, year(s) they participated, their PAOC work location, the types of projects they worked on as well as other types of PAOC involvement (e.g., mentorship opportunities, certifications). The survey also ascertained PAOC member perceptions of program impacts on them (e.g., job impact, personal development, conservation ethos). PAOC members were asked to indicate their satisfaction with, and the quality of, the PAOC program elements. At the end of the survey, participants were asked two open-ended questions: the best or favorite part of your PAOC experience; and if they could improve aspects of the program, what would those suggestions be? Finally, PAOC members were asked to provide socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, race, education) as well as information about their current employment status and type of industry/sector in which they were working.

Quantitative survey responses were converted to a statistical software package (SPSS) for further data cleaning and, when necessary, re-coding. Mean scores and frequencies from these questions are presented in the next section in tabular, figure, and text formats. Open-ended comments were transcribed and coded by the research team to identify major themes and sub-themes. Representative quotes were also used to illustrate the sub-themes for each open-ended question.

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

At the end of the survey, the respondents were asked demographic questions related to their race/ethnicity, gender, age, education, employment status, and employer. The researchers analyzed the data and put it on one table. Below is the collected data.

Table 4. Demographic Profile of PAOC Survey Respondents

Demographic Characteristic	%
Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	6
Black or African American	4
Multiple Races	3
White	82
Other	4
Gender	
Female	47
Male	46
Non-binary	3
Prefer Not to Say	4
Age	
Under 18	8
18	5
19	2
20	8
21-25	35
26 or older	43
Education	
Less than high school degree	8
High school degree or equivalent	12
Some college but no degree	17
Associate degree	6
Trade school certification	2
Bachelor's degree	44
Graduate Degree (Masters, Ph.D., or professional)	11

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

PAOC Participation Characteristics

To qualify for the study, the respondents were first asked if they were a participant in the PAOC. If they responded yes, they were able to move on to complete the survey. If they responded no, they were given a thank you for responding to the survey, and the survey would end for them.

Since the PAOC program has both a Youth Corps and an Adult Corps, the respondents were asked how old they were. Out of all the respondents who filled out the survey, most of the respondents were 26 or older (43%) or were between 21 and 25 years old (35%) (Table 4). The rest were varying ages from between 15 and 20 years old (Table 4).

Following that, the respondents were asked what best describes their position in the PAOC. A majority of respondents identified themselves as Adult Community Crew Member (31% of respondents) (Figure 6). The second most common response was Youth Crew Member (28% of respondents) (Figure 6). However, fewer respondents who participated in the survey identified as Cultural Resource Crew Members (1% of respondents) and Cultural Resource Crew Leaders (1% of respondents) (Figure 6).

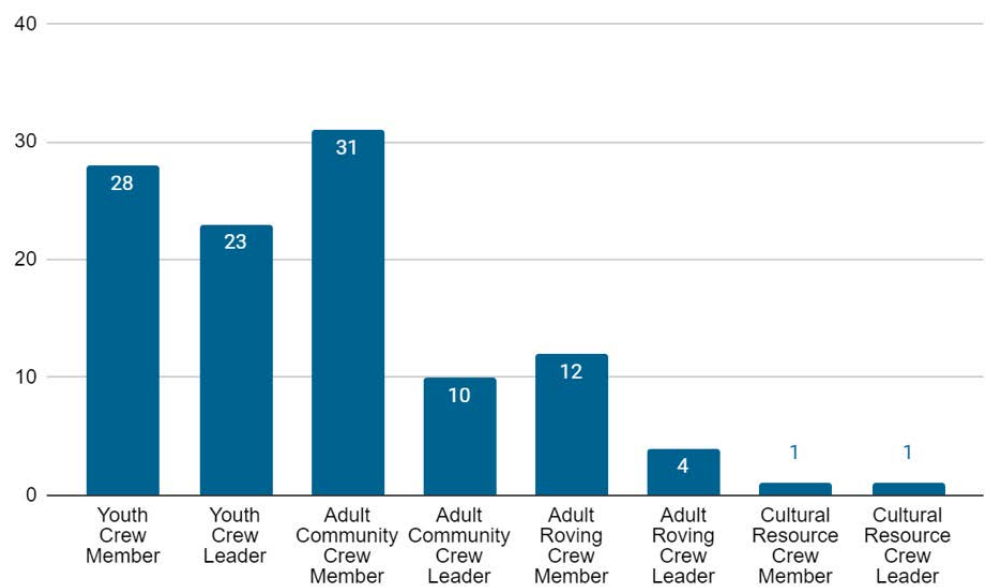


Figure 6. Type of Position Reported (%)

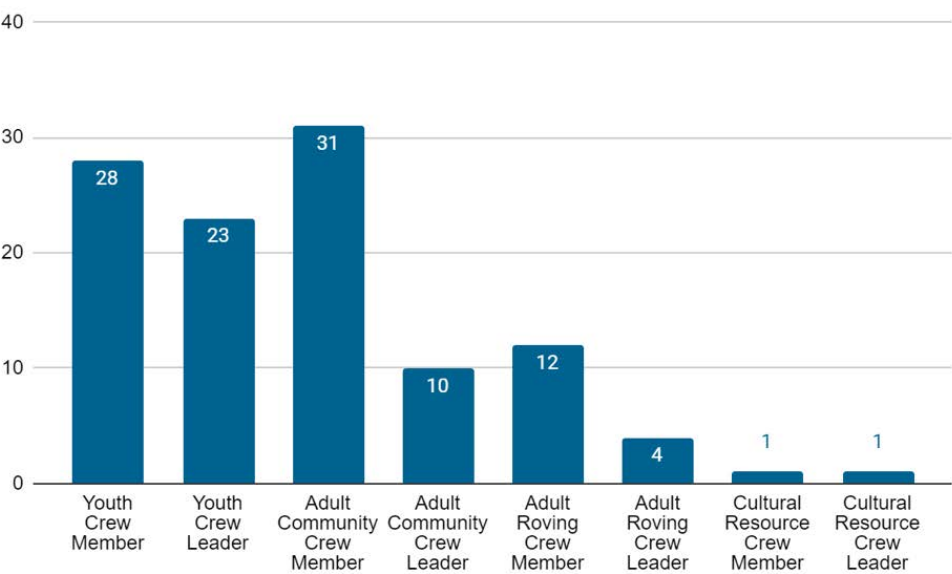


Figure 7. Number of PAOC participants per program year (%)

The respondents were asked in which years they were enrolled in the PAOC, since the program has been running since 2016. Many of the respondents replied that they were in the 2022 year (33%) (Figure 7). The second most common response was 2018 (23%) (Figure 7). The least number of respondents were from 2016 and 2020 (7% and 12% respectively) (Figure 7).

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

PAOC members were asked for a list of the projects that could have been part of their PAOC experience. They were first asked how many types of projects they completed during their PAOC experience, and they were also asked to name one that was the primary focus of their PAOC experience. Respondents stated they completed trail rehabilitation and construction the most (85%) and carpentry and building construction the second most often (70%) (Table 5). The projects the respondents seemed to complete the least included forest stand maintenance (9%) and forest nursery support (4%) (Table 5). Next, the respondents were asked what their primary project was during their PAOC experience. The respondents stated they completed trail rehabilitation and construction the most (52%) and natural resource protection/invasive species management the second most often (15%) (Table 6). In contrast, the respondents stated that the projects they completed the least included fencing installation and maintenance (0.5%) and historic preservation (0.5%) (Table 6).

Table 5. Types of Projects PAOC Members Said They Performed During Their Experience

Projects	(%)
Trail Rehabilitation and Construction	85
Carpentry and Building Construction	70
Natural Resource Protection/Invasive Species Management	67
Campground Rehabilitation and Construction	43
Community Park Maintenance and Construction	43
Hiking Trail Amenity Construction	39
Native Plant Installation	35
Habitat Management	32
Fencing Installation and Maintenance	31
Historic Preservation	31
Crop Tree Release/Branch Removal	29
Community Tree Inventories	17
Boundary Line Work	14
Streambank Restoration	13
Amphitheater Rehabilitation	11
Parking Lots/Roadway Construction	10
Boating Facility Installation and Maintenance	9
Forest Stand Maintenance	9
Forest Nursery Support	4
Other	4

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Table 6. The Primary Focus/Project PAOC Members Reported

Project Type	%
Trail Rehabilitation and Construction	52
Natural Resource Protection/Invasive Species Management	15
Carpentry and Building Construction	15
Community Park Maintenance and Construction	9
Campground Rehabilitation and Construction	3
Other	2
Crop Tree Release/Branch Removal	1
Habitat Management (aquatic and terrestrial)	1
Hiking Trail Amenity Construction	39
Fencing Installation and Maintenance	0.5
Historic Preservation	0.5
TOTAL	100

Respondents were also asked in which PAOC crew they participated. The responses were open-ended, so the researchers used their responses to narrow down 22 locations and summed the number of responses per crew. The crew the respondents were part of the most was the Harrisburg Crew, with 22 responses (Table 7). This was followed up closely by the Philadelphia Crew (21 responses) and the Wilkes-Barre Crew (18 responses) (Table 7). The crews with the least number of responses were the Allentown and the Lancaster crews (1 response each) (Table 7).

Table 7. Crew Locations Represented in the Sample (Top 10 Mentions)

Crew Location	Frequency (N)
Harrisburg	22
Philadelphia	21
Wilkes-Barre	18
Williamsport	17
Other (Specific State Parks/State Forests)	11
Pittsburgh	11
Altoona	9
Saint Mary's	9
Greensburg	7
Reading	7

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Job Training and Certification Uptake

Respondents were asked whether the PAOC program provided them with opportunities for job training or certifications to help them with their future career path. Regarding mentorship or job training opportunities the PAOC members pursued while serving in the PAOC, each question was asked to check all that apply. The respondents said they networked with professional staff (53%), and they were able to do resume writing workshops (43%) (Figure 8). However, fewer respondents believed they were able to complete an interview skills workshop (20%) as well as a skill-up online training (20%) while they were in the PAOC (Figure 8). PAOC adult members were more likely than youth members to take advantage of these mentorship/job development opportunities.

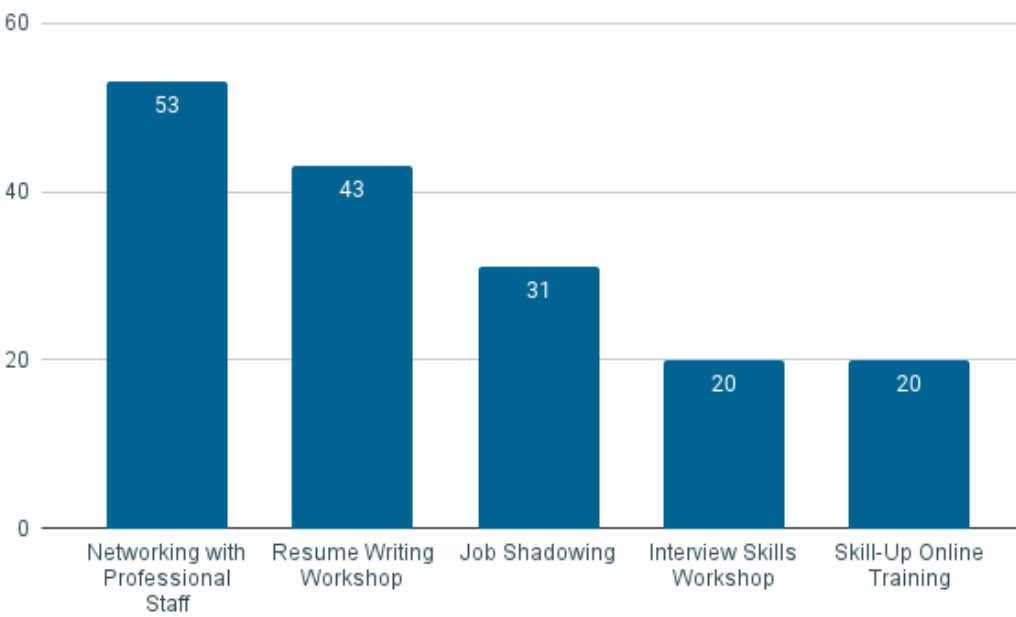


Figure 8. Mentorship and job opportunities pursued while in the PAOC (%)

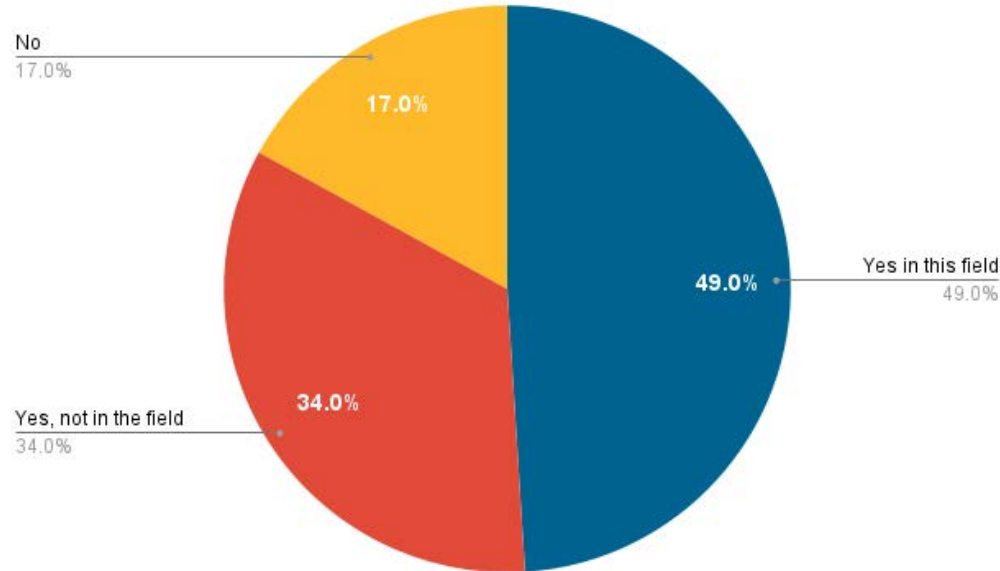


Figure 9. Interest by PAOC members in pursuing a career in the environmental field (%)

Respondents were asked whether they were interested in pursuing a career in the environmental, conservation, or outdoor recreation field. Forty-nine respondents stated they were already working in the field full-time, part-time, or as an intern (Figure 9). Thirty-four respondents stated they were interested, but that they were not working in the field yet (Figure 9). Seventeen respondents stated they were not interested in working in this field (Figure 9). Those who were not interested in working in this field were asked why they were not interested. The responses are as follows: already working in another type of job, other adult responsibilities, dislike of the job conditions or structure, desired better pay, different conservation ideologies, and negative experience working in this field.

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

In terms of certifications, the respondents were asked if they had the opportunity to get a certification while in the PAOC program, whether the certification helped them to secure employment, and whether the respondents maintained this certification. Fifty-four percent of respondents said they were able to get one or more certifications and 46 respondents said they did not get any certifications during the PAOC program (Table 8). PAOC adult members were much more likely than PAOC youth members to receive a certification (77% vs. 22%). Those respondents who did receive certificates were then asked some follow up questions. This included whether the certifications helped them to secure employment (23% said yes, 45% said no, and 32% were unsure). (Table 8). A majority (62%) of those who received certification said they had maintained them. (Table 8).

Table 8. Certifications

Item:	%	N
What certifications did you garner while in the Outdoor Corps?		
None	46	86
One or More	54	99
Of those who got certifications – what were they?*		
Wilderness first aid training		33
Wildland Fire Training		20
Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)		18
Chainsaw Safety		11
Spotted Lanternfly Training		11
Registered Technician		9
Game of Logging		8
Pennsylvania State Pesticide Applicator		8
Herbicide applicator		7
Basic first aid training		5
Did any of those certifications help you secure employment?		
Yes	23	17
No	45	33
Unsure	32	24
Do you maintain any of those certifications?		
Yes	62	45
No	38	28

*more than one certification per respondent could be provided, no % calculated

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Perceptions of Participation Outcomes

Reflecting on their PAOC experience, respondents were asked about how the PAOC prepared them for the future, as well as their perceptions post-PAOC. After reviewing PAOC documents and past reports concerning program objectives, the research team developed items that could be potential outcomes of the PAOC program. Such outcomes included introducing new people, enhancing leadership skills, exposing them to new career options, preparing them to enter the conservation workforce, helping to understand where to volunteer, and building connections to enter the workforce. This list of program objective impact items can be found in Table 9. These were measured on a five-point scale from “never” to “a great deal.” Participants had to choose one answer per category. Considering these items, PAOC members were asked how their experiences in the PAOC contributed to how prepared they felt for their future career and volunteering opportunities. A majority believed that the PAOC introduced them to new people who share a similar passion for conservation and outdoor recreation (94% Strongly Agree/Agree) and that the PAOC enhanced their leadership skills (86% Strongly Agree/Agree) (Table 9). However, fewer PAOC members believed that the PAOC helped them to understand where they can volunteer to build new skills (75% Strongly Agree/Agree) and even fewer respondents believed their PAOC experience gave them connections that helped them to get a job (52% Strongly Agree/Agree) (Table 9). However, there were a few differences in perceptions by PAOC youth vs. adult members. For example, youth members were more likely than adult members to agree that PAOC helped with job connections, but were less likely than adult members to agree their PAOC participation prepared them to enter the conservation workforce.

Table 9. Participation Outcomes in the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps

My participation in the PAOC:	Mean*	Percent (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Introduced me to new people who share a passion for conservation and outdoor recreation	4.5	2	4	0	41	53
Enhanced my leadership skills	4.3	2	4	8	37	49
Helped to educate me on issues facing outdoor recreation and conservation in Pennsylvania	4.3	1	1	8	48	42
Gave me exposure to new career options	4.2	2	3	7	43	45
Increased my conservation ethos	4.2	2	1	14	46	37
Exposed me to new perspectives and ideas from those who have different backgrounds than me	4.2	2	1	9	54	34
Contributed to the growth of my professional network	4.1	2	2	13	44	39
Provided new outdoor recreation skills	4.1	2	3	14	45	36
Helped me identify education paths to support my career interests	4	5	2	17	45	31
Put me at an advantage when trying to find a job	4	2	5	18	44	31
Prepared me to enter the conservation workforce	4	4	3	14	49	30
Affected the career I chose/am choosing	3.9	4	8	16	40	32
Introduced me to new outdoor recreation activities	3.9	2	8	17	42	31
Made me more inclined to volunteer for social or environmental causes	3.9	2	5	21	45	27
Helped me understand where I could volunteer to build my skills	3.9	2	7	16	49	26
Gave me connections that helped me get a job	3.6	5	12	31	27	25

*1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

Section III – PAOC Member Survey



PAOC members were also asked about their experiences both during and after their time with the program. A majority believed their voice was heard through their PAOC experience (65% Moderate/A Great Deal) and that their PAOC experience inspired further career training and study (55% Moderate/A Great Deal) (Table 10). However, fewer PAOC members (34% Moderate/Great Deal) felt that other PAOC members or crew leaders provided support after their time with the program (Table 10). Those who participated in the PAOC most recently (post-COVID-19 - 2021 and 2022 program years) were more likely than those participating prior to agree their voice was heard throughout their PAOC experience.

Table 10. Perceptions Post-PAOC Experience

Item:	Mean*	Percent (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Was your voice heard through your PAOC experience?	3.9	4	9	22	30	35
Has your PAOC experience inspired further career training or study?	3.5	10	11	24	30	25
Have you maintained contact with other PAOC members or crew leaders?	3.3	7	14	39	24	15
Have other PAOC members or crew leaders provided support to you <i>after</i> your time with the corps?	3.0	14	18	34	22	12

*1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Occasionally, 4=A Moderate Amount, 5=A Great Deal

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Improvement in Skills, Abilities, Awareness Due to their PAOC Experience

Participants were also asked about the impacts of skills, abilities, and awareness within the following areas. These were measured on a five-point scale from “never” to “a great deal.” Participants had to choose one answer per category.

In terms of their skill improvement, a majority felt that they improved their field work skills (92% Moderate Amount/A Great Deal) as well as their problem-solving skills (86% Moderate Amount/A Great Deal) (Table 11). Inversely, they responded that their skills did not improve as much regarding their planning skills (77% Moderate Amount/A Great Deal) and customer/visitor skills (39% Moderate Amount/A Great Deal) (Table 11).

Table 11. Extent that the PAOC Contributed to the Following Skills

Item:	Mean*	Percent (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Field work	4.6	1	1	6	27	65
Problem solving	4.3	1	1	12	44	42
Communication	4.2	0	3	15	37	45
Job/workplace readiness	4.1	1	4	14	44	37
Planning	4.1	2	2	19	42	35
Customer/visitor services	3.3	5	18	37	23	17

*1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Occasionally, 4=A Moderate Amount, 5=A Great Deal

With respect to improving abilities, many of the respondents stated that they learned how to work as part of a team (91% Moderate Amount/A Great Deal) and gained leadership experience (88% Moderate Amount/A Great Deal) (Table 12). Other responses were all strong in terms of the respondents agreeing to ability outcomes (Table 12).

Table 12. Extent that the PAOC Improved Abilities in the Following Areas

Item:	Mean*	Percent (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Ability to work as part of a team	4.5	0	1	7	35	57
Leadership experience	4.1	1	8	13	33	45
Workplace motivation	4.1	1	1	19	40	39
Professional relationships	4.1	1	2	20	40	37
Attention to detail	4.1	1	1	16	49	33
Ability to work independently	4	1	6	18	39	36
Asking for help when needed	4	1	6	21	40	32
Being better able to accept constructive feedback	4	1	3	22	43	31
Time management	4	1	6	19	44	30
Workplace reporting (timecard and duties)	3.9	5	8	21	32	34

*1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Occasionally, 4=A Moderate Amount, 5=A Great Deal

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Finally, respondents were asked whether their PAOC experience helped them to improve their awareness of careers within DCNR or the environmental field. Participants stated that they improved their knowledge of career opportunities at DCNR or in the environmental field (86% A Moderate Amount/A Great Deal) as well as their understanding of the responsibilities of a professional working at DCNR or in the environmental field (80% Moderate Amount/A Great Deal) (Table 13). However, in terms of the respondents' interest in pursuing a career at DCNR, the response was much lower (63% A Moderate Amount/A Great Deal) (Table 13). Those who participated in the PAOC most recently (post-COVID-19 – 2021 and 2022 program years) were much more likely than those participating prior to agree that the program improved their knowledge of conservation career opportunities and understanding of daily responsibilities of a conservation professional.

Table 13. Extent Participation in the PAOC Improved Awareness of the Following Areas

Item:	Mean*	Percent (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Understanding the daily responsibilities of a professional working at DCNR or the environmental field	4.2	1	4	15	36	44
Knowledge of career opportunities at PA DCNR or the environmental field	4.2	1	3	10	44	42
Interest in pursuing a career in the environmental field	4.1	1	4	18	36	41
Interest in pursuing a career at DCNR	3.8	4	9	24	31	32

*1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Occasionally, 4=A Moderate Amount, 5=A Great Deal



Section III – PAOC Member Survey

PAOC Quality and Satisfaction Perceptions

Respondents were then asked to rate the quality and satisfaction of their PAOC program. Regarding the quality of their experience, the questions were measured on a five-point scale from “poor” to “excellent.” Participants had to choose one answer per category. Altogether, they enjoyed the quality of the PAOC program itself (81% Very Good/Excellent), as well as their respective PAOC crew leaders (75% Very Good/Excellent), and the training and skills building provided through the PAOC (77% Very Good/Excellent) (Table 14). However, respondents were less likely to feel strong support for the program in terms of follow-up engagement once the program was completed (41% Very Good/Excellent) (Table 14). Overall, the participants were pleased with the program but believed that there could have been better support from the PAOC both during and after the program.

Table 14. Perceived Quality of the PAOC Experience

Item:	Mean*	Percent (%)					N/A
		1	2	3	4	5	
The PAOC program itself	4.3	1	5	12	25	56	1
PAOC Crew Leaders	4.1	3	9	13	29	46	3
Training/skills building provided through the PAOC	4.1	2	4	17	34	43	1
PAOC Mentors (separate from the Crew)	4.0	3	7	16	39	36	10
Fellow PAOC Crew Members	3.9	2	8	21	32	37	4
Support provided through the PAOC	3.8	3	12	22	32	31	1
Follow-up engagement/communication from the PAOC after your experience was completed	3.1	12	25	22	21	20	1

*1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Very Good, 5=Excellent

When asked about their overall satisfaction with their PAOC experience, respondents reported high levels of satisfaction, with 68 percent reporting they were “extremely satisfied” and 23 percent reporting they were “somewhat satisfied.” Only 2 percent reported dissatisfaction with their PAOC experience (Figure 10).

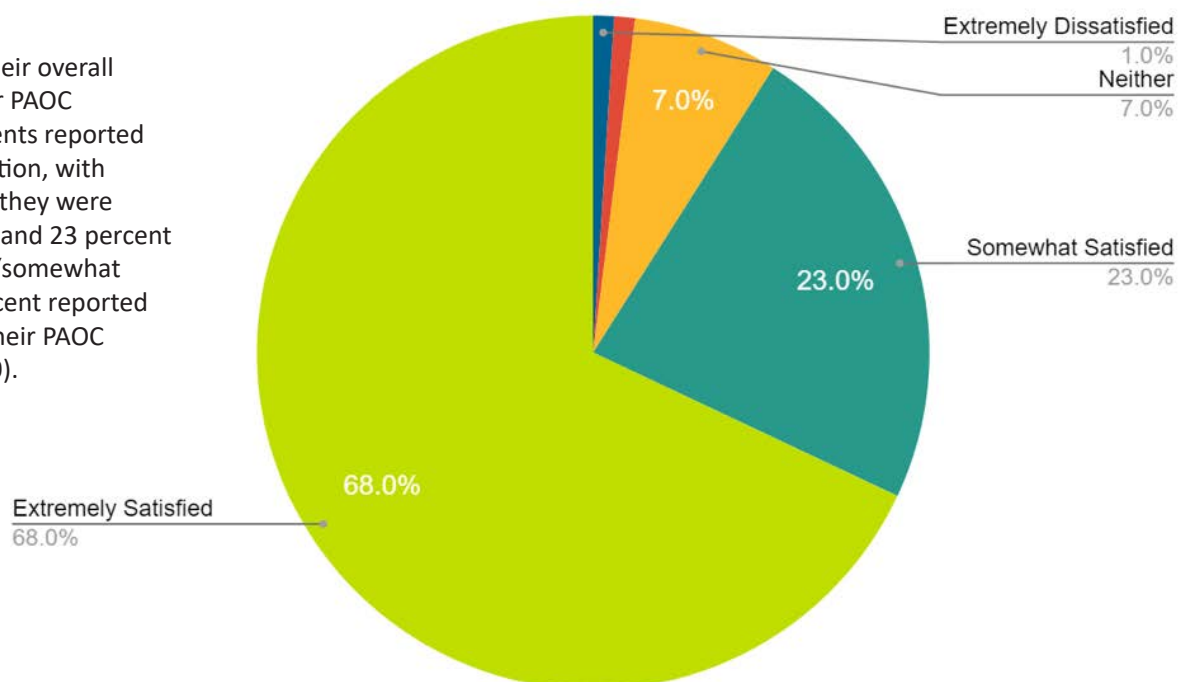


Figure 10. Satisfaction with the PAOC experience (%)

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Post-Participation Attitudes and Intentions

PAOC participants were asked if they would do the PAOC program again if given the chance. Sixty stated that they would definitely enroll without any hesitation (Table 15). Thirty percent said that they would do it again, but with some reservations (Table 15). Four percent said that they would not enroll, and five percent were not sure if they would do it again (Table 15). If the respondents stated that they would not enroll again, they were given a follow-up question asking why they would not re-enroll. Their answers included poor pay, different career choice, wanted a full-time job, or were treated poorly.

Table 15. Would Past Participants Do the PAOC Program All Over Again?

Response option	%
Would definitely enroll without hesitation	61
Would probably still do it, but with some reservations and conditions	30
Would not enroll	4
Not sure	5
TOTAL	100

The participants were also asked if they would be willing to attend an alumni event in the future. Fifty-two percent said that they were “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to attend an event (Figure 11). Thirty percent do not have any opinion (i.e., “neutral”) on whether they would attend an event, and 18 percent were “somewhat unlikely” or “very unlikely” to attend an alumni event (Figure 11).

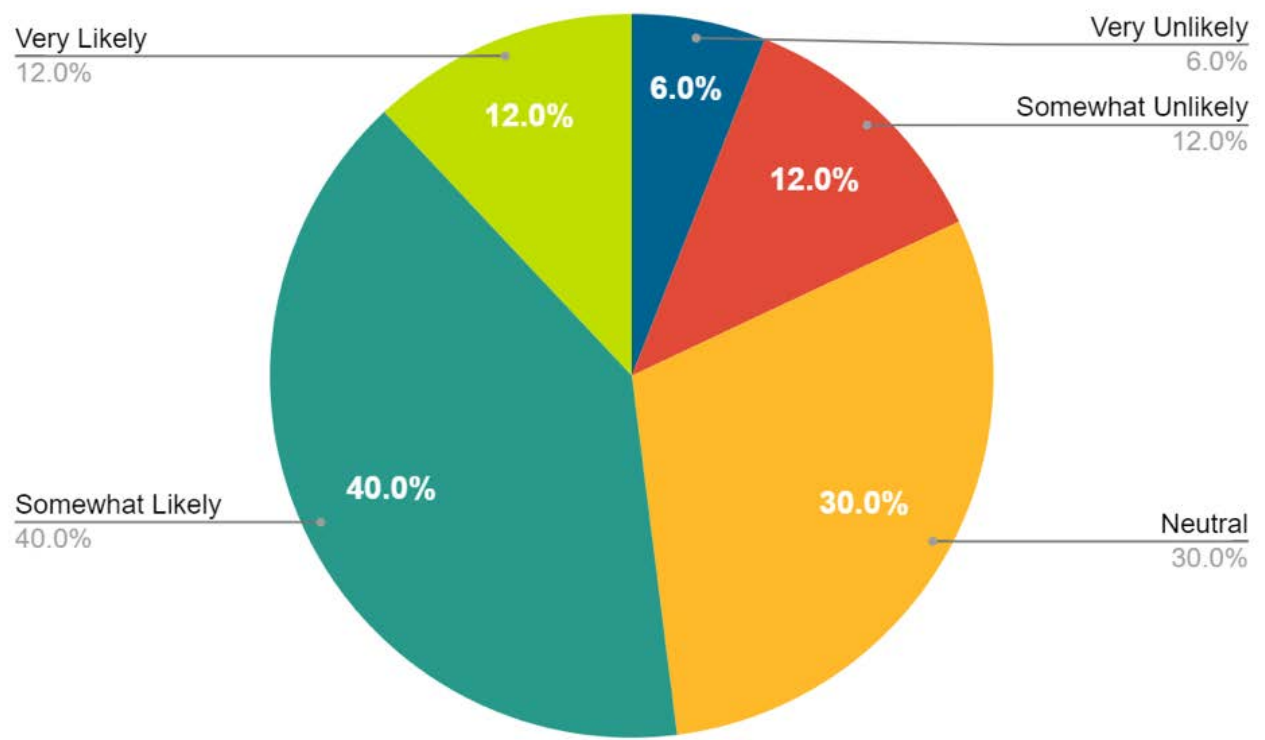


Figure 11. Willing to attend an alumni event (%)

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Conservation Career Intentions and Current Employment

Part of the survey asked whether the respondents were currently employed, whether they work at an environmental, conservation, or outdoor recreation organization, and who exactly their employer is in terms of public agencies, non-profit organizations, or private businesses.

The respondents were asked about what their current employment status is or if they are a student. Fifty-nine percent are working at either a full- or part-time job, 26 percent are enrolled as either a high school student, college student, or in a trade school, and 15 percent are not working or are unable to work (Table 16).

Table 16. Employment Status

Employment Status	%
Working at a full-time job	47
Working at a part-time job	12
Enrolled as a high school student	10
Enrolled as a college student	10
Enrolled in a trade/technical school	<1
Not working or unable to work	15

Regarding whether they are working in an environmental, conservation, or outdoor recreation organization, 49 percent said “yes” and 51 percent said “no” (Figure 12).

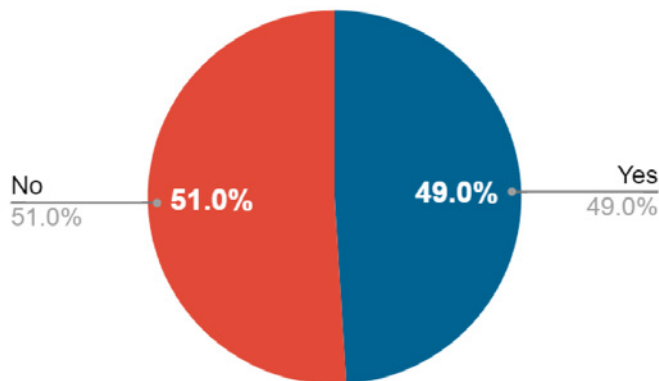


Figure 12. Working in the environmental field (%)

Finally, they were asked who is their employer. Fifty-six percent stated that their employer is a public or governmental agency, 24 percent stated that they work with a nonprofit organization, and 20 percent stated that they work with a private business or organization (Figure 13).

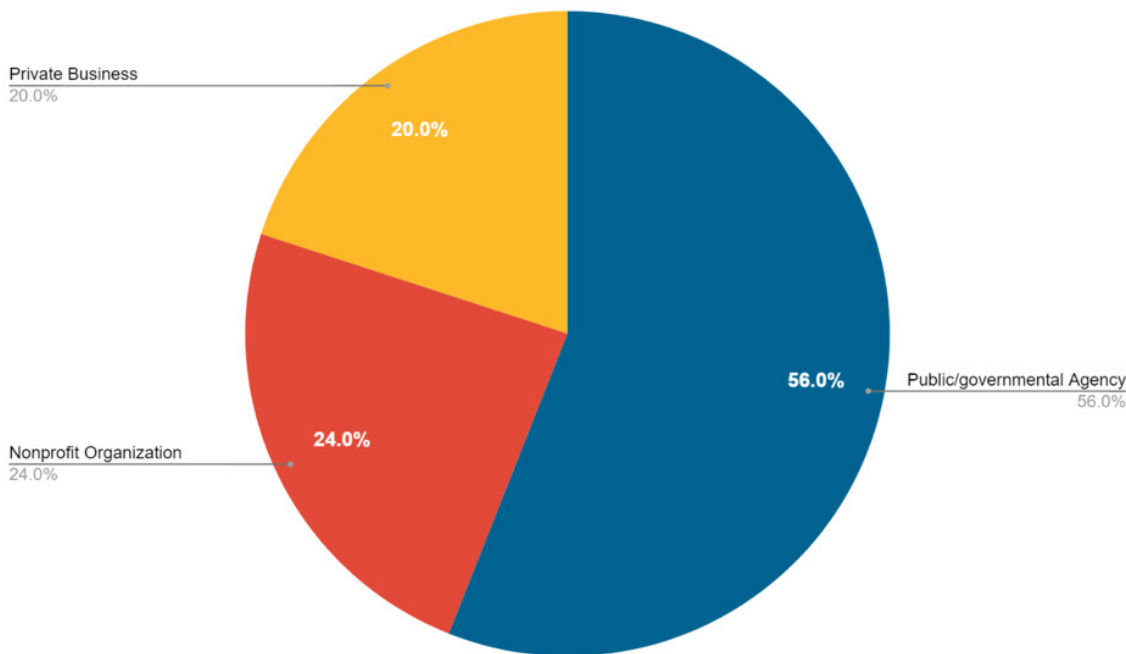


Figure 13. Type of employer (%)

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Favorite Part of the Experience

Toward the end of the survey, respondents were asked several questions about their overall experience. The first question asked about the respondent's favorite part of the PAOC experience. The researchers coded the comments and then generated a codebook and a list of themes and subthemes. The responses centered around three themes: working with people, being in the parks, and having new experiences.

Working with Other People

This theme demonstrates that the respondents enjoyed working with people. The people could have included the crew they were working with as well as anybody they met along the way, such as park or forest workers, or the community they were working around. The respondents also mentioned that they liked meeting new people during their PAOC experience. They enjoyed how the individuals they met throughout their PAOC journey were able to teach them new skills and become their friends. In addition, networking played an important role for many of the respondents in terms of engaging in meaningful conversation and learning more about possible career paths within the environmental field. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"All of the people I've met along the way and all of the knowledge I was able to soak in from everyone around me."

"The friendships and bonds created with others who enjoy the outdoors."

"Working alongside such great DCNR staff (at Laurel Hill, Linn Run and Forbes State Forest) they were all so willing to teach us new skills and to allow us to do as much of the work as possible to not only build up our skills, but also confidence in our abilities. Befriending like-minded people. I gained a best friend from this experience!"

"Interacting with parks and fellow leaders."

"Meeting new people and working outdoors."

"Being a part of a crew and having great support from management."

"Networking with DCNR staff and engaging in meaningful conservation work in Parks and Forests."

"I loved my time with PAOC, it presented challenges I have never dealt with before."

"The behind-the-scenes experience at state parks."

"Getting to do a variety of projects."

"Trying new things and staying motivated."

"All the new skills I received that I did not imagine I would experience."

"Gaining experience in the conservation field."

"Got to experience new parts of the region I worked in."

New Experiences

One thing that the respondents thought was the best part of working with PAOC was exposure to new experiences and opportunities. They especially enjoyed the variety of projects, as well as learning new things through completing each project. They also enjoyed new challenges they might never have seen before and gained new experiences in the environmental field. To the left are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Being In the Parks and Forests

Respondents also stated that one of the things they enjoyed the most was simply being outside or in the parks and forests. Many of them stated that it was helpful for their mental health to work outside and to work in a place where they were passionate to work. It also provided new opportunities for individuals who might not have been able to get outside as often as they could have. Respondents also stated that it gave them the ability to visit more Pennsylvania state parks and forests that they might not have been able to do otherwise. Respondents also enjoyed being able to learn more about wildlife and recreation from being out in the parks and forests. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Getting the chance to work somewhere I was passionate about my work.”

“Being in nature and giving back to the park system.”

“It helped me to appreciate the state parks and what they have to offer. I had seldom visited them before the job.”

“Working outdoors everyday, living in Philadelphia and learning, working and spending time with my crew.”

“Being outside in a free environment and getting to know the wildlife and the recreation we have done on the land.”

“I really loved the job itself and getting out on trails and appreciating PA State Parks.”

“My favorite experience as part of the PAOC was being able to travel to multiple state parks, meet new DCNR employees in the field, and enjoy the beautiful landscapes with my fellow crew members. Developing and sharpening my sense of community and service was crucial during my process.”

“I loved getting to explore state parks across PA. I had lived in Pennsylvania my entire life and had never seen any of the parks we worked in prior to that experience. I had wanted to get involved in a program like this right out of high school, but nothing was available at the time. I love that this is something that is accessible to young professionals!”



Section III – PAOC Member Survey

PAOC Members' Suggestions for Program Improvement

Toward the end of the survey, PAOC members were asked an open-ended question regarding ideas and suggestions for program improvement. There were 17 individuals who replied that the program was great and there was not anything they wanted to see improved. Others did have some suggestions for program improvement, and systematic coding of these responses were categorized into four separate themes: plan better regarding site visitation and work tasks, improve crew preparation, improve career pathways, and create a more inclusive space.

Plan Better Regarding Site Visitation and Work Tasks

This theme includes a belief that PAOC staff could plan better regarding site visitation and work tasks (i.e., varying it depending on the size of the crew available). A few individuals believed that the planning felt rushed and that the assessments did not always relate to the program. Further, they requested more projects that were unique and that did not just seem like busy work (e.g., mulching, completing trail work, or cutting branches). They also believed there should have been better training for the crew leaders, and that there were times when SCA staff did not take their complaints seriously or were lax on safety measures. Finally, they wanted more certification opportunities. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"Give the students working more challenging and rewarding jobs then, for example, spreading mulch for a week or just lopping branches."

"There could be better planning. Sometimes, training and daily work felt rushed. There were also times where not enough information was given to members, whether by SCA staff or crew leaders, which affected how much we got out of our time with the organization."

"Some of the skill-up assessments didn't always relate to the program and seemed catered towards an office work environment."

"Hire better leaders, promote only keeping leaders/members who are motivated to work, better communication on all parts, better organization for things such as pay/workers compensation issues."

"Prioritize certifications more. If I would have had those after the program I would have been more skilled afterwards."

"I was part of the inaugural crew so I am sure a lot has changed. However, during my time there, project partners were not at all prepared for us and had us doing ridiculously easy tasks, which meant we would finish with hours left in the day, and it was also incredibly demoralizing."

"Better allocation of equipment. Many times work was slowed or halted due to inadequate tools."

"We did a lot of trail maintenance. Less grunt work and more professional experiences."

"In terms of SCA, I wish they would take crew member complaints more seriously. Our second crew lead was problematic but the SCA project coordinators did little to nothing to intervene or improve the situation."

"The crews' experience was occasionally negatively impacted by the lack of preparedness of our project partners. If materials or staff were not prepared for the crew's arrival, it often left the leader to scramble to find meaningful work. This was especially difficult on roving crews, where in-person site visits were not possible. When project partners did identify backup projects, they were either not very meaningful or did not require much time to complete. Expectations of the on-site staff varied greatly. Some sites would provide too much support on simpler tasks, while others would not provide enough guidance on more difficult projects. This often seemed to be caused by a communication breakdown between the park management staff and the maintenance staff."

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Improve Crew Preparation

Survey respondents stated that they believed some things could have been done better in terms of the crew itself. They wanted to have a bigger crew so they could complete more projects. They wanted to be able to meet more of the other crews, or to partner with other crews on particularly complex projects where multiple crews might have an advantage working together. They especially wanted a better vetting process for both the crew members and crew leaders, and to inform crew members of the time commitment that PAOC needs prior to hiring them. They also believed that sometimes there were no disciplinary actions taken when problems occurred between crew members. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Sometimes problems with other crew members occurred and when approached higher up the right discipline was not taken.”

“I think my particular crew could have hired more crew members.”

“Unfortunately, a few of the 10 students were let go from the program due to absences, so I think it could be helpful to vet the students a bit more or at least inform them of the expected time commitment.”

“Doing a better job of selecting adult crew leaders. We had 2 sub-par leaders because one left in the middle of the experience and the other one was only hired because it was his second year on the crew. There was no consideration taken from the members of the crew.”

“Better vetting and management of member behavioral issues and attendance.”

“There should be a more intensive hiring process for roving crews. It is not for everyone because the schedule and work/life balance is unique and can be difficult. Members should be interviewed by the roving crew lead as well as the program advisor before being hired.”

“I think intentionally pairing multiple crews on particularly complex projects could be beneficial for crew/leader growth and project efficiency. For example, multiple crews could be assigned to large trail builds/reroutes, or large swaths of resource management.”

“More opportunities to meet/collaborate with other PAOC crews.”

“Improve networking for future students.”

“I have had little to no contact with anyone involved in the PAOC program since my time on the crew. Although this may be just one impact of the pandemic, I would have liked to maintain some of my contacts better.”

“Better job placement, a lot of young people in these programs have environmental degrees and at least in my experience the PAOC did nothing to point us in the direction of any jobs outside of the SCA.”

“PAOC should provide more formal opportunities for crew members to touch base in the years following the program.”

“Help finding a job after the corps. I had a hard time figuring out the PA Website to apply to DCNR jobs.”

“Continuing to connect and reach participants with job opportunities.”

“More career opportunity exposure to the youth.”

Improve Career Pathways

Many of the respondents wanted to have more chances at networking so that they could meet more people who work in the state parks and state forests and have a better idea of potential jobs. They wanted a networking system so they could maintain the connections that they made while working with PAOC. Further, they wanted more help in finding jobs after the program, through either help navigating the state government careers website or by pointing them toward work that was not just with SCA. To the left are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

Section III – PAOC Member Survey

Create a More Inclusive Space

The fourth and final theme reflects the fact that some of the crew members did not feel safe in the space they were in. They wanted crew members and leaders to have DEI training to understand how to navigate microaggressions. They also wanted to have more respect and to feel included. Finally, they wanted more of an outreach effort to Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“...some DEI training could be helpful, just to know how to navigate microaggressions or assumptions as crew members meet each other for the first time.”

“Increase outreach or retention of Black, Indigenous People of Color in the program. I was one of 3 BIPOC in the program out of 50 crewmembers.”

“Creating a more positive environment for women and minorities.”

“I would encourage the PAOC to continue to expand and offer new programs. It is great to see the addition of the Cultural Resource Crew and the youth Deaf crew.”

“I think members could benefit from extended JEDI (justice, equity, diversity & inclusion) training at member training but also throughout the year. Going off of that, some sort of environmental justice training would be awesome too.”



Section IV

PAOC Member Focus Groups

Section IV – PAOC Member Focus Groups

Methods

To gain a greater depth of understanding of the PAOC experience and impacts, PAOC members who had completed the online survey were asked to share their contact information if they were willing to participate in a follow-up virtual focus group session. Those who indicated “yes” and provided their contact information were entered into a database to identify participants for two separate sessions. The first focus group consisted of 12 randomly selected PAOC members (from the remaining pool of interested respondents) to represent a more general, less targeted group of PAOC members. Due to their under-representation in the conservation workforce, it was decided to purposely invite women and minority PAOC members to the second focus group. Gender identity and race were used as screening characteristics to identify these focus group participants. As with the first group, this second virtual focus group was capped at 12 participants to ensure manageability and provide an opportunity for everyone to share their perspectives. All focus group participants were given a \$25 gift card as a token of appreciation.

Focus groups occurred during the evenings of February 15 for the first focus group and February 16 for the second. Both focus groups lasted approximately one hour over the Zoom platform and the conversations were transcribed using the Otter.ai transcription app. Project researchers began each focus group session discussing the purpose of the session, procedural guidelines during the focus group, human subject rights for them as a focus group participant, and a summary of questions to be asked. Then, participants were asked to introduce themselves to the group and share how they found out about the PAOC program and the types of projects they did during their time with the PAOC.

After an introductory discussion, participants were asked core questions querying what knowledge and skills were learned during their PAOC experience and whether it impacted subsequent education, job choices, or volunteering activities. Participants were specifically asked whether the training offered prepared them for work in conservation or recreation roles and if it influences their attitudes or ethos related to conservation. After these questions, the focus group pivoted to experiential outcomes and program performance topics. For example, participants were asked what the most rewarding part of their time with the PAOC was and based on their PAOC experience, what the biggest takeaway was. Participants were also asked what the PAOC did well, what challenges they faced during their PAOC experience (and how they were addressed), and whether they had any suggestions or recommendations for improving the PAOC.

Throughout the recorded focus groups, both researchers took notes and asked clarifying and probing questions based on participant responses and narratives. After focus groups were completed, the Zoom recordings were transcribed and were coded by the research team based on core themes and sub-themes present throughout the discussion. What follows is a summary of those themes and sub-themes associated with key questions using selected participant quotes to illustrate the point.



Section IV – PAOC Member Focus Groups

Focus Group Themes and Sub-Themes

The following themes were identified by the researchers after analyzing the transcripts of the two focus groups. These are presented according to the semi-structured questions that were asked (see Appendix B). Specifically, PAOC members discussed what knowledge and skills were acquired through their experience, the influence of the PAOC on their careers, education, and volunteerism, and its effect on their own conservation ethos.

Knowledge/Skills Acquired

This theme encompasses the knowledge and skills that the participants might have gained from their PAOC experience. These skills could include carpentry and power tool usage, plant identification, gaining new confidence, building leadership skills, learning about others, developing soft skills, being accountable, and networking. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“One of the main things that I ended up doing a lot was basic carpentry. Cause we were building a lot of wooden structures throughout the summer.”

“I had never worked with a basic power tool before this program and it turned out to be very helpful.”

“I think the biggest thing that I got from that year was the grit, you know, you go in there and you get dirty and you get the job done to the best of your ability with what you have and what time you have tools.”

“I really enjoyed getting to know the people on my team, telling them about myself and learning about their various interests.”

“It was more of the soft skills, the leadership, time management, management all together being as a crew leader, having to manage a crew, attend with another crew leader, things like that.”

“But I always say that my biggest takeaway from the program was they offered the adult teams chainsaw training, and that drastically changed my career dreams and aspirations.”

“This was kind of like my first real job so it really taught me the value of hard work and showing up and holding yourself and other people accountable. You know, the shift started like 7:30, so you just had to be punctual. Of course, there would be consequences that the rest of the team would have to bear if you didn't show up, or do what you were supposed to do. So I thought that was like, invaluable. Also just learning how to get along with a lot of different people from very diverse backgrounds, as co-workers, because I think other youth programs that I had previously participated in focused a lot on friendship. And while that was definitely important, and that definitely also arose and developed during our time there, it was also really nice to just get to know people, as co-workers first and sort of develop that relationship.”

“I'd say the connections are really valuable, because I think my leaders in the college course program have gone on to work for the Environmental Protection Agency.”

“I think it was more of the interpersonal, the conflict resolution, working through group dynamics with your crew that probably really impacted me the most. And to go along with that all the networking.”

“It was very much not just like a job, but a job training program. And it was nice to know that as we go into the different parks or forest, they know that and they kind of expect that, and a lot of the staff members are excited to share their stories, are excited to teach us things, and to share their path on how they got to where they got, you know, give us little tricks and hints to get through the system.”

Section IV – PAOC Member Focus Groups

Influence on Career, Education, Volunteerism

This theme asked the participants if the PAOC influenced their education or career path in some way. Sometimes it might not have affected the participants directly, but in others it narrowed their focus onto what they like, or directly influenced them into their current career path. In addition, they were asked about the impact that the PAOC had on their potential volunteering efforts post-PAOC participation. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Yeah, it absolutely changed the trajectory for me, because at first it was just me trying to figure out like, is that something I wanted to delve any deeper into, and after the whole experience, I decided, yeah, so I'm going back to school in the fall at Penn Tech for forestry.”

“I mean, I know for me personally, it increased my little bit of volunteerism.”

“I have to say, no, unfortunately, I haven't been able to take any time for volunteering and such.”

“But, I want to make it clear too, they provided a lot of opportunities, they being DCNR, they provided a lot of opportunities to go into a job after PA Outdoor Corps. At least to me I got a lot of opportunities and references to put on the resume and things like that.”

“...it absolutely had an effect on like, what path I choose chose because I knew I wasn't going to school and I got the trade skills I wanted.”

“So with joining the SCA, they definitely taught you how to look up government jobs, how to apply for them, different things to like keep pulling on your resume...”

“... it directly changed the trajectory of my career.”

“So, it helped me narrow down a lot of things that I wasn't, I didn't want to waste education and time or training on and then I kind of wove through that I think I'm going to be probably working, mainly applying for positions in the private sector and labor positions. So I'm interested to see if they recognize SCA because I know that SCA is pretty popular with them as a program with state agencies, and it's pretty well known but yeah, you went in thinking that you're going to like DCNR, but if you realize that it's not for you, that's not a waste of time. That's really valuable information to have.”

“I think this program kind of helped narrow my interest down to environmental science and ecology and biology, since that was also what my program leaders had chosen to study. And I think it provided a lot of valuable courses like fieldwork, experience and skills and that kind of helped me realize that because I do have the privilege of continuing my education, and I want to pursue this.”

“It definitely was influential in my life as far as personally and professionally. It renewed my passion and interest in getting into the outdoor field, making that clear.”

Section IV – PAOC Member Focus Groups

What does the PAOC do well?

Regarding what the PAOC does well, the respondents replied that they really enjoyed the soft skills they gained, including problem solving skills and leadership skills. In addition, the participants stated they really enjoy coming back to the parks and forests that they worked in to see the projects of which they are proud. They also liked the aspect of learning more about people and meeting new people. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"I think for me being on the crew leader side of things was watching the crew actually finish something and be proud of what they actually did or, you know, telling their friends, "Yes, you know, yeah, I'm working here, I'm doing this" and their friends coming down and seeing what we're doing and whatnot and just seeing that end of it."

"... the fact that you can go back and like, see the stuff that you've done, and just like know, you did that, like that's something that you accomplished certainly has its own reward."

"... how Ted, Mike P, Stephen, were all open to listening to like our problems that we have because my crew had issues with certain staff members at one of the places we were at, and when we voiced our concern to them like they are right on it, like they were set to make sure that everything is settled."

"I felt like I was safe to make a mistake."

"It taught me how to be a good conservation leader, how to be a good worker, to have a good work ethic in general. And also, be flexible right, because your office is a truck, you know, and every day is completely different, right? So, and tons of jobs, no matter what they are, having that flexibility skills are important."

"But while it taught me how to be a good worker, it also taught me what a good employer should look like. And the SCA really supported us and had great training. Where I can say really great things, but at the same point now, I'm back in the real world, like the SCA and the PAOC experience have me in like this nice, happy bubble."

"So, I think what one thing it did really good was bring people together."

"But it was like everybody was there for a little bit of a different reason and so it was just really cool to connect with people. And then from that, and then working with them, you get to know them. And I've actually stayed in contact with about half of them from the Uniontown crew. So that's been pretty cool to just like, say, I've met these people this many years ago, and I still know and talk to them."

"I think they did very well at preparing you for a vast array of situations that you might encounter. They did. They tried. I mean, obviously they can't go over every situation, but they gave you all the tools necessary and if there was something you didn't know they made it very accessible to reach out to someone and say, hey, I've got this really difficult situation, I'm not sure what to do. Or, okay, here's kind of a play by play, two weeks before your crew starts. You're going to call everyone, talk to the parents, do this. So, looking back on it now when you're not in that kind of flurry of, oh my gosh, who's to call this person and try and figure all this out?"

"They were accessible and cared about what you were doing and what they were doing."

"You're changing your field work for your 10-month season, the adult crew you're changing and even with the youth crews, I know that they change locations quite frequently. So, you're doing a different project. Every week you're learning a new skill. Every opportunity you're resetting those group dynamics at each site and with each new group of staff you're working with DCNR. So, if I saw in every person that I've worked with that you just have to be on your toes and adaptable to change, which takes some learning, that's not an innate skill for everyone. So, I found that to be very helpful, both in my professional and my personal life."

Section IV – PAOC Member Focus Groups

What could the PAOC improve upon?

When asked what the PAOC could improve, the participants replied that they wanted to see some better projects for the crews, which could be adapted based on the crew. They wanted the tasks to be scaled to fit the crew, depending on the crew size, and to have tasks that were a little more unique. They also wanted to see more diversity within the crews. Participants also wanted a better pairing of crew leaders, to make sure that the crew leaders can work together in a synthetic way. To accomplish that, they wanted to see a connection regarding human resources within the crews. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“One of the issues we faced for a number of different places is just finding stuff for us to do. Because they would give us jobs that I feel like they would expect us to take like a week, maybe week and a half to do and we’d crank it out in two days. And like they’re surprised that we finished it so fast when we were just going at a normal pace, and then they’re just trying to figure out, okay, what else can they do? And they just start throwing all these like little stuff that no one got to, really just trying to satisfy.”

“... since they’re not working with us all the time, they kind of don’t have a good gauge on how adept we are at doing certain tasks. So I think there may be a lack of gauging our skills. That’s fair, because like, some people are better at certain tasks than others.”

“I think, giving crew leaders, whether they worked with the Corps before or not, maybe time to collaborate with the groups that they’re going to be partnering with beforehand before you actually receive a Crew.”

“I was hoping, getting into the corps, that we would have more restorative work to the landscape when in fact, it was really like maintenance and trail building, which is fine.”

“I remember we had assemblies talking about different topics about, we had an initial one talking about what it would be like working in the organization and we had a couple more throughout the time working there. My suggestion would just be how to make them a little more engaging.”

“With the projects that we get, because we didn’t get too much of a variety because, and I understand that with different State Parks and Forests they require different things to be done, because a lot of them are so low on people. It’s just me personally, like an ideal world, I’d be getting a good variety of stuff.”

“I think something that I would see as beneficial is maybe, and maybe they do this and we just weren’t aware of it, but pairing leaders a little better... But if maybe there would have been, I don’t know a questionnaire, or get to know each other or, or something because you’re kind of just placed with this person and you’re in the middle of the woods and it’s like, okay, go lead these 10 high schoolers.”

“But like, maybe having a point of contact for the members to reach out like as anonymous and just say, can you help fix this?”

“But you know, our crew was very diverse and people came from a lot of different backgrounds, educationally in terms of the neighborhoods, in terms of their home, culture, environments. And sometimes there were, you know, comments that definitely probably weren’t meant maliciously, but they might have come across as insensitive, I think to you know, fellow students, and also maybe to the leaders and I think a few of us may have asked our crew leaders just for like, help with, you know, reconciliation or just like mediating the situation and I think I honestly felt more bad for the crew leaders, just because it didn’t seem like they had like as many tools in their toolkit to like, handle that situation at that time.”

“And so maybe just I don’t know, more vetting of potential applicants or figuring out how to best support students in a more difficult situation to continue, could be helpful.”

“I believe maybe a laptop or some type of better device besides our phones, loading all that information still and, and then when I signed up with payCOMM for here, I had issues signing up with my payCOMM for the new job because it kept on wanting to take me back to the SCA stuff. So something, something with that there, and maybe like I said, a device where you only have SCA and DCNR stuff on, and we don’t have a lot of that kind of stuff on our personal phones.”

Section IV – PAOC Member Focus Groups

Has the PAOC influenced or inspired a conservation ethos in you?

This theme asked participants to identify if their conservation ethos was impacted by the PAOC, or if they already had strong views regarding conservation. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“It gave me great perspective on the challenges that we're facing within the state for conservation. So, a better understanding of the invasive species issues that we're having both with plants and insects, so a lot of really great education on that and, and the management of it as well. And then also, we learned, leave no trace principles, like I learned that day one as a member and tried to continue that throughout leadership.”

“But it was cool to see other crew members, in the process of the program, cultivate a deeper appreciation for conservation and I think through the program overall, whether we're talking to youth or adult programs. You know, for the most part, we're all kind of similar generation. And I think that's something that we find that younger generations hold more easily is having environmental view in our scope, you know, being important.”

Final takeaways based on your PAOC experience?

Finally, the participants listed out the key takeaways they had from working with the PAOC. These takeaways included that being outdoors is good for the participants' mental health, and that they really enjoyed being able to get outside in such a unique way. They also stated that they greatly appreciated the networking aspect of working with the PAOC and being able to explore different career opportunities. In addition, they enjoyed being able to meet with people who have a similar interest in working with and representing the outdoors. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Working outdoors is very good for me, it's like, it helps my mental health a lot, which is one of the reasons why I want to go further down this career path.”

“I think for me, it was, I mean, I enjoyed the work. I enjoyed the crew. I enjoyed being a Crew Leader. I liked getting out.”

“For me, I think it was just like the realization of, I think this is what I want to do. Career goal wise, and like, I think this is what I could do forever. And this is where I want to be. This is the type of work I want to do.”

“I definitely think it has broadened my horizons and all the different jobs that are out there, that you'd never really, I never really knew how many jobs were out there for environmental and conservation. And once you start looking, there's a lot.”

“My takeaway would be a segment to the health and wellness.”

“... it was great to meet youth and other mentors and leaders in the field who had a similar interest in like commitment to stewardship and restoration and conservation. There's this takeaway that anyone can be a steward, and we also have a shared responsibility to take care of the spaces that we utilize, to make them accessible for other people. So I really appreciate SCA's commitment to diversity.”

“I think my biggest takeaway was the opportunities that are available in these like not, the traditionally masculine job opportunities.”

“I think for myself, just being able to be adaptable and flexible and just having that confidence in any type of job, even if you're not totally sure, just being like, here you go, you got this, full steam ahead. And then you're like, okay, I'll figure it out. And you do and then the next time you approach something like that, you have just 10 times more confidence. You're like, I've done this before. It's okay if I'm not quite sure how to do it, or I might not be 100% qualified, but I know I'll figure it out.”

“Making sure that I get a career in what I'm passionate about, and if not choosing to volunteer, and aspects that feed your soul in that way.”

Section V

DCNR State Park and State Forest Manager, Forester, and Leader Survey



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Section V. DCNR State Park and State Forest Manager, Forester, and Leader Survey

Methods

This study also sought the perspectives of DCNR field leaders (e.g., state park managers, district foresters, and maintenance supervisors) regarding the PAOC. As with the PAOC member survey, a brief 10 to 15-minute online survey was developed in consultation with PPFF and DCNR. This survey queried the nature of PAOC work within the state park or state forest where respondents currently worked. A series of questions were then asked regarding the quality and value of PAOC work at their location as well as their perception of the readiness and preparation for PAOC project work (for both PAOC staff and members as well as their own staff). Finally, DCNR leaders were asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions about PAOC training needs, what the PAOC does well, what were the most rewarding parts of working with the PAOC, what could be done at their site to improve PAOC project deliver, and what are the most challenging aspects of working with the PAOC. The survey concluded by asking for any additional advice for the future of the PAOC program.

In mid-January 2023, a pre-survey email was sent by DCNR PAOC staff to DCNR site managers, foresters, and supervisors. This pre-survey email explained the purpose of the study and asked them to consider taking a few minutes to share their perspectives. A week later, a former survey participation request with a link to the Survey Monkey survey was distributed using DCNR listservs. One reminder requesting participation in this voluntary survey was sent a week after the first invitation. The survey was then closed several days later, on February 7, 2023. In total, 105 valid surveys were completed, of those only five indicated they had not worked with the PAOC at their site, yielding a final sample size at 100 for the full complement of survey questions. As with the PAOC member survey, means and frequencies for each of the quantitative questions and thematic coding of open-ended comments are reported in the following results section.



Section V. DCNR State Park and State Forest Manager, Forester, and Leader Survey

Sample Description

The survey respondents represented 89 of the 124 state parks and 19 of the 20 state forests. Forty-five percent of respondents were either a state park manager or an assistant park manager, whereas 25 percent were a district forester or an assistant district forester (Table 17). Twenty-five percent were park maintenance supervisors and forestry maintenance supervisors, with the remaining three percent coming from a regional office or holding an environmental education position (Table 17).

Table 17. Title of DCNR Manager/Leader Who Participated in the Survey

Title	%
State Park Manager	35
Park Maintenance Supervisor	22
Assistant District Forester	16
Assistant Park Manager	10
District Forester	9
Forestry Maintenance Supervisor	4
Assistant Regional Manager	1
Environmental Education Professional	1
Regional Manager	1

Participation and Experience with the PAOC at the State Park or Forest District

Table 18. Year(s) of PAOC Participation at the State Park or Forest District

Years	%	Years (cont.)	%
2022	85	2018	47
2021	78	2017	30
2020	57	2016	15
2019	57		

Table 19. What age group crew did you have on site?

Age Group	%
Both Youth and Young Adult	66
Young Adult	26
Youth	5
Can't Remember	3

Respondents were asked if they had the PAOC come to their park or forest, in what year, and which crew. These questions had only one choice from which the respondents could choose. Many of the respondents said they did have the PAOC come to their park or forest. From that, they were asked what year they had a PAOC crew come to their park or forest. This question was an open choice, so they could select multiple years. The most respondents stated they had a crew come in 2022 (85% response) with 2021 as a follow-up year (78% response) (Table 18). 2016 had the least number of responses (15% response) with 2017 as a follow up year (30% response) (Table 18). They were also asked which crew age group they had on site. They had to choose one response only, and the respondents stated that they had both youth and young adult crews come to their park or forest (66% response) (Table 19).

Section V. DCNR State Park and State Forest Manager, Forester, and Leader Survey

The next few queries referred to the types of projects the crews completed within the parks or forests. The respondents were first asked on what types of projects the crews worked. Respondents stated that trail rehabilitation and construction happened most often (84% response), with carpentry and building construction as the follow up response (78% response) (Table 20). Alternatively, parking lot/roadway construction had the least number of responses (1% response) (Table 20).

Table 20. On what types of projects did the crews work? Top 10 projects.

Projects	%
Trail Rehabilitation and Construction	84
Carpentry and Building Construction	78
Natural Resource Protection/Invasive Species Management	53
Habitat Management (Aquatic and Terrestrial)	25
Hiking Trail Amenity Construction	22
Native Plant Installation	21
Fencing Installation and Maintenance	20
Historic Preservation	18
Campground Rehabilitation and Construction	17
Amphitheater Rehab	10

Regarding the projects that were completed, the respondents were asked which were the most beneficial, the second most beneficial, and the third most beneficial projects completed in their park, forest, or regional office. Trail rehabilitation and construction, carpentry and building construction, and natural resource protection/invasive species management were the three most beneficial projects (Table 21). The next most beneficial projects included boundary line work, fencing installation and maintenance, and campground rehabilitation and construction (Table 21).

Table 21. Most Beneficial PAOC Projects

Of the types of projects completed, which one was <i>the most</i> beneficial?	%
Trail Rehabilitation and Construction	40
Carpentry and Building Construction	24
Natural Resource Protection/Invasive Species Management	15
Boundary Line Work	4
Of the types of projects completed, which one was the <i>second</i> most beneficial?	
Trail Rehabilitation and Construction	29
Carpentry and Building Construction	22
Natural Resource Protection/Invasive Species Management	18
Fencing Installation and Maintenance	7
Of the types of projects completed, which one was the <i>third</i> most beneficial?	
Carpentry and Building Construction	26
Trail Rehabilitation and Construction	19
Natural Resource Protection/Invasive Species Management	16
Campground Rehabilitation and Construction	5

Section V. DCNR State Park and State Forest Manager, Forester, and Leader Survey

Managers were then asked why the PAOC did not work on any projects at their park, forest, or regional office. There were only two responses to this question. One was that there was a general lack of participants and staffing, so they were not able to form a crew. Another reason was that the request was not submitted early enough. When asked if they would like a PAOC crew to work at their park or forest, the respondents had to choose between “yes” and “no.” Most of the respondents said “yes” (75%). In terms of what work a crew could perform at any specific park, forest, or regional office, there were only a few responses to this as well. One type of work that was mentioned was trail work. Another was painting and staining buildings. Finally, there were miscellaneous projects, such as making recycling boxes.

Perceived Quality and Professionalism

This query aimed to determine the quality and professionalism of the PAOC.

The question regarding the quality and professionalism of the PAOC can be found in Table 22. Answers were measured on a five-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Participants had to choose one answer per category. Regarding both the quality and the professionalism of the PAOC, the respondents stated that they were either neutral or simply agreed with the following statements (Table 22).

Table 22. PAOC Work Quality and Professionalism

Item:	Mean*	Percent (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
The quality of work performed by the PAOC	3.5	0	15	36	35	14
The professionalism exhibited by PAOC crews and leaders	3.8	0	5	32	41	22

*1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Very Good, 5=Excellent



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Perceptions of PAOC Training

The respondents were asked about their perceptions of the PAOC training using a series of response items such as: having the staff be prepared to work with PAOC crews, training that helped them make an impact in the park, easing the workload of the staff, and how adequately trained the crews were to complete their work in the park or forest. These items were measured on a five-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Respondents were in agreement that the staff were prepared to work with PAOC crews when they arrived on site (91% Agree/Strongly Agree) as well as that the PAOC work helped result in cost-savings for the respondent’s park or forest (75% Agree/Strongly Agree) (Table 23). Overall, respondents agreed that the PAOC crews helped to ease the workload of the park or forest staff (Table 23). When asked whether the PAOC created additional work for the staff, the respondents did not strongly agree (35% Agree/Strongly Agree) (Table 23). They also disagreed with the statement that the PAOC crews completed projects that were not critical to the needs of the park or forest (34% Agree/Strongly Agree) (Table 23).

Table 23. Manager Perceptions of PAOC Contributions

Item:		Percent (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
My staff was prepared to work with PAOC crews when they arrived on site.	4.1	1	1	7	62	29
PAOC work helped result in cost-savings for my region/park/forest.	4	0	4	21	43	32
Staff investment in training PAOC crew members/leaders was well worth their time.	3.9	0	2	25	53	20
The PAOC prepares program participants for professional work in the conservation field.	3.9	1	2	25	52	20
Staff members are receptive to working with the PAOC.	3.9	1	2	17	62	18
PAOC work in my park/forest helped to ease the workload of my staff.	3.8	2	9	22	44	23
PAOC crews were well prepared to do their work when they arrived on-site.	3.8	0	7	27	49	17
PAOC crews helped to complete or address critical infrastructure projects at my park/forest.	3.7	1	10	26	45	18
PAOC crews were adequately trained to complete their work at my park/forest.	3.6	1	9	29	52	9
PAOC created additional work for my staff.	2.9	7	30	28	27	8
PAOC crews completed projects that were useful, but were not critical to the needs of my park/forest.	2.9	5	34	25	31	5

Section V. DCNR State Park and State Forest Manager, Forester, and Leader Survey

Recommendations for PAOC Training

Toward the end of the survey, respondents were asked several open-ended questions. The researchers coded the comments and then generated a codebook and a list of themes and subthemes. Respondents answering these questions provided some ideas on what additional training they would like to see the PAOC crews receive. This was an open-ended question that the respondents had to type in their responses to answer. There were several respondents to this open-ended prompt who stated that the PAOC crews are adequately trained. However, the rest of the responses centered around these three themes: more conservation training, more trade skills training, and having a better-trained crew leader.

More Conservation Training and Education

This response commonly told the story that the respondents wanted to see more training related to the environment and conservation. They listed that there should be more invasive species training, as well as more arboriculture training. In addition, the respondents recommended that there should be more training in trail work techniques. Finally, they think that the resource crew should be briefed by someone from the Resources Management and Planning Division (RMPD) within DCNR, and that this standard should be followed for other unique crews. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“The only problem I ever had was last year when half the crew wasn't trained as a pesticide tech. I don't have the manpower to split the crew and try to run another project on top of the intended invasive species plan.”

“SCA used to provide quality training in trail maintenance and rehabilitation. That has clearly dropped off over time.”

“I strongly believe more trail maintenance and building training would be a valuable skillset. The construction projects typically require staff time and involvement which leads to on-the-job training, whereas trail maintenance can be more of a self-directed project and free up park staff time.”

“In some of the tree wells they put in too much mulch. Maybe a little more arboriculture.”

“...Crews like the resource crews or crews doing unique resource projects should be at least briefed by someone from RMPD.”

“In addition to better training, greater and more consistent experience - one project building on the next would improve their skill set. Jumping from trail construction, to roofing, to invasive suppression doesn't allow the training received on any topic to become fully developed into a skill.”

“Basic carpentry skills.”

“Usually well trained for trail work, but not for general construction such as carpentry and masonry work. They are always willing to learn, but the park is limited on what we have time to teach within project time frame.”

“POC crews are lacking in skills of all types. I see the program as a way for them to gain skills. They should all be trained on chainsaw use and safety, not just the leader or a single crew member.”

“In order to assist with construction projects crews should have basic carpentry and related skills.”

More Trade Skills Training

Respondents wanted to see more training in trade skills, with an emphasis on carpentry. They also wanted to see more chainsaw training. To the left are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

Section V. DCNR State Park and State Forest Manager, Forester, and Leader Survey

Better Trained Crew Leaders

Respondents stated that they wanted to see crew leaders be better trained to take on the tasks of organizing and working with their crews, as well as better trained in terms of trade skills. They also believed that crew leaders should go through a better vetting process. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Issues observed with the PAOC are both training related and the structure of the crew. Much of the deficiency in training could be ameliorated with a full-time crew leader. One well trained, experienced crew leader could greatly increase efficacy of crews.”

“One year I had some great crews the leaders were highly motivated. Another year the crew leader had no leadership skills and was highly unmotivated.”



Attitudes Toward Expanding PAOC Participation

Respondents were asked about whether they would want to expand further into the PAOC program. This question only had three answers, and the respondent could only choose one of them. Most of the respondents stated that they would be interested in expanding their involvement with the PAOC (56% “Yes”) (Table 24). Only a few respondents stated that they were not interested in expanding their involvement with the PAOC (3% “No”) (Table 24). The rest of the responses can be seen to the right.

Table 24. If you had more staff, would you expand your involvement or projects with the PAOC?

Interested in Expanding Involvement with the PAOC?	%
Yes	56
Maybe	41
No	3

Section V. DCNR State Park and State Forest Manager, Forester, and Leader Survey

What the PAOC Does Well

Toward the end of the survey, respondents were asked several open-ended questions. The researchers coded the comments and then generated a codebook and a list of themes and subthemes. One question referred to what the respondents believed that the PAOC does well. This could be in terms of the programming, or what the program brings to the state parks and forests. The responses to this question seemed to center around these four themes: good energy and attitude, eases the workload, provides new opportunities, and a is good hiring pipeline.



Good Energy and Attitude

Respondents stated that the PAOC participants were willing to learn, were professional while working, and were easy to work with. Respondents said they had a good work ethic, and they were able to accomplish a lot and take pride in their work. They also found it to be incredibly helpful to work with a crew who was motivated to work, and excited to work outside. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"I feel like the PAOC provides people who are optimistic and willing to learn. They accomplish many things that, with current staffing commitments, are hard for the parks to accomplish."

"They were very easy to work with and took pride in their work. All you had to do was give them the materials to work with and they would work together to get the work done."

"They stayed busy while working here each year, were eager to learn, were professional in the field."

"The past two years we had fantastic groups with great leaders willing and enjoying working on projects we've needed done at the park. They have a good balance with work ethic without getting themselves burned out. I think the building educational days and other activities they take part in help with this."

"Take instructions well and work well in a team setting."

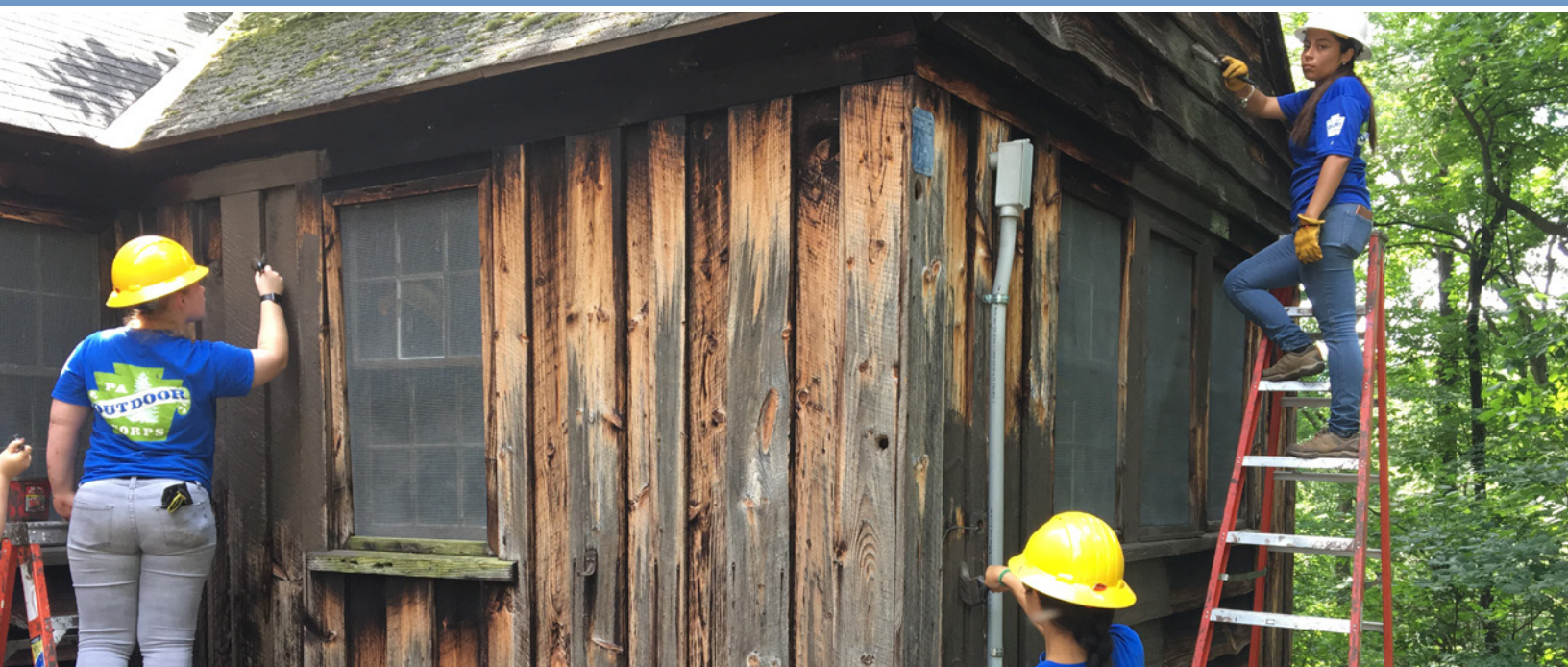
"Receptive to listening and learning. Having an interest in working outdoors and learning about careers with DCNR. Willingness to help and trying to fit in."

"I feel that the program trains these young adults to become professional workers. They follow instructions well, and are typically self-sufficient and can complete tasks without too much management. If they have the materials and tools to complete the job, they will make it happen. The crew leaders have been organized and responsible, which is a must for this type of crew."

"So far almost all of the crew leaders we have worked with have been motivated and helpful. Mike P does a great job getting the requests out and has been very helpful and timely with responses to questions."

"The crews are always motivated, and eager to learn. The members seem to enjoy working outdoors."

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Eases the Workload

The respondents stated that the crews helped to ease the workload of park and forest staff. They really enjoyed that the crews were able to complete projects that were a little more time-consuming or might not have been addressed by the staff for some reason. Some of them also saw the crew as an extra set of eyes in regard to the invasives in the area. In addition, some noted that the PAOC crews had a good funding source, which led to the completion of more projects. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“The extra hands enable us to go beyond our standard busy season operations and continue projects that we could only handle in the spring and fall. It's not only creating opportunities for our future staff but allows the current staff to be involved in larger and more meaningful projects that would have been subbed out or not even considered in the past. I believe our employees, at least at smaller parks, now have a greater chance of involvement in construction projects and when they move on or retire, they will feel they are leaving their legacy.”

“Work to complete projects that otherwise would not be addressed.”

“Properly trained participants in PAOC do ease the workload on park staff.”

“It's an extra hand at times when you really need them. For me it was extra eyeballs on the lookout for invasive plants. I felt like everyone gained from our interaction.”

“Provides funding and manpower to the parks. Provides on the job training for crew members and their crew leaders. Allows parks to hire from PAOC for a variety of different positions.”

“Provides funds and hands to complete projects we would not be able to complete without them! Exposes crew members to the awesomeness of parks and forestry, potential future employee and/or park and forestry advocates. Great well-rounded hands-on training and experience.”

“Handle small but time consuming projects that our staff would take a lot longer to complete due to man power.”

“They recruit well and they have a good funding source.”

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Provides New Opportunities for PAOC Participants

This theme demonstrates that the respondents think that one of the things the PAOC does well is that it provides new experiences and opportunities to its participants. Many of them believe that it gives good training and exposes the youth to potential work opportunities they might receive if they decide they want to continue in this field. Respondents also said that it gave participants new skills that they can use in the 'real world' and exposes them to new environments and facilities. They also said that it provided participants with face time with people who are professionals in their field. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"The PAOC does provide exposure of the participants to state forests and state parks that they probably would not receive otherwise. For the motivated participant, the program provides training and opportunities that are very valuable."

"The program provides so many opportunities for crews to gain experience in a variety of outdoor tasks, and almost all of the skills will be applicable to their future, whether personally or professionally."

"It is good for the youth to get out in the woods and interact with different outdoor job classifications that they may not have known existed."

"It exposes youth to some of the work and operations of state parks and helps them to gain some skills."

"Introduces members to a wide variety of work and new skills as well as state park culture. Funding has been great to support the projects."

"Introduces youth into the field of conservation work and shows them a multitude of different locations in their regions."

"Exposure to real park environments and facilities and face time with park professionals - having opportunities to ask questions and have conversations."

"Provides materials and labor for projects. Gives youth and young adults a chance for meaningful work and a chance to do work within the conservation realm in general. Helps managers perform work they normally would not with current staff."

"It does a good job getting young adults experience with what working with the parks is like. It seems to have worked well for acting as a hiring pipeline into DCNR. It doesn't quite hit experience for crew members that want to get into DCNR law enforcement ranger careers though."

"Prepares young adults for a future career in conservation."

"It is a good recruitment tool for possible new hires interested in our line of work."

"Trains and prepares young people for work culture. It also promotes love in our shared green spaces."

"Providing exposure to the upcoming work force on what to expect working in this field."

"Hopefully it builds our state parks' next rank of constituents as they move into the 'adulthood' phase of life."

"Opportunities for youth to learn about career opportunities in conservation organizations. Have not worked with an adult crew so I cannot speak to them but at least they are working."

"It gives crew leaders and crewmembers a chance to experience the work that goes on in DCNR."

Good Hiring Pipeline

Another thing that respondents said that the PAOC does well is that it creates a good hiring pipeline by providing good exposure and training for young people in the workforce. Many of the respondents also thought that the PAOC brought in the next group of employees for the state park workforce. Finally, the respondents thought that it gave opportunities for youth to learn more about career opportunities that they would be able to find if they decide to go into working in state parks or state forests. To the left are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

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Suggestions for PAOC Project Improvement

Another open-ended question that respondents were asked to answer was about possible improvements they believed could be done to enhance PAOC project delivery. Respondents were asked to fill in their response. The responses centered around these four themes: planning for the crews ahead of time, getting staff involved, having better training, and having a crew at a park or forest consistently each year.

Better Planning for the Crews Ahead of Time

The respondents were very forward about how the parks or forests need to establish plans for the crew ahead of time, which then can be adapted to the size of the crew. They also stated that they wanted to see the crews accomplish projects that were more unique and could be able to further the development of the PAOC participants. The respondents also stated that they did not want the staff to be as involved in the crews' work. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"Find projects that do not require the district maintenance crew's involvement, but tasks that are meaningful and rewarding to the PAOC crew (not mindless tasks like trail clearing, brush cutting.)"

"Difficult to judge project timeframes since every crew brings a different set of skills. Also, the crew's schedule often changes with short notice. To do significant trail work or other projects, a crew needs to be based at a location for an entire season to develop skills, overcome schedule changes, vacancies and have time to complete a project completely."

"Project planning, solicitation, and scheduling needs to occur a full year in advance."

"A little better pre-planning for smoother roll-out upon crew arrival."

"Assist parks with project planning and development, send people onsite to meet with staff, and look around and discuss potential projects."

"If you don't nominate projects, you don't receive projects. Parks need to think outside the box and plan projects that can be completed by the PAOC with limited park staff direction and/or constant oversight."

"Better options for inclement weather work. Alternative learning opportunities."

"Have projects ready and waiting for the PAOC, instead of having them just do invasive work or simple tasks. Have something unique prepared."

"Improved project planning, related to logistics, as well as imbed PAOC crews into "Landscapes" for the season. I feel this would allow the crews and the staff to develop stronger relationships along with improving skillsets that could afford them the opportunity to see projects through from start to finish."

"Selection and timing of project from submission through selection to scheduling needs handled more thoughtfully and patiently."

"A one-page document including crew members, their phone number, and their emergency contact(s). A document with the crew member and what they would like to learn, places to visit, or activity they want to do/try. If we had this ahead of time managers could help the crew leader make these opportunities happen. It's hard to do it on the fly while we have the crews."

"We could plan projects farther in advance to better prepare for additional help."

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More Staff Availability and Involvement with the PAOC

Respondents stated they wanted to see more staff involvement with the PAOC crews. This stems from having more staff available to help the crews, so it was recommended to make sure the timing of the project worked well with the staff's availability. Having more staff available would help to teach the crews more skills and create a more rewarding experience overall. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"If the question is asking what we could do better, I think making sure the timing of the project coincides with our staff's best availability. In terms of improving the program/program delivery, I think better recruitment would result in more awareness/interest in the program and thus ensure dedicated crews. We've had a number of tremendous individuals, but we've also had experiences, mostly with the youth crews, where individuals really didn't have the same level of interest or work ethic."

"More staff involvement would make for a more rewarding experience for all parties and the resource."

"Devote more staff to oversee the work."

"It all comes down to DCNR staff time. The more time we have to give them the better things are. But at times it's hard to juggle the needs of my job and spend time out with the crew. Depending on the crew at times if there is not staff on site there is little productivity."

"Staff that will be directing crews need to have some preparation to receive staff and be made aware of the importance of their roles and impacts that will have on the crews coming to their location."

"We could have more staff involved with the project, especially to prep all the materials, tools, and the work sites."

"More staff interested in teaching skills and mentoring."



Greater Crew Consistency

Crew consistency related to how long the crews were working in each park or forest. This was regarding having the crews consistently at the same park or forest each year, or alternatively having the crew stay at the park or forest for longer so that they can have more of an impact from staying at one site and learning from there. Finally, it relates to making sure the amount of time that the crews have at the park or forest can allow them to finish whatever projects that they started. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"I would like to have them consistently working here each year."

"Assign crews to a park for at least half, if not all, of their working season."

"Longer days."

"Make sure their time allotted can finish projects they started."

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Provide Better Training in Advance of Field Work

This theme demonstrates that the respondents wanted the crews to have better training before beginning to work at the parks and forests. Respondents also wanted expectations to be established before starting the work. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Better skill training PRIOR to deployment. Better leadership development PRIOR to deployment.”

“Establishing expectations with crews prior to beginning work.”

“More infrastructure to house tools and crew for training, rain days storage, safety training, etc. Could be as simple as a pole building to start that they could build and add to over time. Learning basic construction/concrete building trades that could branch out to more such as electrical, finish carpentry, etc.”

“I don't think the youth crews and adult crews should be in the same park together at the same time.”

“Utilize adult crew where individuals can use power tools. More impactful projects.”

Other

On top of these themes, there were some open-ended responses that did not quite fit into a specific theme. This could have been about where the crews could put their tools at the end of the day, having the crew learn some more basic skills, not having the youth and the young adult crews at the park at the same time, and having more impactful projects for the crews. To the left are some of these quotes.



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Most Rewarding Part About Working With the PAOC

Moving on from what the respondents would have improved, the respondents were asked about the most rewarding part of working with the PAOC. Respondents were asked to fill in their opinions in an open-ended format. The responses centered around these four themes: having additional help, seeing their growth and enthusiasm, seeing their career paths, and getting the youth outside.

Appreciated the Additional Help

This theme demonstrates that the respondents enjoyed having extra help from the PAOC crews while they were at their park or forest. In addition, the respondents liked to see the projects move forward at a faster rate with the additional help from the PAOC crews. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Seeing a project move forward faster than if it were just our park staff working on it.”

“Having extra hands.”

“Getting involved in larger projects and meanwhile passing along your knowledge to those who may someday fill your position.”

“Recruiting young adults into the conservation field.”

“When I hear that one of the members accepted a job with DCNR.”

“Making connection for all the members and seeing them grow, some becoming DCNR employees.”

“Feeling like I am teaching the next generation to pick up the work after me.”

“Helping new people become introduced into a career field they enjoy.”

“Working with potential future employees.”

“That the youth are learning about careers and developing a work ethic.”

Assisting with Career Pathways

Regarding this theme, the respondents stated that they really enjoyed being able to pass along the knowledge that they have to the next generation. They also said that they enjoyed seeing the PAOC participants make connections and get recruited into the conservation field. The respondents were excited at the possibility of having the next generation work in this field, especially at DCNR. To the left are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

Getting Youth Outside and Engaged in Conservation

This theme pertained to the respondents stating that they enjoyed seeing the youth get outside in a way that they might not be able to before. Respondents liked to see the younger generation being interested in natural resources and learning how to take care of the environment for future generations. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Getting youth outside.”

“It is nice to see younger adults coming out to the park to give back.”

“Young minds can be guided to taking care of the environment for future generations.”

“Seeing younger adults building interest in the natural resources.”

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Observing PAOC Crew Growth and Enthusiasm

This theme refers to the respondents seeing the crews complete their projects with enthusiasm and motivation. The respondents stated that they really enjoyed being around PAOC crews that were motivated to work outside and get their projects completed. The respondents thought that it was highly rewarding for the PAOC crews to work on a project and be able to come back to the park or forest for years to come and still see the project that they completed. The respondents especially enjoyed seeing the growth of the crews while they were at their park or forest. The crews are grateful for their experience and have a sense of pride in what they completed. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"Their enthusiasm from start to finish. When a project gets completed they are grateful for what they've accomplished and learned."

"The participants showing interest in the forest and learning new things."

"Teaching them skills and having something to show when the work is complete."

"Seeing the pride and sense of accomplishment in some of the participants that are really interested in the outdoors and work that they are doing."

"Possibly teaching them something or working on a particular project that they will remember for a long time."

"Seeing the enthusiasm for the work / program and the camaraderie between the crew members."

"At the end of the day it's not always about the work that was accomplished while they are here. The values and work ethics the young adults learned or built upon while they were here is the big picture. Being a mentor and teaching these young adults that there is a career in DCNR, and other Commonwealth agencies is highly rewarding!"

"Empowerment of the next generation, while instilling a sense of responsibility toward natural resource conservation."

"Great staff and crew. Willing to learn and help wherever was needed. Worked well with them and the project turned out great."

"Teaching new skills to crew members that actually want to learn."

"Seeing the projects evolve from an idea to implementation. Knowing that the crew members are learning valuable skills and helping them understand what a difference they are making out on the park."

"It's cool to see people find things they are passionate about and get paid doing so. It's neat to see the lightbulb go off in their heads that this can be a career path for them in the long run."

"It is nice to see them complete the various projects that we have had them work on and know that they can come back to the park in years to come and see that the fruits of their labor are still there being enjoyed by park visitors."

"Seeing the PAOC members connect with the resource, and specifically the project they are working on. Makes me proud to see them taking pride in their work (and also getting a shout out at the end of the year celebration!)."

"Working with a crew that is genuinely motivated and interested in parks, wanting to make a difference. Seeing completion of a task and interpreting for them the impact their work will have on park visitors."

"When you meet crew members that are there for the mission not for a paycheck. You can tell when someone is there for the right reasons, and you hope to see them in the work force someday."

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Most Challenging Part About Working with the PAOC

Next, the respondents were asked what is the most challenging part of working with the PAOC. Respondents were asked to fill in their opinions in an open-ended format. The responses centered around these four themes: being ill-prepared, time management, being short staffed, and the engagement of PAOC participants.

Being Ill-Prepared for PAOC Crews

The respondents felt that they were ill-prepared for their crew. This could have been from not knowing the crews ahead of time to knowing what projects they were capable of completing, either due to their own knowledge or the crew size. Alternatively, being ill-prepared could have been having projects that could be adapted to the crews or be adapted to different weather conditions. Allowing the park or forest staff to have the contact information for the PAOC crew members was also a challenging part of working with the PAOC program. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Coordinating their work since we don't know the crew or their skills until they show up on site.”

“Slowing down in the busy season to prep and work on the project's educational aspect ahead of the project.”

“Weather. Not having alternative projects they could work on that were able to be done when it was raining.”

“Prep time by park staff and making sure coordination efforts are in place to get multiple projects and day to day tasks done at once, both park and PAOC. Sometimes it can be tough, or slower to complete projects but I feel it is worth it to give the PAOC crew experience that will be life/job experience changing.”

“Rushing to properly permit projects and lack of review.”

“Gathering information ahead of time about the crews. Preassembled: Crew rosters with contact info, gear lists, and crew members interests that is provided at the initial email exchange with the crew leader would be very help alleviate this.”

“Planning and organizing to get staff and POC together to work on projects while dealing with unpredictable weather and other issues that pop-up in the district.”

“Organizing and administering the projects.”

“Having projects for the crew skill level.”

“Motivating the crew members and getting them to buy in to the project.”

“Dealing with members of the crew not actually interested in working.”

“Some of the youth crews aren’t motivated or don’t like the work so it is hard to keep them engaged.”

Struggles with the Engagement of PAOC Participants

This theme demonstrated that it was hard to motivate some crew members and keep them working on the projects that they needed to work on. This theme did not seem like a commonality, but it appeared that the respondents still believed that getting the crews to work together and maintain a good work ethic was difficult, nonetheless. to the left are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

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Better Time Management

Time management as a theme describes how the respondents believed that the crews did not use their time working at the park or forest as efficiently as they could have. Respondents thought that the crews did not have enough time at the park or forest regarding the length of projects and weather conditions. The respondents also stated that they wanted to spend more time with the crews during their time at the respective park or forest. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Time. PAOC is growing and their time on site isn’t always sufficient for some projects to be completed. PAOC is shared evenly as possible, but I would enjoy having them on site for longer periods.”

“Time management. With all the extra people and projects mixed in with standard operations and unpredictable weather conditions.”

“Because of travel and breaks, they only completed about 3 hours of work in an 8-hour shift during the 2023 season.”

“Their hours don’t really reflect a normal working day at the park. By the time they get here, do their stretching, then before you know it, it is lunch. And they usually have to leave earlier than we do, it can really shorten a day’s worth of work. You ask for two weeks of work, but it really turns out to be a week’s worth.”

“Staff time dedication and often timing of the projects, particularly during our busy summer seasons. Sometimes staff working with the crews have issues with motivating the crew members.”

“The fact that we only have them for short bouts of time. We have to hope we get materials in in time and that the weather cooperates during their time at the park.”

“Trying to keep PAOC projects moving forward, while not falling behind on normal operations and staff projects, i.e., short staffed at park.”

“Limited staffing. Parks seem to operate on skeleton crews. The PAOC crews are helpful. If they have good guidance and direction from park staff they are better motivated and trained on whatever project is in front of them.”

“It takes staff time to get these projects set up. Also, some projects have to be completed by park staff because we don’t have the PAOC crew long enough to finish. A phased approach works with trail rehab but some projects (i.e., bridge rehab, pavement repairs) can’t be left in an uncompleted state.”

“Not knowing the experience levels of the crew and how much additional staff will need to be dedicated to projects while they are here.”

“Some crews have more skills in certain areas than others and you are never quite sure what you are going to get when you put projects on the signup sheet.”

“You typically have to designate a staff person and sometimes there are vacancies and staff out so you need to find a way to keep PAOC projects going since you can’t just reschedule.”

“Coordination with staff/balancing park operations in busy times of the year.”

Too Short-Staffed to Work Effectively with PAOC Crews

This theme describes the statements that respondents made in terms of the difficulties of being with the PAOC crews while being short staffed at their park or forest. Respondents stated that it was difficult to maintain normal operations (especially during the busy season) while keeping the PAOC crews moving forward in their projects. They further went on to state that it was hard to have the projects set up for the crews upon arrival, especially when they did not know the levels of experience of the crews. To the left are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

Section V. DCNR State Park and State Forest Manager, Forester, and Leader Survey

Managers' and Foresters' Parting Advice and Thoughts on the PAOC

Finally, the last open-ended question the respondents were asked was on their final advice or parting thoughts they might have for improving the PAOC. Respondents were asked to fill in their response. There were several individuals who did not have any advice for improving the PAOC. However, those who did provide answers can be categorized by these four themes: longer seasons, better recruiting and interviewing, managing expectations, and having motivated crew leaders.

Longer Seasons

The respondents wanted the crews to be at the locations for longer periods of time so they can build their skills up through more unique projects at these sites. They also wanted to keep the crew at one site the whole season and have them work on one bigger project from beginning to end so they could get the satisfaction of seeing their creation come to life. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"I think more crews based at locations for longer periods of time would allow for more skill development and more significant projects at more sites."

"Keep them in one place longer."

"More of a thought - would it be better to have crews own a project(s) from cradle to grave in one landscape vs. crews having a small window at many different parks, but not completing anyone task."

Better Recruiting and Interviewing

This theme demonstrated that the respondents wanted to see a better recruiting effort in terms of the PAOC crews. These recruiting efforts could be in terms of going to high schools, career fairs, trade schools, and other statewide scholastic events. The respondents would like to see a bigger crew with participants who are motivated to work within the PAOC. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"I think I'd like to see more robust recruiting efforts. Not sure if people are actually getting into the schools and promoting the program directly, but I think there would be value in it."

"Continue to refine the interview process to weed out those individuals who are not appropriate for the program."

"Recruitment / advertisement efforts to build bigger crews."

"I'm not sure how the program is marketed, so take this with a grain of salt, but a more robust presence at career fairs, trade schools, and statewide school events such as 4H, and Envirothon, might help bolster interest."



Section V. DCNR State Park and State Forest Manager, Forester, and Leader Survey



Having Motivated Crew Leaders

The respondents stated they believed that having motivated PAOC crew leaders will lead to motivated PAOC crews. They thought there should be better trained crew leaders with at least one year of experience or more. They also thought there should be full time salary crew leader positions so they can provide stability and leadership depth to their respective crews. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Choose PAOC leaders that are self starters and motivated. On inclement weather days a lot of times they are eager to call off the work day, when in reality there is always some kind of work that we could have them doing.”

“... If possible, having crew leaders who have at least one year of experience or more.”

“Better train the leaders to lead the crew. When the leader is screwing off the crew follows.”

“Sometimes, the groups are not as self-motivated as others. I found this to rely heavily on their leader’s own self-motivation.”

“The crews need to have a leader that can lead the project from budget, purchasing, and oversight without heavy involvement from the District.”

“Create full time salary crew leader positions. This would give stability and leadership depth to the program.”

Managing Expectations

This theme describes that the respondents would like to see more expectations be established for the crews ahead of time. This could be from making sure they have some training prior to working in a park or forest or preparing them for working in an environment that requires physical labor. The respondents would also like to see more help with project planning to help ease the workload on their staff. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“Do not give the crew members false hope when it comes to our expectations of them. They cannot work independently on most projects and they need to understand that most of the work is going to require physical labor. They are expected to do work that is normally completed by a semi-skilled laborer or maintenance repairman.”

“I am not sure what training POC members receive before they come out and work on projects but maybe more communication on that subject as well as better communication with the park managers to make sure things are done the correct way or to the park's wishes.”

“Just more help with the project planning to ease the workload on staff and expand the project pool--extra eyes on the park might lead to more project ideas.”

Section VI

Interviews with Key PAOC Organizational Stakeholders

Section VI. Interviews with Key PAOC Organizational Stakeholders



Methods, Measures, and Data Collection

The PAOC is made possible through operational, logistical, and financial support from several organizational partners such as DCNR, L&I, SCA, and PPFF. Leaders and key PAOC liaisons from these organizations were contacted by the research team and asked to participate in an in-depth interview to represent their own (and their organization's) perspectives on the PAOC program. Interviews were scheduled in March 2023 and were conducted over videoconference platforms (i.e., Zoom or Microsoft Teams) and transcribed using Otter.ai software. A series of semi-structured questions were posed, and follow-up questions were asked to clarify or to better understand a certain response or perspective. The interviews began by asking the partners to discuss their understanding of the PAOC history and their organization's role in the PAOC – past and present. After that introductory question, partners were then asked what the PAOC does well and what outcomes they feel the program is achieving. Partners were also asked what they felt were opportunities to improve the PAOC and finally, if there was anything else they wanted to add about the PAOC. To ensure a degree of confidentiality, names are not provided and only organizations will be associated with themes and quotes. The research team reviewed transcripts to identify consistent themes across partners as well as to identify distinctly unique themes from given partner members. Quotes associated with these themes were also identified and linked to the particular organization(s). What follows is a brief summary of themes and quotes that represent the different partner responses.

Program Strengths

The in-depth interviews began by asking stakeholders to describe how their organization intersects with and contributes to the PAOC. Stakeholders discussed the challenges and opportunities associated with youth employment and the need to educate and train a diverse conservation workforce and populace. While the former Pennsylvania Youth Conservation Corps program addressed some of these goals, that program had been moribund and had its financing reallocated elsewhere. Governor Wolf's challenge to state agencies to address youth unemployment and its challenges prompted DCNR and its partner organizations to quickly create and pilot the PAOC, which has grown over the years and is paying some early dividends in conservation job placement in the state. Stakeholders acknowledged the importance of the entire partnership to various aspects of PAOC vitality – e.g., L&I's financial support, SCA's hiring, training, and developmental support, and PPFF's communications and project financing support. They also agreed that the PAOC is a leadership and personal development program as much as it is a workforce training and placement program.

Section VI. Interviews with Key PAOC Organizational Stakeholders

The next question focused on what the PAOC does well and what outcomes it has achieved to date. Their responses were coded into the following themes: empowering youth development and completion of projects.

Empowering Youth Development

The participants believed that one of the things that the PAOC does well is empowering the next generation and giving them new opportunities. This includes helping them with employment, or employing them with DCNR, as well as educating them further on working in the conservation and environmental fields. The PAOC gives space to students to learn new skillsets that help prepare them for their future and for working in the environmental field. Below are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

"I think the corps inspires young people and provides them with an understanding of the natural resources and working in the outdoor space."

"I think that it teaches... a good work ethic, and an understanding of what it means to work hard."

"They learn skills that make them employable as they exit out of this short-term job and into something that they might spend their lifetime, and they can go into those job interviews with a skill set that they might not have gotten from other types of jobs... these are very specific skills that are needed for certain jobs if they want to become landscapers or... nursery men or they want to work somewhere in the outdoor space."

"I think for a lot of people this program is serving as that gateway, that catalyst to get them into the next step in their life, whether it's schooling or a job in a professional conservation profession, or any other profession."

"I think it has done a really good job of introducing participants to state parks and state forests."

"So, we're providing members in the program, both youth and young adult with a variety of skills to do all those things, and that starts with training and then carries on through on the job training throughout the season."

"We're getting an incredible amount of work done in our state parks and state forests."

"We get a tremendous amount of work done."

"The learning curve is pretty steep, but I think we are where we are today from the level of projects that these folks are doing. And the skills that they're learning really do carry through."

"One of the main positive outcomes is really doing good work in our state parks and forests."

"There are many, many, many projects that are on the list, so to speak. But that list of maintenance and upgrades often gets overlooked because more pressing things are what's on the list to be tackled by our seasonal staff or full-time staff, so these projects like fixing trails ... all of those are things that make our parks and forests much more favorable in the eyes of our visitors, so they see a really spiffy location. And that's because of the work that these young people did in the parks."

Completion of Projects

The next thing that the PAOC does well according to respondents is the higher number of projects completed due to the number of PAOC participants within the state parks and forests. Having a higher number of projects completed has been beneficial for the parks and forests and their respective employees. To the left are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

Section VI. Interviews with Key PAOC Organizational Stakeholders

Ideas for PAOC Program Improvement

The respondents were asked if they had any program improvements they wanted to see for the PAOC. Through analyzing the transcripts from the interviews, the following is a list of three themes: increasing networking, increasing diversity, and increasing influential projects.

Increasing Networking

One of the improvements that the respondents wanted to see was an increase in networking opportunities for the crews. This could be in terms of meeting and maintaining relationships with individuals, and educating them on possible career opportunities in the field that they potentially wanted to work in. Quotes that demonstrate this theme are shown on the right.

“I think one of the opportunities is more engagement with other stakeholders. I think that’s really important. Particularly if the young people are not necessarily interested in working in state government or want to work in some area of conservation.”

“Being able to develop that network, and that network can also help them find volunteer opportunities, meet other people. Learn new skills. So I think that’s critical.”

“The other goal of this program is diversifying DCNR’s workforce. There’s still a huge opportunity there. I would like to see a little bit more diversity in our makeup itself, in our corps members...”

“I think we’re focused mostly on race. Gender is also very important. And it’s something we pay attention to in the corps as well. We were, you know, we’ve got all female crews before and it’s been awesome.”

“I would like to see the diversity of the participants continue to grow to be more representative of the Commonwealth population.”

“I will say that our diversity... it’s heads and tails above what it isn’t. Right, but it’s not as high as we think it should [be].”

Increasing Diversity and Representation

When asked about some improvements that the PAOC should strive for, the respondents replied by saying that they should aim to increase diversity within the workforce. This could be through race, gender, and neurodivergent audiences, as well as any others. To the left are some quotes that represent this theme.

Increasing Influential or Signature Projects

One last improvement that was mentioned was that there should be more influential projects for the PAOC crews. This could be projects that the crews could complete from beginning to end that give them an increased skill set. It could also be bringing in more specialty crews that are able to focus on one specific skill set and build that up over the course of the PAOC program. All these improvements were mentioned previously in the PAOC Members Survey as well as the PAOC Managers Survey. To the right are some quotes that demonstrate this theme.

“I think we could, again, look at other types of specialty skills that they could really hone in on a specific skill and stay focused on that.”

“I think there’s an improvement there and a potential for growth, to have corps go into communities and help.”

“So we have a young corps, you know, but can we set up a senior corps aspect of this program where we’re looking at people that are 55 and have who are looking for employment in this space.”

“Particularly for the younger folks, they can develop a little more meaningful projects where I think doing something meaningful is so much more empowering than doing busy work.”

Section VII

Summary of Key Study Takeaways and Recommendations

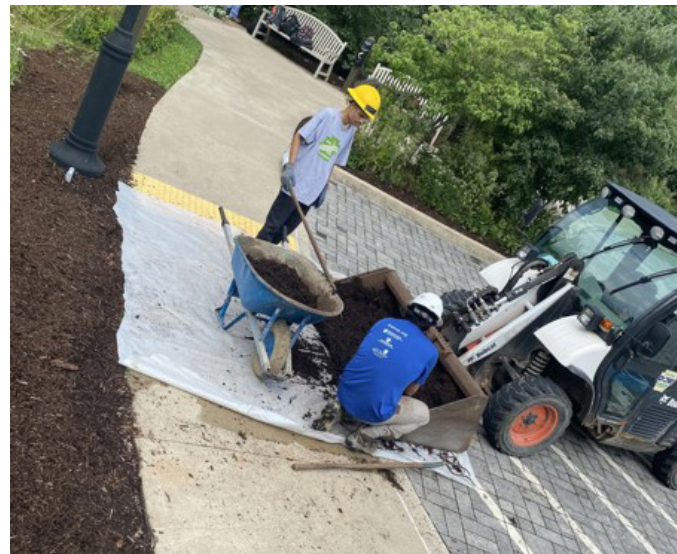


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Section VII. Summary of Key Study Takeaways and Recommendations

Areas of Program Strength and Impact

Pennsylvania's conservation community continues to face environmental and societal challenges that require a passionate and trained workforce that represents the communities served. For a number of reasons, it has been difficult to identify, train, and hire the next generation of conservation leaders. However, workforce and youth development programs such as the PAOC are a promising strategy to close this gap. The purpose of this study was to assess the PAOC on its strengths and weaknesses through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Completing this study has led to a better understanding of program strengths that should be continued as well as several takeaways and recommendations to improve the program. These recommendations were developed through reviewing the different data sources to identify common themes and compelling ideas for improvements.



The PAOC program has grown in its enrollment, reach, and impact since its inception, weathering the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and now embarking on its eighth season, with more than 20 work crews spanning different parts of the state and including specialty work crews. The communications and working relationships between partner organizations and key staff appear strong. There is also evidence from the surveys and interviews that the PAOC creates a pipeline to conservation jobs and provides PAOC members with new skills and experience with work ethics and responsibilities. On the developmental side of things, the PAOC program has had a strong impact on youth and young adult teamwork and leadership development, has developed better knowledge of conservation career opportunities and conditions, and has provided personal benefits related to health and a sense of self-efficacy.

By all accounts, the PAOC should be considered a high-quality, model program that has thrived due to leadership support, the efforts of key partners, and the hard work of the PAOC youth and adult crews. PAOC members appreciated learning new things and having new experiences while enjoying the beauty of the outdoors. PAOC member surveys and focus groups indicated they felt supported during their experience, were empowered to make decisions, and most importantly felt they were allowed make mistakes to learn and grow from them. DCNR and SCA offer a good complement of training opportunities for PAOC members and they conduct annual assessments of the PAOC program – both in terms of activities and projects accomplished, as well as end-of-season evaluations and feedback from PAOC members.

However, a statewide program such as this requires extensive coordination and communication. This program would benefit significantly from increased human capital. Hiring dedicated personnel to manage operations and field coordination could better address program concerns and lead to an increased number of crews and program participants, which in turn would further strengthen the conservation workforce throughout the state. There are some promising developments that are happening in this area. For example, new DCNR PAOC program staff members are being hired to address operational needs, but more could be accomplished with additional staff hires, particularly regionally at the site coordination level.

There are many program strengths that should be recognized and continued (e.g., program design, offered training, focus on teamwork and empowerment). However, this study also sought to help partner members sustain and improve upon what they have built. What follows are a series of researcher-generated recommendations based upon consistent themes and data that crosscut the different studies completed as part of this overall assessment. Some of these recommendations are short-term, specific steps while others are more long-term strategic efforts to improve upon program outcomes and reach. Partner members (i.e., DCNR, SRC, L&I, PPFF) are encouraged to work collaboratively to refine and pursue these steps. Other stakeholders such as local and state policymakers and officials are encouraged to assist PAOC partners in supporting the long-term sustainability of this program through partnerships, technical assistance, and funding.

Section VII. Summary of Key Study Takeaways and Recommendations



Recommendations for the Future

Diversity and Inclusivity

One thing mentioned consistently throughout the surveys, focus groups, and interviews was that the PAOC needs to increase the diversification of its members and leaders. This could be diversifying in terms of race, gender, sexual identity, or in other ways. The demographic profile of PAOC participants has fluctuated year-to-year but has remained less than 20 percent non-white (12 percent in 2021). Creating a more representative profile is admittedly difficult work but could be bolstered through:

- Form strategic partnerships with minority outdoor recreation and conservation groups.
- Initiate targeted hiring of PAOC team leaders who represent the profile of non-white and/or non-male PAOC members.
- Address any perception of racism, sexism, ageism, etc., immediately when present.
- Utilize the GIS maps to expand target recruitment areas.
- Create Help/Tip Line for HR Concerns and Conflict Resolution.
- Provide further DEI/CR training to crew leaders.
- Host listening sessions with underrepresented groups to better understand what would make the program attractive.
- Consider English as a Second Language programs as areas for recruitment.
- Manage generational issues through education and training.

Sustainable Funding and Long-term Planning

It is important to identify a more sustainable funding model to support long-term PAOC planning and investments. This was mentioned throughout stakeholder interviews, and it is important to have a longer funding horizon to account for activities and initiatives. The program would be assisted by funding directed toward additional DCNR staff positions whose purpose would be to help coordinate PAOC projects and logistics by region. With a longer funding and planning horizon, it is advisable to conduct a multi-partner strategic planning effort to set the direction for the PAOC over the next five years.

Section VII. Summary of Key Study Takeaways and Recommendations

Types of Work Performed and Its Connection to the Larger Conservation Community

It is important to work on diversifying the types of work performed, both in terms of project scope and complexity. This includes:

- Provide PAOC crews with work toward “signature projects” beyond routine maintenance to provide a greater long-term “connection to place” for PAOC alumni and their families.
- Expand educational content related to PAOC projects to allow participants to learn from the projects they are working on and see where those projects sit within the larger scope of conservation.
- Convey to PAOC crews the value of what they are doing even if it seems like busy work (e.g., trimming trails).
- Increase networking opportunities with DCNR staff and local conservation/recreation professionals – work to maintain these connections post-experience; consider other professions that support conservation and professional associations (Example: Pa Association of Environmental Professionals).
- Advance site-project planning – matching crew capacity, time availability, and skills to project needs – PAOC crews may be able to stay at a site longer, engage with staff more deeply, and see the bigger impact of their work.
- During interviews... set expectations concerning schedule and time commitments.
- During interviews, set expectations on the projects performed.

While not a widespread concern, some PAOC members also expressed a desire for a quicker and more direct manner to receive assistance for human resource concerns related to conflict resolution and the work environment. One strategy would be to create a confidential tip line to help resolve PAOC crew member concerns.

The Post-PAOC Experience – Increased Communications and Clearer Job Pathways

There are opportunities to enhance the post-PAOC experience including increased communications, connections, updates, and pathways to job opportunities (e.g., through social media, alumni events, reunions) and more direct pathways to DCNR employment (e.g., allow credits to be earned toward job positions and increase DCNR job postings on the PAOC alumni lists).

The PAOC experience provides valuable leadership, people, and hard skills, and (with sufficient funding) there are opportunities to provide additional experiences for youth participants (e.g., teaching outdoor recreation skills, having conservation conversations, discussing policy issues, self-care).

Several PAOC members also expressed a desire for expanded certifications and training. These could include invasive species management, arboriculture, trail work, chainsaws, and leadership, among other training. Several PAOC alumni wanted to receive such training as part of the planning effort prior to their deployment for the upcoming season.

Other thoughts include:

- Connect crew members to non-profit conservation organizations or to the Conservation Volunteer Program to further develop leadership and conservation knowledge, skills, and network.
- Utilize diverse networks to discuss career opportunities.
- Consider a 3–4-month program targeting college students for summer employment.
- Explore the idea of an apprenticeship program.
- Explore opportunities for college credit or certification programs.
- Explore the idea for a ‘senior’ crew for individuals older than the adult crew maximum age.

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Appendix A.

Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps Participant Questionnaire

Appendix A. Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps Participant Questionnaire

Thank you for taking a few minutes to take the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps (PAOC) survey. As a program alum or current participant, we are interested in learning about your experiences with this program. This survey should take no more than 12 minutes and will provide PAOC partners with insights concerning the short- and long-term effects of the program. Respondents who complete this questionnaire can provide their contact information at the end of the survey and receive a complimentary \$15 Amazon gift card. Contact information is for mailing the gift cards and will not be connected with your survey responses. Please click continue below to begin your participation in this study...

Q1 - First, to see if you qualify for this study, were you a participant in the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps (PAOC) program?

☐ Yes (proceed to the next question)

☐ No (thank you for your time, but this survey is only for PAOC participants past and present)

Q2 - Second, how old are you?

☐ 15 (obtain parent/guardian consent page)

☐ 16 (obtain parent/guardian consent page)

☐ 17 (obtain parent/guardian consent page)

☐ 18 (proceed to the next question)

☐ 19 (proceed to the next question)

☐ 20 (proceed to the next question)

☐ 21-25 (proceed to the next question)

☐ 26 or older (proceed to the next question)

Q3 - From the list below, please check which one best described your role/position in the PA Outdoor Corps hereafter referred to as PAOC (check only one)

Q3a ☐ Youth Crew Member

Q3b ☐ Youth Crew Leader

Q3c ☐ Adult Community Crew Member

Q3d ☐ Adult Community Crew Leader

Q3e ☐ Adult Roving Crew Member

Q3f ☐ Adult Roving Crew Leader

Q3g ☐ Cultural Resource Crew Member

Q3h ☐ Cultural Resource Crew Leader

Q4 - What program year(s) were you enrolled in the PAOC? (check all that apply)

Q4a ☐ 2016

Q4b ☐ 2017

Q4c ☐ 2018

Q4d ☐ 2019

Q4e ☐ 2020

Q4f ☐ 2021

Q4g ☐ 2022

Appendix A. Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps Participant Questionnaire

Q5 - What topics/projects did your PAOC experience include? (check all that apply)

- Q5a ☐ Natural Resource Protection/Invasive Species Management
- Q5b ☐ Habitat Management (aquatic and terrestrial)
- Q5c ☐ Carpentry and Building Construction
- Q5d ☐ Historic Preservation
- Q5e ☐ Trail Rehabilitation and Construction
- Q5f ☐ Parking Lots/Roadway Construction
- Q5g ☐ Boundary Line Work
- Q5h ☐ Campground Rehabilitation and Construction
- Q5i ☐ Community Park Maintenance and Construction
- Q5j ☐ Streambank Restoration
- Q5k ☐ Native Plant Instillation
- Q5l ☐ Crop Tree Release/Branch Removal
- Q5m ☐ Fencing Installation and Maintenance
- Q5n ☐ Amphitheatre Rehab
- Q5o ☐ Forest Stand Maintenance
- Q5p ☐ Community Tree Inventories
- Q5q ☐ Forest Nursery Support
- Q5r ☐ Boating Facility Installation and Maintenance
- Q5s ☐ Hiking Trail Amenity Construction
- Q5t ☐ Other – Q5tother - Please specify _____

Q6 – Of the topics/projects listed above, which one would you say was the primary focus/project of your PAOC experience? (Choose only one)

Q7 - What crew were you a part of during your PAOC work? (Please type in the name of your crew)

Q8 - Thinking back on your experiences with the PAOC, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements (Strongly Disagree-Strongly Agree)

Introduced me to new people who share a passion for conservation and outdoor recreation	_____
Enhanced my leadership skills	_____
Helped to educate me on issues facing outdoor recreation and conservation in Pennsylvania	_____
Gave me exposure to new career options	_____
Increased my conservation ethic	_____
Exposed me to new perspectives and ideas from those who have different backgrounds than me	_____
Contributed to the growth of my professional network	_____
Provided new outdoor recreation skills	_____
Helped me identify education paths to support my career interests	_____
Put me at an advantage when trying to find a job	_____
Prepared me to enter the conservation workforce	_____
Affected the career I chose/am choosing	_____
Introduced me to new outdoor recreation activities	_____
Made me more inclined to volunteer for social or environmental causes	_____
Helped me understand where I could volunteer to continue to build my skills	_____
Gave me connections that helped me get a job	_____

Appendix A. Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps Participant Questionnaire

Q9 - What mentorship or job training opportunities did you pursue while serving in PAOC? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Job Shadowing
- ☐ Resume Writing Workshop
- ☐ Interview Skills Workshop
- ☐ Skill-Up Online Training
- ☐ Networking with Professional Staff
- ☐ Other – Q9 other Please specify _____

In addition to program impacts, participants were also asked about the impacts of skills, abilities, and awareness within the following areas. These were measured on... With regard to skills, a majority felt that they improved their fieldwork skills as well as their problem-solving skills. Inversely, they responded that their skills did not improve as much in regard to their planning skills and customer/visitor skills.

Q10 - To what extent did your participation in the PAOC improve your skills in the following areas... (Never to a Great Deal)

- Field work skills _____
- Problem solving skills _____
- Communication skills _____
- Job/workplace readiness _____
- Planning skills _____
- Customer/visitor services _____

Q11 - In the domain of their ability improvement, (strong across the board) (Never to a Great Deal)

- Ability to work as part of a team _____
- Leadership experience _____
- Workplace motivation _____
- Professional relationships _____
- Attention to detail _____
- Ability to work independently _____
- Asking for help when needed _____
- Being better able to accept constructive feedback _____
- Time management _____
- Workplace reporting (timecard and duties) _____

Q12 - To what extent did your participation in the PAOC improve your awareness of the following... (Never to a Great Deal)

- Understanding the daily responsibilities of a professional working at DCNR or the environmental field. _____
- Knowledge of career opportunities at PA DCNR or the environmental field _____
- Interest in pursuing a career in the environmental field _____
- Interest in pursuing a career at PA DCNR _____

Q13 - Please rate the following on a scale (Never to A Great Deal).

- Was your voice heard through your PAOC experience? _____
- Has your PAOC experience inspired further career training or study? _____
- Have you maintained contact with other PAOC members or crew leaders? _____
- Have other PAOC members or crew leaders provided support to you after your time with the corps? _____

Appendix A. Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps Participant Questionnaire

Q14 - Please rate the quality of the following based on your PAOC experience (Poor to Excellent)

The PAOC Program Itself	_____
PAOC Crew Leaders	_____
Training/Skills Building provided through the PAOC	_____
PAOC Mentors (separate from the Crew)	_____
Fellow PAOC Crew Members	_____
Support provided through the PAOC	_____
Follow-up engagement/communication from the PAOC after your experience was completed	_____

Q15 - Overall, how satisfied were you with your PAOC experience?

- ☐ Extremely Dissatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Dissatisfied
- ☐ Neither
- ☐ Somewhat Satisfied
- ☐ Extremely Satisfied

Q16 - If you had to decide all over again whether to join PAOC, what would you decide? (Select one)

- ☐ Would definitely enroll without hesitation
- ☐ Would probably still do it, but with some reservations or conditions
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Would not enroll – Q16why not? (why not enroll) _____

Q17 - Based on your PAOC experience, are you interested in pursuing a career in the environmental, conservation, or outdoor recreation field?

- ☐ Yes, and I'm already working in this field full-time, part-time, or as an intern (then skip pattern to the next question)
- ☐ Yes, I'm interested, but I'm not working in the field yet
- ☐ No, I'm not interested in working this field (Is there any particular reason you are not interested in working in the environmental, conservation, or outdoor recreation field? Q17 any reason not? _____)

Q18 -What certifications did you garner while in the Outdoor Corps?

- ☐ None (skip next two certification questions)
- ☐ One or more (please list _____) – Q18 Cert then go to next certification question...

Q19 - Did any of those certifications help you secure employment?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Q20 - Do you maintain any of those certifications?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Appendix A. Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps Participant Questionnaire

Q21 - How likely would you be to attend an in-person PAOC alumni event in the future? (Very Unlikely to Very Likely)

Q22 - What was the best or your favorite part of your PAOC experience?

Q23 - If you could tell PAOC to improve aspects of the program, what would those suggestions be?

Finally, we have just a few demographic questions for you...

Q24 - Which of the following best describes your status at present? (check only one)

☐ Working at a Full-time job (Follow up prompt – Where are you employed now, What is your job title?)

☐ Working at a Part-time job (Follow up prompt – Where are you employed now, What is your job title?)

☐ Enrolled as a High School Student

☐ Enrolled as a College Student (What is your major?) _____

☐ Enrolled in a Trade/Technical School (What is the trade you are training in?) _____

☐ Not working or Unable to work

Q25 - Do you currently work at an environmental, conservation, or outdoor recreation organization?

☐ Yes Q25 what org? (what is that organization? _____)

☐ No

Q26 – Please indicate which of the following best describes your employer?

☐ Public/governmental agency

☐ Nonprofit organization

☐ Private business/organization

Q27 - What is your present level of education or highest degree earned?

☐ Less than high school degree

☐ High school degree or equivalent

☐ Some college but no degree

☐ Associate degree

☐ Trade school certification

☐ Bachelor's degree

☐ Graduate Degree (Masters, PhD., or professional degree)

Q28 - What is your gender? (select one)

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Non-binary/third gender/fluid/other

☐ Prefer not to say

Appendix A. Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps Participant Questionnaire

Q29 - How would you characterize your racial identity? (select one)

- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Multiple Races
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other (please specify_____)

Q30 - What is your home zip code? (enter 5-digit number)

Place to share contact information to receive the gift card:

Name and Mailing Address

END OF SURVEY – THANK YOU for RESPONSES
Please click Close to end the survey and submit your responses.

Appendix B.

PAOC Member and Alumni Focus Group Guide



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Appendix B. PAOC Member and Alumni Focus Group Guide

Note: Zoom Focus Group Interview occurs after initial email and parental consent obtained for minors.

Interview begins with an introduction to one another, a reminder of the study purpose, a thanks for their participation, a reminder of their rights as a study participant, how long the focus group will last, and a reminder about gift cards.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

First off, tell me who you are and a little about how you found out about the Program and the projects you did as an Outdoor Corps member.

What knowledge and/or skills did you learn as part of your participation in Outdoor Corps?

Did your participation in the PAOC affect your educational, job training, or career choices? If so, in what way?
Follow-up prompt on PAOC impact your involvement in volunteering in conservation/recreation roles.

Do you feel the training offered by the Outdoor Corps prepared you for work in conservation, how so? (necessity?)

Did PAOC influence your thinking, attitudes, or ethos related to conservation? How or why not?

Now, I have just a few questions about the quality of the Outdoor Corps program itself...
What was the most rewarding part of your time with the PAOC?

What things does the Outdoor Corps program do well?

Where there any challenges you encountered when working as a PAOC crew member? What were those?
How were they addressed?

Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for improving the program? What are those?

What was your biggest takeaway from your PAOC experience?

Appendix C.

PAOC State Park Manager and District Forester Survey Instrument



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Appendix C. PAOC State Park Manager and District Forester Survey Instrument

1. In what park forest region/state forest district do you work? _____

2. What is your current title? _____

3. During your time at your present state park/region/forest district, did you ever have the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps come to your park/forest to do work projects?

___ Yes

___ No – ask prospective questions

___ Unsure – ask prospective questions

4. In what years(s) – Of those who said “Yes” _____

5. What age group crew did you have on-site?

___ Youth

___ Young Adult

___ Both

___ Can't remember

6 and 7. On what types of projects did the crews work? (check all that apply and list top three most beneficial to your park/forest)

___ Natural Resource Protection/Invasive Species Management

___ Habitat Management (aquatic and terrestrial)

___ Carpentry and Building Construction

___ Historic Preservation

___ Trail Rehabilitation and Construction

___ Parking Lot/Roadway Construction

___ Boundary Line Work

___ Campground Rehabilitation and Construction

___ Community Park Maintenance and Construction

___ Streambank Restoration

___ Native Plant Installation

___ Crop Tree Release/Branch Removal

___ Fencing Installation and Maintenance

___ Amphitheatre Rehabilitation

___ Forest Stand Maintenance

___ Community Tree Inventories

___ Forest Nursery Support

___ Boating Facility Installation and Maintenance

___ Hiking Trail Amenity Construction

8. For non-PAOC parks/forests – Is there a reason why PAOC didn't work at your park/forest?

Appendix C. PAOC State Park Manager and District Forester Survey Instrument

9. Would you like a PAOC crew to work at your park/forest?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

10. What type of work could a crew perform at your park/forest?

For participating parks/forests...

11. Please rate the quality of the work performed by PAOC – Poor to Excellent

12. Please rate the professionalism exhibited by PAOC crews and leaders – Poor to Excellent

13. Indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements – Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree

PAOC crews helped to complete or address critical infrastructure projects at my park/forest	<hr/>
PAOC crews were adequately trained to complete their work at my park/forest	<hr/>
PAOC crews completed projects that were useful, but were not critical to the needs of my park/forest	<hr/>
PAOC work in my park/forest helped to ease the workload of my staff	<hr/>
PAOC work helped resulted in cost- savings for my region/park/forest	<hr/>
PAOC crews were well prepared to do their work when they arrived on-site	<hr/>
Staff investment in training PAOC crew members/leaders was well worth their time	<hr/>
Staff members are receptive to working with PAOC	<hr/>
The PAOC prepares program participants for professional work in the conservation field	<hr/>
The PAOC created additional work for my staff	<hr/>
My staff was prepared to work with PAOC crews when they arrived on site	<hr/>

14. If you believe that PAOC crews were not adequately trained as outlined above, what additional training would you like to see them receive?

15. If you had more staff, would you expand your involvement or projects with PAOC?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

16. What do you feel the PAOC program does well?

17. What could be done at your park/forests/region to improve PAOC project delivery?

18. What is the most rewarding part about working with the PAOC?

19. What is the most challenging part about working with the PAOC program?

20. What other advice or suggestions do you have for improving the PAOC?

Appendix D.

PAOC Stakeholder and Partner In-Depth Interview Guide



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Appendix D. PAOC Stakeholder and Partner In-Depth Interview Guide

Thank you for participating in this study and talking with us today. This interview is intended to gather opinions and reflections on the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps (PAOC) from the perspective of key stakeholders at PAOC partner organizations (e.g., DCNR, SCA, PPFF, etc.). Representatives like you will help provide about the impact of PAOC activities and them challenges associated with the program.

First off could you tell us about your organization’s role with the PAOC?

In your opinion, what does the PAOC do well?

Based on your understanding of PAOC goals, what outcomes do you feel the program is achieving?

What are some opportunities for program improvement?

Is there anything else you’d like to add about the PAOC?



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For more information visit PaParksAndForests.org.



For more information visit dcnr.pa.gov.