

April 25, 2025

TO: Oregon Ways and Means Joint Subcommittee on Education

RE: Support for Higher Education Coordinating Commission Workforce Programs – Oregon Conservation Corps

Dear Co-Chair Sollman, Co-Chair Ruiz, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Seneca Hescok, I am an enrolled Klamath Tribal member and reside in Chiloquin in Klamath County. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission Workforce Programs, specifically the Oregon Conservation Corps.

I joined Lomakatsi Restoration Project's Oregon Conservation Corps program in 2022 because my home community of Chiloquin was nearly destroyed by the Two-Four-Two Fire in 2020, and the Bootleg Fire the following summer also burned at high-severity, threatening our communities and important natural resources. As a tribal person who subsists off the land, who hunts and fishes in my ancestral territory, I was driven to become a good steward and take care of the land that provides for me and my community, and do my part to prevent future devastating wildfires. For time immemorial, Native people have used good fire and cultural fire to maintain our subsistence resources and for other cultural beneficial uses, so I was drawn to be a part of the work to bring back good fire, work with other tribes on their ancestral homelands as well as my own, and restore forest health.

This program significantly propelled my career development. After graduating from a nine-month OCC program in 2022, I went on to Lomakatsi's advanced training through the Indian Youth Service Corps, and after two years, I became a crew leader and managed the Tribal Stewards program in partnership with Lomakatsi and the Burns Paiute Tribe. I am fully certified in chainsaw operation and wildland fire, and over the past year, as a full-time employee, I became a forestry technician – gathering forest data, setting up forestry and fuels reduction projects, and participating in prescribed burns.

In our community, there is a lot of loss and young people dying as a result of a lack of employment, disparity, and lasting challenges from the impacts to our people from colonization. This program is saving lives and helping to create opportunity for tribal members to be out on the land learning, earning a living, and protecting our communities.

I ask that you continue to support funding for the Oregon Conservation Corps program in this next budget cycle so young adults like me can benefit from this incredible opportunity to serve our communities.