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### **IN TOUGH ECONOMY THESE COLLEGE GRADS MAKE GREEN BY DOING GREEN**

(Madison, WI) As the nation's unemployment rate climbs, recent college graduates are struggling to enter a competitive labor market that often values real-world experience over coursework. But here in Wisconsin some recent graduates are beating the economic blues, building their resume, and benefiting the environment by joining the Wisconsin Conservation Corps.

The Wisconsin Conservation Corps is an AmeriCorps program created and managed by the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, a non-profit conservation group based in Madison. Each year, the Foundation places 16 Wisconsin Conservation Corps members at non-profit and state agency offices around Wisconsin. Members work full or part-time positions in land management, education and outreach, volunteer coordination, and field research. The three-year-old program was the first of its kind in Wisconsin.

"Our Wisconsin Conservation Corps members bring incredible energy, excitement and experience to the organizations for which they work and, in turn, our program provides excellent professional experience," David Clutter, director of the program, noted. Current partners include the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Bureau of Endangered Resources, the Nature Conservancy, the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Milwaukee County Parks Department and others.

Alicia Jepson is a former member who credits the Wisconsin Conservation Corps for helping her find work with the non-profit Sand County Foundation. "I don't think I would have my job today if it wasn't for the experience and network that the Wisconsin Conservation Corps provided," she said. In addition to valuable profession experience, Corps members receive a small salary, a generous education award and student loan deferment.

"Does the money help? Sure, but it's the experience that really pays off," added former member Kevin Doyle. Doyle, who joined the program during its first year, later found a job at the DNR through the Wisconsin Conservation Corps. He credits his experience in the Corps for providing a passion for botany and land management, which he is now pursuing with his education award in a Master's program at the University of Texas.

"The tough job market definitely influenced my decision to apply for the Corps," says Michelle Shivey, one of eleven new members recently hired by the program. Shivey graduated with a B.S. in Forest Science from UW – Madison in 2007, but had difficulty

finding steady work in a competitive field made even more competitive by the down economy.

“I’m sure that I wasn’t as qualified as others for some of the jobs I applied for when I graduated,” Shivey said. “I’m really looking at the Wisconservation Corps experience to fill in some of those gaps and make me a better qualified candidate while simultaneously providing a public service opportunity,” she concluded. Shivey will start a 6-month term with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this month.

Current member Bobbie Webster is wrapping up her year of service with the Nature Conservancy of Wisconsin this March. Webster spent the past year helping the Conservancy manage their conservation properties through fieldwork and coordination of the group’s robust volunteer community. She joined the Corps to enhance her skill set and expand her resume.

Webster, who is about to re-enter the job market was cautiously optimistic about her chances at finding work. “It’s hard to say what employers will be looking for, but if they’re looking for people who are dedicated, hard working, and thoughtful, then I think this experience will make me more competitive,” she concluded.

**Editor’s Note:** A short video about the Wisconservation Corps is available on the Foundation’s Web site – [www.wisconservation.org](http://www.wisconservation.org). To request photos of members at work or to contact past and current members of the program for interviews, please contact Jeffrey Potter at the Natural Resources Foundation, [jeffrey.potter@wisconsin.gov](mailto:jeffrey.potter@wisconsin.gov) or 608-261-4392.

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The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin is a 501c-3 non-profit organization based in Madison, Wisconsin. For more than twenty years, the Foundation has worked with citizens, businesses, non-profits and the government to promote the protection and enjoyment of Wisconsin’s public lands, waters and wildlife. Learn more and donate online at [www.wisconservation.org](http://www.wisconservation.org).