



## Legislation Text

**File #:** 23-0603, **Version:** 1

### PROPOSED CONTRACT

**Department(s):** Department of Resource Management

**Vendor:** Various vendors establishing a Conservation Corps vendor pool, listed below:

<u>Contract No.</u>	<u>Vendor Name</u>
74000013406	National Audubon Society, Inc. (Audubon Great Lakes), Chicago, Illinois
74000013407	Friends of the Forest Preserves, Inc. Chicago, Illinois
74000013408	Openlands, Chicago, Illinois
74000013409	City of Chicago Department of Transportation, Chicago, Illinois
74000013410	The Student Conservation Association, Inc., Chicago, Illinois

**Request:** Authorization for the Forest Preserves of Cook County (the “Forest Preserves”) to enter into and execute

**Good(s) or Service(s):** Professional services agreements for Conservation Corps programs

**Contract Value:** Not to exceed a combined total of \$4,000,000.00 per twelve-month period (or \$24,000,000.00 over the six (6) year term) across all contract numbers listed above. The General Superintendent, or their designee, may adjust via contract amendment funding amounts allocated to each vendor at their discretion within the total \$24,000,000.00 not-to-exceed amount.

**Contract Period:** 1/1/2024 - 12/31/2029

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** FY 2024 \$4,000,000.00, FY 2025 \$4,000,000.00, FY 2026 \$4,000,000.00, FY 2027 \$4,000,000.00, FY 2028 \$4,000,000.00, FY 2029 \$4,000,000.00

**Accounts:** ARPA Conservation Corps 51032.521444; Professional Services 51033.520840 and 51001.520830; Special or Co-op Programs 51001.521313; Grant and Mitigation 51010.521444 and 51010.520840; and all future Professional Services and Grant and Mitigation accounts

**Contract Number(s):** #74000013406, #74000013407, #74000013408, #74000013409, and #74000013410 issued under RFP #23-31-105

**Concurrences:** The Chief Financial Officer has approved this item. Final agreements are subject to legal review and approval.

The contract-specific Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprise goal for this contract was set to zero.

**District(s):** Districtwide

**Summary:** The Forest Preserves issued a Request for Proposals (RFP #23-31-105) seeking firms or organizations to co-facilitate job training and employment programs that utilize a Conservation Corps or Youth Community Internship model. Conservation Corps programs provide paid employment for youth and adult participants who reflect the diversity of Cook County, as well as benefit people who have barriers to employment, have suffered from historical disenfranchisement, or

whose communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental justice issues. Programs feature environmental education and soft skills training within the conservation field that engage participants with nature and prepare them for future employment, with a focus on ecological restoration in the Forest Preserves.

A total of twelve (12) program proposals were received for this project from five (5) different firms and organizations, all of whom were found to be responsive. Proposals were evaluated based on experience and expertise with similar projects, proposed approach, cost, and capacity to perform all aspects of the work. The proposed Conservation Corps programs are as follows:

- 1) **Audubon Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Internship** - The Audubon Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Internship will engage one (1) Field Leader, one (1) Assistant Field Leader and six (6) adult interns in a 24-week ecological restoration program that benefits bird species and their habitats. Participants will conduct invasive plant control and native seed collection at preserves in the south and southwest regions, while also receiving job training and professional networking experiences to prepare participants for careers in land management, ecology, and related fields.
- 2) **Advanced Adult Crews (Friends of the Forest Preserves)** -- The Advanced Adult Crews, administered by Friends of the Forest Preserves, will engage two crews consisting of one (1) Crew Manager, one (1) Assistant Crew Manager, and four (4) adult crew members each, or up to twelve (12) participants annually. The crews will operate year-round with cohort turnover occurring every two years. The program will cultivate the next generation of environmental professionals through job and conservation skills training, while providing tangible and meaningful on-the-ground experiences for members of the beginner crews who have graduated out of entry-level programs and are seeking advanced skills training in forestry, land management, and ecological restoration.
- 3) **Calumet Corps (Friends of the Forest Preserves)** -- The Calumet Corps, administered by Friends of the Forest Preserves, will engage one (1) Crew Manager, one (1) Assistant Crew Manager, and four (4) adult participants annually in hands-on conservation activities such as invasive species control, prescribed burning, and native seed collection and dispersal. Worksites will focus on the Calumet region, primarily within the Sand Ridge and Jurgensen Woods complexes. The program will operate year-round with cohort turnover occurring every two (2) years.
- 4) **Des Plaines River Corps (Friends of the Forest Preserves)** -- The Des Plaines River Corps, administered by Friends of the Forest Preserves, will engage one (1) Crew Manager, one (1) Assistant Crew Manager, and four (4) adult participants annually in hands-on conservation activities such as invasive species control, prescribed burning, and native seed collection and dispersal. Worksites will focus on areas adjacent to the Des Plaines River corridor, primarily within the Salt Creek and Thatcher Woods complexes. The program will operate year-round with cohort turnover occurring every two (2) years.
- 5) **North Branch Corps (Friends of the Forest Preserves)** -- The North Branch Corps, administered by Friends of the Forest Preserves, will engage one (1) Crew Manager, one (1) Assistant Crew Manager, and four (4) adult participants annually in hands-on conservation activities such as invasive species control, prescribed burning, and native seed collection and dispersal. Worksites will focus on areas adjacent to the North Branch river corridor, primarily within the Somme and Harms Woods complexes. The program will operate year-round with cohort turnover occurring every two (2) years.
- 6) **Palos Corps (Friends of the Forest Preserves)** -- The Palos Corps, administered by Friends of the Forest Preserves, will engage two (2) crews consisting of one (1) Crew Manager, one (1) Assistant Crew Manager, and four (4) adult participants, each or up to twelve (12) participants annually. The crews will conduct hands-on conservation activities such as invasive species control, prescribed burning, and native seed collection and

dispersal at worksites within the Palos region. The program will operate year-round with cohort turnover occurring every two (2) years.

- 7) **Forest Preserves Experience (Friends of the Forest Preserves)** - The Forest Preserves Experience program, administered by Friends of the Forest Preserves, provides conservation and job skills training to high-school youth, ages 15 to 19, whose families are clients of the Housing Authority of Cook County. The five (5) week program will engage up to ninety (90) youth participants, eight (8) Assistant Field Leaders, and eighteen (18) adult Crew Leaders annually in hands-on ecological restoration activities supplemented with job readiness skills and nature-based enrichment activities which promote forest preserve awareness and teach participants how healthy forest preserves contribute to their community and the quality of life. Worksites will primarily be in the Thorn Creek, Calumet, and Tinley Creek regions in south and west suburban Cook County.
- 8) **Beaubien Youth Outdoor Ambassador Program (Friends of the Forest Preserves)** - The Beaubien Youth Outdoor Ambassador Program, administered by Friends of the Forest Preserves, will engage ten (10) youth participants (ages 14 - 19), two (2) Crew Leaders, and one (1) Program Assistant annually for six (6) weeks of hands-on conservation work, education in local ecology, and public engagement activities. The program offers an opportunity for community members who reside near Beaubien Woods to gain skills in leadership, job-readiness, and professional development, while learning about important local environmental topics. This program will be operated in collaboration with the Forest Preserves' Department of Conservation and Experiential Programming.
- 9) **Arborist Registered Apprenticeship Program (Openlands)** -- The Arborist Apprenticeship Program, administered by Openlands, will engage six (6) apprentices and up to two (2) Field Supervisors for up to twelve (12) weeks annually to conduct tree and invasive brush removal projects in the Salt Creek and Palos regions. The program is recognized by the Illinois Department of Labor and provides an accessible career pathway for individuals seeking an entry-level experience to facilitate becoming a certified arborist and to work in urban forestry.
- 10) **Greencorps Chicago (Chicago Department of Transportation)** - Greencorps Chicago is the City of Chicago's green-industry employment program with on-the-job training for individuals with barriers to employment. The program promotes environmental stewardship in the Forest Preserves by maintaining and restoring the land through hands-on involvement on a range of conservation projects including invasive plant removal, native plant installation and seeding, prescribed burning, and more. Participants also receive industry-recognized credentials including pesticide licensure and regional prescribed burn certifications. The program will engage approximately six (6) Crew Supervisors and thirty (30) adult participants annually.
- 11) **Gap Year Internship (Student Conservation Association)** - The Gap Year Internship, administered by the Student Conservation Association, serves as a bridge between adult Conservation Corps programs and youth summer programs by exposing participants to advanced restoration skillsets while also supporting career exploration and job readiness training. Over the 6-month program, five (5) young adults and two (2) adult Crew Leaders will conduct conservation projects including invasive plant removal, nature gardening, trail and fence maintenance in addition to seeking environmental education and professional certifications that will make participants desirable candidates for full time employment in ecological restoration upon graduation from the program. Worksites will primarily occur in the Salt Creek and Palos regions, as well as at Forest Preserves nature center facilities.
- 12) **Chicago Conservation Leadership Corps (Student Conservation Association)** - The Chicago Conservation Leadership Corps program, administered by the Student Conservation Association, will engage at least forty (40) high school-aged youth, four (4) young adult Assistant Leaders, and eight (8) adult Crew Leaders annually in hands-on conservation work such as invasive plant removal, nature gardening, trail and fence maintenance supplemented by nature-based recreational activities. The 5-week summer program includes job readiness training and career exploration with an emphasis on engaging youth of color to

increase diversity in the conservation field. Work will occur at Forest Preserves nature center facilities, including but not limited to Little Red Schoolhouse, Sand Ridge, and Trailside Museum of Natural History.

Programs will be implemented and scaled based on budget availability, including potential future grant opportunities and annual levels of matching fund contributions secured by each firm or organization. Conservation Corps programs advance the goals of the Next Century Conservation Plan by mobilizing people to heal and nurture the land.