

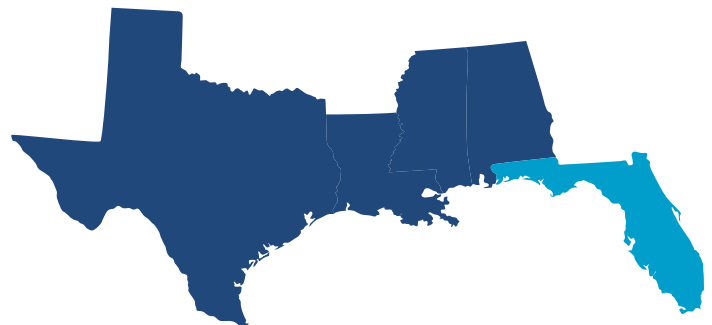
# FLORIDA

## Restoring People and Nature



Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts crew members working on Franklin 98 Living Shoreline during spring 2024. © Michael Dumas Image Arts

In 2018, GulfCorps launched in Florida with the Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast in Franklin County, part of Franklin's Promise Coalition, Inc (FPC). In Year 2, FPC added the Conservation Corps of the Emerald Coast in Escambia County and launched the Conservation Corps of the Emerald Coast in Bay County in Year 3. Franklin's Promise continues to run three crews across the Florida Panhandle. The RESTORE Council approved a new award in April 2021 and GulfCorps 2.0 launched in the fall of 2021. The crews partner with federal, state, county and municipal agencies as well as local nonprofits to implement restoration and conservation projects throughout the Florida Panhandle coast. This work includes mapping and treating invasive plant species; propagating and planting native vegetation; building living shorelines; participating in prescribed burns; and building and maintaining trails and boardwalks. Crews also collect and recycle oyster shells as part of the Santa Rosa County Oyster Shell Recycling program. Since the GulfCorps Program started, FPC crews have impacted over 4,500 acres of coastal habitats on 44 project sites.



**LOCATION** Florida

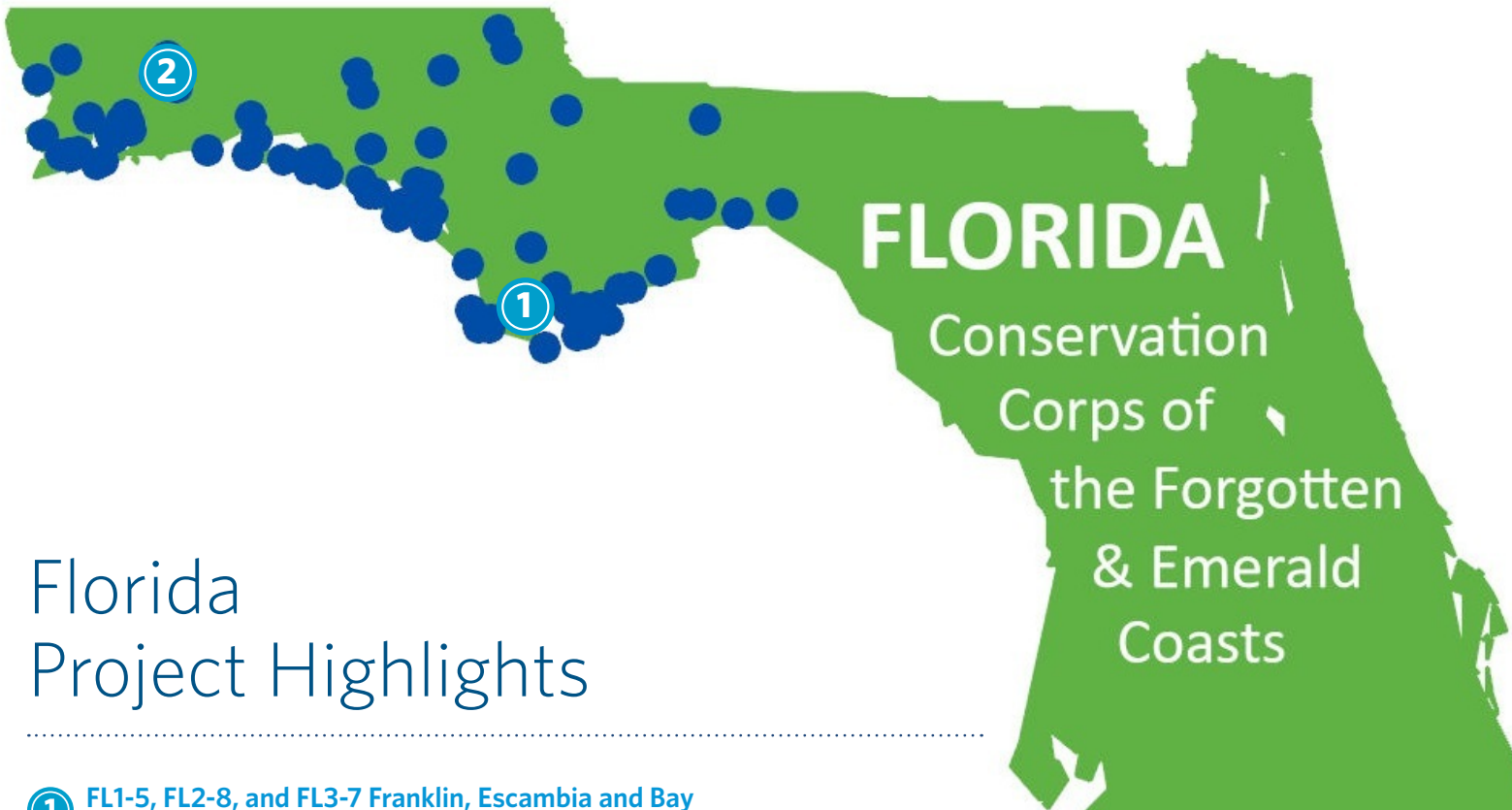
**INVESTMENT** \$3.403 million over 8 years

**PROGRAM PARTNERS** The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Student Conservation Association (SCA), The Corps Network (TCN), The Ember Alliance (TEA)

**FUNDING AGENCIES** Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (RESTORE), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

**PROJECT DATES** 2017 - 2025

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# Florida Project Highlights

## ① FL1-5, FL2-8, and FL3-7 Franklin, Escambia and Bay Shoreline Preparation Activities

In the fall of 2018, FPC formed their Escambia crew and began partnering with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). The crew assisted in propagating grasses to be installed along living shorelines in the area. In the fall of 2019, the Franklin County FPC crew used this model and assisted the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve (ANERR) with constructing a native plant nursery. Since then, FPC crews across the panhandle have propagated over 60,000 grasses to be used in the local area. In addition to plant propagation, FPC crews have taken part in recycling over 15 tons of oyster shell and have created oyster prisms to be used for living shorelines as well. The interest and need for this work has allowed FPC to found OysterCorps which focuses solely on these activities.



*Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts crew members carrying out sea grass to continue building out the living shoreline along Franklin 98 Highway during spring 2024. © Bird Davidson/The Nature Conservancy*

## ② FL2-5b Blackwater River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and FL2-6 Blackwater River State Park

In the fall of 2019 FPC crews began partnering with the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NWFLWMD) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) to support restoration at Blackwater River WMA and Blackwater River State Park. Escambia crews have planted 33 acres of long leaf pines and collected pine cones for propagation across 6 acres. There are many threatened and endangered species within the WMA. The crews have assisted in restoring bog frog and gopher tortoise habitat by removing vegetation and installing fencing. They also cleared areas around 25 tree clusters identified to be home to red-cockaded woodpeckers to ensure their safety during fires. Most recently, the crew was contracted by the United States Forest Service to repair structures along the section of the Florida National Scenic Trail that runs through the WMA. This contract work is important for the future sustainability of each Corps, which is also a goal of the GulfCorps Program.



*Emily Davis, CCFEC Franklin County crew member, prepares to make an initial cut during S-212 Wildland Fire Chainsaws training as a proctor observes. © Michael Dumas Image Arts*

# Florida By the Numbers

**205,584**

GULFCORPS HOURS



**3,115**  
ACRES MONITORED

**4,572**

ACRES IMPACTED



**44**  
ACTIVE PROJECTS

**2,248**  
ACRES OF UPLAND  
ENHANCEMENT



**2,703**

ACRES OF  
PRESCRIBED FIRE

**120,352**  
PLANTS PLANTED



**54**  
ACRES OF  
WETLAND RESTORATION



**561**  
ACRES OF INVASIVE  
SPECIES MANAGEMENT



**1,691**  
ACRES OF WETLAND  
ENHANCEMENT



As the COVID-19 pandemic began, the GulfCorps Program staff worked to ensure crews remained engaged by developing a virtual curriculum for members that they could use when they were unable to work in the field. Year 3 successfully ended in summer 2020.

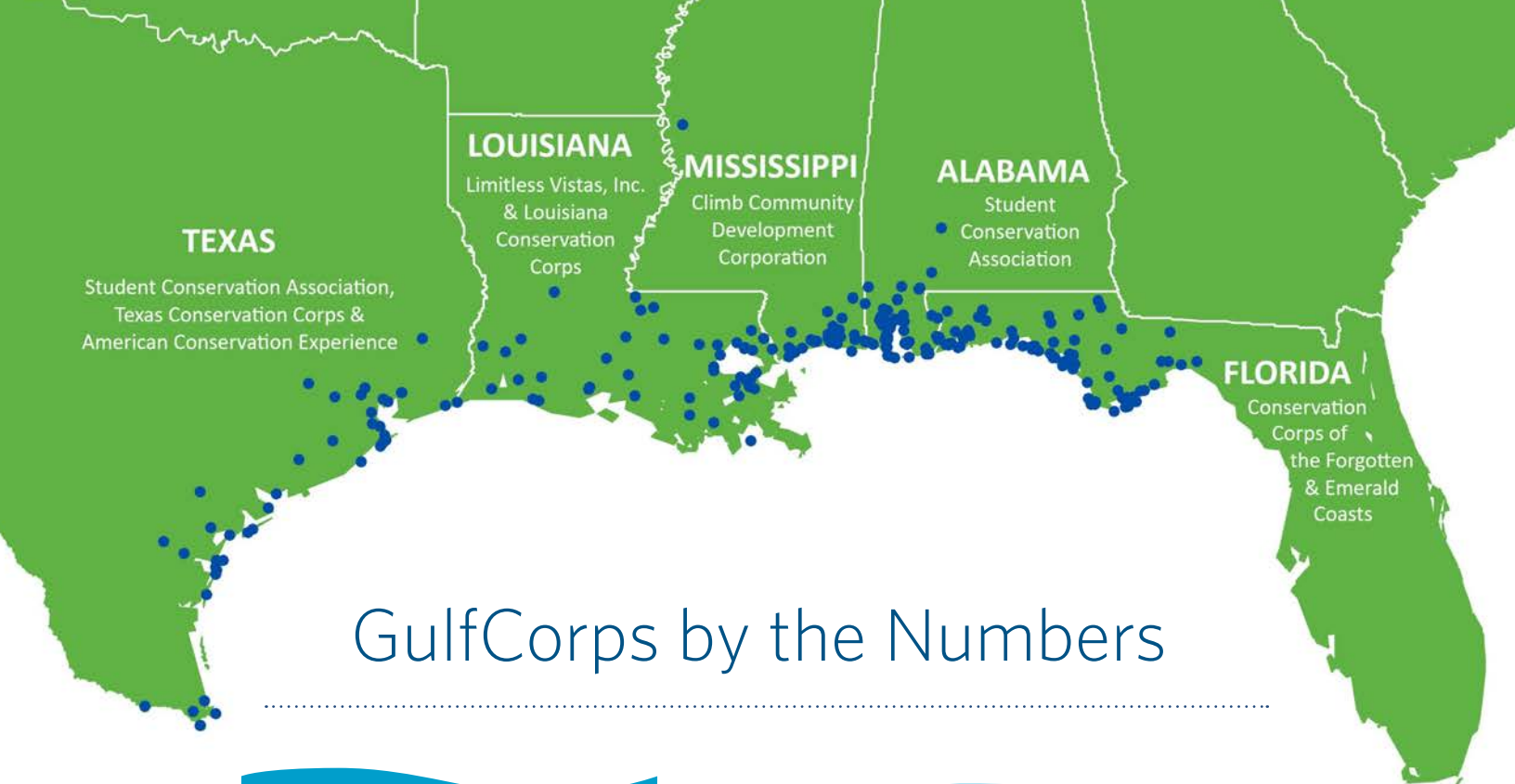
Year 4 launched in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic with a virtual orientation and smaller crews. Despite these obstacles, staff and partners delivered an engaging experience for members via a virtual workforce development curriculum and in-person trainings at the corps level. In April 2021, the RESTORE Council approved a second \$11.9M award for GulfCorps to continue for an additional four years.

The second award for the GulfCorps program (GC2.0) launched in fall 2021. Crews remained smaller as the economy was still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ember Alliance was added as a program partner and SCA created a crew in the Corpus Christi area after American Conservation Experience exited the program. Forty-nine members successfully completed the program during this challenging year.

Year 6 saw the return of in-person orientation with all corps and staff meeting up at Beckwith Camp and Conference Center in Fairhope, Alabama. Additionally, The Ember Alliance delivered a hybrid curriculum (online and in-person) of wildfire and chainsaw training to all crews. This year resulted in 53 standard graduates and the first All-Star graduate!

In Year 7, the program continued to build partnerships with community-based partners and Tribal entities. The crews monitored and/or restored 6,912 acres—the greatest number of acres than any other season. Additionally, TNC secured \$12M from NOAA's Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience grant program under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act. This funds 4 more years of GulfCorps work!

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5	YEAR 6	YEAR 7
GulfCorps launched in 2017 when NOAA awarded a \$7 million grant to TNC for the creation of the program.	Year 2 started in September 2018 and doubled in size to two crews per state, each working for about 7 months. Year 2 ended in summer 2019.	In Year 3, 11 crews worked for 8-9 months —the biggest year, yet. Project partners included state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, local/municipal agencies, and academic institutions. TNC, SCA and TCN worked closely with NOAA to plan and execute sound conservation and restoration projects and to create a high-quality restoration workforce that had proven field experience.				



## GulfCorps by the Numbers

**529,248**

TOTAL GULFCORPS HOURS

**29,738**

TOTAL ACRES IMPACTED



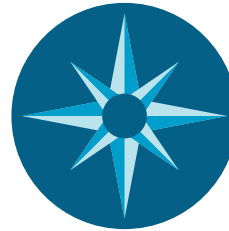
**119,142**

PAID TRAINING HOURS



**188**

ACRES OF WETLAND RESTORATION



**20,404**

ACRES BEING MONITORED



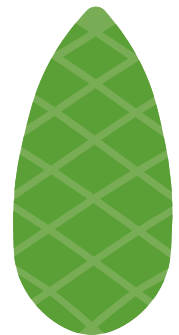
**7,397**

ACRES OF WETLAND  
ENHANCEMENT



**3,121**

ACRES OF INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT



**12,759**

ACRES OF  
UPLAND ENHANCEMENT



Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts members and staff receive the Oyster Reef Award during orientation at Beckwith Camp and Conference Center, Fairhope, Alabama, on September 18, 2023. © Michael Dumas Image Arts

## Florida Project Partners

During Years 1 – 7, CCFEC crews worked on meaningful coastal restoration projects under the direction of a range of federal, state, and community partners:

- Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve
- St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve
- US Forest Service
- Florida Forest Service
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Franklin County
- Gulf County Public Works
- Northwest Florida Water Management District
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Apalachee Regional Planning Council
- Apalachicola Riverkeeper
- Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Escambia County
- Florida State Parks
- The Nature Conservancy in Alabama and Florida
- National Park Service
- Choctahatchee Bay Alliance
- City of Mexico Beach
- City of Panama City Beach
- St. Andrew Bay Resource Management Association
- City of Lynn Haven
- City of Panama City
- City of Parker
- City of Callaway
- City of Springfield

## Local Crews, Local Communities

At its heart, GulfCorps is about rebuilding the environment and local communities. This means working with and relying on organizations that know and are deeply rooted in the local communities GulfCorps is helping.

In Florida, GulfCorps is working with crews from **Franklin's Promise Coalition, Inc.** Conservation Corps of the Forgotten and Emerald Coasts in Franklin, Bay, Gulf, and Escambia Counties. Franklin's Promise was founded in 2014 with a goal of empowering young people to positively impact their lives, their community, and the land they live on. Young adults on these crews receive job training, leadership skills, academic programming, and other support to help them find careers in their local communities after they complete their GulfCorps term of service.

## Member Highlights



© Michael Dumas Image Arts

### Alexis Powell

During her term as a Bay County crew member, Alexis Powell completed training in CPR/First Aid, OSHA 10, S-212 Wildland Fire Chainsaws, and Florida Trail Maintenance Basics. Alexis was always ready for what new challenges were thrown her way and her hard work ethic paid off when she was called on to become a crew leader and community organizer for the Bay County Region with the CCFEC. In this position, she will use her knowledge of and connection to her community to work on recruitment, outreach, and awareness of the opportunities available to young adults in the area with CCFEC.



© Michael Dumas Image Arts

### Arron O'Kelley

During his term as a Franklin County crew member, Arron O'Kelley received training in CPR/First Aid, Florida Trail Maintenance Basics, S-212 Wildland Fire Chainsaws, and OSHA 10. Arron also became qualified as a Wildland Firefighter Type 2 (FFT2) by passing National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) courses S-130 Firefighter Training, S-190 Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior, L-180 Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service, and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) courses, and passing the arduous pack test where he walked three miles in 45 minutes carrying 45 pounds on his back. His training, ability to keep a level head in any situation, and his leadership qualities earned him a crew leader position with the Franklin County crew this upcoming season.



All three CCFEC crews during orientation at Beckwith Camp and Conference Center, Fairhope, Alabama, on September 18, 2023. © Michael Dumas Image Arts

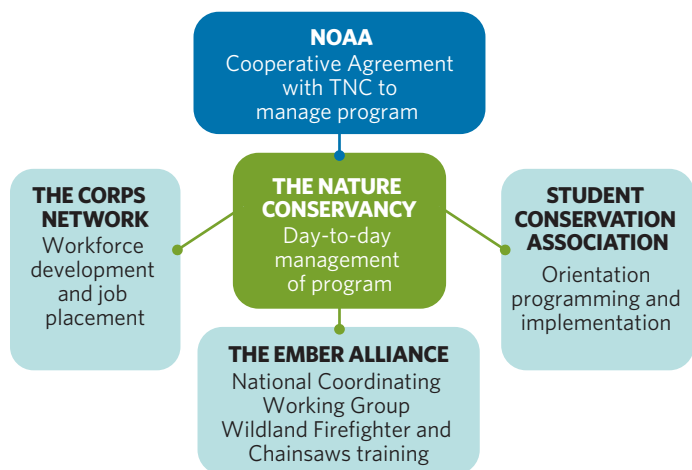
## The GulfCorps Program Team

- NOAA Fisheries – Fiscal sponsor, environmental compliance, program advisor
- The Nature Conservancy – Program day-to-day operations, conservation and project planning, monitoring, implementation
- The Corps Network – Workforce development, member preparation to pursue careers in conservation and restoration, job placement, post-program tracking
- Student Conservation Association – Orientation programming and implementation
- The Ember Alliance – National Wildfire Coordinating Group Wildland Fire and Chainsaws training

Through this project, NOAA, TNC and partners are

- Providing support to local conservation corps that recruit young adults from their communities. These young adults want to better their communities through restoration and conservation work. GulfCorps aims to recruit 75% of each crew from Gulf Coast communities.
- Providing young adults with the highest quality training, including project-related training, industry-recognized certifications, and workforce development opportunities. This combination of training, work experience and professional development fuels placements in environmental jobs, internships, externships and post-secondary educational opportunities.
- Working with stakeholders to select restoration projects that address ecological impacts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and that are consistent with the RESTORE Act's Comprehensive Plan.
- Monitoring progress over the course of the entire program to make certain the work is producing the desired environmental results.

## Partner Roles



## Sample Project Partners

US Fish and Wildlife Service (FL, AL, LA, MS, TX) National Forest Service (FL, LA, MS), National Park Service (FL, MS, LA, TX), National Estuarine Research Reserves (FL, AL, TX)

**Florida** – St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve, Escambia County, Northwest Florida Water Management District, Florida Department of Environmental Protection

**Alabama** – Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Mobile County Environmental Services, South Alabama Land Trust, Forever Wild

**Mississippi** – Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain, University of Southern Mississippi

**Louisiana** – City of New Orleans, Louisiana Office of State Parks, Woodlands Conservancy, Recreation & Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC)

**Texas** – Armand Bayou Nature Center, Galveston Bay Foundation, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Houston Parks Board, Houston Audubon, City of Port Aransas



For more information, contact:

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