

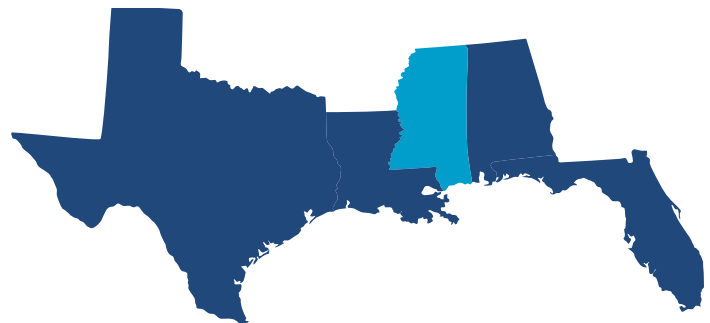
MISSISSIPPI

Restoring People and Nature



Climb crew member Sellers Johnson assists in prescribed burning at De Soto National Forest. © Devin Birmingham/Climb CDC

In 2018, GulfCorps launched a ten-person crew in Gulfport with Climb Community Development Corporation. In Years 2 and 3, Climb managed two crews per season and down-sized to one crew again in Year 4 during the COVID-19 pandemic surge. The RESTORE Council approved a new award in April 2021 and GulfCorps 2.0 launched in the fall of 2021. Climb is currently managing two smaller crews serving the Gulfport area. The Corps partner with federal, state, county and municipal agencies as well as local nonprofits to implement restoration and conservation projects throughout the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The work includes mapping and treating invasive plant species; planting native marsh vegetation; restoring pitcher plant bogs; participating in prescribed burns; and building and maintaining trails and boardwalks. Crews also locate and remove invasive apple snails and apple snail egg masses within the Pascagoula River and Pearl River watersheds. Since the GulfCorps Program started, Climb crews have impacted over 9,000 acres of coastal habitats on 15 project sites.



LOCATION Mississippi

INVESTMENT \$2.456 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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MISSISSIPPI

Climb Community Development Corporation

Mississippi Project Highlights

① MS1-2 Desoto National Forest

In January of 2018, the Climb CDC crew began partnering with the United States Forest Service (USFS) at the De Soto National Forest (NF). The crew has treated 87 acres of invasive species, planted 40 acres of native trees, and maintained 20 miles of trail. The staff at De Soto NF are striving to restore the multiple pitcher plant bogs around the forest. The crew has supported them in this target by assisting with application of prescribed burns on 8,000 acres and demarcating bogs to receive restoration in the future. The crew has also used their monitoring skills to map over 500 acres of invasive species and assess the status of endangered gopher tortoise burrows.



Climb crew members and staff discussing trail maintenance activities at De Soto National Forest for trail maintenance project work on April 11, 2024. © Michael Dumas Image Arts

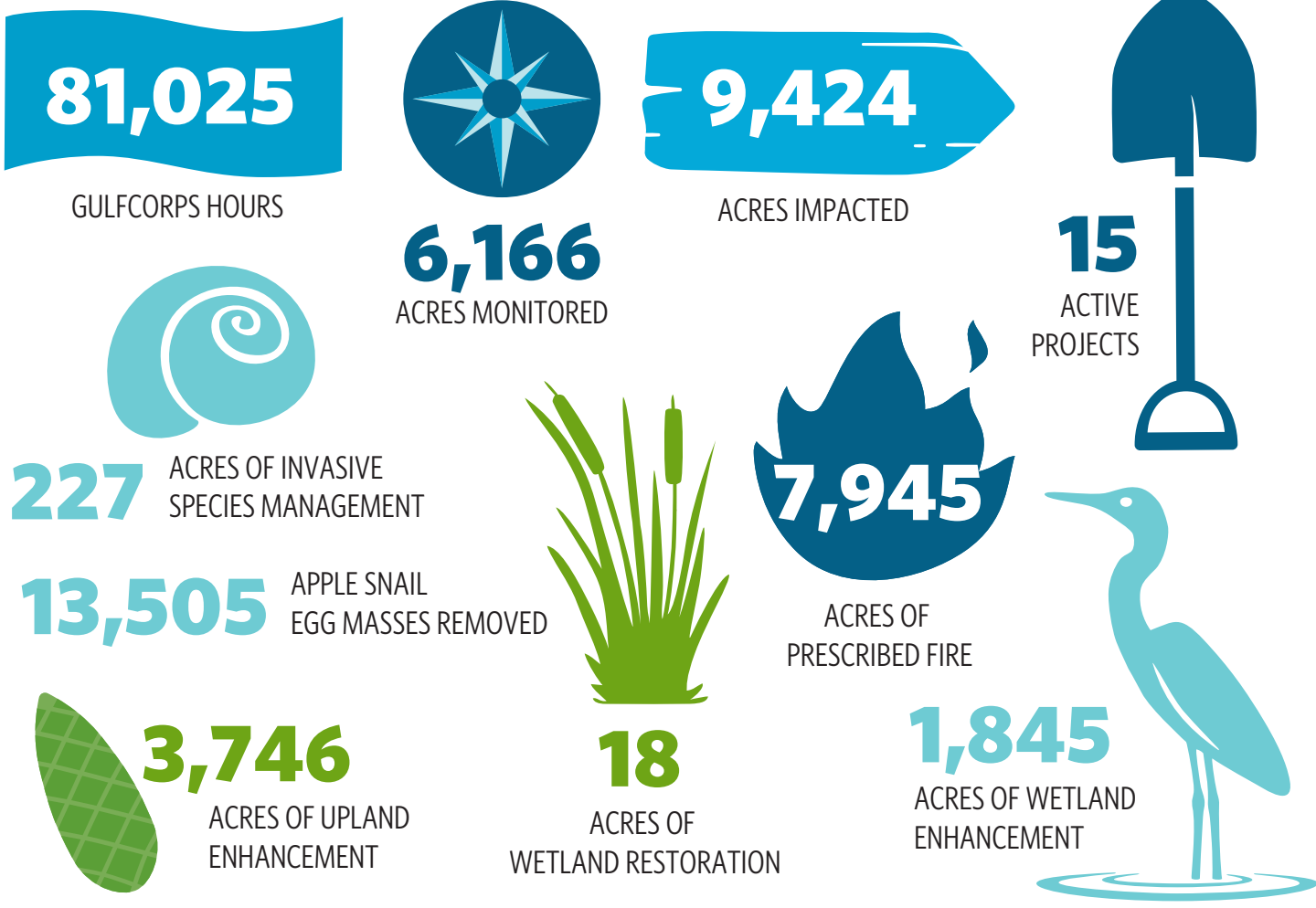
② MS1-4 MDMR Apple Snail Removal Project

In January of 2018, the Climb crew began partnering with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources to help reduce the population of the invasive Ampullariidae, commonly referred to as apple snails. Apple snails rapidly consume wetland vegetation which leaves less food for native species and often causes erosion of shorelines. To minimize the population, the crew was asked to remove apple snail egg clutches, which can contain up to 2,000 eggs each. The crew has removed over 14,000 snail egg masses across 57 acres of the Pascagoula River and Pearl River Watersheds.



Climb crew members kayaking on the Pearl River for Apple Snail Removal Project. © Dakota Skog/Climb CDC

Mississippi By the Numbers



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.

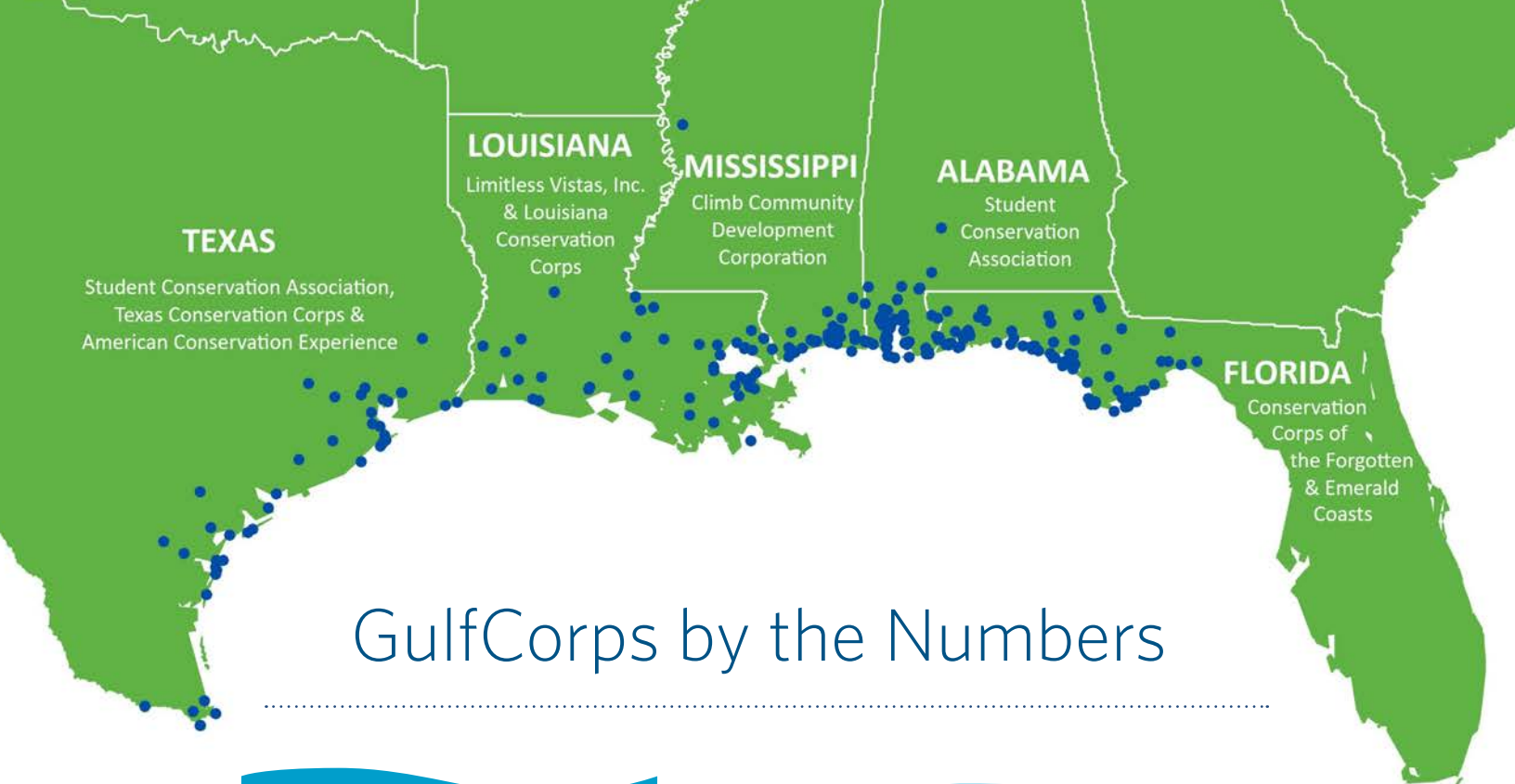
Year 4 launched in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic with a virtual orientation and smaller crews. Despite these obstacles, staff and partners delivered an engaging experience for members via a virtual workforce development curriculum and in-person trainings at the corps level. In April 2021, the RESTORE 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



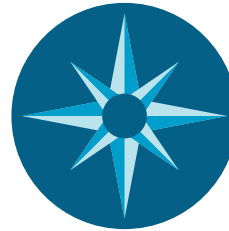
119,142

PAID TRAINING HOURS



188

ACRES OF WETLAND RESTORATION



20,404

ACRES BEING MONITORED



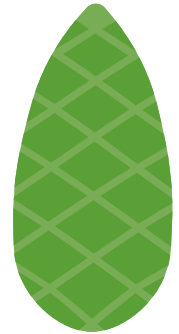
7,397

ACRES OF WETLAND
ENHANCEMENT



3,121

ACRES OF INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT



12,759

ACRES OF
UPLAND ENHANCEMENT



Climb crew members discussing service day field work activities at Beckwith Camp and Conference Center, Fairhope, Alabama on September 14, 2023. © Michael Dumas Image Arts

Mississippi Project Partners

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

- Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
- MS Gulf Coast Heritage (Blueways Guide)
- Covington Civil and Environmental
- National Park Service
- US Forest Service
- University of Southern Mississippi
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- The Nature Conservancy in Mississippi
- Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain

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 Mississippi, GulfCorps is working with **Climb Community Development Corporation**, a Mississippi-based nonprofit organization that promotes strong communities by providing individuals access to opportunities that inspire self-reliance. Climb helps homeless young people aged 16 -24 by providing individualized case management, connections to resources, improved access to services and support, and assistance with basic needs. Climb is also a part of YouthBuild, a Department of Labor community-based alternative education program that provides job training and educational opportunities in culinary and hospitality, conservation, construction, and medical assistant tracks.

Member Highlights



© Michael Dumas Image Arts

Sellers Johnson

Sellers Johnson is an enthusiastic and dedicated emerging conservationist driven by a passion for Mississippi native wildlife.

“Since the beginning, Sellers has shown an interest and passion for the wildlife native to Mississippi and has shared his knowledge of wildlife with those around him. Sellers always takes every opportunity he has to improve his knowledge and gain more skills.” – Dakota Skog (Climb staff).

During Seller’s time in GulfCorps, he engaged in assisting with prescribed burns after gaining certificates such as S-212 Wildland Fire Chainsaws and Adult First Air/CPR. Sellers is excited about the opportunities in conservation and is committed to leveraging his new skills while continuing to learn and share his own knowledge.

“My term at GulfCorps has opened my eyes to new careers I had never considered and equipped me with the certifications and experience necessary to start a career in the conservation field” – Sellers



Climb CDC crew group photo during orientation at Beckwith Camp and Conference Center, Fairhope, Alabama, on September 18, 2023. © Michael Dumas Image Arts

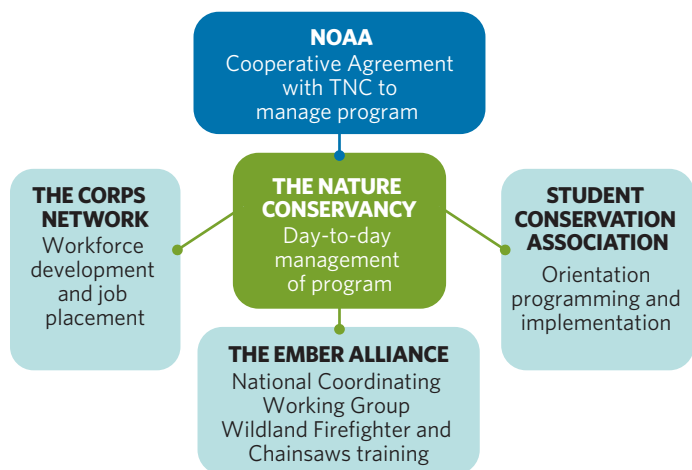
The GulfCorps Program Team

- 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



The Corps Network

