



Building Resilient Communities: A Place-Based Approach to the Need for a Conservation Workforce



Interview with 10,000 Years Institute's Jill Silver

Conducted by BEF's Julia Jaquery

As agencies work to conserve more land throughout Washington State, the need for a restoration-focused workforce is increasing. Some limited-term work crew models exist, including AmeriCorps, which provides opportunities to work outside and stemmed from the New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps. However, given the need for long-term engagement with ecosystem management for restoration to be effective, some organizations are developing year-round programs centered on place-based, localized relationships to the landscape.

One such organization is 10,000 Years Institute (10KYI), based in Forks, WA. We interviewed the director, Jill Silver, to learn more about the year-round restoration program that she helped develop, and find out how this model might be replicated in other places.

JULIA JAQUERY: Hi Jill, thank you so much for being here today. We're here to discuss the year-round Pulling Together in Restoration program, which you developed to provide a locally-based workforce for conservation, restoration, and resiliency projects on the Olympic Peninsula. Can you share a bit about how the program came to be and what it looks like today?

JILL SILVER: The Pulling Together in Restoration (PTIR) program is a locally-based Conservation Corps, except that it's year-round, without term limits and hires locally to support stewardship practices in traditional natural resource-based industries. We're working on a federal or state proposal for \$30 million per biennium for the [Olympic] Coast. That's still a drop in the bucket in terms of the hands, eyes, and effort that need to be invested in the variety of different projects in forests, rivers, and coastlines across our rural coastal landscapes.

We first proposed the idea for PTIR in 2013 at the request of The Nature

Conservancy. I had been looking for a way to grow the invasive species projects on the Hoh River that had been struggling for very scarce funding for almost two decades. Because invasive plants know no boundaries and don't disappear after two years of treatment, I wrote a proposal for a Conservation Corps-style, year-round, locally staffed, cross-boundary, multiple watershed based, multiple landowner, continuous invasive species project.

We've built the program into a service and local 'field college' conducting invasive species surveys, developing methods and protocols, and providing preventative treatments for restoration projects, roads, in forestry, and in rural communities.

We ranked number 1 out of 14 projects this year, so we're funded again through 2025, and by 2025, I'm focused on establishing the CCC and achieving the \$30 million investment in communities, 140 jobs, and resilient watersheds. All of the millions of dollars of restoration projects that occur on the coast every year typically involve disturbing the dirt- woody debris movement, riparian enhancement, fish passage barrier removal and replacement, and habitat enhancement projects; as such, they're almost all working in places where invasive plants exist or can be introduced. It's taken several years of encouragement, but in the restoration grants, there's now an addendum now that asks, "do you have invasive species? What are your plans for dealing with them?" We have this funding, trained staff, a track record, and relationships with agency and program managers and most landowners. So we just offer to do the [invasive species removal] work for

restoration sponsors, and to teach them and their staff at the same time. Many are turning to us to provide the work that will support success in restoration over the long term.

We hire locally. Forks is a hard place to get people under 30 to come and stay. To be able to do the kind of evaluation and response at the level that we do it, we take data everywhere we are, and we develop management strategies around it. We do adaptive management, and applied science. That's really what our mission is. And we do invasives because we are focused on protecting ecosystem services and native biodiversity. Native plants form the foundation of all the habitats, industries, and services we rely on for clean water, air, carbon storage, fish, food, soil, and climate — and invasive plants arrest the succession and health of native plant communities.

Looking Forward: Expanding the Vision for the PTIR Program

Current Budget & Capacity: \$1.4 million per biennium; up to 25 local jobs

Funding Source: Washington Coast Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WCRR) — funded by State capital budget with a focus on creating jobs, resiliency, and addressing climate change impacts

Types of Projects Funded: Flood risk reduction, forest restoration thinning, nearshore restoration

Projected Budget & Capacity: \$30 million per biennium; up to 120 crew jobs + 20 supervisor positions



Snahapish crew and large wood.
Photo Credit: 10,000 Years Institute

Comparing Models

Current Capacity	10,000 Years Institute's Pulling Together in Restoration Program	AmeriCorps 10-Month Crew Work Model
Time scale	Year-round; indefinite	10 month cycles; 2 term limits
Age limits?	No	Yes — 18-25 years old
Jobs	Up to 25	6
Region served	Olympic Peninsula	Washington State

JJ: How long do field staff typically stick around? Does it make a big difference in the crew's perspective of the landscape to have locals doing the work?

JS: Good question. We have some folks who've been with us as long as eight years, which is wonderful. We take everybody who walks in the door who is in physical shape to be able to make it out in the field, who hopefully has some experience hunting, fishing, hiking, boating, landscaping, or even helping their grandmother in the garden. We work to give them the knowledge to understand the watersheds they live in— to know who else is living there, know which way the winds come from, where the water flows from and what has happened to the landscape, and about native plants and their functions in the places they grow.

We have a fair amount of turnover because we're taking everybody, and there are a lot of people who either don't like it, or can't show up for work for one reason or another. We work for a long time with each other to get through issues. Other folks really love the work. They all know each other. Their families all know each other. Tribal logging and fishing communities, folks whose parents work in the local prisons, people whose parents work for the agencies like DNR, or who operate heavy equipment for roads or mining gravel. We hire retired foresters and loggers who help with logistics and setting up projects and programs. I have a 78 year-old support staff — retired from the Coast Guard, volunteering as the president of the Pacific Coast Salmon Coalition — who goes out and cuts fallen trees out of the road for us on routes that we need to get into, and takes us out in his drift boat or canoe if we need to get across

a channel and the river is too high. He's been training his granddaughter, taking her with him all over the area, and I'm hoping to hire her! She knows all the roads, and everything that he does with fish, beavers, and habitats, and loves to pull Scotch broom. We're hiring families, grandparents down to grandkids, locally.

In the past, I wasn't able to get onto some properties because of my reputation as an environmentalist. I worked for the Hoh Tribe for nine years and stopped a lot of timber harvests when they were in places they shouldn't have been. Since, I've switched to doing invasive species work. Removing Scotch broom and tansy ragwort protects people's tree farms and their animals — that has established that we have shared values, and provided a pathway to step into the conservative world in such a way that there's no conflict. We have a WCC crew out of Port Angeles and another out of Elma in their third season with us.

JJ: The Washington Conservation Corps crew is on a 10 month cycle. Do you find that that's a good program to hire from?

JS: Oh, my goodness, they are so good. They go to WCC looking for this kind of work. They know what they want, and they know the jobs that they're going to be offered when they get out, and they have the educational background to support them in the jobs.

As I was looking for support to build the CCC, I had meetings with the lead of the WCC program, and asked if they'd consider the year-round Conservation Corps concept with \$30 million per biennium; but the answer was no, it's not their model. The problem for everyone out here on the coast and

perhaps statewide is that there aren't enough WCC crews to meet the needs, and not enough housing for them either, and their commutes are long and carbon-heavy. In order to reduce the time and carbon for travel, I request crews that are based in Port Angeles to work from Port Angeles through the Sol Duc to Forks, so that they only have an hour drive. The crew from Elma works on our South Coast areas. We need people who are local.

Really, what I want is to be able to inculcate what we know and what we do, and expand the model so that stewardship is the platform from which all communities are functioning. Yes, they're doing timber harvest. Yes, they're fishing. Yes, they're doing recreational tourism. But they're doing it with an understanding of how it all connects.

JJ: Right. Operating more from resource consciousness, rather than resource extraction.

JS: Exactly. I mean, they'd be doing both, but they'd be extracting within the bounds of what they can protect in ecosystem services. Most people I've worked with out here didn't believe in climate change, and many still don't. Some are starting to— if they're open-minded enough to check into the heat domes, atmospheric river events, the disruption of rain events, rapidly melting glaciers, and increased flooding— if they're really paying attention. One thing folks comment on and observe are shifts in timing for berries and bees, and in species.

I've discovered that if you don't have the language for what you're seeing— who the plants, the birds, the insects are— if you don't have the concepts or the

curiosity, you don't see what is there. My goal is to keep planting the seeds and dropping the pebbles in the pond so the ripples go out and come back again, and to stay patient. I'm not a natural teacher, really, I want to be alone out in the woods, watching American dippers, watch the river flow and change; that's what I want to be doing. Hopefully the ripples are going to keep radiating out.

JJ: Is there an education component to your Conservation Corps program?

JS: As far as education, we ask people if they're going to go to school when they come in for an interview. I ask them if they like to read- I have an entire library of books here and I'm always buying more. I hand out books all the time, and I buy field guides for staff. Over the last two years, we've also been working with Peninsula College and Western Washington University's College of the Environment to develop a natural resources certification and accreditation at Peninsula College here in Forks, and in Port Angeles.

I provided input on the skills needed for the range of positions and work types we have here at 10KYI to include in the curriculum, and it has turned into a curriculum around natural resources from all aspects- forestry, fisheries, ecosystems, monitoring and collecting data, along with writing. Invasives are included, as well as drone videography, presentations, imagery; learning to report and communicate, and translate information. And then, internships with the scientific or survey projects that are happening- road engineering, setting up timber sales, conducting stream surveys for fish and macroinvertebrates, gradient and complexity, ambient monitoring- all of those will have internships available that are accredited, and some will be paid.

JJ: Thanks so much for sharing insight about these programs and for the groundbreaking work that your team has done and will continue to do on the Peninsula.

Bio:

Jill Silver conducts applied ecology in the coastal watersheds of Washington State in which she grew up, with a passion for developing projects and research that build locally-sourced knowledge into locally-based solutions to resolve challenging and interrelated issues. Building on a foundation of environmental studies and sciences coursework at The Evergreen State College, she has been the director of the non-profit organization 10,000 Years Institute for the past two decades, where her focus is assessing and addressing the intersections between climate change, forested and aquatic ecosystems, ecosystem services, and the negative impacts of invasive plants.

About 10,000 Years Institute:

Working with diverse partners and local communities from timber to tribes, 10KYI identifies needs and opportunities for education and jobs in research and restoration, and innovates methods that increase restoration success while decreasing cost and impact over time. Working from the foundational principle that people will steward what they know and love, 10KYI's Pulling Together in Restoration (PTIR) project is entering its fifth biennium, training and employing local crews in projects to protect native biodiversity and ecosystem services in the watersheds where their communities work and live. With proactive investment, this model can grow into local watershed-based and permanent year-round conservation corps that invest in people, and develop the skills needed to grow and support resilience into an uncertain climatic future.



Jill and Leo trenching along old tree bole.
Photo Credit: 10,000 Years Institute



All crew lined up.
Photo Credit: 10,000 Years Institute