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Conserving Parks, Transforming Lives: How the Student Conservation Association is Shaping the Next 100 Years of National Parks and the Next Generation of American Youth

Liz Putnam

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**CONSERVING PARKS, TRANSFORMING LIVES:
HOW THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION IS
SHAPING THE NEXT 100 YEARS OF NATIONAL PARKS
AND THE NEXT GENERATION OF AMERICAN YOUTH**

*Liz Putnam**

I.	Introduction	127
II.	The Origin and Expansion of SCA.....	129
III.	The Transformative Experience Provided by SCA	131
	A. The Transformative Power of Nature	131
	B. A Parent’s Perspective	134
IV.	SCA and Continued Relevance of National Parks for Younger Generations	138

I. INTRODUCTION

When, with the support of many friends and mentors, I launched the Student Conservation Association (SCA) in 1957—sixty years ago next year—my objective was to help rescue our national parks.¹ Not because they were being clear-cut or strip-mined or turned into hazardous waste dumps. Quite the opposite—they were in danger of being “loved to death.”

This year, the National Park Service celebrates its centennial after greeting a record-shattering 307.2 million visitors in 2015.² Under these

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1. *SCA Founder, Liz Putnam*, THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION, <http://www.thesca.org/about/sca-founder-liz-putnam> (last visited Oct. 4, 2016).

2. NPT Staff, *National Park System Had 307.2 Million Visitors in 2015, According to National Park Service*, NATIONAL PARKS TRAVELER (Feb. 18, 2016), <http://www.nationalparkstraveler.com/2016/02/national-park-system-had-3072-million-visitors->

circumstances, you might think the parks were at risk of excessive *amore*. Ironically, however, the real threat today is that national parks are becoming irrelevant to large segments of our society.

The typical national park visitor is approaching retirement age.³ Nearly four in five visitors are White,⁴ despite the fact that Whites currently make up less than 63% of the US population⁵ and are on pace to be in the minority by 2044.⁶ Throw in the nature-deficit disorder⁷ epidemic among today's youth and the ongoing shift in our population to urban areas,⁸ and the trends do not bode well for the future of our parks.

To its credit, the National Park Service recognizes this dilemma as it charts a direction for its second century, and it has prioritized increasing youth engagement and cultivating a more diverse and inclusive following.⁹ Interior Secretary, Sally Jewell, also acknowledged that a "course-correction" is necessary. "We haven't found a way to connect with the young people of today, who are more diverse, more tech-savvy, and more disconnected from nature than ever before," Jewell stated, adding "we must recommit ourselves to making our parks and public lands available to all."¹⁰

It pleases me that SCA has been making substantial contributions in

2015-according-national-park-service.

3. Ryan Bergeron and Sean Redlitz, *Does the National Park Service Have a Youth Problem?*, CNN.COM (Mar. 19, 2015 8:51 PM), <http://www.cnn.com/2015/03/19/us/im-national-parks-older-visitors-morgan-spurlock/>.

4. Glenn Nelson, *Why Are Our Parks So White?*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (Jul. 10, 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/12/opinion/sunday/diversify-our-national-parks.html?_r=2.

5. Eric Kayne/for NBC News, *Census: White Majority in U.S. Gone by 2043*, NBC NEWS (Jun. 13, 2013 4:11 AM), http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/06/13/18934111-census-white-majority-in-us-gone-by-2043.

6. Sandra L. Colby and Jennifer M. Ortman, *Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014 to 2060*, CENSUS.GOV, page 1, (Mar. 2015), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.pdf>.

7. Richard Louv, *Last child in the woods*. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. 99-101, 2005.

8. Greg Toppo and Paul Overberg, *See Ya, Suburbs: More Want to Live in the Big City*, USA TODAY (Mar. 27, 2014), <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/03/27/census-cities-metro-growth-population/6863219/>.

9. Lisa Holzapfel, *Connecting People to Parks*, A CALL TO ACTION, page 9, (Aug. 25, 2015), https://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/C2A_2014.pdf; Jesus Guzman, *Advancing the NPS Education Mission*, A CALL TO ACTION, page 13 (Aug. 25, 2015), https://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/C2A_2014.pdf; Leslie Velarde, *Enhancing Professional and Organizational Excellence*, A CALL TO ACTION, page 21 (Aug. 25, 2015), https://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/C2A_2014.pdf; Donald J. Hellmann, *The National Park Service at 100*, 50 AKRON LAW REV. 1, 77-79 (2017).

10. Sally Jewell, Interior Secretary, *The Next 100 Year of American Conservation at National Park Week* (Apr. 19, 2016), in *The Next 100 Years of American Conservation*, US INTERIOR DEPARTMENT, <https://medium.com/@Interior/the-next-100-years-of-american-conservation-397c42b8f1f2#oyzk4oh69> (last visited (Oct. 4, 2016).

these areas for the past six decades, but the transformative impact of SCA experiences in national parks and other wilderness areas been fully measured and analyzed only in the past year or so.¹¹ The findings provide a formula for significantly advancing youth development as well as preserving our parks, and the evidence has been there from the very start.

II. THE ORIGIN AND EXPANSION OF SCA

In 1953, I was a sophomore at Vassar College when I read a startling article in Harper's Magazine by historian and conservationist Bernard DeVoto titled *Let's Close the National Parks*. DeVoto wrote that national parks had been woefully underfunded for years, leaving them ill-prepared for the onslaught of visitors taking place as post-World War II families hit the road in search of outdoor adventures. Our parks, DeVoto warned, were at risk of being "loved to death."¹²

He noted that the dedicated but too-few park rangers were largely limited to cleaning latrines and removing trash.¹³ Interpretive programs were abandoned, and trails and roads were often neglected due to a lack of funding and manpower. Worst of all, rangers were living with their families in leaky, tar-paper shacks that were built as temporary housing accommodations decades earlier by the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC, President Roosevelt's Depression era work program.¹⁴

To awaken the American people to this national disgrace, DeVoto recommended some national parks should be closed.¹⁵ He called for the military to keep the public out until Congress provided the funding necessary to protect the parks from people—and the people from the parks. DeVoto wrote: "Let us, as a beginning, close Yellowstone, Yosemite, Rocky Mountain, and Grand Canyon National Parks – close and seal them, assign the Army to patrol them, and so hold them secure till they can be safely reopened."¹⁶ It's hard to imagine locking up places like Yellowstone and Yosemite, but DeVoto was absolutely serious.

That article planted quite an image in my mind, but it also planted a

11. A.K. Syvertsen and T.K. Sullivan, *Study Highlights: Youth Development Through Service to Nature: A Study of Student Conservation Association Programs*, MINNEAPOLIS, MN: SEARCH INSTITUTE (2016), <http://www.search-institute.org/sites/default/files/b/Youth-Development-through-Service-to-Nature-Research-Brief-2016.pdf>.

12. Bernard DeVoto, *Let's Close the National Parks*, Harper's Magazine 49-52, (Oct. 1953).

13. *Id.*

14. *Id.*

15. *Id.*

16. *Id.*

seed. I thought there must be a better solution. In my family, we grew up with the ethic that if something needed to be done—do it! So I thought: why couldn't young people—like myself at that time—volunteer to be of help?

I wrote my senior college thesis on “A Proposal for a Student Conservation Corps”—a modern day CCC-type program—believing that young people would welcome the challenge of volunteering their services to our national parks and doing important work that would not otherwise be done. At the same time, participants would benefit from the hands-on experience and from living and working in a beautiful outdoor area—a “win-win” for both the individual and the land.

Following two years of talks with the Park Service, as well as countless hours spent fundraising, developing a program, and recruiting, the first SCA volunteers arrived at Grand Teton and Olympic National Parks in June of 1957. Now, nearly six decades later, more than 80,000 high school, college and graduate students have served with SCA in national parks, forests, refuges, cultural landmarks and community green spaces.¹⁷

SCA's mission is “to build the next generation of conservation leaders and inspire lifelong stewardship.”¹⁸ Resource management professionals nationwide rely on SCA's young apprentices, who annually render more than 1.5 million hours of service, preserve two million acres of habitat, and maintain over two thousand miles of trail—the equivalent of the entire Appalachian Trail.¹⁹ They also care for endangered species, conduct field research, provide visitor services and much more.

Surveys indicate 70% of SCA alumni continue to work or study in the environmental field after their volunteer service is complete.²⁰ Many SCA members go on to professional careers with the same agencies at which they volunteered. SCA's workforce development programs with the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have

17. *Our Programs*, THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION, <https://www.thesca.org/serve> (last visited Oct. 4, 2016).

18. *Creating Leaders for the Environment: All in a Day's Work*, THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION, <https://www.thesca.org/about> (last visited Oct. 4, 2016).

19. *What We Do*, THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION, <https://www.thesca.org/about/what-we-do> (last visited Oct. 4, 2016); *The WashCycle: Student Conservation Association Helps Maintain DC Trails*, THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION (Oct. 31, 2012), <https://www.thesca.org/connect/blog/washcycle-student-conservation-association-helps-maintain-dc-trails>.

20. *Opportunities: Service Stewardship and Sustainability*, THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION, <http://thesca.org/serve/opportunities> (last visited Oct. 4, 2016).

earned national awards,²¹ and the U.S. Conference of Mayors has recognized SCA's community conservation programs for city teens as one of America's top green jobs programs for youth.²²

SCA has also been the inspiration to a myriad of other service programs, including the national Youth Conservation Corps (YCC)—Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson proposed the YCC after meeting an SCA crew in his home state of Washington and invited me to Washington to testify in support of his legislation—and the national parks' Volunteer in Parks (“VIP”) program.

III. THE TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY SCA

As a youth conservation organization, SCA's credentials would seem to be in order. In 1998, however, Dr. Stephen Kellert, a renowned scholar whose work focuses on understanding the connection between nature and humanity, examined SCA from a different angle. Kellert explored, through rigorous longitudinal and retrospective study, the impacts of three longstanding outdoor programs: SCA, the National Outdoor Leadership School (“NOLS”), and Outward Bound.²³

Previous analyses of outdoor and wilderness programs suggested that nature-based experiences offer a wide range of benefits for participants, but Kellert's was the first national study to explore this impact in depth. While these organizations share an interest in fostering personal growth and appreciation for the natural environment, of the three, SCA is uniquely focused on environmental service and conservation. Outward Bound is more challenge-oriented, and NOLS emphasizes interpersonal and leadership skills.

A. *The Transformative Power of Nature*

Kellert found remarkable results in the areas of environmental interest, knowledge, and attitudes as well as the personal and character development of participants. Kellert asserted “[t]hese participants often viewed their experience as a kind of ‘conversion’ event, with many having become a fundamentally different person.”²⁴ Youth emerged with

21. *Id.*

22. *Johnson Controls Receives \$550,000 Grant for Conservation Leadership Corps*, THE CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY NEWSWIRE (Jun. 25, 2009), http://www.csrwire.com/press_releases/27245-Johnson-Controls-receives-550-000-grant-for-Conservation-Leadership-Corps.

23. Stephen R. Kellert, *A National Study of Outdoor Wilderness Experience*, page 5 (Sept. 1998), <http://www.childrenandnature.org/uploads/kellert.complete.text.pdf>.

24. *Id.* at 19.

major, and sometimes profound, transformations in the way they saw themselves and their plans for the future.²⁵ Kellert's investigation found that the key to this transformation was the experience of coping in an unfamiliar and unspoiled natural setting in the company of others.²⁶

A powerful example of the type of transformation SCA participants experience comes from AmaRece Davis, who recently bared his anguish, dreams and determination in an op-ed column in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.²⁷

"I've lived in Homewood for all of my 21 years," AmaRece opened, appearing spent even at such an early age. His is a hard-edged neighborhood plagued by poverty, crime and drugs, and AmaRece stated bleakly that it is often an unforgiving trap.

"Two of my older brothers are in prison for murder," he wrote. "They'll likely never see the outside again, and as a teenager I was right behind them, heading down that same dark path."

AmaRece's course changed, he revealed, after he joined SCA's Pittsburgh crew. In cities across the country, SCA employs underserved teens in municipal parks to provide opportunities where few exist. AmaRece admitted "neither my life nor my attitude changed much," however, until he accepted a crew position at Sequoia National Park.

In California, he recalled, "I sat at the base of one of these giants on my 18th birthday, and thought about all of my friends and relatives who had never been out of Pittsburgh and of others who hadn't even survived to be 18. I came home a different person. I had found something larger than myself, figuratively and literally."

AmaRece enrolled in community college, got a part-time job, and pledged to help other youths turn their lives around. Starting with his 16-year old brother. "I want to be a beacon for the kids who live in Homewood," he wrote, "to help them understand that we do have chances to live a better life – we just have to look for them a little bit harder than people who grow up elsewhere."

SCA was encouraged by Kellert's research. While we had set out to save the nation's parks, Kellert's work suggested that more was

25. *Id.* at 24.

26. *Id.*

27. AmaRece Davis, *Local Dispatch: Distant Woods Focus One Young Man on Helping Homewood*, PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE (Jul. 8, 2014 11:26 PM), <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/portfolio/2014/07/09/Local-dispatch-Distant-woods-focus-one-young-man-on-helping-Homewood/stories/201407090010>.

happening behind the scenes. Most importantly, the research suggested that the anecdotes from alumni who consistently referred to their SCA experiences as “life-changing” weren’t mere hyperbole. These observations were likely illustrations of a broader phenomenon.

In 2012, more than a decade after the Kellert study, SCA set out to understand the full picture of SCA’s impact on volunteers. Our central question was both simple and significant: Are participants truly transformed by their SCA experiences, and if so, how?

SCA partnered with the Search Institute²⁸, an internationally-renowned research-to-practice organization focused on discovering what kids need to succeed. The Search Institute was founded one year after SCA and was a pioneer in its own right, with a history of using social science research to better understand the lives, beliefs, and values of young people.²⁹ Best known for its Developmental Assets framework and approach to youth development, Search’s studies have recently focused on the nature of thriving in adolescence and the role of “sparks.”³⁰

In his passionate TED talk, the late Peter Benson, Ph.D., former president of Search Institute,³¹ describes the language of human thriving as “kids who experience joy, kids who are connected and engaged. . . kids with kindness and generosity. . . kids who contribute.” The spark is the “animating engine” that gives a young person direction, hope, and purpose.³²

While the language of thriving and sparks was new for us, it also resonated with an unexpected familiarity. SCA had sparked the American youth conservation movement, and the sparks of our staff, leaders, and volunteers had been kindling the flames of our own organization in the years since.

SCA and the Search Institute spent three years immersed in qualitative and quantitative investigation of its programs. The process began with interviews and focus groups with SCA participants, staff, and alumni, followed a year later with refinements to SCA’s program model, and most recently with a pre/post-test assessment of program

28. Kate Hagner, *More Than Measurement: Changing Lives with the Student Conservation Association* (August 14, 2015), <http://www.search-institute.org/blog/more-than-measurement>.

29. *About Search Institute*, SEARCH INSTITUTE, <http://www.search-institute.org/about> (last visited Oct. 15, 2016).

30. *Insights from Research: The Power of Sparks*, SEARCH INSTITUTE (Sept. 16, 2015), <http://www.search-institute.org/blog/power-of-sparks>.

31. Peter Benson, *Sparks: How Youth Thrive*, TEDxTC (April 22, 2011) <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/TEDxTC-Peter-Benson-Sparks-How>.

32. *Id.*

participants that drew on learning about the unique developmental experience of SCA programs. Results from the study and the Search Institute's analysis are clear: SCA can now claim an impact on lives that rivals its decades-long impact on the land.³³

Kit Lewis is Parker Davis's mother; Parker is a four-time alumnus from Seattle. Upon Parker's graduation from college, Kit wrote SCA a poignant letter.

"Make no mistake," she wrote, "SCA was a pivotal factor in Parker's drive toward college and a promising future. Serving with SCA in high school, he discovered that the world is full of limitless possibility. . . . That he could take an impenetrable forest and make a path through it, not only for himself, but for others, too."

Summer crew after summer crew, Kit saw in Parker many of the same qualities identified by the Search Institute: an increased sense of confidence, a renewed willingness to embrace challenge, a desire to contribute to the greater good. "He has matured so much. . . his SCA crews out-of-state were the most liberating; he could reflect and ponder his place in this world."

Recently, Parker graduated from Western Washington University. Earlier, when he earned his high school diploma, his parents tied a bow to a shiny Pulaski, the trademark tool of SCA trail builders. "I've never seen him so delighted," Kit stated. "It's a symbol of those SCA years and a big part of who he is and who he's becoming."

"I hate to sound so melodramatic, but I really do believe that SCA did for Parker what only the very best teen programs can do: took him away from his parents, away from his high school, and into a brand new world with beauty, accountability, hard work, fun times and supportive mentors."

"I can't tell you how important that has been for Parker, and for this mom . . . On behalf of the Village That Raises Children, thank you so much."³⁴

B. A Parent's Perspective

Participants showed significant change on a number of indicators of

33. Kate Hagner, *More Than Measurement: Changing Lives with the Student Conservation Association* (August 14, 2015), <http://www.search-institute.org/blog/more-than-measurement>.

34. Kit Lewis, *A Parent's perspective on the SCA experience*, THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION, <https://www.thesca.org/connect/blog/our-family-so-grateful> (last visited October 15, 2016).

conservation leadership. After SCA, they were more aware of how their actions affected nature; felt more connected to nature; had a greater sense of responsibility for the environment; had explored conservation careers; and were more likely to make choices to conserve resources, critically analyze environmental issues, and teach others about conservation.³⁵

Adolescence and young adulthood is a critical time in the development of what some call an “environmental identity.”³⁶ Results suggest that the conservation and environmental immersion experiences within SCA programs significantly alter the way participants think about and interact with the natural world.³⁷ This type of transformation could be particularly powerful coming during adolescence. As an organization dedicated to building conservation leaders, those results alone would have been cause for celebration. Yet the Search Institute’s investigation revealed much more.

Participants experienced significant gains in their skills to work with others.³⁸ They emerged from SCA better able to express their ideas, take the perspective of others, work as part of a team, and engage others to reach a goal.³⁹ They also became more civically engaged, with an enhanced sense of responsibility to the greater good, a heightened awareness of the interconnectedness between choices and the world around them, and a deepened connection to their community.⁴⁰

The research further revealed that SCA participants were developing in other powerful ways. One way was in the area of thriving, the focus of Search Institute’s previous body of work that resonated early on with SCA.⁴¹ As professionals with lifetimes of experience working in nature, we were familiar with the image of a thriving landscape. Similarly, young people who thrive, according to Search, have a core animating force within them that propels their positive

35. Syvertsen, A. K., Sullivan, T. S., & Wu, C., *SCA Youth Program Outcome and Critical Program Factors: Summary of Findings*, MINNEAPOLIS, MN: SEARCH INSTITUTE (2015), <http://www.search-institute.org/downloadable/SCA-PhaseIII-Key-Findings.pdf>. at 10-14.

36. Susan Clayton, *Environmental Identity: A Conceptual and an Operational Definition* (2003) <http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2004-14744-003> at Abstract.

37. Syvertsen, A. K., Sullivan, T. S., & Wu, C., *SCA Youth Program Outcome and Critical Program Factors: Summary of Findings*, MINNEAPOLIS, MN: SEARCH INSTITUTE (2015), <http://www.search-institute.org/downloadable/SCA-PhaseIII-Key-Findings.pdf>. at 10.

38. *Id.* at 11.

39. *Id.* at 12.

40. *Id.* at 16.

41. *Sparks and Thriving*, SEARCH INSTITUTE (2016), <http://www.search-institute.org/research/sparks-thriving>.

development over the long-term.⁴²

The study showed that this, too, was an area of growth for SCA participants. As participants became more open to discovering new things, more hopeful about their future, more focused on their goals, and more aware of their strengths and weaknesses they had a greater sense of self-efficacy and were also better able to identify their personal passions or sparks.⁴³

At SCA, we were excited about the results, but we weren't the only ones. The experts at the Search Institute were excited because they saw that SCA was impacting youth in ways that decades of research proved to be powerful for creating extraordinary human beings who thrive in their private lives, in their communities, and in the world.

"A sense of purpose, openness to challenge, planfulness and perseverance – these can fuel a lifetime of growth and development. And they can be challenging to build in traditional education settings," said Gene Roehlkepartain, Ph.D., vice president for research and development at the Search Institute.⁴⁴ "It is unusual to see statistically significant differences between pre- and post-program survey results across such a wide range of youth development outcomes."⁴⁵

On August 25, 2015, SCA and the National Park Service celebrated the agency's 99th birthday on the National Mall in Washington, DC. With NPS Director Jon Jarvis looking on, SCA Centennial Volunteer Ambassador Ayomide Sekiteri delivered the keynote address, excerpted below:

"If it was based solely on statistics, I wouldn't be standing here. The typical national park visitor is considerably older and very white. That's not me at all.

"I am twenty-two, African-American, and the daughter of two Nigerian-born and raised parents. No, I am not the typical national park visitor.

"But I am here! I'm here to break the myth that young people, and especially young people of color, don't care about national parks or, for that matter, nature.

42. *Id.*

43. Syvertsen, A. K., Sullivan, T. S., & Wu, C., *SCA Youth Program Outcome and Critical Program Factors: Summary of Findings*, MINNEAPOLIS, MN: SEARCH INSTITUTE (2015), <http://www.search-institute.org/downloadable/SCA-PhaseIII-Key-Findings.pdf>, at 9-14.

44. *Search Institute: SCA Impact on Youth*, THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION (August 5, 2015), <http://www.thesca.org/news/search-institute-sca-impact-youth>.

45. *Id.*

“For a long time I was detached from the outdoors. But during my spring break of 2014, I traveled all the way to Jackson Hole, Wyoming for training in SCA’s NPS Academy. I had never seen mountains so large, and moose, bison, coyotes, herds of elk. I saw the stars – no, I really saw stars, shining brighter than I ever knew they could shine.

“Things were different from that moment on. I decided that there was so much more beyond the cities, skyscrapers, and pavement. I have now just recently graduated, completing my major in environmental science and policy at Hood College.

“My experiences with SCA and NPS have helped me immensely in my journey of self-discovery. They have changed the way I see the outdoors, even the way I see myself. I know my history can be found in the national parks and I sense my future can be, too.

“That’s why I’m here today. To prove that young people of color care about our parks, to explore the outdoors as well as a career, and to inspire others the way the Grand Tetons, Yosemite, Valley Forge and the Lincoln Memorial inspire me.”⁴⁶

Because they can be such a powerful influence on the future success of young people, these are precisely the traits and skills that schools and youth development organizations are trying to build in their participants. In his 2013 bestseller *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, journalist Paul Tough explored an emerging body of research,⁴⁷ including that of psychologists Carol Dweck, on the importance of a growth mindset, and Angela Duckworth, on the power of grit, that demonstrates the important of non-cognitive skills—grit, curiosity, perseverance, contentiousness, and others—for the future success of young people. Additionally, an emphasis on other-centeredness is also at the core of a growing movement in the American academic community as Harvard and other institutions of higher learning move to place a greater an emphasis on caring for others over individual achievement in their admissions criteria.

Despite their best efforts, however, educational institutions are not able to transform youth in the ways that SCA does. According to Search, among the critical factors in SCA programs are: living and working together with new people, building relationships with peers and mentor leaders, being outdoors and unplugged from the familiar and often from

46. *Young People of Color Care About Our Parks*, The Student Conservation Association, <https://thesca.org/ayomide> (last visited Oct. 15, 2016).

47. Paul Tough, *How Children Succeed* 76, 97-98 (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1st ed. 2012).

technology, performing hard work to complete a conservation project that makes a real and tangible difference for the land, reflecting together with teammates on all that they've done, and reflecting individually on the bigness of the world and what it tells them about their place in it, who they are, and who they want to be.⁴⁸

All of these critical factors in the SCA experience were rooted in the original SCA program launched in 1957 at Grand Teton and Olympic National Parks. The impetus for that was the need to protect the nation's public lands. SCA hadn't set out to create a youth development program per se. However, the power of the experience for individual transformation was there from the beginning. The study demonstrates that young people working together on important conservation projects triggers the impact on those doing the work.⁴⁹ In other words, the transformation of participants is inseparable from the transformation of the land; youth development was happening not alongside service to nature but because of it.

And the story doesn't stop there. Developing the skills and character strengths in young people that put them on a path to thriving is critically important for the conservation field. In the face of climate change, urbanization, and other pressures on our natural environment, the future of our world will depend on conservationists conducting research, developing policies and programs, and taking action in their daily lives to conserve resources and convincing others to do the same. Fostering thriving in youth and building the next generation of conservation leaders are inextricably linked. Youth who thrive have the tools, skills, and sparks to shape their future – and the future of the planet.

IV. SCA AND CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF NATIONAL PARKS FOR YOUNGER GENERATIONS

As mentioned earlier, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell has called for a “course-correction” on national parks. Calling the National Park Service's centennial a rare opportunity to inspire Americans to embrace the great outdoors, Jewell recommended increasing service and other engagement opportunities for youth from all backgrounds.⁵⁰ This, she

48. A.K. Syvertsen and T.K. Sullivan, *Study Highlights: Youth Development Through Service to Nature: A Study of Student Conservation Association Programs*, MINNEAPOLIS, MN: SEARCH INSTITUTE (2016), <http://www.search-institute.org/sites/default/files/b/Youth-Development-through-Service-to-Nature-Research-Brief-2016.pdf>, at 2.

49. *Id.*

50. *Secretary Jewell Offers Vision for Next 100 Years of Conservation in America* (April 19,

noted, would help to ensure that national parks would be relevant for all Americans well into the future.⁵¹

As she gave her address, SCA and the National Park Service announced the renewal and expansion of our Centennial Volunteer Ambassador program, a joint initiative piloted in 2015 and one that that will mark the Park Service's 100th anniversary by placing 100 young adults in parks across the country, where SCA members will build the ranks of park volunteers and supporters.

"Even as we celebrate the National Park Service's first one hundred years," said National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis, "we are focused on the next one hundred years and the next generation of conservation leaders. These Centennial Volunteer Ambassadors will share their passion for national parks and inspire people to develop their own connections to the great outdoors all across America."⁵²

Director Jarvis is a long-time proponent of SCA. Like the Search experts, Jarvis has seen the impact SCA has on young—though from a much closer perspective. "I've been working with SCA almost my entire career," Jarvis said. "I've been with the Service for almost 37 years and I hired my first SCA in 1978. I see the lights go on with these young folks when they're out in these environments and working hard and experiencing these places."⁵³

The National Park Service centennial will segue directly into SCA's 60th anniversary, as will newer and bigger opportunities to conserve lands and transform lives.

2016), <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-jewell-offers-vision-next-100-years-conservation-america>.

51. Sally Jewell, Interior Secretary, The Next 100 Year of American Conservation at National Park Week (Apr. 19, 2016), in *The Next 100 Years of American Conservation*, US Interior Department, <https://medium.com/@Interior/the-next-100-years-of-american-conservation-397c42b8f1f2#.oyzk4oh69> (last visited (Oct. 4, 2016)); and *Secretary Jewell Offers Vision for Next 100 Years of Conservation in America* (April 19, 2016), <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-jewell-offers-vision-next-100-years-conservation-america>.

52. NPS, *SCA Expand Centennial Volunteer Ambassadors Program for 2016-17*, THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION (April 19, 2016), <https://www.thesca.org/news/nps-sca-expand-centennial-volunteer-ambassadors-program-2016-17>.

53. Q&A: *John Jarvis*, THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION (April 21, 2014), <http://www.thesca.org/news/qa-jon-jarvis>.