



US Fish and Wildlife Service
Public Lands Corps Guidelines



Public Lands Corps Program Guidelines

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The Public Lands Corps Program & Purpose

Under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is authorized to: (1) establish and implement Public Lands Corps (PLC) projects designed to carry out research or resource protection activities on its behalf; (2) certify participants who meet eligibility requirements for the PLC non-competitive hiring authority status; and, (3) ensure consistent, quality program standards throughout the FWS.

The purpose of the PLC program is to provide meaningful work, national service, and training-based opportunities for individuals who are 16 to 30 years old, and veterans who are 35 or younger¹, called 'participants' throughout this document, in the areas of public lands management and natural and cultural resources conservation, development, and scientific research. As outlined in statute², the PLC's goals are to:

1. Perform, in a cost-effective manner, appropriate conservation projects on eligible lands where existing Government employees will not perform such projects.
2. Assist Governments and Tribes in performing research and public education tasks associated with natural and cultural resources on eligible lands.
3. Expose young people and veterans to public service while furthering their understanding and appreciation of the Nation's natural and cultural resources.
4. Stimulate interest among the Nation's youth in the FWS and conservation careers by exposing them to conservation, scientific research, and other professionals in the FWS, and offering them non-competitive hiring eligibility for Federal positions for which they qualify upon meeting program requirements.
5. Expand educational opportunities by rewarding individuals who participate in national service with an increased ability to pursue higher education or job training and allow participants the opportunity to seek forbearance on Stafford loans.³

The FWS is committed to investing in our future workforce of conservation stewards by providing diverse participants paid opportunities to make significant contributions to our mission. This special hiring authority provides the Service with an opportunity to help meet the agency's goal of building a diverse and inclusive workforce. The FWS is committed to building and retaining a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the ethnic, age, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds and language diversity of contemporary America. Participants are engaged to advance their educational background and training while developing leadership skills through service to their community and the United States, ensuring the future of our wildlife habitats. Under the guidance, coaching, or mentoring of FWS staff, participants perform work to support our public lands by working to boost the impact of the FWS *"for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the American people."*

Eligible Participants

- People between 16 and 30 years old at the time when service begins
- Veterans may be up to 35 years old
- Citizens or permanent legal residents of the United States
- Individuals must possess or agree to pursue a high school diploma or equivalent

Parameters of Work

- PLC Certification requires successful completion of a project with minimum 640 hours of satisfactory service. Participants may accrue hours on a single project or across multiple projects hosted by the FWS and/or other Federal lands management agencies.
- At least 120 hours of the participant's project must be completed on or in support of public lands or Indian lands
- Project types may include, but are not limited to:

¹ Public Law

² [Public Law 109-154](#),

³ Stafford loans are Federal student loans available from the U.S. Department of Education for eligible students to help cover the cost of higher education at a four-year college or university, community college, or trade, career, or technical school. More info available at <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/loans/subsidized-unsubsidized>

- Wildlife and Habitat Management/Restoration
- Invasive Species Removal
- Trail Building/Restoration
- Wildfire and Fuel Management
- Climate Mitigation and Resilience
- Emergency and Natural Disaster
- Visitor Services
- Diversity & Inclusion
- Transportation/Community Connectedness
- Law Enforcement
- Infrastructure and Maintenance
- Virtual and/or in-person opportunities hosted by FWS Headquarters, Regions, or Divisions (e.g. Ecological Services, Migratory Birds, etc)

PLC Certification Process

The following sequence describes the Public Lands Corps certification process. Responsible parties are indicated in **bold**.

1. **FWS Youth Corps Partner** provides participants with meaningful, full-time, productive work on or in support of public. **FWS Youth Corps Partner** provides accurate information about the PLC program at the time of onboarding.
2. **FWS Supervisor** works closely with the **FWS Youth Corps Partner** to select candidates, provide oversight and task management, and ensure that eligible participants are aware of the PLC program and its benefits.
3. **PLC Participant** satisfactorily serves a minimum 640 hours of service on appropriate projects, 120 of which are on or in support of Federal lands, Tribal lands, or Hawaiian home lands while engaged with a qualified partner organization(s) under an FWS agreement.
4. **PLC Participant** notifies the **FWS Supervisor** of their intention to seek PLC non-competitive hiring authority, ideally prior to the project end to ensure timely certificate issuance.
5. **PLC Participant** works with the **FWS Supervisor** and **FWS Youth Corps Partner** to document, validate, and sign the *Participant Work Hours Verification Form* (Attachment 2). If relevant, **PLC Participant** provides copies of all *Participant Work Hours Verification Forms* from previous PLC projects used to meet hour requirements.
6. **FWS Supervisor** forwards the complete *PLC Participant Work Hours Verification Form(s)* to the appropriate **FWS Regional PLC Coordinator** in a timely fashion.
7. **FWS Regional PLC Coordinator** reviews *PLC Participant Work Hours Verification Form(s)* to ensure they are properly completed, signs *Certification Memo for Non-Competitive Eligibility* (Attachment 3), and sends copies to the qualifying participants, FWS Youth Corps Partner, and FWS Supervisor.
8. **FWS Supervisor, FWS Youth Corps Partner, and FWS Regional PLC Coordinator** maintain copies of the *PLC Participant Work Hours Verification Forms* for all projects the participant has served or in accordance with Privacy Act requirements.
9. **PLC Participant** maintains a signed *Certification Memo for Non-competitive Eligibility* and provides a copy of the *Certification Memo for Non-competitive Eligibility* in any application package to claim eligibility for special hiring authority when applying for General Schedule and Federal Wage Schedule positions for permanent, temporary, or term vacancies advertised on www.USAJOB.gov.

PLC Non-competitive Hiring Authority for Federal Positions

DOI Personnel Bulletin (PB) 21-09⁴ establishes policy and procedures for providing qualifying participants with PLC non-competitive hiring authority status to apply for permanent, temporary, and term General Schedule or Federal Wage Schedule competitive positions with the FWS. Candidates can use the PLC non-competitive hiring authority to compete

⁴ DOI PB 21-09 (Departmental Policy on Public Lands Corp Hiring Authority), dated November 5, 2021, is located here: <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/elips/documents/pb-21-09-departmental-policy-on-public-lands-corps-hiring-authority-11.5.2021.pdf>.

for internal, merit promotion vacancy announcements that include consideration of applicants eligible for special hiring authorities.

To receive this certificate, candidates must have completed their most recent PLC project, which provided them with a total of 640 hours, including 120 hours on eligible service lands, **within the last 2 years**. For individuals who are issued multiple certificates, the most recently issued PLC Certificate should be used to apply for vacancies.

Although the PLC non-competitive hiring authority is a non-competitive recruitment source, eligible participants are not guaranteed automatic placement into Federal positions and must be appointed into the competitive service. Eligible participants **must apply and be selected** based on creditable education, specialized training, and professional work and volunteer experience, for positions through USAJOBS.gov. Time served in the PLC is not creditable for purposes of computations for retirement, time in grade, leave, or Thrift Savings Plan benefits.

Partners, Funding, and FWS Youth Corps Membership

The FWS seeks partners with the ability to hire qualified youth and/or conservation corps. Such partners maintain the organizational capacity and unique qualifications necessary to work collaboratively with the FWS to develop projects under the PLC Act. To do so, Partners must apply to become members of the FWS Youth Corps to implement appropriate projects in conjunction with the FWS, and to provide the benefit of PLC non-competitive hiring eligibility to qualified participants who meet eligibility requirements. Partners that were prior members of the Interagency 21st Century Conservation Corps (21CSC) do not need to reapply to become members of the *FWS Youth Corps Member List* (Attachment 4). FWS hiring managers are strongly encouraged to seek partners from the FWS Youth Corps Member List to ensure that interns are eligible for the benefits of the Public Lands Corps Authority.

Partners must enter into an agreement to implement PLC projects. While the FWS is authorized to use contracts for PLC projects and internships, cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding (MOU) more accurately reflect the nature of the relationship between the FWS and partners under PLC where both parties have substantial involvement in completing identified work. Such agreements include membership in the FWS Youth Corps. FWS offices are authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with qualified youth or conservation corps under the Youth Engagement, Education, and Employment (15.676) Assistance Listing.

Projects can be funded through federally appropriated funds from FWS and any source of Federal Government funds. Partners are required to provide a minimum 25% cost match from non-Federal sources in the form of either cash or in-kind services. In-kind services may include labor, facilities, materials, and/or equipment. No cost match is required for PLC projects carried out on Tribal lands or Hawaiian home lands⁵.

To request membership in FWS Youth Corps, interested organizations should submit a *Request for Membership in the Fish and Wildlife Services' Youth Corps* (Attachment 5) via email to fwsyouthcorps@fws.gov and include the FWS National Youth Coordinator, Branch of Visitor Services, National Wildlife Refuge System.

Contacts and Further Information

Questions involving detailed information on overall PLC requirements should be directed to the FWS National Youth Coordinator, Branch of Visitor Services, National Wildlife Refuge System. Region specific questions should be directed to FWS Regional Intern & Fellow Coordinators or FWS Regional PLC Coordinators. Coordinator contact information is available on the FWS National Youth SharePoint.

Questions on the PLC non-competitive hiring authority status component of this guidance should be referred to the [Human Capital Lead Staffing Specialist](#)

For further information, see the [Public Lands Corps Department of Interior Policy](#).

⁵ For definitions of Indian lands and Hawaiian home lands see section 1722 of the Public Lands Corps Act (<http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title16/chapter37/subchapter2&edition=prelim>)

Attachments

Attachment 1 – Frequently Asked Questions

Attachment 2 - Participant Work Hours Verification Form

Attachment 3 – Certification Memo for Non-Competitive Eligibility

Attachment 4 – FWS Youth Corps Member List

Attachment 5 - Request for Membership in the Fish and Wildlife Services' Youth Corps

Frequently Asked Questions

When can I earn my Certification Memo for Non-Competitive Eligibility to activate my non-competitive eligibility through the Public Lands Corps Authority?

A certificate for Public Lands Corps authority may be granted when a participant completes an appropriate project and meets the 640-hour requirement. Once a candidate completes a project and reaches 640 eligible hours, they may either submit a Participant Work Hours Verification Form or wait until the completion of their service term. PLC Candidates are NOT required to apply for PLC certification at a certain point in their project/internship experience. Once in compliance with their program's minimum standards, they may choose to either: **1)** Apply as soon as they reach 640 hours and a project is complete, **2)** Apply at the culmination of their **service term** (e.g. 12-month fellowship), even if it is longer than 640 hours, or **3)** Apply & receive a certificate upon completion of a project and 640 hours of service AND apply again at the culmination of their service term **if** they have completed an additional project and earned an additional 640 hours.

For how long is non-competitive eligibility through the Public Lands Corps Authority valid?

Appointments under this authority must be effective within 2 years of the date of service on the *Certification Memo for Non-Competitive Eligibility*. **This means the former PLC participant must have completed all pre-employment requirements and started their federal position before the 2-year eligibility period expires.** Under no circumstances may an appointment eligibility period under this authority exceed 2 years, nor can the 2-year timeframe be paused, extended, or deferred. Appointment to a qualifying Federal position is limited to U.S. citizens and nationals.

How many times may I apply my PLC Certification Memo to vacancies on USAJobs?

An eligible individual may be non-competitively appointed more than once if it is still within the 2-year timeframe.

How do I apply for positions using PLC non-competitive hiring authority status?

Under this authority, participants may apply for qualifying permanent, temporary, and term competitive positions via vacancy announcements on USAJOBS that are only open to FWS and other Federal lands management agency employees, and to candidates with special hiring authorities. When applying for qualifying positions on USAJOBS, participants must:

- Submit a resume, educational transcripts, and other required materials requested by the vacancy to justify background, education, and experience;
- Complete the vacancy questionnaire or other process the vacancy announcement on USAJOBS describes;
- Claim special hiring authority when prompted and attach an electronic copy of the signed certificate of eligibility of PLC non-competitive hiring authority; and
- Submit and confirm the application before the announcement deadline.

If a candidate is currently over the eligible age requirement, but worked on a project when they were within the eligible age requirement, can they earn PLC certification?

PLC eligible candidates must be between the ages of 16 and 30, inclusive, or a veteran age 35 or younger, **at the time the individual begins the term of service.** Additionally, PLC eligible candidates must have completed their most recent PLC project which provided them with a total of 640 hours **within the last two years.**

Where can I obtain PLC hours? Is there a limit to the number of projects in which I can participate to earn them?

Participants can accrue hours on multiple projects in all U.S. Department of the Interior land management agencies, as well as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Commerce, among other approved Federal agencies. All such hours may be used to meet the hourly requirements for the PLC non-competitive hiring authority

status. Eligible participants may continue to accrue hours in the PLC and can become eligible for additional PLC certificates (i.e., by accruing an additional 640 hours) based on their individual term(s) of service. It is the responsibility of the participant to keep copies of all completed *Participant Work Hours Verification Forms* from all the projects they have worked and plan to use to show that they have met the minimum hourly requirement for PLC non-competitive hiring authority.

Which lands are included in the definition of “public lands”?

The term “public lands” means any lands or waters (or interest therein) owned or administered by the United States. Federal lands including military bases are eligible according to this definition, however state and local lands are not eligible. Additionally, Tribal lands or Hawaiian home lands⁶ are eligible. The term “Indian lands” means-- (A) any Indian reservation; (B) any public domain Indian allotments; (C) any former Indian reservation in the State of Oklahoma; (D) any land held by incorporated Native groups, regional corporations, and village corporations under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (43 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.); and (E) any land held by dependent Indian communities within the borders of the United States whether within the original or subsequently acquired territory thereof, and whether within or without the limits of a State. The term “Hawaiian home lands” means all lands given the status of Hawaiian home lands under section 204 of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920 (42 Stat. 110), or under the corresponding provision of the Constitution of the State of Hawaii adopted under section 4 of the Act entitled “An Act to provide for the admission of the State of Hawaii into the Union”, approved March 18, 1959 (Public Law 86-3; 73 Stat. 5).

The partner organization that employs my intern was formerly part of the 21st Century Conservation Corps. Do they need to reapply for membership in the FWS Youth Corps?

Partners that were prior members of the Interagency 21st Century Conservation Corps (21CSC) do not need to reapply to become members of the FWS Youth Corps.

How is the Public Lands Corps authorized?

Public Lands Corps (PLC) is authorized by Congress under 16 U.S.C. Sec. 1721-1726; [Public Law 109-154](#),⁷ Public Lands Corps Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2005, as amended in the National Park Service Centennial Act of 2016, Pub. L. 114-289; and, as amended in the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, Recreation Act of 2019, Pub. L. 116-9, and all subsequent amendments.

⁶ For definitions of Indian lands and Hawaiian home lands see section 1722 of the Public Lands Corps Act (<http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title16/chapter37/subchapter2&edition=prelim>)

⁷ [Public Law 109-154](#),