

Samuel Wilson Testimony for support of LD 1040 “An Act To Enhance Funding Opportunities for the Youth Conservation Corps”

Good afternoon Senator Saviello, Representative Welsh, and members of the committee. My name is Sam Wilson, and I am the Program Manager at the Acton Wakefield Watersheds Alliance, or AWWA. Our organization works in the border region of Wakefield NH, and Acton Maine. Since 2006, our Youth Conservation Corps, or YCC, has installed 670 erosion control measures on 172 properties around the lakes and rivers in our region. I've personally been involved with 150 of those properties. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1040.

It would sound impressive to say that Maine's YCCs have made an immeasurable impact on the environment. However, the measured results are even more impressive. The AWWA YCC, with the help of its many partners, has prevented an estimated 304 tons of sediment from entering lakes in Maine and New Hampshire. That's more than the weight of a blue whale.

A YCC's success is easily measured in sediment tons, water clarity and total phosphorus levels, however there is an intangible effect of the work that we do, one that I've been able to experience first-hand through all levels of my career. I started working with AWWA in 2006 for our first YCC season. As a teenager in a rural town, my initial draw to the YCC was the short commute since it was one of the only teen jobs in town. What kept me coming back year after year though was the sense of camaraderie which came with the physical labor. Working with my crew to dig massive holes for rain gardens and grinding through the rocky New England soils creates a bond which few experiences rival. We learned to obsess over small details, making projects functional while taking pride in their aesthetics. Working on the YCC crew taught me the satisfaction of completing a job with my own two hands, and gave me the confidence to build and learn new skills.

I led my first YCC crew in 2009. I was nineteen, having just completed my freshman year of college. Responsibility was new to me; up to that point my biggest responsibility had been making sure I had enough clean clothes to get through my classes for the week. Now, I was leading a crew of six high school kids. I was responsible for their work, their efficiency, and their safety. I learned how to motivate the crew, how to handle unexpected obstacles, and the importance of expressing the same work ethic I expected from them. Through all of this, my Program Manager was a mentor and friend to me, guiding me through the professional and personal hurdles of my life.

After three years as a crew leader, I became the Program Manager in charge of our YCC. Working in all stages of the YCC has helped me to be a better leader. Each year, I see new crew members learn important skills. Yes, they know how to properly dig a hole. But more importantly, they know how to work as a team, how to divide their labor efficiently, and how to think for themselves to solve a problem.

I've also been lucky enough to see our current crew leaders, both of whom have put in years on the crew, growing to literally become the problem solvers and leaders of tomorrow as they ponder their career choices. LD 1040 will allow the State of Maine to further support not only the environmental benefits of YCC's across the state, but also the individuals who will be the foundation of our future; teens about to enter the work force.

Thank you for your time and consideration