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Thursday, March 6, 2008

## Youth volunteers learn forestry skills on Catoctin Mountain

by Jeremy Hauck | Staff Writer  
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Amid the howls of chainsaws on a wooded mountaintop, young volunteers from across the nation learned about themselves as they studied and practiced forest management this week.

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Zach Brooks, 22, and Molly Burr, 19, both of Michigan, on Monday sat in a sunlit meadow surrounded by a dense stand of young trees in the Frederick city watershed, running a file across the teeth of a chainsaw in order to make it sharper.

They and 27 other members of the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps [NCCC], a division of the federal Corporation for National and Community Service, were the guests and students of the Maryland Forest Service, Catoctin

Mountain Park and the Potomac Conservancy, a nonprofit that seeks to protect tributaries to the Potomac River. Between Feb. 28 and Tuesday, corps members (ages 18 to 24) spent their nights at Camp Round



Tom Fedor/The Gazette  
 Americorps National Civilian Community Corps' Eddie Chavira, 20, of California, works to thin the forestry in the Hamburg area of the Frederick Municipal Forest on Catoctin Mountain Monday morning.

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**THIS  
WEEKEND**

Meadow in Catoctin Mountain Park and their days taking lessons from Maryland Forest Service officials on how to use chainsaws to cut trees.

The corps cut down junk trees in the Frederick City Watershed — just south of Cunningham Falls State Park — in order to give good trees a better chance at growing.

Brooks and Burr both joined the corps in late January, and will travel the eastern U.S. from their base in Perry Point, Md., to work on service projects, hosted by municipalities, parks, schools and nonprofits, until November.

“I had a friend who did NCCC couple years ago, and that’s how I found out about it,” Brooks said, adding that his friend specifically recommended applying for the chainsaw training. “I didn’t know that I would be up on the top of a mountain like this. This is pretty sweet.”

Brooks graduated college with degrees in advertising and psychology. He and Burr did not know each other before joining AmeriCorps, and they met on the plane to Maryland.

“I’m finding out what I want to do with my life,” he said. “Who knows, maybe I want to work with chainsaws for the rest of my life. It’s pretty cool. I’m enjoying it.”

The volunteers’ work in the field helps to supply labor to keep the forest growing as it should, according to forestry officials.

“One of things we’re trying to explain to them is that we’re trying to create a diverse forest here ... so that if we have a



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really bad gypsy moth infestation, or another forest pest comes in and devastates a certain type of tree, there's still a stand of trees left to keep the water quality good," said Chuck Harris, who works for the forest service.

The stand – or grouping of trees of a certain age or species – where the volunteers were working sprang up two decades ago, after forestry officials removed trees killed by a gypsy moth invasion. The volunteers would find a tree marked for conservation, and would cut the trees on three sides of it, thus allowing the tree to gather more water, nutrients and sunlight, and grow faster – just as a gardener protects flowers from weeds, said Bryan Seipp, a forester and director of restoration with the Potomac Conservancy, a partner in the training.

The effects of the work would be felt all the way down to the Chesapeake Bay, Seipp added.

“If we can keep them protected, at least we [will] have something to work with downstream,” he said.

AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps