There is no price that I could put on what my AmeriCorps service has meant to me, my family and my life today. Through my time as an AmeriCorps member I became involved, engaged and aware of what my community was really all about. My service led to full-time employment, home ownership, involvement in local service organizations, and a strong desire to be civically engaged. I sincerely believe that without my time with AmeriCorps I wouldn’t be living and working in Michigan.

*Abigail Ertel, Community Program Lead, Huron Pines  
Served at HeadWaters Land Conservancy in 2008*

When I applied for the Huron Pines AmeriCorps program, I was fresh out of grad school. Through my AmeriCorps service, instead of being on for a seasonal job as a technician, I was actually leading projects and programs. It really fast-tracked my career.

*Josh Leisen, Watershed Project Manager, Huron Pines  
Served at Huron Pines in 2013*

Being an AmeriCorps member has been an amazing experience, I would highly recommend it for anyone. It really leads you in the right direction. It helps you find your passion.

*Katelyn Burns, currently serving at MSU Extension/Michigan Sea Grant*

My AmeriCorps experience has taught me a lot. Not only professionally, but about Michigan and the communities I’ve been serving in. I can’t tell you how many times we’ve been working on trails or pulling invasive species and people have come up and told us how much these natural areas mean to them, how grateful they are that we’re maintaining trails or preserving the natural beauty.

*Derek Brinks, currently serving at Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy*
A Decade of Service

Growing a community of environmental stewards begins with putting committed Huron Pines AmeriCorps members in the field, and empowering them to take the lead on the projects they’re most passionate about. As these Huron Pines AmeriCorps members are given the ability to make a difference, the stronger we become as a community, which is why the Huron Pines AmeriCorps program has been developing leaders in conservation since 2007.

We’ve come a long way over the last decade, from 9 Huron Pines AmeriCorps members in our first year to 30 members at host sites across the state in 2017, and our efforts and growth have not gone unnoticed. In 2015, we were honored to receive the Governor’s Service Award for Outstanding National Service Program. This is an award we share with all of the members, organizations and funders who have partnered with us to make this program a success.

A New Generation of Environmental Stewards

The Huron Pines AmeriCorps program matches applicants from across the country with nonprofits, agencies and organizations throughout Michigan to complete a 10-month term of service related to the field of conservation. Through their service, Huron Pines AmeriCorps members strive to enhance Michigan’s natural resources and foster environmental stewardship by engaging local volunteers, community groups and schools in service projects, hands-on learning opportunities and educational workshops.

Building Connections and Developing Skills

Our program provides recent college graduates and those new to the field of conservation the opportunity to build skills with hands-on training and experience.

People like Claire Wood, who served two terms in 2013 and 2014 with the Leelanau Conservancy, who said, “I’m sure without my AmeriCorps service I wouldn’t be where I am today professionally. I am doing something I’m truly passionate about now and that’s worth it.”

Huron Pines AmeriCorps alumnus Daniel Moffatt is another example of someone who was able to build skills while being a champion for the environment. During Moffatt’s 2012 term of service with the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative he worked alongside other environmental leaders toward a cause he believed in.

As Moffatt put it, “AmeriCorps gave me the opportunity to coordinate a fantastic group of professional teachers, educators and scientists for the purpose of empowering young people as environmental leaders and social entrepreneurs.”

Empowering Future Conservation Leaders

In addition to working alongside seasoned professionals, AmeriCorps members are given the opportunity to take the lead and develop new programming at the sites where they serve.

This year, Samantha Griffin, a Huron Pines AmeriCorps member in her second year of service with Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, had the experience of launching a program from the ground up. Samantha manages a program that uses goats as agents of invasive species removal.

“I was there when we picked up the goats,” Griffin said. “I helped train the goats. I took them out to their first site. I check on them every single day and the work they are doing is phenomenal. From an environmentalist standpoint, it’s so satisfying to watch the goats enjoying eating these invasive species that make our lives so difficult.”

Initiating new programs like this one leave a lasting impact on the organizations where Huron Pines AmeriCorps members serve.
Creating Communities Committed to Nature

Huron Pines AmeriCorps members also increase the capacity of the organizations where they serve. This means more community outreach, more projects completed and more impact for the overall organization.

Scott Whitcomb, an AmeriCorps site supervisor with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources at Pigeon River Country State Forest is someone who knows first-hand just how valuable AmeriCorps members can be in supporting partner organizations and agencies.

“Having an AmeriCorps member has made a tremendous and meaningful contribution to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources by expanding our capacity to complete on-the-ground conservation initiatives,” Whitcomb said. “As a state agency responsible for environmental stewardship on millions of acres of state lands there are more projects to complete than we have the ability to handle with the limited resources at our disposal. AmeriCorps lets us take on some of those projects that simply would not get done otherwise.”

AmeriCorps Works

Getting things done is, of course, what Huron Pines AmeriCorps members are known for—taking leadership and initiative to perform vital service work for the natural environment in Northeast Michigan and around the Great Lakes.

We could not be more proud of what our members, past and present, have accomplished through their service, and each milestone reached offers a new perspective on where the program is headed, and the new goals we can achieve together.

Huron Pines AmeriCorps Project Spotlight

Growing Outdoor Education at Vanderbilt Schools

At Vanderbilt Area Schools, nature and education go hand-in-hand. On a beautiful fall day, students got outside for a walk along the new nature trail in their school forest. The nature trail was built in August by students, teachers, community volunteers and AmeriCorps members.

Before on-the-ground work began, the school sat down with Huron Pines AmeriCorps members and Huron Pines staff to create a Forest Stewardship Plan to establish an outline for how best to connect the school and its students to the natural resources in their backyard. These plans are part of the statewide Forest Stewardship Program administered by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and funded by the U.S. Forest Service, and connect the school to further project funding and resources.

Vanderbilt Superintendent/Principal, Rick Heitmeyer, has a goal of making sure all students get outside for one hour a week. The new half-mile trail is the first step toward reaching that goal. The trail was built with the support of the community, trail clearing and wood chipping by M&M Excavating and Bunker and Sons Sawmill, and funding from the Otsego County Community Foundation (Youth Advisory Council Fund, Otsego County United Way and the McNamara Fund).

There's more to come. Through collaboration with Huron Pines and the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative network, and partial funding from the Otsego County Community Foundation and the Great Lakes Fishery Trust, the school has plans to build an outdoor classroom on the hilltop along the nature trail. The classroom was designed by industrial art students and is slated to be installed in 2018 once full funding is secured.

Projects like this are what Huron Pines AmeriCorps is all about. AmeriCorps members with diverse skills and backgrounds coming together to assess needs, collaborate with community partners and make a positive impact on the environment.
Thank You

We could not have gotten here without the support of the many host sites and funders who have made this program a success over the years.