



OFFICE OF  
**INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

RECOVERY

# RECOVERY OVERSIGHT ADVISORY


Youth Related Recovery Act Projects



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DEC 22 2010

To: Chris Henderson  
Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Economic Recovery and Stimulus

From: Robert A. Knox   
Assistant Inspector General for Recovery Oversight

Subject: Recovery Oversight Advisory – Youth Related Recovery Act Projects  
Report No. RO-B-MOA-098-2011

This advisory, regarding Recovery Act projects that employed youth, is part of our ongoing efforts to oversee and ensure the accountability of funding appropriated to the U.S. Department of the Interior (Department) in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act). Despite guidance within the Recovery Act itself, and encouragement from the Secretary to employ youth wherever possible, we encountered challenges quantifying youth specific Recovery Act projects and learned that bureaus did little to no tracking of how many youth were employed. Inconsistent measures, coupled with the late timing of guidance specific to hiring youth under the Recovery Act, meant the Department likely missed an opportunity to use Recovery Act funds to galvanize its commitment to youth involvement.

We will post this advisory on our Web site ([www.doioig.gov/recovery/](http://www.doioig.gov/recovery/)) and [Recovery.gov](http://Recovery.gov). No action or response is requested for this advisory. Information contained in this advisory may also be included in our semiannual reports to Congress. We performed our work in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections adopted by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. Please contact me if you have any questions.

## Background

Youth between the ages of 16 and 24 have seen unemployment rates increase in recent years from 10.8 percent in 2007 to 19.1 percent in 2010.<sup>1</sup> One of the Recovery Act's general provisions states that the Secretary of Interior, "shall utilize, where practicable, the Public Lands Corps, Youth Conservation Corps, Student Conservation Association, Job Corps and other related partnerships with Federal, state, local, tribal or non-profit groups that serve young adults."<sup>2</sup>

Educating, engaging, and employing youth in conservation activities has been a long-held tradition within the Department. The Secretary rejuvenated the Department's commitment to youth involvement by creating the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Youth Conservation Corps initiative and including it as part of the Fiscal Year 2010 budget. In his priority message to the Department on May 4, 2009, the Secretary also encouraged bureaus to employ youth wherever possible as they implement the Recovery Act.

<sup>1</sup> *Employment and Unemployment Among Youth – Summer 2010*, USDL-10-1175, August 27, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Pub. Law No. 111-5, § 702.

Our goal for this review was to determine to what extent Recovery Act funds were used to galvanize the Department’s youth initiative and employ youth. Specifically, we sought to identify the number and type of Recovery Act projects that utilized youth, the amount of funding that bureaus obligated for youth projects, to whom the money was obligated, and the number of youth employed. We analyzed Recovery Act project lists and Departmental financial data, interviewed staff from the newly created Office of Youth in Natural Resources, and spoke to officials from the three bureaus with the most youth related Recovery Act projects: the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the National Park Service (NPS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

## Youth-Specific Recovery Act Projects

We encountered challenges quantifying youth-specific Recovery Act projects because the Recovery Act project lists provided to the Department did not consistently track youth-specific projects over time, and the bureaus did not consistently track this information.

The number of Recovery Act projects that involve youth from the start of the Recovery Act to the time we conducted our review was fewer than what bureaus originally reported in early project lists. On an initial list from May 2009, 356 projects were identified as meeting the Secretary’s youth initiative, with BLM, NPS, and FWS having the highest number of youth projects (Figure 1). One year later, only 321 of those projects remained on the project list. We could not determine if these projects were still related to the Secretary’s youth initiative because that specific information was no longer being captured. Information provided by BLM, NPS, and FWS, indicated that not all of the 321 projects on the June 2010 list were related to youth, despite having been originally identified as such.

Bureau	May 2009	June 2010
Bureau of Indian Affairs	32	31
Bureau of Land Management	106	106
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation	15	11
National Park Service	146	117
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	47	46
U.S. Geological Survey	10	10
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>321</b>

Figure 1. Number of Youth Projects by Bureau

## Recovery Act Dollars Obligated for Youth Projects

We also analyzed Departmental financial data to determine the types of projects receiving Recovery Act funds, what proportion of those dollars were obligated for youth projects, and who received the funds. According to financial data downloaded as of July 23, 2010, the Department obligated \$50,326,426 in Recovery Act funds for youth projects.<sup>3</sup> A total of \$33,188,955 was

<sup>3</sup> Data from the Departmental financial system as of July 23, 2010, did not identify youth projects specifically. Rather, we identified potential youth projects based on a variety of criteria, including: vendor names that contained the words “Youth”, “Student”, “Corps”, “Conservation”, “University”, or “College”; project types with “youth” specifically in their title (e.g. Habitat Restoration – Youth Programs); and on project information provided to us by BLM, FWS, and NPS.

obligated for Habitat Restoration and Trails (Figure 2).

<b>Project Type</b>	<b>Total Obligations</b>	<b>Obligations for Youth Projects</b>	<b>Percent Youth Projects</b>
Abandoned Mines	\$47,961,303	\$3,963,654	8 percent
Deferred Maintenance	\$270,816,521	\$1,940,424	1 percent
Earthquake	\$29,277,587	\$4,816,861	16 percent
Emergency Drought Relief	\$20,990,659	\$1,842	0 percent <sup>4</sup>
Habitat Restoration	\$68,264,587	\$17,547,785	26 percent
Trails	\$27,357,825	\$15,641,171	57 percent
National Mapping Program Enhancements	\$14,448,220	\$1,724,506	12 percent
Renewable Energy Authorization	\$38,574,097	\$279,609	1 percent
Roads & Bridges Deferred Maintenance	\$25,657,111	\$192,759	1 percent
Volcano	\$13,350,633	\$4,217,815	32 percent
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$556,698,543</b>	<b>\$50,326,426</b>	<b>9 percent</b>

Figure 2. Recovery Act moneys obligated for youth projects.

We determined that 57 percent of total obligations for trails projects were youth related and came from BLM and NPS. The Student Conservation Association, a youth-oriented

<sup>4</sup> Figures in this column are rounded to the nearest percentile.

conservation group that has had a long-standing relationship with the Department, was the single largest recipient.



Figure 3. Students working on Glacier Basin Trail at Mount Rainier National Park. Source: OIG photo.

Recovery Act dollars obligated for youth habitat restoration projects came from BLM and FWS, \$14,399,540 and \$3,148,245, respectively, and represent 26 percent of the Department's total obligations for this type of work. BLM's obligations were spread across a wide variety of recipients. FWS obligations were predominantly payroll actions indicating direct hires through programs such as the Youth Conservation Corps, the Student Temporary Employment Program, and the Student Career Experience Program.

Thirty-two percent of Volcano projects (upgrades to the National Volcano Early Warning System by the U.S. Geological Survey) were obligated to universities who employ students, among others, for the work. The University of Alaska, Fairbanks was the largest recipient for these projects, receiving \$2.5 million.

### **Youth Employed by the Recovery Act**

With the release of funds coming not long after the Department's renewed commitment to youth involvement, the Recovery Act could have served as a catalyst to increase youth employment, but evidence that it actually did so is only anecdotal. When we asked BLM, NPS, and FWS officials if the Recovery Act enabled them to hire more youth than they normally would, they all stated that it did. When we asked how many youth their Recovery Act projects employed, we learned that the methods they used for collecting this information varied widely. Complicating matters was the fact that Recovery Act recipients were not required to report job creation numbers on projects less than \$25,000. For those awards that required reporting, not all recipients actually reported that information, and a specific distinction for youth was not required. The Office of Management and Budget also changed job reporting requirements after



the first quarter of reporting, further rendering futile any attempt to accurately measure the number of youth employed by the Recovery Act.

Additional factors complicated the bureaus' efforts to employ youth. There was confusion about whether the Recovery Act's Davis-Bacon labor standards would inhibit the Department's ability to use the Youth Conservation Corps, Student Conservation Association, and other related partnerships that serve youth, and the issue was not resolved until the end of May 2009. Departmental guidance concerning cooperative agreements with youth organizations under the Recovery Act was not released until mid-June 2009, and the master cooperative agreement with the Student Conservation Association was not signed until July 2009. Summer is the prime season for hiring youth, so the Department likely missed an opportunity to use the Recovery Act to truly galvanize its commitment to youth involvement.

We are encouraged, though, by the establishment of the Office of Youth in Natural Resources and the creation of the Departmental Youth Task Force, and hope they continue their efforts to centralize policy and establish meaningful measures related to youth employment and engagement. Had these measures been firmly established prior to the Recovery Act, the Department might have been in a better position to fully maximize youth participation during implementation.

cc: Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior  
Director, Office of Youth in Natural Resources, U.S. Department of the Interior  
Director, Bureau of Land Management  
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Director, National Park Service  
Director, U.S. Geological Survey  
Assistant Secretary, Policy, Management, and Budget  
Director, Office of Acquisition and Property Management  
Acting Director, Office of Financial Management  
Recovery Coordinator, Bureau of Land Management  
Recovery Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Recovery Coordinator, National Park Service  
Recovery Coordinator, U.S. Geological Survey  
Departmental GAO/OIG Audit Liaison  
Audit Liaison, Office of the Secretary  
Audit Liaison, Bureau of Land Management  
Audit Liaison, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Audit Liaison, National Park Service  
Audit Liaison, U.S. Geological Survey

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