Environmental Careers and Opportunities (ECO) AmeriCorps is an AmeriCorps program within the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VTDEC). ECO AmeriCorps is funded in part by an AmeriCorps state grant provided through SerVermont from the Corporation for National & Community Service. Service sites will provide meaningful service opportunities, regular supervision with oversight of service hours and timesheets, office space and office equipment, orientation to the worksite, additional training (as needed) and mileage reimbursement. The 2023-2024 program will begin mid-September 2023 and end in August 2024.

To be considered, service sites must:

- Demonstrate a commitment to DEIJ principles and provide a pathway for involvement at the host site and program level.
- Be a non-profit, municipality, state agency, tribal government, or educational institution.
- Provide a position description showcasing activities that are appropriate to the mission of ECO AmeriCorps.
- Provide a work environment that is ADA compliant, drug-free, and carries supplies and equipment necessary for members to perform their duties.
- Be able to provide the cash match and mileage reimbursement at the federal General Services Administration (GSA) rate for service-related travel for the member.
- Attend a supervisor orientation and be available for a minimum of two subsequent site visits and check-ins from ECO AmeriCorps staff.
- Clarify any additional responsibilities to the member according to your organization's policies.
- Notify ECO AmeriCorps staff about conflicts or other issues as they arise.

Other Requirements and Responsibilities:

- Confirm member selection, on-site training, member supervision and support throughout term of service, other forms and documentation as required by AmeriCorps, mileage reimbursement for service-related travel.
- Main supervisor must attend AmeriCorps supervisor orientation (or make special arrangements).

Host Site cost based on # of full-time employees:

*Full-Time (1,700 hours over 11 months)*
Half-Time (900 hours over 6 months)

- $5,250 regardless of size

Quarter-Time (450 hours over 3 months)

- $2,625 regardless of size

For more information about the host site application:

- Visit the ECO Website for supporting documents: www.ecoamericorps.org
- Or contact Program Supervisor, Dustin Bowman, dustin.bowman@vermont.gov, 802-461-5222

The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation is sponsoring AmeriCorps positions through its AmeriCorps Program. The State of Vermont is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Positions are open to all applicants without regard to race, color, national origin, ethnicity, disability, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, veteran's status, religion, or creed.

Name of Organization or Municipality:

VT DEC Wetlands Program

Address of Organization or Municipality:

1 National Life Drive, Davis 2, Montpelier VT

Primary Supervisor Name and Title:

Tina Heath, District Wetlands Ecologist

Primary Supervisor's email:

tina.heath@vermont.gov

Primary Supervisor's phone #:

8024906202

Please provide a brief description of your role at your site:

I (Tina Heath) am responsible for evaluating and protecting significant wetlands by interpreting and implementing the Vermont Wetland Rules in my regulatory district. This involves timely communication and working closely with landowners, consultants, municipalities, and other state and federal entities. This role manages many types of wetland projects including permitting, compliance, Class I protection, and restoration. Additionally, I supervise the wetland bioassessment program housed within the DEC Wetlands Program (“Program”) which assesses the biological integrity and ecological condition of wetlands in Vermont. My position also has a heavy focus on education and outreach.

Which hosting category are you applying to?
What is the title of the position you are requesting?

Wetland Stewardship Assistant

Describe your proposed service project.

[Note: performance measures are based on improved acres of public land, improved miles of waterways or trails, number of Vermonters provided environmental stewardship education or training, and number of members placed in green jobs after completing their AmeriCorps service. Capacity-building activities are allowed. Please describe any projected impact.]

1. Wetland Bioassessment:

During the summer field season this member will collect data on wetland ecological health in targeted watersheds for that year. The position will pair closely with staff ecologists to collect and process biological, chemical, physical, and human disturbance data at 20 + sites. This person will also assist in data management and writing site reports. This work supplies important data that helps identify high-quality wetlands that may need further protection as well as degraded wetlands that may be good candidates for restoration efforts. This season the bioassessment team will focus on a select number of sites that are in or associated with Environmental Justice Communities, which were identified using UVM's Environmental Disparity Index, and monitoring these wetlands will give us a better sense of their condition for management purposes. There is also a focus on collecting data on black ash swamps, a culturally significant Wetland Natural Community type to the state recognized Western Abenaki. Another crucial mission of the bioassessment program is providing education and outreach on wetland health, ecology, and their importance to Vermont’s people, wildlife, and landscape. The service member will be involved with all outreach event/workshop planning and participation, as well as working and meeting with individual landowners, conservation groups, and schools during bioassessment field visits.

2. Wetland Mapping:

The member will also serve with our in-house and contracted mapping experts to drastically improve thousands of acres of the state's wetland mapping. State wetland jurisdiction is directly tied to wetland mapping and there is a significant need to map wetlands for both protection and restoration goals. Wetland mapping projects over the last few decades have been done in a piecemeal fashion and may have potentially favored areas with more money and resources. Wall-to-wall mapping is important to environmental justice as it ensures wetlands are mapped consistently throughout the state, including in areas with less money and resources. This position will be directly involved with the wetland mapping process, which includes fall, spring, and summer ground-truthing of wetlands and wintertime desktop reviews. Additionally, the service member will help the Program find multiple avenues for outreach in order to ensure municipalities are aware of state wetland mapping and updates on mapping progress. A large mapping project in Addison, Rutland, and Washington Counties will be wrapping up in 2023 which provides a great opportunity for this member to perform outreach and town visits in these Basins.

3. Independent Outreach Project:

Spreading the message that wetlands are critical for human safety, wildlife habitat, water quality, and general enjoyment is an essential element of the Program. Providing educational and outreach opportunities is imperative to protecting wetlands and drawing the public’s attention to their importance.
in the landscape. The Program puts high value on having this message delivered to all peoples, communities, demographics, and cultures that make their home Vermont. Wetlands are an irreplaceable piece of Vermont’s landscape and should be accessible and enjoyed by all groups. The service member will be tasked with an independent project that focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusive justice initiatives the Program would like to focus on as we move forward into the future. This person will pick a project that resonates with them and have the opportunity to develop and lead an endeavor that strives to make wetlands and the Vermont wetland protection process accessible to more people.

Project List:

A. Coordinating with a school district in a low-income, EJ community, or diverse area to bring children on a Class I wetland tour: Wetlands are also meant to be enjoyed, explored, and inspire excitement. Many children don’t have access to wild places due to financial limitations, being too far away, not having a family vehicle, etc. This project will introduce children to those wild places for an exploratory fun adventure where a lot can be learned too. The goal is to visit at least one Class I wetland in the spring—the most highly protected and high-quality wetlands in Vermont.

B. Bring wetlands to the school: collaborating with a school district in a low-income, EJ community, or diverse area and either visiting a wetland nearby on town or state-owned land, or even on the school property. Geared towards adolescents and teens, the project will be to visit a particular wetland site multiple times to learn about wetland identification, wetland functions, and wetland protection.

C. Collaborate with a non-profit ecological adventure or education program (Siskin Ecological Adventures or a similar group could be options) to provide a group of kids from underserved communities with a larger wetland exploration experience. Ideas here would be paddling the LaPlatte River wetlands or camping in the Peacham Bog Natural Area. Would provide the kind of transformational, close contact with nature experience that many people who have lifelong connections and appreciation for the natural world get as kids. This would require researching and writing a grant specific to this project. It would provide opportunity to collaborate with partners from a non-profit (and potentially even other AmeriCorps members) and practice coordinating a project with multiple moving parts and interested parties.

D. Learning more about the aesthetics and recreational values of wetlands: The Vermont Wetland Rules protect wetlands that are significant for their aesthetic values and recreational opportunities. Wetlands provide a free source of visual and auditory beauty, entertainment, wellbeing, and sustenance but as a society we don’t emphasize those value protections to the level of other functions such as water quality and wildlife habitat. The goal of this project is to explore the perspectives, stories, ethics, and ideals that underserved communities and/or individuals place on their wetlands and develop metrics and criteria to better understand the significance of these values.

E. Developing a process to include state tribes in the wetland regulation. How can Traditional Indigenous Knowledge TIK, comments, and concerns be better voiced in the permitting process? This project will be focused on working with Abenaki communities to understand their needs which could be addressed through wetland regulation. Results will be dependent on Tribal needs and could include recommendations for a formal review process or recommending TIK in permit considerations.

F. Connecting with a town or city in an underserved area and offering evaluation of wetlands on public land that are accessible to all residents. This would be a combination of connecting with the community, working with other Wetlands staff to complete an ecological assessment of wetlands in the area, then conducting outreach and education to the community, perhaps including presentations, guided walks, or other outreach activities.
What data collection tools will the member use to record the impacts of their service activity?

- Relational database that tracks data for sites visited for bioassessment work.
- Esri Survey123 app and associated online maps.
- Individual site reports for bioassessment sites as well as broader-level project reports.
- Memos that summarize outreach events and activities.
- Map review datapoints added to Arc GIS Online or the ESRI Field Maps app for each specific mapping project.
- Independent Project Report that describes: the project; goals and objectives; project outline and implementation timeline; summary of events/experiences; descriptions of deliverables, criteria, and/or metrics; discussion on why a particular project sparked interest and meaning; what was learned; recommendations for improvement; closing conclusion.

Please provide any additional information (data, statistics, reports, etc.) that demonstrates the compelling need for the proposed position:

Bioassessment: The Wetlands Program does not currently have a large enough dataset to provide statistically robust results of Vermont’s wetland condition status and trends. The Program continues to build its capacity through visiting wetland sites and collecting data. Having additional help increases our ability to collect data more quickly and efficiently, allowing us to get to more sites. This data is critical for informing Tactical Basin Plans of identified wetlands prioritized for additional protections or restoration opportunities.

Mapping: In the Missisquoi watershed, updated mapping identified 38% more wetlands than had been previously mapped. Many thousands of acres of wetlands remain unmapped throughout the State. Identification is key to protection. Sharing these maps and the importance of wetland identification with the public is critical for protection and restoration efforts.

DEIJ Initiatives Outreach: The Program is seeking to incorporate DEIJ initiatives and principles into our daily workflows. Our mission scope is large and includes all aspects of wetland protection, management, restoration, assessment, mapping, and outreach. The work is diverse and impacts all people living in and visiting Vermont, and we recognize there is a huge need to initiate increased awareness of these efforts to various groups of people, especially those that are financially disadvantaged or BIPOC. These outreach efforts can create opportunities to learn, engage with peers, recognize similar ideals, appreciate different perspectives, and have the potential to drive positive changes. Moving forward into the future the Program wants to ensure there is equal access to those prospects for all. This position will include a unique opportunity to be part of our adopting of additional DEIJ measures moving forward.

What initiatives does your organization take to support diversity, equity, inclusion, and environmental justice (DEIJ)? Please include any historical data or details for on-going strategic plans, partnerships, and projects, as relevant.

The State of Vermont is an equal opportunity employer.
In 2019, The Agency established its first Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. This Committee is responsible for establishing and creating inclusivity through learning and discussion opportunities. These outreach efforts are to promote improved cultural competency while creating a diverse and welcoming work environment. ANR’s objectives through this Committee are to provide a culture of mutual respect, appreciating differences, and cross-cultural understanding; adapt and connect with a changing and diverse public; and recruit and welcome a more diverse working force that is representative of the people who live in Vermont. The Committee has hosted seven staff workshops; collaborated with internal and external groups engaged in D&E work; created outreach material for staff including weekly email series, Microsoft Teams and intranet platforms, and open meetings; and supported ANR departments addressing equity matters.

While underrepresented people are by definition less likely to own land and thus wetlands, these people are affected significantly by wetlands in their communities which provide functions and values. Broad-scale wetland monitoring and ecological assessments allow us to perform outreach and bring people to wetlands. A new implementation of randomly chosen wetlands as part of our selection process means avoidance of bias in site selection. The wall-to-wall mapping that is being conducted in Vermont allows us to document wetlands in underrepresented areas that may not have previously been mapped.

Outline how DEIJ principles can be incorporated into your organization's work moving forward. (Provide examples of any trainings, workshops, projects, partnerships, etc.)

The Wetlands Program is committed to DEIJ initiatives and understands the necessity of changing decades of inequity and bias. During the winter of 2023, Wetlands Program staff are participating in a three-part training on racial diversity, equity, and inclusion. This 9-hour workshop is facilitated by the Transformative Teaching Collective and these workshop experiences so far have allowed for very open, honest, and vulnerable discussions while brainstorming on how to create a system that disintegrates inequity, racism, and bias in the workplace.

The Wetlands Program has been incorporating environmental justice initiatives and priorities in the most recently funded Wetland Program Development Grant and will continue to incorporate DEIJ concepts into future grant applications. Specifically, EJ communities have been incorporated into the Wetland Bioassessment Program's field season planning, where a various number of sites are identified in these communities with plans to sample and collect wetland condition data. Individual site reports are created and provided to those landowners that granted permission to access their property. These site reports provide important information on the site’s wetland condition, what lives there, and what significant functions may be present. This information provides an educational opportunity for the landowner or entity to learn about their wetlands and the importance of their wetland in the local landscape. Additionally, the Program plans to incorporate specific DEIJ-based projects involving focused outreach opportunities in low-income areas, ensuring the permitting process is equal and fair across the diversity of communities within Vermont, having adequate wetland mapping applied to all regions of Vermont, and working with indigenous groups to provide a platform for their thoughts, perspectives and contributions to wetland management, restoration, and protection.

Describe specific challenges that your organization has faced while integrating DEIJ Principles.

The state of Vermont is mostly white and is one of the least diverse states in the nation. As a result, it can be challenging to recognize when a white colleague or oneself may be exhibiting unintentional bias to another person or situation. Other scenarios that present challenges to equity and inclusion can occur
when targeting sites for assessment in low-income areas and environmental justice communities as there isn’t a mechanism by which the Program can currently determine an individual’s income or other factors that may be relevant. Additionally, wetland assessment is dependent on landowner permission to grant access to a site so it is never a guarantee during the planning process that a targeted site will be sampled, and this type of situation presents its own set of challenges in regard to unintentional sampling bias. Furthermore, underrepresented groups are less likely to own land, and there is currently no mechanism to engage people renting land in the bioassessment process.

How will the ECO member be included or supported in on-going or future DEIJ work at the organization, if they so choose?

The Wetlands Program plans to incorporate DEIJ initiatives into our workflow and will certainly continue and/or expand off the person’s individual project once their service time is complete. We would welcome the ECO member to serve as a liaison between the Program and specific DEIJ-focused projects in the future. Communication is extremely convenient in our present day by maintaining connections through email, “chat” platforms, texting, and phone calls.

Does the supervisor have adequate time and leadership experience to manage an ECO member? Please explain how:

I (Tina) currently supervise the Bioassessment Program, which includes one full-time staff and often several seasonal staff. My experience as a supervisor over the years has equipped me with the balance and organizational skills needed to stay on top of effectively managing and delegating tasks, as well as creating time for staff needs and help. I often work with different seasonal staff and internships from year to year, and this has kept me diligent as a mentor in providing a structured and constructive learning experience for new staff that lead to successful field seasons and worthwhile time spent in the Program. I am passionate about the projects we work on as a Program and the people who I work with. I am especially passionate about making the outdoors, nature, and wetlands specifically accessible to all groups of people as there can be such an impact to a person’s wellbeing, mental health, and motivation to learn about and protect these critical resources. I understand the requirements associated with the AmeriCorps position and will make sure to comply with all expectations. The Wetlands Program is a small group of great people, and we often assist one another on projects and challenges. This member will be closely working with other staff in the Program, and if I’m not available for assistance there are several other staff that can help, including (but not limited to) Laura Lapierre, Elijah Schumacher (previous ECO Americorps Service Member), and Charlie Hohn. The member will be fully incorporated into the Program and will experience all angles of wetland work including a good amount of field time being immersed in different wetlands, attending meetings, mapping wetlands, presenting on important topics including DEIJ projects, and plenty of public interactions.

Will the member have access to networking opportunities in this position? Please explain:

Bioassessment: The Wetlands Program works closely with other Watershed Management Division (WSMD) monitoring staff to collaborate on monitoring methodologies, data, and coordination. The member will be able to participate in events such as the annual WSMD Monitoring Summit to learn about the Division’s monitoring work and will have the opportunity to assist these other programs for a day or so. Additionally, this person will also have opportunities connecting with biomonitoring staff from other states in the Northeast by attending the annual NEBAWWG (New England Biological Assessment Wetland Work Group) meeting.
Mapping: Private Vermont contractors will be working with the staff program team and member throughout the service. Members will be able to contact wetland consultants to discuss their mapping. Presenting on our mapping will expose the member to state partners, municipalities, and the regulated community.

Outreach: This service member will engage with various groups of people and the general public through their focused individual project. There will be many opportunities in networking during community interactions.

Does your organization currently host or plan to host an AmeriCorps member from another program? If yes, briefly describe the duties of this other position.

The Wetlands Program does not host any other AmeriCorps positions.

Please list any clothing/equipment the member will need that you cannot provide (e.g., hiking boots, waders, raingear, etc.). Is a reliable vehicle expected? As the host site, you are responsible for providing all tools and technical equipment needed for the position (e.g., computer, phone, GPS, etc.).

Hiking boots, rain gear, backpack, rubber boots. Member is not expected to use their vehicle for travel to sites or meetings. We will use state vehicles.

Is there someone in your organization's network that might be interested in mentoring your ECO service member? *Note, 1-2 hours per month, not required

Yes

Are you willing to search with program staff over the summer to help your ECO member secure affordable and safe housing?

Yes

Many of our members are not from Vermont and are seeking a sense of community away from home. In what ways would you be willing to help them establish community connections? (Housing, peer networks, affinity spaces, local resources, fun places to go)

Several Wetland Program employees including Elijah and Charlie live in Montpelier, are involved in the community, and will be able to direct the member to social activities, outdoor recreation, and more in this area. Montpelier is a lively community and there are many options available. Burlington, which is a 45 minute drive away, is a larger town with additional opportunities, and is a location where several other DEC members live.

Montpelier is home to the North Branch Nature Center which provides access to a nice hiking, biking, and multi winter use trail network and also hosts a variety of nature classes and workshops which are fun, allow a member to meet community members, and would be directly relevant to their position (springtime wetland plant ID, for instance). There are a variety of other ways to engage in the community in the Montpelier area, from pickup ultimate frisbee and soccer during the summer to contra dances, to a vibrant farmer’s market, to community discussion and engagement roundtables on local history, art, and social issues offered through the Kellogg Hubbard Library. A number of yoga studios operate in town and a pretty active mountain biking and cross-country ski community are out and about on the trails. Hubbard Park
hosts free community concerts during the summer and seasonal festivals and celebrations year-round. Community garden space is available. There are multiple places of worship in the area, mainly Christian, including some that advertise an “open and affirming” approach and embrace socially progressive stances. The Beth Jacob synagogue meets in Montpelier and Islamic faith-based communities can be found about 45 minutes away in Winooski and S Burlington. Live music can be found regularly at multiple venues about town.

Provide approximate impact numbers (e.g. miles of rivers treated) in each focus area.

Water Quality and Trail Improvement - Please project Impact Numbers on miles of river/stream/trail treated and/or improved.

0

Land Conservation and Remediation - Please project impact numbers on acres of public parks or other public, publicly managed or tribal lands improved.

0

Community Engagement Outreach and Education - Please project number of individuals receiving environmental stewardship education or training.

35

Sponsoring Organization's Mission:

The Vermont Wetlands Program (“the Program”) is a part of the Watershed Management Division, housed under the Department of Environmental Conservation of the Agency of Natural Resources. The Watershed Management Division (“the Division”) is responsible for protecting, maintaining, enhancing and restoring the quality of Vermont’s surface water resources, including the 300,000+ acres of wetlands in Vermont which is approximately 5% of the State.

The mission of the Wetlands Program within the Watershed Management Division is:

“To identify, inventory, monitor, and protect wetlands that provide significant functions and values; to encourage the restoration and enhancement of degraded wetlands; and to provide the citizens of Vermont with information and assistance to allow them to be fully informed of wetland issues and to practice sound wetland stewardship.”

Goals for the ECO AmeriCorps Position:

• Being a valued member on the field team collecting condition data on Vermont wetlands and gaining skills in ecology, botany, hydrology, soil characterization, and water chemistry.

• Participating, reviewing, and drafting wetland polygons for basin-specific wetland mapping projects, gaining skills in ArcGIS mapping and map ground truthing using ESRI smartphone apps.

• Collaborating and building relationships with other watershed management colleagues and outside community members.

• Providing education and outreach about wetlands and wetland bioassessment to students, landowners, other natural resources professionals, and the general public.
• Completing a chosen independent project focusing on engaging with underserved communities and pursuing DEIJ initiatives.

• Making direct and impactful contributions to the bioassessment program; wetland mapping projects; and the DEIJ-focused outreach project.

Essential Functions. Functions that applicant must be able to perform. These may be listed in bullet form:

Bioassessment:

Training will be provided for technical tasks and methodologies

- Field data collection: assist with collecting water chemistry samples, characterizing soils, and assessing landscape information.

- Field preparation and data processing: support equipment calibration; data entry.

- Contribute to wetland presence/absence identification in the field and through desktop aerial interpretation.

Outreach:

- Interacting with communities associated with the chosen independent project.

- Engaging with the general public through site visits, workshops, and educational event opportunities.

- Creating the independent project’s goals, objectives, outline, schedules and timelines, metrics and deliverables, final report and findings.

Mapping:

- Review of draft wetland maps in the field and through aerial interpretation.

- Presentations on the Program's wetland mapping projects to internal and external partners.

What are the secondary functions? These are projects or tasks that may be accomplished as time allows or applicant’s interests evolve.

- Site visit report writing for bioassessment

- Sorting, labeling, and generally curating the herbarium

- Producing a conference poster on use and application of VRAM, or mapping project, or findings from TIK research, or individual project, or special interest (i.e.: “Role of cedar seepage forests on Vermont’s landscape”) for a conference – FEMC or Northeast Natural History Conference or similar

- Building an app for simplified VRAMs that could encourage better community science engagement in wetland bioassessment and be quickly and easily submitted

- Creation of wetland maps using aerial interpretation, site plans, and field notes

Desired Qualifications:
- Ability to hike at least 3 miles over uneven terrain with 20lbs of equipment.
- Perform service in adverse outdoor conditions (rain, bugs, heat, cold).
- Utilize MS Office applications (Excel, Word)
- Create and edit polygons in ArcMap ESRI GIS.
- Production of professional maps/cartography
- Public speaking
- Efficiency in multi-tasking and project management
- Independent; driven; and adaptable
- Desire to serve with diverse communities and motivated to help create systemic changes

Minimum Qualifications:

- Be a US citizen, a national, or legal permanent resident alien of the U.S.;
- Be at least 18 years of age upon entering the Pre-Service Orientation (there is no upper age limit);
- Be a high school graduate or have a GED certificate or be willing to work towards their GED as part of their service-year successful completion requirement. A member cannot have dropped out of high school to join AmeriCorps. If a member has a documented medical reason/professional opinion why they cannot finish high school, they might be eligible; call in this case;
- Has not been convicted of murder or sexual assault and is willing to undergo a National Service Criminal History Check;
- Must submit to Agency of Human Services checks, i.e. Adult Abuse and Child Abuse Prevention;
- Be committed to the ECO AmeriCorps program, and its ethic of service and personal and professional development of its participants;
- Have the ability and enthusiasm to drive to, attend, and participate in required trainings and events, and be prepared to drive up to 2-3 hours each way

Service Conditions (will the position be largely outside, office based, hybrid or seasonally/project dependent, in schools, etc.) *

The service conditions will be considered hybrid. It will be a combination of field work, office service, and project dependent; meaning that the chosen project will dictate what other types of work environments may be encountered.

Will the member have access to "vulnerable populations"? This includes youth, elderly and individuals with disabilities.

Yes

Time Requirements:

Full time: will need to complete a minimum of 1700 service hours, serving approximately 40 hours/week over the course of the 11-month service term, September 13, 2023 - August 9, 2024
Orientation and Training:

ECO will provide members with orientation at the beginning of the service term. Host sites are expected to provide additional on-boarding training as well. Throughout the service term, ECO will provide in-person and virtual trainings to members on a variety of topics.

Benefits:

- Education award of $6,895 (pre-tax) upon successful completion of service
- $23,000 Living Allowance, paid bi-weekly
- Training
- Childcare assistance, if eligible
- Health Coverage
- Access to AmeriCorps Alumni Network
- Student loan forbearance and interest payments, if eligible

Evaluation and Reporting:

Mid and final performance reviews, quarterly reports, weekly timesheets, and end of service survey