

## Charting New Territory in the Agency

By Carey Hengstenberg and Linnea Myers, Department of Environmental Conservation

Scarcely one year ago, key members of the Department of Environmental Conservation sat together to envision a state-led service corps focused on environmental conservation. After expedited research on similar programs in other states, the team applied in January for federal funding to start its own. In June, they learned that the funding was approved, and by September, the program was filled to capacity. Last month, the new 'ECO AmeriCorps' welcomed 20 members into a year of service, each one of whom will work to improve water quality through unique projects with professional partners.



**2015-2016 ECO AmeriCorps members** Front row: Michelle Grasiozi, Jimmy Young, Travis Hart, Julia Gulka, Skylar Francis, Julianne Lovergine, Diana Jamarillo, Katy Gimma, Madeline Cotter, Jim Armbruster, Andrew Nguyen, Elizabeth Gribkoff. Back row: Chelsea Roston, Chris Yurek, Brittain Faville, Zack Simpson, Bea Smith, Joe Bondi, Grant Taylor. Not pictured: David Sinclair.

The 'ECO' in ECO AmeriCorps stands for Environmental Careers and Opportunities. Early in the program development, the DEC team decided to place large emphasis on training and career development for its members. Twenty staff at the Agency of Natural Resources volunteered as program mentors to each of the ECO AmeriCorps members. The program looks forward to these relationships not only

nurturing the goals of the AmeriCorps members, but also inspiring and renewing the focus of the mentors themselves.

Program goals are simple, but their impacts may be felt for years to come. By tracking the miles of waterways treated, the acres of public land improved, the number of people educated, and the number of members who earn “green” jobs after service, the effects of ECO AmeriCorps will be tangible. But perhaps more important than performance measures are the new relationships forged between the Agency, municipalities, watershed organizations, and AmeriCorps members on the shared goal of cleaner, safer water for all.

The quick and successful launch of ECO AmeriCorps could not have been possible without the help of countless partners who provided feedback and advice during the program formation. This large web of participants included host sites and supervisors, mentors, Agency of Natural Resources leadership and administrative staff, the Governor’s office, several Mayors, SerVermont, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board AmeriCorps program, the members themselves, and other AmeriCorps sister programs operating in Vermont and other states.



*Joshua Faulkner (UVM Extension – Center for Sustainable Agriculture) creates a work plan with ECO Member Michelle Graziosi.*



*Justin Kenney (Business Technology Project Manager, VT DEC) mentors ECO Team Leader Katy Gimma*



*ECO Member Travis Hart meets his supervisor Jim Eikenberry (USDA-NRCS)*