



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Press Release/Photo Opportunity

Media Contacts:

- Charlotte Overby, Conservation Lands Foundation, 573-356-9493, Char@conservationlands.org
- Rhody Soria, California Conservation Corps, 909-708-8477, rhody.soria@ccc.ca.gov
- Steve Razo, BLM External Affairs, 951-697-5217

Veterans Conservation Crew Restore Trails at National Monument

Edison International grant will help veterans get employment and subsequent training to pursue careers in public lands

San Francisco, CA (February 13, 2014) – This week, an all-veterans conservation crew began a four-week project to improve popular hiking trails in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument near Palm Springs, CA. Edison International awarded a \$35,000 grant to the Conservation Lands Foundation for this effort.

The 13-person crew is made up entirely of post-9/11 military veterans and is part of the California Conservation Corps. They will be making improvements to the Art Smith, Hopalong Cassidy and Bear Creek Oasis trails to help stop erosion, repair trail berms and clear brush—making the area more accessible and easier for visitors to hike in the monument.

“We’re grateful for the funding provided by Edison International because it has created a powerful partnership,” said Charlotte Overby of the Conservation Lands Foundation. “It provides jobs for veterans, accomplishes some much-needed restoration work on a beautiful National Monument, and results in real benefits for the public.”

The crew will tackle work on more than 10 miles of trail, much of it rugged and remote. The goal is to improve three popular trails—one of which goes through a Wilderness area—for visitors and to enhance the surrounding habitat.

The Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument includes spectacular desert scenery, critical wildlife habitat for animals including Peninsular bighorn sheep, and more than 300 miles of trails for hiking, horseback riding and some for mountain biking. The monument receives hundreds of thousands of visitors each year and is part of the National Conservation Lands. The monument is co-managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service in coordination with Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians and other partners.

In addition to pay, crew members also receive training and mentoring that can help them apply for permanent positions with public land management agencies.

"This is a unique project for the CCC, and we're pleased to work together with all the different partners," said Rhody Soria, Conservation Supervisor for the CCC. "For our veterans crew, they have the chance to gain great trail-building skills while increasing the recreational opportunities in the area."

"This project is a win-win for both the vets and the community. It will make a positive difference in the lives of the veterans, giving them hands-on restoration experience while making substantial improvements to the trails so more people can enjoy the beauty of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument," said Steven Harris, BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner.

Photo and Interview Opportunity: On Wednesday, Feb. 19th, the veterans crew will work with local volunteers from the Friends of the Desert Mountains and the Desert Trails Hiking Club for a special work day. Media are welcome to attend. For additional information on the volunteer day, contact the Friends of the Desert Mountains at 760-568-9918.

Media interested in interviews with veterans corps members should contact Rhody Soria at 909-708-8477, rhody.soria@ccc.ca.gov.

###

About Conservation Lands Foundation

The Conservation Lands Foundation works to protect, restore and expand the National Conservation Lands so they will endure from generation to generation. The National Conservation Lands are protected public lands and waterways that have joined the ranks of our national parks and wildlife refuges as special places that preserve our natural, historical and scientific treasures. www.conservationlands.org

About Edison International

Edison International, through its subsidiaries, is a generator and distributor of electric power and an investor in infrastructure and energy assets, including renewable energy. Headquartered in Rosemead, CA, Edison International is the parent company of Southern California Edison – one of the nation's largest electric utilities. www.edison.com

About California Conservation Corp (CCC)

The California Conservation Corps is a state agency that puts together young people and the environment, to the benefit of both. Young men and women between the ages of 18 and 25 sign up for a year of working outdoors to improve California's natural resources. They also assist with emergency response: fighting fires, floods, earthquakes and pest infestations. The CCC, modeled after the original Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s, is the oldest and largest conservation corps now in operation. www.ccc.ca.gov