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The Walker Slough, an offshoot of the San Joaquin River, is seen running alongside Van Buski

The Walker Slough, an offshoot of the San Joaquin River, is seen running alongside Van Buskirk Park in Stockton, California, Jan. 26, 2023. Environmental groups hope the former municipal golf course will be converted into a restored floodplain. (OSV News/Reuters/Nathan Frandino)



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The Biden administration has made a bid to support both clean energy and jobs for young people with the creation of the American Climate Corps — a new plan the White House described Sept. 20 as a "workforce training and service initiative that will ensure more young people have access to the skills-based training necessary for good-paying careers in the clean energy and climate resilience economy."

Reminiscent of the Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps — New Deal employment and infrastructure programs that put millions of people to work in public projects from 1933-1943 — the American Climate Corps promises to initially mobilize more than 20,000 citizens.

The White House said Corps members, upon completion of a paid training program, will be tasked with "conserving and restoring our lands and waters, bolstering community resilience, deploying clean energy, implementing energy efficient technologies, and advancing environmental justice" in both private and public sector positions.

Like the WPA, the American Climate Corps was created by an executive order of the president, after it initially faced funding-based opposition when included in early versions of the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act. Biden has credited the measure with lowering energy costs, increasing energy security, creating new jobs and cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Unlike the WPA, which largely employed its participants in manual labor, at least some Corps participants would be entering sectors that typically involve science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills. Nonetheless, the White House said prior experience is not required for most positions.

A dedicated American Climate Corps website will be launched in the coming months.

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"We are very excited about President Biden's launch of the American Climate Corps. This program is poised to meet the urgent needs to help people acquire the skills to actualize the work that needs to be done for a just transition away from fossil fuels and into a sustainable future," said Anna Johnson, North America senior programs manager for the Laudato Si' Movement, an international network of member organizations, local communities and grassroots leaders working to implement the tenets of Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, "*Laudato Si*'."

Johnson said the network is grateful to everyone who advocated for the program, which she said, also upholds Catholic social teaching on the dignity of work.

"As Pope Francis says in '*Laudato Si*'," 'The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change,'" she said. "This program can help us as a human family move faster towards that hopeful change."

The White House's announcement noted five states — California, Colorado, Maine, Michigan and Washington — have existing climate corps programs; five more states — Arizona, Utah, Minnesota, North Carolina and Maryland — also have announced plans to move forward with their own climate corps programs.

Just days earlier, 75,000 activists flooded the streets of New York City in a march demanding an end to fossil fuels, while the United Nations held its first-ever "Climate Ambition Summit" — a conference that included 41 countries, but excluded both the United States and China. The U.N. invited only leaders from nations with concrete plans to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions.

In a Sept. 19 speech to the 78th Session of the U.N. General Assembly, Biden declared climate change an "existential threat" to "all of humanity."

Jared Blumenfeld, then-regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency, is pic

Jared Blumenfeld, then-regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency, is pictured in a file photo using his smartphone to take photos of a restored section of the Napa River in Napa, California. The restoration project aims to provide a better habitat for trout and prevent further erosion along the river's banks. (OSV News/Reuters/Elijah Nouvelage)

The Biden administration has faced criticism over fossil fuel expansion and extraction, including the Willow Project in the Arctic, leases in the Gulf of Mexico, and the Mountain Valley Pipeline in Virginia and West Virginia. In what some political observers viewed as an olive branch to youthful voters, Biden has since barred federal drilling on millions of acres of federal property.

The United Nations has stated that "about $5.9 trillion was spent on subsidizing the fossil fuel industry in 2020, including through explicit subsidies, tax breaks, and health and environmental damages that were not priced into the cost of fossil fuels."

The International Renewable Energy Agency — an intergovernmental organization that supports 167 countries and the European Union in transitioning to sustainable energy — estimates that substantially increasing renewable energy sources could save the U.S. economy $30-$140 billion per year by 2030.

The jobs creation program comes at a welcome time, especially for young adults.

Job search site Monster.com reported in May that 74% of graduates "are worried that the current state of the economy will impact their job prospects."

While the labor market is perceived as fairly strong, September's LinkedIn Workforce Report showed hiring fell 3.6% in August compared to July across almost all sectors, resulting in the third consecutive month of hiring declines. Nationally, hiring in the U.S. was 23.8% lower in August compared to last year.

Yet the Department of Energy reported in June "the energy workforce added almost 300,000 jobs (+3.8% growth)" in 2022 with growth in every state and the District of Columbia. The top three states were California, Texas and West Virginia, and included clean vehicle, solar, wind and geothermal industries.

An aerial view shows a neighborhood adjacent to Van Buskirk Park in Stockton, Calif., Jan. 26,

An aerial view shows a neighborhood adjacent to Van Buskirk Park in Stockton, California, Jan. 26, 2023. Environmental groups hope the former municipal golf course will be converted into a restored floodplain. (OSV News/Reuters/Nathan Frandino)

The American Climate Corps announcement was greeted with "excitement and hope" by Kayla Jacobs, program manager of youth mobilization at Catholic Climate Covenant. The Washington-based consortium of 20 national organizations formed in 2006 with the help of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"Initiatives like this are one of many steps that are needed for a sustainable and just future," she said.

"We're particularly grateful for the focus on young people," Jacobs said. "We know from experience working with youth in the faith and environment space that our efforts to address the climate crisis will go nowhere if the voices of young people, especially those from frontline communities, aren't front and center. The initiative

also promises quality careers in clean energy and climate resilience that we know are needed for a just transition and better future for all."

On Sept. 1, Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, Illinois, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace, released a statement marking the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. The World Day of Prayer opens the Season of Creation, which extends until Oct. 4, St. Francis of Assisi's feast day.

"The ecological conversion of hearts and changes in lifestyles are important for us as individuals and our holiness, but it is the public policy decisions about collective impacts that will significantly change the course of our environmental future," the bishops' statement said. "We must pursue rapid decarbonization — "an energy revolution" — to seriously address climate change, yet without doing so on the backs of the poor and under-privileged."