

*Program will employ returning vets to work on projects to preserve and conserve national parks, public lands, and America's great outdoors*

Washington, D.C. — Today, Rep. Steve Israel (D-Huntington) praised President Obama's announcement that he plans to create a Veterans Jobs Corps to hire Veterans as first responders, law enforcement officers and conservationists. Rep. Israel applauded the President's commitment to employ up to 20,000 veterans over the next five years on projects aimed at preserving and restoring our national parks and other federal, state and local lands. Rep. Israel suggested this program dubbed "Wilderness Warriors" to the President during a visit to the White House last fall.

"I was thrilled to hear that President Obama will be including aspects of my Wilderness Warriors proposal in his initiative to put vets to work," said Rep. Israel. "With the unemployment rate for post-Sept. 11 military veterans at 13.1 percent, it is essential that we take bold steps to help those who have sacrificed so much to fight for our country. My Wilderness Warriors proposal stems from the idea that we can give these men and women a renewed sense of bonding and connect them with other returning veterans in outdoor service projects, while at the same time preserving and conserving our national parks, land and resources that are much in need of repair."

Rep. Israel was convinced of the benefits of a Veterans Job Corps program like Wilderness Warriors after supporting a similar program launched by his constituent, John Sferazo, an ironworker who helped in the cleanup after the Sept. 11 attacks. Mr. Sferazo, American Greenlands Restoration, Inc. (AGRI) founder, was scarred physically and emotionally by his work at Ground Zero. He decided to create an outdoor service program that rehabilitates lands and forests for himself and other similarly affected recovery workers, responders and veterans. Mr. Sferazo was inspired by the courage displayed by so many, that he has made it AGRI's mission to help those who suffer both mentally and physically as a result of their service. His program has not only helped the local habitat, but it has also provided work and a therapeutic opportunity for those involved.

"I want to thank Rep. Israel for bringing the idea for a Veterans Jobs Corps to President Obama," said Mr. Sferazo. "For all of us who either responded to Sept. 11 or went to combat as a result of Sept. 11, we are finally receiving the recognition and payment we deserve. Many of us suffer from medical maladies not fully addressed by medical professionals, and the

Wilderness Warriors program will provide those in this category with a therapeutic employment experience that also helps America's great outdoors."