

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**2/4/2010**

---

**Contact:** Caitlin Coleman  
OSM/VISTA Outreach Coordinator

**Phone:** 304.252.4848

**Fax:** 304.252.4889

**E-mail:** outreach@accwt.org



## **Secretary Salazar honors youth in the environment**

On Monday, February 8, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar will celebrate a group that exemplifies his youth initiative—a team of recent college graduates who have been volunteering with community improvement/watershed groups throughout Appalachian coal country and the hardrock west. --These volunteers are members of the Office of Surface Mining's two teams of AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service To America [OSM/VISTAs] coordinated by Dr. T Allan Comp.

Secretary Salazar has already commended the Watershed Teams by saying "I am proud of the OSM/VISTA teams, Allan Comp, and the young people working daily to tackle issues facing rural mining communities. They are restoring the natural world and will be the next generation of conservation leaders."

Comp's work won him the ultimate peer-nominated honor in September when he was awarded the Service to America Medal: Environment. Now, on February 8 Secretary Salazar will celebrate Comp and his Watershed Teams [OSM/VISTA Teams], which were created through unique partnerships between the Office of Surface Mining, AmeriCorps\*VISTA, and grassroots community groups. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, Salazar will speak at a reception held in Allan Comp's honor in Washington, DC's Department of the Interior Building.

The Service to America Medal is the highest award put out by the Partnership for Public Service, often referred to as the "Oscar of public service." When Comp was honored with this medal, it was the first time that the Partnership recognized a Department of the Interior employee for service to the environment.

"I am honored to have been awarded this medal; it recognizes the challenges being met by these OSM/VISTA Volunteers, their community sponsors and the many hours of service they all put in." said Comp in September. "I'm proud of the community and environmental work that the OSM/VISTA teams do. I know that Secretary Salazar is too."

Not only is Secretary Salazar impressed that Comp was awarded this medal, he is also celebrating the OSM/VISTA Teams because they exemplify his youth initiative. Secretary Salazar created a new Interior office, the Office of Youth in Natural Resources,

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**2/4/2010**

in June. Dr. Comp's work was recognized by the Partnership for Public Service largely because of the complexity of the partnerships he assembles to assist these rural mining communities across the nation, bringing young college graduates to serve their community and the environment.

Dr. Comp's OSM/VISTA teams, the Appalachian Coal Country Watershed Team and the Western Hardrock Watershed Team, are coalitions of grassroots-level watershed improvement groups. These local watershed groups are determined to help heal land scarred by pre-regulatory mining practices while creating economic stability needed in the rural communities where they serve. OSM/VISTA volunteers, all college graduates willing to commit a year of their time to national service, function like a domestic equivalent of the Peace Corps, serving rural mining communities impoverished by environmental degradation.

Together the teams include 83 OSM/VISTAs that serve in ten different states. OSM/VISTAs tackle a wide range of issues. They deal with acid mine drainage, straight-pipes, fecal coliform bacteria, and other chemicals in the water. They create environmental education programs, train volunteers in water quality monitoring, and teach people how to construct rain barrels, create Web sites, write the grants needed to support these activities and organize all kinds of events. Visit [accwt.org](http://accwt.org) or [hardrockteam.org](http://hardrockteam.org) for more information about the teams.