

Youth Engaged in Sustainable Systems (YESS) Wraps Up Another Summer

by Chelsea Trout

This summer, 60 high school students from around Washington State participated in the Youth Engaged in Sustainable Systems summer program. They engaged in PEI's Forest Management and Restoration Ecology frameworks, exploring potential careers with their teachers and in the field with several local community partners, while receiving high school credit and an \$1,800 stipend.

"The triangle partnership model of this program between PEI, K-12 teachers, and natural resource professionals are what makes the YESS program so strong," says PEI's Green Jobs Coordinator Chelsea Trout. "Students are learning real-life skills in these fields and making connections in their own communities. It's a great opportunity for kids who may need to make up credit, need a summer job, and might not do well just sitting behind a desk.

2024 Program Highlights

Riverview School District: Restoration Ecology, Year 3

During their final project presentations, Riverview students described 'getting to know their co-workers' as their favorite part of the program, referring to their classmates. Although they didn't use the word 'stewardship,' everything Trout and PEI's East Sound Regional FieldSTEM Coordinator Lydia Geschiere heard described exactly that. Students used terms like reciprocity and knowledge of noxious weeds during their presentations and shared their desire to explore careers in such fields or at least volunteer for similar work.

Community Partners:

Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust
Snoqualmie Tribe Environmental & Natural Resources
Lake Sammamish State Park
Franklin Falls
Oxbow Farm and Conservation Center
King County Basin Stewards
Snoqualmie Valley Preservation Alliance

City of Issaquah
Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
United States Forest Service (USFS)



Riverview YESS Crew

Yakima Valley Technical Skills Center (YV Tech): Restoration Ecology, Year 3



Yakima Valley Technical Skills Center YESS crew

Central WA Regional FieldSTEM Coordinator Amber Yeager says, “. . . it was so incredibly inspiring seeing the Yakima YESS students presenting their work after a summer of learning in the field with their hands in the dirt and in the stream and making connections between the work they were doing, their communities, and their lives.. When asked if they would recommend this program to other students, all said “Yes!” except for one who said, “Probably”, paused, and then said, “I just wouldn’t want them to take my place.” That spoke volumes to me about the impact of this program and I hope that it can continue to grow and reach even more students.”

Yakima Valley Tech Community Partners:

MCFEG
 Yakima Basin Environmental Education Program
 Yakima Arboretum
 Bull Trout Task Force
 WDFW

DNR
 USFS
 Yakima Herald
 Yakama Nation

Glenwood School District: Forest Management, Year 2

Mary Pierce of The Goldendale Sentinel states, “This year three Glenwood students participated, gaining new skills in forestry and ecosystems management. I had the privilege, once again, of attending their end-of-program presentations and was very impressed with all three. They created slide presentations showing where their assigned timber plots were located, what tree species their plots contained, what posed threats to the trees, and how they would treat their plots to maintain a healthy forest.”



Glenwood YESS program students

Glenwood Community Partners:

Mount Adams Resource Stewards (MARS)
Private landowners
DNR
Lava Nursery
American Forest Management
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Retired USFS

Tumwater School District: Forest Management, Year 2

In debriefing Tumwater’s YESS program this summer, a PEI staff member told Tumwater School District Science Teacher John Glenn, “Your program is unique in that you have such an amazing community of partners that come on board: like a kaleidoscope.” Like last year, Tumwater holds the record for the most community partners engaged for their YESS program with a total of 14, representing state agencies, the city of Tumwater, natural resources companies, nonprofit conservation groups, tribes, and higher education.



Tumwater YESS crew

Tumwater Community Partners

Capitol Land Trust
City of Tumwater
LOTT
Thurston Conservation District
South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group
Deschutes Falls Park
Grays Harbor College Forest Management Program
Port Blakely

DNR
Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
Sierra Pacific Industries
Squaxin Island Tribe
Weyerhaeuser
Port of Olympia

Lake Quinault School District: Forest Management, Year 1



Lake Quinault YESS crew

This was the first year for the Lake Quinault YESS program and both students and lead teacher Dani DeMarco appreciated the cultural connections embedded in their restoration ecology work. One project involved the removal of hazardous trees near the popular Falls Creek Campground, which is on Quinault tribal land. “It was a very big deal because they were cultural trees,” she explains. “My students and I got to see the whole process before the trees were cut, right after the trees were cut, and they got to see the wood today... there is one piece that will actually become a canoe.”

Lake Quinault Community Partners

Rayonier	10,000 Years Institute
Grays Harbor College	Sierra Pacific Industries
Satsop Learning Center	USFS
Quinault Department of Natural Resources	

Onalaska School District: Restoration Ecology, Year 1

It was also year one for the Onalaska YESS program, which engaged an impressive nine community partners. The hands-on nature of the program was effective for students, according to lead teacher Kevin Hoffman. “We’re out here performing tangible tasks that require participation,” he says. “It provides a richer learning opportunity for all the students. You can take the students with the most behavior challenges in class, and they will be the best workers. They’re full of energy, full of thoughts and ideas. They want to ask questions, invent things, and be creative. This is perfect for them.”



Onalaska YESS crew

Onalaska Community Partners

Tacoma Metro Parks

Washington State Parks

DNR

WDFW

Onalaska Fire Dept

USFS

Burnt Ridge Nursery

Lewis County CD

NorthWest Trek

Sierra Pacific Industries