

CONNECTING YOUTH TO STEWARDSHIP CAREERS

by Lindsay E. Miller, *Wallowa Resources*

Youth engagement in real-world career exploration has powerful, proven benefits that last a lifetime. It builds job skills and increases workforce readiness to give our kids a leg up as they graduate and move into the next phase of life. Wallowa Resources' Stewardship Education Program creates work experience opportunities specifically around natural resource management that aim to educate and provide real-world context for our county's youth.

Each summer, Wallowa Resources recruits local high school students to participate in our Natural Resources Summer Internship Program. The program pairs natural resource management education with related local fieldwork experiences. Interns work on local land and connect with professionals who do the real work in our county. Through this mentored work experience, students gain first-hand experience with the professional world and come out better prepared and better educated to enter the workforce.

In our county, landscape-level stewardship, or natural resource land management work, requires mindful and meaningful collaboration among many public and private organizations. Likewise, Wallowa Resources' high school internship relies on the collaboration and expertise of organizations and professionals in Wallowa County to help inform and guide the projects in which students participate. Now in its sixth year, the program works with numerous organizations and individuals in the county to give youth a broad range of exposure to natural resource topics and careers. Each year, we "adopt" a river or watershed where we can do meaningful restoration and conservation work. This work can include riparian cage management, invasive weed removal, and monitoring efforts along local watersheds and provides a rich educational and work experience to students.

Last summer, interns were able to take part in a new stewardship collaboration with the Nez Perce Tribe Fisheries Division. Students went out to The Nature Conservancy gulch area on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest adjacent to the Zumwalt Prairie with Montana Pagano, the Northeast Oregon and Southeast Washington Watershed Restoration Specialist with the Nez Perce Tribe Fisheries Division. Pagano educated students about a riparian planting project designed



Wallowa County youth work to remove a hog panel cage that was put in place to provide protection for establishing vegetation. (Photo: Lindsay Miller)

to restore riparian habitat and encourage beaver to move back into the area. Interns assessed planting success and helped remove cages around plantings that were no longer necessary so that these resources could be reused elsewhere.

This collaboration with the Nez Perce Tribe is just one example of how the Natural Resources Summer Internship Program offers opportunities for students to learn about the multi-faceted nature of

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Summer interns remove vegetation cages that are no longer needed in this area. The materials now can be repurposed for another project. (Photo: Lindsay Miller)