



WASHINGTON STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION



## FOREST YOUTH SUCCESS

### BY THE NUMBERS

- Since 2002, more than \$1 million in work value provided in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

#### In 2012:

- \$113,812 in work value.
- 1 mile of new boundary marked and cleared.
- 14 miles of trail work completed.
- 1 mile of new trail built.
- 14 acres of white pine pruning.
- 2 acres of invasive species removal; 2 acres surveyed.
- 19 miles of roadside brushing.
- Habitat enhancement, with 8 western pond turtles released.
- 4 acres of fuel treatment for prevention of forest fire.
- 9,500 trout released.
- 75 campsites maintained.
- 360 cubic yards of oyster shells placed in fish filter beds.

### 2014

#### ISSUE

Despite living in a county that is about 90% forested, many Skamania County youth have little connection with, or knowledge of, the surrounding forest. And, in a county where poverty and unemployment are high, youth have almost no employment opportunities and few chances to gain job experience. At the same time, local forest managers and communities need help completing projects to benefit the health of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

#### RESPONSE

Washington State University Extension 4-H, along with Stevenson-Carson School District, Skamania County, the Mt. Adams Institute, and the USDA Forest Service have partnered to create the Forest Youth Success (FYS) program for youth development and employment. Goals of the FYS program are:

- Teach the fundamentals of forest ecology and forest health management through work in a real-world setting;
- Develop and enhance life skills to increase employability;
- Help participants develop a sense of responsibility for themselves, the forest, and their communities;
- Provide participating youth with basic job skills in a paid-work setting that emphasizes environmental stewardship; and
- Employ local adults as program crew leaders to further community engagement and emphasize positive youth–adult relationships, at a ratio of approximately 5 youth to 1 adult.

Since 2009, FYS received competitive awards from the USDA Forest Service Resource Advisory Committee of more than \$670,000 and county contributions of \$80,000 as a result of the Secure Rural Schools Title II funding. Each year, the program employs ten adults and 48 youth to complete forest health projects.

The WSU Extension 4-H FYS program was accepted as a National 4-H Program of Distinction, and the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA) awarded the program a Specialty Team Award in Excellence for Natural Resource and Environmental Stewardship in 2013.



## QUOTES

*"Working so closely with FYS has truly been a rewarding project as I am very passionate about this program, especially since it helped me gain responsibility and leadership as an adolescent."*

*"FYS has allowed me to get the work experience I need to get a job in the real world. It has instilled in me the work ethic and morals of any good citizen and allowed me to grow as a person."*

*"FYS has helped me become a leader, step out of my comfort zone, and learn so much about this beautiful place we live in, how to help maintain it and the amazing people that already love and appreciate it."*

## IMPACTS

Since 2002, the FYS program has been the largest summertime employer of youth in Skamania County. On average, \$165,000 in direct work value is completed on the forest each year, with a total estimated value of more than a million dollars for the Gifford Pinchot National Forest since the program's inception. In 2012, all 48 students who participated in FYS received elective high school credits for summer work through the credit recovery pilot project.

Using the 4-H life skills development tool, positive life-skill impacts are measured annually. In 2012, FYS participants indicated increases in all life skills and employability indicators that were measured. FYS participants also showed an increase in understanding forest management practices (79%) and awareness of the types of natural resource careers (71%).

From 2009 through 2011, 95% to 98% of student participants confirmed slight to significant changes in life skills, including:

- Decision making;
- Financial resource management;
- Listening;
- Effective communication;
- Organization;
- Problem-solving; and
- Job responsibility.

In 2010, past participants from the previous five years were surveyed for lasting impacts. More than 65% responded that FYS helped them acquire another job. Ninety-five percent credit the program for forming their work ethic and increasing their basic job skills. More than 70% of past participants credit FYS for shaping their career interests. More than 50% chose their college major and shaped their degree because of FYS, and more than 90% found FYS effective for helping manage personal finances.



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