

# Extension 'Cord

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## Connecting People, Resources, & Knowledge

*"Welcome to the Extension 'Cord, a monthly briefing paper from WSU Snohomish County Extension. Even though we have existed for over 100 years, we have realized that too many people are unaware of the diversity and impact of our programs. Each issue will highlight the purpose, activities and results of one particular program. The 'Cord will showcase the work of our 1,000 volunteers and 25 staff. Please do not hesitate to contact any of our staff for more information."*

*Curt Moulton, Extension Director*



## Summer Youth Forestry Institute - Inspiring the Next Generation of Natural Resource Professionals

**W**WSU Snohomish County Extension, in partnership with Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie Darrington Ranger District, piloted a unique experiential summer job opportunity for Snohomish County teens called the Summer Youth Forestry Institute. Due to the declining enrollments in forestry and other natural resource careers it is imperative that high school students are provided more exposure to early job experiences in these fields. Many youth do not have a good sense of what natural resource management is and what career options exist. WSU Extension received a grant to work with the Darrington Ranger District to connect Snohomish County youth directly with forestry and natural resource projects and professionals.

In partnership with high school career counselors and educators a rigorous selection process was developed and six Snohomish County teens were hired and put to work in the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie Forest, receiving a stipend for their service. The teens completed a total of 120 hours of work and training, impressing forest service staff and WSU educators with their passion and eagerness to learn about forestry and the natural world as well as their dedication to accomplishing challenging tasks.



The biggest hurdle was to prepare the teens for field projects that included trail maintenance and construction, post-thinning data collection, invasive plant and white pine blister rust removal. In short order these teens learned how to work as a team, clearly communicate, and set and reach specific goals in a physically demanding environment. The program kicked off with two days of 4-H challenge activities that helped students develop group norms, build cohesive teams and acquire the communication skills necessary to complete the physically and mentally challenging work.

The students were immersed in lessons both in-class and in the field that included; forest ecology and health, native plant and tree identification, forest measurements, field navigation, and silviculture. Samantha Chang, Darrington Ranger District Forester, and Kevin Zobrist, WSU Extension Forester, provided hands-on lessons of forest management practices and data collection protocols. The students quickly gained the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their job and attributed their success to the experiential aspect of their learning environment. Complex concepts and technical skills would be required for the post-thinning data collection project and the students felt prepared and eager to accomplish their tasks.

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The students completed 13 post-thinning data collection plots in very steep terrain, construction and maintenance on national forest trails, removal of invasive weeds on public lands, and branch pruning to improve the health of national forest stands infected with a damaging exotic disease. Forest Service staff were very impressed with what the teens accomplished on public lands in a limited amount of time. The students were consistently described as “prepared and hard-working.”

Another important aspect of this program was to teach the youth about forestry and natural resource careers. A career planning day included visits from various natural resource and forestry professionals, résumé writing, and self-assessments. The students met and talked with a Forest Service fire crew leader, a law enforcement officer, foresters from various agencies, a wildlife biologist, and a Tribal fisheries technician. The guests shared their passion for their field of work and the path that led them to their career choice. The students also learned what educational requirements would be necessary for jobs in the natural resource and forestry fields.

This program helped introduce Snohomish County youth to career options they had never imagined pursuing. The students all considered this program an important achievement and feel they have a greater understanding of forestry and natural resource career options and the educational requirements associated with them. The goal of WSU Extension and the Forest Service is to expand this program in hopes of inspiring a new generation of professionals dedicated to the sustainable management of our precious natural resources. The outcomes of a project like this not only help us meet the resource challenges of the future it makes a big difference in the life of an impressionable youth. The quote below from one of the parents sums it up quite nicely:

*“We want to thank you for the opportunity that you provided our son this summer. He has not stopped talking about it. We have driven up to Darrington since and he showed us some of the things he learned. During conversations over the past few months he was abound with information, I would ask how he knew this information and he said, “I learned it through the WSU Forestry Field job this summer”. Thank you so much for what you do. You make a difference at an impressionable age”.*



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