

By the numbers:

- Since 2002, over \$1,064,000 of work value provided in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest
- Since 2002, over 650 summer jobs created

2014 Season:

- 30 jobs created, 560 labor days
- 8 partner agencies provided projects
- 1.25 miles of cave work in Ape Cave
- 3.6 miles of trailwork
- 11.7 miles of brush and fuels reduction work
- 485 drains cleared
- 67 campsites maintained
- 100 acres of noxious weeds removed
- 2.5 miles of boundary cleared
- 3450 fish and 6 turtle released
- 14 habitat structures built

Building Healthy Youth, Forests and Communities

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.

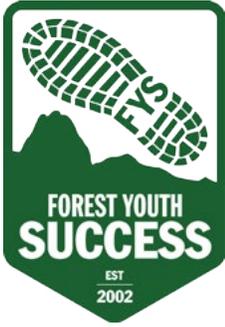
Response

A partnership between Stevenson-Carson School District, Washington State University Extension 4-H, Skamania County, the Mt. Adams Institute, and the US Forest Service created 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.

Each year, the program employs ten adults and 48 youth to complete forest health projects and is the largest youth employer in the county.

The FYS program is recognized nationally as a leader in youth employability and development. The program has accepted the 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.



“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.”

“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.”

“I have learned so much in these amazing 6 weeks. FYS taught us how to trust, and work well with others, and to keep great work ethic. I think this is a great program and should be continued.”

Impacts

Since 2002, the FYS program has been the largest summertime employer of youth in Skamania County. On average, \$165,000 amount of direct work value is completed on the forest each year, with a total value estimated at well over a million dollars for the Gifford Pinchot National Forest since the program’s inception. In 2014, all students who participated in FYS received elective high school credits for summer work through the credit recovery project.

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
- Job responsibility

In 2010, past participants from the previous five years were surveyed for lasting impacts. Over 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. Over 70% of past participants credit FYS for shaping their career interests. Over 50% chose their college major and shaped their degree because of FYS. Over 90% found FYS effective for helping manage personal finances.