

Promoting Forestry Education on the Yakama Reservation

By Tia Beavert and Megan Rivard

The Yakama Reservation in southcentral Washington State is home to the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (Yakama Nation or YN). The 1.4-million-acre Reservation consists of ~650,000 acres of forest that provides ecological and cultural resources to the Yakama people. A portion of the forest management activities on the Yakama Reservation is completed by the Yakama Nation Tribal Forestry Program, which consists of the Fee Land, Forest Development, Fuels Management, and Fire Management Programs. At peak season, the overall program employs ~125 individuals ranging from entry-level resource worker positions that have little to no forestry or fire background to experienced professionals. In 2019, the Yakama Nation received the Sustainable Forestry Initiative's (SFI) President's Award for Advancing Sustainable Forest Management and Commitment to SFI (<https://forests.org/the-yakama-nation-wins-award/>).

The program has recognized the importance of outreach and is striving toward a stronger outreach to reach Tribal youth who are interested in forestry or wildland fire. By building a strong outreach presence, the program can assist in the promotion of workforce development, education, and Tribal professionals on the reservation. Tribal Forestry focuses on both forest management and the creation of opportunities for youth to engage in forest management and wildland fire. Annually, the program makes available one to two college intern positions and two to four summer youth positions.

Connecting forestry to careers

The YN Higher Education and YN Department of Natural Resource programs have provided an opportunity for Tribal youth to study forestry by creating a

partnership with Salish Kootenai College (SKC) through the establishment of a Yakama Branch Campus. Students can gain an associates or bachelor's degree in forestry or staff can gain continuing education credits to learn Sahaptin [A language spoken in south-central Washington and northern Oregon] or improve GIS skills. The creation of this program has enabled non-traditional students with young families to study forestry while maintaining the ability to support their families and provide the opportunity for Tribal members to learn forestry at home.

Tribal Forestry currently has seven Tribal members students seeking a degree in forestry within the Yakama Branch of SKC. One student, Deland Olney, is completing his final project with focus on huckleberry enhancement and has a strong cultural background that is beneficial in teaching our youth the importance of science and cultural integration. Olney has years of experience within the Tribe's Forestry program and returned to SKC for a forestry degree.

Six other students currently enrolled in the SKC Forestry program started as seasonal workers within one of the three branches of Tribal Forestry and decided to pursue education in forestry. These students are able to learn about forestry within a classroom and concurrently

gain field experience alongside current Tribal professionals. Four of the students have recently transitioned to forest technician positions (Wayne Watlamet, Theodore Olney, Landon Smartlowit, and Sean Ward) and have been exposed to many different aspects of forestry from timber sale preparation to reforestation. All of the students have a promising future in forestry and are the future land managers for the Yakama Nation. One of the program's recent forester hires, Toni Sandoval, completed a summer college internship along her sister Brooke within the Forest Development program in 2019. At the time, both sisters were exploring different career options and post-graduation from Central Washington University (2021), and Toni applied for a position within the program.

Connecting educators to Yakama Nation forestry

In December 2019, Paul Robitaille, formerly SIF's senior advisor, Indigenous Relations, invited Pacific Education Institute (PEI) to meet with Doug Olney, the Yakama Nation's timber resource manager, and Beavert to explore opportunities to support the Yakama Nation in providing forest education resources to their staff and teachers who work with tribal students. Following the meeting, PEI wrote and received a SFI Commu-



Tia Beavert



Megan Rivard



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During the teacher in-person training and field tour hosted by the Yakama Tribal Forestry program in August 2021, Deland Olney discussed his research on huckleberry enhancement.

nity Grant to hold Project Learning Tree (PLT) Green Jobs and Focus on Forests workshops, as well as a day-long exploration of sustainable forest management.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the training was delayed until 2021. In February 2021, Yakama Nation Tribal Forestry staff participated in the Green Job's training to learn how to teach forestry to youth. In August 2021, the YN Tribal Forestry program hosted ten teachers (four middle school and six high school) from Central Washington at the White Swan Forest Development office to teach them about forestry and observe Yakama Nation forest management. Teachers from the Columbia, East Valley, Goldendale, Mt Adams, Pasco, Royal, Toppenish, West Valley School Districts, and the Yakama Nation Tribal School were present for the in-person training and field tour.

To start the day, participants engaged in the "You Be the Boss" activity from PLT Green Jobs. After discussion about the ecosystem services provided by forests, teams of three or four designed a management plan for their hypothetical "400-Acre-Wood." The rich discussions about preservation, recreational use, cultural heritage sites, and habitat framed the difficult decisions forest managers make each day. After designing the management plan, participants completed a cost-benefit analysis of their plan. "My forest did horrible," stated one participant. "It is hard to balance costs and revenue while still protecting the land."

After a group conversation about the challenging choices foresters face, the participants completed their classroom time with the "Tough Choices" activity from PLT Focus on Forests. The activity was supplemented with an article about Yakama Nation forest management for wildfire control.

In the field, YN Tribal Forestry Fee Land, Fuels Management, Forest Development, and Fire Management programs set up question-and-answer stations to allow participants to learn about the various aspects of forest management. Participants walked from one expert to the next to learn more about the program and careers. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the most impactful part of this workshop was talking with the experts.

Upon reflection and evaluation of the day, participants and field experts alike



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The classroom portion of the in-person training had teachers design a forest management plan to learn about the challenges foresters face when managing forests.

both wanted more time. "We could set up a true tour of these different projects and see how the different management practices look," suggested forester Ryan Sanchez. After lunch, the group was taken to the Signal Peak Lookout to learn about the extent of the lands managed by Yakama Nation and visualize the enormity of the work. Participants climbed to the top of the lookout tower and learned about wildfire management, from smoke-spotting to line work.

"I did not realize how vast the various systems were and how they interact with each other," stated one participant. "There are so many areas of occupation

and jobs available!" The ultimate goal is that more students in Central Washington will be introduced to these careers and opportunities, and teachers seemed eager to share what they learned with their classrooms. *WF*

Tia Beavert is the tribal forest manager for Yakama Nation Tribal Forestry. She can be reached at (509) 865-5121 ext. 4653 or tia_beavert@yakama.com. Megan Rivard is the Central WA FieldSTEM Coordinator with Pacific Education Institute. She can be reached at (253) 271-9546 or mrivard@pacificeducationinstitute.org.

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