



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Alaska Region

2011

# Youth in the Great Outdoors



Following the Kanak Trail, SCA High School Trail Crew, Alaska Peninsula NWR.



## Engage, Educate, Employ

Through the *Youth in Great Outdoors* initiative, Secretary Salazar challenged all Interior agencies to increase youth hires by “engaging young people from all walks of life with our natural resources and building pathways to careers in resource stewardship.”

Within the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, two groups work to implement this initiative. First, the Connecting People with Nature Working Group focuses on engaging and educating youth about the great outdoors. Second, the Youth Coordination Team focuses on educating and employing diverse youth through career awareness, targeted diversity recruitment, the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP), the Student Career Employment Program (SCEP), and an array of partners. Both teams are comprised of national, regional and field staff and work cooperatively with the National Conservation Training Center, Office of Diversity and Civil Rights and others.

This report chronicles Region 7’s youth employment and our success in meeting the initiative’s targets. With the Region’s tool box of recruitment methods, hiring authorities, and partner organizations, we were able to contribute to the success of this initiative. Despite declining budgets, Region 7 surpassed youth employment targets. We attracted a vibrant and talented workforce of 284 youth ages 15-25 who worked across all programs for at least 80 hours each.

More importantly, this report celebrates our amazing youth workforce, invigorating our field camps, visitor centers, and staff meetings with energy, creativity, and passion. Finally, this report explores how we are creatively improving the quality of youth hire programs and overcoming Region 7’s unique challenges to effectively educate and employ talented and diverse youth.

*The future of America’s treasured landscapes depends upon the next generation’s understanding of and connection to the Great Outdoors, so getting younger children outside in nature and providing educational programs for them is just as important as providing jobs for older youth.*

~Secretary of Interior, Ken Salazar, 2010 Address to the Corps Network Forum



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# Youth, 2011 Hires at a Glance



During Fiscal Year 2011, Region 7 hired **284** youth (ages 15-25) through **direct hires and partnerships.**

Youth filled **37** permanent and temporary positions across all programs and field stations.

**Six** students attending college or vocational schools filled **Student Career Experience Program (SCEP)** positions. **One** SCEP student was converted to full time employment.

**Partners** such as The Student Conservation Association (SCA), other non-profits, tribal organizations, and university partners employed **120** youth interns to provide outreach and visitor services, do climate change research, monitor fisheries, and much more.

**Five** Youth Conservations Corps (YCC) employed and educated **29** high school-aged youth at Alaska Maritime, Arctic, Kenai, Kodiak, and Tetlin National Wildlife Refuges.

**Six** Alaska Native Science and Engineering (ANSEP) students were placed in internships with the Migratory Bird Division, Arctic, Yukon Delta, and Togiak Refuges.



*SCA Intern, radio-tracking ducklings for the Fairbanks Fish & Wildlife Field Office.*



# Youth, A Summer Field Army



Migratory Birds biologists pictured with youth volunteers, SCEP employees, and temporary hires.

Each summer, the allure of wild Alaska draws youth from all over the world to work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This army of hard working, adventurous youth run field camps from Barrow to the Aleutians; collect field data through long daylight hours; staff visitor centers; and educate the public about wildlife conservation and recreation.

About half of these youth (130) are lucky enough to get federal jobs through seasonal employment or student hire programs. The other 127\* volunteer or work with partners, a number nearly eclipsing other traditional hiring methods.

In the course of a short field season, Region 7 must recruit, hire, train, and dispatch this army, which is nothing short of miraculous in light of geographic, budget, bureaucratic, and training challenges. Offices across the state have creatively addressed these challenges and successfully employed youth doing some of the hardest, yet most rewarding, work in the Service.

\*40 of the 127 college-aged partner hires were volunteers. These volunteers are not captured in "Youth in the Great Outdoors" reporting, but they contributed thousands of hours to the Service in 2011.

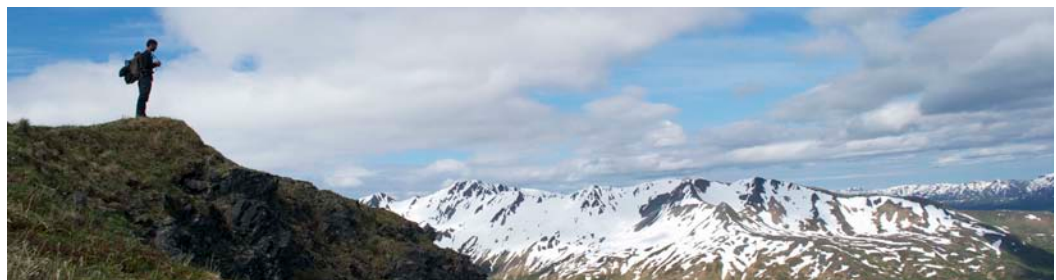
## Filling the Ranks

Surprisingly, for some youth, Alaska's geographic isolation is an advantage to recruitment, not a barrier. We often have youth coming to us. For example, Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge advertised for five volunteer biological technicians who were required to work a total of 5 ½ months, 6 days a week from the remote Camp Island. Despite these harsh conditions and no pay, 106 intrepid youth applied.

This free skilled labor has both short and long term returns. While volunteering they conducted a high level of field research critical to determining the foraging diet and habitat quality for the Kodiak Brown Bear. Later, some go on to graduate programs with research questions centered on Service objectives; thereby, returning hundreds of thousands of dollars from an investment of pennies. In light of declining budgets, Service volunteer programs must be bolstered to ensure we are supporting the passionate youth enlisting.

*Alaska made quite an impression on me. I met some amazing people who are very passionate about their work and the lifestyle is incredible. There aren't many cities that I could work in where I could hike up a mountain on my lunch break.*

*~Alaska Conservation Fund Intern, Lindsay Spurrier  
Juneau Fish and Wildlife Field Office*



Ross Dorendorf collects data on Kodiak Mountain Goats.

### Partnerships Make it Possible

Since nearly half of this summer's youth army were hired by our partners; common goals, cooperative agreements and open communication were key. The Service worked with universities, tribal organizations and non-profits to engage youth in a wide range of high quality internships. The Student Conservation Association remains our largest partner with 24 interns in 2011. Conservation Interns spend anywhere from 6 weeks to 12 months working with field stations on a variety of projects. For example, SCA interns assisted with climate change and inventory and monitoring projects; taught school children about the importance of wildlife to people; and contributed to refuge planning documents and endangered species projects.

### The Training Regimen

Once on board, youth go through a regimen of mandatory training tailored to the extreme conditions found with most jobs on the Last Frontier. Training youth employees takes the effort of the



*Francesca Cannizzo and refuge biologists collaring a Kodiak brown bear.*

entire staff and can take up to two weeks to cover airplane, boat and bear safety, field camp operations, and content and skills for specific positions. Training needs are being met in collaborative and creative ways using the regional video conference system, and/or partner and staff experts.

### To the Field

Once dispatched far and wide, these young people collect field data with implications for every research facet from

climate change to migratory flyways, or they enlighten thousands of visitors through interpretive programs. All gain life and work experiences found nowhere else in the Service.

Now that our summer field army has dwindled to a few hardy soldiers, we need to look to next summer and beyond. We can keep them enlisting by remaining the premier science lab for the budding adventurous scientist, continuing successful partnerships, and offering youth more high quality paid and unpaid work opportunities.



*The SCA High School Trail Crew, at Alaska Peninsula NWR celebrates a job well done.*



# Youth

## Future Neighbors, Citizens and Leaders

Alaska high-school aged youth helped the Service on a variety of projects all summer; whether it was the entire high school in Arctic Village, the eight randomly selected applicants in Soldotna, the small corps in Northway, Kodiak, Sand Point and Homer, or the herds of youth in Anchorage. A myriad of field stations and partners made these unique work-learning experiences possible for more than 50 Alaskan youth. These programs focused on high returns by providing memorable outdoor experiences, developing a conservation ethic among local youth, cultivating early job skills, and completing much needed wildlife conservation work.

### Youth Conservation Corps

The Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) remains our most valuable tool to engage

*My favorite part of the job was going out to Halibut Bay. . . The work we did was bigger than we are, cleaning up beach debris and just making a difference for the island was the best part of my experience at the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge.*

~Kodiak NWR YCC Enrollee, Maryna Darminio.

youth on public lands. This summer, five refuges hired 29 YCC enrollees. Participating refuges continued to innovate and improve YCC programs to benefit the Service's mission, and the career and character development of enrollees.

In just a few short years, Alaska Maritime and Kodiak National Wildlife Refuges have thoughtfully grown YCC programs. These successful programs

integrate multiple refuge programs; provide learning experiences; and foster creativity for enrollees to find their own voice for conservation. The success of both programs is best seen and heard through the new media products the Corps produced.

### Youth Conservation Voices

Throughout the season, the Kodiak YCC crew conducted interviews of all youth coworkers. They also created



*Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge's YCC enrollee reflecting about his experience aboard the research vessel the M/V Tiglax.*





Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge YCC crew members, Jewel Jackson and Alaina Kuchenoff, lead bug collecting at the Sand Point Stewardship Camp.

a short video on an environmental topic relevant to their summer work. One particularly powerful video was created by enrollee Wendi Castellon demonstrating how each of us can make a difference with marine debris. Found at <http://bit.ly/sOejdW>. YCC Supervisor, Lacy Squartsoff (STEP student) also created a playful and scenic recruitment video found at <http://bit.ly/tHCtE9>.

The Corps at Alaska Maritime NWR sharpened their interpretive, scientific, and construction skills on a variety of projects. The centerpiece of their summer was traveling through the Aleutian Islands on the research vessel the *M/V Tiglax*, an adventure most seasoned biologists can only dream of taking. They then stopped at Sand Point to teach science programs for 75 campers at the two-week Stewardship Camp. Two videos capture their amazing experiences. In one video, YCC Enrollee, Traven Apiki marvels, “There is a sea lion out there in the

water, two of them, three of them, four of them, six of them, they keep multiplying. Oh, they are roaring at us, let’s see if we can hear them.” View the video at <http://bit.ly/s9PL6z> In the second video, YCC: *It’s Intense*, the team chronicles teaching children in Sand Point, Alaska. View at <http://bit.ly/uV5xoy>.

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge hosts the largest and longest-running YCC program. The Refuge has employed an average of eight enrollees annually for the last two decades. Kenai’s spike camp based program provides unforgettable experiences paired with developing a strong work and conservation ethic. The YCC trail crew roves to the far corners of the refuge to complete much needed campsite, cabin and trail work while learning *Leave No Trace* principles and technical work skills.

Although Kenai enrollees only experience one aspect of the refuge (recreation maintenance), leaders purposefully integrate the work projects into the bigger refuge

picture. At the beginning of each project, leaders facilitate discussions where enrollees are asked to think critically and creatively about the purpose of a project. Leaders also take advantage of ‘teachable moments’ to share information.

Arctic and Tetlin National Wildlife Refuges enlist youth in the remote communities of Arctic Village and Northway. In Arctic Village, all the high-school aged youth were employed to work on community and visitor services projects. Both crews received valuable safety and natural history training from a variety of refuge staff and local elders. This year, the Arctic crew’s crowning experience was a flight over Arctic Refuge which they see across the East Fork of the Chandalar River, but rarely have the opportunity to visit.

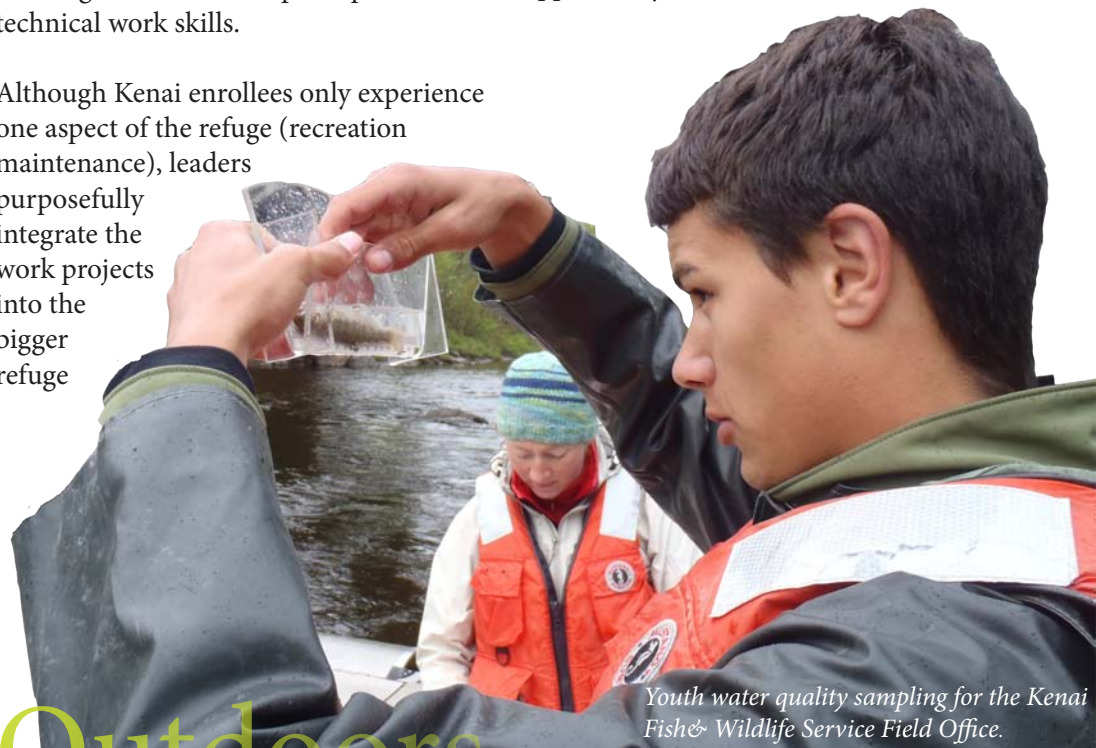
Use your smart phone to check out these QR Codes.



Kodiak YCC member, Wendi Castellon’s Marine Debris Video.



Alaska Maritime YCC’s video about their time aboard the *M/V Tiglax*.



Youth water quality sampling for the Kenai Fish & Wildlife Service Field Office.





*Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge's SCA trail crew meet in camp before the work day.*

### **Partner Youth Corps Programs**

We don't just stop with the YCC program, other stations engaged partners to target similarly aged youth in urban and rural communities. In the small village of Venetie, Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge enlisted youth ages 9 to 15 to conduct annual wetland monitoring. The program provided hands-on biological experience to local youth, and an opportunity for the Refuge to more effectively monitor significant resources on private lands, and improve working relationship with village residents.

The Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office's Coastal Program once again supported 20 employees in the award winning Youth Employment in Parks (YEP) program in partnership with the Anchorage Parks Foundation. YEP aims to create a meaningful "first job" experience and career pathways for diverse youth to work in natural resources. YEP employees assisted on a variety of riparian habitat restoration projects for the Service around Anchorage.

The Fairbanks Fish & Wildlife Field office designed a similar program. Fifteen Fairbanks youth ages 12 to 16 participated in this summer's three-week program. Over the course of the program youth removed over 400 pounds of invasive weeds from project sites, surveyed more than 21 miles of the Chena River for invasive plants, and restored native plants to multiple sites.

*Kenai's YCC Leader, Christa Kennedy, returns to the gravel quarry with buckets on Hidden Creek Trail.*

Employing high school-aged youngsters can sometimes be challenging. Many may be experiencing their first job. As a result, some need to be taught the basics of being on time, arriving prepared, and staying on task for an entire eight-hour work day. Also those under 18 years old are limited by policy on the types of equipment they can use. And don't forget the extra paperwork and logistical hurdles to surmount when taking them to remote field camps.

Although it is more challenging for supervisors to create and run these programs, it is worth the investment including the amazing energy, perspective and creativity youth bring to the Service. These programs introduce hundreds of neighbors to the mission of the Service, inform future citizens about issues relevant to wildlife conservation and provide experiences to spark the next Rachel Carson or Aldo Leopold into a career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



*Ryan prepares to release an owl as part of Fairbanks monitoring project.*

# Youth, Diverse and Urban are Key to our Future



*Fairbanks students assesses age of duck egg.*

In the United States, changing demographics are creating more racial and cultural diversity than ever before. Populations are also more concentrated in urban areas, farther and farther from wildlife and wilderness. As a wildlife conservation agency in the farthest reaches of the country, we face the danger of becoming irrelevant to the majority of American people. Luckily, Region 7 is positioned to transform with the changing population. The Secretary has called us to better “engage people from all walks of life in careers in natural resources;” our national leadership is committed to shaping a diverse workforce (*USFWS Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan FY2011-FY2015*); and a significant percentage of Alaska USFWS employees will be eligible to retire in the next five years allowing us to innovate and diversify through this transition.

## **Diverse Stakeholder Engagement**

The Region’s greatest success in employing a diverse youth audience is our engagement of Alaska Native youth in our Youth Conservation Corps programs, the Alaska Science and Engineering Program, and partner internships with tribal

organizations. For example, the Office of Subsistence Management’s Partners for Fisheries Monitoring sponsors upwards of 30 internships for high-school and college-age Alaska Natives. In addition to providing diversity, these programs give critical stakeholders in Alaska’s wildlife management the skills to participate more fully in management decisions.

## **Urban and Diverse Audiences**

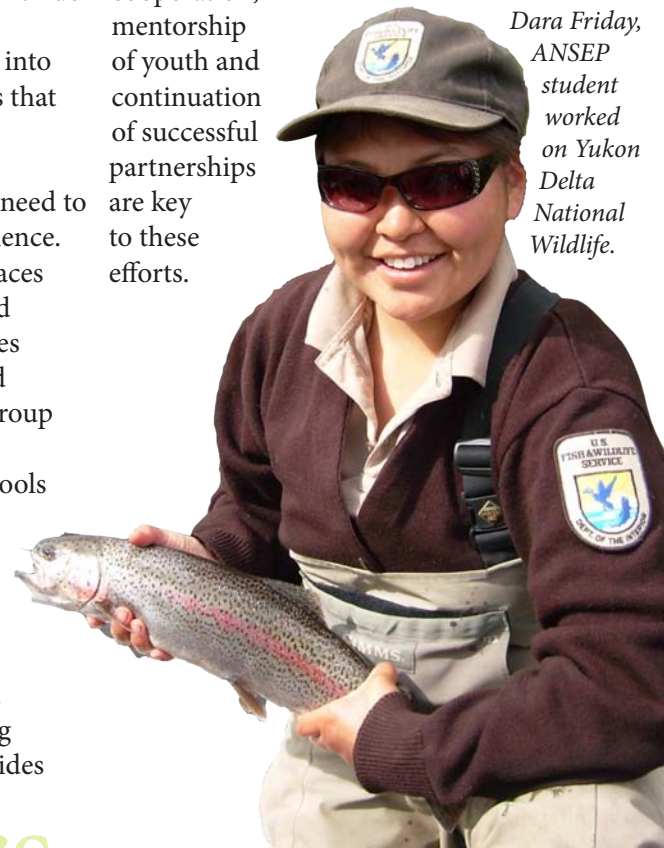
Despite our success with rural Alaska Natives, we still face the challenge of engaging an American people who are growing up in concrete environments surrounded by manicured lawns and tamed wildlife. Many of the youth we employ had their passions sparked earlier in life by a seminal moment in the outdoors, and supportive mentors who guided them to explore their passions. Many urban youth miss these moments or have no one guiding them toward outdoor pursuits. If we want to continue to fill our ranks with the best and brightest we need to venture early into these urban jungles with messages that speak directly to these youth.

If we expect a response, messages need to be tailored specifically to this audience. The lone adventurer in faraway places may not appeal to those comforted by towering skyscrapers and hordes of people. To create these targeted messages, a cross programmatic group has been formulating an outreach plan. In 2012, they hope to have tools to interest this audience in employment opportunities.

In addition to targeted outreach, these youth need to be contacted earlier in their lives and academic careers. The Connecting People with Nature initiative provides

opportunities for this younger age group to connect with the outdoors. As for their earlier academic careers, a new program piloted by other regions called the Career Diversity Internship Program (CDIP), recruits college freshman and sophomores in fields from Communication to Pre-Med Biology to participate in an internship to connect them to careers in the Service. Interns are mentored by FWS staff and contribute their unique perspectives and skills to field stations. In 2012, Region 7 will participate in this program, which will employ youth and offer mentoring opportunities to mid and late career professionals.

With our progress toward reaching Alaska Native youth, and our plans to reach out to diverse urban audiences, Region 7 is well on its way to creating an agency capable of addressing future natural resource challenges with a vibrant, diverse and talented workforce. Cross programmatic cooperation, mentorship of youth and continuation of successful partnerships are key to these efforts.



*Dara Friday, ANSEP student worked on Yukon Delta National Wildlife.*