National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

North Cascades National Park Complex



Pathways for Youth an initiative towards stewardship

Pathways for Youth

At North Cascades National Park Complex, we are developing the next generation of public land stewards and NPS employees. By deliberately connecting existing programs and partnerships, North Cascades is creating a continuum of meaningful park-based experiences, a pathway to stewardship.

With nearly 400 units in urban and natural areas across the country, the NPS is well-positioned to experiment with different models of youth engagement. *Pathways for Youth* is not a formal program nor a revolutionary approach. Instead, it is an agreement and shared commitment between park supervisors, employees, hiring officials, and partner organizations. It is a unified effort to connect youth with their public lands and shared heritage.

Pathways are encouraged through evidence that repeat experiences in parks create a sense of stewardship. There is no one "right" route or time line for traveling a pathway.

Pathways Examples

Kirstie Englis

- 2007 North Cascades Wild, North Cascades Institute
- 2008 Mount Rainier Work Crew, Student Conservation Association
- 2010 Campground Ranger, North Cascades

Jaya Ghosh

- 2005 Conservation Leadership Corps, Student Conservation Association, Seattle
- 2006 Work Crew, Student Conservation Association, Hopewell Furnace
- 2007 Work Crew, Student Conservation Association, Mount Rainier
- 2008 Work Crew, Student Conservation Association, Glennallen National Forest
- 2009 2010 Interpretive Ranger, North Cascades

What is a Pathway?

A pathway is a sequence of experiences, each building on the last and offering deeper connection to one's national parks. Though each step is unique, they can be organized into three broad categories:

- 1) EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS introduce students (elementary through high school) to national parks through fun, curriculum-based approaches. In many instances, this is the youth's first exposure to nature and outdoor recreation.
- 2) INTERNSHIPS offer real-world work experience and are often supplemented by a stipend and/or school credit. Interns are high school or college students and work for an entire summer season. They gain employment skills and experiences that then make them qualified for future NPS jobs.
- 3) EMPLOYMENT at a national park is available through seasonal and permanent positions (10,650 and 1,000, respectively, in 2010). In these paid positions, students have a higher level of engagement and responsibility in fulfilling park operations.



Goals

- 1) To develop stewards of our public lands. National parks belong to the American people, the pinnacle of ownership being active stewardship. Long term relevancy can only be achieved through engaged citizenry and the active help of the American people.
- 2) To diversify the NPS workforce.

 Over the past ten years, while the American population has become more diverse, the NPS has actually become less. By mentoring and recruiting underrepresented youth, North Cascades is building a diverse pool of highlymotivated and skilled candidates for NPS employment.

National Efforts

The Second Century Commission proposed recommendations for the next 100 years of service, suggesting that "the National Park Service should invite all Americans to build a personal connection with the parks, placing a high priority on engaging diverse audiences through its operations and programming." Similarly, the NPS Director has articulated four priorities to guide the agency: Education, Stewardship, Relevancy, and Workforce. With these goals in mind, parks and regional offices began to strategically look forward and experiment with new programs.

Other national parks that have successful youth engagement programs include Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and Lowell National Historical Park. North Cascades continues to look to other parks and organizations for lessons learned. Due to differing park conditions, there is no one-size-fits-all model for youth engagement. One lesson is clear, though; multiple positive experiences lead to a greater sense of stewardship.

Regional Map of North Cascades



North Cascades Wild students summit Desolation Peak, a climax of their 12-day program that includes canoeing, backpacking, and service projects with NPS staff. Photo courtesy of Amy Brown

Background

Recently, North Cascades managers recognized that their park partners, the Student Conservation Association and North Cascades Institute, not only serve many diverse youth through their programs but also help develop individuals who were well-qualified for seasonal employment. In 2009, North Cascades recruited three alumni from these programs for seasonal positions. The effort expanded to 18 students in 2010 through additional youth partners and opportunities.

Prior to each summer season, partner organizations work with parks to match the students with appropriate internship and employment opportunities.

Each of these students had either a previous experience at North Cascades or another public land (U.S. Forest Service or Seattle Parks and Recreation, for example). The familiarity with park resources and previously demonstrated commitment to stewardship creates a win-win opportunity to both youth and park.

Park Qualities

Established in 1968, North Cascades National Park Complex is a large wilderness park, three hours northeast of Seattle. Due to its steep terrain and distinct precipitation patterns, the park supports a variety of environments and strong biodiversity. Hikers and mountaineers explore the rugged alpine landscape, families camp along the glacial-fed rivers and lakes, and three hydroelectric dams provide Seattle with 20% of its electricity. With its heavily glaciated peaks, North Cascades is often called the Alps of America.

Park Partners

Partners provide invaluable support and help fulfill the NPS mission to audiences beyond park boundaries. Their resources, expertise, and varied missions help connect new audiences to national parks. Two partners in particular have been instrumental in developing *Pathways for Youth*:

1) The Student Conservation Association (SCA), created in 1957, provides high school and college students with hands-on conservation opportunities through internships, community programs, and work crews. North Cascades has a long history with the SCA and in 2002, hosted more SCA interns than any other national park in the country. Many permanent, term, and seasonal North Cascades employees began their career through a SCA internship. Each year, the SCA offers recruit-

ment and administrative support and NPS staff provide the field opportunities and professional opportunities.

2) North Cascades Institute (NCI), established in 1986 by former North Cascades rangers, is the park's primary educational partner. They seek to conserve and restore Northwest environments through education and offer seminars, classes, and stewardship programs. Additionally, they recruit and introduce youth to the North Cascades through curriculumbased and experiential programs like Mountain School, North Cascades Wild, and Cascades Climate Challenge. In 2010, over 2,000 youth participated in NCI programs.

Other park partners and funding sources include:

- Youth Conservation Corps
- Public Lands Corps
- Washington Conservation Corps
- Youth Internship Program
- Skagit County Worksource
- U.S. Forest Service
- · Seattle Parks and Recreation

Many of these partnerships have been in place prior to the creation of *Pathways for Youth*. North Cascades is simply working to align existing park and partner-led programs to create these pathways.

Challenges

Currently, *Pathways for Youth*, is an unfunded endeavor and requires staff to work creatively to patch work opportunities together with soft-funded projects. This provides a logistical challenge as staff are unable to guarantee a set amount of positions each year for youth. (A \$350,000 base increase is in the President's FY2010 Budget to put *Pathways for Youth* on sustainable financial footing.)

For *Pathways for Youth* to succeed, it requires a cultural shift in how supervisors work with their employees. To encourage youth along an individualized pathway requires a relationship not limited to the nine-to-five workday. There are skills like counseling and cultural sensitivity that are not normally expected of supervisors. Successful mentoring is a multiyear commitment. Who provides this support, and how exactly, is an on-going discussion between North Cascades and its partners.

As *Pathways for Youth* grows, it is quickly apparent that a bottleneck occurs between qualified youth and available employment at North Cascades. Success implementation of this program requires partnerships with other national parks who can share youth, match them to the right jobs, and offer similar meaningful opportunities.

Relevancy & Workforce

In 2008, for the first time, more people lived in urban areas than rural ones. The average American consumes twelve hours of media each day. By 2050, nearly one in five will be an immigrant and Hispanics will be the largest minority, at 29% of the American population.

With these social changes, the NPS cannot expect that park visitation patterns will remain as they have over that last half century. As the needs of the American public change, so must NPS operations.

Unintentionally, the NPS has attracted visitors and a workforce that are largely white, middle to upper class, and college educated. As a public agency, to remain relevant and meet the needs of the people, employees should reflect the demographics of the country.

Every year, North Cascades hires over one hundred seasonal employees. Roughly 70% are previous employees, i.e. rehires. It is within the annual 30% turnover that the *Pathways for Youth* initiative can, overtime, have great impacts; each year, there are over thirty opportunities to hire a more diverse workforce.

Pathways for Youth is not a quick fix; rather, it is a long-term investment in fostering a generation where national parks are relevant and people feel they are stewards for the future.

Success

At its essence, *Pathways for Youth* aims to create a constituency of engaged citizens, no matter their profession. If a student spends two weeks canoeing at North Cascades, returns the following summer as a GS-3 campground ranger, and then goes on to become a business owner, teacher, or parent later in life—reflecting fondly on that national park experience and sharing that sense of stewardship with others, then *Pathways for Youth* will be a success.

For more information: Charles Beall Chief of Interpretation

(360) 854-7302 Charles_Beall@nps.gov