



U.S. Forest Service
Kaibab National Forest
800 S. 6th St.
Williams, AZ 86046
Voice: (928) 635-8200
Email: mailroom_r3_kaibab@fs.fed.us
Web: www.fs.usda.gov/kaibab

News Release

Media Contact: Jackie Banks
(928) 635-8314
jcbanks@fs.fed.us



Youth crews spend summer supporting public lands & creating community

Williams, Ariz., Sept. 1, 2017—For Immediate Release. The Kaibab National Forest hosted two youth crews for the summer to accomplish projects, experience public lands, and learn skills and a strong work ethic, all while earning money and the possibility of an education award upon program completion.

The Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) is a program coordinated through the Arizona Conservation Corps that affords young people, typically 17- and 18-year-olds, the opportunity to perform community service and resource conservation through hands-on project work with a variety of land management and community partners, including the Kaibab National Forest. As in past years, the Kaibab hosted two crews this summer, one stationed in Williams and the other in Fredonia.

“When I think about the experience our YCC members get serving on public lands, I’m struck with what a great opportunity it is for them to develop a healthy relationship with work and service,” said Russ Dickerson, operations director for the Arizona Conservation Corps. “They get to work as a close team, come to understand that if they don’t give it everything they have someone else may have to pick up the slack, and see firsthand the lasting impacts that their service can have.”

The 2017 YCC program ran from June 5 to July 22. Corps members worked Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and assisted with a variety of resource areas on the Kaibab National Forest including range, wildlife, recreation, fire, archaeology, timber and silviculture. Both the Williams and Fredonia YCC corps members completed a remarkably diverse array of projects helping Kaibab employees with work they may not have otherwise had the time or person-power to accomplish.

The Williams YCC crew assisted range staff in removing a broken trick tank, which is a watering device for livestock or wildlife, and unneeded fencing material. Working with the recreation department, they helped maintain the popular Bill Williams Mountain Trail by using crosscut saws to clear fallen trees, and they helped clean out drainage ditches. Assisting silviculturists, they scrubbed aspen trees to remove damaging oystershell scale insects and helped monitor the condition of aspen stands.

“On the Kaibab National Forest, we take a multi-faceted approach to protecting our aspen, which are in decline due to a variety of factors,” said Josh Giles, silviculturist for the Williams and Tusayan districts of the forest. “The corps members helped us scrub off pathogens, cut encroaching conifers out of aspen stands in order to reduce competition, and monitor the progress we are making to protect this important species. We were able to teach them about the precarious state of aspen and the role we can play as land managers to help make a difference.”

The Williams YCC corps members worked with fire and archaeology crews to thin and pile trees from the historic 1930s Civilian Conservation Corps interpretive site located near Barney Flat south of Williams. They also removed fuels and low vegetation from historic logging railroad grades across the Williams Ranger District in order to help protect the sites from future wildfires. Finally, they assisted biologists in removing crayfish, an invasive species, from Keyhole Sink. Crayfish are not native to Arizona, but they have become established in many waters throughout the state and endanger aquatic native species.

Fredonia YCC corps members accomplished an equivalently impressive list of projects during their tenure on the North Kaibab Ranger District. They worked with the range department to remove invasive bull thistle and old, unneeded fencing across the district. They assisted the timber and silviculture programs to mark boundaries for a timber sale while also being taught skills in map reading and GPS, plant and tree identification, forest health, and insect and disease identification.

“Working with the youth is not just about getting the job done,” said Allison Ayers, wilderness and trails specialist with the North Kaibab Ranger District. “It’s also about empowering young people to do things they never thought in their wildest dreams that they could do. This program makes the impossible possible for many young adults.”

The Fredonia YCC crew also assisted in clearing and maintaining a number of trails, including the iconic Rainbow Rim Trail, and received instruction on crosscut saw and ax use and technique. They helped spruce up the popular Kaibab Plateau Visitor Center and were treated to a presentation on California condors. They assisted in painting the porch, steps and outhouse at the historic Jacob Lake Ranger Station Cabin and then got to take an educational tour of the North Kaibab Ranger District to view archaeological sites and learn about Forest Service cultural resource management and laws.

From camping out at Big Springs to trekking to a fire lookout, Fredonia YCC corps members were offered engaging opportunities to not just work in but to also learn about public lands and their management.

“On the Kaibab National Forest, we have partners who have been committed to YCC members’ development for a long time and are really invested in our YCC members’ experiences,” Dickerson said. “If the YCC members work as hard in their future endeavors and take the lessons they learn about communication and teamwork along with them, there’s no need for any of us to worry about the future.”

All told, YCC corps members contributed a whopping 2,410 hours toward project work on the Kaibab National Forest that forest personnel likely would not otherwise have been able to accomplish. They also saw places that few people will ever see, experienced challenges that not everyone could overcome, and made investments in public lands that will endure for years or even decades.

“We’ve all been passed a torch to conserve and care for these lands that have been set aside, and we should see to it that we’re able to pass that same torch. Additionally, though, there’s something delightfully subversive about a young person swinging an ax,” Dickerson said. “The story about young people only staring at their phones and thinking only for themselves is so widespread that it goes

unchallenged. I know a different set of young people, though – their boots are trashed, their hands have hard callouses, their packs are heavy, and they’re giving, unselfish, aware, and thoughtful.”

For additional information on YCC, visit www.azcorps.org. Follow the Kaibab National Forest on Facebook and Twitter @KaibabNF.

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Williams YCC corps members work with fire and archaeology crews to thin and pile trees on the Williams Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest. Credit Kaibab National Forest.