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Kaibab National Forest



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Kaibab National Forest: A Classroom Where Communities Meet, Learn Together

FREDONIA, Ariz. – “Every drop is a miracle,” exclaimed Chuck Adams, a member of the Tobacco clan in the Hopi village of Tewa. “It has its own connection and purpose. It has its own song, its own soul source, and its own story to tell how it benefits the land, the animals and the people.”

The soft-spoken, yet deliberate tone emanating from beneath the wide brim of his hat spoke loudly of Adams’ reverence for the forest and its abundant resources. As he spoke of the value of water and other ecological resources on the Kaibab National Forest, referring to all life as his “little brothers,” Adams said it was especially important to him to volunteer to be part of a unique collaborative project on the forest that took place in late July.

“We are here to protect, preserve and restore, and I have a deep feeling for doing this kind of work, which is why I volunteered to be here. They say that we learn from each other, and I wanted to be here to watch our youth progress. My experience started with the elders: my grandpa and my uncles. They taught me what we’ve been hearing here all week. Having respect for the land, the plants and the animals because it’s all in one cycle, and learning that when I was growing up is how I learned about stewardship of the land.”

In Native American communities, there is an abiding respect for life, nature, family, elders, and community. This was especially apparent as Hopi elders partnered with managers of the Kaibab National Forest to spend five days mentoring Hopi tribal youth and working together to restore two natural springs on the North Kaibab Ranger District, from July 28 to Aug. 1. For over two decades, the relationship between the Hopi Tribe and Kaibab National Forest has grown as the two worked closely on various land management issues.

This spring’s restoration project is the first tribal-Forest Service collaborative project to be implemented since the February 2014 publication of the new Land and Resource Management Plan (forest plan) for the Kaibab National Forest, and the concept of shared stewardship is a commitment that the Forest Service and the Hopi and Kaibab-Paiute tribes plan to expand on over time.

In 2006, the Kaibab National Forest began revising its forest plan, a document that provides guidance and direction to Forest Service staff so they may best fulfill stewardship responsibilities in order to meet the needs of the American people, now and for future generations. During consultation on the new forest plan, tribal partners identified concerns for the conditions of natural springs, and a desire to build partnerships to restore these vital resources. Protecting the Kaibab’s natural waters came forward as an important concern for both the tribes and the Forest Service.

“All lands managed by the Forest Service were once tribal lands. Prior to the creation of national forests, native

people lived here for centuries and amassed a tremendous amount of information about how we care for the land. We call that traditional ecological knowledge,” said Kaibab National Forest Tribal Liaison Mike Lyndon. “Whenever we can integrate traditional ecological knowledge into our management techniques, we get better management.”

As the Kaibab National Forest’s first collaborative approach to spring restoration under its new forest plan, much of the week’s agenda was centered on improvements to Castle Springs and Big Springs. More than 40 people from the Forest Service and Hopi Tribe labored together to remove graffiti at Castle Springs and remove a decaying corral, rusted barbed wire and trash in the vicinity. The group also uprooted invasive vegetation encroaching in an adjacent meadow at Castle Springs, constructed water catchments for both wildlife and grazing cattle, and built a fence to protect the spring.

Meanwhile as work at Castle Springs was being completed, additional work was being done at Big Springs to construct a more visible path along the spring in order to deter visitors from making their own paths, alleviating the spider web effect of footpaths that was damaging fragile soils. And, while the week was filled with many hours of manual labor, the schedule was also packed with many intangibles. Just as the Forest Service’s mission is to manage for multiple-use and meet the diverse needs of the American people, the spring restoration project also met multiple objectives.

Respecting Each Other:

The weeklong event started with a welcome by an elder from the Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians, followed briefly with individual introductions and a warm welcome from Kaibab National Forest Supervisor Mike Williams and North Kaibab District Ranger Randall Walker.

“I want to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Hopi and Paiute elders, and the tribal youth. Your ongoing support of the Kaibab National Forest makes projects such as this collaborative management of sacred sites project possible. Your hospitality and willingness to share your traditional ecological knowledge of natural waters and spring restoration make it enjoyable to be part of this week’s events,” said Walker. “Your role as leaders and mentors is priceless for teaching all of our youth the spiritual, cultural and historical value these natural waters play in the future ecological management of our forests.”

For everyone involved in the spring restoration project, the week was filled with many intangible concepts; respect was perhaps the most abstract yet abundant of the week’s curriculum.

Forest Service managers worked closely with Hopi and Paiute staff and elders for nearly a year to plan the project in order to provide a community service, to further build upon already-strong relationships between the agency and the tribes, and to accomplish on-the-ground work to benefit Native American sacred sites.

Land management agencies such as the Forest Service hold in public trust a great diversity of landscapes and sites, including many culturally important sites held sacred by Indian tribes. Sacred sites are specific locations on federal land that are identified by an Indian tribe as sacred by virtue of its religious or ceremonial significance. This project is part of a national effort by the Forest Service to improve its work with native people on the protection and interpretation of Native American sacred sites. Because of the Hopi sacred values associated with water and natural springs, the project provided a platform to discuss how the Forest Service can better understand and manage sacred sites issues.

“To me, the term sacred site means something that is of value to both the native and non-native people. It has a sole purpose and has benefits for the land, animals and people, and for each of those it has its own connection and meaning,” said Adams, a former chemical engineer with Ford Motor Company who returned home and now works for the Hopi Office of Range Management and Land Operations. “It’s good that we pass this on to our youth. We learn from each other and our focus here is to teach our youth the importance of pursuing an education and hopefully what we teach them this week will stick in their minds.”

Pursuing An Education:

The importance of education was a major theme during the weeklong project. Tribal elders, Forest Service personnel and participating partners took every opportunity to turn the Kaibab National Forest into a classroom for the 17 Hopi youth between the ages of 16 and 21 who participated in the project as part of the Hopi Tribe Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Summer Youth Development Program.

“We liked the idea of bringing the youth here to do some work with the Forest Service and educate them about the importance of water, the springs and the forest,” said Everett Gomez, WIA case counselor. “We liked the idea of having our elders work with youth directly and at the same time invite presenters to tell the youth what they do in their respective career fields and what education is necessary to begin a career in these fields in hopes of enticing the youth to pursue their own education.”

According to Gomez, it was the first time ever that WIA took tribal youth off the reservation to take part in a project. “Regardless of whether any of our youth go on to be a scientist, hydrologist or a fire fighter is irrelevant,” said Gomez. “The point is that they think, they broaden their horizons, they experience something that they may not necessarily have experienced, and they pursue some type of education.”

In conjunction with WIA, primary partners on the project included the Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians, the Hopi Tribe Cultural Preservation Office, the Hopi Cultural Resources Advisory Task Team and the Kaibab National Forest. Forest planners also received support from the six programs under the Hopi Tribe Department of Natural Resources, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Office, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the Grand Canyon Trust. Throughout the week, resource professionals from each of these organizations provided the tribal youth with workshops and presentations focusing on the importance of education.

Nearly all of the participants gave personal accounts to the youth about how they started their career paths. One such example was Hopi Cultural Preservation Office archaeologist Joel Nicholas. During his presentation, Nicholas told the youth that he himself was a product of the Hopi WIA program in 1994. Nicholas comes from the village of Shungopavi and first started working with the Kaibab National Forest in 2009 under the Student Temporary Employment Program as part of the Forest Service’s national Multicultural Workforce Strategic Initiatives program, one of many Forest Service opportunities for students to earn money, continue their education, train with professionals, and combine academic study with on-the-job experience.

“I’m very happy with what we have accomplished this week. Even though they’re tired, and we want them to be tired, they are listening,” said Gomez, referring to the tribal youth who participated in the project. “They’re listening and their minds are turning. They’re thinking, and that’s what it’s all about,” said Gomez.

Protecting Our Resources:

In addition to the goal of inspiring tribal youth to pursue education and consider careers associated with the land and its resources, Forest Service staff, Hopi staff and tribal elders also embarked on the restoration of natural springs in the interest of shared stewardship and the preservation of an important sacred site.

“For us, working out in the field and with these resources is important. Teaching our youth that we need to do whatever it takes to protect these resources is vital,” said Adams. “As natives, we visually like to see things, so we can always remember. Showing people the springs, the water sources, and telling them about it are tough for people to understand unless they walk the land.”

As part of the overarching stewardship focus, the Forest Service hoped to gain traditional ecological knowledge from the tribes to incorporate into future land management activities. The sharing of traditional ecological knowledge simply means passing along the knowledge gained from one generation to the next or one culture to another in order to sustain local resources such as the natural springs.

“Involving our youth along with our tribal advisors helps us pass on traditional knowledge,” said Nicholas. “We are

only here for so long and we need our teachings to be passed on to the generations that come after us.”

Protecting that traditional knowledge is something the Hopi staff and elders take very seriously as was apparent when Adams spoke of the forest’s resources and teaching the youth about their value.

“Technology today has progressed so much that we sometimes take it for granted. We turn the faucet and expect to get hot water, and we get upset when we don’t have hot water or gas,” explained Adams. “These resources are our lifeline, water is life and showing people so they understand this link and its effect to our communities and our families is important.”

Collaborating With Purpose:

All of the participants in the spring restoration project agreed with Adams that the best way to really understand and convey the value of the forest’s resources is to get outdoors and work together on the land. It was that kind of collaboration with purpose that led to the accomplishment of many project objectives including providing an environment for tribal elders to teach young people and Forest Service staff about traditional ecological knowledge related to management of natural springs, documenting efforts and producing a film about sacred sites and the value of jointly managing those precious resources, and facilitating discussions and building on already-established relationships between the Forest Service and tribes.

“It was such an honor to be able to participate in such a sharing of traditional knowledge. The knowledge the Hopi elders shared was such a benefit to the youth, and to us Forest Service representatives. The work we did was especially beneficial to the land we all cherish and care so much about,” said Dan Meza, Forest Service Tribal Relations Program Manager for the Southwestern Region.

Reflecting on the week’s events, tribal youth Dana Tewewina, a member of the Blue Spruce and Spider clan in the Hopi village of Tewa, said he learned some valuable lessons during his time on the Kaibab National Forest.

“For me the week had some life changing lessons that I wouldn’t have learned being back in my community,” said Tewewina. “Like in yesterday’s presentation, I learned about the word Maasaw, a Hopi word meaning ‘the Earth guardian’. “It taught me about our commitment to take care of the land, which is something I didn’t really know until yesterday. It taught me who we really are, who we should be and how to set examples, and I learned that we should take every opportunity in life to gain knowledge because it’s not going to be around forever.”

Since the collaborative spring restoration project, the Kaibab National Forest has continued efforts to protect and preserve the sacred site. Members of the forest’s leadership team and fire management organization worked together to build a permanent fence around the spring, which will prevent encroachment by cattle.

As the week came to a close, the tribal youth were each presented with gifts and certificates by Gomez in appreciation for their summer accomplishments in the WIA program, and Walker thanked the tribal youth and staff for helping make the week a success.

“Every time we get out on the ground and work together, the relationships become stronger, and it always opens the door for the next project. We’re looking forward to continuing the work we’re doing together,” said Williams.

Currently, partners are already planning a meeting to discuss further development of this new partnership and the next collaborative project.

“It is important to all of us to come together and work as one. Doing what we’re doing here - protecting, educating and restoring. What the Kaibab National Forest is doing now is leading, conferring and sitting down at the table to collaborate with the tribes to get our heads together. This is an ideal setting, and I think that what we are doing here is good,” said Adams.

Photos of the project are available at <http://tinyurl.com/HopiYouthSpringRestoration2014>. For news and events

about the Kaibab National Forest, please visit <http://www.fs.usda.gov/kaibab>. For news and events about the Hopi Tribe, please visit <http://www.hopi-nsn.gov/news/>, and for news and events about the Kaibab Paiute Tribe, please visit <http://www.kaibabpaiute-nsn.gov/>.

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