

Valerie: Hi, this is Valerie Fellows with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Public Affairs. Today we're celebrating the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Service's Fisheries program and 140 years of aquatic resource conservation across the country. I'm talking with Patrick Durham, the Director of Native American Programs for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about the Tribal Youth Conservation Corps. Welcome Pat!

Pat: Thank you Valerie. Glad to be here.

Valerie: Tell me a little bit about what is the Tribal Youth Conservation Corps?

Pat: Let me back up just a moment. Something that most people don't know is that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service started out as a fisheries program. We began as the U.S. Fish and Fisheries Commission in the 1800s with the McCloud Wintu Tribe on the McCloud River, managing salmon. That partnership with Indian tribes has moved forward into the current century with continued partnerships with tribes and tribal organizations, such as the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission and Great Lakes Indian Fisheries Commission. We work closely with the Southwest Indian Tribal Fisheries Commission. One of the priorities that we see and common ground we have with the tribes is investing in youth. The young people that we work with today are the fisheries and habitat managers for the future. I think one of the most important things that the Fish and Wildlife Service can do in protecting resources in the future is working with young people. Number one, they want to work with us. Number two, they believe that there is a spiritual connection with the environment. It's their calling. What we try to do with the Fisheries program is to capture that enthusiasm that these young people have and give them opportunities. We bring them on as youth hires individually, and we've brought them on as groups through the Youth Conservation Corps. This is a priority for the Service. This is a priority for the Department, in fact, under our new America's Great Outdoors initiative. There's a large component which focuses on young people. The young people that we're hiring right now are built on a number of fish hatcheries, fish health centers, and fish and wildlife conservation offices. The half-dozen programs that we're running right now include Great Lakes. They include the Pacific Northwest. We have a group in California, Salish Kootenai Tribe. We're working closely with, I believe, Creston National Fish Hatchery and the Salish Kootenai College at the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana. We work with Mescalero Hatchery, one of our premier sites. The Mescalero Apache Tribes Fish Hatchery was once a Fish and Wildlife

Service Hatchery that we transferred to the Tribe. They've managed to restore that hatchery to full working conditions. Every year, for the past, I want to say, ten years, we have hired a group of students under the tutelage of a phenomenal fish hatchery manager, Mike Montoya. Mike Montoya has been working with these young people to restore the hatchery, to bring fish to the tribes of the Southwest that are members of the Southwest Tribal Fisheries Commission. I can name six or seven right now that have gone on to change their majors in college to fisheries, habitat, and wildlife biology, and are looking at careers. We've been working with this program long enough to have seen quite a few of them go into careers. So this is exciting stuff for us. The White Mountain Apache Tribe, in partnership with our Fish Health Center in Pinetop, Arizona, has steadily brought on a handful of STEP and SCEP students to work with our fish health center there. One of the first people that went through that program was a man by the name of Chris Kitcheon, a tribal member at White Mountain Apache. He is now one of our Fish and Wildlife biologists, having gone through this youth program, gone through college, gotten a job and worked his way up the food chain of the Fish and Wildlife Service. He is now organizing youth programs. So that is an excellent example of how we are bringing young people full circle—to capturing their enthusiasm, giving them the opportunity to pursue careers and then helping them in those careers. Then once they're there, they're able to give back and give other young people the same opportunity.

Valerie: So it sounds like the program is intended to provide youth with a new set of skills, maybe even some on the job training and education. And one of the benefits that's come out of it is not only a partnership with these Native American youth, but really some of them are going to make this their career in the long term. So what kind of skills are they learning? What kind of projects or techniques could they learn as part of their interaction with the Service?

Pat: When people hear about a fisheries program, they automatically think of fish and streams, lakes and rivers and such. Fish and habitat conservation is the correct title. These young people are not only working in fish hatcheries and fish health centers, but they are working in wetlands management and restoration at Salish Kootenai Tribe. The National Bison Range National Wildlife Refuge is on that reservation. They were looking after the bison on the site. The types of work that they are doing involves rain management, maintenance, trail building, of course, the fisheries and fish hatcheries restoration of species. They're also working as a unit, working as a team, working with their leadership. They're exposed to a variety of the jobs they're

involved with in fish and wildlife management, including travel, the requirements to be selected for these positions. They're doing applications. They're made aware of the economics that they're doing. They're exposed to the whole wide range of what it takes to run a national fish and wildlife agency, a tribal agency. They've been at the local level working with hatcheries, refuges, fish health centers. Of course, tribal departments are a component to this as well. So we're not just opening the door to young people having outdoor careers as biologists, and range techs, fish techs and such. We're trying to give them a broad view of what it takes to run a national fish and wildlife agency, or even a local unit that we have, or that the tribe may have. By exposing them to all of those opportunities, they are able to maintain that connection that they felt and the enthusiasm they have for working in outdoor careers and fish and wildlife careers. But spending all day in the snow or in 100 degree weather doesn't appeal to everybody. There are plenty of inside jobs or careers that fit that inclination that young people have to work, to help nature, the environment, the fish and wildlife species, that don't necessarily mean getting your feet dirty.

Valerie: Thanks Patrick. Again, that was Pat Durham, the Director of Native American Programs for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I'm also talking with a couple of youth that have participated either in the Tribal Youth Conservation Corps or as a SCEP or a STEP student with some of our fish programs, either our fish hatcheries or our fish technology centers. I'm talking with Joel Colelay with the White Mountain Apache Tribe in Arizona and Amanda Berens with the Salish Kootenai in Montana. Joel what has the Tribal Youth Conservation Corps done for you?

Joel: It gave me a job. It gave me a way to support my family, my wife and my son. It's also given me a chance to look at life in a different way, and it's guided me through a lot of things. It kept me going every day. It's not the easiest job, but it's directed me. It's given me a path of responsibility.

Valerie: I remember seeing you speak in D.C. last year. It was really powerful, a very moving speech. Is there anything else you want people to know about the Tribal Youth Conservation Corps program?

Joel: It's a good program. It helps the youth to think life over and think about what they want to do in life. It kind of gives them a direction of what to do in life, how to go about life.

Valerie: Thanks Joel!

Joel: Thank you.

Valerie: And now I'm talking with Amanda Berens from the Salish Kootenai Tribe in Montana. Amanda, what has the Tribal Youth Conservation Corps done for you? What has it meant to you?

Amanda: I think the Tribal YCC program has really played an important part in my future as a wildlife biologist. I've had many opportunities that I probably couldn't have gotten anywhere else. I can contact people who can help me in my future career and professional endeavors. I had the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C. last November and give a speech on behalf of the Fish and Wildlife Service and Montana YCC program. This opportunity has given me the opportunity to be a STEP student and intern for Fish and Wildlife Service in D.C. this fall. I've also been given the opportunity to work with the Montana YCC program this summer. Both of these experiences are helping me with my future career plans and improving my professional skills.

Valerie: So do you try to encourage other Native American youth to go into the Tribal YCC program?

Amanda: I do. I think it's a very good opportunity for them to kind of get their foot in the door, especially from the small reservations. Sometimes it's hard to get their experience and allow people to get anywhere. I think the program's important because it really encourages kids to be outside. Even this summer so far I had kind of worked with the kids and found that a lot of them don't really know how to use some of the tools we're using. They had never cut wood. They've never cleared trails or something. So I think it's kind of important to keep encouraging kids to be outdoors.

Valerie: Great! Thanks Amanda. Thanks for joining us for this podcast today about the Tribal Youth Conservation Corps and the programs that the Service is working on to engage youth in the outdoors, for careers, for inspiration, for education, and for on the job training and skill sets. If you would like to look up more information about this, please visit the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov/fisheries>.

