

## Arizona Trail Seeds of Stewardship Program

### *Trail Work and Two-Wheeled Adventure*

by Deborah Oslik



On April 7<sup>th</sup>, the Seeds of Stewardship Program hit the trail for its fourth outing with the Pima Partnership Academy. This outing was both focused on community service, as well as introducing mountain biking to the students our program serves.

We began our day on the Rincon Valley Passage of the Arizona Trail, where we met Pima County Natural Resources Specialist Steve Anderson. Steve facilitated our morning of trail



work, providing us with necessary tools and instructions for being safe and effective trail workers. As a group, we traveled south with work gloves and tools in hand, trimming and removing protruding branches and cactus as we moved along. It was a great experience to do service work on the very trail we would be riding mountain bikes on that afternoon. This enabled students to later notice and understand how the work they did impacts different trail users, including themselves!

After our morning project and a quick lunch, John Heiman from Southwest Trekking rolled into the parking lot in a giant green school bus full of mountain bikes and safety equipment. Watching him pull into the dirt parking lot certainly brought an added element of excitement to the journey we were about to embark on.

We spent time getting properly outfitted to our bikes, and learning some basic mountain bike skills before heading out on the trail. We rode approximately four miles, which was plenty in the heat of the day. The three students with us that day all took to riding quite differently. I later wondered if Mac, one of the participating students, excelled on the mountain bike because of his experience growing up riding horses on the Navajo Reservation. He shared that riding mountain bikes was "the most fun" he had out on the trail yet. Emiliano, younger and more tentative, struggled with pedaling over the rough terrain, but ended the day feeling super excited for more opportunities to get out on the trail.



When it came time to drop him off at the group home in central Tucson where he lives, he insisted I come in and tell the home manager about the upcoming camping trip we are offering to the students at his school next month.



At the beginning of the year, we told the students at Pima Partnership that if they attend at least two of our outings during the year, they would be eligible for an end of the year camping trip. For many of the students, this helps encourage a sense of ownership and commitment so that they could be part of this special opportunity. After our April 7 outing, we now have a group of eligible students for the camping trip, which will be in the Santa Catalina Mountains along the Arizona Trail.

Lastly, I recently learned from our teacher liaison at Pima Partnership Academy, Cindy Winston, that when they were taking photos for the yearbook this past month, the club that had the most students show up was for our club – painting a clear picture that what we are doing is truly impacting the “at-risk” population of this school.

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