



Youth Outreach & Education Report



Northern Arizona

SOS north has been hard at play and learning since school started back in August. We have met with all but two of our school for at least one outing, serving approximately 410 students thus far. On our outings we have removed bags of invasive weeds, learned map and compass skills, mapped watersheds, repaired trail tread, used dichotomous keys to learn more about the plants and animals of our ecosystem, studied C. Hart Merriam's Life Zones and the history of his research camp near the AZT on the San Francisco Peaks, and most importantly given students the chance to lay in the grass, play games with their friends, and connect with nature in a real and relaxed way. We have needed to be a bit flexible and creative so far in October with lower than normal temperatures, rain, snow and very muddy trails. Some outings have had to be canceled or rescheduled while others have needed to move to indoor classroom activities.

Gear Girls has completed its second full fall season with 30 girls registered. We attended the *Pedals vs. Pistons* trail work event where the Gear Girls made up $\frac{2}{3}$ of the "Pedals" participants and were only a few people short of taking the trophy for the mountain bikers this year. We have seen returning athletes progress to very advanced technical riding skills while also taking on leadership and mentorship roles within the group. We co-hosted a very successful fundraiser in partnership with the Flagstaff Mountain Film Festival in September that not only brought in some financial support, it spread the word about our programming to a huge standing room only audience at the Orpheum Theatre. We ended our season on a super positive note with a one night camp-out at Dead Horse Ranch State Park. The girls rode some very technical trails, played games, helped cook and clean up from meals, and generally had a fantastic time.

Please see the attached *Summer of Service* report from American Conservation Experience for highlights on the incredible summer program we helped facilitate and fund with youth from Flagstaff. This is stewardship in action!

Southern Arizona

SOS South has been busy, with 20 outings over the past two months with students from Patagonia, Bisbee, Vail, South Tucson, Tucson, Oracle, Globe, and Miami. This school year we are working with 12 schools, including one literacy class and credit recovery school.

This year, I developed new outdoor education curriculum, which has been very well received by teachers and administrators. Already, students have covered every biome in Southern Arizona along the Arizona Trail and we're looking forward to winter outings and service projects.

Since I received an Emerging Leaders scholarship to attend the Partnership for the National Trails System Conference in Washington later this month, I asked teachers for quotes about the impact of the SOS program to integrate into my presentation. Here are a few that have been submitted thus far:

Imago Dei Middle School in Tucson

For over a year now I have watched my middle school students discover animal remains in desert washes, swim in cool pools of fresh water along steep mountain trails, observe birds, frogs, snakes, and other wildlife in their natural habitat, and generally learn about the world around them through the Arizona Trail Association's Seeds of Stewardship program. While these first-hand experiences would be more than enough to make a partnership with ATA worthwhile, it's the change that is seen after the field trip ends that is the true value of such expeditions. Students have consistently fewer behavioral issues, better listening skills, and overall attitude towards their learning experience after spending a day outside with Treven and the S.O.S. crew. It is my sincere belief that a day spent outdoors awakens a sense of curiosity and yearning for knowledge that translates directly back into the classroom, home, and every other aspect of a young person's life; and through the Seeds of Stewardship program, I am happy to say that our students have that.

Mountain Vista Elementary School in Oracle

For two years, Treven Hooker and his assistants led us on five fun-filled, learning expeditions each year. It was a very exciting learning experience for all of us. I had the opportunity to plan the outings with Treven and help design lessons around the Arizona Academic Standards. We integrated science, reading, writing, math, and social studies in the lessons. The geology lessons included the water cycle, mineral deposits, and weather. In biology, the students learned about many biomes that surround the town of Oracle which is in the foothills of the Catalina Mountain range including Mount Lemmon; the rich, natural habitat of insects, mammals, and reptiles was explored in many different areas including the Oracle sections of the Arizona Trail (Oracle is a gateway community), Catalina State Park, the Nature Conservancy 7B Ranch in Mammoth, and Mt Lemmon.

The science portion also included how natural events and human activities have positively and negatively impacted our environment. The Native American culture and history in our area was investigated as the students listened to stories, read articles, and had real-life experiences picking prickly pears and preparing and canning their own jelly. Students wrote about their adventures and learning experiences in a journal as they researched information about and completed each trip.

The last expedition was to another area of our local Arizona Trail which is part of the Oracle State Park. The students participated in a culminating activity of stewardship as they learned how to safely use gardening tools, so they could clear a one-mile section of the Arizona Trail to help take care of their precious environment.

I was so taken by the response of the students that I integrated more hands on, real-life experiences for the students to expand their learning experience.

Edge High School in Tucson

We see a higher level of academic and school engagement in students who are a part of Seeds of Stewardship. Seeds of Stewardship gives students the unique opportunity to connect with the environment around them. It gives them a chance to form positive peer relationships around their new found love of the outdoors.

I observe the students connect with adults that they begin to see as resources rather than authority figures. These relationships continue at school and facilitate both student learning and self-advocacy to connect with broader support services.

Students follow more conservation news and what is happening to the national forests around them. One told me excitedly about a mining project being proposed in the area and what we must do to stop it.

I observe that students who participate in hikes develop positive peer relationships, demonstrate less disruptive behavior, and show greater academic progress.

At our school there are two students who had never hiked on a trail before and had never been to the mountains around Tucson. Seeds of Stewardship opened up the natural world to them. This has had a positive impact on mental health, attendance, and school engagement. Since experiencing the sights and sounds of the natural world they have shown more enthusiasm for ecology, and connecting with peers outdoors.

Treven conducts an activity asking the group to listen to feel, to smell and taste the outdoors then leaves students for a moment of silence giving them space to observe and connect with the more minute details of the forests. When we get back to school students often reflect on this moment. "The silence was my favorite part", "I didn't know the wind could sound like that."

The students' favorite activity involves silence. Seeds of Stewardship encourage students to take a few minutes of silence to observe and feel the world around them. Many students remarked on this activity later, saying "I have never felt so at peace", "I noticed so many things I hadn't before", and "I didn't know the wind could sound like that". They said it allowed them to fully relax and sink into the woods. I noticed a shift in the group after this activity. Students seemed more relaxed in their bodies and with each other. The students were more open to reflection and sharing their experiences that day. They seemed more present to the beautiful nature around them. It is these types of connective experiences that plant a seed in youth. That feeling of peace, fullness and connection to the natural world is an important step toward motivating them to protect these natural places in the future.