

**Youth Outreach Report**  
**Northern Arizona Seeds of Stewardship & Gear Girls**  
March 2021 - June 2021 | Prepared by Julie Polovitch



**Seeds of Stewardship:**

- Coordinated and facilitated the spring session of [After School on the AZT](#):
  - 1 group, 10 youth, 8 outings including 1 trail maintenance project.
- Developed a summer Seeds of Stewardship program, conducted outreach, completed registration, and planned outings. The summer program will include 6 adventurous experiences for 6th-8th graders.
- Capacity building: Created a work plan for Miguel Sotelo to take on more hours and responsibilities, further assisting with coordinating and facilitating programs, in August-December 2021.
- In progress: Planning and conducting registration for 2 open-enrollment trail maintenance projects for Flagstaff youth.

**Gear Girls:**

- Coordinated and facilitated the spring session of [Gear Girls](#).
  - 2 groups, 21 youth, 17 outings including 2 trail maintenance projects and 1 environmental restoration project.
  - Our program featured in the [AZ Daily Sun](#) and [ABC15](#).
- Developed curriculum for and facilitated the [Junior Coaches](#) program.
  - Junior Coaches, a leadership and skills development program, is for older Gear Girls participants who are excited to take on more leadership and mentorship opportunities. This program will create pathways for participants to become coaches and stay involved in the program beyond 8th grade, ultimately making Gear Girls more long-term sustainable.
  - This session, we facilitated 6 workshop-style trainings for 4 young women to become Junior Coaches.
- Capacity building: Onboarded 3 new volunteer coaches. In progress: Outreach and interviews for a Lead Coach.
- Completed registration and planning for summer Gear Girls opportunities.
  - We'll host our 10-week program, a 5-part thru-ride series, and 4 clinics.
  - Summer programs begin TODAY – June 19!

## **Arizona Trail Ambassador Program** ***an accredited Arizona Rising Master Naturalist Program*** **2020-2021 Season**



The Arizona Trail Ambassador Program is an eight-month internship for high school students in their Junior and Senior years in southern Arizona. Each year, 10 youth from the Tucson area are selected based on letters of interest and our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Policy. Throughout the program, Ambassadors are educated in Sonoran Desert natural sciences and human pre/histories and cultures, and trained in public speaking and environmental education methodologies, and community connection and engagement. The program operates every Sunday on the ancestral lands of the Tohono O'odham, Pascua Yaqui and Chiricahua Apache on lands now managed by Saguaro National Park, Coronado National Forest, and Pima County. Below is a summary of the 2020-2021 Arizona Trail Ambassador Program.

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Through the riparian galleries of Cienega Creek to the steep slopes of Saguaro National Park's Rincon Mountain District to the ancient volcano of the Santa Rita Mountains, Ambassadors hiked, learned, and explored each landscape with excitement and awe. Rare avian visitors from all over the world greeted the group at their first outdoor classroom -- Cienega Creek Natural Preserve. Water is essential to life in any desert, so it was only natural that water was our first and most important lesson. Water helped the group learn about climate and weather, desert adaptations and biological functions, human migration and occupation of the area, and environmental issues and dangers. Using moist soils, Ambassadors learned how to track wildlife and incorporated tracking into interpretive teaching skills. Ambassadors spent nearly three months learning in Cienega Creek in order to experience the landscape throughout an entire season and understand it on a deeper level.

Heading North, students traveled to the slopes of a very important mountain range. Traditionally called Tova Do'ag by the Tohono O'odham, the Rincon Mountain foothills became our second outdoor classroom. Here, Western screech owls flying from their day dens passed over our heads, and winter storms brought hail, snow, and rain. The Ambassadors learned about body language and public speaking, and practiced presenting environmental education lessons for the first time. Some of the plants and animals of this area were familiar to the group, but some were still mysterious. Together the group used identification guide books to correctly identify different species throughout the area. Using these books, the group was able to learn about the many species thriving together, and better understand the flora and fauna of the Sonoran Desert.

Following the Cienega Creek watershed south, we found ourselves at the foothills of the Santa Rita Mountains (Cewi Du'ag in the O'odham language). Here, the group wore helmets, gloves, and carried trail tools south along the Arizona Trail from Apache Springs Trailhead. Over three months, the group worked on repairing and maintaining portions of the AZT. Together, we built waterbars, created drainages, used rocks to establish eroding trail edges, and so much more. We discussed Leave No Trace ethics and how they can still be practiced while doing trail work. Not surprisingly, the group found this to be one of their most beloved parts of the internship. After stewardship events, the Ambassadors spent their time in Gardner Canyon and Madera Canyon learning about Sky Island history and ecology. The group found a love of birding, traditional technologies, and steep mountain hiking. Some Ambassadors had never explored coniferous biomes before, and were shocked to be in them while so close to the desert floor.

After learning so much, the Ambassadors wanted the opportunity to give back. Throughout the entire program, the Ambassadors began working on Community Action Projects. Their goal was to identify

community environmental issues they felt passionate about, and design a project to address those issues in their community.

Community Action Projects took many forms. Elijah Nixon's project works to remove invasive plants and trash from the Cienega Creek corridor. Maeve Harper developed an Environmental Education curriculum and lessons designed for children to educate them on forest ecology within the Sonoran Desert. Annamaria Pongratz developed brochures which educate the community about the ecological significance of Cienega Creek, its cultural relevance, and current environmental issues.

These are just three examples of the work the Ambassadors are doing to enrich and connect their community. Each Ambassador found a way to address local issues and support their communities. After eight months of experience, education, and stewardship, the Arizona Trail Ambassadors are ready to advocate and support the Arizona National Scenic Trail and all of the wonderful natural landscapes it traverses.

Special thanks to Tucson Electric Power, the United States Forest Service, and Arizona Trail Association members, donors and business partners for their support of this program -- which is offered at no cost to youth.