

## **Youth Outreach Report: Northern AZ Seeds of Stewardship & Gear Girls**

July 2021 - September 23, 2021 | Prepared by Treven Hooker & Julie Polovitch

### **Southern AZ Seeds of Stewardship:**

From March 2020 to September 2021, Seeds of Stewardship was unable to operate normally due to the Covid-19 pandemic and schools moving to virtual learning. So in order to maintain engagement and commitment to our mission, the Arizona Ambassador Program was created. The Ambassador Program is an 8-month internship for junior and senior high school students within the greater Tucson Area. The Program trains students to be environmental educators of the Arizona Trail and its surrounding natural environments. The internship is accredited by the Arizona Association of Environmental Educators (AAEE) and its national affiliate – NAAEE, and is the acting Arizona Junior Master Naturalist Program under the name Arizona Rising Naturalists.

The second AZT Ambassador cohort has just begun and this year is promising to be far more potent and productive. More organizations and partners are partnering with the Program, and our participants are more serious and more motivated than previous interns. Kayla Purigraski is an expert wilderness guide and an incredible environmental educator, and we are incredibly fortunate to have her helping with both the Ambassador program and Seeds of Stewardship.

Seeds of Stewardship is working to redevelop its connections after the Pandemic hiatus. The Pandemic has shifted, but not necessarily for the better. Schools are open, but school faculty, school boards, and school culture is far from recovered. Schools are overwhelmed not just by a lack of resources or adequate time for adjustment, but also by the preoccupation of social and cultural changes due to the pandemic. These factors have severely limited the time and partnership capabilities. Many schools have shown interest and have committed to partnership, but the realization of those desires is happening at a snail's pace. I am confident we will have a full roster by the end of 2021, and it is going to be better than ever. The pandemic is showing our communities just how valuable our natural spaces are, and Seeds of Stewardship is the perfect program to facilitate that.

Currently, we have three schools partnered, and 8 others who have reserved spaces for partnership. We are struggling to partner with schools within the Copper Corridor, but that too seems like it will resolve positively. By the end of 2021, Seeds of Stewardship will be fully operational and the Arizona Trail Ambassador Program will continue to shine.

### **Northern AZ Seeds of Stewardship:**

- Coordinated and facilitated the summer session of Seeds of Stewardship, which encompassed adventure-based outings for middle schoolers:
  - 1 group, 12 youth, 4 outings. Public lands closures in June necessitated cancelling 2 outings; we were able to successfully continue programming despite the heavy monsoon season.
- In August, onboarded Miguel Sotelo to take on more hours and responsibilities. Miguel has stepped in as the main coordinator and lead facilitator for the [After School on the AZT](#) program.
- Assisted Miguel with completing planning, outreach, and registration for the After School on the AZT fall session. The session is underway and will include:
  - 1 group, 9 youth, 8 outings including 1 trail maintenance project

- Recharged and fostered partnerships with schools, scheduling 38 outings with 9 groups for the 2021-2022 school year. Plus, more outings with more groups are in development!
  - We've facilitated 7 outings for 6 different classes so far this school year.

### **Gear Girls:**

- Coordinated and facilitated the summer session of [Gear Girls](#).
  - The 10-week program encompassed 1 group, 10 youth, and 5 outings. Public lands closures, poor air quality from smoke, and heavy monsoons caused 5 cancellations.
  - Facilitated 2 open-enrollment group rides as part of our [summer thru ride series](#). Unfortunately 3 rides were cancelled due to the challenges listed above. These rides were a great outreach opportunity and ended up inspiring 5 new participants to register for our 10-week program.
- Completed registration and planning for the fall session, which commenced on Sept 11 and will encompass
  - 1 group, 15 youth, 10 outings including 1 trail maintenance project
- Capacity building: Onboarded 1 new volunteer coach and 1 paid Lead Coach, Heather Coates. In progress: Outreach for another Lead Coach to replace Elena Schaefer when she moves in mid-October.
- Assisted Brittany Chavez with bringing in 2 new funding sources: The Cairn Project and The Move Together Grant from Women's Sports Foundation