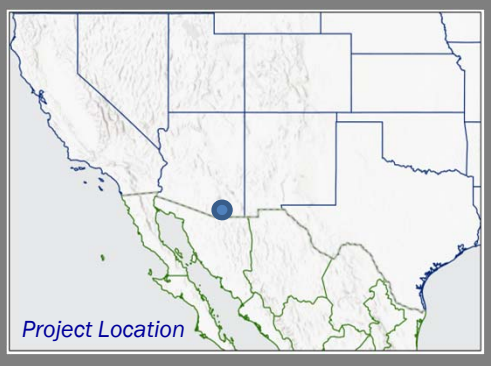
Community Engagement and Education

Employing Youth in Conservation at Borderlands Earth Care Youth Institute

Douglas BECY Crew Rolls out a Pond Liner for Chiricahua Leopard Frog Habitat

The Borderlands Earth Care Youth (BECY) Institute provides paid internships to youths age 15-20 to work with conservation professionals conducting restoration projects in the ecologically rich US-Mexico border region of Arizona. The program, initiated in Patagonia, AZ in 2013, has expanded to Douglas and Nogales, AZ. In addition to hands-on restoration work, the program curriculum covers three major themes: watershed restoration, ecosystem restoration, and community restoration.


Project Location

KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED

Population growth, development, and increased urbanization have contributed to fragmentation and degradation of wildlands in the Arizona-Sonora borderlands. Additionally, the region faces significant economic challenges—at 23.5%, Santa Cruz county has a poverty rate 9.1% higher than the national average. The BECY Institute and affiliated organizations seek to promote a restoration-based economy by creating opportunities to earn a livable wage through employment that involves restoration of degraded landscapes. Participants in the youth program are paid to complete a variety of restoration projects through which they learn marketable skills and a conservation ethic.

PROJECT GOALS

- Hire culturally diverse youth living on the US/Mexico border to conduct restoration projects in the trans-national watersheds they call home
- Train the next generation of land stewards, provide marketable job skills, and educate tomorrow's conservation leaders about the issues that surround watershed restoration, ecosystem restoration, and food-system restoration

MORE THAN A SUMMER JOB

"Youth don't have many job opportunities in high school, and they may not know exactly what career they want to get into. BECY has answered this for me by getting me a job outside of class during the summer and introducing me to so many new people with such interesting, specialized careers." -Jake Paun, BECY graduate

Patagonia Crew Shows off a Trinchera Built to Slow In-Channel Flow

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Hands-on Conservation Experience: Each crew, led by two educational facilitators, spends 32 hours a week for 6 weeks completing conservation projects including: building wildlife ponds, planting native wetland species, constructing erosion control structures, pond/spring restoration, creation of habitat for endangered wildlife species, invasive species removal, native seed collecting/curating, native plant propagation, permaculture design, and garden work.

Conservation Mentors: Through direct work with conservation professionals from federal agencies and non-profit organizations, interns are better able to envision themselves in positive, professional roles in the communities where they have grown up.

Future Conservation Professionals: Eighty-three youth have graduated from the program and many are now studying conservation-related fields in college. Some graduates of the program have been hired to return as Education Facilitators, with more graduates seeking positions.

Collaborators

See online for full list of collaborators

Funding Partners

See online for full list of funding partners

Case study support provided by US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Bureau of Reclamation, US Forest Service, and Cross Watershed Network. Updated August 2018.
Photos courtesy of Caleb Weaver/BECY Institute

LESSONS LEARNED

Exposure to a variety of perspectives and projects helped ensure that the program was engaging for a diverse group of interns. Through direct work with a wide array of conservation professionals, interns are better able to envision themselves in positive professional roles in the communities where they have grown up.

Work provided by the interns makes a tangible difference in the community. For example, interns built the Watershed Living Laboratory, an outdoor classroom on the Patagonia Union High School campus. The interns worked with ecologists and landscape designers to design and install rain gardens on campus. The interns planted native pollinator-attracting plants, native edible plants and heritage fruit trees. Two cisterns were installed, to water the fruit trees and support a fish pond. Hundreds of students interact with these gardens on a daily basis.

NEXT STEPS

- Expand the institute to Nogales, AZ in 2018 potentially fund expansion into other rural border communities in the US and Mexico
- Continue to identify a variety of project partners throughout the region to engage youth in conservation-related work

PROJECT RESOURCES

For more information on this project, contact Caleb Weaver: weaver.caleb@gmail.com

For additional project resources and case studies, visit the Collaborative Conservation and Adaptation Strategy Toolbox: WWW.DESERTLCC.ORG/RESOURCE/CCAST

Patagonia Crew Prepares a Pond Fed by a Rainwater-Harvesting Cistern