

The Next Generation: Youth Reduce Fire Fuels at Lake Cascade

[music]

[chainsaw]

[cracking]

Micaela Petrini: I just learned yesterday how to fell trees with a chainsaw, so you know, I busted four of those out this morning. And it's just, like, the satisfaction of working hard and, like, seeing those end points and reaching them is something that I really value.

[chainsaw]

Nicole Trammel: Since I'm going to be a senior this year I really want to start to set myself up for the future and have my options open and have good skills that can carry on.

[music]

Gretchen Fitzgerald: Reclamation has a fire management plan around Lake Cascade, and this youth group is in there doing some fuels reduction and forest health.

Don Yarbrough: We're doing this because A, it's fire fuels reduction, B, it opens the ecosystem up for big game, C, it also helps raptors that are recently re-established in the area... relatively recently, within 30 years.

Gretchen: They are limbing and thinning some of the underbrush and some of the dying trees and trees that are in tight clumps where fuels can spread. All the trees that were removed were previously marked by the Bureau of Reclamation.

Lee House: The matter and the fuel that we're clearing out, that we're thinning out of this forest, we are then putting into these piles. Another crew will come through, I think in the winter months so the fire risk is a little less high, and the idea is that there will be a controlled burn that will then eliminate that. From the larger trees that we're taking down we're actually acquiring some firewood out of that and giving it to people who are in need of firewood for the winter.

[chainsaw]

Lee: The blue helmets today, we are an adult crew of three and then one crew leader with a green helmet. The red crew is a youth crew, and they are the ones doing the pickup today. And the green helmets are strictly crew leaders.

Micaela: I'm the crew leader for red crew at Northwest Youth Corps. The youth range in age from 16 to 19, coed. As you can tell there aren't, like, supervisors and program coordinators out here all the time, and so it's up to us to kind of take charge and get the job done.

Gretchen: This partnership is part of Obama's America in the Great Outdoors. So the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, though federal partners such as the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Reclamation, has supplied matching grant funds for natural resource projects like the one at Cascade Reservoir. The Northwest Youth Corps group helped Reclamation manage our public lands through providing unique opportunities for youth to learn conservation skills and mentoring in the field.

Don: So we're really prioritizing facilitating an outdoor work experience for them. This is an opportunity from which you can come out of, put it on a resume, it looks great.

Lee: It can be a lot more beneficial than working in retail or something.

Gretchen: I've been a volunteer for one of those youth groups when I was younger as well, and it gave me the opportunity to get where I'm at today.

Nicole: And it's a great learning experience because you learn more about yourself and more how to interact with people. Because living with 11 people for 5 weeks, you learn a lot. 'Cause everyone had a different personality and different sense of humor and come from different backgrounds.

[music]

Micaela: I love the idea of being able to be a force in these youths' lives that encourages them and motivates them and is there for them. You're providing them with opportunities to increase their work ethic and understand what community is. It's so much more than, like, hauling sticks or digging trail. It's like watching personal growth.

Lee: I think it's a huge opportunity that most young people need to experience. I imagine a larger population of the youth are kind of distracted by social media and their phones, and we're out here experiencing wildlife and learning about trees and learning about fuels reduction and the ecosystem. And it's just, I feel like it's a pretty important thing that a lot of people would benefit from.

[music]