



## NORTH CASCADES INSTITUTE

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### North Cascades Wild 2011 Report

In 2011, North Cascades Wild continued to connect underserved youth to wild places, fostering the development of a stewardship ethic, building awareness and support for wilderness and public lands, and engaging students in responsible outdoor recreation. This year, fifty-one underserved youth participated, becoming stewards of wilderness, parks and their home communities.



Twenty-nine students from Skagit and Whatcom Counties have thus far participated in four spring and fall community service and outdoor recreation day trips. Day trip activities have included taking care of native shrubs, sedges and grasses at the North Cascades Marblemount Nursery, participating in the Migratory Shorebird Festival at Padilla Bay National Estuarine Reserve, canoeing and maintaining

restoration plantings at North Cascades Environmental Learning Center, and presenting to more than 400 attendees at our annual picnic about their experiences and what they learned. Two additional day trips are scheduled for October 8<sup>th</sup> (our North Cascades Wild Reunion event) and October 22<sup>nd</sup> (a tree-planting party in Whatcom County). During our Reunion, students will complete a service project at Camp Long in Seattle, share a pizza lunch, watch a slideshow from the summer, receive certificates recognizing them for their achievements and learn about additional opportunities to stay involved. A total of 89 hours of service have thus far been contributed to North Cascades National Park during the day trips with an additional 120 hours expected in October.

Fifty-one students participated in our 12-day canoe camping, backpacking and service program on Ross Lake in North Cascades National Park and Baker Lake in Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Our recruiting area included students from Whatcom County, Skagit County, Tukwila, Shoreline and Seattle. 92% of students participating were underserved, coming from diverse multi-ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Many students were first generation Americans having come from countries such as Burundi, Cambodia, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Egypt, Cuba, China, Mexico and



El Salvador. Most had never before visited a national park, canoed on a wilderness lake or slept under a starry sky. These students contributed more than 1,400 hours of service to North Cascades National Park and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest while learning about leadership, Leave No Trace, community building, stewardship, wilderness, and developing a sense of place through the study of natural and cultural history.

**Our stewardship accomplishments included the following:**

- Brushed, cleared and retreaded two miles of trail
- Restored and maintained four backcountry campgrounds, including three near Ross Lake in North Cascades National Park and one along Baker Lake in Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Work included reconfiguring sights, maintaining fire rings and tent pads, removing social trails and redefining high use trails.
- Restored 0.25 acres of riparian habitat along the shores of Ross Lake through invasive species management
- Collected 1.5 pounds of native plant seeds
- Removed 200 feet of decaying puncheon bridge
- Built 400 feet of new turnpike trail crossing wet areas
- Built one backcountry toilet, five tent pads and 300 feet of new trail
- Placed two fire rings
- Participated in National Park Service fish research, including snorkeling, collecting data and counting non-native red-sided shiners
- North Cascades Wild students successfully taught about native plants and led a service project at Baker Lake to fifteen younger students, age 5-14, from the Kulshan Creek Neighborhood Kids' Program. The project included cleaning six bridges along the trail.



We are also offering our second annual 3-day Youth Leadership Conference at the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center in November. This event will bring together students from diverse regional youth stewardship programs to network, reconnect, enhance leadership, communication and group cooperation skills, learn about future opportunities to engage and make a commitment to continue their engagement. We expect to engage sixty high school and college-aged students at the conference.

We feel particularly proud this year to have had nineteen North Cascades Wild students from previous years return to North Cascades National Park or Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National



Forest as employees or as participants in other programs. In all, eleven were employed as student hires for all or part of the summer, three participated in our Cascades Climate Challenge program, three participated in 15- or 30-day Student Conservation Association crews, and two helped out with or attended our Community and Neighborhood or Stewardship programs. In addition, one student completed his Senior Culminating Project on climate change in the North Cascades, which resulted from what he learned during his North Cascades Wild trip.

**Several students wrote the following about their experience:**

*“I can truthfully say that my experience has been all I hoped for and more. I was expecting a fun camping trip but what I got was invaluable lessons and irreplaceable friendships, both of which will stick with me throughout my lifetime. I experienced the beauty of nature first-hand while learning about its fragility...I also learned ways to reduce my impact on nature, both while camping, hiking and while at home. Perhaps most importantly, I learned to care. I’ve always known that we’re all supposed to be “eco-friendly.” But it wasn’t until this trip that I started to take this idea personally. It finally hit me just how crucial it is that I consider the potential harm that even my daily activities can have on the world around me.”*

**-Laura Gillespie, 12<sup>th</sup> grade, Seattle, WA**

*“I truly enjoyed this trip, it made me believe in myself. During those 12 days, we were doing service projects everyday, like picking up trash, Leave No Trace, teaching elementary kids about natural resources and building tent pads. This kind of work affected me deeply when I got home. I realized that I’m no longer me, but a better person. I understand now how important the wilderness and nature is. I know now that ‘One branch may not a tree, but together we are a big tree.’ “*

**-Son Huynh, 11<sup>th</sup> grade, Lake Forest Park, WA**

*“For me the trip was one of the most challenging things I have ever done in my life. I learned about everything, like trees, animals, wilderness, birds, friendship, getting along, communicating, sharing feelings, making others feel better, and most importantly living as one big family with people you have never met before and getting along with them.”*

**-Meron Shiferaw, 12<sup>th</sup> grade, Seattle, WA**



*“I would like to thank you for making it possible for students to be a part of the North Cascades Wild Trip. It was an outstanding experience for me being out in the wild for 12 days. I learned how every little thing you do can effect nature in so many ways. I would like you to keep this program going because it gives a lot of teenagers the chance to learn about the environment and how to prevent it from being destroyed.”*

**-Jeffery Reeves, 11<sup>th</sup> grade, Sedro-Woolley, WA**

*“I want to thank you for your support and interest in helping fund programs like North Cascades Wild so high schoolers like myself can learn and experience this beautiful place. ...The first few days of hiking were strenuous and exhausting, having to carry all of our food on our backs up an unforgiving mountainside. But when we finally got there, all the soreness and bleak hopes disappeared as I saw Hozomeen Lake. It was the most beautiful, secluded place I had ever seen in my life. When we finished setting up camp, we went swimming in it, and up until that point everyone was loud and making jokes and having fun. Then we heard our first loon and the entire group was in silence as the sound echoed off the mountains. That moment right there had to be my most favorite experience of the entire trip.”*

**-Isabelle Rodriquez, 12<sup>th</sup> grade, Bellingham, WA**



North Cascades Wild is a truly remarkable program that changes lives. The support of Outdoor Youth Connections has made it possible to continue to offer this program to qualifying students for free. Thank you for your generous and continued support and for all that Outdoor Youth Connections does to help instill a love of the outdoors in our future generations.

