



United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service Earth Team

Volunteer Showcase

Earth Team Crucial to NRCS Pilot Success

NRCS Earth Team volunteers are a crucial component for the new pilot project between USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Indian Nations Conservation Alliance (INCA).

Six Native American high school students in Montana, Oklahoma and Arizona spent the summer as Earth Team volunteers, working with NRCS professionals, both in the field and the office.

As Earth Team volunteers, the students received on-the-job training in basic soils, livestock water design, fencing, irrigation practices, erosion control, wetland identification and rangeland inventory.

"I identified different plants and grasses and clipped grasses using the rings to determine forage production," said Morgan Boggs, a Montana senior and Earth Team volunteer in the INCA pilot.

Shelbi St. Goddard, another Montana Earth Team/INCA student, received training in wetland plant identification, spring development and invasive weed control on the Blackfeet Reservation.

"I liked working outdoors the most, it felt more hands on and it drew my attention," said Shelbi.

Arizona Earth Team/INCA student Edwina Antone spent a lot of time in the field learning the importance of water management. Her training included irrigation reservoir design, drought management planning and monitoring, and pond survey and design. Edwina observed one water storage project that used a solar pumping plant to pump water into a storage tank.



Arizona Earth Team/INCA student, Edwina Antone's field training emphasized the importance of water management. Here she is testing the float valve in a livestock water tank.



Shelbi St. Goddard, (second from left) Montana Earth Team/INCA student, received training on invasive weed control on the Blackfeet Reservation.

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Certifying diversion terraces and seasonal high tunnels for the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) was one of Kasey Jo Blevins' first jobs as an Earth Team/INCA student in Oklahoma. Kasey learned how to certify conservation practices in the field and develop EQIP files in the office.

Fellow Oklahoma Earth Team/INCA student Cash Dowers spent his summer assessing potential Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) sites, evaluating flood control structures and measuring damages from flood erosion.

As part of his training in Conservation Stewardship Planning Program, Cash created a new customer file in Toolkit, generating the conservation plan map, soils map, location map and topography map.

Both Cash and Kasey Jo staffed the NRCS booth at the Choctaw Nation Youth Summit and provided Earth Team brochures, NRCS American Indian Heritage poster, NRCS career brochures and various NRCS materials to participants.

The Earth Team/INCA pilot is designed to attract more Native American students to a career in natural resource conservation. Their on-the-job training was designed to increase the students' qualifications for the USDA Pathways Internship Program, which employs college students working toward a degree in natural resources.

"I was given the opportunity to explore not only a career with NRCS but also with many other natural resource related partners to USDA," said Shelbi St. Goddard.

NRCS' Earth Team volunteer program helps the agency meet conservation needs in communities. Volunteers enable NRCS to stretch available resources and help put additional conservation practices on the ground. Volunteers' efforts help improve land and wildlife habitat and contribute to cleaner water and air – even if they are working behind the scenes in an office. Nationally, more than 25,000 volunteers donated 318,500 hours to the agency worth about \$7.2 million last year.

To learn more about NRCS' Earth Team Volunteer program visit: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/volunteers>.



Oklahoma Earth Team/INCA students Kasey Jo Blevins (above) learns how to certify conservation practices and Cash Dowes (right) sets a benchmark for an engineering structure.



Kasey Jo Blevins and Cash Dowes (above) helped staff the NRCS booth at the Choctaw Nation Youth Summit and provided Earth Team brochures to participants.

The Earth Team is the volunteer component of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. If you are interested in volunteering, contact the National Earth Team Office at 888-526-3227 or visit: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/volunteers/>

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