

## **Plumas Conservation, Restoration, and Education in Watersheds (P-CREW)**

*Live. Work. Learn. Play.*

### **About the Sierra Institute for Community and Environment**

The Sierra Institute for Community and Environment (Sierra Institute) is a community-based organization which actively promotes healthy forests, watersheds, and communities by investing in the well-being of diverse rural communities and strengthening their participation in natural resource management. Our work is grounded by the concept of triple bottom line values, supporting initiatives that simultaneously benefit the environment, economy, and equity within a given landscape. Sierra Institute's Plumas Conservation, Restoration, and Education in Watersheds (P-CREW) Youth Corps provides employment for diverse groups of youth and improves equity in education and experience on northern California's public lands.

### **Program Background**

Sierra Institute's P-CREW Youth Corps is an immersive, five-week, experiential work opportunity designed to offer employment on northern California's public lands to youth from rural and urban areas around the state. P-CREW initially started as a collaborative program between the Sierra Institute and staff of the Plumas National Forest who wanted to connect rural youth from the top of the Feather River Watershed (Plumas County) to downstream urban youth (East Bay). As the program has grown, we have extended our focus area to include larger areas within the watershed. The program strives to develop the next generation of natural resource stewards through work experience, field-based education, personal growth, and professional development.

P-CREW encourages participants to embrace their role as stewards of our public lands by working on the landscapes of the northern Sierra and forming relationships with California's headwater ecosystems. Since Euro-American settlement this region has struggled to concurrently sustain human livelihoods and ecological integrity, and despite shifting to multi-use and ecosystem-based management practices in the early 1990's, management decisions still often fail to meaningfully address the scale of degradation on the landscape. Changing the approach to land management requires managers and communities to recognize the interconnectedness of ecological processes like wildfire and the inequities within human populations wrought by limited access to natural spaces and increasing vulnerability to climate change induced natural disasters. Shifting the culture and perspectives guiding land modern management requires youth to be exposed to the outcomes of past management decisions, taught to recognize and measure the continued impacts of current management activities, and participate in ecological restoration while concurrently developing a connection to place and dedication to stewardship.

P-CREW is uniquely capable of providing a formative and unforgettable experience for youth through immersion in the culture and communities of the Sierra Nevada's largest watershed. Students will work closely with community-based organizations and the rural areas they serve during their time in the northern Sierra. Students forge unexpectedly strong friendships, develop leadership and job skills, explore diverse and wild forests, and build pride and confidence in themselves. We purposefully design crews to be balanced across geographies and gender identities to increase opportunities for exposure to different backgrounds, stories, and cultures among crewmates. P-CREW also encourages students to stay engaged with our program and community through continued workforce opportunities including our Alumni All-Star Assistant and Crew Leader positions, which are frequently filled by program alumni.

## **Program Details**

The P-CREW program is based out of Taylorsville, CA - a small community within a large mountain meadow referred to as "Indian Valley". The community of Taylorsville is a blend of long-time residents, ranchers, loggers, and newcomers drawn to the area for its beauty. The region offers unique, rural community events that bring people together and is surrounded by many outdoor recreation opportunities such as Lake Almanor, the Plumas and Lassen National Forests, and Lassen Volcanic National Park.

P-CREW members spend all of their time outside, working, learning, and exploring. Students perform a variety of tasks related to ecological restoration and outdoor recreation requiring challenging physical labor and communication with their crew members. We partner closely with regional professionals from federal and state agencies, environmental non-profits, and county governmental organizations to provide crew members with diverse work which exposes them to different landscapes, tools, and strategies used to manage and monitor ecosystems. Our project work improves the health of nearby forests and watersheds and includes: trail maintenance and building, invasive species removal, aspen and meadow restoration, and hazardous fuels reduction.

Our youth crews are each led by two, highly experienced and capable crew leaders and an Alumni All-Star Assistant - a returning P-CREW alumni in the role of a "leader in training". Crew leaders have a minimum Wilderness First Aid (WFA) certification and AAA's and crew members receive basic first aid and CPR certifications as part of their training. Program support staff also hold Wilderness First Responder and Mental Health First Aid training.

## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Sierra Institute's P-CREW Program**

We at the Sierra Institute recognize that job opportunities in the natural resource and environmental sectors along with access to the outdoors are not shared equitably nor are they sufficiently inclusive of the diverse population of the United States. Addressing these issues requires intentional work to eliminate systemic barriers, cultivate respect, and address inequities head-on. We are committed to ending environmental racism and injustices by providing opportunities that increase environmental literacy and outdoor learning that increase understanding, access, and job opportunities. To advance this commitment, our P-CREW program is dedicated to fostering inclusive environments and to actions that promote trust, acceptance, and the celebration of diversity in the outdoors.

In P-CREW, students live and work on the traditional homelands of the Mountain Maidu, Yana, Konkow, and Washoe peoples and we acknowledge the continued stewardship of these homelands by aboriginal peoples and their connection to these landscapes. P-CREW is committed to be a part of reconciling the erasure of indigenous culture and the forced separation of these people from their land through representation in the restoration workforce and integration of cultural management practices in ecological restoration and project implementation. By amplifying the perspective of our indigenous partners, we strive to strengthen the cultural relevance of land management; emphasizing a process that is both reflective and adaptive.

## **COVID-19**

Through the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Sierra Institute developed extensive field crew policies and procedures for COVID-19 risk reduction and mitigation that were informed by best available science and compliant with local, state, and federally established guidelines. This has allowed us to continue to safely and successfully operate the P-CREW program. Sierra Institute continues to review and update our policies and procedures based on the best available information and currently requires all employees to be fully vaccinated and boosted.