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FOREST GUILD TRAINS YOUTH CREWS TO IMPROVE FOREST HEALTH AND REDUCE FOREST FIRE RISK

SANTA FE, N.M.—For more than two decades the Forest Guild has supported community-based forestry, forest restoration, and youth education and development in New Mexico. This summer is no exception. The Forest Guild's Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) consists of 46 crew members and six crew leaders from six New Mexico forest-based communities (Las Vegas, El Rito, Cuba, Jemez, Mountainair, and Silver City). Through the YCC, the Forest Guild teaches these youth the skills to pursue a career in forestry or related sciences and develop the understanding and character to become strong community leaders.

Through their "in-the-woods" training and work, the Guild also helps maintain and strengthen the connection of these youth with the natural world. YCC crew members have a variety of reasons for choosing this challenging and rewarding summer work program including loving to work in the woods every day, getting and staying in top physical shape, and learning an interesting variety of skills from trail building to assessing watershed health to ecological monitoring.

"It is amazing to see the dollar amount of work reflected on the end of season reports that the various U.S. Forest Service District staff turn in to the Regional office," says Forest Guild Senior Forester, Orlando Romero. Romero oversees the YCC program. "On a very practical level, without the Guild's YCC crews to complete them, many projects on national forest and other public lands would remain undone due to Forest Service budget constraints. The districts have nothing but praise for the work the crews do every summer."

Last year the total value of the YCC program to the U.S. Forest Service Region 3 was approximately $144,000, and this year's total is expected to be close to $180,000 based on the increased number of crew members.

The Forest Guild YCC is anchored by a strong forestry and ecology education and training curriculum. The program includes a hands-on learning approach where youth learn scientific concepts by applying these concepts in the field under the direction of natural resource professionals.

"One of the highlights of my year is participating in the Forest Guild YCC program," says Forest Guild's Southwest Region Director, Mike DeBonis. "I'm especially proud of the fact that corps members are eligible to receive college credit for their summer work."

DeBonis adds that the program helps youth develop the skills and experience needed to grow into successful community leaders and natural resource professionals. "Over the long term, we have witnessed the spark of interest that grew into a passion in dozens of the YCC youth who stayed in touch with us and were motivated to pursue careers in natural resource and forest management. Now as adults, they contribute to the well being of their communities through stewardship and leadership."

The Forest Guild is grateful to these funders for their generous support for the 2008 YCC program: Azalea Foundation, Ford Foundation, Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation, National Forest Foundation, State of New Mexico YCC Program, and U.S. Forest Service Region 3.

The Forest Guild is a national organization of more than 600 foresters, allied professionals, and supporters who manage forestlands in the United States and Canada and advocate for ecologically sound forest practices. The mission of the Forest Guild is to practice and promote ecologically, economically, and socially responsible forestry—"excellent forestry"— as a means of sustaining the integrity of forest ecosystems and the human communities dependent upon them. The Forest Guild maintains staff in New Mexico, Massachusetts, California, and Tennessee, and has volunteer coordinators in nine other states.

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