

“The Restoration Economy: Examining Environmental and Economic Opportunities.”
Virtual Forum
July 7, 2020

Taos Pueblo-Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, Taos, New Mexico

Witness Statement- Dwayne LeftHand Sr., Conservation Coordinator

Rocky Mountain Youth Corps has been serving local communities in Northern New Mexico for the past twenty-five years. This year is the twenty-fifth anniversary of RMYC in the Taos Valley. We also have a Middle Rio Grande Office in Albuquerque that has been working with diverse communities in the urban setting inclusive of Tribal Communities and other diverse populations for the past five years. This is true for the whole RMYC organization, to provide paid jobs to underserved, diverse youth in the communities we serve. RMYC promotes economic development and impact directly to families and communities that may have no income source whatsoever coming into their homes. This is the first work experience and opportunity for most of the youth we serve. In many instances they are the sole income source for their families.

Tribal Youth face many challenges within their communities, just as other minority communities there are high rates of poverty, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, dropout rates, domestic violence, racial and social injustice, homelessness, and the list goes on.

RMYC provides a stepping stone to new opportunities for our youth. We provide support through our training program, drug and alcohol prevention program as well as Personal Development training inclusive of Individual Development Plans, diversity training, conflict resolution, team-building activities, and leadership development. Other project trainings include 1st aid/CPR, trail skills, sawyer training and certification, leave no trace ethics, ecology, conservation and preservation techniques and other project specific training as needed. We provide Professional Development encompassing college workshops, resume development, budgeting and financial management, mental health first aid and others as the interest rises or a need occurs.

We engage our youth through several different models. We offer Day Crews, Spike Crews and individual placements. Day crews report Monday- Friday 8am- 430 pm, Spike Crews are on an 8 day pattern, Working Tuesday-Tuesday and off six days. Our individual placements are typically placed with partnering agencies to meet the demands of that agency and gain valuable professional experiences.

Our crews work in all areas of Public Lands, Tribal Lands, Municipalities, Federal and State agencies doing a variety of conservation work, preservation work, invasive species removal, ecology, community based projects and community service projects.

The importance of Youth Corps organizations such as RMYC is instrumental to the communities we serve. I myself am an Alumni of the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps. Over twenty years ago I testified in front of the Natural Resources Committee in Washington, DC as a youth, in support of the Collaborative

Forest Restoration Program that has benefited New Mexico on a landscape scale regarding conservation efforts across the board. Now all states have access to CFRP funding. I feel this is my calling because I am sitting here in front of you today, coming full circle being a witness attesting to the importance of Youth Corps around the nation and the impact it has to the economy locally, nationally and globally and on many levels addressing the needs of our youth and the communities we serve.

Finally I would like to address the need and our support of the Indian Youth Service Corps that was passed with the Dingell Act. No specific funds were attached supporting the IYSC and no specific agency was tasked for oversight and flow through. These are two major concerns we have as a Tribal Youth Organization. We want to make sure that whatever Federal fiscal agency is tasked with oversight and financial accountability, that the Tribes get adequate funding support and that work is not only allowed on public lands but allows Tribes to do work on their own lands.

I would like to thank Congressman/Chairman Grijalva and his staff for their invite, as well as a special thanks to Congresswoman/Chair Debra Haaland and her staff for the invitation to represent RMYC and Tribal Youth Organizations such as the Taos Pueblo Rocky Mountain Youth Corps here in New Mexico, and thank you to the House Natural Resources Committee for this opportunity. Thank you all for your efforts and continued support on environmental issues, conservation, preservation and economic recovery and restoration impacting local communities on a national scale.

Respectfully submitted,

Dwayne LeftHand Sr.
Taos Pueblo Conservation Coordinator