

YOUNG IDAHOANS — HELPING BUILD AN EVEN BETTER IDAHO

April 20, 2017 at 8:47 am |

This Earth Day provides an important reminder of the remarkable natural assets all around us and the considerable work and problem-solving required to sustain these resources so that we all can continue to experience their benefits. I had the opportunity to meet with Idahoans involved in the Idaho Conservation Corps (ICC). The work they are doing to maintain Idaho's natural resources is worthy of highlighting.

ICC enables Idaho youth and young adults statewide to assist with resource management projects carried out with a multitude of partners that include the national forests; federal, state and county agencies; and local and other organizations. For example, 30 young Idahoans have gained employment and educational experience through helping with wildfire fuels reduction at Lake Cascade State Park.

The ICC partnered with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Lake Cascade State Park to carry out this project that the ICC reports provides multiple benefits beyond occupational experience for young Idahoans: "In addition to protecting the wildland-urban interface from high-intensity wildfires, the trees removed are cut to firewood length to provide to local low-income families with fuel for the winter months." This is one of the various ICC projects carried out throughout the state. The ICC reported the following impressive accomplishments in just its first year of existence last year:

34,764 project hours;

83 miles of trails built/maintained;

147 youth served;

833 acres of forest delineation;

524 acres of land restored;

2,940 hours of education; and

24 project partners.

ICC's stated "core purpose is to provide opportunities for youth and young adults to learn, grow, and experience success." The ICC offers programs in three main focus areas: youth programs; young adults; and conservation internships. Through its youth programs, young people age 16 to 18 can participate in 5-week education and job-skill training programs that include outdoor experiences.

ICC indicates that participants earn money, high school credit and job reference opportunities. Participants in the young adult programs can earn income while obtaining job training and assisting with conservation activities, such as wildfire reduction efforts, non-native weed eradication and trail building and maintenance. Through its conservation internships, the ICC provides “hands on training and experience to those interested in pursuing employment with land and water resource management agencies, and other community partners.”

Involvement of Idaho’s youth in addressing current and future natural resource needs is extremely beneficial as we think about the future of our great state. Effective management of our increasingly pressured, natural resources is a perpetual need. Sparking interest in Idaho’s youth to go into natural resource careers and to contribute new ideas that can help resolve environmental stewardship challenges is a win-win.

The celebration of Earth Day this month provides a fitting opportunity to recognize some of the forward-thinking conservation work that is being achieved in Idaho. Thank you to those involved with the ICC, including Idaho’s young participants, and similar efforts who are helping sustain Idaho’s natural resources and providing inspiring experience for Idaho’s young people, and thank you to the many Idahoans who work every day to better our communities.