

Young and old this summer at national park

All ages find something at Lewis and Clark

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Claire Albright, left, and Kelsey Hunter, right, with the Youth Conservation Corps participate in one of the summer youth programs at Lewis and Clark National Historical Park. Albright and Hunter were working to rid parts of the area of Scotch broom, a non-native invasive species.



Kelsey Hunter with the Youth C...
from an area in the Lewis and C...

Visitors at Lewis and Clark National Historical Park may have noticed a wide variety of age groups at the park this summer.

While several youth programs continued to grow this year, an upcoming increase to the cost of senior passes has prompted those 62 and older to pounce on a relative bargain while they still can.

The number of youth participating in programs, internships and summer jobs more than doubles the park's staff and is as expansive as it has ever been, Superintendent Jon Burpee said. Programs such as the Youth Conservation Corps, Northwest Youth Corps and Student Conservation Association have drawn 38 teenagers and young adults throughout the summer, and about 50 students have participated in summer camps.

Workers and participants include local people as well as those coming from as far away as New York City.

"It's a little stunning to me how complex this program is," said Burpee, who took over the job early this year.

Roles for young people include wildfire reduction projects, non-native weed eradication, trail building and maintenance, interpretation, various visitor's center tasks, campground cleanup, historic preservation and stream restoration.

Programs feature opportunities specifically allocated for minority groups. One science internship designated for a minority person between 18 and 35 allows the intern to conduct inventory, monitoring and research; learn geographic information systems and other technologies and complete interpretive and educational projects. At the end of the summer, interns from across the county gather in Washington, D.C., to present their work and learn about federal job opportunities.

Youth apply for the programs throughout the year, while park rangers visit local schools to recruit for the upcoming summer. Rangers pitch the idea of an exciting summer job and a glimpse at a possible career choice. In turn, the park benefits immediately from the additional manpower and long term from the possibility of more job applications.

Burpee credits his staff for their ability to imagine opportunities for growth and in youth programs.

"It's a great opportunity to reach as many youth as possible but also get some great stuff done," he said. "It's a neat program to allows the park to do much more than it otherwise could."

Practical incentives

More practical incentives have drawn seniors to the park lately.

Lifetime passes for seniors will increase from \$10 — the price established in 1994 — to \$80 on Aug. 28. Seniors also can buy \$20 annual passes that can be redeemed for lifetime passes after four years. Fee changes were mandated by Congress in December.

The number of \$10 senior passes sold in June and July approached 2,000, easily more than double the number sold in that time last year. Though Lewis and Clark has run out of passes, it is offering rain checks for people who wish to purchase them before the deadline.

"The demand has been incredibly high," Burpee said.

The estimated \$37.6 million in national revenue from the increased pass fees will fund deferred maintenance projects, improved visitor facilities and trail maintenance.

Fee revenues are required by law to be used solely for park upkeep. At least 80 percent of fees collected at each park must remain within that specific park. Some large parks are required to share as much as 20 percent of fee revenue with other parks around the country.

Lewis and Clark, a relatively small park, keeps all of its revenue and also competes for a slice of national profits. With more people, young and old, flocking to the historic and natural areas east of Warrenton, fees will be funneled toward educational programs and a restructured, larger visitor's center sometime in the future.

"It creates a long-term fund to allow the parks to address the unique needs they have," Burpee said. "Access to national parks is something that's really cherished."

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