



NORTH CASCADES INSTITUTE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | *Summer Youth Program Long-Term Participant Impacts Survey*

Over the past decade, North Cascades Institute has been offering summer youth programs focused on getting teens outside. The programs have had different models and names: Parks Climate Challenge, Cascades Climate Challenge, North Cascades Wild, and currently Youth Leadership Adventures (YLA). However, the main program goals have remained the same: Leadership and Stewardship, Connection to Nature and the Outdoors, and Exposure to Careers in the Outdoors and Environment. In fall 2020, we asked alumni to share insights on their participation. 71 alumni, ages 13-31, responded, including nearly a quarter who participated over six years ago. The overarching question we had:

► *Are our summer youth programs making the difference we intended?*



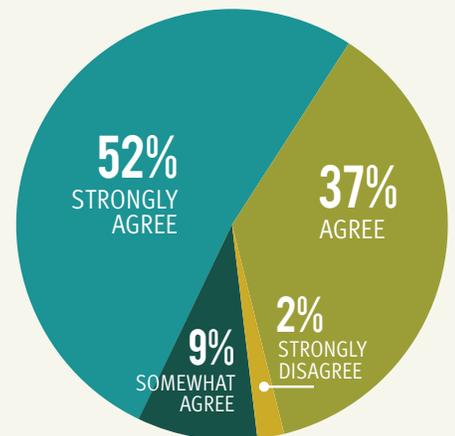
LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Cultivating **leadership and stewardship** in participants is one program impact area. 89% of alumni “strongly agreed” or “agreed” (“reported”) that participating in the Institute summer youth program improved their leadership skills with Teamwork and Communication being the most frequently reported skills used. 95% also reported that they practiced more environmental actions in their daily lives. While advocacy is not explicitly taught in the program, two-thirds reported that they participated in more advocacy actions on behalf of environmental conservation. Examples we included for advocacy actions were signing petitions, calling legislators, and voting for pro-environmental policies and policymakers. This suggests a radiating effect of the program’s leadership and stewardship curriculum.

“I’m an RA in college, so literally every leadership skill is applicable. Things like active listening/communication, defining boundaries, and mentoring.”

—20-year-old Latinx female

“I improved my leadership skills”



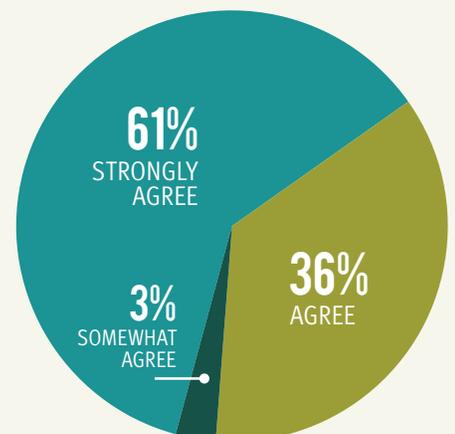
SENSE OF PLACE

Multiple barriers exist for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) and those with few financial resources to safely and comfortably access—and connect with—the outdoors. Another program impact area is **developing a connection with nature and the outdoors**. 94% of alumni reported a stronger sense of belonging in the outdoors; 93% reported better understanding of the ways that people interacted with nature, and 97% reported greater knowledge on how climate change impacts the region. Finally, we wanted to understand if the formation of an outdoor identity included a lasting connection to the North Cascades. When asked if alumni feel connected to places they went to during their programs, they overwhelmingly said yes (91%). As one 20-year-old white transgender male alum reported, **“It was like coming home for the first time.”**

“I love Ross Lake and Mount Baker Back Country! ... I am proud to be from the PNW and I sincerely hope I am able to return to the national park!”

—20-year-old Black and white non-binary female

“I know more about how climate change impacts our region”



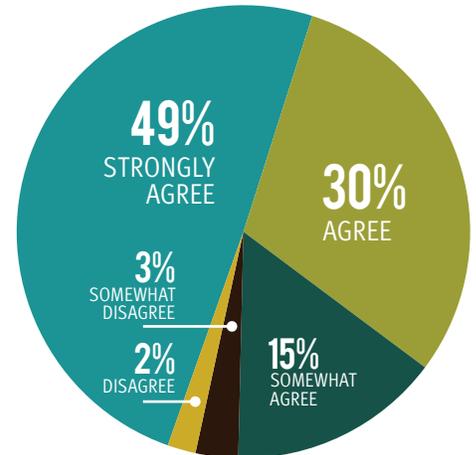
CAREER & ACADEMICS

Due to underrepresentation of BIPOC in the workforces in outdoors and environmental sectors, inspiring interest in potential **careers in the outdoors and environment** has been a program impact area. 79% of alumni reported their interest in studying or working in these fields increased as a result of participating. To understand better how interest translates to actual workforce participation, we asked alumni if they have worked as an intern or staff person in the outdoor or environmental field since participating in the program and within the last 12 months. 39% of alumni reported workforce participation since participating in the program, and 33% within the last 12 months.

“Since my YLA time I was determined to find work outside. My first job out of high school was with the forest service and I have worked with them for four seasons from recreation to wild land firefighting. And I am currently working with a conservation corp crew!

—24 year-old Black and Asian/Pacific Islander female

“My interest in studying or working in the outdoor or environmental fields increased.”



We asked one final open-ended question to solicit any additional thoughts. Responses included those about lasting relationships, confidence-building, valuing diversity, and treasuring their memories and bonds with the North Cascades. However, one brief comment stands out and reminds us that *goals* and *impact areas* only mean so much: **“It helped me get through a tough time.”**

“It was the first introduction into my life about what working in an environmental field could entail. It opened the door to a path I didn't know existed and now, more than 10 years later, I am still very grateful for having participated.

—31-year old Asian/Pacific Islander female

CONCLUSION

Alumni respondents across all points in the Institute's summer youth program history provided overwhelmingly positive feedback on the impact areas we measured, letting us know that participation had enduring impacts on their lives including expanding career interests to the outdoors and the environment. As the Institute heads into the future, we are further aligning our summer youth program to the Institute's mission: “inspiring environmental stewardship through transformative experiences in nature.” What this will look like is a summer youth program that cultivates a sense of hope and agency in addressing climate change, and provides tools for participants to make a difference no matter where they are and what careers they choose.

Responses to demographic questions showed broad ranges of alumni characteristics, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, and distance in time from participation. The age range was 13-31 years of age, with the majority between 17-23. Alumni overwhelmingly identified as female (76.1%), which is generally reflective of program participation; 4% identified as transgender or gender non-conforming. Respondents' racial and ethnic identities also reflected historical participation: 53% included a racial or ethnic identity that was not white or Caucasian, including 23% as Hispanic or Latinx, 18% as Asian or Asian-American, 7% as Black or African-American, 1% Native or American Indian, and 4% other identities.