

The Leader

Northwest Watershed Institute invites teens to Youth Environmental Stewards Base Camp

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Caleb Lumbard studies shellfish with a hand sense as part of the Northwest Watershed Institute's Youth Environmental Stewards program. COURTESY PHOTO

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The Northwest Watershed Institute is launching the Youth Environmental Stewards (YES!) Base Camp, a new eight-week nature program for teens' outdoor nature studies. YES! Base Camp is similar to the popular YES! program run by the Northwest Watershed Institute, but has been completely redesigned for social distancing.

Participants will begin by mapping out their "Home Base and Natural Range," places they and their families agree

are safe within strict COVID-19 “Stay Home” rules, before spending a minimum of 10 hours a week outdoors, doing activities centered around different natural themes.

With a goal of taking care of their local ecosystems, students will explore wildlife, plants and sustainable food production, as well as hone their outdoor field skills.

In the final two weeks, participants are taken with designing and completing an independent project to either help the natural world or enhance their skills.

By the close of the program, the teens will have spent a minimum of 80 hours outdoors over the course of the two-month program.

The group of 20 teens will meet as a group online twice a week with Northwest Watershed Institute staff and expert field guests to explore new topics, take on outdoor and nature challenges, learn about environmental activities they can do outside alone, and share what they’ve learned.

This program also aims to inspire career choices.

“What I think kids will be most excited about is meeting the special guest experts,” said Stella Jorgenson, a Port Townsend High School student. “I want to find new mentors, and learn from outdoor professionals.”

Teens who complete YES! Base Camp will be invited to help lead future Northwest Watershed Institute events, and receive an NWI YES! Crew Leader sweatshirt, boots and work gloves.

For now, the COVID-19 “Stay Home” rules prohibit the group from gathering, but the coordinators hope that, in the coming months, as protocols ease, the group can again safely help lead tree-planting, coastal clean-ups, and tours and projects at NWI’s Tarboo Wildlife Preserve.

Unlike the previous YES! Program, which was accredited in seven schools, YES! Base Camp is not a class, nor will it count for graduation credit.

“The opportunity to try a short independent project and meet local experts seems likely to incubate senior projects, (which makes it) a perfect program for rising seniors,” said Jude Rubin, NWI program coordinator, but she emphasized that teens aged 14 and older are welcome to apply.

Participants will need access to a computer or phone with video and microphone capabilities for twice-weekly online meetings, while the Northwest Watershed Institute provides most of the field gear and materials needed.

If the program fills by April 28, Base Camp will run from May 1 through June 26, serving youths aged 14-19 in East Jefferson County.

Thanks to a grant from Washington's No Child Left Inside Program and generous local donors, the program is offered at no cost.

To fill out an application form, visit forms.gle/xwva1L9Ago7WYUB66.

All accepted participants will be required to submit a waiver form, signed by their parent or legal guardian, before starting the program.

Questions should be directed to Jude Rubin, Northwest Watershed Institute's Director of Stewardship, via email at nwiyes@gmail.com.

Apply as soon as possible, because YES! Base Camp starts on May 1.