

## Working for the earth: Students train for ecological projects

Thirteen students from three high schools in East Jefferson County have finished field training for the newly accredited Watershed Science and Stewardship Class.

By [Peninsula Daily News](#)

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PORT TOWNSEND — The Northwest Watershed Institute and its partners are training environmental stewards for the future.

Thirteen students from three high schools in East Jefferson County — Port Townsend and Chimacum school districts and Jefferson Community School — recently completed field training for the newly accredited Watershed Science and Stewardship Class for the 2016-17 school year, said Jude Rubin, director of stewardship for the Northwest Watershed Institute (NWI) of Port Townsend.

During the remainder of the school year, the students will serve for a minimum of 30 hours as leaders and assistants on ecological service projects, she said.

Port Townsend High School junior Lauren Taracka is one of seven students to create an internship with YES! community partners. She will conduct a baseline study of amphibians and reptiles in the Tarboodabob Watershed with mentor organization Northwest Watershed Institute.

## **Working together**

Through the new class, NWI — a nonprofit working to protect and restore Pacific Northwest watersheds and habitats — is working with seven natural resource organizations to encourage students to learn directly from professionals about their research, restoration and conservation projects.

The class is funded by local businesses and individuals so that it is offered free to students, although they were asked for an optional donation to help cover food costs.

“Caring for the Earth is the most urgently needed work of our time,” Rubin said. “And Jefferson County students can make important, lasting contributions.

“But first, they need a chance to explore environmental issues and natural resource careers by working shoulder-to-shoulder with experts. I’ve learned that many students love hard work, and they want to apply themselves in meaningful ways.”

## **Education initiative**

Watershed Science and Stewardship is part of NWI’s education initiative, the Youth Environmental Stewards Program, or YES Program, in which students study protected and restored habitats in such areas as the Tarboo-Dabob watershed, Snow Creek, Chimacum Creek and Marrowstone Island.

A week before schools resumed classes, students completed a field-training course exploring natural ecosystems of East Jefferson County — from headwaters to bays — while focusing on forest health, salmon and wildlife restoration and water quality.

Students are completing the class by leading tree-planting and non-native invasive plant removal events and serving as interpretive docents at salmon-bearing streams. They served as zone captains during the International Coastal Cleanup on Sept. 17.

In addition, students will assist as marine aquarists and outdoor educators.

Students chose from approved projects to meet their own interests and work styles.

For example, marine biology students Henry Stier of Jefferson Community School and Caleb Lumbard of Port Townsend High School hauled hundreds of pounds of debris off beaches during the International Coastal Cleanup.

Stier worked at Second Beach in La Push with Carol Bernthal, superintendent of the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary. On the same day, Lumbard worked on his own, cleaning up North Beach in Port Townsend.

## **Day of Caring**

Meanwhile, Chimacum Pi sophomore Anna Wilke and Port Townsend High School senior Gannon Short tended the Kul Kah Han Native Plant Demonstration Garden during United Good Neighbors' Day of Caring on Sept. 16-17.

Collectively, students have signed up for a minimum of 400 hours of work to complete the course, Rubin said.

In addition, seven students will intern with local groups, adding 630 hours of research and restoration.

In total, students are predicted to dedicate 1,030 hours through the new program, Rubin said.

During the field training course, "we did 10 field studies in five days, hosted two dinner events, had four evening classes for professional skills and completed about 10 hours of homework," said Brennan LaBrie, a Port Townsend High School senior.

Students also assisted with meals, cleaning and field leadership tasks.

"It was demanding, but working together in the sand and mud, and living together for a week, we had a great time and became close friends," LaBrie said.

Students stayed in dorms at Fort Flagler, with trips to Gibbs Lake and to several sites in the Tarboo-Dabob watershed, Snow Creek watershed and Marrowstone Island.

### **Field course**

Mentors for the field course included Rubin; Peter Bahls, NWI executive director; Chrissy McLean and Sarah Doyle, North Olympic Salmon Coalition Restoration ecologist-educators; Carrie Clendaniel, Jefferson Land Trust stewardship associate; Betsy Carlson, Port Townsend Marine Science Center citizen science coordinator; and Evan Dobrowski, water quality monitoring specialist with the Jefferson County Department of Health's Environmental Health Division.

State mentors included Joe Arnett, Heritage Program native rare plant botanist with the state Department of Natural Resources; and the state Department of Fish and Wildlife Shellfish Harvest Management Team: biologist Camille Speck, Doug Rogers and Paul Clarke.

In addition, students toured the Taylor Shellfish Hatchery in Quilcene and met with Nikki Russell of United Good Neighbors. They also served as docents at the Wooden Boat Festival.

Other class participants are Port Townsend High School students Hannah Bahls (Peninsula College Running Start), Bodie La Brie, Rowan Halpin, Ashley Rosser and Lauren Taracka; and Chimacum Pi Program students Alex Ben-Barak, Owen Brummel and Mimi Molotsky.

In April, the program received a \$10,000 grant from the Jefferson Community Fund's new "Better Living Through Giving" Circle, a group of 10 local philanthropists, Ruben said. Other supporters included NWI board members, supporters and local residents.

Businesses and individuals who gave goods and services to support field camp include The Food Co-op, Henerey Hardware, Olympic Art & Office Supply and The Quimper Fruit Gleaners. Port Townsend High School supplied transportation, and Grant Street teacher Peter Braden led orientation.