



Funds Distribution Report

Recipient Organization:
Washington's National Park Fund

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Organization's General Goals:

To raise funds to preserve and enhance the natural beauty, cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities of Mount Rainier, North Cascades, and Olympic National Parks so that they remain vibrant, thriving ecosystems and cherished destinations for future generations.

Date of Award: 2021 Q2
Level: \$2,501 to \$5,000

For more information, please read the attached report from Washington's National Park Fund.

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Community Resilience Through Food Sustainability & Native Plant Education

Final Report to the Tulalip Tribes Charitable Fund

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Washington's National Park Fund was honored to receive a grant of [REDACTED] from the Tulalip Tribes Charitable Fund in support of the ***Community Resilience Through Food Sustainability & Native Plant Education*** project at North Cascades National Park. Today, we would like to provide you with an update on this exciting – and growing – program.

This project was developed by the park's education staff and launched in 2020, in partnership with community partners that include the Darrington School District, Lummi Nation, Lummi Nation School, Lummi Natural Resources, Glacier Peak Institute, and the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe, to provide engaging outdoor educational experiences for local students to learn about native plants and ecosystems. The project is also aimed at creating pathways to food sustainability for tribes residing in the park's gateway communities in Snohomish and Skagit counties. In the following report, we share the outcomes of this project's activities throughout 2023.

Activities & Accomplishments

Food Sustainability & Native Plant Education activities took place throughout 2023 at Darrington Elementary and High Schools, the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe reservation, and the North Cascades National Park Service Complex. The project provided unique opportunities for students in the park's gateway community of Darrington to experience the park and expand their knowledge of growing plants including native plants and food crops. Over the last year, **57 students** were engaged through **in-class lessons** and **immersive park field trips** led by park educators and Native youth interns.

Alongside park rangers, teachers, and community volunteers, youth completed the planting of an **ethnobotanical garden** at the park's North Cascades Visitor Center. For many students, this was their first experience at the park – and now, every time they return, their impact will be on view outside the Visitor Center's doors.



Project partner Glacier Peak Institute delivered 31 lessons to facilitate youth-led gardening education on planting at the new Darrington School District Greenhouse (which was constructed by the project in 2021), resulting in service to approximately **217 youth**, which further empowers and encourages food sustainability and food sovereignty. These lessons, and the resulting greenhouse/garden management to maintain the plants outside of school hours, resulted in the preparation of approximately 600 starts for use during the 2023 spring planting season, all of which were either transplanted into the garden for continued care and stewardship by the students or distributed out to the community as part of Glacier Peak Institute's annual plant sale.

During this year, the Food Sustainability Project extended its impact to the **Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe**, to provide support for the tribe's garden and healthy eating initiatives and to aid in the **establishment of a greenhouse on tribal land**. This project allowed for the opportunity to foster and strengthen relationships and partnerships between the park and the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe and **Glacier Peak Institute** (which provided instructors and volunteers to support the greenhouse construction), as well as provided students an opportunity to explore park resources both in place-based and curriculum-based activities and lessons.

According to North Cascades National Park Superintendent Don Striker, the Food Sustainability Project makes a lot of sense for the National Park Service.

"We're able to interact with the Sauk-Suiattle (tribe) and help them preserve their culture," he explained. This partnership benefits both the park and the tribe. "We get to share the combination of our modern scientific knowledge and the fact that we have, in many cases, preserved the native seeds of the area that were traditionally here – and to combine that with the traditional indigenous knowledge that the tribes have."

The Food Sustainability Project in Action

WNPF staff accompanied 19 students from two Darrington high school classes – Environmental Literature and Botany – on a field trip to North Cascades National Park. The students first arrived at Marblemount for an outdoor introduction to the revegetation process in the park's native plant center. There, seeds that are collected throughout the park are planted and grown to seedlings, at which point park staff and volunteers can plant them in areas where native plants have been damaged or removed as part of their park-wide restoration efforts.



To kick off their day, Stacy and Becca, horticulturalists at North Cascades National Park, asked the students an icebreaker question: *what's your favorite or least favorite plant, and why?* The answers ranged, but two candidates emerged as universally disliked: stinging nettle (*urtica dioica*, a plant known for its very irritating "stinging" hairs) and "stinky Bob" (*Geranium robertianum* or Herb Robert, an especially smelly invasive weed).

Though some plants might be irritating to encounter, the students were excited to learn from Stacy and Becca just how diverse the park around them is. In fact, with more than 1,600 species of plants in the North Cascades, it is believed to be among the most biodiverse national parks. They also learned about the human impact on plants, and how devastating it can be to native species. While it's not easy to trample on a Douglas Fir, heather and other subalpine plants are much easier to damage.



After the students had learned all about the plant diversity of the North Cascades, it was time to do some hands-on learning at the North Cascades Visitor Center in Newhalem. There, the park's Education Coordinator divided the students into three groups that took turns on various activities in and around the visitor center and surrounding trails.

One group went on a short nature hike down the Sterling Munro Boardwalk, identifying native plants along the way before reaching the dramatic overview of the Picket Mountains.

In just 300 feet, students discovered hemlock, western red cedar, and vine maple, a tree species that grows in avalanche chutes. The students were especially fascinated to learn about how trees can react to mistletoe, a parasite that grows in trees in the area, by compartmentalizing. This means that if a limb gets infected with mistletoe, the tree can choose to stop the limb from growing and reduce the damage.

Another group of students spent time exploring the interpretive exhibits in the Visitor Center, while the final group broke ground on one of the core goals of the Food Sustainability & Native Plant Education Project: developing and planting an ethnobotanical garden outside of the Visitor Center. With the long-term goal of presenting visitors to the park with an immediate, up-close look at the diversity of native plants that grow within its boundaries, the garden's early tasks include working on the plant bed, trimming overgrowth of the current plants, locating and placing small and medium-sized boulders and rocks to support the growth and display of creeping plants, and removal of unhealthy plants. The students were quick to roll up their sleeves and get to work.

The field trip ended with a conversation with the Education Coordinator about what makes the North Cascades special – and worth protecting. For these students, who live so close to the park's boundaries, the hope is that they leave the field trip having engaged with the park resources on a deeper level and with a better understanding of the close relationship between the park landscape and their home community.



Challenges & New Developments

Staff turnover at North Cascades National Park as well as at each of its partnering agencies and schools posed a challenge. As positions were either rehired or cut, the partners needed to regroup and get new participants up to speed. What helped was the ability to use project funding to hire an intern for an extended period (year-round). The intern worked in partnership with the staffs at the park and Glacier Peak Institute to implement project activities, providing greater overall stability.

Unfortunately, construction of the new greenhouse at the Lummi Nation School was delayed due to capacity issues at the school during the height of the pandemic. However, conversations with the school and tribe continued, and plans for their reengagement in the project are now starting to move forward. North Cascades National Park is now in early talks to work with the Lummi Nation School and a new partner, Common Threads (of Bellingham), in the coming year on a new phase of the project. Together, the groups hope to install the new greenhouse to help expand the impact of the school's recently created school garden, hire an AmeriCorps Food Educator to implement twice-weekly gardening and cooking classes for students and families, bring Lummi Nation School students to the national park for field trips, and explore the addition of summertime programming for youth (including summer employment opportunities). We hope to be able to provide you with more specifics about these new programming opportunities in the coming months.

In Summary



This project continues to improve the lives of youth and strengthen the relationships between the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe, the Darrington Community, the Lummi Nation, and the National Park Service. It meets the fundamental need of food security and provides impactful opportunities for students to engage with the natural world both in their communities and in the greater ecosystem.

For additional information, please contact Alex Day, WNPF's Interim Chief Executive Officer, at grants@wnpf.org or (206) 623-2063.