

# **Youth Environmental Summer Studies (YESS) Program**

## **2025 Final Report**

*Scott River Watershed Council | June 23, 2024 – July 31, 2025*



This summer marked the 9th season of the Youth Environmental Summer Studies (YESS) Program, a milestone for a program that has grown into a cornerstone of youth engagement in the Scott Valley.

The 2025 YESS program provided six weeks of hands-on environmental stewardship training for youth, combining restoration work, ecological monitoring, and community engagement. Participants worked throughout the Scott River watershed, gaining technical skills, leadership experience, and exposure to natural resource careers, all while making a direct impact on the health of their community's lands and waters.

Over the past nine seasons, YESS has introduced dozens of local youth to the science and practice of watershed restoration, instilling a sense of responsibility and connection to place. Each summer, participants return with new skills, confidence, and awareness of career pathways in conservation and resource management.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the funders and partners who make this program possible: the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Coastal Commission, State Coastal Conservancy, and the Department of Parks & Recreation Office of Grants & Local Services for their generous support, and the Etna Police Activities League (PAL) for providing the use of their van, ensuring our students could reach the diverse field sites across the watershed. We are also grateful for the opportunities our crew had to work alongside the Quartz Valley Indian Reservation, the Watershed Science and Training Center, and Ascend Wilderness Experiences, whose collaboration enriched the program with diverse perspectives, technical expertise, and experiences that deepened student learning and connection to the land.

Nine years in, YESS continues to thrive thanks to this support, our dedicated staff, and the energy and curiosity of the students who step forward each summer to learn, lead, and make a difference. A special shoutout to our Crew leader, Shannon Wedgely. Shannon's mentorship this year was invaluable to these youth people of Scott Valley.

**Restoration & Habitat Work:** The crew harvested and processed willow and wood for Beaver Dam Analog (BDA) construction at Noyes Valley Creek, Beaver Haven, and Sugar Creek. Work included reinforcing cattle exclusion “barriers” next to structures, planting native willow, and preparing gully stuffing materials to stabilize banks and improve habitat. Meadow projects at Big Meadows involved our annual Dyer’s woad patch removal (an invasive weed), erosion control, and installation of moisture monitoring systems.



*Figure 1 - Crew posing on an ELJ structure after reinforcing it with rock.*

**Etna Creek Annual Clean Up Event:** As part of their summer experience, YESS participants also joined working alongside community members to remove trash and debris from the creek corridor. This effort not only improved local water quality and habitat but also highlighted the importance of community stewardship. For many students, it was a chance to see how even small actions, like hauling out invasive weeds or pulling garbage from the stream—contribute to the larger health of the Scott River watershed. The cleanup served as a powerful reminder that caring for our environment starts at home, in our own backyard creeks.



*Figure 2. YESS crew setting up work signs for the event.*



**Quartz Valley Indian Reservation (QVIR) Partnership:** YESS partnered with QVIR on willow planting at Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) restoration sites, water quality monitoring at local swim holes (with in-house and lab analysis), and community/tribal engagement through support of the annual QVIR bike raffle/health fair. This was a great opportunity for youth to connect from diverse cultural backgrounds.



*Figure 3 - Owen gathering water samples at local swim holes for E. coli testing*

**Invasive Species Management:** Targeted removal of spotted knapweed, Dyer's woad, yellow star thistle, mustard, and blackberry was completed at Whipple Ranch, Hayden Ridge, Big Meadows, and Etna Public Works. Crews applied treatment methods based on plant maturity, including root pulling, cutting, bagging, and solarizing seed heads.



*Figure 4 - Big smiles at Big Meadows after picking our annual Dyer's woad patch*

**Education & Field Experiences:** The program incorporated two immersive camping trips. In the Sisson-Callahan Wilderness, participants rerouted trails, removed dead snags, attended an ecology/botany field class, and conducted micro-trash cleanup. The coastal trip included visits to the Klamath Estuary, Cal Poly Marine Lab, Cal-poly Humboldt State University, and Redwood National Park, exposing youth to diverse ecosystems and career pathways.



*Figure 5 - Liz Houghton teaching ecology and soil science.*

**Program Outcomes:** The 2025 YESS program was a complete success! The crew worked together wonderfully, and the smaller group size allowed Crew leader Shannon Wedgely to provide more one-on-one mentorship with each youth member. This personalized approach fostered growth in work ethic, self-development, teamwork, and an appreciation for both ecological and cultural diversity. Participants also deepened their understanding of environmental stewardship philosophy and gained valuable insights on how to be conscientious, engaged, and upstanding citizens.