

Project Completion Report Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (RM-CESU)

Project Title: Native American Student Employment Project, Ph. 2

Project Code (such as UMT-72 and/or the “J” number): NPS: P13AC00288; UMT-284

Type of Project (Research, Technical Assistance or Education): Technical Assistance

Funding Agency: National Park Service

Partner University: University of Montana

NPS Agreement Technical Representative (with complete contact information):

Elizabeth A. Horton
Park Archeologist
National Park Service, Yellowstone National Park
PO Box 168, Yellowstone NP, WY 82190
Phone: 307.344.2290; 406.548.4440
Fax: 406.848.9958
beth_horton@nps.gov

Principal Investigators (with complete contact information):

Dr. Michael Patterson
W. A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation
University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
Phone: 406.243.5521
michael.patterson@umontana.edu

Start Date of Project: 05/01/2013

End Date of Project: 12/31/2017

Funding Amount: \$18,525

Project Summary, including descriptions of project deliverables, work accomplished and/or major results. If the information is restricted (e.g. location of endangered species or cultural resources), indicate the title and location of the final report. Also add web sites where project-related information may be found.

The National Park Service has a strong commitment to enhancing and maintaining workforce diversity. Yellowstone National Park has a special commitment to recruiting and retaining Native Americans due to its government to government relationship with 26 associated tribes. The University of Montana, through the Native American Natural Resource Program (NANRP) in the College of Forestry and Conservation, has made a commitment to recruit, tutor, advise and mentor Native American students. Some of the services provided by NANRP include academic and financial aid advising, internship and seasonal job placement, and providing

Native American students with the services and resources they need for a successful academic experience at the University of Montana. The mission of NANRP is to provide Native American students enrolled in the College of Forestry and Conservation with educational opportunities and support that will assist and guide them as they earn their undergraduate degrees. The NANRP provides specialized services and support to Native American students in the College of Forestry and Conservation, but the University of Montana has a deep commitment to recruiting and mentoring Native American students in all departments of the University.

The objective of this project is to maintain and further develop a program to recruit, train, and retain Native Americans in the NPS workforce. The University of Montana, through the NANRP and other programs, has developed expertise in advising and mentoring Native American students and placing them in internships and summer employment positions with federal agencies. The NPS is benefiting from the experience and expertise of University of Montana staff in recruiting, training, and retaining Native American employees.

Number of students participating in this project: undergraduates, graduate students, degrees conferred.

Four undergraduate student interns participated with this project, through internship placement with Yellowstone National Park.

Lessons Learned from this project:

The number of students we have been able to bring into the program has not been what we envisioned and intended at the outset, so this is a valuable time to reflect on the reasons why.

Based on our observations and discussions with students we believe there are several contributing factors. First, the CFC/NPS Yellowstone Internship in and of itself is an attractive opportunity to Native American students exploring career opportunities with the National Park Service and in natural resource management and conservation more broadly. However, in actually trying to structure the opportunity in ways that meet the needs of these prospective interns, two issues have kept some potentially interested students from applying. The first is a cultural factor therefore has widespread implications for working with Native American employees in general. Relative to non-Native employees, Native Americans tend to have a higher degree of obligations to extended families back home. Concern that the work schedule is not sufficiently flexible to accommodate those obligations has prevented some potentially interested students from pursuing this opportunity.

The second factor stems from the fact that a large portion of Native American students are also parents. Thus they have to find situations that accommodate their needs as parents. Specifically, the need for family housing has been an issue that has prevented some potentially interested students from applying. For example, this year a single father was interested in the opportunity but could not commit to it because family housing was not an option. Also, finding opportunities and financial resources to support child care during the work day has proven an obstacle for some of these students.

The NPS staff have tried to be understanding of students with respect to these issues. And one student who completed the internship program was a single mother. But in the end she had to leave the children with her family, visiting them at home as often as she could. Yet even for this intern, the situation proved quite challenging. Most Native students with families have not viewed the situation as accommodating enough to meet their needs.

Questions centered on housing have been an issue for some students without families as well. Specifically, for students without a car, the prospect of having to find housing outside of the park is discouraging candidates from applying. Additionally, the NPS has high demand for its housing and prospective interns are not certain whether they will be able to receive housing until the NPS has made its allocations, which is usually late in the student's decision making process. Students with these concerns feel like they cannot wait that late in the process to determine their summer employment and so pursue other opportunities for which they can resolve these questions at an earlier stage.

Additionally, one student intern returned feeling like the internship did not provide a sufficient range of experience and professional development opportunities they were seeking. Specifically, the student described the job as primarily mundane tasks focused on spraying for weeds. This discouraged some other students from pursuing as they felt the internship would not sufficiently meet their educational and professional development goals.

To some degree the housing issue might be addressed on how the university addresses the salary situation. One suggestion that has been made by the Native American program coordinator is to consider offering the wage on a sliding scale. Offer one wage if housing is provided by the National Park Service, offer a higher wage when housing is not available.

A second area which the University can approach the opportunity somewhat differently is how we seek to engage prospective students. We have relied primarily on a conventional advertising approach. This year we expanded that approach from advertising to just UM students to advertising to Salish Kootenai College students as well. That yielded some additional inquiries, but no additional applicants in the end. On reflection we believe the University should experiment with a shift from conventional advertising to a more relational approach. In a more relational approach we would seek to cultivate interest in the opportunity among our Native Students from their initial interactions with us.