



# Seasonal summer jobs offer opportunities for youths and young adults

High Desert Partnership techs get variety of experiences as part of work crew

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photos by Kaylee Littlefield

For high school and college age people, looking for summer jobs can be a stressful undertaking. However, the High Desert Partnership is hoping to help youths and young adults test out the waters in the natural resource career field by giving them experience as technicians collecting information on vegetation and helping with projects for the Harney Basin Wetlands Collaborative and the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative.



*Pictured: Range Scientist Dustin Johnson and summer crew Camille Torres, Carter Lardy, Danika Piotrowski, Tea Recanzone along with Garrett Johnson. Dustin is training the crew on the protocols for mapping and monitoring at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge for a Reed Canarygrass project.*

Kaylee Littlefield is the High Desert Partnership Community Involvement and Monitoring Coordinator who heads up the summer work crew. It is the crew's job to monitor the different projects going on within the collaboratives. So far this summer, the crew has done work in the Pueblo Mountains monitoring the vegetation growing around a fuel break. They've also worked on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and in the Frenchglen area monitoring and mapping the presence, distribution and density of reed canarygrass, an invasive wetland grass species with limited forage or wildlife habitat value. The field work supports a larger study mapping reed canarygrass presence and expansion in the Harney Basin in response to water availability and management over the past five years. Additionally, the crews are monitoring the plants, plant height and shrubs within several dry meadow plots on the refuge that were set up and inventoried in 2019 and 2020.

Hands-on experience



*Pictured: Carter Lardy and Megan Ellibee setting up a monitoring plot at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.*

This kind of work was exactly what Danika Piotrowski, a recent graduate from California Polytechnic State University, had in mind when she applied for and got the position with the High Desert Partnership. “I was looking for a seasonal job where I got to work outside and go somewhere I’ve never been before and this was exactly that,” she said. “I graduated with a degree in environmental management. I’m finding out that I do really like working outside, and the crew is awesome. Everyone is fun to be around.”

Littlefield said that oftentimes college students going into natural resource careers have trouble getting the field experience they need to apply for jobs after graduation. For example, she said most students who go to Oregon State University for a range management degree must travel two to three hours to participate in a lab day where they can learn about sagebrush and juniper trees. “Offering these opportunities to work during the summer monitoring gives them that field experience that other jobs are expecting them to have and gives them experience with a greater variety of vegetation. That’s always helpful,” she said.

Piotrowski would like to experience a few more seasonal jobs to try out different areas of interest within the natural resource career field. Then she’ll likely go back to school to concentrate on that area of focus.

#### Youth internships

Carter Lardy is 16 and the youngest member of the crew. He will be a junior at Burns High School this fall. He heard about the job from his sophomore biology teacher, Amy Smith. When he contacted the High Desert Partnership, it was decided he would be a good fit for the partnership’s Harney Internship Program, part of the Youth Changing the Community Collaborative. It is a paid internship and involves giving a presentation at the conclusion of the job.

Lardy said he was hoping to gain more experience for his resume for the future when he applies for a natural resources job or for when he goes on to higher education. He has enjoyed the job so far. “I’m learning plant identification skills, and I’m learning about the process of what they actually do in these jobs and what they entail,” he said.

#### Universal job skills

Two more members of the crew were simply interested in finding jobs for the summer but have found that they are learning skills that will come in handy in their chosen career fields. Friends Megan Ellibee and Tea

Recanzone are both college students who graduated from Burns High School in 2019. Ellibee attends Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Wash., and Recanzone attends Boise State University. Both are involved in education programs at their respective schools with the intent of being teachers once they graduate.

Ellibee worked on the HDP crew last summer and it was such a positive experience that she applied to work there again this summer. She convinced her friend, Recanzone, to apply too. While plant identification likely won't figure into her teaching career, Ellibee sees definite benefits to the job that will make her a better educator. "I think leadership and communication are the biggest things I'm learning, especially since I want to become a teacher. Those are extremely important qualities to have for my future career. I'm pretty much an introvert when it comes to life, but this job has definitely helped me build up those skills a lot," she said.

As someone who grew up in Harney County, Ellibee said she never really looked in detail at the unique nature of the high desert landscape. "I used to make jokes and say that there is only sagebrush out there. Now, from doing this job, I've definitely learned a lot more. It's kind of cool that when I drive out to places, I actually know what I'm seeing out there."

Recanzone rodeos in her off time in the summers and said she needed a reliable job working four 10-hour days so she could have her weekends free. In the past, during the summers she has worked for her dad on construction projects or at the Hi-Desert Pool. So this is a completely different experience for her, but she said she is enjoying being outside and learning new things. "I've learned how to work on a team and communicate with each other about how to get the job done as efficiently as possible," she said. "Working with a different group of people with different backgrounds in a different environment has helped me, and I think I'll be able to apply that to my teaching career one day."



Camille Torres grew up in Seattle and after high school spent some time in New Zealand before landing at her aunt's place in Drewsey for the summer. She said she needed a summer job and has always liked being outdoors and learning about plants. Her future plans might include attending OSU to attain a degree in botany or perhaps going to culinary school with the intention of opening a farm to table restaurant someday.

*Pictured: Summer monitoring work is long, hot days. Danika Piotrowski, taking a break in a bed of Reed Canarygrass and Meadow Foxtail.*

Torres said she is learning team building and data collection skills and that she has enjoyed learning more about how the High Desert Partnership and its various collaborative work. "Being part of the High Desert Partnership as a collaboration is pretty cool,"

she said. "Getting to see how this runs and how it's connecting the community is pretty cool as well."

Learning more about collaboratives and how they work has also been enlightening for Recanzone as she comes from a ranching background. "I think what they're doing is awesome, especially because it's bringing the community together," she said.

Littlefield said that while the summer technician crew positions offer youths and young adults the chance to explore careers in natural resources, they also offer opportunities to learn and hone skills that can transfer to other jobs as well. "We've expanded out into other things in the community to help open up more opportunities that maybe weren't there before," she said.

*This article is provided by High Desert Partnership; a Harney County nonprofit convening and supporting six collaboratives including the Harney Basin Wetlands Collaborative, the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative and the Youth Changing the Community Collaborative.*

