



Youth Find Meaningful Summer Work in Remote Corners of Harney County

Though they're small in number, the members of High Desert Partnership's Summer Monitoring Crew have played a crucial role in forwarding the important work the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative continues to do in southeast Oregon's sagebrush steppe.

By Scott Barton
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Each morning throughout the summer months in Harney County, Kaylee Littlefield meets a Summer Monitoring Crew at High Desert Partnership (HDP) and assigns them their tasks for the day. Before the sun rises, the crew heads out to a specified remote corner of the county to do monitoring work for High Desert Partnership's Harney County Wildfire Collaborative (HCWC).

Overseeing this seasonal work crew is a job Littlefield enjoys. Since she graduated from Oregon State University's Eastern Oregon campus in La Grande with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Rangeland Management in 2021, she has been the Community Involvement and Monitoring Coordinator for High Desert Partnership. Her duties are to oversee assigned work crew projects, make sure they have the tools, materials, and knowledge they need, and monitor their daily progress on each assigned project.

Summer Monitoring Crew 2022



The individuals that comprise the 2022 Summer Monitoring Crew are a unique bunch. They have close ties to the land and community, and a vested interest in working to see that it's bountiful and viable for generations to come.

Pictured: Carter Lardy, Hunter Kemper, Amanda Sutcliffe and Kaylee Littlefield giving a presentation about their summer monitoring work during a Harney County Wildfire Collaborative Stinkingwater Mountains field tour in July.

Carter Lardy

This summer marks Carter Lardy's second with the HDP Summer Monitoring Crew. The 17-year-old first heard about the opportunity in 2021 from his high school biology teacher, Amy Smith. It didn't take long for

Lardy to take the plunge of an interview, and ultimately land the paid summer internship. "I've learned a lot about the different vegetation throughout the region this summer," says Lardy. "I've grown up hunting and fishing throughout this country, and having a greater knowledge of the landscape has deepened my appreciation for it." Going forward, Lardy hopes to use the skills he's learned the past two summers to pursue higher education and a career in natural resources.

Hunter Kemper

Hunter Kemper is a 17-year-old senior at Burns High School. Much of the work Kemper has helped with this summer has taken place in the Stinkingwater Mountains and greater portions of the Southeast Oregon Wildfire Resiliency Project. These regions are where the HCWC has done extensive work to make the sagebrush steppe less susceptible and more resilient to wildfire. The work has included monitoring of vegetation on Potential Control Fire Lines (PCLs) in the Stinkingwater Mountains and Medusahead monitoring in areas around Juntura. "I've learned a lot about what fire means for the landscape I call home," cites Kemper. "There's a lot more work that goes into planning for wildfires than I ever knew – it's been really neat to be a part of."

The Summer Monitoring Crew's efforts aren't just focused on vegetation monitoring though. Both Kemper and Lardy say one of their more memorable experiences from the summer was banding migratory waterfowl on Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. This work is instrumental in monitoring populations, survival rates, migration patterns, habitat use, and a host of other indicators that speak to the health of various species. "Having the chance to be outside, learn about the natural environment I've grown up in, and develop a more intimate relationship with the land have been the greatest rewards of working on the Summer Monitoring Crew," says Kemper.

Amanda Sutcliffe

The most senior member of this year's Summer Monitoring Crew is Amanda Sutcliffe. The 23-year-old recently graduated from Oregon State University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Science. Her position is that of Biological Technician and has seen her play an integral role in the monitoring of vegetation, much like Lardy and Kemper. Specifically, the work entails performing transect surveys on both private and federal lands. She says, "the work involves hiking to marked plots using GPS equipment and measuring the height of plants along a transect (path), as well as counting the shrub density or cover along the line."

Additionally, Sutcliffe has really enjoyed the various educational trainings she's undergone this summer that have shed light on the meaningful collaborative work HDP does throughout the community. Going forward, Sutcliffe views her experience with the Summer Monitoring Crew as invaluable. "The work provided me with field experience for future careers related to my degree by getting hands-on practice collecting data and performing vegetation surveys," she continues. "This position also allowed me to learn more about stakeholder involvement in natural resource management, while also developing essential skills that can be applied to any workplace. I have grown both professionally and personally by the knowledge and skills gained by working at HDP."

Playing a Crucial Role

Though they're small in number, the members of 2022's HDP Summer Monitoring Crew have played a crucial role in forwarding the important work HDP and the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative continue to do in the region's sagebrush steppe. Kaylee Littlefield sums it up well when she says, "Ultimately, what I hope for is that each crew member can walk away saying they love rangeland management and want to go into natural resource career fields because of the great they had with HDP they had when they were starting."

This article is provided by High Desert Partnership; a Harney County nonprofit convening and supporting six collaboratives including the Harney County Wildlife Collaborative.

