



Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests
1008 Highway 64, Kamiah, ID 83536
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“These are the Skills that Built America” Taught at Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

Media Contact: Cyrus Forman (Cyrus.Forman@usda.gov)

KAMIAH, Idaho:— Around 175 new and seasoned wilderness professionals from the Northern Rockies and beyond gathered at Powell Ranger Station on the edge of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness from May 20th-May 24th for the fourth annual Northern Rockies Wilderness Skills Institute. After pitching their tents and filling the bunkhouses, they began a week of classes designed to share the traditional skills they need to clear trail, handle horses, lead wilderness field crews, and educate visitors in a wilderness setting. The week began with greetings from Forest Supervisor Cheryl Probert and keynote addresses by Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee member Samuel Penney and Tribal Natural Resource Manager Aaron Miles that stressed the importance of conservation work to the Tribe and how co-stewardship honors the Tribe's history and culture as they exercise the rights reserved to the Tribe on their homelands by treaty.

Participants in trainings included field going partners, members of the Nez Perce Tribal Cultural Resource program, and National Park Service and Forest Service staff. Among the partner organizations represented were Montana Conservation Corps, the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation, the Great Burn Conservation Alliance, Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness, Backcountry Horsemen, the Absaroka-Beartooth Foundation, and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation. Over the course of the week, students ate together, built trail together, made music together, and built relationships between partners and staff to unite in their mission. Chris Noyes, Deputy District Ranger for the Lochsa-Powell Ranger District saw more than just learning and camaraderie and felt that it represented “a return to why this district was created in the first place: an outpost in the wilderness.”

In addition to on-the-ground experiential classes in basic and advanced trail maintenance, crosscut saw skills, and horsemanship, attendees also studied field leadership skills and the practices and theory of wilderness management. One instructor was Mark Himmel, national chairman of Backcountry Horsemen of America, who has been helping to instruct classes for three years. Himmel explained that this training “makes an impact on the next generation by getting the participants the skills they need to have a career in the wilderness. Working with traditional tools puts you in a different spirit. It’s important to get that spark lit.”

For Brenda Yankoviak, National Trails Program Manager for the Forest Service, the week of classes was not just “an investment in field going staff and partners to keep skills alive and build community,” it was also a homecoming, to the district where her decades of Forest Service experience began. Bob Beckley, a technical expert in wilderness skills and former smokejumper on the Moose Creek Ranger District, explained how the institute represented a change in mindset from his early years when “my mentors thought it was strange that I wanted to learn crosscut instead of chainsaw.” He lamented how many traditional skills were lost from that mindset but, “This is where we can reinvent the wheel” so that traditional skills are sustained into the future.





Participants seemed to share the sentiment. Erynn Castellanos, Education Partnership Specialist with the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation, said: “It’s great to connect with our partners and friends we can’t connect with during the field season. This is our first year here and what partners gain from this institute is what inspired

us to join.” Ian Harris of the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation extolled “The commonality of the wilderness mindset and folks sharing and learning together.”

Mid-week, students woke up to snowy tents from late spring storms, but that didn’t stop their spirit. They got out and took to the trails, where they put their newfound skills to work, clearing trails, practicing horsemanship, and thinking about how to steward wilderness. Despite full days, participants partook in additional evening programs meant to engage their artistic senses. Collage artist, Jennifer Ogden, from the Bitterroot Valley shared how nature inspires her creations and led the group in a short journal making workshop. On another evening, participants attended a talk from local legend Jim Renshaw, a former Moose Creek outfitter whose lifelong relationship with the Selway began when he was only 2 months old, who shared stories about the nearby wilderness area that predated passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act. On the last evening, the group closed out the week with a concert by The Pack Strings, a Missoula band that plays acoustic roots and folk music comprised of former and present Forest Service wilderness employees.. As the attendees head out to work in wilderness areas throughout the Northern Rockies and beyond this summer, they will take the skills, spirit, and knowledge they gained during the week’s training with them. And for wilderness visitors, their hard work will enable a future generation of stewards to enjoy their time in some of America’s wildest places.



Caption: Group picture of all participants

 <p>NRWSI 2024</p>	<p>175 Total Participants and Instructors Engaged</p>		<p>Participants from 5 states</p>
	<p>1 Tribal Nation 2 Federal Agencies 7 Partner Groups</p>		



Caption: Students in the Defensive Horsemanship class learn and practice packing loads for stock supported trips.



Caption: Students pose after practicing trail maintenance.



Caption: Students in the Advanced Crosscut Saw class showing off a tree they felled.

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