

2023 Nature Series Program Summary in partnership with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

The 2023 BIPOC Youth Nature Series was a transformative program that provided an accessible, safe, and community driven pathway for young BIPOC community members in Oregon to connect with the state's natural beauty, and deepen their understanding of environmental topics. Through a series of five workshops in the summer of 2022, participants had the opportunity to learn from partner organizations about various subjects such as indigenous farming approaches, plant and tree identification, water quality, and exploring hiking trail networks in the Portland Metro region. By exploring and experiencing Oregon's natural beauty, participants gained a deeper understanding of the region's diverse ecosystems.

The BIPOC Youth Nature Series sought to equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to continue their journey in environmental justice. By providing a foundation in land-based experiential learning, the program nurtured a cohort of conservation and environmental carers who could actively contribute to movement building and Indigenous sovereignty.

The Nature Series program activities kicked off with a visit to Lacamas Lake, where youth were led on a native plant ID scavenger hunt by APANO's very own climate justice fellow, Jeremy Hart. During this trip, we explored several elements of the natural environment and shared a meal next to a lively running stream. Our program also included visiting the Black and Indigenous farmers market, Come Thru, where youth learned about indigenous farming approaches, sustainable food practices, and built relationships with local vendors and community members. Additionally, they engaged in hands-on activities such as repotting, painting, and caring for houseplants, bringing their connection to nature closer to home.

Participants also had the opportunity to explore the Duncan Creek trail with Friends of the Columbia Gorge partner Melissa Gonzalez, where they learned about watershed and its ecological significance. Another event took us to the Lower Columbia Estuary in a guided tour with Indigenous elder, Alvey Seeyouma, where they gained insight into land and habitat restoration practices. These diverse experiences provided the participants with a comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness between land and people, transcending industrial perspectives.

To evaluate the success of the program, we implemented several feedback mechanisms. Ongoing one-on-one check ins with staff provided a platform for participants to share their learnings, experiences, and personal developments. Community conversations offered a space for collective reflection and learning. A final follow-up survey was conducted to assess participants' comfort levels in natural spaces, their perceived knowledge gained, and whether the program inspired them to pursue future outdoor activities, learning, or interests in restoration and conservation.

By participating in outdoor activities, promoting restoration and conservation practices, and investing in the hands-on learning opportunities for BIPOC youth, our work empowered youth to become advocates for intersectional sustainability. The BIPOC Youth Nature Series left the youth enriched in community, knowledge, and a heightened appreciation for natural spaces, ensuring a brighter future for both the participants and the environment.