



# AZSA 2023 Youth Conservation Workforce Development



Arizona  
Sustainability  
Alliance



**CORAZÓN  
LATINO**

# AZSA Youth Conservation Workforce

## Developing the next generation of conservation leaders in Arizona

What if you were a young adult fascinated by the landscapes and wildlife surrounding your home but needed to learn how to get involved in their care and management? Furthermore, what if you did not know anyone who worked in a conservation-related field and could not think of anyone to ask about it besides your high school guidance counselor?

What if you were a guidance counselor or teacher for some of these young adults and desired to assist them but needed more structure to do so effectively?

Imagine you are an environmental professional who sincerely desires an ethnically, age-and gender-diverse workforce in your organization and, more broadly, in your city, county, state, and country but do not see it occurring due to all societal structural issues. In addition, you are acutely aware of regional ecosystem and watershed issues that need more physical attention due to a lack of human resources.

If you were one of these individuals, you could create innovative connections to address all or some of the disconnects you noticed and experienced. This was accomplished in 2021 and 2022 by several organizations, including the Arizona Sustainability Alliance, ASU University City Exchange, Corazón Latino, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department, Audubon Southwest, Buckeye Union High School District, and Rio Reimagined, who joined forces to increase community stewardship of local ecosystems and watersheds and to create opportunities for young conservationists in the area. The Arizona Youth Conservation Workforce Development Program (AZYCWD) was developed by this coalition of organizations, led by AZSA, with funding provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Five Star and Urban Waters Program.



## Youth Conservation Workforce at a glance:

- One Year Program
- 140 hours of Conservation Education
- Focused on students impacted along the Rio Reimagined Corridor
- Students learn:
  - Conservation Practices and Principles
  - Restoration Practices
  - Riparian Land Management
  - Project Management
  - And much more!

The Arizona Youth Conservation Workforce Development Program is a one-year workforce development pilot program that began in June 2022 and ended in May 2023. It comprises a 140-hour conservation work program for Buckeye Union High School District students. It addresses regional ecosystem and watershed issues by engaging students from low-income communities along the Rio Reimagined corridor, (which focuses on 45 miles of the river,) in conservation internships to implement restoration projects. The participating students are learning about and implementing restoration projects along the Rio Reimagined corridor, thus contributing to riparian restoration efforts in the area in direct coordination with state and county land agencies. In addition to the hands-on conservation work experience program, participants engage in a socio-scientifically and culturally relevant classroom curriculum about the Rio Reimagined Corridor and receive mentorship from area conservation professionals.

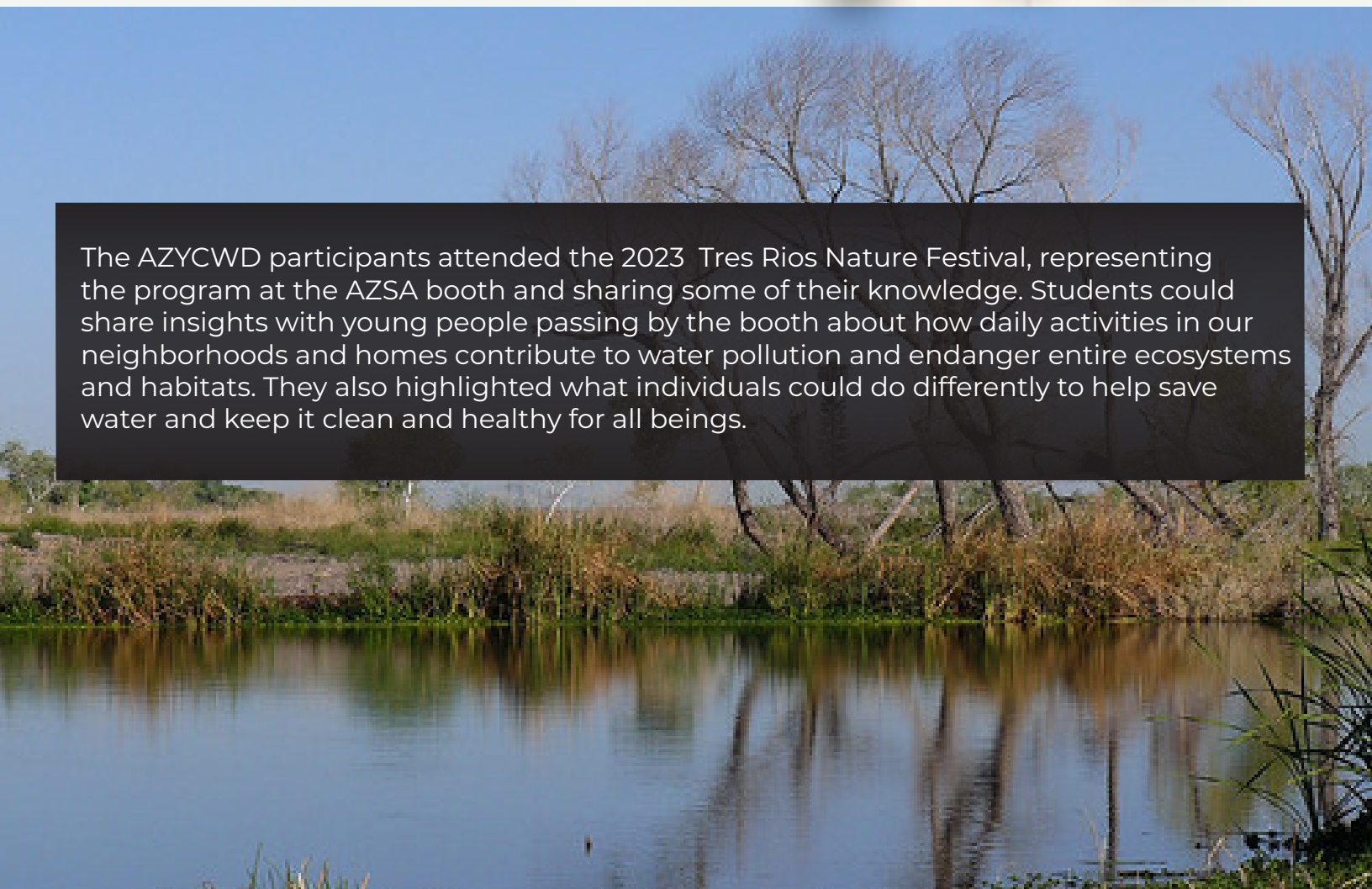


**“PARTICIPANTS ENGAGE IN A SOCIO-SCIENTIFICALLY AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT CLASSROOM CURRICULUM ABOUT THE RIO REIMAGINED CORRIDOR AND RECEIVE MENTORSHIP FROM AREA CONSERVATION PROFESSIONALS.”**

By providing this education, field experience, mentorship, and exposure to career opportunities, AZSA and its partners seek to develop the next generation of Arizona conservationists from the local community. The goal is to improve access to the conservation sector for diverse youth from Arizona communities disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation by developing relevant job skills and pathways to college and careers for BIPOC high school students. The approach is offering place-based, culturally relevant environmental education for rising high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors who are interested in learning about opportunities in conservation; hands-on, paid field training and experiential learning, capped by mentorship and professional development.



The AZYCWD participants attended the 2023 Tres Rios Nature Festival, representing the program at the AZSA booth and sharing some of their knowledge. Students could share insights with young people passing by the booth about how daily activities in our neighborhoods and homes contribute to water pollution and endanger entire ecosystems and habitats. They also highlighted what individuals could do differently to help save water and keep it clean and healthy for all beings.





The capstone project for the year was a day-long community event in partnership with the City of Avondale at the site of a restoration project at Festival Fields Park. The youth conservation participants led the day's activities, such as educating volunteers about the proper procedures for removing invasive species and the types of native tree species, including Arizona Ash and Desert Willow, that were planted in the project area. The participants also lead activities such as trash removal around the site.



## Meet The Graduates

At the graduation ceremony and celebration held at Youngker High School in May 2023, the graduating students presented a report about their journey within the program and the results of their capstone project to all the program partners and their school community. Graduates also received a certificate of learning or expertise to signify successful program completion.



**Vianney Aguilar-Cano**  
Youngker High School



**Jared Crabtree**  
Youngker High School



**Caliyah Howard**  
Youngker High School



**Kiya Gomez**  
Buckeye Union High School



**Jose Ramirez**  
Youngker High School

Participants have completed approximately 140 hours of program experience, including classroom lessons, professional development virtual meetings, guest speakers, field trips, and volunteer experience, in addition to paid time for their work at the restoration sites. Local conservation professionals were also available from November 2022 through May 2023 to mentor students enrolled in the program.



The partners—AZSA, Corazón Latino, Rio Reimagined, Arizona Game & Fish Department, and others—hope to build and expand this program after this first pilot year and invite organizations interested in contributing to reach out for more information. To learn more about this program, please contact AZSA's Program Manager, Ouname Mhotsha (ouname.mhotsha@azsustainabilityalliance.com). Please also visit [Arizona Sustainability Alliance](#), [Corazon Latino](#), and [Rio Reimagined](#) to learn more about the organizations implementing the program.



**The Rio Reimagined**



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