



# Engaging Youth in Building Fire-Adapted Communities

*Expanding a Nationally Recognized Forest Restoration & Workforce Development Model*  
*Serving Southern Oregon: Jackson, Josephine, and Klamath Counties*  
March 2019



Lomakatsi Restoration Project is a non-profit, grassroots organization that for more than 20 years has worked within low-income, forest-based communities throughout Oregon and Northern California to create social equity and sustainable economic opportunities by restoring dry forest ecosystems and creating fire adapted communities.

***Lomakatsi's mission is to restore ecosystems and the sustainability of communities, cultures and economies.***

## **The Challenge**

Southern Oregon is in a state of crisis, facing increasing frequency and severity of wildfire and smoke. Thousands of acres of public and private forest lands require urgent ecologically-based treatment to reduce fuel loads, improve watershed health, and bolster resiliency so they can continue to provide vital ecosystem services for the community. Wildfire and smoke threaten the health and economies of our rural communities, many of which are already facing intense economic challenges following the loss of jobs from the once thriving forest products industry. Youth in rural forest-based and tribal communities struggle to find long-term employment and career opportunities.

## **Our Solution**

For over 15 years, Lomakatsi has employed an innovative and highly successful model for engaging a diversity of youth in ecological restoration to build fire-adapted forests and communities. This model creates meaningful, living wage work experiences that provide the foundation for the next generation of workers in the forest product and ecological restoration industries.

## **Lomakatsi's Youth Ecological Stewardship Training and Employment Program**

Lomakatsi's Youth Ecological Stewardship Training and Employment Program utilizes landscape-scale ecological restoration projects integrated into Master Stewardship Agreements occurring on the Rogue River-Siskiyou and Fremont-Winema National Forests to provide training and career development to diverse groups of youth ages 16 to 24. Programs range from four to six weeks in length. These programs provide access to a wide range of career professionals in the natural resources field and develop the youths' skills in hands-on ecological forestry, while providing full-time employment for the duration of the program.

## **Program Accomplishments to Date**

Over the past fifteen years, Lomakatsi has led hundreds of youth in the restoration of thousands of acres of public and private forests lands. We have created precedent-setting collaborative agreements employing these youth to work side by side with forestry experts and seasoned professional forestry workers to reduce fuels across the Oregon landscape, creating healthy, fire-resistant environments. This work includes reducing hazardous forest fuels, conducting thinning of forest tree species in accordance with best practices for management of forest health, and providing training for employment in the emerging restoration forestry industry that Lomakatsi has been leading and advancing for the past 24 years.

## **Our Nationally Recognized Program Model for Partnerships and Sustainability**

Lomakatsi's unique best practice model has been recognized by the National Congress of American Indians, U.S. Department of Interior, and U.S. Department of Agriculture for its successes tackling socio-economic and environmental challenges.

## **Championing Diversity**

Lomakatsi is committed to creating social equity through all of our work. Through this program, each year over 40 youth – tribal, Latino, Caucasian, both male and female, from a diversity of socio-economic, rural backgrounds – are trained in ecological forestry and are mentored by multiple career professionals in natural resource management. A key mutual goal with our federal agency partners is to provide the pipeline for developing a more diverse and inclusive workforce in the U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### **Program Summaries - *Lomakatsi Partnerships***

#### **Ashland Watershed Youth Training and Employment Program**

*Serving Jackson County – 2013-2019*

This four-week summer intensive education, workforce training, and employment program is designed for juniors and seniors from Ashland, Phoenix and Medford High Schools. Through the Ashland Forest Resiliency Stewardship Project, in partnership with the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest, utilizing the Ashland Watershed as an outdoor classroom, participants gain hands-on experience in all aspects of ecological forestry and stewardship. As part of a long-term restoration forestry and community wildlife protection initiative, the project has accomplished fuels reduction treatments across 9,000 acres and yielded 14 million board feet of saw logs. These byproducts of restoration are processed at local mills, further sustaining our economies.

#### **Tribal Youth Ecological Forestry Training Program**

*Serving Klamath County – 2011-2019*

Through a partnership with the Klamath Tribes' Education and Employment and Natural Resources Departments, and the Fremont-Winema National Forest, this program provides tribal youth with hands-on training as they explore career paths in natural resources. These youth learn a variety of skills in forest and watershed restoration, while they work to reduce hazardous fuels and restore forest health. This precedent-setting project has treated 48,000 acres of fire prone forests, producing 24 million board feet of timber as the byproducts of ecological forestry.

#### **Wild Rivers Youth Training and Employment Program**

*Serving Josephine county – 2007-2019*

In partnership with the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest, this program provides a unique and significant opportunity for young people in the Illinois Valley. By developing educational and technical experience in ecosystem restoration, youth are inspired to explore natural resource career paths, while mitigating hazardous fuels. Fuels have been reduced in 2,000 acres of forest and 500,000 board feet of timber have been removed to restore forest health.

### **Current Program Budget**

Youth Ecological Stewardship Training and Employment Program annual cost for implementation of the three programs listed above: \$300,000.

### **Further Support Needed to Meet Demand**

Each year, Lomakatsi receives three times the number of qualified applicants to our Youth Ecological Stewardship Training and Employment Program than we have the funding to accommodate, and demand is only growing. Youth who participate are thrilled with their experience and commonly provide the feedback that they wish the program was longer. Meanwhile, the need for restoration and fuels reduction work in our forests – and for sustainable forestry jobs – is more urgent than ever.

Lomakatsi is seeking support totaling \$1.5 million spread over three years to triple the size of our Youth Ecological Stewardship Training and Employment Program. We believe this program is a highly-exportable model that can significantly abate the risks of wildfire and smoke while providing critical hands-on experience and training for a diverse range of youth interested in forestry careers. As we restore forests and create safer communities, we also address socio-economic challenges in our rural forest-based and tribal communities.

## A Legacy of Collaborative Environmental Leadership

Lomakatsi is a leader in developing innovative, landscape-scale restoration initiatives that include training and employing youth crews and multi-cultural team members. Our organization's experience and the meaningful partnerships we've forged over the past 24 years make us highly qualified to collaborate on the creation and management of a **Site Demonstration Pilot Project Initiative** in the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest, Fremont-Winema National Forest and adjacent private lands, as a replicable state model for youth and young adults, as they create more fire resilient forests and fire adapted communities.

Learn more about Lomakatsi's growing legacy at [www.lomakatsi.org](http://www.lomakatsi.org).



### Exploring careers in natural resources

*Above:* Participants in Lomakatsi's Tribal Youth Ecological Forestry Training Program, based in Klamath County.



### Engaging Youth in Forest Restoration

From forest inventory assessments and marking trees, to thinning and restoring forest resilience, to preparing for prescribed fire, Lomakatsi's Youth Ecological Stewardship Training and Employment Program provides 16 to 24 year-olds with hands-on vocational experience as they reduce fuel loads to protect communities.

