



YEP 2008 Crew Leader Testimonial **Written by Stephen Calkin**

My name is Stephen Calkin. Currently I'm a sophomore in college. I am a typical Alaskan who loves the outdoors and takes advantage of Alaska's vast natural beauty in many ways. I love to hunt and fish, I love to hike and camp, and I love outdoor "extreme" sports such as paintballing and dirt-biking. I am unique in that I hug trees and am not afraid to hunt animals. The bottom line for me is: if it has anything to do with nature I'm usually interested in it.

I applied for the leadership position in the YEP program during my freshman year of college at 19. The YEP program interested me because I wanted to work outdoors above all else. As I looked into the YEP program I realized that the program is centered on giving back to the community with an environmental emphasis. This fit my personality very well as I love the idea of community involvement, I love the outdoors and outdoor stewardship, and I wanted to gain more leadership experience.

There have been many lasting impacts that my summer job has had on me. It has helped me refine my leadership skills, specifically interpersonal communication and clarity. It helped me better understand how the Alaskan outdoors works and how society can work with it rather than against it. Above all, my time in YEP gave me not only a sense of stewardship for the land but the tools to carry it out. From identifying and cutting down dying and dead trees to recognizing creek bank erosion and restoration I feel more equipped to help what I love, the Alaskan outdoors, flourish.

YEP was like a match made in heaven for me, and I feel that it appeals to a wide variety of Alaskans. As long as one likes to work outdoors, I feel that they will at least be content in the job. If you are someone like me who loves Alaska and closely identifies with the outdoors, YEP is the place for you. What you learn, who you work with, and the pure satisfaction of seeing projects through and knowing that they have an impact on your own community are rewards that no paycheck can match. I encourage youth to get involved with this program so that they learn more about their community and the outdoors as well as earn a paycheck. I cannot stress to the city of Anchorage how important it is to keep youth involved and keep their minds growing in positive ways. Take it from my experience, this program ties youth more closely to their community and to other youth around the town, building positive relationships and a positive attitude.