



# EDD

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DEPARTMENT

## OUTDOOR RECREATION DIVISION

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
Sept. 21, 2021

## **First Cohort of Outdoor Industry Paid High School Interns Graduates**

*Pilot program connects students with careers in the outdoors*

**SANTA FE, N.M.** – The Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD) has announced the initial cohort of high school students to graduate from New Mexico’s first paid outdoor industry internship pilot program.

The program, sponsored by ORD, is run by Future Focused Education, an Albuquerque-based nonprofit that seeks to better connect underserved and nontraditional students to college and careers.

Since June 2021, three students – Jose, Sarah, and Gabriel – have worked with outdoor industry employers in Las Cruces and Santa Fe. The employers – Friends of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, River Source, and Santa Fe Children’s Museum – each hired an intern for the summer to develop skills needed to work in the outdoor industry. ORD contributed \$13,500 toward the program, which was used to convene employers, support FFE in putting infrastructure in place, and subsidize the intern stipends. Each participating company also contributed toward intern compensation. Students put in a total of 423 hours with the employers, according to FFE.

The three students made their final exhibition presentations in August. Each internship emphasized hands-on, experiential learning. For example, in the case of Jose, who interned at River Source, the internship entailed field work in the upper Santa Fe Watershed and meetings with U.S. Forest Service and City of Santa Fe Water Division staff, who spoke about their own job pathways in fire prevention and watershed management.

“A spark of interest lit up in Jose,” River Source Director Rich Schrader said. “River Source’s Watershed Academy was fortunate to provide training and job-shadowing for [Jose] to protect water and forests, areas of interest he was curious about but did not have any work experience in. The [ORD] funding made a big impact by enabling Future Focused Education to place Jose in the Watershed Academy internship, and help him keep advancing his professional experience in protecting land, water, and forests.”

Near the end of the internship, Schrader connected Jose with the Forest Stewards Guild Youth Corps, who were hiring. Jose applied, interviewed, and was hired.

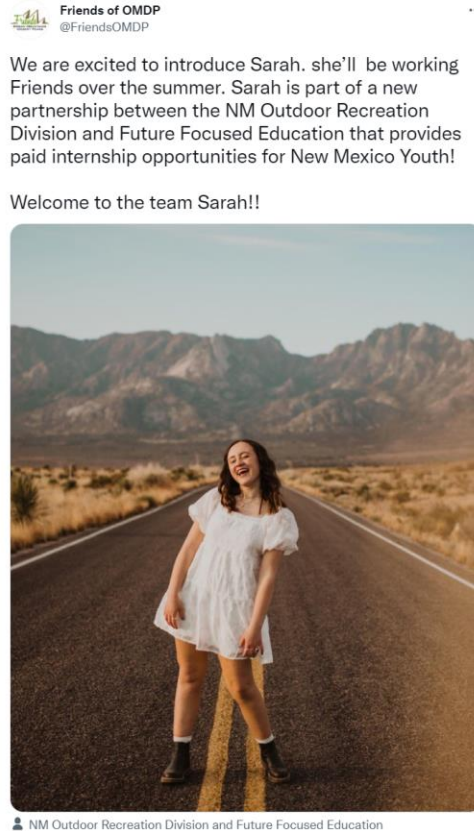
“The Watershed Academy with River Source and Future Focused Education made me connect more with nature,” Jose said. “I now have a better understanding of how important water, land, and forests are. This internship helped me further my career opportunities in learning and experiencing new things in a career in the environment. I couldn’t have experienced any of this if I didn’t have help from Communities in Schools, River Source, and Future Focused Education.”

“The ‘X’ in our X3 Internship Program stands for ‘explore, experience, and expand,’” Mike May, Director of Workforce Learning at FFE, said. “It’s so gratifying to see that vision coming to life for young people in the outdoor sector in New Mexico.”

“ORD is committed to ensuring all New Mexicans gain from the public health, environmental, and economic benefits of sustainable outdoor recreation,” ORD Director Axie Navas said. “Fundamentally, that means connecting our young people with family-sustaining, healthy, fulfilling careers in New Mexico. That is the vision behind this internship developed by FFE, which is committed to bringing opportunities for the best education to students who need it the most.”

The program will continue this fall with another cohort of students and an additional \$14,100 in funding from ORD.

The outdoor industry employs over 35,000 people in New Mexico and is growing faster than the nation’s as a whole, according to data from the [2019 Bureau of Economic Analysis](#).



The paid internship is one of the first results to come out of the Cradle-to-Career Outdoor Industry Strategy, supported by the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program. The plan builds a pathway from pre-K through higher education for students interested in working in, and for, the outdoors and emphasizes early outdoor access through programs like the Outdoor Equity Fund, climate education, and real-world paid experience that opens doors to solid New Mexico careers in tribal and rural areas.

Learn more by visiting the ORD website at [www.nmoutside.com](http://www.nmoutside.com).

To participate in the outdoor industry internship program as a school or employer, please contact ORD Director Navas at [Alexandra.navas@state.nm.us](mailto:Alexandra.navas@state.nm.us) and FFE Director for Workforce Learning Mike May at [mike@futurefocusededucation.org](mailto:mike@futurefocusededucation.org).

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