



NEW MEXICO

OUTDOOR RECREATION DIVISION

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67 Interns Graduate from Outdoor Economy Workforce Training

New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division investments leads to \$177,000 in student pay

SANTA FE, N.M. – The New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD) of the New Mexico Economic Development Department (EDD) announces the third cohort of high school students to graduate from New Mexico’s first paid outdoor industry internship program.

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

Since fall 2021, the paid outdoor internship program has placed 67 students with 14 outdoor recreation industry employers in Taos, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Las Cruces. This participation level represents tremendous growth over the first cohort, which consisted of only three interns, [announced in September 2021](#).

“Outdoor Recreation is one of the target industries identified by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham to diversify the economy and create jobs,” Acting Economic Development Department Cabinet Secretary Mark Roper said. “This is exactly what the paid internship program does. We build career paths for today’s young stewards to become the outdoor careerists of tomorrow.”

The \$45,000 granted by ORD over the last three years has catalyzed over \$177,000 in funding for youth internships. This funding has been provided by participating outdoor recreation employers and the Public Education Department’s Summer Internship Program, designed to increase work-based learning in New Mexico. The interns worked hundreds of hours with the employers, learning about outdoor education, grassroots agriculture, land management and conservation, watershed health, and more.

“This innovative program serves as a bridge, linking aspiring young minds in New Mexico with rewarding careers within the state’s flourishing outdoor industry,” Karina Armijo, director of the Outdoor Recreation Division, stated. “In an era where our outdoor recreation sector is expanding rapidly, this initiative provides invaluable exposure for our youth and opens pathways into diverse fields such as environmental science, outdoor education, hospitality, conservation, and beyond.”

“The New Mexico Public Education Department (NM PED) continues to advocate for legislative funding for paid internships so local communities can provide mentorship and valuable work experiences in different industry settings, including those partnering with the Outdoor Recreation Division. State investment in the Summer Enrichment Internship Program (SEIP), as just one example, supports communities, districts, and

schools across the state to develop internship programs for local, high school-aged youth,” PED Staff & Special Projects Manager Marc Duske said. “Knowing the significant role that the outdoor recreation economy plays throughout our state, both in rural and urban settings, we salute the work of our ORD colleagues.”

The 14 outdoor employers participating since 2021 include:

- Audubon Southwest
- Center for NM Archeology
- Forest Stewards Guild
- Friends of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks
- Hands-On Heritage Summer Program
- Laguna Pueblo Environmental Program
- Los Poblanos Historic Inn and Organic Farm
- NM Wildlife Center
- Pueblo of Tesuque Farm
- Reunity Resources
- RiverSource
- Santa Fe Children’s Museum
- Taos Ski Valley Inc.
- Wander NM Food Tours

“My internship has helped me explore my interest in being a teacher and given me skills and experience in outdoor education,” Education Assistant Intern at the Santa Fe Children’s Museum Gustavo Gonzales Batres said. “It’s calming and relaxing to be learning outdoors. This has helped me maintain a positive outlook and be able to contribute to my community.”

“In multiple industries across the state, New Mexico has recognized the need to invest early in growing and retaining young talent,” FFE Workforce Learning Director Mike May said. “By providing support to employers to offer work-based learning opportunities, ORD is leading the way in creating onramps into the OREC [outdoor recreation] sector.”

The outdoor industry employs over 28,000 people in New Mexico and contributes \$2.4 billion annually to the state GDP, according to 2022 data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

The paid internship program was an outgrowth 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 programming like the youth programs funded by ORD’s Outdoor Equity Fund. Internships also offer 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 [NMOutside.com](https://www.nmoutside.com).

To participate in the outdoor industry internship program as a school or employer, please contact Lucia Duncan at lucia@futurefocusededucation.org.

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Julian Rodriguez at Reunity Resources Harvesting. Photo courtesy of Future Focused Education.



Razan Faidi (left) at River Source Doing Watershed Restoration. Photo courtesy of Future Focused Education.

The mission of the Outdoor Recreation Division, a division of the New Mexico Economic Development Department, is to increase equitable access to the outdoors for all New Mexicans, ensuring healthy outcomes, environmental stewardship, and economic prosperity. For more information, visit nmoutside.com or follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) at [@NMOutdoorRec](#).



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