

Oregon State University Extension Service

METRO CONNECTION

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Introducing our RECAN member Becky Bittner



Born and raised in Hollywood, Calif., Becky Bittner is a long way from home. Now, the lifelong outdoor lover spends her free time hiking, camping and rowing in the Pacific Northwest, and workdays sharing her passion for the local ecosystem with curious youth. As a knowledge exchange forester for the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Bittner helps scientists communicate their research. A large part of that work entails developing programs that will make emerging science accessible to Oregon, Washington and Alaska students, from kindergarten through high school.

Bittner partners with Oregon State University Extension and Bureau of Land Management to bring to life the Inner City Youth Institute, which offers programming to students interested in the natural sciences. Students participating in the programs are usually part of a natural resources or environmental sciences club at their schools, and are given the opportunity for safe outdoor educational experiences and mentorships with professionals in the field.

Summer experiences vary. Some years, students head to OSU's main campus in Corvallis. "A lot of these kids have never been to a college before," Bittner said. This summer, for example, youth will be heading up to Mount St. Helens where they will camp, learn from foresters, experience a full day of field work, and help build interpretive signage and trails. "One of these days, these kids will be voting," Bittner said. "So I hope this might help them make better informed choices about the environment."

Bittner got her start in forestry through a college internship program. While she always loved spending time in the outdoors as a child, Bittner was not aware of career options available in the natural sciences. During her senior year earning a business degree, Bittner snagged an internship with the local park service. That gave her a lightbulb moment. "This is what I want to do," she remembers thinking. She studied forestry at Oregon State University and went on to work in National Forests, including in the Siuslaw, Los Padres, Inyo and Coconino.

Now living in Vancouver, Wash., with her husband and three children, Bittner competes with the Vancouver Lake Rowing Club. "I love the team aspect – it takes everybody in the boat," she said. "And I love being on the water." She also spends as much time outdoors as possible. Their family spends a lot of time finding remote locations where they can camp, hike and get away from it all. "It's such a great escape," Bittner said. "It's untouched – the beauty."

Bittner has been a RECAN member for several years. She said it's helpful to learn about all the work going on with underserved communities, and finds the group useful for networking and spreading the word about her organization's work and events. "You learn something new every time you go," she said. "And everybody is so passionate."

