

FOUR VOICES ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY RESEARCH

“Mae Burnette uses her ability to intimately know the lands of her Reservation as she leads a project to restore dozens of springs and wetlands that were damaged after recent severe wildfires. I have had the pleasure to work closely with Mae for many years, as a coworker, student researcher, and now coresearcher. Mae has taught me to see springs as fountains of life for plants, animals, and people.

Despite their great ecological and cultural significance, springs have received relatively little attention in ecological studies and in post-wildfire rehabilitation plans. For these reasons, our research together focuses on restoring these places. Small, remote springs seem insignificant compared to a large river with great runs of salmon, but for many of these places, we know that we have made a difference. They have demonstrated their vitality to us and to others in the community.”

–Jonathan Long, former CFRF fellow

“Springs have life. Some of our springs have been damaged. When I go to them, they talk to me. We work to help them breathe again. If you have faith in them, they will show you that they have life within them. To work with Mother Nature, you listen, feel, smell, and respect with your heart. Listen to the spring as it is seeping from the ground. Feel the spring as it flows to see if it is cold or hot. Smell the spring to see if it is safe to drink. Respect the spring so it will nourish you back with respect. These lessons I learned from working on these projects. I have learned from my mistakes, and I now have more respect for nature. As an experienced fire fighter, I have learned that fire and water have much in common. They both have signs of life, and they both can destroy land, plants, animals, and people.

Work-ing with Jonathan has taught me about nature. If the land has a big cut, you do not need a band aid to fix it; you can restore it with its own kind—rocks and vegetation. I look forward to learning more with Jonathan in the future.”

–Mae Burnette, White Mountain Apache Tribe, has worked with two fellows supported by the CFRF Program (Jonathan Long 1999 and Candy Lupe 2001) and participated in two workshops sponsored by the Program.

One of the ways that we share our research with others in the community is through the annual youth ecological camps sponsored by the Tribe’s Watershed Program and organized by Candy Lupe, another former CFRF fellow. We work with the participants to restore some of the springs using native materials and techniques inspired by traditional erosion control practices. These are the words of one participant and his grandfather: “I went to camp this summer to learn about plants and water. We saw a lot of different places, including Soldier Spring. That place was special because there was a lot of water in a little stream. It was fun to help out. Some of the plants that I remember are buttercup, iris, strawberries, onion, pine, mullein, rush, and duckweed. I want to go to camp again next year to learn more.”

–Darius Q. Albert, a participant in the Tribe’s annual youth ecological camp

“Maybe he’ll remember what he did that day. He was really shocked to see a river flow from underneath the ground. Things like that he questioned—where does this water come from? Why are we saving these plants? In his photo album, he will look at his pictures and remember.”

–Wilbert Albert, Darius’ grandfather, reflecting on what his grandson took home from the camp

