



Camp Tillamook youth youth plant trees, grow skills

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At-risk youth from Camp Tillamook on the Oregon Coast are helping the environment and themselves by planting trees and protecting wetlands.

The Oregon Youth Authority (OYA), the state's juvenile justice agency, operates two facilities side-by-side in coastal Tillamook County. Camp Tillamook focuses on giving at-risk youth the skills they need to return to their home communities as productive, crime-free citizens after they serve their court-ordered sentences.

That's where the tree farm comes in.

Working with the non-profit Tillamook Estuaries Partnership, camp staff and youth have created one of the largest tree farms on the coast. Youth tend to many varieties of sapling trees and then replant them under staff supervision in nearby wetlands.

Denessa Martin, superintendent of OYA's facilities in Tillamook, said youth have planted tens of thousands of saplings in the area in the past several years.

"It's a win for our youth, for sustainability, for education, and it's helping the partnership," said Martin. "It all aligns with the youth being part of the solution for the community and the environment."

The youth say they're learning skills and traits to help them adjust to society after they leave OYA for home.



At-risk youth in the care of the Oregon Youth Authority tend to saplings at Camp Tillamook's tree farm.

"It's helping me learn the value of hard work and giving back to the community," said one youth after planting a tree in a reforestation area near the community of Garibaldi. "I also like working outside and staying busy."

In addition to growing and planting trees, OYA youth at Tillamook learn woodworking, gardening and computer repair skills. The Tillamook School District operates a high school next to the camp, and youth take education and vocational classes to improve their prospects after release.

"Education is vital to reformation," said Martin. "For these youth to succeed, they need to not only learn job skills, but also the value of hard work and helping their communities."