

# WildLink Summary

WildLink's mission is to give underserved teens a series of wilderness- and home-based experiences that will empower them to better their own lives as well as their communities; and to ensure that the diverse California citizenry is informed, invested and committed to the enduring resource of Wilderness.

WildLink is an innovative partnership between the Yosemite Institute, Yosemite and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks, the Sequoia Natural History Association and the National Forests of the Sierra. Since 2000, the WildLink Program has worked to open Sierra wilderness to the multi-cultural population living at its doorstep and demonstrate the relevance and benefits of Wilderness and public lands to all Americans. Every school year, 108 culturally diverse high school students participate in wilderness backpacking expeditions in the Sierra; these WildLink students in turn impact 1100 underserved Californians annually through Wilderness Ambassador projects.

WildLink does not simply send youth on a one-time wilderness expedition. Being a part of the program means that students benefit from a wide array of opportunities designed to provide leadership training and personal empowerment, giving them tools to change their own lives as well as their home communities. WildLink works with its participants months before and years after their expeditions. These opportunities include:

1. **Pre-trip visits** in which WildLink students and their families can meet WildLink staff and have their questions and concerns about this new wilderness experience addressed.
2. **Expeditions** in which 108 youth participate each year in hands on research projects, and challenge themselves emotionally, physically and academically in a completely new way.
3. **Wilderness Ambassador Program**, in which students impact 1100 underserved Californians annually through ambassador projects designed to empower youth as community leaders. These projects take on many different forms, including presentations to their classes and school boards, or local stewardship projects.
4. **WildLink Family Weekend**, in which youth return to Yosemite with their family members for a free weekend at our WildLink Family Weekend. Alumni relish the opportunity to take on the role of guide as they share their wilderness experiences with the people closest to them.
5. **Internships and career opportunities** with the WildLink/NPS Bridge program, as well as one-on-one mentoring from the WildLink staff for individuals who are motivated to seek positions in environmental education and park and forest management.
6. **Website outreach**, which includes a webpage of journal entries, photos and artwork for every student who has participated in our program.

Through these programs, WildLink students push themselves in a variety of ways: as athletes, by backpacking at high elevation in often challenging conditions, and summiting mountain peaks; and as writers and artists, by completing detailed field journals and writing about their experiences. They learn self-reliance and how to become leaders among their peers and in their communities, through our wilderness ambassador projects and youth leadership summit program. They also gain a lifelong connection to the recreational, spiritual, and emotional opportunities that can be found in wild places.

**View WildLink at <http://wildlink.wilderness.net>**

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A program of the Sierra Nevada Wilderness Education Project and the Yosemite Institute