

Congratulations to all the exemplary teachers who were honored in last week's "Above and Beyond" insert in the newspaper, and many thanks to the Helena Education Foundation for bringing that recognition to the community's attention! I can't think of any honor that would be more rewarding than having a student identify you as his or her most influential teacher.

While we on the Helena National Forest have numerous ties to these educators as instructors to our children as well as some of our younger employees having been in their classrooms, we have a particularly close relationship with Mr. Tom Pedersen, a science instructor at Capital High School. Tom has served as the field supervisor for the Youth Forest Monitoring Program the past few seasons and contributes significantly to the program's success. YFMP has been in place for the past eight summers, utilizing the skills of nine gifted high school students to conduct resource monitoring on the Helena National Forest. Over the years, students from Boulder, Clancy, Helena, Jefferson City, Montana City, Townsend, and Lincoln have participated.

Due to the substantial budget cuts we are facing this year, we found it impossible to make the financial contribution to YFMP's funding that we have provided in past years, putting the program's continued existence in jeopardy. We then asked the Lewis & Clark and Jefferson County Commissioners to consider funding the program with "Title 3" funds, which are Federal dollars distributed annually to counties with Federal land holdings. The terms of Title 3 disbursements specify that the money must be utilized for natural resource-related projects.

I'd like to personally thank Commissioners Murray, Varone, and Tinsley from L&C County, and Commissioners Notbohm, Cargill, and Lythgoe from Jefferson County for their far-sighted decision to generously allocate Title 3 funding to maintain this very worthwhile program. The students benefit from the experience, our monitoring program benefits, and our communities benefit from development of future leaders. These students emerge from the program with marketable skills and a deeper understanding of ecological processes.

Two other partners are key players in making the program a success. The College of Technology provides work space for the students, including access to computer labs and computer staff support. The Helena Forest Foundation provides financial assistance for supplies and equipment.

Thanks again to the Commissioners, congratulations and thanks to all of our teachers for their dedication and service, and thanks to all the people who make our communities a better place to live and raise families. We are all extremely fortunate to live in this beautiful part of Montana.

--Tom Clifford is the Supervisor of the Helena National Forest