



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

News Release

Central California District

For Immediate Release: June 30, 2017

CA-CC-17-28

Contact: Serena Baker, 916-941-3146, sbaker@blm.gov

BLM Congratulates Atwell Island Project-Work Based Learning Graduates

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. –The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) congratulates 13 Alpaugh and Allensworth students for graduating from the Atwell Island Project-Work Based Learning Program. Today's graduation ceremony, which is open to the public, will take place in the cafeteria at Alpaugh Unified School, 5313 Road 39, Alpaugh.

The month-long program, which takes place at Atwell Island, managed by the Bakersfield Field Office, provides high school juniors and seniors with hands-on experience in a land retirement and restoration project. After completing the program, graduates showcase their journey through presentations that highlight their experiences and the study. While the BLM provides the land and resources necessary for the students' research, the ideas and opinions presented by the students are their own independent thoughts.

“The BLM strives to be a good neighbor in the communities we serve, so the program provides a unique opportunity for these students to use public lands as a living classroom,” says Field Manager Gabriel Garcia, BLM Bakersfield Field Office. “The Atwell Island Project is in the heart of the Central Valley's agricultural industry, so these teens are seeing first-hand how returning public land to native vegetation would allow local farmers greater access to water.”

The Atwell Island Project encompasses roughly 8,000 acres on the northeast shore of Tulare Lake, which was once the largest fresh water lake west of the Mississippi River. It was acquired by the BLM through the Central Valley Project Improvement Act's land retirement program to restore native upland and wetland habitats benefiting wildlife, recreationists and the surrounding communities.

The Tulare Basin Wildlife Partners, a non-profit, charitable organization that supports land and water conservation, coordinated with the Tulare County Office of Education to enroll students from nearby communities into the program to study water quality, which is essential to the project's wetland restoration.

“The work-based program is an intermediary step between high school and college, allowing students to formulate essential questions, acquire and apply practical and critical knowledge, make real-world connections, and develop 21st Century skills to help them build a brighter future for themselves and their communities,” explains Francisco Escamilla, Atwell Island Project-Work Based Learning Program coordinator.

“It is extremely exciting to have youth who grew up next to Atwell Island take their summer break to learn about the natural resources and help build their communities as BLM and the Tulare Basin Wildlife Partnership celebrate a decade of working together to restore Atwell Island,” says Dezaraye Bagalayos, Tulare Basin Wildlife Partnership program coordinator. “The program works to engage youth in their own backyard to increase a sense of community and awareness of the natural and historical resources that surround them.”

Innovative initiatives and partnerships across federal and state agencies, like the Atwell Island Project-Work Based Learning Program, are producing tangible results. Tulare Basin Wildlife Partners’ work has significantly contributed to the success of wetland restoration and collaboration by connecting stakeholders who are interested in habitat and water-related enhancement projects, conducting environmental education and research, and organizing volunteer and youth opportunities.

As stewards, the BLM manages public lands for the benefit of current and future generations, supporting conservation as the agency pursues its multiple-use mission. The BLM believes connecting youth to public lands connects them to America’s natural and cultural heritage.

The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. In Fiscal Year 2015, the BLM generated \$4.1 billion in receipts from activities occurring on public lands.

-BLM-

Bakersfield Field Office, 3801 Pegasus Drive, Bakersfield, CA 93308