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Grant Aids STAR Academy Timber Crews

(Pierre) – Youth at the State Treatment and Rehabilitation (STAR) Academy near Custer have some new tools for use in a work therapy program.

A *Greenworks!* grant from the Project Learning Tree, an environmental education program for educators and students, is helping supply and outfit two timber crews, made up of youth from the Youth Challenge Center, a residential program for boys at the STAR Academy. The timber crews do advance digging of fire lines for prescribed burns and fire prevention in Custer State Park (CSP), forest floor maintenance, brush piling, slash burning, buffalo corral maintenance and fence mending as well as campground maintenance and construction under the supervision of the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks.

Penny Hanna, the Science and Health teacher at STAR Evergreen High School, applied for the *Greenworks!* grant as a wildfire management/education project after attending a forest ecology workshop at Outlaw Ranch that was sponsored by Project Learning Tree.

"I saw an opportunity to benefit the timber crews," Hanna said. "With new clothing and equipment, they would have more flexibility with what kinds of community projects they could do."

After consulting with STAR administrators and timber crew supervisors, Hanna compiled a list of clothing and equipment the crews use. The grant was awarded last December in the amount of 25-hundred dollars. The Custer City Council and Custer County Commission have each contributed five hundred dollars in matching funds with an additional two hundred and fifty dollars in matching funds from Golden West. The total amount available to the Youth Challenge Center timber crews is \$3,750. In addition, Rick Wheeler, owner/operator of French Creek Supply, offered to fund an appreciation meal for the timber crew at the completion of their current brush-stacking project in Custer State Park.

STAR Academy youth also participate in a variety of community service projects such as snow shoveling and yard work for the elderly and disabled, painting and maintenance for non-profit, city and county agencies, and highway cleanup both for the Department of Transportation and CSP.

"The projects benefit the community as well as the youth," said Youth Challenge Center Program Manager Jason Gillaspie. "It increases job knowledge and job skills. They can see their accomplishments. There's something concrete they have done. Years from now, they can bring people back and show them a fence line they helped mend, or a road they helped repair."

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STAR Academy youth fix a fence in Custer State Park.



STAR Academy youth tend to a burning slash pile.