

# 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Urban Youth Christmas Tree Harvest

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Major: Public Affairs

On a cold Saturday morning, the closed facility for the Gifford Pinchot National Forest was full of activity. Children and adults of all age groups filled a large conference room for one objective in mind- their Christmas tree. The 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Urban Youth Annual Christmas Tree Harvest hosted by the USDA Forest Service, Vancouver Housing Authority, Vancouver/Clark Parks and Recreation Teen Services,



Evergreen School District 112, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Vancouver Branch, and the Community African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church have teamed up since 1989 to treat a special group of kids with an unforgettable Christmas experience on December 2, 2006. This year broke a new record with 97 people in attendance.



The Urban Youth Annual Christmas Tree Harvest is spearheaded by Earl Ford, the NAACP President and USDA Forest Service Natural Resources and Planning Staff Officer. Ford and others at the Gifford Pinchot provides the opportunity every year that focuses on a diverse group of children and teenagers of all ages, backgrounds, and ethnicities to cut down their Christmas tree(s) in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest; but there is one catch. The catch is that the tree is not for free. Almost everyone who was able, willing, and allowed—children whom needed permission slips—had an assigned compensated job, unless they were there on a volunteer basis.



From registrars, drivers, cooks, kitchen helpers, team leaders, tree taggers, tree haulers, or anything else that needed to get done, Ford had a person for the job. When I saw this, I immediately thought of the cliché, “Nothing is for free.” Despite snowballs fights, campfires, and sleigh rides everywhere, the children never strayed far from their jobs. They learned how compliance, responsibility, and teamwork will pay off after a little hard work.

