

2014 SUMMARY REPORT

NORTH CASCADES INSTITUTE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL



PURPOSE Connect students to the natural world through a hands-on environmental education experience that explores the North Cascades ecosystem through reading, writing, science, mathematics, social studies, art and physical fitness.



Connection

to nature and fellow classmates through cooperative learning



Appreciation

for the value of National Parks and public lands as places to learn

Mountain School

North Cascades Institute's nationally recognized residential education program offered at the Environmental Learning Center in cooperation with North Cascades National Park. More than 26,000 students have participated since 1990.

Knowledge

of North Cascades ecosystems and the scientific process



Inspiration

to continue learning about and connecting with the natural world



FORMAT Students spend 3 to 5 days with their classmates, teachers and parent chaperones learning about the natural and cultural history of the mountains through one of two curricular tracks.

Ecosystems Explorations (Grades 4-6) offers hands-on lessons about topics including the wildlife of the North Cascades, biodiversity, food webs, glaciers and geology, watersheds, cultural history, ethnobotany and forest ecology. Students bond as they work, learn, reflect and play games together in a wilderness classroom.

Field Science and Leadership (Grades 6-12) offers firsthand experience with scientific equipment and field study techniques. Students complete a field investigation about forested or aquatic communities, present their findings and make conclusions about their research in a symposium-style discussion with their peers, teachers and National Park representatives.

Pre- and post-trip visits prepare students for the concepts they will learn and support the application of conservation principles into their daily lives. Many post-trip visits include stewardship work in public green spaces near schools.

AT A GLANCE

2,796

participants

54

participating schools

74%

of schools participating were public

89%

of schools received financial aid

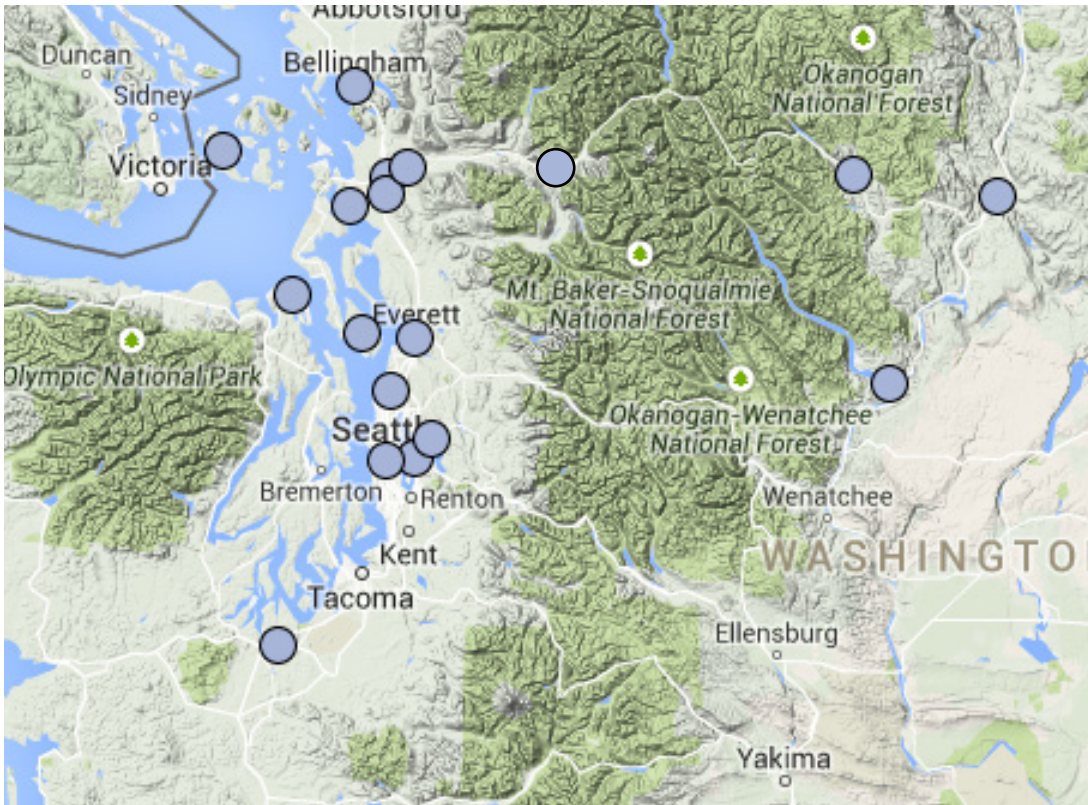
\$325

Cost per child to participate for 3-days, 2-nights

43%

of students had never visited a National Park before

PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES



- Anacortes
- Bellingham
- Bellevue
- Burlington
- Chelan
- Darrington
- Everett
- La Conner
- Lacey
- Lakewood
- Lynnwood
- Mount Vernon
- Omak
- Port Townsend
- Redmond
- San Juan Island
- Seattle
- Sedro-Woolley
- Whidbey Island
- Winthrop

STEWARDSHIP

A partnership with Bellingham Parks and Recreation created an opportunity for 765 students to engage in 14 hands-on stewardship projects within walking distance of their schools. Work to remove invasive species and maintain and rehabilitate trails benefitted the following public spaces:

Carl Cozier Community Forest, Connelly Creek Nature Area, Cordata School Campus, Cornwall Park, Euclid Park, Laurelwood Trail, North Ridge Park, Old Village Trail, Roosevelt Nature Trail, Squaticum Creek Park, St. Peter's Trail, Memorial Park and Fairhaven Park



NEW & NOTABLE

Two schools were rescheduled because of an avalanche that closed Highway 20 for one week in March. Following the Oso mudslide, the Institute invited all Darrington 2nd and 3rd graders for a special 1-day Mountain School experience at no cost. Darrington 5th graders will participate in the 3-day program for the first time in 2015!

The Institute became a Field Research Collaborator with UC Berkeley's Lawrence Hall of Science BEETLES Project (Best Environmental Education Teaching and Learning Expertise Sharing). Mountain School is our first program to benefit from this work to develop best practices in science teaching and learning for field instructors.

TEACHER EVALUATION

31% said their students had an increased appreciation for the environment and interest in their surroundings

18% noticed that students had an increased respect for each other and the local environment



A NEWFOUND APPRECIATION

From Associate Director, Jeff Giesen

One of my daughter's classmates is an 11-year-old who suffers from severe anxiety disorder. Their teachers were understandably concerned about how she would fare at Mountain School this year. She wears headphones, cries and growls for most of the school day. As a chaperone for their class, I sat with her at each dinner and watched, with amazement, her change over the next three days.

After learning outside all day, there were no tears at our first dinner and she wasn't wearing headphones. She did growl at me though and said she was "Wild Wolverine." I shared all of the ways I think wolverines are cool and – eventually – out came a smile as she relaxed and wolfed down her second helping of salad.

The next night I sat with her and her teacher. Guess who slept through the night without a problem? Guess who was engaged more than usual? Guess who looked at a frozen woodpecker? And guess who was on her second plate of salad again?

The last day of Mountain School is always hard for kids, and she was no exception. To help students transition and say goodbye, we have a tradition of making an unselfish wish as part of a closing circle. And when it was her turn, she was able to articulate her wish on her own – more than most kids could do. It reminded me that Mountain School brings out the best in kids, giving them a chance to show a side of themselves that they may often hide away—which is so critical for connection and learning.



FROM TEACHERS & PARENTS



“These students have the opportunity to explore and learn about their place in the natural world and the concept of sustainability. I can’t think of a more important mission.”

– Overlake School Teacher (Redmond, WA)



“These kids will remember that they did this and that they did this together for a long time. They bonded and got to experience “school” in a different way.”

– Little Mountain Elementary School Chaperone (Mount Vernon, WA)



“The students love learning by being in an outdoor classroom, where they can move and play and sit and think and explore all at the same time and in the same place.”

– Happy Valley Elementary School Chaperone (Bellingham, WA)

PARTNERS Mountain School is made possible with generous support from individuals and organizations, including:



The Burning Foundation, Skagit Community Foundation, Whatcom Community Foundation and the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community.



More information:
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