This 2018 summer, our ELK’sters logged more camping hours than EVER before in our 22 year history! Kicking the summer off with an adventure out to Golden Gate State Park, ELK youth and families (with little ones as young as three years old), enjoyed a full day of fishing at Dude’s Fishing Hole. Although the fish proved to be hiding that day, participants caught crawdads and learned all about lake ecosystems before tucking in at Rifleman Phillips Group Campground. Next, our little adventurers journeyed to the Great Sand Dunes for four days of fun. Youth hiked “High Dune” and stood atop it’s 699 foot high peak. A highlight of this trip was a night hike through the dunes, which ended with some good ol’ fashioned stargazing. The Great Sand Dunes is known for its dark skies that give visitors a unique ability to see the stars. Following, the middle of the summer brought ELK’s high school aged Leadership Corps students to Rocky Mountain National Park where they had the opportunity to meet and network with professionals in the outdoor field, including National Park Service Bouldering Rangers and Geoff Elliott from the Rocky Mountain Conservancy. Youth helped National Park Service Rangers build a fence along a trail before watching the sunset at an overlook along Trail Ridge Road. For many students, this was their first time being above the treeline! Our last two camping trips of the summer were all about family. For the second year in a row, ELK youth and families traveled to Estes Park’s YMCA of the Rockies where they enjoyed archery, riflery, and low-ropes team building activities. They saved just enough energy to wake at five the next morning to enjoy the sunrise and some fishing. Finally, youth and families waved goodbye to Summer with a camping trip at the Aurora Reservoir for the first time ever! Families participated in a night hike where coyotes could be heard yelping in the distance. Day activities included archery, fishing, and kayaking. Kayaking was a first and a favorite for many of our participants. This fun-filled summer was definitely one for the books!
The Montbello Open Space and ELK Education and Community Center will protect and nurture our greatest assets - our children, families, and our environment. The benefits of time spent outdoors have been confirmed by science in studies and research and at ELK we get to witness the transformation in our young people and families as they experience the outdoors in so many ways. Every experience we provide at ELK has doses of physical activity, lessons in the natural sciences, and most importantly, how to care for our public lands.

It has been our goal to tap into the natural and innate curiosity about the living world. We do this by simply allowing our students to investigate, encouraging them to ask questions by engaging them in new, meaningful, inclusive, and culturally relevant opportunities. We encourage them to be life-long learners, care for one another, and reach their fullest potential.

ELK's fullest potential will soon be realized. A transformation is taking place in the Montbello community with work at the Montbello Open Space. This vacant lot is being restored into a short grass prairie ecosystem with an outdoor classroom, walking paths, nature play areas, a climbing boulder, and green infrastructure. Our partners in this endeavor, The Trust for Public Land and Denver Parks and Recreation, continue to provide guidance and support as we complete the Open Space in 2019.

ELK has already activated parts of the Open Space to provide the community with unparalleled science education and outdoor experiences. Our educational walks include exploring the prairie ecology through the stone art monuments and learning about the night sky in the outdoor classroom. We’ve started a climbing club with McClone Elementary using our climbing boulder, built and funded by The North Face. The climbing world aligns with many of ELK’s visions for our youth - trust, commitment, solving problems, goal setting, and the fact that sometimes you fail to go straight up - but the ELK family and community still supports you and they are there to catch you and overcome any challenges.

As we finish up the Open Space, our next challenge is the education and community center which will be built on one acre of the property that once completed, will house ELK’s education programs and community space. We continue to fundraise and we hope to “summit” and secure the necessary funding to complete the project. Join me in the climb to meet this challenge.

For Our Youth,

—Loretta Pineda, Executive Director
**Great Outdoors Colorado Inspire Initiative**

For the past three years, ELK has been honored to be one of 13 partners within the Go Wild Northeast Metro Coalition, as part of the Great Outdoors Colorado Inspire Initiative. "The Inspire Initiative aims to excite Coloradans, particularly young people, to appreciate, enjoy, learn about, and steward our great outdoors. This initiative asks the local community coalitions to work with neighborhoods to develop parks, trails, and programs to get youth and their families into our local community parks, our National Wildlife Refuge and in the future, the Colorado mountains." This year, our Go Wild Northeast Metro Coalition hosted outdoor events and activities for the whole family at partner organizations such as Barr Lake, the Aurora Reservoir, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, the Urban Farm, and more. We look forward to this unique collaboration exposing increasing numbers of youth and families to the outdoors and careers in the STEM fields.

**Upcoming Programs**

**Check online for more information**

**Friday, January 4th | Ice Skating**

Ages: 10+ | Times: 10am-1pm | Location: Meet at DCIS

Sign-Up: RSVP with Amy Wright at Awright@elkkids.org

Let’s strap on those skates for some ice skating at the Denver International Airport! Once again, Denver Plaza at the airport will be home to a FREE 34’ X 60’ ice skating rink! We will even have some yummy hot chocolate to help keep us warm! This program supports Outdoor Recreation and Leadership Development.

**Monday, January 21st**

Martin Luther King Jr. Marade (March and Parade!)

Ages: Everyone is invited! | Time: Meet at 10am

Location: City Park

Sign-Up: RSVP with Amy Wright at Awright@elkkids.org

Come celebrate with us at the largest Martin Luther King Jr. march and rally in the United States. ELK staff and students will be meeting in the southeast section of City Park and we’ll march together to Civic Center Park, where a large rally commemorates the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. Details: 9am pick up at DCIS-M or 10am meet up at City Park. This program supports Volunteerism.

**2018 Year-Long Partnerships**

We are very grateful for the year-long partnerships we have had throughout 2018 with two incredible organizations. For 2018, Environmental Learning for Kids was chosen as Denver Beer Co.’s Charity Partner of the Year. This partnership included the proceeds from several Denver Beer Co. events such as a Spring silent disco party, a Summer beer festival, and their Summer Patio Workout Series, in addition to their hosting of this year’s ELK Untapped. We even received multiple beer donations for ELK events, AND had the opportunity to participate in the creation of our very own ELK brew! We were also selected as one of three beneficiaries of the Denver Petroleum Club’s 2018 Mentor Program. As part of this partnership, ELK received one-third of the proceeds from two events – a Summer BBQ and a Golf Tournament where we also hosted ELK informational booths. We are so thankful for awesome partnerships like these and we look forward to many more in 2019!
We're pleased to announce a Matching Challenge Opportunity for year-end donations! The Friedman Family Foundation has graciously pledged $2,500 as a challenge opportunity to offer supporters like you the potential to effectively double the impact of your gift! Gifts made online or via mail from now through the end of the 2018 calendar year will be eligible to have their gift doubled. Don’t hesitate to join others during this season of giving back to our community by making a gift today at www.elkkids.org or mail gifts directly to ELK at P.O. Box 21679, Denver, CO 80221.

ELK is honored to have advocates in the Montbello community like ELK’s Family Tree Member and ELK Parent, Juan Urias. What hasn’t Juan done for ELK? Over the past several years Juan has participated in ELK events, volunteered, donated time and services to maintain ELK vehicles, and been a staunch advocate for ELK’s work by recruiting kids from his neighborhood and even providing transportation. Juan’s dedication to ELK is deep as he is also a member of ELK’s Family Tree as a monthly donor to ELK. Speaking on his monthly commitment Juan says, “My contribution to ELK is a way for me give back. My kids have the opportunity to see and go places that I never had the chance to experience as a kid. I’ve seen all the kids involved with ELK experiencing their first trip outdoors and it gives me a sense of fulfillment. It makes me feel that I can plant my seed in this organization so it can grow bigger and better for future generations.” We couldn’t say it better ourselves, and Juan’s commitment to ELK inspires us to continue to reach under-represented communities of youth in Colorado with science education, career exploration, and outdoor experiences. Join Juan in supporting ELK and become an ELK’s Family Tree member today at www.ELKKids.org.