ELK Alternative Spring Break 2018

On March 24th, 2018, 10 ELK youth and 4 ELK staff members with adventure on their minds and a thirst to “wander where the wifi is weak,” piled into two vans and set off on the trip of a lifetime. This year’s ELK Alternative Spring Break trip started off with a bang as the team arrived in beautiful Moab, UT where they hiked the Windows Arches Trail. The next day was spent exploring Flagstaff, AZ and winding down with a game of sunset volleyball, ELK youth and staff spent day three touring the campus of Northern Arizona University’s School of Forestry. On this tour, youth learned how to use, extract, and study tree rings to study fire ecology and climate change and toured the University’s Ancient DNA Lab. The crew then participated in a service project that required them to “mimic fire” to preserve an Aspen Grove in Coconino County. Day four found everyone at Rogers Lake Natural Area learning additional forms of preservative study, where they were surprised to find a fresh ELK carcass, courtesy of a hungry mountain lion. Luckily, our ELKster’s were having a MUCH better day than our namesake!

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And then day five arrived and it was all about the Grand Canyon. And it was beautiful, mesmerizing, and life-changing. After taking as many mental pictures as possible, the crew went down Bright Angel Trail for a 3 mile round-trip hike. This part of the trip was especially inspirational as the youth supported one another in completing this physically demanding adventure and an overwhelming sense of accomplishment was certainly felt back at the top. The next day included a trip to Elden Pueblo Heritage Site where the team utilized GPS tracking to map and create a trail following specific botanical plants of interest. Participants had the opportunity to explore an unexcavated pueblo where they discovered pieces of pottery from the ancestral Hopi.

The last day arrived all too quickly. The trip ended on a high note as they headed back through Moab for a sunset hummer tour, before completing their final reflections together as a family.
From education and empowerment to mentorship and coaching, ELK is there in an inclusive, exciting way as our youth engage in a love of outdoors, environment, math, science, and more. Time and time again our students and alumni tell us how much of a role ELK plays in college, family, jobs, and beyond. It truly inspires, educates, and transforms the individual and we are so grateful for your support of all we do.

We continue to engage new partners in our Inspire, Educate and Transform community campaign project to build the ELK Education and Community Center and Montbello Open Space. Our latest partnerships come from the outdoor recreation industry. The project has attracted national interest as access to urban parks fuels the movement to ensure that all people have access to the benefits of local parks and recreation. The Outdoor Recreation Association, a force for the industry in recreation and trade policy, sustainable business innovation and increasing outdoor participation, came together in Denver for the Outdoor Retailer Show this Winter. ELK engaged with OIA, the Colorado Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry, The North Face, and BOGS Footwear along with other retailers and non-profits to show our commitment to equity, inclusion, and diversity in the outdoors.

Restoration and construction activities at the Open Space are currently underway. The Montbello Open Space and Education Center will serve as a home for Environmental Learning for Kids and as the far northeast Denver community’s epicenter and trailhead within the urban environment; fostering science, stewardship, and outdoor recreational activities. The Open Space features “nature play areas” – fallen logs, stumps, geologic discovery, and climbing areas. Aimed at celebrating community and making the sport of climbing more accessible and inclusive, The North Face launched “Walls Are Meant for Climbing.” The program was built on the idea that climbing brings everyone together to test themselves, build trust, and strengthen communities. Given this initiative, The North Face is supporting a climbing boulder for the Montbello Open Space Park through the partnership with The Trust for Public Land. This is the first community to receive support for a climbing initiative.

The achievement of actual construction having started on this project is no small feat for ELK. We continue to fundraise for the ELK Education and Community Center which will be the hub and provide expanded environmental and STEM education to the community. To learn more about how you can help us “climb” this summit and secure the necessary funding, please contact me at lpineda@elkkids.org or at 303-257-2501.

P.S. Stay-tuned as the Summer Outdoor Retailer Show returns to Denver July 23-27th. We’ll have special activities for all to enjoy.

For Our Youth,

— Loretta Pineda, Executive Director
Over the past two years, I’ve had the honor of seeing the Learning Environmental Activities for Families (LEAF) Program grow immensely. LEAF allows us to reach community members in unique ways by creating positive outdoor experiences for youth as young as infants and their grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, guardians, and other family members. These programs strengthen family bonds while achieving our goals of outdoor recreation, science education, and career exploration. ELK hosts a LEAF program one to two times per month, where we visit Colorado’s beautiful State Parks, go camping, visit outdoor resources in our backyard, host workshops in the community, and more.

- Julia Whitten, Education Coordinator/AmeriCorps VISTA

Stay connected with LEAF programming, community resources, and community events for families by subscribing to the bi-annual LEAF newsletter. Contact Julia Whitten at jwhitten@elkkids.org or Amy Wright at awright@elkkids.org. Julia’s term at ELK closes August 18th.

Special Note: Julia Whitten will end her second year of service with the AmeriCorps VISTA program in August. Julia has been accepted into the Environmental Science & Policy graduate program at Duke University. Julia has been a catalyst in the community working with our families. We will miss her and she will always be a part of the ELK family. We expect her to return “home” to Colorado.

We are happy to announce Christian Giles as our ELK 2018 Tim Crisman Scholarship winner! The Tim Crisman Memorial Scholarship Fund was established by Environmental Learning for Kids and Jane Crisman in 2011 to celebrate the life of Tim through transforming the lives of ELK youth. Here’s what Christian had to say about this honor: “Acquiring the Tim Crisman scholarship has allowed me the opportunity to further my education. Through the ELK program I’ve been able to experience various jobs in the outdoors and as a result, I want to pursue a career in environmental education. With this passion for the outdoors I feel honored to receive this award and will use it to give back not only to my ELK family, but even greater, to my Montbello community. Through my education I will be able to inspire other kids like me, and give them a chance most of us don’t have. Thanks to ELK I’m even closer to making this dream a reality. I can’t wait for what my future has in store for me, and I’m excited to make a difference.”

- Christian Giles

“A man who has come full circle. His glass is full and his cup runneth over.” – Rosemary Valentine

In February, Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK) was saddened by the passing of Jake “Pop” Gilmore. Jake, a veteran, joined the U.S. Air Force at the age of 17 in 1952. Jake’s military tour of duty included Japan (during the Korean War), Thailand and Vietnam. Jake earned many accolades, awards, and certificates during his military career for honorable service. He also was employed as a Bailiff for the U.S. Federal District Court serving under the Honorable Judge Richard P. Matsch. Jake returned to school attending Metropolitan State University and earned a B.S. degree in 1984. His hobbies included fishing, traveling, watching Netflix and most of all, spending time with his family and friends. Everyone shares the same remembrance of an amazing and caring man who looked after anyone that came into his life and it was evident that he always treated people like his own family. He was a dear friend and supporter of ELK youth and families. We will miss his infectious smile, kind presence, and love of fishing.

Pop Gilmore, father of ELK co-founder Scott Gilmore, leaves a legacy as gifts made in Pop’s memory will continue connecting kids with the outdoors, science education, and lasting mentor relationships. To continue to honor his legacy gifts may be made in his memory at http://coloradogives.org/InMemoryofPopsGilmore.
The Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK) organization is having a GREAT year! We have already been honored to receive the following awards, and we very much look forward to achieving more throughout the year:

- Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals’ 2018 Project Excellence Award for our Urban Ranger youth employment program
- Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education’s Outstanding Youth Environmental Leadership Award for ELK’s Student Coordinator, Yesica Chavez
- Denver Beer Co.’s 2018 Charity Partner
- Denver Petroleum Club’s 2018 Partner

For the fourth year in a row, ELK is proud to participate in the Colfax Marathon. Last year we boasted 50 runners, an ELK youth team, and were able to raise over $7,000! This year we have an additional ELK youth team and hope to have an even larger event. Help make this fun annual event a true success and support the team of ELK runners by making a gift at the event page at: https://www.coloradogives.org/ColfaxMarathonELK2018. All proceeds directly benefit ELK programs.