



CONTACT: Kelsey Stamm
(W) 406.721.8784
(C) 406.531.9137
kelsey@ecologyproject.org

Ecology Project International Awarded \$10,000 for Galapagos Conservation: Sea World Bush Gardens Funds Youth Conservation Education and Habitat Restoration

July 7, 2010 Missoula, MT – Non-profit Ecology Project International (EPI) received \$10,000 from Sea World & Busch Gardens Conservation Fund for their Galapagos Island Ecology Program. The Galapagos Islands, located on the equator 600 miles west of Ecuador’s coast, are a World Heritage Site famous for their endemic flora and fauna. EPI’s program involves local Galapagos youth in hands-on science education and conservation, helping researchers collect data on the giant Galapagos tortoise and restore native habitat by removing invasive plants.

EPI’s program was among 95 projects selected for funding by the Conservation Fund, which allocated just over \$1,000,000 overall. This is the second time EPI has received a grant for their work in Galapagos from Sea World & Busch Gardens, most recently in 2006.

Julie Osborn, EPI’s Advancement Director and Co-Founder, says, “We are thrilled to receive the generous support of Sea World and Busch Gardens to enable local residents’ involvement in hands-on conservation in Galapagos.”

Since 2006, 400 Galapagos high school students have participated in EPI’s program, partnered with 400 students from the US. Both local and international youth volunteer with researchers at the Galapagos National Park’s tortoise rearing center, monitoring hatchlings in efforts to rehabilitate the species in the wild. Tortoise eggs and hatchlings cannot survive in the wild due to introduced predators. EPI’s program is the first involvement of local youth in the Park’s captive breeding program.

The explosion of invasive plants in Galapagos is destroying native habitat and poses a significant threat to the survival of the giant tortoise and other native flora and fauna. In addition to working with the hatchlings, youth help remove invasive species like blackberry and passion fruit plants, as well as learning about the challenges of living and working within a unique and fragile ecosystem.

“Students return from an EPI course with more confidence, more knowledge, and more respect for their surroundings,” says Marco Hoyos, Director of Environmental Education of Galapagos National Park. “As a result, they are able to appreciate the importance of protecting the environment where they live.”

Many Galapagos youth have never visited the National Park, even though it covers 97% of the archipelago. Surrounded by urban sites, they often do not have the opportunity to see the wildlife that makes Galapagos incredibly distinct from the rest of the world, or be actively involved in conservation of the islands.

EPI's mission is to change that reality, and give youth the opportunity to work alongside scientists on real conservation research projects, and learn how they can make a difference in the world, both at home and abroad.

Carolina Jácome Ávila, a 2009 EPI participant from Galapagos, explained how EPI's program impacted her and her fellow students: "We learned how to love our island of Santa Cruz and to take care of the animals and plants on the island."

To date, more than 6,000 people have participated in EPI's programs in the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador; Costa Rica; the Sea of Cortez in Mexico; and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in the U.S. In all of these programs, EPI reaches out to local youth, to immerse them in the outdoors, and apply science to real-world projects with researchers to aid conservation efforts. Inspired by the natural wonders of the world, and convinced by their experience that they can make a difference in the world, students are better equipped to make informed decisions about natural resources important to their community's economic and environmental health.

For more information about EPI's work in Montana and internationally fostering conservation for the next generation, visit <http://www.ecologyproject.org>, call (406) 721-8784, or email info@ecologyproject.org.

###