

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**COSTA RICA YOUTH EXPLORE CONSERVATION IN GYE**  
ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL FACILITATES LOCAL MONTANA EXCHANGE

AUGUST 4, 2009 YELLOWSTONE – A GROUP OF HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH FROM COSTA RICA HAVE ARRIVED IN MONTANA, READY TO EXPLORE. THEY BEGIN THEIR JOURNEY IN PARADISE VALLEY, AND MOVE THROUGH YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK AND NEIGHBORING TOWNS. THESE YOUTH ARE NOT SIMPLY TOURISTS OF THE GYE, BUT STUDENTS TAKING ON CONSERVATION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE USFS GARDINER DISTRICT THROUGH ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL (EPI).

EPI PARTNERS SCIENTISTS WITH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT SEVERAL ECOLOGICALLY FRAGILE ENVIRONMENTS WORLDWIDE INCLUDING COSTA RICA, THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS, MEXICO, AND YELLOWSTONE, WITH THE MISSION TO IMPROVE AND INSPIRE SCIENCE EDUCATION AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS WORLDWIDE THROUGH FIELD-BASED STUDENT-SCIENTIST PARTNERSHIPS. SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 2000, THIS IS THE VERY FIRST TIME EPI HAS FACILITATED AN EXCHANGE WITH THEIR STUDENTS FROM LATIN AMERICA IN ITS YELLOWSTONE ECOLOGY PROGRAM.

WHILE IN THE GYE, THESE STUDENTS, AS WELL AS LOCAL MONTANA YOUTH, WILL AID BIOLOGISTS AND RESEARCHERS IN CONSERVATION PROJECTS. SPECIFICALLY, EPI PARTICIPANTS ASSIST WITH SEVERAL USFS RESEARCH PROJECTS, SUCH AS MONITORING BEARS AND WOLVES, MEASURING ASPEN AND WHITEBARK PINE TREES, AND BUILDING AND REPAIRING WOLVERINE TRAPS. DURING THESE PROJECTS, YOUTH LEARN ABOUT SCIENCE THROUGH HANDS-ON WORK, EXPLORE THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE AREA, AND COME TO UNDERSTAND ECOLOGICAL TIES BETWEEN ANIMALS, PLANTS, LANDSCAPES, AND PEOPLE OF THE AREA.

IN ADDITION TO WORKING ON VARIOUS RESEARCH PROJECTS WITH THE USFS, STUDENTS JOIN CONSERVATION EFFORTS AT THE SUN RANCH INSTITUTE, REMOVING FENCE LINE TO RESTORE MIGRATION CORRIDORS FOR ELK AND OTHER CREATURES. THE SUN RANCH OCCUPIES 26,000 ACRES OF RANCH LAND IN THE MADISON VALLEY WEST OF YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK AND IS IMPORTANT HABITAT FOR MIGRATING WILDLIFE. THE SUN RANCH ATTEMPTS TO CONTINUE RANCHING PRACTICES WHILE MINIMIZING NEGATIVE IMPACT ON WILDLIFE AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

WHILE IN MONTANA, THE COSTA RICA STUDENTS WILL ALSO HAVE THE CHANCE TO EXPERIENCE TRUE MONTANA SUMMER FUN - WHITEWATER RAFTING IN THE ALBERTON GORGE AND PARTAKING IN GOOD OL' BARBEQUES. STUDENTS FROM GARDINER AND COOKE CITY WILL PARTICIPATE IN SIMILAR ACTIVITIES, AND FINISH THEIR TRIP WITH AN EXCHANGE DAY WITH THEIR COSTA RICA PEERS. DURING THIS TIME, STUDENTS WILL LEARN ABOUT EACH OTHER'S CULTURE AND SHARE WITH EACH OTHER WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED. MISSOULA FAMILIES WILL OPEN THEIR HOMES TO HOST THE COSTA RICA STUDENTS FOR TWO NIGHTS BEFORE THEIR RETURN TO COSTA RICA.

FOR COSTA RICA STUDENTS, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THEY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO TRAVEL ABROAD AND DISCOVER ANIMALS AND PLANTS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE IN THEIR TROPICAL RAINFORESTS. MOST OF THESE STUDENTS COME FROM RURAL TOWNS AND HAVE LIMITED CHANCES TO TRAVEL, DUE TO LACK OF FINANCIAL MEANS. THIS IS ALSO A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM; MOST STUDENTS LEARN ENTIRELY FROM COPYING INFORMATION FROM A BOARD, DURING A TEACHER'S LECTURE, OR DIRECTLY FROM A TEXTBOOK.

MONTANA STUDENTS REALIZE THAT THEIR BACKYARD IS ACTUALLY PRETTY UNIQUE, AND BY LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE ECOLOGY OF THE AREA AND SEEING HOW THEIR INTERNATIONAL PEERS ARE EXCITED BY IT, BECOME CONNECTED TO THE LAND AND ANIMALS IN A WAY THEY NEVER HAVE BEFORE. THIS MOTIVATES THEM TO CONSIDER THEIR IMPACTS WHERE THEY LIVE. PARTICIPANTS ARE ALSO EXPOSED TO MANY TYPES OF LAND MANAGERS OF THE GYE: PUBLIC AGENCIES, PRIVATE LAND OWNERS, AND CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS. THIS HELPS THEM ACQUIRE A BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF THE MANY CONSERVATION ISSUES IN THE GYE, AND HOPEFULLY, BE THE FUTURE STEWARDS OF THE LAND.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT EPI'S WORK IN MONTANA AND ABROAD, GO TO [WWW.ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG](http://WWW.ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG), CALL (406) 721-8784, OR EMAIL EPI AT [INFO@ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG](mailto:INFO@ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG).

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