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Ecology Project International Receives \$20,000 Grant from National Forest Foundation:

To fund youth conservation education in Gallatin National Forest

January 20, 2009 Missoula– Ecology Project International (EPI) will expand its international youth education program on the ecology of the Gallatin National Forest in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), thanks to a recent \$20,000 grant from the National Forest Foundation (NFF).

The NFF headquarters are based in Missoula, Montana. In commenting about EPI's program, NFF President William Possiel says "I have no doubt that significant benefit will come to the Gallatin National Forest and nearby communities."

The non-profit partner of the federal United States Forest Service, the NFF funded EPI's Yellowstone Ecology Program for the first time in the program's five year history. The Yellowstone Ecology Program engages young people in environmental stewardship and conservation projects in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, such as conducting grizzly bear DNA studies, monitoring bluebirds, and collecting data on infestation of whitebark pine trees.

During summer 2009, 13 students from Costa Rica joined the team; the NFF grant will allow international student group from Ecuador's Galapagos Islands to participate.

To date, EPI has worked with approximately 300 students from Montana, and more than 100 participants from around the US in the Yellowstone Ecology Program. Students are chosen to participate in EPI programs based on their motivation and demonstrated interest, rather than only classroom performance or financial resources.

In recent years, schools are increasingly cutting funding for field trips and parents may not be financially able to make up the difference, so young people have fewer learning experiences in the field, a potential danger for the future land management of sensitive areas like the GYE.

Last summer, EPI students learned about the threat of losing whitebark pine stands to blister rust and pine beetle infestations. Whitebark pines are an important source of food for grizzly bears, taken off the endangered species list in 2007, so their uncertain future could result in a serious imbalance within the entire ecosystem.

While students learn about problems and issues, they also are empowered through knowledge and applicable scientific skills to become part of the solution.

“EPI has opened my eyes to the vastness of the world and the human impact upon it. It has shown me the problems of the world as well as the tools to fix it” says Missoula Hellgate student Raven Dryden, who participated in the Yellowstone Ecology program in 2009.

EPI’s unique approach to environmental education enhances conservation through the creation of a scientifically literate public with direct experience in nature, and a populace that is better equipped to make informed decisions about natural resources important to their community’s economic and environmental health. To date, more than 6,000 people have participated in EPI’s programs in Costa Rica, the Galapagos Islands, Mexico, and Montana.

EPI has been offering experiential field courses since 2000, and launched the Yellowstone Ecology Program in 2005. The 2009 program season involved 68 individuals, a growth rate of 183% from 2008, demonstrating the great interest in, and need for, environmental education. EPI plans to involve more Montana students in 2010.

To learn more about EPI’s work in the U.S. and internationally, visit www.ecologyproject.org, call (406) 721-8784, or email EPI at info@ecologyproject.org.

See the [published article](#) in the Billings Gazette.

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