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Ecology Project International Chosen as ‘Cause of the Week’ on About.com:

Featured on Web Site’s Popular Non-Profit Blog

April 5, 2010, Missoula, MT – Ecology Project International (EPI) was chosen from among numerous entries as “Cause of the Week” and featured on the blog of non-profit guru Joanne Fritz. Fritz is the non-profit expert for About.com, part of the New York Times Company.

Commenting about EPI’s “beautiful website,” Fritz says, “It is inspiring to see young people experience and understand nature.”

Each week, Fritz chooses a cause or organization to feature in her weekly blog.

Missoula-based EPI currently operates experiential conservation education programs in Costa Rica, Ecuador’s Galapagos Islands, Mexico’s Sea of Cortez and in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem of Montana and Wyoming. During these courses, students learn science in a hands-on setting in some of the most unique places in the world, and contribute to conservation projects with scientists to address issues threatening keystone species and native habitat.

Most EPI participants are local Costa Ricans, Mexicans, and Ecuadorians, joined by others drawn from around the world to collaborate with their peers in cultural activities and science research. EPI is the only organization that partners local youth with researchers to collaborate on conservation projects.

Students take part in real-world scientific efforts to improve conservation in areas unique in terms of biodiversity – sites that are frequented by thousands of international tourists each year. With EPI and research teams, local youth protect and monitor Leatherback sea turtles; restore native habitat for the giant Galapagos tortoise; collect data on whales and other marine mammals to create a conservation zone in Mexico; and help with land management and wildlife monitoring in Yellowstone. Teachers of the students learn experiential education methods, to enhance scientific learning in their classrooms.

The idea behind EPI was born when EPI co-founders Scott Pankratz and Julie Osborn were living in Costa Rica during the 1990s. They realized that despite the ample presence of international research teams and prolific scientific studies, many critical habitats and species continued to decline. The gulf between local people and the scientific community was extensive: eggs from the critically endangered Leatherback sea turtle were sold at local markets and piles of trash washed up on the beach. Most researchers they interacted with were foreigners, and few spoke any Spanish.

Scott had recently finished a graduate program in experiential education at the Teton Science School in Wyoming, and Julie had completed her Master’s in biology at Stanford University. They combined their knowledge of education and science in 1998 and launched the first EPI

course in 2000, involving 61 local Costa Rica youth and their teachers. EPI will celebrate its 10th anniversary this year.

To date, more than 6,000 people have participated in EPI's programs. EPI's innovative approach to environmental education immerses youth in the outdoors, during which they apply science to real-world projects with scientists to aid conservation efforts. Inspired by the natural wonders of the world, and empowered by their experience that they can make a difference in the world, students become better equipped to make informed decisions about natural resources important to their community's economic and environmental health.

You may see Fritz' blog about EPI on the about.com Web site at <http://nonprofit.about.com/b/2010/03/25/cause-of-the-week-ecology-project-international.htm?nl=1>.

For more information about EPI's work in Missoula and abroad, visit www.ecologyproject.org, call (406) 721-8784, or email info@ecologyproject.org.

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