ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL

ANNUAL REPORT

Creating more vibrant, resilient, and sustainable communities



OUR MISSION: OURVISION: We envision a diverse movement building communities that cherish and restore the

We inspire youth with nature and empower them with science, fostering tomorrow's leaders.

We envision a diverse movement building ecosystems that sustain them.

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COMMITING TO OUR VALUES in 2023

Dear EPI Community,

Welcome to Ecology Project International's journey through FY 2023–guided by our core values of Protecting and restoring the natural world, Commitment to local communities, Equity and inclusion, and Personal growth for collective change.

From completing a comprehensive compensation review to ensure equity for our staff, to embarking on the search for our next executive director, our commitment to equity and inclusion shone brightly in 2023.

In Yellowstone, we engaged with Indigenous worldviews and values, embodying our commitment to local communities as we worked to reconstruct narratives around bison management. In Costa Rica, our dedication to protecting and restoring the natural world was evident as we celebrated the record success of our conservation efforts at Pacuare Reserve, achieving a 0% illegal nest harvesting rate. Across all EPI's programs, from Belize to Baja, we witnessed personal growth for collective change as participants and communities alike were empowered to make positive environmental impacts.

As our students traversed the landscapes of Yellowstone, Costa Rica, Belize, Baja California Sur, and the Galapagos Islands, our courses resonated with these values, painting a portrait of purpose and impact.

As we reflect on these chapters of our story, we extend our deepest gratitude to our dedicated staff, passionate partners, and unwavering supporters, who have journeyed alongside us, fueling our collective purpose with their boundless dedication and inspiration.

With warmth and gratitude,

ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL

LEADERSHIP EAQUERSHIP



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MARLU ROBLEDO Mexico Program Manager



EYLEN ZUÑIGA Pacuare Reserve Manager



DAVE SCHIMELPFENIG Program Operations Manager



NOTABLE VOID SEASON



BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR DESERT & COASTAL ECOLOGY

EPI Mexico's annual "My Sustainable Community" festival is a collaborative educational event for people of all ages to enjoy. In 2023, 13 EPI Alumni helped recruit, organize, and coordinate presenters and attendees to experience an afternoon celebrating scientific and environmental education with 217 attendees from La Paz. EPI Mexico's field programs hosted 300 local Mexican participants and 124 U.S. visiting participants who engaged in sea turtle, grey whale, and local fish population research.



BELIZE TROPICAL ECOLOGY

Students on course in Belize see firsthand how plastic pollution reaches the healthiest coral reef barrier in the world. While engaged in beach cleanups, they document the specific items they find, establishing a tangible, eye-opening connection between everyday items and their ultimate destination. As participants of the Nurdle Patrol, a citizen science project run by researchers at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute, EPI students get to better understand the plastic issue from its origins. The Tobacco Caye Marine Station (TCMS) in Tobacco Caye, Belize is our partner for these service-based activities. EPI students engage in coral reef monitoring to assess the health and threats of the Mesoamerican coral reef barrier.

COSTA RICA SEA TURTLE ECOLOGY

In 2023, EPI Costa Rica engaged 377 local Costa Rican students from fifteen high schools in field trips to Pacuare Reserve and onsite conservation workshops at their schools to examine how climate change affects biodiversity, explore the forest ecosystem, and brainstorm powerful changes they can make in their lives to positively impact the environment. The Reserve's researchers celebrated a massive success, with a record 0% illegal nest harvesting rate for the first time in the history of conservation and research at Pacuare Reserve.



GALAPAGOS

The Galapagos Islands are globally renowned as a living laboratory with abundant opportunities for scientific research and conservation work. EPI proudly partners with the Ecuadorian nonprofit ECOS and the Molas Eco Club to immerse our students and teachers in an ecosystem unlike any other, while empowering them to engage in research themselves. In 2023, EPI participants removed 1,420 invasive caracols, or giant African snails, to help maintain the endemic biodiversity the Galapagos Islands are known for. Additionally, 46 giant tortoises were monitored to help the Galapagos National Park better understand and safeguard the species.



YELLOWSTONE WILDLIFE & WINTER ECOLOGY

Engaging with Indigenous worldviews and values, 72 teachers from around the U.S. dedicated seven days to workshops focused on bison management in Yellowstone. The Buffalo Nations Program wove ecological insights with the historical impact of federal policies on Indigenous communities, giving participants an understanding of the current context for buffalo management. Despite challenging histories, the program aimed at reconstructing narratives in classrooms and reigniting connections between Native communities, Yellowstone, and bison.

As for conservation research and service, EPI students contributed a collective 8,765 hours enhancing pronghorn migration, removing invasive species, monitoring amphibian health, and understanding bison populations.



EPI& ECOS ANEW CHAPTER

EMPOWERING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS



Since its inception in 2003, EPI Galapagos has been dedicated to fostering environmental stewardship through hands-on education in the Galapagos Islands. Over the past two decades, EPI's field-based educational program has inspired thousands of local students, educators, and community members to actively engage in the conservation of these unique islands.

In 2023, EPI announced a significant evolution in its operations in the Galapagos, aiming to deepen local support and funding while maintaining its commitment to world-class education programs. This transformation introduced a new chapter in the organization's journey, marked by the establishment of ECOS (Education for Sustainable Communities), a new Ecuadorian nonprofit organization.

WHAT IS ECOS?

ECOS emerged as a natural progression of EPI Galapagos, embodying a shared vision to enhance local impact on sustainable development education for the youth of the



A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDERS

Galapagos Islands. With the transition, EPI Galapagos staff seamlessly integrated into ECOS, ensuring continuity in program delivery and educational excellence.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE ECOS/EPI ALLIANCE? Despite the organizational shift, participants enjoy the same

exceptional service and quality that have defined EPI's programs in the Galapagos. Through a collaborative agreement, EPI and ECOS have maintained course itineraries, curriculum standards, instructor expertise, and provider networks, preserving the essence of the EPI Galapagos experience.

Moreover, ECOS has expanded the horizon for local engagement and impact. With newfound flexibility in funding and program design, ECOS has diversified its initiatives to address broader sustainability challenges and reach a wider audience of Galapagos youth.



OUR VISION HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO BE IN SERVICE TO LOCAL COMMUNTY LEADERSHIP. WE STARTED EPI TO FACILITATE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND SCIENTISTS SO THAT EDUCATION AND CONSERVATION CAN MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER WITH LOCAL INSPIRATION, GUIDANCE, AND LEADERSHIP. THE EPI GALAPAGOS PROGRAM HAS TAKEN THIS IMPERATIVE TO THE HIGHEST LEVEL. WITH THIS STEP, OUR ORGANIZATION, ALONG WITH THE WORK WE STARTED 20 YEARS AGO, CONTINUES TO EVOLVE.

-JULIE OSBORN, EPI CO-FOUNDER

LOOKING AHEAD: TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The alliance between ECOS and EPI represents a strategic alignment of missions, combining expertise in environmental education with an even deeper focus on local empowerment. As ECOS takes the helm of EPI's Galapagos operations, it embarks on a journey to amplify the organization's legacy of conservation education while fostering sustainable development across the archipelago.

In this new chapter, ECOS and EPI stand united in our commitment to nurturing the next generation of environmental leaders in the Galapagos Islands, ensuring a legacy of stewardship amidst the unparalleled biodiversity of the Galapagos.

GLOBAL PARTICIPATION

In 2023, Ecology Project International (EPI) expanded its collaborative efforts with educators, community members, and Alumni, bolstering our capacity to address challenges and invigorate our programs. Our unwavering commitment to environmental education was evident as we conducted various activities, including field courses, workshops, eco club events, community service projects, and enriching field trips.

These initiatives collectively engaged 4,719 individuals, with over 3,479 being local participants, showcasing the depth of our impact within communities. Notably, our programs saw remarkable outcomes, exemplified by an 11% enhancement in environmental literacy among students. As part of our ongoing evaluation, we measured significant growth in ecological knowledge (11%), dispositions (7%), competencies (15%), and social emotional skills (9%) among our core program participants.

EPI has reached a total of 117,502 participants through field and community-based programs to date!



PARTICIPANTS BY PROGRAM



WHY EPI? I LOVE EPI BECAUSE WHEN YOU'RE IN THE FIELD, YOU'RE A PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER. IT'S NOT JUST YOU ISOLATED IN YOUR WORLD. IT'S TRULY A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EXPERIENCE. EPI HAS GIVEN ME SO MANY MOMENTS IN NATURE WITH WILDLIFE THAT I COULDN'T HAVE HAD ANY OTHER WAY, -ZOE KUHN, 3-TIIME EPI ALUM (GA, YEL, BZ)



Thanks to our advocates in 2023, EPI engaged 4,719 participants in field-based programs & increased their knowledge of environmental action strategies by

GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

Alumni Activities: Opportunities to increase environmental leadership roles for alumni within their community/school/workplace—most participants in these activities will have participated in an EPI core field program

Community Service: Volunteer service work taking place in the community at large, led by EPI staff and/or alumni

Core Programs: EPI's flagship multi-day courses, partnering students and scientists in the field at every program site

Eco Club Meetings: A gathering of EPI alumni and other local youth to collaborate or plan future alumni/community activities

Eco Tour: Field courses or short trips for adults and families

Field Trip: Short (1-3 days) alumni excursions into the field to participate in research and observation

Festivals & Symposiums: Gatherings coordinated by EPI staff and volunteers that attract large numbers of participants, families, teachers, school administrators, partners, and community members

Outreach: Activities intended to reach a broader local audience who haven't yet or can't participate in our core programs

Presentations & Events: Educational opportunities for the public or a specific group of EPI constituents led by EPI alumni, staff, and scientific partners

Workshops: Short-term, curriculum-based activities that take place in the field or other locations outside of a school

EXPLORING WILDERNESS & BUILDING COMMUNITIES

HOW EPI SHAPES ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS BEYOND BORDERS





Spending a week off-the-grid on the picturesque desert island of Isla Espiritu Santo impacts anyone lucky enough to participate in an EPI Mexico Coastal Ecology course. While students often describe the course as remarkable, it was life-changing for local EPI Mexico Alumna Salma Macias. It deepened her understanding of the local ecology while uniquely connecting her to her community and classmates. As many EPI Alumni can attest, camping without the distractions of phones can create lasting friendships, unforgettable memories, and curiosities about the natural world.

After her initial EPI course, Salma attended a sea turtle conservation workshop led by a local EPI Alumni ecoclub, the Californios Verdes. The way the Californios Verdes student

leaders guided the participants through hands-on sea turtle work while speaking passionately about environmental concerns in their community prompted Salma to join their club. Salma became an active participant, meeting with the group for two hours a week to plan activities like beach clean-ups and field trips.

"The Californios Verdes know that even though we are young, we have powerful voices to solve problems."

After years of local environmental leadership, Salma took her inspiration further by enrolling in a field-based environmental education graduate program at the Teton Science School (TSS). Salma arrived in the tiny mountain town of Kelly, Wyoming, in the Fall of 2022 to begin her graduate program, leaving her beloved beaches behind for record-shattering snowfall. In the winter of 2023, she found a way to connect her graduate studies back to where it all began: EPI!

Salma instructed three courses for EPI Yellowstone to fulfill practicum requirements for TSS. While she found it challenging to translate her knowledge of marine biology to the terrestrial wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the number of skills from EPI Mexico that did translate helped her take the lead. No matter the ecosystem you're in or the languageyouspeak, everyone can find meaning in place-based education. Salma's enthusiasm, leadership skills, and group management abilities learned from EPI Mexico enabled her to be an incredible asset to the EPI Yellowstone team!



AJOURNEYIN Environmental advocacy

EPI ALUMNA MAKES HISTORY IN HISTORIC CLIMATE TRIAL



Growing up amidst the stunning landscapes of Missoula, Montana, Grace Gibson-Snyder's connection to nature started as early as she can remember. The Missoula Valley boasts whitewater rivers, rugged mountain terrain, and access to pristine wilderness unlike any other metropolitan area in the United States. Scars of ancient Glacial Lake Missoula's waterlines are visible along hillsides in town, serving as a visual reminder of the area's geologic history. Grace recalls the environment as a constant backdrop in her daily life, fostering a deep-rooted appreciation for the natural world. While her exposure to the outdoors was vast and ever-present in Missoula, it wasn't until Grace was



more than two thousand miles from home that she first dove into handson environmental education. In 2017, Grace joined her 8th-grade class on a Marine Ecology course with EPI Mexico. The coursework, instructor leadership, and cultural exchange with local students opened her eyes to the interconnectedness of ecosystems and theurgencyofenvironmentalstewardship.

"EPI genuinely solidified the scientific side of my interest in environmental ethics, which was really grounding for me getting into the policy and humanities side of environmentalism," said Grace in an interview with EPI's Alumni Program Coordinator.

Not long after Grace returned to Montana, her leadership role in environmental advocacy began. She joined the Students Against Violating the Environment (SAVE) Club in high school, where she was introduced to a quest speaker from Our Children's Trust. Our Children's Trust uses legal and scientific expertise so youth can tell their stories in court, in the media, and on the world stage. After talking with her parents and exchanging logistic emails, 16-year-old Grace was poised to join 15 other young people in suing the State of Montana for violating their right to a clean and healthful environment. The case finally went to court in 2023 in what is now known as the historic Held vs. State of Montana climate trial. The judge ruled that the use and promotion of fossil

fuels while ignoring climate change violates the plaintiffs' constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment.

What did winning the trial means to her? "So much. On a legal level, it is an affirmation of our constitutional rights and the role the government has in protecting its people and Montana's environment. On a cultural level, it reminds me of how tied to the environment Montanans are, and that Montanans will always come together to protect the environment."

Reflecting on her journey, Grace emphasizes the pivotal role of her experiences with EPI in shaping her environmental ethic. While the scientific aspect was captivating, it was the human connections forged during her time in Mexico that left a lasting mark. These connections deepened her understanding of environmental issues while empowering her to navigate the world with a newfound confidence.

As Grace continues her studies in Global Affairs and International Relations with a focus on Environmental Policy at Yale University, her journey stands as a testament to the power of youth activism and the enduring legacy of field-based education.

EPI is incredibly proud to be one of the first steps in Grace's lifelong path of environmental advocacy and cannot wait to see what history she makes next.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

TOTAL REVENUE \$5,187,285

TOTAL EXPENSES **\$5,865,128**

Assets

Current Assets	\$1,407,385
Fixed Assets (Property & Equipment)	\$1,572,182
Other Assets (Long-term grants & Pledes)	\$277,593
TOTAL ASSETS	\$3,257,160
Liabilities & Net Assets	
Accounts Payable	\$22,710
Credit Cards	\$14,406
Other Current Liabilities	\$1,589,632
COVID-19 Vouchers	\$71,574
Long-term Liabilities	\$285,736
Equity	\$1,344,660
TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	\$3,257,160

Figures as of December 31, 2023

THE INSPIRATION AND GUIDANCE EPI PROVIDED ME WITH IN YELLOWSTONE WAS UNFORGETTABLE, AND I THINK IT'S DEMONSTRATED BY HOW TWO YEARS LATER I'VE NOW BEEN ABLE TO BRING BACK WHAT I LEARNED IN MONTANA TO MAKE CHANGE IN MY OWN COMMUNITY.

-CAMERON, 2023 ALUMNI LEADERSHIP AWARD WINNER

FY2023 REVENUE SOURCES

During the fiscal year of 2023, EPI saw a rise in revenue generated from tuition fees. This increase underscores the robustness of our primary income sources, with student and educator tuition contributing to 69% of our funding, while donations and other revenue streams remained stable.

Grant funding remained crucial, affirming our proficiency in cultivating varied funding channels. Additionally, revenue generated from Eco-visitors at Pacuare Reserve continued to flourish. Our dedication to maintaining a well-rounded mix of earned income, donations, and grants underscores our commitment to the enduring sustainability of our environmental education and conservation mission. Tuition 69% Grants 13% Donations 7% Pacuare Income 8% Other Income 1% Rental Income 2%



EXPENSES

EPI allocated 88% of its funds towards program-related expenses, surpassing the five-year average of 80% and surpassing our pre-pandemic records. Every expenditure, including essential mission support, plays a role in crafting impactful and transformative programs. Our expenses are classified into four main categories:

- **Direct Program Expenses:** The budget for each program is tailored based on factors like the number of participants, activities, and course duration.
- Core Mission Administrative Support: Encompassing Finance, HR, Systems, and Board of Directors oversight.
- Core Mission Fundraising Support: Facilitating EPI's historic goal that 70% or more of our participants are underserved students.
- Core Mission Communications & Marketing Support: Empowering EPI to establish and sustain relationships with stakeholders, including donors, volunteers, beneficiaries, and the broader community.



Our achievements and impact thrive on a sturdy foundation! Our investments in support services are essential for long-term success, ensuring safety and excellence in our field programs.

PACUARE RESERVE

MILESTONES AND DISCOVERIES AT PACUARE RESERVE

At Pacuare Reserve, the conservation and research efforts are centered around the iconic leatherback sea turtles. These majestic creatures face numerous threats throughout their nesting cycle, from predation to habitat loss. However, with the dedicated efforts of research assistants, staff, and volunteers, significant strides have been made in mitigating these challenges.



Hybrid Hatchlings & Other Discoveries In 2023, the team at Pacuare Reserve achieved a groundbreaking milestone: the registration of live *hybrid* hatchlings from three different species - green, loggerhead, and hawksbill sea turtles. This remarkable discovery, a first in the Reserve's recorded history, underscores the importance of the conservation efforts in preserving genetic diversity among sea turtle populations. Currently, the hybrid DNA is undergoing analysis in a laboratory in Mexico, while the hatchlings have been safely released into the sea.

In addition to the hybrid hatchlings, another extraordinary find was made - a two-headed leatherback embryo. This rare occurrence highlights the complexities of sea turtle biology and the need for continued research and conservation efforts. More than 100 malformed sea turtle embryos were also transferred to a partner veterinary clinic for further analysis, providing valuable insights into the health and well-being of these endangered species.

Hatchery Construction & Success Rates

Volunteers played a crucial role in constructing a hatchery at the beginning of the year, providing safe and controlled environments for sea turtle nests that are otherwise vulnerable to threats on the beach. Rising temperatures, erosion, and predation pose significant risks to nests outside the hatchery, making this infrastructure essential for the survival of sea turtles.

The efforts bore fruit as 2023 marked the first time in the history of conservation and research at Pacuare Reserve where researchers recorded a 0% illegal nest harvesting rate. This remarkable success underscores the effectiveness of the modifications made each year, reaffirming the importance and impact of ongoing conservation initiatives.

Pacuare Reserve continues to be a beacon of hope for leatherback sea turtles and the broader marine ecosystem. Through dedicated research, community engagement, and conservation efforts, we strive to ensure a brighter future for these magnificent creatures and the habitats they call home.





LEATHERBACK HATCHING SUCCESS % BY METHOD

LIFELONG CONNECTIONS IN COSTA RICA

REFLECTIONS FROM THE INAUGURAL EPI ALUMNI REUNION IN COSTA RICA

What do you get when you bring a group of strangers together to do manual labor on the edge of the Costa Rican jungle? A week full of gutbusting laughter, unbelievable wildlife observations, and a beach prepped for leatherback sea turtles to lay their eggs.

The inaugural Alumni Reunion to Pacuare Reserve brought previous EPI participants together from a wide array of educational backgrounds, interests, hometowns, and ages, yet the group clicked like they had been digging holes on the beach together for years. At one moment, a master's student in mechanical engineering was drinking out of a coconut alongside a Nashville-based singer-songwriter. The next, an 18-yearold from Moscow, Idaho was discussing climate policy with a 7th-grade science

teacher from rural New York. No matter whowaspairedtogether, the conversation and laughter flowed as naturally as the Pacuare River into the Caribbean Sea.

"This was an amazing experience for me and I needed it. I've been feeling like I'm falling into the routine "daily grind" of life and so I truly needed an opportunity to meet new people, learn about a new culture, volunteer to help amazing animals, and get out of my comfort zone." -Ellie Metzger, 2023 Alumni Reunion participant

The objective of the volunteer experience was to place large location markers (think mile marker, but driftwood) in the sand every 25 meters along the 6-kilometer beach. By having precise points of reference, Research Assistants are better





able to report where they discover sea turtle nest locations and relocate them to thesafetyofthehatcherywithgreaterease.

The 2023 EPI Alumni Reunion was a success for conservation efforts and lifelong personal connections alike. Pausing day-to-day chaos can be meaningful for everyone, whether that looks like disconnecting from the fast pace of work, school, or the digital world. Based on the overwhelmingly positive feedback from the first Reunion, we hope to make it an annual tradition for all EPI participants to look forward to.



THANKS TO THE SUPPORTERS WHO MADE THIS POSSIBLE!



YOUR 2023 GIFTS

Leatherbacks (\$100,000+)

FOUNDATION/CORPORATE Alumbra Innovations Foundation Bridgemill Foundation Edward L. Anderson Jr. Foundation

IN-KIND Google

Bison (\$75,000-\$99,999)

FOUNDATION/CORPORATE USAID & Fhi360

Whale Sharks (\$50,000-\$74,999)

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IN-KIND

Google

Agami Heron (\$10,000-\$49,999)

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INDIVIDUAL

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IN-KIND Box

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INDIVIDUAL

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Our 2023 supporter lists include gifts made during the calendar year: January 1 - December 31, 2023.

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Pronghorn (\$250-\$999)

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IN-KIND

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Green Sea Turtle (up to \$249)

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Our heartfelt appreciation goes out to the members of our Leadership Circle who have generously designated EPI as a beneficiary in their wills. Their unwavering dedication to our planet serves as a shining example of commitment and inspires hope for a better tomorrow.

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IT TAKES VERY LITTLE TO FIND DESPAIR. BUT WE ARE NOW MORE AWARE THAN EVER ABOUT WHAT WE COULD LOSE, WHICH IS CAUSING MANY TO TAKE ACTION. THE MOST WONDERFUL THING IS SEEING PEOPLE FIGHT TO MAKE THE WORLD A LITTLE BETTER IN ANY WAY THEY CAN. THE PEOPLE I SAW AT PACUARE RESERVE WERE DOING JUST THAT. -KADEN, 2023 PACUARE RESERVE VISITOR ATINU

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