

## Students help restore Pacific Northwest national parks

Nearly 500 students from inner-city Seattle rolled up their sleeves in summer 2004 to help restore natural ecosystems in North Cascades and Mount Rainier National Parks, and San Juan Island National Historical Park. They collected seeds for the North Cascades greenhouse, where native plants are raised for park restoration projects, and they also removed 7 square meters of a non-native geranium. At Mount Rainier, students removed nonnative plants, brushed trails, and prepared plants for the greenhouse. At San Juan Island they planted grasses and monitored their growth, and also mapped the extent of nonnative blackberry in the park. In addition to their hard work, students learned about the



ecosystems they were restoring through fun, interactive lessons prepared and presented by staff of the nonprofit partner of the National Park Service, EarthCorps, and the North Coast and Cascades Research Learning Network. Through evaluations, students reported that they appreciated the opportunity to make a difference and learn about their national parks. One student asked, “Can we do this in Seattle?”

That question has led Seattle City Parks Community Centers to consider how they can develop this program in students’ home communities. Seattle Parks teen leaders have been working with the national park partner, EarthCorps, to develop restoration and stewardship projects in the city parks.

Thanks to funding from the Public Land Corps, this project evolved into a multilayered partnership among the National Park Service, EarthCorps, the City of Seattle, and numerous other nonprofit youth groups. EarthCorps, a nonprofit Seattle-based

restoration group, has been leading this program for the past three years in partnership with the resource education and natural resources staff at the national parks. EarthCorps has extensive experience leading volunteer groups in restoration work, experience that has been key to the success of this program.

For most of the participants and many of the adult leaders, this visit to a national park was their first. Because this project integrates students’ experiences in national parks and their home communities, it provides a good model for developing a network of local and national program partners who promote stewardship values and understanding.

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