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Three Environmental Education Organizations Team up to Get Washington's Children Outside

More than 10,000 low income children throughout Western Washington will connect more closely with the natural world around them thanks to a \$200,000 state grant awarded jointly to three of the state's leading nonprofit environmental education organizations – IslandWood on Bainbridge Island, North Cascades Institute in Sedro-Woolley and Olympic Park Institute in Port Angeles.

“No Child Left Inside” is a first-time grant program administered by the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission which announced today that \$1.5 million in grants has been awarded to education and recreation programs.

“Olympic Park Institute, North Cascades Institute and IslandWood are leading providers of residential outdoor education in our state,” says Ben Klasky, executive director of IslandWood. “We are honored that State Parks and Recreation has recognized and funded our work in providing high quality outdoor education for Washington's kids.”

The program is an effort to help get children back outside to learn about and enjoy nature. Washington's children are as “plugged in” as the rest of the nation's children. They are spending more time indoors, on computers, watching television, and less time playing and learning outside. Outdoor education and recreation programs can help turn this trend around. These programs help reduce stress of our over-scheduled children, increase their attention spans, reduce absenteeism, create positive behavioral changes and increase overall test scores. Outdoor education programs help children gain the experiences and benefits of connecting with the great outdoors.

Frank Galloway, a former State Parks ranger, is manager for No Child Left Inside and also supervises Inside-Out, a State Parks youth and family camping program with a focus on cultural diversity. Galloway says he's seen first-hand the magic that happens for kids when they make a connection with nature. “You literally see the light go on in their eyes,” Galloway says. “Learning about our environment and getting out in nature is very powerful for anyone – but especially for kids. It can provide meaning for their lives and give them a sense of confidence and self-reliance that branches out to other areas of their lives and helps them be successful. Programs like this also ensure that we are raising environmental stewards for the future.”

The cooperative grant will help fund environmental education programs and subsidize participation in residential, multi-day environmental education programs by schools with a high number of low income, diverse students. In addition, it will help fund outdoor field trips, after school programs and other experiences in nature for low-income residents of the communities served by the partner organizations.

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About North Cascades Institute

North Cascades Institute is a 22-year old nonprofit whose mission is to conserve and restore Northwest environments through education. Founded in 1986, it seeks to inspire closer relationships with nature through direct experiences in the natural world. It offers programs for people of all ages including natural history seminars for adults, Mountain School (a three-day residential program for elementary, middle and high school students), North Cascades Wild for underserved urban youth, a graduate program, Speakers Series and other unique programs. In 2006, the Institute opened North Cascades Environmental Learning Center, a wilderness field campus on Diablo Lake. For more information, call (360) 856-5700 or visit <http://www.ncascades.org/>

About Olympic Park Institute

Founded in 1987, Olympic Park Institute's mission is to teach science and environmental education in nature's classroom to inspire a personal connection to the natural world and responsible actions to sustain it. Located on Lake Crescent's shore, Olympic Park Institute offers field science education for school groups, conference facilities and adult education programs. Olympic Park Institute was named an exemplary organization by the Environmental Education Association of Washington and is a campus of Yosemite National Institutes, recipient of the 2004 California Governor's Award for Environmental and Economic Leadership in Children's Education. For more information, call (360) 928-3720 or visit <http://www.OlympicParkInstitute.org>

About IslandWood

Located on Bainbridge Island, WA, IslandWood is a unique 255-acre outdoor learning center designed to provide exceptional learning experiences and inspire lifelong environmental and community stewardship. Through its flagship School Overnight Program, IslandWood's experienced teaching naturalists and educators combine scientific inquiry, technology and the arts to help Puget Sound-area students understand cultural and biological diversity. IslandWood also offers community programs for adults, children and families; volunteer opportunities; a speaker's series and other community events open to the public. For more information visit www.islandwood.com

About Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission manages a diverse system of more than 120 parks and several recreation programs, including long-distance trails, boating safety, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. The 95-year-old park system will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2013.