



TRAIL Mix

SPRING/SUMMER
2023

ELK NEWSLETTER

SPRING BREAK-ING — AT GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK

Traditionally, the saying goes “time sure flies when you’re having fun.” We’d be hard pressed to find too many folks that would consider these last few years to be “fun.” But somehow, time did still fly. And before we knew it, four long years had gone by since our last Spring Break trip here at Environmental Learning for Kids. This year, we rectified that drought, and in many ways, made up for it.

After attempting to pack, realizing we had way too many bags, and then packing again - but this time Tetris-style, we set off with seven ELK staff members and fifteen students in tow. Day one was dedicated to a scenic drive that also served to give folks time to chat and get to know one another through mouthfuls of chips and M&M’s. That evening, we broke bread (well, pizza) and a lot of nervousness as students got to feel more comfortable around one another.

Day two included a trip to the Fort Garland Museum and Cultural Center. Students received a very educational tour and had the opportunity to build their own adobe bricks. From there, the crew visited Colorado Gators Reptile Park. Did you know that alligators can weigh more

than 1,000 lbs!? We didn’t, but we do now! This evening was concluded with a relaxing dip in the nearby hot springs.

Day three was spent at Zapata Ranch. In partnership with The Nature Conservancy, our crew assisted with an on-site trail clean-up that really brought the team together as we saw first-hand, the positive impact we can have when we team up. Following, we toured the Ranch and viewed the mesmerizing buffalo-filled landscapes.

Day four was the crown jewel, and what everyone had been waiting for - a visit to Great Sand Dunes National Park! It was everything we hoped for and more. The sun perfectly warmed the sand at our feet. We rented boards and raced one another to the bottom. We also learned about how this natural wonder was originally formed, and how it became such an iconic landscape within our beautiful state. The laughter and joy went on as long as the grains of sand.

As one student shared, “What I love about going on ELK trips is that everyone is willing to share. It feels as if you’re going on trips with your cousins, instead of an organization.”

Same, fam. Same.



ELK STUDENTS AT GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK

Keep up to date on all our upcoming events and programs by subscribing to our newsletter at www.ELKKids.org. You can also read more fascinating stories about our ongoing adventures by following our blog at <https://elkkids.medium.com/>.

A message from Juan Pérez Sáez, Executive Director

IT'S ALL IN THE STRATEGY



Alan Lakein once said, "Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now." At Environmental Learning for Kids, the young people we serve are our present and future. And it was in service to those highly important individuals that we recently created our 2023-2025 Strategic Plan.

Our approach to this process was as always with the reverberating question of - what do our youth, families, and community need from us to effectively thrive? To discover as much, input was collected from ELK stakeholders through

interviews, focus groups, and the solicitation of community input. From there, we were able to put a picture together of where the largest needs are, where gap areas could be found, and what areas we're most effective in and should continue to stay the course.

We produced the following 2023-2025 strategic vision: By 2026, ELK will build upon its success and relationships to partner with new neighborhoods and further develop the Education Center into a community anchor.

This process also included revisiting our mission, vision, and values. While our vision of "a world in which all people are caretakers of themselves, each other, and the natural world" is still a sentiment that we hold in high esteem, our mission and values have been updated to reflect who we are now, and where we're going.

Mission: Cultivating a diverse community of leaders and environmental stewards by increasing outdoor equity.

While we are centering our future and looking with pride at our successes, ELK's newly updated values are:

- **Justice, equity, diversity & inclusion**
- **Social-emotional learning**
- **Accessibility to nature**
- **Life-long experiential learning**

We look forward to our reinvigorated journey with you by our side.

In unity,

– Juan Pérez Sáez | Executive Director

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Pride Fishing Fun

Sunday, June 11th from 10am-2pm

Join ELK for some Pride Fishing Fun!! Come learn how to fish and all the best ways to catch a big one at Waterton Canyon's Lake Lehow! Participate in some fun Pride activities for the chance to win great outdoor prizes or tickets to local activities! All fishing supplies and lunch will be provided.

RSVP with Sam Gilmore at Sgilmore@elkkids.org

Prairie Science

Wednesday, June 14th from 9:30am-1:30pm

Join ELK in partnership with Sand Creek Regional Greenway and the Bluff Lake Nature Center to become a prairie scientist for the day! We will learn about prairie ecosystems, who calls them home and why they are important. Students will take a trip to Bluff Lake to count prairie dogs in their colony and learn about animal populations in the wild. Lunch and transportation provided!

RSVP with Sam Gilmore at Sgilmore@elkkids.org



SCHOOL PROGRAMS

The entry point for Environmental Learning for Kids is truly School Programs. Through ELK School Programs, we are able to meet students where they are, providing hands-on, experiential learning that fills the cup of knowledge and quenches the thirst of curiosity. So far this spring, we have traveled throughout Montbello, Thornton, and Commerce City hosting "Owl Pellet Dissection" and "Who Polluted the South Platte?" programs with some of our school and library partners. Our after-school students at Academy 360 are staying busy focusing on gardening activities such as painting/placing pet rocks, molding seed balls into unicorns and bunnies, and constructing terrariums with recycled 2-liter bottles!



SCHOOL PROGRAM DIG KIT DISSECTION



TERRARIUM TIME!

ELK's WORK IS RECOGNIZED

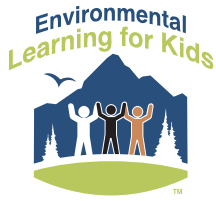
Five Star Stem Partner of the Year Award from Adams12 Five Star Schools

We are proud to announce that our Education Coordinator for School-Based Programs, Jake Preston, was recently selected as the recipient of the Five Star Stem Partner of the Year Award from Adams12 Five Star Schools. We are so delighted with his efforts, and his overwhelming impact on far northeast students.



ELK is a 2023 Starburst Award Winner!

The Colorado Lottery recently announced their 2023 Starburst Awardees - eight unique and exceptional projects that used lottery dollars to enrich communities across our great state. We are very honored to be highlighted for our efforts in our far northeast community.



P.O. Box 21679
Denver, CO 80221

BECOME A MONTHLY ELK FAMILY TREE DONOR!

Join the ELK family by becoming an ELK Family Tree donor! Your monthly donation can help transform the lives of far northeast Denver students, encouraging them to explore our beautiful outdoors and consider careers in STEM. A gift of just \$10 a month can provide a student with their first experience fishing or visiting our Rocky Mountains!

To become a monthly donor please visit www.elkkids.org, then:

- Select “Monthly” on the dropdown menu under “Frequency”

Thank you for your continued support of ELK! Be on the lookout for exciting updates for our members of the ELK Family Tree program.



Save the date for our largest fundraiser of the year, ELK 'n Eggs!

Join us at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science on September 29th, 2023, from 7:30-9:00 am as we celebrate the joy, love, and community that encompasses ELK.

Contact Sean Cortes at scortes@elkkids.org to RSVP for this always fun and always free event. Sponsorship opportunities are available. Contact Sean for more information.