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Local Area Students Benefit from Parks as Classrooms This School Year

THE NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION'S SUPPORT HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR STUDENTS, MANY FROM UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES, TO ACCESS EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PARKS

KENNESAW, GA (March 9, 2020) Since 2011, the National Park Foundation (NPF) has engaged more than one million students in educational programs connecting them with national parks across the country, including Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park , Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, and Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park through the Open Outdoors for Kids Focus City program.

The metro Atlanta partnership for Open OutDoors for Kids is one of NPF's focus cities. A program within a program, the Open OutDoors for Kids focus cities are provided with expanded investments to create successful models for how parks, schools, and other local partners can collaborate on a long-term basis to not only connect kids to parks, but also raise awareness broadly about the importance of connecting children to the outdoors and historical and cultural sites.

The overall goal for this program is to offer an interactive learning experience, aligned with the curriculum, that will help build relationships with 2,160 underserved local area fourth-graders. The program will increase the use of the three metro Atlanta area parks as a place for site-based learning. Specific schools will visit Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park in the spring, Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area in the fall, and Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Park in early winter.

At Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park (KEMO), the Open Outdoors for Kids fieldtrips are underway. This past week, KEMO engaged with a large school group out from Brumby Elementary. At the end of the field-based learning, two of the teachers shared that this was an extremely hands on learning experience and that it aligned perfectly with the fourth grade curriculum. They were both ecstatic because their students really enjoyed the program and learned as well.

Over the past nine years, more than one million students, many of whom are from underserved communities, have directly benefited from engaging with parks as classrooms. Together with its donors and partners, NPF has invested \$13.9 million since 2011 toward fostering the next generation of park champions. The organization's goal is to connect 250,000 kids and adults to parks throughout 2020 via school field trips, service corps, volunteer efforts, and fellowships, thereby growing the community of people who benefit from and care about these treasured places.

"National parks are vibrant living laboratories that enrich learning for students of all ages," said National Park Foundation President and CEO Will Shafroth. "The National Park Foundation and partners are bridging the gap to make transformational experiences possible for one million students and counting, eliminating barriers to access and maximizing educational benefits."

As the official nonprofit partner of the National Park Service, NPF raises support from generous individuals and dedicated partners for diverse in-park educational experiences that connect kids, high-schoolers, and students of all ages to their local parks and inspires the next generation of park champions. From local philanthropic organizations and friends' groups, to local schools, to community-based organizations, partners are critical to this effort.

While national parks are found throughout the United States, several factors affect students' abilities to access them. A lack of transportation options and financial means, working parents who are unable to provide transportation, and geographic proximity are all potential challenges to park visitation for young people.

A recent fieldtrip of fourth grade students visited Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield from a Title 1 school located near the metro Atlanta area. Of the 150 students visiting, only three of the students had ever visited a national park before. The Focus City Grant is important because the students from the Title 1 schools are an underserved population. When students engage in science, history, and learning in a kinesthetic way, outside of the regular classroom, there is an incredible learning opportunity that will elicit memories for a lifetime in their national parks.

The National Park Foundation is committed to making educational experiences in parks more accessible for all people, with a specific focus on underserved populations and communities of color, in both rural and urban settings across the country. National Park Foundation-supported programs across the country engage students and their teachers in educational field trips, provide young adults and veterans employment opportunities that help restore public lands, connect people of all ages with the joyful experiences of giving back through volunteer events, and offer career development opportunities for teachers and emerging scholars. All of these efforts are part of NPF's broader work to connect people to and protect national parks.

NPF's Open OutDoors for Kids program connects elementary school-aged youth to national parks through meaningful, educational, and engaging field trips. The majority of funding for this program supports fourth grade students at Title I schools with high percentages of students from low-income families that receive financial assistance through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to help ensure they have the resources to meet academic standards. Nationally, school districts in high-poverty communities have the highest total Title I allocations per eligible student. Schools in these communities are less likely to have the resources to engage national parks and outdoor education into student curriculum.

Additionally, Open OutDoors for Kids complements the federal Every Kid Outdoors initiative focusing on 10-year-old students, the age of most fourth graders. Research indicates that children of that age are at a unique developmental stage in their learning where they begin to understand how the world around them works in more concrete ways and they are more receptive to engaging with nature and the environment. View the list of the National Park Foundation Open OutDoors for Kids grantee projects for the 2019-2020 school year.

Thanks to private philanthropy, including support for Open OutDoors for Kids from Find Your Park/Encuentra Tu Parque premier partner Union Pacific Railroad and partners such as the 3M Open Fund, Apple, Columbia Sportswear, OARS, Parks Project, Sierra, Niantic, and Winnebago Industries Foundation, the National Park Foundation is investing \$2.5 million in educational programs across the country during the 2019-2020 school year. Select projects were matched with federal funds as part of the Centennial Challenge program.

Individuals, foundations, and companies can bolster programs like this by supporting NPF's efforts to engage more students with national parks as classrooms. Visit [the NPF website](#) to learn more.

ABOUT KENNESAW MOUNTAIN NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK

Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park is a site within the national park system that preserves a Civil War battleground of the Atlanta Campaign. Opposing forces maneuvered and fought here from June 19 - July 2, 1864. Although most famous as a Civil War battlefield, Kennesaw Mountain has a richer story that includes cultural and natural resources as well. The park has monuments, historical markers, cannon emplacements, and over 22 miles of trails.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION

The National Park Foundation is the official charity of America's national parks and nonprofit partner to the National Park Service. Chartered by Congress in 1967, the National Park Foundation raises private funds to help protect more than 84 million acres of national parks through critical conservation and preservation efforts and connect all Americans with their incomparable natural landscapes, vibrant culture, and rich history. Find out more and become a part of the national park community at www.nationalparks.org.

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