



Rocky Mountain National Park Eagle Rock Internship Program: A Productive Partnership for Youth Engagement

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National Park Service
 U.S. Department of Interior
 Rocky Mountain National Park



Eagle Rock School & Professional
 Development Center
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The Concept – A Productive Partnership

The Eagle Rock (ER) Internship Program is a collaborative partnership between Rocky Mountain National Park and Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center. The program was developed to address the lack of diversity in the park, provide opportunities for youth to personally connect to the NPS, and create viable career paths for youth from underrepresented groups. This internship program focuses on bridging the critical years between high school and college when students are making decisions that will influence their career and educational choices. Students receive hands-on experience, connections to the existing workforce, and active mentoring as they begin their working relationship.



Our Partner – Eagle Rock School

Eagle Rock School (ERS) is a year-round, residential, full-scholarship high school for students ages 15-20, located in Estes Park. ERS works with students who have not been successful in traditional academic environments. The student body is purposefully diverse with students from around the country; many from urban areas. ERS curriculum is focused on hands-on learning, personal growth, and building community. The school has a focus on outdoor education, which allows students to receive credit for non-traditions class work.

What is the ERS Internship?

The ER Internship Program begins with a volunteer service learning experience, followed by a full-time, paid, temporary position at the park, complemented by professional development training. The volunteer experience is executed in conjunction with a course at Eagle Rock School. Students divide their time equally between volunteering in the park and attending Eagle Rock School, discussing and applying their experiences in the classroom. Staff from RMNP and ER work closely together to ensure the volunteer and classroom experiences are complementary. During the second half of the program, the students are hired as part of the National Park Service Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). This two-step approach provides a smoother transition and allows the interns to adjust to a new culture.



Small Numbers, Large Success

- Over the last 3 summers, 14 interns have participated ranging from 3 to 6 interns per summer
- Gender – 11 Females (79%), 3 Males (21%)
- Diversity – 12 (86%) interns are from underrepresented groups
- Retention – 9 interns (64%) returning as STEP employees – 3 for their 3rd job at the park
- Education – all 9 returning interns are attending or planning to attend college

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Strong partnership with substantial involvement between the two organizations
- Open, clear, and candid communication
- Shared costs and commitments
- Mentorship/supervision provided from both
- Investment approach – building future NPS employees
- Retention focus – developing long term relationships, with partners, park staff and interns
- Hosting approach – addressing issues and overcoming obstacles
- Avoid culture shock
- Mentoring
- Time devoted to feedback and debriefs of experiences
- Keep it small – make it personal
- High expectations and responsibilities – for park staff and interns
- Professional development for interns – building the employees we want



What makes this program unique?

Student Recruitment

We utilize our partners to help find and recruit potential interns. This allows the NPS to capitalize on existing trusting relationships and connect with distant communities.

Intern Support

A key to the program is the hosting approach and support that is provided by NPS and ER staff throughout the internship. It is essential to have a dedicated NPS internship coordinator. Interns receive assistance on navigating the federal bureaucracy, understanding the NPS organizational culture and transitioning to a professional work place.

Interns as Investments in our Future

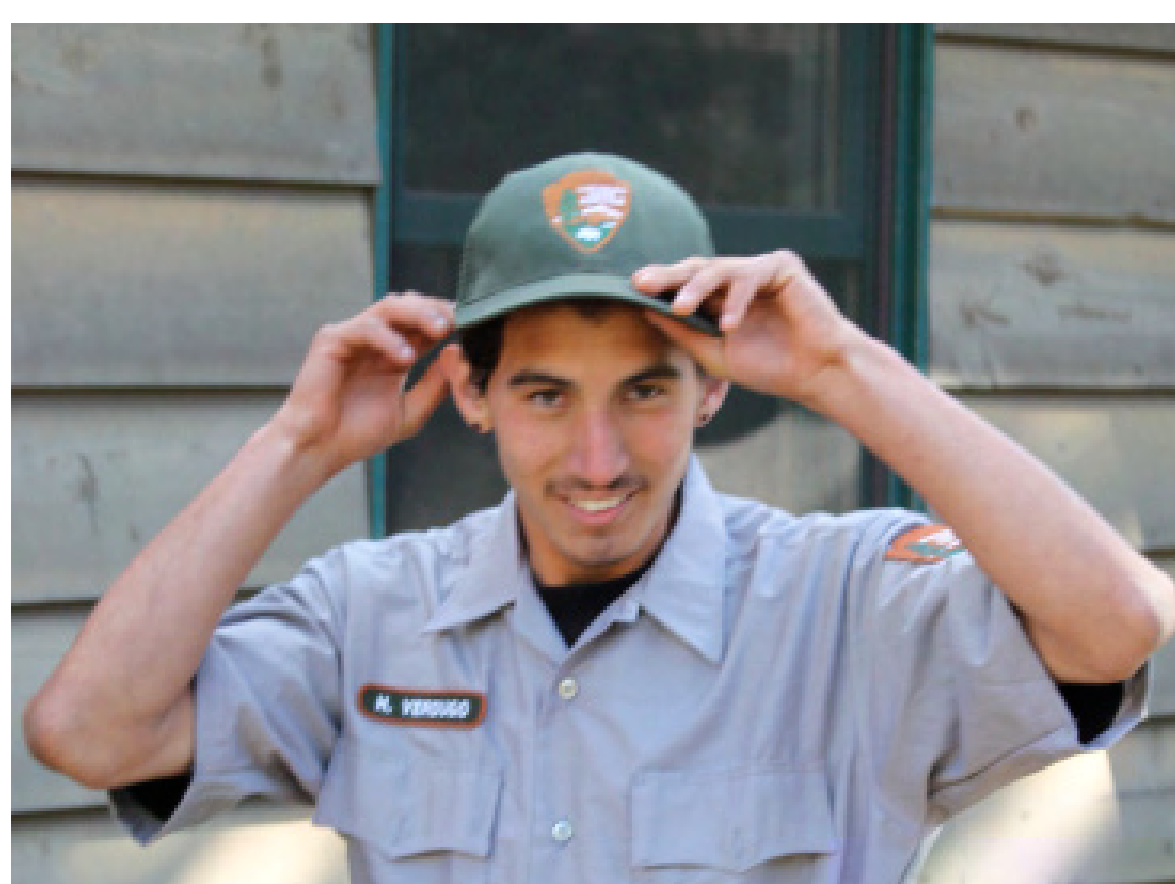
Emphasis is placed on building long-term relationships and preparing interns for careers with the NPS. This includes matching interns to positions, providing standard NPS training, helping students complete all of the paperwork and preparing them for the next step after the internship.

Professional Development Curriculum

A key to success is the training and professional development program that emphasizes active, interdisciplinary, and experiential learning. The core of this program is the workbook which provides important orientation, weekly themes and assignments that provide a framework for the internship. Interns and park staff participate in a series of assignments, activities, and discussions that provide context for the experience.

Operationally Focused

Interns are treated as NPS employees. They complete the same paperwork, wear the same uniform, and have the same obligations and requirements. Interns are embedded in existing work crews and work side by side with other NPS staff.



What Hector Gained

- Independence
- Certified Fork Lift Operator
- Positive Network
- Uniform and Steel Toe Boots
- Possible Career
- Future 'Red Card'
- Family
- Pay Check
- Opportunities
- Responsibility
- Friendship

LESSONS LEARNED

- Focus on the possible not the past
- Relevancy begins with a relationship
- Remove cultural barriers for involvement
- People are the key to the park experience
- Interns will meet high expectations and rise to the challenge
- NPS staff and VIPs are supportive of high school students and provide great cross generational mentoring
- Interns develop a strong work ethic, sense of purpose and are empowered to make change
- Interns make strong personal connections to the park and the people

