



# NORTH CASCADES INSTITUTE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

2021-2022  
PROGRAM  
REPORT

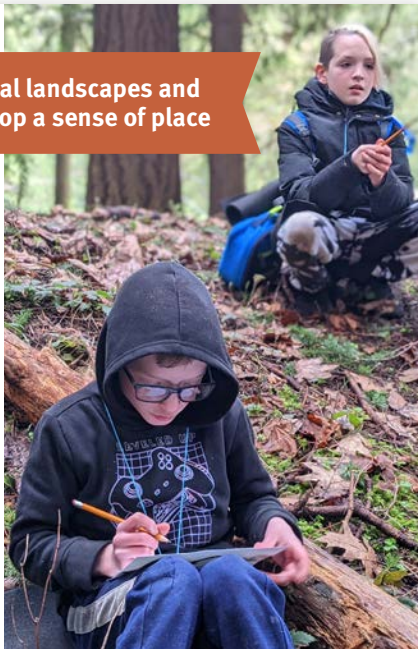
**Mountain School** is our 32-year-old education program for 5th grade classes that connects students to the natural and cultural history of the North Cascades through hands-on, interdisciplinary experiences. While Mountain School is traditionally a three-day, two-night program at the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center, pandemic restrictions led to the creation of an alternative program format, **Mountain School: Choose Your Own Adventure**, for the 2021-22 school year. Consisting of one Online Session followed by a Field Day at either the Learning Center or in a park closer to home, this hybrid model of Mountain School was the first field trip for most students since schools closed in 2020. The experience gave students the opportunity to learn about ecological communities with their classmates, teachers and parent chaperones.

## Program Goals and Outcomes

### CONNECT to local landscapes and develop a sense of place

“Today was full of fun activities, rain, games and more. I don't want to ever forget North Cascades Institute.

— Methow Valley Elementary student



“My favorite part was walking in silence. When we did that I noticed lots of things I wouldn't have otherwise.

— Regional elementary school student



### PRACTICE observation and inquiry

### INSPIRE stewardship of the natural world

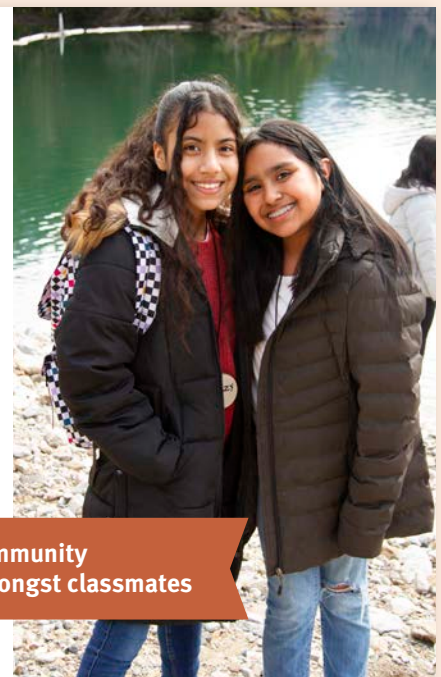
“My day's highlight was pulling out a HUGE Himalayan Blackberry root! It was like 30,000 feet long! Dear me in the future, I will save the earth and ecosystem!

— Wade King Elementary student



“It was a joy watching students be 'kids' without distractions of computers and phones—just good ole fashioned giggles, excitement, and talking with each other.

— Concrete Elementary teacher



### CULTIVATE community amongst classmates

## Participant Snapshot



**2,221** YOUTH participants

**13,332** LEARNER HOURS

**\$200K** TUITION SUBSIDIZED by the Institute

**38** Schools in the **NORTH CASCADES** ecosystem served

**100%** Schools received **FINANCIAL AID**

**255** TEACHERS & CHAPERONES

**18%** Students with **DISABILITIES**

**15%** Transitional **BILINGUAL**

**51%** Students are **LOW-INCOME** according to free & reduced lunch

**40%** Identify as **PEOPLE OF COLOR**

Participant demographics aggregated from Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction data.

## What did your class enjoy most about Mountain School?

Here's what teachers said about their students' outdoor learning adventures:

“ They could not stop talking about how much they enjoyed every part of the trip. They loved being able to hold specimens and really enjoyed getting to play in nature.

— Teacher from Samish Elementary

“ They loved being outside and close to such spectacular country. They loved the camouflage game and contrary to what they might tell you ~ the quiet reflective time in nature was a highlight.

— Teacher from Edison Elementary

“ I was in Talia's group and she was amazing! My group really enjoyed the mushroom hunting and water color activity. She engaged in fun conversations with the students during lunch. It was great to see and hear Talia modeling her bilingual skills for the students. She was an awesome trail teacher.

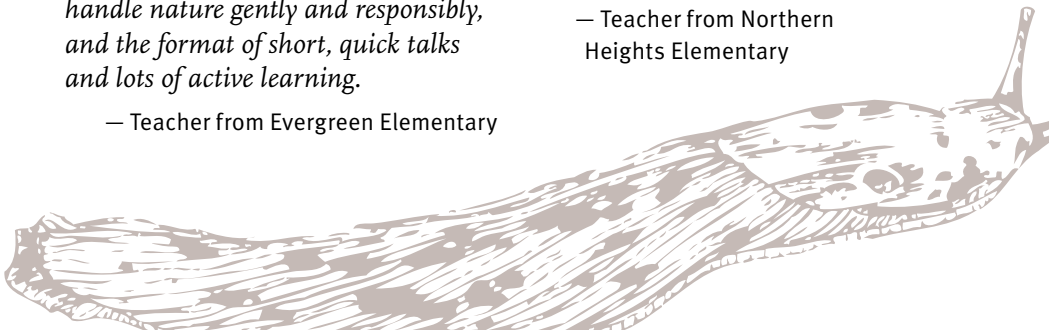
— Teacher from West View Elementary

“ My students love seeing the learning we do in action, being trusted enough to be expected to handle nature gently and responsibly, and the format of short, quick talks and lots of active learning.

— Teacher from Evergreen Elementary

“ Being outside. This was their first trip in 2-3 years...they loved being able to take a trip!

— Teacher from Northern Heights Elementary



## Choose Your Own Adventure: A day in the life of a Mountain School student!

In **Mountain School: Choose Your Own Adventure**, students participated in one interactive virtual session from their classrooms, then joined Institute staff and our partners on a field excursion either at the Learning Center or a park closer to their school. While each experience is a little bit different, here is what a Mountain School Adventure may have looked like for a student:

### DAY 1: The Virtual Program

**FIRST**, meet your Mountain School instructor via Zoom for an introduction to North Cascades Institute, Mountain School, and your upcoming field trip. Your class is headed to the Learning Center, so you also get to meet a North Cascades National Park Ranger!

**NEXT**, you get to work on skills you will need for your field day: using natural objects, practice making observations, asking questions, and making connections using the phrases “I notice...,” “I wonder...,” and “It reminds me of...”.

**FINALLY**, the instructor answers your questions as you get ready for your field day.

### DAY 2: An Adventure at the Learning Center



**8:00** ▶ Ride the school bus into the North Cascades. Driving across Diablo Dam might be a little scary!

**11:30** ▶ Stop to eat your lunch on the trail



**9:45** ▶ Arrive at the Learning Center and meet your Mountain School instructor, Hannah. You'll be in the Red Salmon trail group.

RED SALMON

**10:00** ▶ Pick up your wood cookie name tag and delicious snack pack. Now we'll discuss how today, you'll be building skills to meet and interact with a *Mystery Friend*.



**12:00** ▶ Time to meet the Mystery Friend! Hannah hands out paper bags containing Mystery Friends. Reach into the bag without looking and use the sense of touch to practice “I notice, I wonder, It reminds me of.” Now take a look at your Mystery Friend...Lichen! Examine it through hand lenses and look for more in the forest.

**10:20** ▶ Spend time walking on the forest trails, playing *Sneaky Marker*. This will hone your observation skills while you look for a marker Hannah hid in the forest. Each round, the hiding place gets harder to find! Debrief about what you saw and how it felt to look for and find the marker. The more you look the more you see!



**12:55** ▶ Time for reflection and discussion. Walk to the beach on Diablo Lake with a buddy, reflecting on the day. Write a postcard to yourself in the future about what you've learned, want to remember, and want to learn more about.



**1:20** ▶ Walk to the parking lot for goodbyes and team cheer!





## Mountain School in Local Parks

**Mountain School: Choose Your Own Adventure** gave schools the option to do their field day closer to home. Our instructors packed up their lesson plans and brought Mountain School to the students, either in the park closest to their school (Fall 2021) or to Whatcom Falls Park in Bellingham (Spring 2022). In addition to eliminating lengthy bus rides, this option was an opportunity to help students engage with nature right in their own backyards. It also allowed us to work in partnership with City of Bellingham staff to incorporate a stewardship project—removing non-native plants—which teachers consistently reported as being a highlight of the day for their students.

In the words of one of our City of Bellingham partners: *"It was a wonderful experience to work alongside Mountain School this past spring! My biggest highlight was helping the Mountain School students discover their inner passion for stewardship. It was so rewarding when, following an hour of hard work, students raised their hands and asked about more ways to get involved in environmental restoration and help their neighborhoods and parks. The Institute did a spectacular job showing students that the restoration work they engage in matters."*

**Where in the world are Mountain School students?** During Choose Your Own Adventure, you might have seen students at Whatcom Falls Park, Little Mountain Park, Civic Athletic Complex, Cordata Park, Squalicum Creek, Fairhaven Park, Memorial Park, Euclid Park, or Big Rock Garden!



## Mountain School At Home: Safe Transformative Experiences in Nature During School Closures

For 2020-21, the first school year of the pandemic, we were unable to host in-person Mountain School. In order to ensure that students still had opportunities for transformative learning experiences in nature, our dedicated Mountain School instructors developed a series of "Mountain School at Home" lessons, activities, and videos, which we provided free of charge to schools, teachers, parents, and the general community.

See the full array of "Mountain School at Home" resources, including 5 lessons translated into Spanish, at [ncascades.org/ms-at-home](https://ncascades.org/ms-at-home). Students of all ages will enjoy learning about watersheds in the North Cascades, making their own Trail Cookies, singing along to "Hello, It's Tree," and much more.

## Partners and Major Donors

We extend our special thanks to these organizations and individuals for their generous support.

### ► PARTNERS



Seattle City Light



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### ► MAJOR FUNDERS

- Anonymous Foundation
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- Juniper Foundation
- Lummi Nation Community Contributions
- Mac and Linda MacGregor
- Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Washington School Principals' Education Foundation:
- Outdoor Schools Washington
- Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission

► And more than **330 individuals** who donated to youth and school programs

