impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Building a future of outdoor stewards and adventure seekers in nature's classroom

AT A GLANCE

Youth spend time in their local outdoors to develop skills, knowledge and an increased appreciation for the natural environment through recreation activity in the Adventure Idaho Project.

The Situation

There exists a strong case for children to be in nature for the significant health benefits (physical, cognitive, behavioral, mental, social) which has been systematically studied over the last three decades. However, youth today still struggle with increasing diagnoses of challenging health conditions such as obesity, ADHD, depression and autism for example. Idaho youth have opportunity to access an abundance of outdoor and natural resource areas right in their backyard. This serves as an optimal learning environment for children's developmental growth and overall health. Non-formal education programs with a focus on exposing children to active learning in nature have gained momentum over the years. Funding sources at local, state and federal levels can be sought in efforts to "get youth outside" and interacting in nature.

Our Response

The University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development's Adventure Idaho Project is an outdoor education and recreation-based program teaching youth recreation skills and encouraging pro-social behavior among people and the natural environment. This project offers Idaho youth recreational adventures



Learners engage in a Leave No Trace hands-on activity to realize the impact that trash has on nature and our lands.

including experience in paddling a class II river, fly fishing for cutthroat trout and engaging with the outdoor environment through Leave No Trace (LNT) hands-on activities. A first season of 2025 presented 76 youth ages 6-17 years old, land-based lessons on LNT and 26 youth river paddling and fly-casting lessons on the water. Less than 3% of participating youth from the local area counties (Latah, Benewah, Shoshone) have engaged in these outdoor recreation activities. Although youth living in rural Idaho reside directly in and around outdoor recreation resources, many lack opportunities to pursue diverse types of recreation experiences in nature. UI Extension provides educational services to communities to connect all citizens to Idaho public lands and natural resources as an adventure.

University of Idaho Extension

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Program Outcomes

Several outcomes were achieved because of the Adventure Idaho Project (AIP). Most notably is the influence of the recreation activities as a "new" experience for the youth participants. Now over two seasons, 48 youth engaged in fly casting for trout on an Idaho recreational and scenic river of which 42 had never been given the opportunity to try it. Similarly, 43 of the 48 participants had never been paddling (pack raft) down a river. Since the inception of the program, 235 youth have gained outdoor adventure experiences in paddling, fishing, fly tying, off-road cycling, hiking and navigation. Impactfully, one youth participant (age 10) shared his newfound entrepreneurial interest and endeavor in selling his "tied flies" after one educational session with AIP. Further conversations during activities revealed participant interest in continued/future adventure recreation programming. Parent chaperones and youth voiced eagerness to "do this again" whether they try engaging in the activity on their own or through Extension programming. One parent commented… "this experience has given me the confidence to do this (pack raft/paddle) on my own. Thank you for providing this opportunity for us."



Packrafting student demonstrates their ability to paddle and navigate a Class II River on a recreational and scenic stretch.



Fly fishing for cutthroat trout on the St. Joe River. Local youth and parents learning together and enjoying a new experience.

The Future

Future programming includes expanding the project to new audiences and continuation of the outdoor learning experiences with participants. By tracking engagement, outdoor skill development and attitude toward nature, the project targets recreational activity fostering positive youth development and sustainable recreation in youth participant's local public lands and waterways. Youth experience and practice responsibly the outdoor ethics lessons and demonstrate safe practices for enjoying outdoor recreation in the natural environment. Longterm outcome impacts will showcase youth as responsible practitioners and advocates for natural resource conservation and healthy outdoor recreation habits.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Thank you to the collaborative partners in local youth cooperative groups/families, St. Maries Middle School, UI Extension in Benewah County and commercial outfitter, Great Rift Outdoors. The Adventure Idaho Project was successfully piloted and continued. This project is funded in part by the Wild Rivers Grant through DMV issued White Water Rafting license plate sales.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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University of Idaho, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Idaho counties cooperating.
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