Connecting with Youth: the Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventure Model

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What is UWCA?
Purpose of UWCA
Partners
Role of Forest Service
Evaluation
Spreading the Word
Have an adventure right in the heart of the Twin Cities!
Motivating Factors for Partner Participation in UWCA

1. Address the achievement gap in graduation rates between white students and students of color.

2. Teach a stewardship ethic to our youth—what you do at home impacts the Mississippi River.

3. Teach the value of our public lands as a play to play, care for, and possibly build a career around.
Ever widening achievement gap, made worse by summer learning loss.
Wilderness Inquiry—connecting people from all walks of life to the natural world through shared outdoor adventures.
Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures (UWCA)

Pyramid of Engagement

- **Introductory Outdoor Experiences**: [10,000+ youth]
  - Urban youth are introduced to outdoor recreation and nature, which are proven to inspire lifelong engagement in outdoor activities, healthy lifestyles, and environmental stewardship.

- **Overnight Experiences**: [1,000+ youth]
  - Young people gain confidence and independence. As fear of the outdoors decreases, interest, care, and knowledge of the environment increase.

- **Multi-day Experiences**: [500 youth]
  - Participants solidify connection to nature. Interest in outdoor jobs and desire to “give back” begins.

- **Internships**: [250 youth]
  - Participants define environmental education and career paths.

- **Jobs**: [100 youth]
  - Hundreds of new faces placed in outdoor jobs ranging from canoe guides to EPA scientists.

Annual Participant Input

- Community Organizations
- Families
- Schools
- Religious Groups
Having fun on the Mississippi!
Stepping out further, canoeing and camping “up north.”
A grand adventure to Glacier National Park
Faith’s journey

Canoeing on Miss River

Local camping

Glacier NP

ARTIC college
The mission of **Urban Connections** is to grow and foster mutual relationships that connect urban residents and the Forest Service using local green spaces and partnerships.
Signing National MOU with FS
TEACHERS REACTION TO OVERNIGHT LOCAL OVERNIGHT CAMPING TRIP:

“I think the students got to know each other well and got to know me better. I’ll never forget the bus ride home. I felt like there was almost a peace or sadness because, I think out in the woods, they really felt AMAZING and CONFIDENT, almost like they were a TEAM OF WINNERS. And I don’t think they often feel that way. They really felt positive and they don’t always feel that way here in school.”
2012 survey by UMN Center for Applied Research & Educational Improvement

- 3 in 10 students had no prior experience related to the Mississippi River.
- 92% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the river trip was a valuable experience for all students.
- 88% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they worked with others as a team.
- 92% of teachers believe the outdoor experience supported academic learning.
EDUCATIONAL THEMES SUPPORTED BY A UWCA EXPERIENCE:

Science and Engineering:
- Bridge spans
- Life cycle of mussels
- Aquatic insects
- My street is a river
- Water cycle
- Design a boat

Natural & cultural history:
- Sedimentary layers
- Waterfall on the move
- Fur trade
- Lumber and sawmills
- Fossils
- US-Dakota history
How are we doing in addressing the STEWARDSHIP ETHIC?

“How UWCA has impacted my life by showing me a side of nature that I have never seen, and giving me the chance to enjoy the beauty of nature ... I pay closer attention than I have before picking up litter and watering dried trees, grass and other plants.”
How are we doing in developing SELF AWARENESS AND CONFIDENCE?

“My level of confidence is higher. For me, it was that I stopped seeing barriers. I can see other people’s barriers, and my own too, you can take steps to address them.”
SHOUT OUT

Paul Labowitz, MNRRA
Park Superintendent

Wilderness Inquiry
pictures
BEST PRACTICE