

TWF Supports National Effort to Increase Youth Outdoor Participation

The North Face has awarded a \$2,500 grant to TWF's Great Outdoors University (GOU) program, which will help low-wealth children and families explore the outdoors. Since 2006, GOU has provided meaningful outdoor experiences to more than 8,000 inner-city children in Memphis and Nashville through day and weekend camping, fishing and nature trips.

GOU was selected from hundreds of applications because of the program's success in reaching kids who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to experience Tennessee's great outdoors. In the final grant cycle of 2011, The North Face awarded \$125,000 in Explore Fund grants to 51 projects, helping more than 30,000 kids connect to nature.

"The children participating in trips through Great Outdoors University are being introduced to a whole new realm, and it's impacting their lives and building an appreciation for the natural world that will carry into adulthood," says Sonya Wood Mahler, TWF's Great Outdoors University program manager. "We hear over and over from our program partners that these are life-changing experiences for the kids, and only through the support of organizations like The North Face are we able to do it. Many of the kids tell me it is the best day of their lives!"

Great Outdoors University was launched as a pilot program in 2006 in Memphis by TWF Board Member Peter Schutt. GOU was designed as an outdoor experience and education program that provides ongoing, hands-on outdoor and nature programming for free to low-wealth, at-risk children and youth. GOU participants come from partnering organizations that include outdoor education in their efforts. In Memphis, for example, GOU has partnered with the Boy Scouts of America's ScoutReach program (ensuring that all young people have an opportunity to join Scouting, regardless of their circumstances) and Girls, Inc. (dedicated to inspiring all girls to be strong, smart and bold).

GOU has filled a niche that helps these organizations fulfill their mandates to provide outdoor education in their service to children and youth. The program was expanded to Nashville in the spring of 2009. In 2011, Schutt became the first Tennessean ever to be named the National Wildlife Federation's Volunteer of the Year. Since its inception, this program has touched the lives of more than 8,000 youth participants.

Key program support comes from the *Memphis Daily News*, the Maddox Charitable Trust, the Memorial Foundation and the Cracker Barrel Foundation, among others.

"We believe in the importance of bringing youth together from diverse backgrounds and providing them with opportunities to get outdoors," said Ann Krcik, director of Outdoor Exploration at The North Face. "We support organizations that work to create these opportunities for youth because we've seen firsthand how these programs can ignite a passion for the outdoors and teach them the importance of protecting the places we play for generations to come."

About The North Face Explore Fund

The North Face® Explore Fund™ is a grant program committed to supporting non-profit, community organizations that break down the barriers preventing children and families from experiencing the outdoors. The Explore Fund, administered by The Outdoor Foundation, finds, engages and provides funding for new partners that help further the mission of inspiring the next generation of explorers and conservationists by helping them discover nature's playground.

About PlanetExplore

PlanetExplore is an online community founded by The North Face, powered by partner organizations that share a passion for the outdoors, and designed to help individuals and families learn about and participate in outdoor activities and events in their area. PlanetExplore is a portal to the outdoors designed to inspire and enable people of all ages to become regularly active outside, and to enjoy the benefits gained through a connection to nature.

For more information, please visit:

The Explore Fund www.explorefund.com

PlanetExplore www.planetexplore.com

