Eagle Eye Institute

Using the power of nature to transform urban youth

Eagle Eye Institute is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering urban people from low-income communities, especially youth of color, to play an active role in caring for our environment.
MAY
SPRING OPEN HOUSE: On May 7th, we hosted an introduction to our site and our program model at MountainStar Forest in Peru, MA. We networked with staff, faculty, and students from Hampshire College and staff from Kestrel Land Trust, who are now partners.

JUNE
SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM (pp. 4-5): On June 12th, our summer interns, Sabrina Dengler and Joe Hazelton, began six weeks of living and working in Peru. They worked on land management, gardening, trail building, tractor work, carpentry, and more. We offered workshops by DCR Forest Health Specialist Ken Gooch and author/illustrator Clare Walker Leslie.

JULY
YOUTH INTERN-IN-TRAINING (p.5): For one week in July, we hosted one of our young leaders for an internship-in-training for the second year. Sabiha Miahjee of Somerville, MA, has been connected with Eagle Eye for seven years, since she was a youth participant on Eagle Eye programs. Sabiha camped at our site for one week in July and completed garden and trail projects alongside the summer interns.

EAGLE EYE ALUMNI: On July 22nd-23rd, we held our 2nd annual Alumni Gathering and annual Board Staff Family Retreat. We hosted 23 Eagle Eye alumni and their families for an overnight retreat. In addition to board members, staff, and interns, we re-engaged alumni who had not been connected for many years, including 2005 Eagle Eye intern Patty Nugent, and Darien of Somerville, MA, a former Eagle Eye youth participant.

AUGUST
JAMES BALDWIN SCHOLARS (p.6): The James Baldwin Scholars Program of Hampshire College offers scholarships to talented students from underserved communities. On August 29th, we offered a Learn About Forests™ program to eight incoming JB Scholars and four current JB Scholars as part of their orientation. We were joined by naturalist John Green, a long-time instructor with Eagle Eye, and Karen Warren, professor of environmental education at Hampshire.

SEPTEMBER
LIGHTHOUSE HOLYOKE (p.6): On September 29th, teens from alternative school LightHouse Holyoke came to Peru for a Forest Stewardship Day. This was an introductory program with LightHouse, and included icebreakers and games, nature awareness activities, lunch in the outdoor kitchen, trail and brush clearing stewardship project, and a campfire.

VOLUNTEERS: We engaged long-term volunteers in our work this year, including fourth-year Hampshire student, Ryan Allmendinger, and Northeastern student, Rebecca Sirull. Ryan volunteered on the LightHouse program and Hampshire class visit in October. He is completing a research project with Eagle Eye and LightHouse for his senior project (p.7). Rebecca, a volunteer since 2014, completed a graphic design project for us in April 2017.

OCTOBER
HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE: On October 22nd, we hosted an experiential and environmental education seminar class from Hampshire College. We gave them a tour of our site and presented various aspects of Eagle Eye’s program model. The students brought a theory-based perspective to our model of hands-on education and led a discussion on social justice and outdoor access.
Update from the MountainStar Site Manager
Scott Beach

This summer, I had the help of two interns, Sabrina and Joe. My goal was to give them an outdoor working experience and expose them to some new types of work. Joe and Sabrina worked with me in the mornings from 8-12 on weekdays. This was for a period of six weeks.

They learned how to operate a chainsaw, chip brush with a wood chipper, and drive a 32 horsepower 4WD tractor. Also, they got experience splitting firewood with a wood splitter and, their least favorite, many, many hours with a weedwacker maintaining the mile-long driveway at MountainStar Forest.

The biggest project we worked on was the post and beam cabin. There was a great deal of hammer and chisel work mating the beams together to form walls and bracing. We also had to use the bandsaw to mill some additional beams. This included using the tractor and the winch and cutting trees in the forest. Overall, it was a very positive experience for me.

New Youth Education Coordinator
Joe Jewett

I'm Joe Jewett, and I'm the new Youth Education Coordinator in the partnership between Kestrel Land Trust and Eagle Eye Institute. Last year, Kestrel had an Americorps member working to get students at Holyoke and Amherst High Schools outdoors and creating the possibility of transformation through interaction with the natural world. I will continue that work at Dean Tech High School and also possibly Lighthouse Holyoke.

I will draw upon my previous experience with Eagle Eye, dating back to the early 2000’s, when I helped organize the Rainbow Stewards youth program in Somerville. Other resources I will bring to bear include outdoor expedition leadership and wilderness skills developed through backcountry experiences, primitive skills gatherings, and camp mentoring, as well as teaching experience from two years plus spent as a full-time music teacher in the Holyoke Public Schools. I look forward to rekindling my relationships with members of the Eagle Eye community as well as meeting new ones.

Eagle Eye receives $5,000 Grant From Kestrel Land Trust

The grant is part of a partnership between the two organizations to advance their common goal of providing meaningful outdoor nature experiences for youth in urban communities in the Pioneer Valley. The grant-funded Youth Education Coordinator position will continue the work started last year by Kestrel at Dean Tech, offering outdoor activities and outings to local green areas, including the Connecticut River and the Holyoke Range. Students will have the option for a deeper retreat experience during one-day and overnight programs at MountainStar Forest. Kestrel Land Trust has conserved forests, farms, and riverways in the Pioneer Valley since 1970.
SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The goal of our internship program is to give college students hands-on experience in land management, sustainable living, and youth mentorship. For this pilot year, we had two interns, a current student and a recent graduate, working at our site for six weeks. They camped in tents, getting an in-depth experience of being in nature day and night and in all weather.

The interns learned what it takes to manage a site of 220 acres, as well as live in a low-impact way that uses fewer resources. For our 2nd annual Alumni Gathering and Board Staff Family Retreat, the interns facilitated games, directed a stewardship project, and led a hike on the trails they had worked on. Over six weeks, they learned a lot about themselves and the land, gaining a variety of outdoor skills in the process.

Eagle Eye gave me a sense of strength and confidence with the outdoors that I hadn't experienced before. As a kid from the New Jersey suburbs, unpopulated nature wasn't something I was used to, and neither was camping or land management. I showed up doubtful and nervous, but left six weeks later feeling confident and peaceful. Interning with Eagle Eye showed me that I can work, sleep, cook, and live in the outdoors, as well as be deeply connected to its rhythms. I want to share this feeling with others who believe that a lack of experience with the outdoors means a lack of ability.

The more people I meet connected to Eagle Eye, the more it's clear to me that this is a community filled with love and support for one another and the rest of the natural world, and a deep sense of social justice, and I have no doubt that it'll continue to do great and important work for our larger earth community.

SABRINA DENGLER
Hampshire College '17
Eagle Eye Residential Intern
JOE HAZELTON  
University of Michigan ‘19  
Eagle Eye Residential Intern  

This summer, I helped to build a new guest cabin and a stone stairway, in addition to daily site upkeep. In high school, I had volunteered on AMC trail crews, but Eagle Eye gave me my first chance to lead, finding places where trails needed clearing or grading and, during the stairway build, delegating tasks to others. While setting stairs with Sabiha, I think the two of us were able to talk more freely than we might have in any designed mentoring space.  

I now look back at hikes around MountainStar Forest for moments of peace and reprieve. Eagle Eye has built an incredible community to share this feeling, and from conversations with community members, I know this feeling will continue to change lives.

SABIHA MIAHJEE  
Somerville, MA  
Eagle Eye Intern-in-Training  

Eagle Eye has helped me grow and connect with nature over the years, since I was six years old. I’m welcomed back to Peru every summer, which I appreciate because I don’t think I would get the experience to hike trails, help build a cabin, or help build a bench anywhere else. I stay off electronics while I’m in Peru, which is refreshing because I don’t want to constantly check how many likes or views I get on a post. Also, seeing MaJa, Anthony, and Cass always makes me want to come back the next year because they’ve helped me grow into a better person in general.

We are excited to have received a $15,000 grant from the Community Impact Fund to further develop this internship program in 2018.
James Baldwin Scholars Program
Learn About Forests™, August 29th, 2017

The students said:
“I learned that I am not as afraid of nature as I thought I was.”
—Tasheena, age 20

“I am meant to be in nature as much as anyone else.”
—Aubriana, age 20

“Nature will only be here if we respect it and take care of it.”
—Kristen, age 20

The leaders said:
“Some [students] were a little withdrawn in the beginning, but as the day continued, they began to connect more with the surroundings and each other. [Eagle Eye] made sure everyone was involved and took time to address the participants’ specific needs.”—Miguel

LightHouse Holyoke
Forest Stewardship Day, September 29th, 2017

The students said:
“I learned that I was surrounded by amazing people.”
—Liam, age 13

“I actually had more fun than I thought I would.”
—Twix, age 15

“I like nature and Eagle Eye is great.”
—Max, age 13

“We get a lot done while everyone works together.”
—Luke, age 16

The James Baldwin Scholars have a discussion at the fire circle about barriers to outdoor access faced by people of color.

Students from LightHouse Holyoke play Meet a Tree and clear trails as part of a stewardship day at MountainStar Forest.

The leaders said:
“I witnessed that the youth got into being in the woods and enjoyed nature. [Eagle Eye] facilitated great and led the group quite well. We loved the fact that they had cooked for us and had a great outlook on the day.”—Carlos
2017 Partnership Highlights

KESTREL LAND TRUST: Earlier this year, we began developing a partnership with Amherst-based Kestrel Land Trust. Recognizing both organizations’ goal of engaging local communities on conserved lands, especially urban youth from underserved communities, this partnership combines our capacities to provide new opportunities for Holyoke youth to get outdoors and get connected to local green spaces.

HOLYOKE SCHOOLS: As part of the partnership between Kestrel Land Trust and Eagle Eye Institute, we have been building relationships with schools in Holyoke, including Dean Tech High School and LightHouse Holyoke, in order to develop and implement outdoor and environmental programs for their students.

HAMPShIRE COLLEGE: Eagle Eye has been connecting with academic departments and programs at Hampshire College. This fall, we visited Tim Zimmerman’s environmental education class to talk about Eagle Eye and hosted Karen Warren’s experiential education seminar class in Peru. Working with college students allows us to expand our capacity, while offering a hands-on learning experience to students interested in social justice and environmental education.

RESEARCH PROJECT: Hampshire student Ryan Allmendinger has been volunteering with Eagle Eye for two years. He started by coming to Peru and working on the guest cabin, then volunteering on youth programs. For his senior project at Hampshire, he is developing a program for LightHouse and Eagle Eye, employing research, student observation, and interviews.

15th Annual Hike-a-thon
October 22nd, 2017

This year’s Hike-a-thon, our biggest fundraiser of the year and our way of bringing our community together, was the largest ever, with over 50 people hiking for Eagle Eye. At the time of print, we’ve raised $13,000 towards our $15,000 goal, which will be matched 1:1.

Friends of the Fells co-hosted this year’s Hike-a-thon, leading the hike and stewardship. Students of the Fells, a student group that utilizes the Fells for recreation and service learning, cleaned up trash along the way. We enjoyed a picnic lunch at the Fells Reservoir, courtesy of Basil Tree Catering.

Thank you to Melinda Stockmann for organizing the 5th Annual SF Bay Area Hike-a-thon to support our work!

Ryan helped coordinate the LightHouse youth program.
Please help us reach our 2017 fundraising goal of $50,000!

We have raised $40,000

Help us raise the remaining $10,000 by year end.

Your support is crucial to our work engaging urban youth in hands-on learning in nature that builds environmental awareness, develops responsibility, and cultivates leadership through stewardship of our natural resources.

Support Eagle Eye’s Youth Programs and Partnerships!

Contribution Levels

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