

Arizona Trail Seeds of Stewardship Program

A Chance to Give Back

by Deborah Oslik



On April 12th, the Arizona Trail Association's Seeds of Stewardship Program led its third and final outing with Vail Blended Learning Middle School for this school year. Our program goal was to lead a minimum of three outings with each school that we partnered with this year, and each outing was to be centered on a building theme. The theme for the final trip was service. We believe that through our previous outings, which were based on experiencing nature and environmental education, students had opportunities to build connection with their environment and feel more compelled to do service to preserve it.

Our outings with Vail Blended Learning not only met our three-outing goal, but each of those days spent out on the trail felt meaningful and successful for the students. The focus of the April 12 outing was trail work along the Arizona Trail. We had a core of nine students who showed up to participate in the outing. We collaborated with Mark Flint, a Pima County Natural Resources Specialist, who met us at Colossal Cave Mountain Park with tools, guidance, and instructions for our trail work for the day. We split into two groups: "The Loppers & The Rockers." The "Loppers" meandered down the trail with loppers and handsaws with the intention of trimming brush away from the trail so that all users, including horseback riders, could enjoy the trail without being scratched by branches. The "Rockers" went the other way on the trail to an identified section on the trail suffering from erosion. The students worked together to collect the appropriate rocks and then play a game of Rock Tetris to fit them together so they will be stable and long lasting.



After our successful morning of trail work, we gathered together in the shade to relax and eat lunch together. I offered up Skittles for jokes and silly tricks from the students, which was a source of a lot of laughter and learning new things about one another. We then transitioned into a more serious conversation of reflection about the work they had done that morning. Each of the two groups shared about their specific jobs on the trail, how they made a difference, and how they felt during and after performing the service. Overall, the students

were surprised that they enjoyed the work itself, and felt good about working together. Josh Ruddick, one of the two teachers along with us for the day, saw that this trail work was particularly impactful for this student group. Mr. Ruddick later shared that it is “my hope that we can do more [outings] next year and include more service based work in each field trip we do.”

After our discussion, we had a recognition ceremony of all of the students present. As Mr. Ruddick noted, “We had 9 students that made every field trip, that is 15% of the student body and pretty darn good for our first year with a new school.” We wanted to recognize these students who were committed to showing up for these trips and being active participants and users of the Arizona Trail. They were each presented with their own Arizona Trail water bottle, along with other little Arizona Trail goodies such as stickers and bookmarks.

After the students’ hard work on the trail, we ended the day in a place we could all escape the heat – underground. We traveled around the corner to the Colossal Cave, and went on a tour of the cave. It was a fun and educational way to end our outing.

This outing was made possible by generous grants from Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI) and Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold Foundation.

