



Pathways to Parks: Eagle Rock Internship Program



The Eagle Rock Internship Program is a collaborative partnership between Rocky Mountain National Park, and Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center, a year-round, residential, full-scholarship high school for students ages 15–17, located in Estes Park, Colorado. The school provides students that have not succeeded in traditional public schools an opportunity to earn a high school diploma. The Eagle Rock School student body comprises a purposefully diverse community with students from across the nation. This Pathways to Parks partnership develops opportunities for students to connect with national parks, fosters student interest in science and public lands, and ultimately provides a path for students to pursue careers in the National Park Service.

Pathways to Parks

The Pathways to Parks is an initiative of the Rocky Mountain National Park-based Continental Divide Research Learning Center. Pathways is a three staged approach: information, involvement, and internship. It provides students with multiple entry points to employment with the National Park Service. These include volunteering, citizen science, service learning, and shadowing. Students engage with the park based on their level of interest and commitment.

Career Choices

The Eagle Rock Internship Program focuses on bridging the critical years between high school and college when students are making decisions that will influence their career choices. Students may choose their park career path from any number of positions in environmental education, administration, facility management, resource stewardship, and visitor protection. This program gives students hands-on experience, connects them to the existing workforce, and mentors them as they begin their working relationship. Its innovative educational and development program emphasizes active, interdisciplinary, experiential learning.



The Eagle Rock Internship Program begins with a volunteer experience, followed by a full-time, paid, temporary position at the park, complemented by professional development training. The volunteer experience is executed in conjunction with a course at Eagle Rock School. Students divide their time equally between volunteering in the park and attending Eagle Rock School, discussing and applying their experiences in the classroom. Staff from Rocky Mountain National Park and Eagle Rock School work closely together to ensure the volunteer and classroom experiences are complementary. During the second half of the program, the students are hired as part of the National Park Service Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). This two step approach ensures that students prepared for employment are personally choosing to commit to a job typically in the same position as their volunteer experience.

Park Experience

The training and professional development that students and the park participate in throughout the internship consists of a series of assignments, activities, and discussions. These activities include documenting fieldwork in a field journal, recording their experiences through photo assignments, setting goals, working with supervisors on progress assessments, and reflecting on their experience. The internship is unique because it is guided by weekly themes based fundamental competencies (personal and professional attributes that are critical to successful performance) for leaders in the federal government: interpersonal skills, oral communication, integrity/honesty, written communication, continual learning, and public service motivation. The purpose of the assignments is to help the interns make the most from their experience and provide a context to assess and develop knowledge, skills, and abilities.



Future Stewards

This Eagle Rock Internship Program supports sharing national parks with students and nurtures the next generation of park stewards. Both Rocky Mountain National Park and the Eagle Rock students benefit from this carefully structured program, in part because students are introduced to working in the park as volunteers and are more prepared to make the transition into employees. The National Park Service as an organization benefits by connecting with a diverse student population at a time when career choices are being made. According to one student, “At the beginning of this it was just something to do, but I realized at the end my internship that it has opened millions of opportunities for me.”

The students can choose to join a park work group, including facility management (top), exotic plant management (middle), and environmental education (bottom).