

THE Durango HERALD

Science camp gives students two weeks of hands-on learning in 'living classroom'

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Friday, July 21, 2017 9:45 PM Updated: Saturday, July 22, 2017 1:16 PM



For a second summer, high school students spent two weeks learning about science – and having fun.

Through Mountain Studies Institute's Experience Mountain Science Program, kids in grades 10, 11 and 12 got their hands dirty learning in the "living classroom" of the San Juan Mountains.

"Our intention is to help high school students get outside and do real, hands-on science," said Amanda Kuenzi, community science director at [Mountain Studies Institute \(http://www.mountainstudies.org/\)](http://www.mountainstudies.org/). "They also interact with science professionals that are working here in our San Juan Mountain communities so that they become aware of what types of science careers are available here."

Kuenzi said part of Mountain Studies Institute's mission is to promote economic development in the San Juan Mountains – and that means getting residents to stay.

"There's that phenomenon of the 'brain drain' – people that are the best and the brightest think they need to leave this area to pursue a career in science and go to a bigger city," she said. "We just want to provide a platform for that interaction between science professionals that are working here with high school students so they can have that opportunity to know you can still be in forestry or abandoned mines or hydrology, and you can stay here."

The two weeks include trail building and sign installation in Silverton; groundwater sampling in Telluride; weed management in Vallecito; and checking out the methane hotspot in the Four Corners.

Along with that, campers journal and learn to write scientific articles. Writing is a piece of the program that has far-reaching importance, Kuenzi said.

"Another focus of this program is to develop 21st-century skills. A lot of that is focused on communicating science and trying to help students learn how to be those objective interpreters of science," she said. "Science that's in a vacuum doesn't help anybody; science that's just in a laboratory or on a shelf doesn't really help anybody, but when you can communicate it effectively to the public, that's where the rubber meets the road."

While the program sounds intense, there is time for campers to let their hair down.

"It's really fun," Kuenzi said. "We still try to have a little bit of down time and play Frisbee and run around."

The price was set this year at \$600 for the full two weeks, and there's a scholarship program to help out families. Families can also help lower their fees by offering to drive campers to meeting points because the program is offered to students from all over the area – from Telluride and Ridgway to Pagosa Springs and all points in between.

"Our intention is to bring together students from all these different watersheds and bring them together so they're networking with each other," Kuenzi said. "There are connections between science-minded youth across the San Juan Mountains, which is cool."

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