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August 19, 2021

State Parks Division works with local partners to create mural at City of Rocks State Park

Youth Mural Program highlights youth exploring outside and learning about ecosystems

Faywood, NM –The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, State Parks Division (State Parks) recently partnered with the New Mexico Economic Development Department's Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD), the Western New Mexico University Outdoor Program (WNMU), and the Youth Mural Program (YMP) to create an outdoor mural at City of Rocks State Park in southwestern New Mexico. The project was funded through the ORD Outdoor Equity Grant which aims to engage low-income youth in nature-based outdoor recreation activities and provide education about climate and the environment.

The WNMU Outdoor Program partnered with City of Rocks State Park and the YMP to offer the camp to twenty-three students between the ages of 8 and 14, and included 4 young adult apprentices.

“It was great having the kids out here at the park changing what was once a blank wall to an amazing mural for all our visitors to enjoy” said Gabe Medrano, Park Manager, City of Rocks State Park. “I would like to thank the kids for their hard work, and I look forward to working with WNMU on another mural.”

“Projects like the Youth Mural Program at City of Rocks State Park perfectly capture the spirit of the Outdoor Equity Fund,” said ORD Director Axie Navas. “It’s truly transformative outdoor recreation, combining outdoor exploration, community pride, and climate change education.”

“This was a great partnership and we're so happy to have had the opportunity to work with

everyone to get kids and their families outside!” said Dr. Kathy Whiteman, WNMU Outdoor Program Director.

Every summer, the Youth Mural Program offers a youth camp, but this year decided to partner with the WNMU Outdoor Program to get kids exploring outside and learning about the southwestern region and City of Rocks State Park. The mural was designed and painted by the youth campers over a 2-week period.

“Getting the kids to the park and providing them with this opportunity was hugely impactful; this group seemed to bond in a unique way and these kids formed lasting friendships; it was great!” added Diana Leyba-Ingalls, YMP Director.

The first week of camp was spent on a field trip to the Gila National Forest, teambuilding activities, classroom-based lessons, and a field trip to City of Rocks discussing the ecoregion and mural design.

In the Gila, the campers discussed the role of fire in shaping forests and talked about climate change. At City of Rocks, campers focused on Chihuahuan Desert ecosystems and discussed the role of rodents on community structure. In week 2 the students explored the desert and painted the mural. On the last night, students and their families camped overnight at the park, enjoying fajitas for dinner and s’mores over a campfire. The campers played on the rocks watched the sunset observed foraging bats, (most likely Western pipistrelle, *Parastrellus Hesperus*), gazed at the night sky, and slept in tents - some for the very first time.

A dedication of the mural was held at the end of July, and the campers invited parents and families to add their handprints to the mural.



Students work on an outdoor mural at City of Rocks State Park.



The outdoor mural at City of Rocks State Park was funded by the NM Economic Development Department's Outdoor Recreation Division Outdoor Equity Grant.

For more information, visit our website at <https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/spd/>

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