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Title

Parks in Focus: Inspiring the next generation of park stewards

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4dx9d8t1>

Journal

Parks Stewardship Forum, 36(3)

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Publication Date

2020

DOI

10.5070/P536349871

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PSF

PARKS STEWARDSHIP FORUM

Humanizing the Seas

A Case for Integrating the Arts and Humanities
into *Ocean Literacy and Stewardship*

CITATION

Muter, Bret A. 2020. Parks in Focus: Inspiring the next generation of park stewards. *Parks Stewardship Forum* 36(3): 547–559.

A DOI for this citation is available at: <https://escholarship.org/uc/psf>

Plastic Catch • Susan Schultz
porcelain and wood sculpture



THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S FRAME

PARKS IN FOCUS

Inspiring the next generation of park stewards

BRET A. MUTER



INTRODUCTION

The park idea will flourish only if it is constantly restated and made relevant to the values esteemed by future generations.

— *Stewart L. Udall*, 1972

As we collectively work toward a future where our nation’s public lands are inclusive, safe, and accessible places for everyone to enjoy, I am often reminded of this quote from Stewart Udall. As many of us know, Stewart was a lifelong advocate for the environment. Among his many significant achievements, Stewart helped champion the protection of millions of acres of land during his tenure as secretary of the interior through the creation of more than 100 public land sites across the country, including national parks, national monuments, national lakeshores/seashores, wildlife refuges, and more. Throughout his life, Stewart also spoke passionately and frequently about the importance of engaging young people in the outdoors and ensuring those experiences are both meaningful and culturally relevant to new generations.

One way the Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation, an independent federal agency, has been carrying on Stewart’s public lands legacy is through Parks in Focus (a registered trademark of the foundation), a program that connects youth from underserved and under-represented communities to our nation’s public lands through photography and outdoor learning. Based in Tucson, Arizona, the program works closely with the Western National Parks Association, Boys & Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters programs, schools, and other youth-serving organizations to put cameras in the hands of youth—many of whom have had limited exposure to the outdoors—and lead them on fun and educational excursions to public land sites across Arizona and around the country.

Photography inspires the Parks in Focus curriculum, which integrates science, history, culture, technology, and art as participating youth hike, camp, explore, and photograph settings ranging from schoolyards and city park systems to the Grand Canyon and Yosemite. Cameras become familiar and effective tools for youth to observe, document, and learn about the natural and cultural resources of the sites they visit. More importantly, however, digital cameras provide a powerful outlet for youth to be creative and share stories about their lives and their own outdoor experiences. Providing space for sharing art and amplifying voices through personal storytelling is essential if we are truly committed to making public lands experiences relevant, inclusive, and inspiring now and in the future.

Stewart Udall would have celebrated his 100th birthday in 2020. If he were alive today, I suspect he would be reminding us to listen to the voices, stories, and perspectives that have been excluded for too long. I imagine he would also find inspiration, as we do, in the stories and incredible artwork created by the youth who have participated in the Parks in Focus program. It is easy to imagine a brighter future for our public lands with this new generation of park stewards and advocates leading the way.

For more information about Parks in Focus, visit udall.gov.

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OVERLEAF

Parks in Focus leads engaging activities in classrooms, schoolyards, and local parks where students are provided with cameras and practice basic photography skills as they learn about local plants, animals, and landscapes within their own communities and beyond.



Mer'jai, age 12, was excited to find and photograph these unseasonal saguaro blossoms during a fall outing to Saguaro National Park.



Sergio, age 15, waited patiently to take this photograph of a queen butterfly fluttering through the gardens outside of the entrance to Tumacácori National Historical Park.



Natalia, age 12, was inspired by the textures and layers throughout the mission grounds at Tumacácori National Historical Park.



Students practice landscape photography during an overnight camping trip to Chiricahua National Monument.



Nessa, age 13, took this close-up of an organ pipe cactus during a Parks in Focus trip to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument last fall.



Eddie, age 14, photographed these beautiful Apache plume flowers in front of the San Francisco Peaks while exploring Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument.



Adolfo, age 15, captured this image of a western collared lizard while visiting Wupatki National Monument on a multiday Parks in Focus camping trip in northern Arizona.



Students photograph and learn about ancient pueblos and culture while visiting Wupatki National Monument.



Reina, age 12, noticed this curious rock squirrel while hiking the South Kaibab Trail to Ooh-Aah Point during a Parks in Focus trip to Grand Canyon National Park.



Parks in Focus participants visit Horseshoe Bend at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area to take in a memorable sunset.



Photo by Aliscella, age 10. The most important goal of Parks in Focus is to provide youth with positive outdoor experiences. As Stewart Udall would say, youth need opportunities to “Cherish sunsets, wild creatures, and wild places. Have a love affair with the wonder and beauty of the earth.”