

South San Juan Wilderness Trek

Application Process

Application Information: **Due Date Friday, April 19**

Thank you for your interest in this trek and your initiation of the application process. This application includes two components: essay questions and a letter of support. Both must be received by Friday, April 19. The letter of support should be written by an adult (**non-family member**) that knows you well. Please provide the Letter of Support Explanation sheet, included on page 2, to your chosen adult. All responses will be confidential.

An electronic copy of this application can be found at www.dmconseruation.com.

Completed applications should be emailed to rectork@dmcounty.com or mailed to:

Starr's Cave Nature Center
11627 Starr's Cave Rd.
Burlington, IA 52601

Full Name: _____ Current Grade Level: _____

High School Name: _____

Home Mailing Address: _____

Applicant Phone Number: _____ Applicant Email: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

Parent/Guardian Email: _____

List dietary restrictions and/or medical conditions we should be aware of (attach extra sheet if needed):

Application Essay Questions (please type answers)

1. Why do you want to go on this trek?
2. What do you want to do when you graduate high school? How do you think this experience will assist you as you make choices/decisions about your future?
3. Of the various challenges that this trek presents you, (social-emotional, intellectual, maturity/responsibility, physical) which do you see as most challenging for you? Why?
4. What do you feel you, as an individual, can offer this trek and your fellow journey mates? Provide us with examples of your experiences working within a group or as part of a team.
5. This trek will take you into the South San Juan Wilderness, an area designated by the federal government as Wilderness. Our government has a legal definition for Wilderness. How do *you* define wilderness?
6. What benefits do you think Wilderness areas offer to society in general?
7. Please describe any camping /backpacking experiences you have. (Past wilderness experience is not a prerequisite for this trek.)
8. Backpacking requires physical fitness and endurance. What activities (organized or independent) prepare you for the physical component of this trip?"

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Explanation of Letter of Support

Greetings,

Thank you for agreeing to write a letter of support for this applicant to the South San Juan Wilderness Backpacking Trek. This communication is meant to provide you with a clear description of this trek and the challenges it presents. Additionally, it will identify the topics we wish you to address in your letter to best assist us in selecting participants.

In cooperation with the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the San Juan Mountains Association (SJMA), Des Moines County Conservation (DMCC) is leading a two week backpacking trip for area high school students to the South San Juan Wilderness in Colorado. The 127,000 acres in this federally designated wilderness area straddles the Continental Divide and offers stunning alpine tundra habitats, sweeping vistas, and solitude.

Participants need not have prior wilderness experience, as a mandatory orientation day will teach skills needed in the backcountry. Students will learn backpacking skills, Leave No Trace ethics, and wilderness restoration techniques. Participants will work on projects like trail construction, campsite rehabilitation, monitoring and restoration.

We are not in the tourism business. We are not offering this experience to provide travel for high school students to exotic, far off lands for an adrenaline-based thrill. We are offering this trip to give students experiences in nature they could never experience in Iowa and to stimulate their minds in what the world has to offer. Through this experience, we hope to alter the way our students conceive wilderness and how they perceive their relationship to it. This experience will be a watershed moment for each participant; it can even change their life.

With this description in front of you, we are now asking you to help us determine if this applicant is prepared for the challenges, and if they are deserving of the rewards. The challenges of the trek are summarized by four components:

- 1. Physical:** participants may backpack up to 10 miles/day, camp, and work for six days in the backcountry under very primitive conditions. Packs may weigh up to 45 pounds.
- 2. Social/Emotional:** the success of the trek largely depends on the participants evolving from strangers to a cohesive community of friends. Students will be required to contribute to group tasks.
- 3. Maturity/Responsibility:** participants must recognize the group dynamics, be autonomous, self-motivated and accepting of diversity. Participants must also be trusted to make good decisions and to minimize risks.
- 4. Intellectual:** the goal of this trek is to assist students in their personal journey towards understanding the role of nature in their lives and to return to Iowa to find wilderness and to find themselves at home in it.

In your letter of support please address these four topics as you evaluate the participant's attributes within the context of this trek. Additionally, please include your opinions on how the participant will benefit from this opportunity.

Please return your letter of support via mail or email no later than Friday, April 19. All information provided is confidential and will be viewed only by the selection committee. If you need further information, please feel free to contact me.

Many thanks,

Kent Rector

Starr's Cave Nature Center

11627 Starr's Cave Rd. | Burlington, IA 52601

O: 319-753-5808 | E: rectork@dmccounty.com