



# Find Yourself Outside.

This year has definitely presented challenges.

There are, of course, *practical* challenges.

- How do we offer classroom programs without classrooms?
- How do we do hands-on learning from a distance?



More important, however, are the *fundamental* challenges.

- **How can we feel grounded and secure, in a world where almost nothing feels safe or certain?**
- **How do we connect to one another, the world, or any sense of meaning, in a climate of distance?**

All of us feel this weight, especially children.

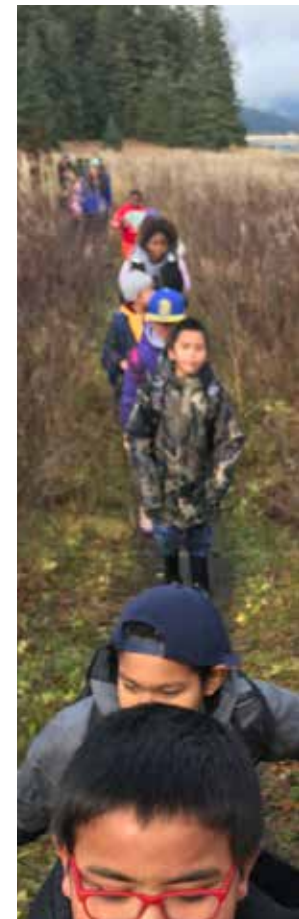
Discovery Southeast exists because there's insight, stability, and vitality to be found in nature.

For children—and for all of us—finding and investing in that deeper connection is more important than ever, and Discovery Southeast has always been dedicated to providing it.

Thank you to everyone supporting formative experiences for children in nature. We are grateful to rest on the shoulders of dedicated naturalists, consistent supporters, and teachers and parents committed to creating opportunities for children.



Whether it's small group lessons, or independent exploration, there has never been a more important time for connection and hands-on learning in nature.



# A Place for Place-Based Education.

What a 30th birthday present! Discovery Southeast now has a place, thanks to Judy Maier's generous donation of seven acres on the Back Loop. The property is on a beautiful former terminal moraine of the Mendenhall Glacier, studded with kettle ponds and glacial erratics. At the crossroads of several protected areas and often traversed by wildlife, the land is ripe for ecological study and will be a great place for children to learn outside.

This is actually Judy's second major gift. Her first was helping start Discovery Southeast. Judy came to Juneau in her youth to help build the Methodist Camp at Eagle Beach. Years later, as a classroom teacher, she brought her students there, where they learned from the Scout Camp's caretaker and budding naturalist Richard Carstensen, Discovery Southeast's founding Lead



*Judy and the Maier family at a conveyance ceremony this fall at the property.*

Naturalist. You know the rest of the story: those lessons took off and became "Nature Studies," our core program in every elementary school, and thus the beginning of Discovery Southeast.

***Judy, thank you for getting Discovery Southeast off the ground... and now back onto the ground!***

# Nature Studies..Without Classrooms.

Our core program Nature Studies has always gone into classrooms to bring children outdoors. In that way we reach every child in our community, at a formative time. But right now classrooms are not currently meeting in-person, so we're adjusting.

Every two months we are distributing a student journal for every elementary student in Juneau. The journals are intended to inspire both teachers and students to get outside and engage with nature. In September students collected seeds and tested them for flying, floating, and hitch-hiking ability. In November students looked at how water shapes the land, and created some erosion themselves. The curriculum is available on our website, where anyone can download and use all of our "distance learning" materials.

The student journal is supplemented by videos, which provide background information, and outline how each activity can be completed. We have recently started doing virtual field trips with classrooms via video conference, and we are excited to meet with our first in-person class and their teacher this month! Our plan is to offer a suite of options for classrooms in the winter, which includes virtual field trips, full in-person field trips with classes, and/or acting as a mentor/partner to help teachers facilitate in-person outdoor learning.

Finally, we're offering small group, in-person programs at select schools, using the same protocols that allowed summer camp to operate. These in-person groups are roughly 6-10 kids and 2 naturalists. These programs are based around getting out in nature, having fun, and connecting with one another. Families can register for them on our website, and there's no need to pay (although you can).

Of course, like always, you can find natural history resources on our websites. [JuneauNature.DiscoverySoutheast.org](http://JuneauNature.DiscoverySoutheast.org) has enough information to keep you curious for an entire pandemic, and [DiscoverySoutheast.org](http://DiscoverySoutheast.org) has a great "on-line content" section on our Programs page.

In summary, we're altering Nature Studies to exist through take-home packets, supplemented with videos, on-line resources, and in-person small group options at schools. We can't wait for the real thing to resume, but in the meantime we are dedicated to engaging children meaningfully in nature in whatever way we can.

## Thank You Teachers

Every year we have the privilege of working closely with classroom teachers. Their innovation and unflinching dedication to students always shines bright, but this year is a whole new level. We are impressed and grateful.



*\*This year's photos show various mask use and distancing because some are before the pandemic or in "bubble camps" of pre-grouped families.*



# Summer Camp in a Pandemic.

It's not easy, because every decision holds a heavier weight than before. We're already accustomed to weighing risks: You arrive at a beach and look around. What are kids going to be drawn to? Is the tide coming in? Are the rocks slippery? We learn to manage these risks by allowing kids to explore in a way that they perceive as adventurous, yet with which we feel comfortable.

This summer of Outdoor Explorers was obviously different. There was a clear risk we couldn't see, and it could bring consequences that were definitely not in our comfort zone.



So what do you do to mitigate risk? You set up boundaries, just like managing a beach. For covid we developed safety protocols to feel confident and comfortable in the way we were running our camp. There were things you might expect, like daily health screenings, face masks, smaller groups, no shared supplies. And there were more complicated logistics, like reconfiguring staffing to avoid overlap among camps plus allow extra paid time off. Or running an entire day at one location, to avoid indoor time or van transit.



The heaviness of the pandemic was truly heavy. We kept the days short. We talked about our experiences, a lot. It was necessary.

Was it worth it? We believe it was. The exposure level was something most Southeast Alaskans already assumed: outdoor, masked, distanced, in small groups. And we were one of very few groups offering in person programming this summer.



There were many children saying "I am so happy to see my friends" or "I am so happy to make friends!" that made it especially meaningful. A smile, a laugh, a connection: it's what we were all craving this summer. Parents reported their kids were "lighter" and less moody after a day of camp. They were incredibly thankful to be able to get their kids connecting with others, being active, and interacting with tangible things off a screen, in an environment that offered reasonable safeguards.

What did we learn? A lot, just like every summer of Outdoor Explorers. We were reminded every day of the importance of boundaries, but also the importance of connection, with each other and with this place.

Your support makes this possible. **Please renew or join today.**



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# Gunalchéesh!



Discovery Southeast thanks and honors Áak'w & T'aakú Kwáans, on whose land we listen and teach.