City youths to study state's natural wonders at University of Montana this summer

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High school students from metropolitan areas throughout the nation will have the opportunity to study the natural wonders of Montana first hand during the 1969 Summer Session at the University of Montana. The University has received a $22,000 National Science Foundation grant to conduct, for the third summer, an eight-week field ecology training program for high school juniors. The eight-week program is staggered one week to allow 20 students in each section. Project dates are June 23-Aug. 15 and June 30-Aug. 22. The same staff will be employed for both sections.

The 40 students, chosen from a list of nationwide applicants, will be selected on the basis of academic performance, science test scores and personal recommendations. An important factor in selection, according to the project director Dr. Forrest D. Thomas II, associate professor of chemistry at UM, is finding students "who have had little exposure to the out-of-doors practical aspect of the biological sciences."

Cities represented at Montana's science training program last year included Alexandria, Ind.; Pittsfield, Mass.; Wheaton, Ill.; Memphis, Tenn.; St. Louis, Mo.; Lawrence, Kan.; Chevy Chase, Md.; Jamaica, N.Y.; San Francisco, Calif.; Newark, N.J., and Arlington, Tex.

"The program," Dr. Thomas explained, "is unique among NSF projects in that it allows these city-bound youngsters to participate in extensive field experience including hikes and pack trips.

"It is difficult for people in Montana to understand the magnitude of the experience for these students," Dr. Thomas continued. "They've never seen this before. One girl last summer said the only contact with nature she had had were walks through Central Park."
The chemist indicated that the program is broad, skimming the surface of all aspects of the outdoors.

"The Missoula area is a good base of operations since it provides terrains ranging from swampy river bottoms to dry grass lands. There is a unique biological population in each area," Dr. Thomas added.

The program includes study in the areas of flora and fauna, entomology, geology, soils, grasslands, forests, aquatic ecology, aspects of pollution, pesticides, microbiology and wildlife. Among the many field trips included are ones to Ninepipes National Wildlife Refuge, the Bitterroot Mountains, Flathead Lake, logging sites, experimental forests and the Hoerner Waldorf kraft paper mill in Missoula.

The two-day trip to Glacier National Park provides the students with an opportunity to study alpine ecology, wildlife and geology.

"The program is climaxed with a six-day pack trip into the Bob Marshall Wilderness area, 100 miles northeast of Missoula, where the ecology has been relatively undisturbed by human intervention," Dr. Thomas said.

The program, he continued, gives an overall view of ecology, pointing out what the problems are, which areas have been grossly exploited and comparing them with the undisturbed areas.

"Some of the students go away pretty disturbed about what is happening to the environment," he concluded.