

Profile

Ted James

Walking Mountains Science Center

Water isn't just a subject that Ted James teaches; it is the avenue through which he teaches all subjects.

In his 15 years of teaching science at Eagle Valley Middle School in Eagle, Colo., James' curriculum included river excursions through Glenwood Canyon, countless field trips to aquatic sites, time in the lab studying samples, and projects that parent chaperones would often marvel at as college-level.

James attributes his ability to teach such in-depth coursework to the support he received from Colorado River Watch and the Walking Mountains Science Center, formerly the Gore Range Natural Science School. Through his River Watch course, James' students sampled more than 300 local river sites for aquatic research—translating to at least 300 field trips and more than 300 sessions in the lab.

"It's real-world science," James says, noting that after proving the samples met strict protocol standards, the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission began using the data to set standards for minimizing heavy metal pollution leaching from old mines in the area. James' students helped monitor streams that ordinarily would not have the manpower to be monitored.

Though James retired last year from teaching, he has begun new projects at the Walking Mountains Science Center. He hopes citizen scientists will collect aquatic samples from local rivers and bring them in for analysis at the center's newly-opened Buck Creek Campus in Avon.

The Buck Creek Campus is the first educational facility in Colorado to achieve the U.S. Green Building Council's highest certification for sustainable design, LEED Platinum. There, equipment and indoor lab space will be available; James will be at-the-ready to help analyze samples; and public programs with names in the vein of Watershed Wednesdays will facilitate social connection. Ideally, James will provide a model of teaching science that inspires people to get involved in local schools.



Kevin Moloney (2)

"I've seen programs come and go because people get burned out," says James. He hopes the community aspect will give participants staying power, adding that teacher turnover in school districts makes water curriculum person-specific. A more ideal scenario would be an involved resident who serves as an anchor for a particular creek, collects consistent samples and assists in River Watch classes when a teacher runs a local program.

If the typical voter was required to have the scientific literacy of one of his seventh-grade students we'd be better off, James says, "We need an informed citizenry on water education and it's not going to happen just leaving it up to the public schools." —Emily Palm



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