MEDIA RELEASE
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Contact: Jennifer Beard, Development Associate
Telephone 253-514-0187; Email Jennifer@harborwildwatch.org

Harbor WildWatch is excited to announce the award of a $2,500 grant from the New Belgium Foundation to support outdoor, STEM courses for local students in the 2016-2017 school year. As environmental stewards, The New Belgium Foundation is enthusiastic about programs that foster connectivity between humans and nature. They aim to discover programs that engage youth from a variety of backgrounds in the outdoors and prepare them to make knowledgeable choices about the environment. Harbor WildWatch is an environmental education organization which focuses on the stewardship of Puget Sound and provides interactive learning and volunteer experiences for the residents and visitors of the greater Gig Harbor community.

Through the Explorer Series, Harbor WildWatch has delivered field STEM workshops to over 12,000 students at local beaches, estuaries and wetlands since 2008. Designed to get kids outside, this program provides an opportunity to apply classroom knowledge in a real-world setting. Participants learn to identify animal and plant life, measure erosion and monitor biodiversity – with the ultimate goal of increasing interest and aptitude in STEM subjects among K-12 students.

Harbor WildWatch continues to see a vital need for supplemental science education in Washington – both through the increased demand for programs and student achievement. According to the 2016 Washington STEM Education Report Card, “of every 100 children born in Washington, only 40 will graduate high school on track for a STEM-related career. The rest will not be prepared because of poor academic performance, limited proficiency in math and science, a lack of interest in STEM subjects, and limited access to rich community-based experiences that provide the context for STEM.”

Youth are also spending more time indoors and in front of screens than ever before. This screen time leads to a lack of awareness about local environments and expands students disconnect between their academic lessons and the natural world. When Harbor WildWatch hosts school groups on the shores of Puget Sound, students get to enjoy fresh air and open natural spaces and; for some of these children, they are visiting the beach for the first time.

With support from the New Belgium Foundation, Harbor WildWatch will continue to work to close these gaps and address community needs by relating STEM-based learning and ecological stewardship to everyday life. Program Coordinator, Rachel Easton, believes that “by connecting youth to local wildlife and regional ecology, we help catalyze a lifelong interest in scientific learning, develop a sense of place, and encourage the future scientists, leaders, and citizens of Pierce and Kitsap County.”

To learn more about Harbor WildWatch’s Explorer Series or other youth programs, please contact Rachel@harborwildwatch.org. Or visit www.harborwildwatch.org/youthprograms.

Harbor WildWatch is a 501(c)(3) non-profit environmental education organization based in Gig Harbor, WA. Their mission is to inspire stewardship for Puget Sound by providing learning opportunities about the environment to the people in the local community. Through more than 600 fun and interactive programs each year, Harbor WildWatch hopes to inform residents and visitors about local marine life and elicit their involvement in preserving our natural resources. To make a donation or learn more about Harbor WildWatch, visit www.harborwildwatch.org.