October 2006

Hands on the Land
A National Network of Field Classrooms Linking Students, Teachers, and Parents to their Public Lands

Featured Site:
Chugach National Forest Glacier Ranger District

In the heart of south-central Alaska, the 5.6 million acre tapestry of the Chugach National Forest (CNF) pulsates with abundant beauty. From the rugged mountaintops blanketed in blue ice to the sweeping valley floors carpeted green below, this second largest national forest and northern most temperature rainforest allows the lakes, rivers, islands and glaciers of Prince William Sound to exist as one of the most breathtaking places on earth.

The Glacier Ranger District (GRD) Conservation Education (CE) program has been in a kinetic state of evolution since January of 2005 when the CE team determined it necessary to increase their impact left on students and teachers. The remainder of the year would be spent planning: developing and aligning curriculum to education standards, becoming a Hands on the Land (HOL) site, establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Anchorage School District, and finalizing the GRD CE Plan.

One year from that initial decision to grow, Forest Service educators hear an inspired 3rd grader, turned snowshoe-enthusiast, claim to her friend: "This is the best field trip ever!" during the premiere Forest Ranger Academy field trip to Portage Valley, CNF.

The new and improved education program, the Forest Ranger Academy, is designed to allow FS educators more time with students, but most importantly get the students into their national forest! Three units are offered for 3rd grade teachers: "Aqua Rangers," "Tree Rangers," or "Storm Rangers," each consisting of pre and post evaluation, classroom instruction, and the anticipated field trip to Portage Valley. Thanks to agency HOL monies, the GRD purchased snowshoes so the young urban audience can get their hands on the forest while visiting the Portage Valley Learning Center (PVLC). In addition, the cost for busing 10 school groups from Anchorage to Portage was kindly covered by direct support funds through our non-profit partner, the Alaska Natural History Association.

The mascot, adorned with love and some other items by a group of 3rd graders.

Snowshoeing students explore Alaska's wilderness during their CE program.

While the Forest Ranger Academy generates the largest number of student contact hours for our district, the Forest Explorer Summer Camps are making their way onto the edu-scene. The CE team is hopeful that interest will increase in the upcoming summers and community members will take advantage of the free day camps. Six local students participated in the pilot camp this past summer, learning outdoor survival skills while recreating in their national forest. The camp was a success and CE team members are confident the program will only continue to grow as word gets out!

A website for the GRD Interpretation & Conservation Education program is currently under construction, so watch the Chugach National Forest site profile on handsontheland.org for links and upcoming news. Please feel free to contact Stephanie Israel or Kathy Bagley at 907-783-3242 with questions or ideas.

Member News

Great Smoky Mountains National Park Terrestrial Invertebrate Monitoring

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina has contributed multiple resources to the Terrestrial Invertebrate Monitoring Study, 'Digging Down Into the Dirt' of the HOL website; including a lesson plan for grades 4-6 called 'Leaf Litter Critters' posted by GSMNP Education Coordinator, Susan Sachs. Already this fall, students from Swain Middle School have posted data collected from the field near the GSMNP Oconaluftee Visitor Center. Using various tools such as a student made leaf litter sifter (see the HOL link to the 'Leaf Litter Critters' to make your own) students examine invertebrate diversity and ecosystem conditions. HOL's homepage also now includes a "How To" link designed to help other sites conduct their own monitoring of this, and other, wonderful hands-on science activities. See this month's Web Corner for more information on Environmental Monitoring.

Students prepare for their data collection as part of the Terrestrial Invertebrate Study.

Students collect & record data on Cutleaf Coneflower in the Purchase Knob ozone garden.

Upcoming Events

North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) 35th Annual Conference

Held this month, October 11th – 14th, NAAEE's 35th Annual Conference will be a gathering of over 1,000 educators in Minnesota, at the headwaters of two major water systems, Red River of the North and the Mississippi River.

Focus will be on the role of environmental educators in bringing together community participants to work toward the goal of a healthy, equitable, and sustainable world. Surrounded by the "land of 10,000 lakes," much focus will often be on water issues, yet other aspects of the natural and built environment are also on the agenda. Themes addressed include Sustainability; Joining Forces (environmental justice, health, and education); Schools, Education, Achievement, and Literacy; EE Leadership Skills; and Conservation and Community Education which focuses on the significant environmental results achieved through peoples' positive experience with natural spaces.

For more information or to register, visit www.naaee.org/conference. Information, results and discussion will also be available upon completion of the conference at NAAEE's website.

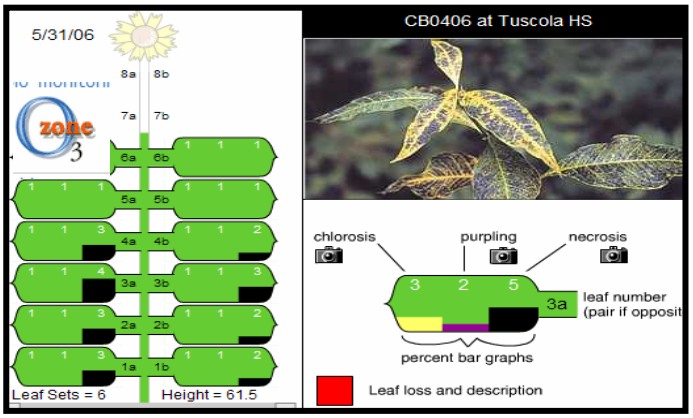
Web Corner

Posting Environmental Monitoring Programs

Many HOL partner sites conduct research and data collection with visiting students – but did you know that the data you collect, can be posted to the HOL website and then compared with similar data collected by sites across the country?

By clicking on the 'Hands-on Science' link from the HOL homepage, several focal projects are listed, as well as information on how to start your own monitoring program. Example featured monitoring program currently available include the Terrestrial Invertebrate Study (see Member News for more info) and the Ozone Bio-Monitoring Garden Study. The Ozone study allows students to utilize the leaves of plants as bio-indicators for possible ozone damage. Student can then graph their data using multiple tools provided.

To start posting your Environmental Monitoring Program, or become involved in existing research, contact HOL webmaster Dave Zelenka or Ellen Reid.



HOL generated graph of Foliar Area Injury of a garden plant monitored and observed by Tuscola High School students as part of the Ozone Bio-Monitoring Program.