



Hands on the Land

A National Network of Field Classrooms Linking Students, Teachers, and Parents to their Public Lands and Waterways

Featured Site

Empire Ranch

The Empire Ranch, 50 miles southeast of Tucson, AZ, is situated in the high Sonoran Desert in the heart of the 42,000 acre Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (LCNCA). The Empire Ranch House is a 22-room adobe and wood frame building which dates to 1870 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Empire Ranch, known to many as the filming location for western movies such as "Red River" and "Gunfight at the OK Corral", is one of Southern Arizona's oldest continuously working cattle ranches.

The Empire Ranch Foundation, a non-profit charitable organization established in 1997, works with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) -Tucson Field Office to generate funding to preserve the ranch buildings and natural landscapes, as well as to enhance the educational and recreational opportunities it offers to the general public.

Last June, the Foundation launched *Wild about the Grasslands!*, a week-long summer day camp for students in Grades 6 to 8. This outdoor experiential program focused on sustainability of the natural resources and cultural heritage of this unique environment. Five of the rarest habitat types in the American Southwest came to life for the students as they engaged in hands-on, minds-on activities in "the wild".



Young naturalists hiking to Empire Gulch.

Students had great fun using GPS units to find well hidden geocaches and monitor Vinca, an invasive exotic plant, near the Empire Gulch. History came alive as they toured the ranch and heard humorous tales of "the way life really was" for a ranch hand. *Wild about the Grasslands!* ignited a spark that is sure to make a difference in the lives of these "young naturalists".

Each May, local middle school students make their way back to Empire Ranch Headquarters to attend *Legacy Day*, a very successful field day ranching education program. Students and their teachers are transported back at least 50 years into the past to participate in live frontier territory living. This year, working with mesquite brush being cleared on the LCNCA by the BLM, students built a "retaque" corral fence some 150 foot long to demonstrate how livestock confinement was done in Southern Arizona and in Sonora Mexico.

The 2007 Roundup and Open House, coinciding with National Public Lands Day, is sponsored by the Empire Ranch Foundation and the Bureau of Land Management. *Growing up on the Empire Ranch* will provide a complete Western experience with many exhibits reflecting the heritage of ranching in southeastern Arizona. Wagon rides, Kid's Corral with 4-H presentations, educational & photo exhibits, and arena events will make this an entertaining event for the entire family. For more information, please visit the Empire Ranch Foundation website at www.empireranchfoundation.org or contact Gail Corkill at gcorkill@wca-educate.com.



Riparian Sampling: Looking for macroinvertebrates in all the right places!

During this time, students worked with conservation scientists and local naturalists to learn about the great diversity of plant and animal life in semi-desert grasslands, sacaton grasslands, mesquite woodlands, cotton-wood willow riparian areas, and cienegas. They investigated macroinvertebrates in the riparian area, made herbariums of native plants, and created nature inspired journals, flags and collages.

Member News



Summer fun at *Summer Explorers Biology Camp!*

Prairie Wetlands Learning Center Fergus Falls, Minnesota

The week of June 11 – 15, 2007 was a time of discovery and adventure for students and teachers at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. The Center hosted its second annual *Summer Explorers Biology Camp* for students entering sixth and seventh grades, along with a concurrent “Teaching in the Outdoor Classroom” workshop for teachers. It was a great opportunity for students and teachers to learn together. The camp and workshop were led by Dave Ellis and Chip McAllister, Fergus Falls ISD 544 teachers, as well as Laura Bonneau, Teresa Jaskiewicz, and Molly Stoddard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service environmental educators stationed at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center.

Nine teachers and non-formal educators spent the week learning about authentic, place-based education and how to integrate the outdoor classroom into teaching subjects like science, math, reading, and writing. Each teacher was paired with a small group of Summer Explorers (students attending the camp), and they spent the week learning and discovering the prairie wetlands ecosystem together. Hands-on activities such as aquatic plant and macroinvertebrate studies, prairie plant identification, sound mapping, and other field investigations made the camp rewarding for everyone involved. Participants learned about Ernest Thompson Seton, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Byrd Baylor, Laura Ingalls Wilder, and other famous naturalists throughout the week.

In the words of one teacher, “It didn’t feel like a workshop...it was like going back in time to summer camp. I love hands on learning.” Another teacher appreciated that “instead of floods of printed curriculum, I got strategies and practiced them and can see how they might fit into my teaching style.” Student responses to the camp were overwhelmingly positive, too. Participants not only wanted to expand the camp to an overnight experience, but several of them also wanted to come back for the camp next year, even as teaching assistants. Once again, the combination kids’ camp and teacher workshop was an outstanding success.

Upcoming Events

National Public Lands Day
Helping Hands for America’s Lands
Saturday, September 29, 2007
www.publiclandsday.org



**The 2007 HOL Award winners will
be announced in October!**
**Thank you for all of your
nominations!**



Web Corner

Updating your Site Profile

Updating Your Site Profile

As a member of Hands on the Land, your site’s information is posted in the Site Profiles section. In order to share the most current information for your site on the HOL website, you must update content when changes at your site occur. Updating your Site Profile is easy. Follow these steps:

1. View the Site Profile Training Module by clicking on the Program Provider link on the HOL homepage, then by clicking on the Web Site Training Modules link.
OR
1. Log in to the Admin Hub. If you do not know your password or never received one, contact webmaster Dave Zelenka at dzelenka@interactive-earth.com.
2. Click on the Update a Site Profile link under ‘Content Management’.
3. Choose your site. You have 45 minutes from the time of log in to complete your work. You may want to edit your text in a word processor and then copy and paste into the text fields.
4. Complete the necessary updates and click ‘update profile’.

The Web Site Profile Training Module gives additional details for enhancing your site profile. Please contact Dave Zelenka or HOL Program Director, Ellen Reid at ereid@keystone.org with any questions.