

National Fire Plan

6th Grade Science Camp – Fire Ecology

Bishop, California

2004

Since 2001, the Bernasconi Education Center in Big Pine, CA has hosted a week long Science camp for local 6th graders. The camp hosts nearly 200 students each season, aiming to give each of them an opportunity to better appreciate nature and outdoor experiences. While at the camp, the students are rotated through several educational stations and are required to maintain a record of their experiences in a journal for class credit. The stations include instruction on hiking, bird watching, team building, basic ecology concepts, basic fire / forest ecology concepts and map and compass use.

Since its inception, Interpretive Specialists and Fire Prevention Staff from the White Mountain Ranger District on the Inyo National Forest have worked together to host the 2 hour fire / forest ecology session. During the session, students are given a basic understanding about the natural role fire plays in the environment, examples of the effects that fire exclusion has had on the forest, and management's current efforts to use fire in the reduction of hazardous fuels in fire prone areas.

The session begins with exploratory classroom discussions on local fire history, fuel loading, forest health, fire intensities, and the resulting positive and negative effects of fire on the environment. During the discussion, students are given the opportunity to have their questions answered about why fire managers and professional firefighters often use prescribed fire and wildland fire use in forest management. The students are then taken on a short walk through an area that has been impacted by fire. Throughout the walk they are challenged to apply what they have been taught by pointing out the many effects that fire had had on the area's plant and animal life. Near the close of the session, the students demonstrate their understanding of fire cycles and plant succession through the creation of a mural that displays the relationship between a forest's growth and multiple fire occurrences over time.

This program continues to make valuable strides in achieving National Fire Plan goals. Through educating local students about the fire's natural role in the environment, forest management staff have successfully raised public awareness of how prescribed fire and wildland fire use have helped to reduce hazardous fuels and restore forest health, as well as helped to further protect life, property and resources from wildfire.

