



Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie
National Forest

Forest FEATURES

Local Students Learn, Work Outdoors

When summer comes, learning doesn't stop for high school students taking part in the North Cascades Institutes Wild program. Teens from around Puget Sound get a new perspective on outdoor education and leadership development through camping, hiking and working in the North Cascades National Park and the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.



NCI Wild students enjoy the sun setting over Baker Lake. Photo by Amy Brown, NCI Wild coordinator.

Wild is a program that introduces students to nature, stewardship and community. "Our aim is to connect youth to wild places by fostering the development of stewardship ethics while building awareness for wilderness and public lands," said Amy Brown, NCI Wild coordinator. She explained that the outing activities reinforce the program's educational themes: leadership development, community building, stewardship, and developing a sense of place by studying natural and cultural history.

Seven students and three instructors embarked on a 12-day camping adventure in mid-July that took them outdoors in the Mt. Baker Wilderness. Much of the work planned was at campgrounds across from Baker Lake, where they had to canoe, a new

experience for many, along with camping and hiking.

Starting at Maple Groove campground along the shores of Baker Lake, they "brushed out," or removed overgrowth from the campground, facilities and along the trailhead. They built three picnic tables, took two dilapidated tables apart and moved one by canoe across the lake to Lower Sandy campground where they pieced it back together. "We were moving history. Those picnic tables were built by the Civilian Conservation Corp over 60 years ago," said Aleazar Gebresenbet, from Shoreline High School in Seattle.

The students started each day designating a leader, whose responsibility was to keep everyone on task and follow a set of rules the group had previously developed and agreed upon. If one of the rules were broken, the leader set the punishment.



Kulshan kids Emiliano Victorina-Reyes, age 9, and Alex Gomez, age 7, secure tent pads in place with steel stakes.

“I had Bubba (Gebresenbet) do a little dance after he left the camp journal out all night,” said Harmony Beebe, from Mt. Vernon High School. Each student was responsible for writing in a group journal. “We share whatever is on our minds, from camping and hiking to canoeing or cooking,” said Beebe.

One of the group’s projects during their stay in the forest was to teach young kids from Kulshan Creek neighborhood in Mt. Vernon, Wash., how to become land stewards. The elementary to middle school city kids learned how to build tent pads, plant native shrubs and leave no trace by scouring the area for trash. “Leave the place better than we found it,” was the motto they followed.

Each evening the students met over the fire where they reflected on the activities of the day. “I have learned the difference between wilderness and true defined wilderness,” said Briana Nelson from Garfield High School in

Seattle, Wash. “This has given me a chance to think, feel and know myself,” she said.

For many of the students, the experience left them with a whole new outlook. “This program has changed me, deep down. I have acquired life skills, learning how to cook, canoe, camp and backpack,” Bebee said. Nelson agreed that the outing made a difference for her. “At first I didn’t want to be outdoors with bugs and animals, now, I feel a new connection, a place I can go to slow down,” Nelson said. “Wild has helped me find a sense of place, of being,” she said.

Wild starts each June and runs through August with six trips, two sessions running concurrently over the summer. Students work with National Park Service and Forest Service professionals to complete conservation service projects that can earn them community service hours. Fifty-four youth have participated this summer, and 202 have gone through Wild in the four years of the program.

Wild is sponsored by North Cascades Institute and North Cascades National Park, with additional support from the Lake Forest Park Stewardship Foundation, Ross Lake Resort and the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

The program is free for those who qualify from high schools in Seattle, Lake Forest Park, Skagit County and Whatcom County, Wash. For more information contact Amy Brown at 360-854-2582 or look through the North Cascades Institutes website at <http://www.ncascades.org/index.html> and North Cascades Wild at http://www.ncascades.org/programs/youth/north_cascades_wild/.

*Story and photos by Kelly Sprute
August 2010*