

Sitka Kids are “Hands-On” for Earth Day

By Frank Barnes, Information Receptionist, Sitka Ranger District



Geof Smith teaches kids about the interdependency of organisms in the stream.



Kids simulate rain drops running down the hill.

The 2010 Earth Day Awareness Program was a big success for the Sitka Ranger District. Brad Kriekhaus, District Biologist, planned and implemented a fun day of learning for the 3rd grade classes at *Keet Gooshi Heen* Elementary School in Sitka. The students were very receptive to the educational materials and seemed eager to learn about their outdoor environment.

For this multiagency effort, Geof Smith represented the National Park Service, Caroline Jezierski the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Kelsey Jacobson the Sitka Conservation Society, and Linda Speerstra the Army Corps of Engineers. I joined other Sitka Ranger District employees Marty Becker, Rob Miller, Craig Buehler, Erik Abele and Joe Serio to help with the day's activities.

Several learning stations were set up along Cutthroat Creek, where small groups of *Keet Gooshi Heen* students were given presentations on the different aspects of stream management.

Kelsey Jacobson supervised a very creative game designed by 3rd grade teacher Rebecca Himschoot to help the kids understand watersheds. Jacobson explained the concept of a watershed by asking the kids to track a drop of rain as went from the top of Gavan Hill, down to the ocean, and back to the top again via evaporation. Then, she reinforced the concept by asking the kids to simulate the process. They ran down a small hill while touching markers labeled “stream,” “river,” and then “ocean,” where they picked up more markers labeled “evaporation,” and ran with them back up to the “mountain top.”

At another station, Caroline Jezierski pointed out different characteristics of the stream and how important these features are to fish habitat. She then walked them along the stream and to explore ways to improve the streambed to make a better home for the fish. Marty Becker, Miller Rob and Craig Buehler got down in the stream with their shovels and demonstrated changes such

as riffles and pools can be built in to make the stream more supportive of life. That mucking around in the muddy water really had the kid's attention.

Joe Serio's presentation featured an aquarium with live cutthroat and Dolly Varden trout that were removed from the creek that morning. He pointed out and named the different body parts and markings of the two species of fish as they swam around the tank. Serio then used a series of pictures to explain the life cycle of salmon and their dependence on healthy streams. He also spoke about the strong sense of smell that salmon have to help them find their way back to the stream, where they were born, after years of roaming the Pacific Ocean as adults.

Geof Smith had a streamside table full of examples to explain the fish food chain and emphasized the interdependency of the organisms in the stream he was standing in. His display had not only preserved specimens in vials but he also livened it



up with live specimens collected in Cutthroat Creek that morning. Everyone knows how well bugs and kids get along—he was a hit.

Smith also had hands-on examples of slimy algae, swimming, crawling insect grazers and minnow size cutthroats. He pointed out the habitat limitations of Cutthroat Creek imposed on it by the surrounding development and explained what changes could be made to restore it to a healthy stream. Students were reminded at each station of what Earth Day is all about, and how important it is for them to be mindful of, and take care of, their natural environment.

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