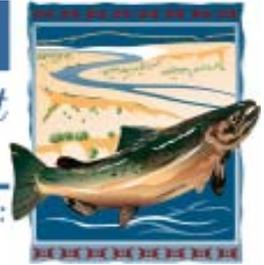


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

*Hanford Reach National Monument
Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge*

... protecting the last of the free-flowing Columbia River



May 7, 2005

Third Annual Rattlesnake Mountain Field Trip

Hanford Reach National Monument, in partnership with Kennewick Community Education sponsored the third annual Rattlesnake Mountain class and field trip May 4th and 7th. A full crowd of 80 local citizens enjoyed an evening presentation featuring wildlife biology, cultural history, restoration activities and planning updates to prepare for Saturday's field trip to the Fitzner-Eberhardt Arid Lands Ecology (ALE) Reserve Unit of the National Monument. The highlight of the field trip was an opportunity to explore the 3600 foot summit of Rattlesnake Mountain where they were greeted by the sweeping vistas of the Pasco Basin and the tundra-like flowering forbs making their brief spring appearance. A special wildflower



identification manual was designed and printed just for the occasion.



Monument staff designed and presented a variety of educational sessions focusing on the Arid Lands Ecology Reserve. Visitors learned about the unique shrub-steppe environment of the ALE, the natural and cultural resources managed by the USFWS and how their tax dollars are used to protect and restore the unique shrub-steppe habitat. Feedback from students was extremely positive and indicated a deeper understanding of the USFWS's mission to conserve and protect the fragile habitats set aside for future generations.

The field trip was not without its unexpected situations. One of the charter buses did not take kindly to the steep climb up Rattlesnake Mountain. It did complete a sputtering ascent and was rewarded by cheers from its passengers, however the descent was cut short by hot brakes. Monument staff flew into action and quickly changed itinerary to rescue the stranded passengers and bring the bus down safely. After an impromptu staff meeting, a rotation schedule was agreed upon to keep the crippled bus off the mountain. Kudos go out to the staff members for quick thinking and decisive actions that made the schedule for the afternoon field sessions run smoothly.

As in past field trips, the visitors to the summit were most impressed. Many stated that they had lived in the Tri-cities for many years and several had worked on the construction of the then top-secret Hanford site, but no one ever imagined that they would have the opportunity to view the basin from the summit of the mountain that has been off-limits for over 60 years. For some, it was truly a gift to know that they had finally made it to the top in their lifetime, a thought that we, as National Wildlife Refuge managers, must never lose sight of.

