

National Elk Refuge News – December 23, 2008

Winter Solstice Celebrated at Visitor Center



Above: A National Elk Refuge mascot helped spread the word about Sunday's event.

Right: With guidance from a family member, a youngster searches for his place on Planet Earth.



With a major snowstorm on the horizon, the first day of winter was celebrated at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center in Jackson this past weekend, with several free family activities available to help participants learn about the science of the winter solstice and the changes the season brings.

A costumed mascot braved the steady snowfall and stood outside on the curb, waving at passersby and enticing them to stop at the visitor center for the event. Families who attended were greeted at the door with a description of the special activities offered that day, an opportunity to

sign up for announcements notifying them of similar family events planned in the future, and a steaming cup of hot chocolate to set them on their way.

Participants had a range of activities they could choose from on Sunday. Using a globe and flashlight, scientists of all ages could simulate the tilt of the earth during the different seasons and discover how the angle affects the amount of sunlight an area receives. With a related lesson by *Bill Nye the Science Guy* running continuously on a computer nearby, participants could challenge themselves with a winter solstice quiz.



Naturalist Justin Walters leads a discussion on winter adaptations, using a snowshoe hare hide to demonstrate camouflage in the snow.



A young explorer tries on a pair of snowshoes.

A colorful art activity was available inside the visitor center, using the natural light from a large picture window to showcase the stained glass look-alike final products.

Not all of the activities were held inside the center. Several naturalist-led hikes were offered out on the center's lawn in order to discover hidden objects in the snow and talk about their significance to winter. Snowshoes were available for those that wanted to compare walking in boots to that of footwear that would keep them closer to the top of the snowpack.

The solstice party is one of several family events planned at the Visitor Center this year, helping promote

the national *Get Outdoors, It's Yours!* program. The campaign is an interagency initiative to encourage children and their families to spend more time outside and engaging with nature.

All eight Federal land and water management agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, National Park Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey) are participating in the *Get Outdoors, It's Yours!* initiative. For more information on the *Get Outdoors, It's Yours!* program, visit www.getoutdoorsitsyours.gov.