Refuge Provides Latino Outreach through Pura Vida Program

As a prominent member of the community, the refuge also looks for opportunities to connect residents to nature, and one group in particular offers the potential for a lot of new connections to nature: Jackson’s large and growing Latino population.

“Historically, local Latino youth and their families have visited the neighboring federal lands at much lower rates than other populations,” says the refuge’s Lori Iverson.

Working to combat that, the refuge recently took part in Grand Teton National Park’s Pura Vida program, a program designed to educate and engage the Latino community in Jackson. One part of the program encouraged Latino students to visit their public lands during their spring break.

“Our hope was to spark discussions about the importance of stewardship and instill a desire to seek out more experiences in the outdoors,” Iverson says.

Eight students followed through on the refuge visit, and despite some nasty weather, they enjoyed a wagon ride to get up close with the elk and a driving tour of the refuge. They also heard about the
refuge’s purpose and the mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Culminating the Pura Vida week, the students led their families on a Friday evening tour of the refuge, park, and Bridger-Teton National Forest. Nearly 40 people came on the tour, with the Pura Vida students acting as naturalists/tour guides for their families, sharing the knowledge they learned.

“By participating in Grand Teton National Park’s Pura Vida program,” Iverson says, “the National Elk Refuge staff had the opportunity to dissolve any barriers, introduce the students to the refuge and what it has to offer, and welcome the participants to return with their families to share their experience.”

Sounds like they succeeded.

Top: Students show their appreciation to the horses that pulled them on their wagon ride. Below: Students look for bighorn sheep on Miller Butte during a refuge driving tour.