

National Elk Refuge News – June 25, 2013

Summer Camp Sampler Includes Visit to Refuge



While National Elk Refuge volunteer Cindy Templeton shows students photos of some early homesteads in the Jackson Hole valley (left), volunteer Margaret Lozar lets the same children experience what the inside of a homestead may have smelled like by passing around a container filled with sod and charcoal (right).

Over 70 students got a glimpse of homesteading history earlier this month through a visit to the historic Miller House and a series of activities that centered on early Jackson Hole life and the establishment of the National Elk Refuge. Six groups of students visited over a two-day span as part of a summer camp sampler offered by Systems of Education and Teton 10.

Systems of Education is a community-wide system involving parents, families, schools, community organizations, philanthropists, and businesses to align goals and mobilize resources to ensure every child in Teton County has a strong foundation for lifelong learning, from early education in preschool years to high school graduation and beyond. A Systems of Education working group, concerned about summer learning loss, was approached by the Teton County School District

and asked if they could create programs for students that don't qualify for summer school but need additional experiences over the summer to serve as enrichment programs.

With the task at hand, the group looked at working with existing programs and day camps to expand learning opportunities for other students over the course of a three-week period. The objective of the summer sampler program was to introduce youth and their families to several quality programs at an affordable rate so families could then enroll in their own programs that appeal most to their children for the remainder of the summer and into the following school year. The varied experiences would also give the students exposure to outdoor experiences in Teton County. The Jackson Hole Children's Museum, Presbyterian Church of Jackson Hole's JOY Summer

Camp, and Teton Science Schools stepped up to the challenge of increasing their capacities and accommodating 75 more children during the three-week period.

Systems of Education started advertising the summer sampler during parent teacher conferences in February, prioritizing children that had the least amount of exposure to summer camps. Of the students selected, 70% had one month or less of any kind of summer programs; 25% had no previous exposure to any kind with summer camps or programs. Determining that cost may have been a factor in the lack of previous summer camp experience, Systems of Education worked with an initiative called Teton 10 to secure funding. Teton 10 is a Jackson Hole effort to get youth and teens outside, promote an active lifestyle, connect to their community, and confidently engage in outdoor opportunities.



Students write in their activity books while imagining life in a one-room homestead.

The program is a project of the Bridger-Teton National Forest Children's Forest and is administered by Teton Science Schools and Center of Wonder. With \$17,000 in scholarship money secured, students could participate in the three-week summer sampler program for an affordable price.

The National Elk Refuge participated as one of the community resources that provided experiences for the students. Refuge volunteers organized a series of activities, first discussing the rigors of packing up and leaving a home in the eastern United States over a century ago for an unknown destination further west. Students filled out booklets helping them imagine what the adventure may have been like and what difficulties early pioneers might have experienced. The lesson took

place inside the historic Miller House, a home that was large for its time and is sometimes referred to as Jackson's first "trophy home."

Students sat on the back porch of the historic house, a scale much more representative of a one-room homestead. Inside the back porch,



As part of the lesson, students were tasked with listing what they would have packed as they moved out west and what they would have left behind. One student, thinking about what was most important to take along, simply wrote, "memories."



Binoculars enabled the students to see coyotes, bald eagles, and an osprey which they hadn't seen with their naked eyes.

Refuge and the purpose of the National Wildlife Refuge System. After using binoculars to take in the views and look for wildlife, the students passed around skulls, antlers, horns, and furs while talking about animals found in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The learning experience focused on the needs and adaptations of animals, stressing the importance of adequate habitat and the role of the National Elk Refuge in the Jackson Hole valley.

“We saw the wheels turning during some of the lessons,” said Margaret Lozar, one of the volunteers that organized the lessons. “Some of the older students asked questions that showed they were really thinking about some of the key information we presented,” she explained. “It was good exposure to a part of their community.”

students placed signs representing a bed, a wood stove, a chair, and other objects around the room to visualize the limited space inside a typical homestead compared to

that of a modern-day home.

From there, students moved outdoors to discuss the establishment of the National Elk

The students ranged in age from grades 1–6.



Students crowd around Refuge volunteer Joe Lozar to get a closer look at the elk hide he pulled out for the students to see and feel.