

Learning to be a game warden

by Kelly Modla



Officers Shay Hurd (Kenai National Wildlife Refuge), Daniel Carnow (NOAA), and Jacque Kosto (Alaska State Parks) help kids learn to shoot with air rifles.

This past weekend, the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge hosted the 2015 Youth Game Warden Camp. This camp is a collaborative effort between natural resource agencies to provide young people an opportunity to meet and learn about the interesting job of a game warden. They discovered that you need to be a little bit curious, take a keen interest in wildlife and fisheries management, natural resource law enforcement, enjoy interacting with the visiting public, be a quick thinker, and enjoy an outdoor office.

So what do you get when you bring together 40 fourth, fifth, and sixth graders and engage them in such activities as wildlife forensics, wildlife management and law enforcement, wildlife robotics, archery, antlers, skulls, and duck identification? This motley crew of 9-12 year olds brought with them lots of enthusiasm and excitement to learn about conservation, loads of great questions and observations, and a will-

ingness to try some new skills. The camp participants learned and developed game warden skills in real life field scenarios, while partnered up with a real game warden.

One of the goals of the camp was to foster awareness and respect for Alaska's natural resources. For example, we talked about migratory bird identifications, and survey techniques used to count them, fish tagging equipment, and the benefits of the duck stamp program. How about learning a little bit about robotic decoy use in natural resource law enforcement, or looking for clues and using technology to solve a wildlife crime? These opportunities may spark career interests in fisheries and wildlife management, natural resource conservation, or being a game warden, and gives kids a meaningful, fun experience. That's what this camp was all about.



Participants in the 2015 Youth Game Warden Camp learn to navigate in the woods with GPS units and compasses.



Working with two camp participants, Robert Begich (Alaska Department of Fish & Game) steps through a real-life scenario of checking waterfowl hunters on Headquarters Lake.

Youngsters learned archery fundamentals for the proper shooting techniques and safety on the shooting line. Everyone from first time shooters to more advanced archers who showcased their talent were treated to a fun and engaging experience learning skills that some will use for a lifetime.

During boating safety, the ice bucket challenge tested their bravery. The goal was to pick up as many coins as they could in a bucket of ice water and then try their best to zip up a life jacket, demonstrating the effects of hypothermia on fine motor skills.

Asked what they enjoyed about the camp, kids responded with “everything!” “figuring out what happened to the bear,” “archery,” “air rifle,” “checking duck hunters,” and, “navigating with GPS to find animals or evidence in the woods.”

In order to give the kids a better understanding of wildlife management and law enforcement, the entire camp was conducted by game wardens, fisheries and wildlife managers and biologists, and volunteers. Our partners for this awesome event included the Alaska Federal Wildlife Officers, Friends of the Kenai Refuge, Alaska Wildlife Troopers, Alaska State Parks, U.S. Forest Service, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Park Service, and the local chapter of 4-H.

2016 is just around the corner...got to get planning.

Kelly Modla is a law enforcement officer at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Find more information at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/> or <http://www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge>.