

STUDENTS LEAVE A LEGACY OF OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS



When Tony Avalos was in 5th grade, his class at C. Roy Carmichael Elementary in Portola named their outdoor classroom “Kids Creek Forest.” Back then, Kids’ Creek was a wonderful place for discovery, but the lack of a clearly identified, safe access point and seating for students posed a barrier for many teachers to bring class outside.

On a recent snowy day, Tony, who is now a student at Feather River College, came back to visit Kids Creek with his fellow CRC alum, Cammie Gaylord. Tony and Cammie looked with satisfaction on the “outdoor classroom,” now complete with a loop trail, amphitheater style seating, and a welcoming sign to mark Kids Creek Forest as CRC Elementary’s own Learning Landscape.

Kids Creek Forest is one of fourteen properties FRLT is working to conserve for local schoolchildren through its Learning Landscapes program. Learning Landscapes is designed to greatly enhance local children’s contact with the natural world, place-based learning, and hands-on stewardship experiences. We accomplish this by conserving natural “outdoor classrooms” adjacent to every public school in the Feather River Watershed and supporting their educational use. Learning Landscapes includes all of Plumas County and portions of Lassen and Sierra counties, reaching approximately 2,500 school children per year in grades K-12. Tony and Cammie took a lead in creating their grade school alma mater’s Learning Landscape. In 2009, Cammie devoted her senior project to cleaning up barbed wire, planning the classroom’s layout, and installing hay bales for

temporary seating. For his senior project in 2011, Tony worked with FRLT’s partner Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship to create a walking loop trail.

Community passion and generosity brought the outdoor classroom to completion. Folchi Materials donated trail materials. The Stein family paid for the seating area, which local contractor Mike Marquette and volunteers installed. Plumas Bank and the Hagen family donated funds for a sign.

This story is being replicated across the Feather River region. With a \$90,000 grant from the Stewardship Council, FRLT is working with teachers and students to install signs, seating areas, and safe access trails for outdoor classrooms at nine other schools. In each case, the local school and community are stepping up with generous in-kind donations of time, skills, and materials.

Does it make a difference? Yes it does. Principal Edeltraud Marquette reports that teachers at CRC Elementary are now bringing their students outside two to three times as often. This is what Learning Landscapes is designed to do – to create an environment and the support necessary for teachers to get children out learning from the land as often as possible. We aim to nurture a culture of care and stewardship that students will carry with them for their lifetimes. It seems to be working. Students like Tony and Cammie are leaving a legacy for younger students to connect with the natural world so that, as Cammie says, “my own children can experience what I did.”

TEACHING FROM THE LAND

Workshop Aims To Get Kids on the Land

"7th-12th grade kids are capable of taking great action to take care of what they care about. Knowledge plus action equals power." With these words, Learning Landscapes Coordinator Rob Wade kicked off a three day workshop for teachers on FRLT's recently conserved Heart K Ranch in Genesee Valley.

The Teaching from the Land workshop offered a hands-on field immersion in restoring riparian and meadow habitats. High school teachers from Westwood, Chester, Greenville, Quincy, and Portola participated.

After opening words from Maidu community member Trina Cunningham, the teachers jumped into hands-on workshops, several directly benefitting the restoration of the Heart K:

- ◆ Steam flow measurement and willow restoration with Feather River Coordinated Resource Management (CRM)
- ◆ Bird population monitoring and nesting box construction with Plumas Audubon
- ◆ Native plant restoration with Feather River College
- ◆ Controlling invasive weeds with FRLT staff

Inspired and equipped, this school year these teachers and their students have been planning and implementing service-learning and restoration projects on their schools' own Learning Landscapes properties.

Throughout the year, Learning Landscapes offers ongoing teacher workshops, curriculum planning sessions and outings with local natural resource professionals.

Gratitude to the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation & PG&E's 5 Star Restoration Program, Plumas County RAC and Feather River CRM, Feather River College's SB70 grant, our local partners, and our generous donors for empowering teachers and kids to get out on the land, actively taking care of this place we call home.

Learning Landscapes At a Glance

- ◆ 7 communities
- ◆ 12 landowners
- ◆ 14 schools
- ◆ 15 properties
- ◆ 3 school districts
- ◆ 2,500 schoolchildren

MISSION

To conserve riparian, meadow and forest lands adjacent to every school in the Upper Feather River, while supporting teachers to independently use these learning landscapes effectively and sustainably.

VISION

All students in all schools in the Upper Feather River are engaged in quality outdoor learning and the stewardship of their local environment.

