

Students to get hands-on education in Tahoe forest

By Kathryn Reed

Joy Barney is doing her part to make sure students on the South Shore are getting outdoors.

The conservation education coordinator for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit of the U.S. Forest Service was shocked when she moved here five years ago and some high school students looked at her funny when she asked if they had ever hiked in the surrounding forest. She presumably had a look of disbelief when they said no.

“A lot of students who grow up here don’t have the same access as tourists who come play here,” Barney said.



Students will be learning about life in the outdoors of Lake Tahoe through Children's Forest.
Photo/LTN

Through the Children's Forest program third- through fifth-grade students will explore the area from the Tallac Site to

Taylor Creek Visitors Center along Highway 89 on the South Shore. It's officially known as the Pope-Baldwin Recreation Area.

Barney said the goal is to link the two areas historically, culturally and environmentally, and then explore how to improve what's there. Youngsters will be given opportunities to have a voice and be leaders in forest management.

Children's Forest is an expansion of the Forest Service's More Kids in the Woods program that started in 2007. The new program is site specific, whereas the older initiative is more programs driven.

This is the second year the USFS has handed out Children's Forest grants, with it the first time for LTBMU to receive a grant. The amount allocated is \$40,000. Another \$50,000 in in-kind contributions has come from LTBMU, South Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition and Tahoe Heritage Fund. The Washoe Tribe is also an integral partner.

The bulk of the costs are to start the program, with the goal being it will be in existence for years. The funding provides age-appropriate curriculum.

The big launch will be June 2-3 during the Wild Tahoe Weekend, which is now in its second year. Fourth- and fifth-graders will initiate the Children's Forest, with third-graders becoming part of the program in the fall during their annual kokanee salmon field trips.

Besides Lake Tahoe Unified students, Incline Elementary, Lake Tahoe School and Tahoe Expedition Academy students will be part of the outdoor program. About 1,700 students are expected to go through Children's Forest this summer and fall.

The Native Species Festival on June 3 is when the Children's Forest will be in the forefront. While it is geared toward adults and kids, it will be students who lead most of the

programs that day, including a play put on by fifth-graders. Everyone may dress as a native species for the parade.

The Forest Service is talking with Washoe Tribe members to see if they would do seed collection earlier than normal so plantings could occur during the festival at the Washoe Tending and Gathering Garden at the Tallac Site.

The plan is once the garden is finished, it will provide students an opportunity to learn about native plant species and develop a relationship with the Washoe Tribe.

From June 4-13 field trips to the site for fourth- and fifth-graders are slated. This is when the pilot curriculum for Children's Forest will be introduced to the students.

Learning materials include fourth-graders tackling forest ecology and land management, and fifth-graders watershed restoration, hazardous fuels reduction, and human impacts on the environment.

During the summer, expect to see high school students who are part of the 4-year-old Generation Green program leading tours from the Rainbow Trail to the Tallac Site, talking about trees, forest ecology, history and cultures of the area.

In a separate program, K-2 students get outside each year in what's called Outdoor Explore where they follow the Lam Watah trail in Stateline to Nevada Beach. This group may eventually be incorporated into Children's Forest.