



HANDS ON THE LAND

A National Network of Field Classrooms Connecting Students, Teachers, and Parents to Their Public Lands and Waterways

FEATURED SITE

Alder Creek Children's Forest was founded in 2002 in rural Douglas County, Oregon, to serve two of the state's greatest resources: its coniferous forests and its youth. Douglas County has for some time been one of the top timber producers in the country, and is expected to surpass all other counties of the Pacific Northwest during the first half of the 21st century. Whether as voting citizens, political decision-makers, or on-the-ground managers, the youth of Douglas County will play a crucial role in deciding how its vast coniferous forest resources should be treated in future. Thus the mission of Alder Creek Children's Forest: *to offer a place, partnerships, and programs designed for young citizens to learn to work together to create healthy, sustainable forests, watersheds, and communities.* The U.S. Bureau of Land Management and a wide range of public and private partners have been key to the success of Alder Creek Children's Forest in delivering this mission to area schools and youth organizations.



Youth from the Wolf Creek Job Corps construct a new connector trail on the ACCF site, May 2009.

Explore Your Forests and Watersheds!

The Oregon Explorers Initiative

With state, county, and local support and sponsorship via the Gray Family Fund, Alder Creek Children's Forest (ACCF) recently launched Oregon Explorers, a new initiative that takes place-based education into the 21st century with cutting-edge interactive technologies. Oregon Explorers supports standards-based field, classroom, and computer lab activities utilizing online mapping and building on the Oregon Explorer natural resources digital library (www.oregonexplorer.info).



Teachers participating in a recent Oregon Explorers workshop apply GPS in the field as they gather data on a small fallen log, October 2009.

Oregon Explorers is currently offered via two ACCF programs: Explore Your Forest in fall, and Explore Your Watershed in spring, building on tools learned during the fall program. Oregon Explorers activities consist of three linked phases: preparation, field exploration, and follow-up. Mapping skills and background information gained during pre-field preparation are then applied via GPS-enhanced field exploration based on existing natural resource curricula such as Project Learning Tree, and followed by classroom and computer activities that give youth the opportunity to map, analyze, write about, and share their field experiences. The educational advantages of this sequence are many: far more than an isolated outdoor field trip, the learning experience of youth in Oregon Explorers is a sustained inquiry-based process, emulating how natural resources are actually researched and managed in the 21st century, with a wide range of subject area learning outcomes possible.

In the same spirit as the Hands on the Land network, the Oregon Explorers initiative offers youth in south Douglas County the opportunity to share their local forest and watershed expertise with others in Oregon via a Moodle site (oregonexplorers.orvsd.org) supported by the Oregon Virtual School District. Additionally, the Oregon Natural Resource Education Program provides twice-annual training workshops on the ACCF site to introduce area teachers to outdoor education curricula as well as the Oregon Explorers learning process and related technologies.

More information:

See <http://www.aldercreek.org/teachers/OE.html> or contact Jim Proctor at Lewis & Clark College (jproctor@lclark.edu, 503.768.7707).