

A different kind of environmental education

By SARA KINCAID

Sun Staff Reporter

06/20/2005



Camp may have seemed like fun and games -- it was the "Logger Olympics" -- but earlier in the week the campers attended to more serious business: forest management.

The first week of the Junior Foresters Academy, sponsored by the Northern Arizona University forestry department, ended, with another of the four sessions beginning today.

It is the second year for the summer camp geared toward children and teens interested in the environment.

"(It) connects kids to the forest and the natural world that surrounds them so they can learn and teach others about good stewardship, land ethics and forest health," director Cheryl Miller said. "The most important emphasis of the curriculum is to have fun while learning in the forest."

It was expanded to an overnight camp and the age was expanded to cover 10- to 16-year-olds. The program grew in popularity from 35 participants last year to 85 signed up so far, she said.

Returning junior foresters will participate in a camp the week of July 4. There are 16 returning campers.

Activities in the Junior Foresters Academy

include hiking and nature-based art projects.

Campers also learn about forest science, restoration, wildfire risk and prevention, sustainable wood harvesting, wildlife, American Indian culture, ecological sustainability, team building and community service.

Junior Foresters, as the campers are called, have the opportunity to work with natural resource professionals.



"We need to take care of the trees, not waste water and be careful of fire," Charmayne Claw, 12, said, listing what she's learned at camp.

Her favorite activity was doing tie dye, but her favorite forest-related activity was measuring trees in her group's plot.

Students are assigned a plot on the NAU Centennial Forest to create a management plan. Among the measurements they learn to take are diameter at breast height and measuring their paces, Gabe Villas, 10, said.

"My mom has been working with forestry students for a long time and it got me interested," he said. "I'm loving it."

Camp counselors are NAU graduate and undergraduate students from forestry, environmental science, parks and recreation management and education. There is one counselor for every six campers.

The students stay in large, tan canvas tents with wood bunks.

"We like telling scary stories," Villas said about nightlife at camp.

There are seven campers and a counselor to a tent, he said.

They also make rules for camp, like not eating bugs.

"Someone did that, but I'm not going to tell you who," he said.

They also have rules about touching wildlife, keeping their hands clean and not playing with fire.

Villas said he's looking forward to coming back next year.

The remaining one-week overnight camp sessions are June 20-24, June 28-July 1 and July 4-8. Tuition is \$650 per week and includes meals, a camp T-shirt and activities. Scholarships are available.

New topic areas include the NAU Ropes Course, forest insects, community building, Leave No Trace land ethics and aquatic life.

For more information about the junior and senior Forester Academy, visit <http://www.for.nau.edu/> or contact Cheryl Miller at 523-6727 or send an e-mail to Cheryl.Miller@nau.edu.

Reporter Sara Kincaid can be reached at 556-2250 or skincaid@azdailysun.com.