

## Off the Buses and into the Woods!

Students enjoy a day of learning in the great outdoors. June 16, 2011

Prince William County Schools News Stories: <http://tinyurl.com/3g7fmbn>

On Tuesday, June 14, more than 500 students from West Gate and Loch Lomond Elementary Schools and Parkside Middle School participated in the



second annual “ED OUT: Head Outdoors for Education and Fun.” The day was filled with outdoor experiences at Camp William B. Snyder and Silver Lake Regional Park, both in Haymarket.

Groups of fourth-graders from the two elementary schools and seventh-grade students from Parkside Middle filed off the buses and into the cool morning sunshine. Surrounded by blue skies and scenic views of fields, hills, and forests, the students faced a beautiful day out of their school buildings. Activities for the day included orienteering, hiking, camping, birding, and

geocaching. The students received education about watersheds, habitat restoration, assessing water quality, and building a buoy.

Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS) and its long-standing partner, the USDA Forest Service, work with the American Recreation Council, National Wildlife Federation, Prince William Park Authority, and a wide variety of federal and state agencies, associations, and private companies to provide ED OUT opportunities to students. ED OUT not only heightens awareness of the need for healthy exercise, but links this to educational learning experiences that exist in communities. ED OUT is aligned with a number of national efforts and activity days designed to get youth and their families outdoors, including National Get Outdoors day, which was observed on June 11. Nationally, the underlying goal of ED OUT is to encourage outdoor fun as a strategy to, among other things, help reduce the alarming increase in obesity among American youth.

While seventh-graders scooped up and observed macroinvertebrates in various life stages, fourth-grade students participated in exercises to help them imagine being a squirrel or a rabbit and having traits like exceptional balance and speed, and jumping ability that these animals rely on to



\*PEREC Education Director Cindy Smith and Lisa Des Jardins conducted the 7<sup>th</sup> grade macroinvertebrate collection station to test whether the created wetland was functioning as a natural wetland. Students collected and identified snails, damsel and dragonfly nymphs, beetles, giant water bugs and many more wetland inhabitants.

*\*this caption is an addition to the original PWCS News Story*



survive and escape predators. Other student teams worked on building communication skills as they cooperated to successfully walk the wire or cross the “canyon.”

Ranger educators from the USDA Forest Service and staff from other environmental organizations talked with the students about things they can do this summer at the parks and in the outdoors with their families. They also discussed the career options available to them in these fields.

While students may have exhibited some initial reserve with the unfamiliar activities, shouts of encouragement and cheers of accomplishment replaced the timidity as they conspired to beat the clock and overcome whatever challenge they encountered.

It took one industrious young lady only a few minutes to decide that the best course of action for getting two groups across a log to opposite ends of an imaginary ravine was cooperation. Crouching on the log, she let others use her back as the balance they needed to step their way to safety at the other side. Once the idea took hold, others took her place so that all could successfully maneuver the challenge.

During a well-earned break for lunch, students heard from Dr. Steven L. Walts, Superintendent of Schools, who reminded them to take advantage of the outdoors to learn, observe, and discover.

Walts introduced Dr. Safiya Samman of the USDA Forest Service who conducted a swearing in ceremony to induct all of the students as Forest Service Junior Rangers.



“Now that you are official Junior Rangers, I hope you will take some of the experiences you had here today and continue them during the summer,” said Walts.

The break also included a sing along and a visit from Cathy Landy, of Kids4Trees, who came to celebrate the Year of the Tree with the students, provided each student with a sapling, and encouraged them to plant their trees at home.



For further information on ED OUT, contact:  
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