

Seeing the forest for the trees, and much more



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DEMOCRAT-HERALD

LEBANON — Forests Today and Forever wants youngsters to see forests for more than just their trees.

The Eugene-based nonprofit foundation holds annual Forest Field Days to educate students about natural resources and good forest management. Their workshops teach everything

from stream protection to wildlife identification to how to calculate the amount of board feet of timber in a particular plot.

On Friday, volunteers from the group's partner agencies took 200 sixth-graders from Seven Oak Middle School in Lebanon through the Forest Field Day stations at Happy Valley Tree Farm on Bellinger Scale Road east of Lebanon.

Groups circulated among four stations: wildlife, recreation, soil and water, and forestry management.

Each plays a critical role in maintaining a healthy forest, explained Dick Powell, a Starker Forests representative and a member of the Forests Today and Forever board of directors.

"To a lot of people, a forest is nothing but trees," he said. "It's so much more than that. It's plants. It's wildlife. It's human use of it, for products. To manage it, you really have to look at all of those aspects."

Take timber production, said Brian Murray of Cascade Timber Consulting, a volunteer at the forestry management station. To know what you can produce, you first need to know what you have.

Murray showed the students how to measure a small plot — one-tenth of an acre — and estimate the available board feet of timber by counting the number and type of trees and their sizes.

Students then extrapolate out that information for the farm as a whole to know whether they should plan for immediate logging, thin just a few trees or wait until the forest grows larger.

Humans aren't the only beings who use forests, however, explained Robin Galloway of the Oregon State University Extension Office. Good forest management means taking wildlife into account, too.

"All the different animals you are going to see from the farm here are real," she said as students lined up to identify skulls and other animal markers during a wildlife hike. "If nothing else, remember, you're a guest, and this is the home of the animals."

The field day is part of a six-week science and math curriculum that requires students to create a five-year management plan for a fictional 200-acre forested area willed to them by a grandmother.

Working in groups of four, each student role-plays a family member with a specific desire for the property, whether it's to log it, protect it as a wildlife habitat or use it for a campground.

Sixth-grader Trinity Fenner said the field trip drives home the importance of managing real-life tree farms.

"We need to protect this forest," she said. "It could be, like, just gone one day if we just cut it down and leave it there."