

The Register-Guard

Lane County sixth-graders learn about forests by taking a field trip to a tree farm

By Dylan Darling

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CROW — The sounds of laughter and learning bounced through a tree farm southwest of Eugene on Thursday, as hundreds of sixth-grade students spent the day away from their classrooms.

“We want to get kids out and understanding working forests,” said Beth Krisko, executive director of Forests Today & Forever, a Eugene-based nonprofit organization. “We want to connect kids to the forest, and we have a strong emphasis on the benefits that forests provide to all of us, including clean water, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and, of course, timber.”

Forests Today & Forever has been running “Forest Field Days,” one-day field trips to private forestland, since 1995. Busloads of students have visited the Bauman Tree Farm, a 672-acre property close to Crow, for nearly a decade. Once in the woods, the kids cycle through volunteer-led stations for hands-on lessons about trees, soils, creeks and more.

This school year, 17 middle schools in the Eugene-Springfield area will take part, with some visiting the tree farm this fall and other groups waiting until spring. About 2,000 students in all will go through the program, which includes two to six weeks of curriculum.

Thursday, 120 students came from Oaklea Middle School in Junction City. Lessons during the field trip allowed students to use math and science skills, while having some time to walk along a path through the woods.

In a Douglas fir stand, the kids learned how foresters size up trees and figure out their ages. Tom Bauman planted the trees in what had been a hay field more than 40 years ago. Bauman and his wife, Lindsay Reaves, own the Bauman Tree Farm.

The couple’s livelihood comes from timber, and Reaves said they selective-log each year. The Bauman family has had the land for 73 years, and three generations of family.

Logging can be a controversial and polarizing topic. But Reaves said she wants students to understand the science of forests and the choices small forestland owners like her make when managing their property. The day in the woods inspires some students to learn more about forestry.

“What pleases me is when I go into a career fair in high school and kids are like, ‘Oh, I remember Forest Field Days, it was so cool,’” Reaves said.

Being outside on a clear and crisp autumn day was fun “instead of being cooped up in a classroom,” said Gena Pileggi, an 11-year-old sixth-grader from Oaklea Middle School.

The change in scenery didn’t mean that the day wasn’t educational. “You get to learn fun facts about different things,” said Addi Albin, 11, another sixth-grader at the school.

As part of the supporting studies, the students learn about the Oregon Forest Practices Act, which regulates how landowners harvest trees and what needs to happen afterwards, said Darbi Haffner, an Oaklea sixth-grade teacher.

“It’s just good knowledge for them to have, living in Oregon,” she said.

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