

Calling all 4th graders (parents and teachers, too!)

Did you know that millions of acres of national parks, historic structures, cultural artifacts, ancient forests, snow-capped mountains, and clear blue lakes belong to you? Our federal public lands and waters belong to all Americans and they're waiting to be explored!

Last year, to help engage and create our next generation of public land visitors, the White House, in partnership with federal land management agencies, launched the Every Kid in a Park initiative. It was a big success, and it has been extended for a second year! The program's goal is a broad one: to provide an opportunity for each and every fourth grade student across the country to experience their federal public lands and waters in person throughout the 2016-2017 school year.

If you are in the fourth grade (or home-school/free choice equivalent and 9 to 11 years old), you can participate in a fun online activity (www.everykidinapark.gov) and receive a voucher for a free fourth-grade pass. Print out the pass and take it with you to national parks, forests, monuments, and historic sites across the United States for free entrance admission. Come to the BLM office in Hines if you want to exchange your paper pass for a hard-plastic, keepsake version!

There are many places in Oregon where you can use this annual pass, like the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, Crater Lake National Park, Oregon Caves National Monument, Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area and the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. Thanks to the Forest Service, the Every Kid in a Park pass also grants a free Christmas tree permit to fourth graders. All you need to do is present a valid pass from the Every Kid in the Park website at your local Forest Service Office to claim your permit. Most tree permit sales begin in November.

Educators can gain fee-free access for their students by visiting the Every Kid in a Park website and entering the "Educators" section, where they can download the personalized paper vouchers for each of their students. Educators will also find downloadable learning activities, aligned with standards that can be used to introduce fourth graders to topics exploring federal lands and waters. And remember, the BLM can offer a specialist to join you in-class and combine a regular lesson plan with natural resource education.

Why fourth graders? Research shows that children ages 9 to 11 are at a unique developmental stage in their learning where they begin to understand how the world around them works in more concrete ways. They are most likely to have positive attitudes towards nature, the environment and culture and grow into the next generation of stewards, ready to support and care for these natural wonders and historical landmarks.

Right now, young people are spending more time in front of screens than outside. Engaging youth in the great outdoors, whether at work or play, is priority for the BLM. For the health of our economy and our nation's public lands, it's critical that we work to establish deep, meaningful connections between young people – from every background and every community – and our natural resources.

Call the BLM Burns District's Tara Thissell at (541) 573-4519 if you have questions about the Every Kid in a Park program, or if you are interested in exploring an education opportunity with us.

