



Bridging the Divide 2012: *Beaver on Trial*



Photo by Michael S. Quinton, National Geographic

A large, busy rodent took center stage during a field camp for American Indian students held June 24-30 at the University of Montana-Western's Birch Creek Outdoor Education Center near Dillon., Mont.

Beaver on Trial: the role of beaver in riparian ecosystems and potential impacts to threatened and endangered fish species was the underlying theme for the third annual Bridging the Divide Natural and Cultural Resources Field Camp.

Through a curriculum that places equal emphasis on scientific exploration, cultural heritage awareness and outdoor experience, students received instruction in a variety of related topics.

Scientists from the BLM and Forest Service explained the dynamic nature of hydrologic systems, the plant composition that defines healthy riparian areas, and the critical elements of proper function-

ing aquatic habitats. They placed special emphasis on red willow and the native west-slope cutthroat and bull trout.

"I really enjoyed interacting with the students," said Kelly Urresti, rangeland management specialist for the Dillon Field Office. "And they did learn the difference between sedges, rushes and grasses...I think that one will stick with them!"

Given the summer's record high temperatures, the students particularly enjoyed donning waders and participating in the electrofishing as part of brook trout removal efforts in segments of west-slope cutthroat streams.

From tribal elders, students learned about the traditional uses of various riparian plant species and the technologies used for harvesting native fish species (e.g., weirs, fish traps and fishing spears).

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Bridging the Divide Expanded to the Northern Cheyenne in 2012

In late spring 2012, the BLM-Montana/Dakotas received special funding from the Washington Office Executive Order Program to expand the Bridging the Divide Natural and Cultural Resources Field Camp curriculum to the Northern Cheyenne Tribe.

Working in partnership with the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Chief Dull Knife College (CDKC), and the Ashland Ranger District-Custer National Forest, the BLM integrated the curriculum into the already-established CDKC Upward Bound program for tribal high school youth.

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Beaver on Tiial, cont.

Tim Ryan of Ethnotech, LLC showed students how to make cordage from dog bane ("Indian hemp") and how to construct fish traps using willow and cordage. As usual, this segment of the camp was a favorite.



Tim Ryan (Ethnotech) shows how to process Dog Bane canes into cordage material. Photo by Ryan Powell, South Zone Archaeologist, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

The camp program had the intended result of tying the scientific to the cultural. During a discussion on pollinators, BLM botanist Wendy Velman pointed out that thorough and effective management recognizes the interactions that a plant species might have with an insect or animal to complete its life cycle.

"Right," added a student. "Just like the elders that knew when to harvest a plant by knowing who (which insect or animal) was using it at different times of the season."

Bridging the Divide is jointly sponsored by the BLM-Montana/Dakotas and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in cooperation with American Indian tribes and tribal high schools. This year's participants were native students and tribal elders from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation in southeastern Idaho and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes of the Flathead Reservation in western Montana.

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Tim Ryan (Ethnotech) sets traditional fish trap in stream.



Paul Hutchinson (BLM) explains aquatic ecosystems.



Students conduct vegetation transects along a riparian area.

Northern Cheyenne, cont.

Held June 18 - July 27, the Upward Bound program on the CDKC campus provided math and science instruction with emphasis on ecology, ecosystems, cultural resource management and traditional cultural knowledge.

Staff from the BLM-Montana/Dakotas State Office and Miles City Field Office provided presentations and field trips which focused on the Bridging the Divide Program (Mark Sant); botany and noxious weeds (Wendy Velman); archaeology/history (Doug Melton); wildlife (Bobby Baker); the history of the BLM (Jeff Kitchens); and employment opportunities with

the BLM and other federal agencies (Sara Romero-Minkoff). In addition, Tim Ryan of Ethnotech provided demonstrations in traditional skills.

With the modest start in 2012, the funding provided by the Washington Office will be incorporated into a multi-year assistance agreement with Chief Dull Knife College to expand the Bridging the Divide curriculum to Northern Cheyenne high school students.

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