

## Casper camp teaches kids about natural world

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Raquel Speth clutches a green net as she hunts for creatures hidden among the rocks at Garden Creek Falls.

The 8-year-old turns over a stone in the middle of the creek and spots worm-like animals smaller than the nail of her pinkie finger. She picks up the rock for a closer look.

“Look at the little, tiny thingies,” she says.

Speth shows her find to Amber Townsend, a counselor at Wyoming Nature Camp in Casper.

“Ooh, that’s a good one,” Townsend tells her.

All along Garden Creek, kids are making discoveries. Two girls are using tweezers to collect specimens from crevices near the falls. A little farther downstream, boys are gathering rocks for further examination.

The week-long camp, organized by the nonprofit Wyoming Land Trust, teaches kids about the natural world. On this Tuesday morning, the campers are focused on macroinvertebrates: dragonflies, midges and other critters that live in the creek ecosystem.

“The goal is to show them what is in their backyards and given them the scientific framework to understand what it is,” says Kendall Brunette, the trust’s communications coordinator.

The trust’s focus is land conversation. But two years ago, it began hosting camps in Pinedale to give children an appreciation for natural resources.

Last fall, the group expanded its focus from Sublette County to the entire state. It also added new camps in Casper, Rock Springs and Gillette.

The camps are open to kids entering first through sixth grades. They cover five basic topics: ecosystems, agriculture, energy, water ecology and geology.

Each session is tailored to the community where it takes place. Agriculture lessons in Pinedale focus on cattle. In Rock Springs, kids learn about sheep.

“Our goal in these camps is to educate the next generation of land stewards,” Brunette says.



Hand-on learning is emphasized. So after a quick lesson near the falls, the kids begin searching the creek for creatures.

When they find something, they bring it to Kristi Kucera, who, like all the counselors, is from the Teton Science Schools. Together they leaf through laminated identification cards until they determine the creature’s name.

A short distance away, Mac Edmondson collects specimens from a white tub filled with water and rocks. The 9-year-old Casper boy scoops each animal into an ice cube tray.

“These little bugs, we are finding interesting things out about them,” he says. “They are really good swimmers and they will turn into dragonflies.”

Afterward, the kids and counselors gather in a circle



and count up their discoveries. They've found eight different animals.

"Who was surprised by the amount of macroinvertebrates we found today?" Kucera asks.

Everyone raises his or her hand.

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