

CLASSROOM GONE WILD; SANTA FE WATERSHED ASSOCIATION OPENS UP WATERWAYS TO ELEMENTARY-SCHOOL KIDS.

By: STACI MATLOCK

"It's an experience for kids to get out in the wild. Most of the time they want to play video games and watch television." Larry Jaramillo, parent chaperone on watershed field trip

A class of Kearny Elementary fifth-graders honed in on one important event in their field trip Wednesday to document aquatic bugs on the upper Santa Fe River.

"We caught a fish!" said one student, showing to classmates the fingerling trout swimming around in a bucket.

The fish, accidentally caught in the insect net, was returned promptly to the river. For an hour, students donned wading boots and gently swooped up tiny mayflies, stone flies and other water bugs, and identified them with the help of a volunteer.

But several had only one thing on their minds. "We just want to catch a fish," said Melina Herburger, 11.

About 20 students, a couple of parents and volunteers with the Santa Fe Watershed Association walked a half-mile into the Santa Fe Municipal Watershed and beyond the city's Nichols Reservoir to study the bugs and learn more about the river. The watershed has been closed to the public for decades, except for special tours. This fall, the watershed association and city water staff are hosting elementary- and middle-school students in the watershed as part of an education and outreach program.

The walk provided ample teaching moments.

Pamela Dupzyk, program director for the watershed association, pointed out a beaver dam, a tree parasite that looked like a nest, and even bear poop. "Ew," said Adriana Cruz, 11, bending down to see the pile.

Richard Encinias, almost 11, was among the handful of students who has fished several rivers around the state, from the Rio Grande to Pecos. His parents were along for the watershed trek. His dad, Larry Jaramillo, is an avid angler and camper. Jaramillo thought the outing to study water bugs on the river was a great thing for the students.

"It's an experience for kids to get out in the wild," Jaramillo said. "Most of the time they want to play video games and watch television. I like to get my family motivated to enjoy the outdoors, wildlife, fishing."

The outreach program is part of a Santa Fe Watershed management plan created by the city, the watershed association and the Santa Fe National Forest. The City Council approved the plan recently. Funding for the outreach program for the next three years is from the state Water Trust Board.

Outreach will include Santa Fe Blue Pages, an illustrated guide to all things water around the city, such as xeriscaping, water rights, sources of water and how the watershed works. The book is in the works.

"It will be very accessible to readers," Dupzyk said.

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