

Campers Learn Conservation Ethic

Importance of Conservation Taught at Camp Wittman

By Angie Fletcher



Wittman Farms

Bob Liming, Valley Boys and Girls Club executive director, created the initial concept of Camp Wittman, and organized countless volunteers to build and maintain the camp facilities.

Camp Wittman is more than a place for youth to spend a fun-filled summer week away from home. Camp Wittman is a mountain-top retreat where visitors discover an appreciation for timber, wildlife and water while learning about the importance of preserving natural resources.

"A joint goal between Wittman Farms and the local Boys and Girls Club is to provide a facility that offers youth development and outdoor and natural resource education for students, teachers and natural resource professionals," says Dick Wittman, president of Wittman Farms and Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association board member.

In 1986, Wittman Farms, a fourth-generation family farm located 23 miles from Lewiston, Idaho, offered the Boys & Girls Club a small section of its Craig Mountain property to use as a camp for at-risk and under-privileged children. "We are farmers, cattlemen, and timber and wildlife resource managers, and we have a responsibility to help educate consumers, teachers, industry professionals and public policy makers about our industry," says Wittman.

Funding for camp programming comes from several sources, including the Camp Wittman Fund. The facilities are maintained by donations and grants for improvements, plus volunteer time and donations.

"This camp facilitates a real-life learning experience about a multiple-use approach to natural resource management," Wittman says. "At the camp, we focus on renewability,

sustainability and economic multiplier concepts behind natural resource management."

Learning from the Pros

Students are exposed to real-life agricultural, timber, conservation and wildlife professionals who pursue their vocations to enhance the quality of life through sound stewardship practices. Students learn about agriculture by studying grazing strategies of livestock. They gain insight into timber resources by studying species and age identification. Discovering wildlife, they explore hunting issues, habitat management and how to determine how much wildlife harvest to allow.

Students identify the impacts of pollution and the importance of taking preventive measures to avoid polluting resources. They learn to trace the complete water cycle from a creek that originates near the camp and eventually ends up in the Pacific Ocean. They are asked to identify the many ways water affects society and how it gets replenished.

Camp patrons gain an understanding of how natural resources impact jobs, food, homes and general economic growth. They learn how to

trace the biological and economic chains from topics such as pasture grass to the hamburger they eat and from a tree to the paper they write on. As they follow the economic chain they gain an understanding of the multiplier effect created by harvesting natural resources and how numerous jobs are created along the chain.

Visitors range in age from 9 to 80. The camp specializes in school environmental education and summer camps for children ages 9 to 13 but also helps older teens to learn team and outdoor survival skills. Camp Wittman is also a place where organizations such as FFA and 4-H can send student leaders to attend leadership development classes.

Camp Wittman is designed to accommodate 20 to 40 students in a classroom setting, but it has had as many as 200 visitors at one time. Annual enrollment is between 500 and 600 students who typically stay two days.

Lans Richardson, past student and Western Montana vocational agriculture teacher says, "The lessons I learned at Camp Wittman stuck with me for a long time, and I know I will always think differently about the industry after the internship."

The camp is solar powered and includes a natural resource education center, covered campfire and amphitheatre area, kitchen and dining rooms, arts and crafts pavilion, soils pit, boys and girls dorms, lighted restrooms, water cistern and supply system, shower houses with hot water, Indian teepees, ropes course, horse-shoe pits, archery range, storage building, cook's corner (private sleeping cabin) and parking area.

For more information about Camp Wittman, the Boys and Girls Clubs and the Camp Wittman Fund, contact the Boys and Girls Club of the LC Valley, Tel: (208) 746-2301, or Dick Wittman, Tel: (208) 843-5595.