

In celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of the North Coast Wilderness Bill, Round Valley Elementary/Middle School students visited the hidden beauty of the Black Butte Wild and Scenic River on October 18th and 21st. More than 170 students participated in half day interpretive hikes – observing wildlife, stream vegetation and especially rocks and water.

The previous weekend's heavy rains had raised water levels and therefore hope that returning Chinook salmon might have made their way up from the lower Eel near Fortuna. Douglas Hutt, Round Valley Indian Tribes Council member explained that Coal Mine Falls in the Middle Eel required sustained flows double what we could observe, to permit salmon passage. Mr. Hutt provided insight from traditional ecological knowledge, personal experience and work for tribal and state natural resource agencies. Additional interpretive support was provided by the Upper Lake/Covelo Ranger District of the Mendocino National Forest, the Eel River Recovery Project (ERRP) and Our Wilderness Now. Cathy Avila, Mendocino National Forest Wilderness Manger "thoroughly enjoyed" her experience answering questions, "It was a privilege to spend the day with the kids; I was amazed at their curiosity."

The Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act is celebrating 10 years this October. Signed into law in 2006, it protected 273,000 acres of wilderness and set aside approximately 51,000 acres as a Recreational Management Area for off-highway vehicles and mountain bikes. It also designated 21 miles of a Wild and Scenic River including the Black Butte River.

The focus of the students' exploration was for each classroom to choose a scientific question concerning the Black Butte River – about the fish, the water or the rocks and geology – that they would observe then research further upon returning to school. The Round Valley Indian Tribes EPA will be publishing eight questions and answers, one from each classroom from 1st through 8th grade, in their upcoming monthly community newsletter.

Gratitude

The student trips to the river were a source of much gratitude for many members of the community:

- Gratitude for the beauty, complexity and abundance of the natural world.
- Gratitude for the preservation of the River through the efforts of CalWild, the Mendocino National Forest and the human communities throughout pre-history and history.
- Gratitude to those who provided the means to visit and study the River including the RVUSD bus drivers, cafeteria staff who packed 190 lunches, Cal Wild and ERRP.
- Gratitude from the many professionals, parents and community volunteers who interpreted, chaperoned or provided other support at the River – for the students who gave us the opportunity to experience the river with new eyes and a deeper sense of wonder.