

11. PROGRAM: PUBLIC SERVICE

K-12 Programs

The Natural Reserve System provides a broad base of environmental science education throughout the primary and secondary school curriculum. NRS programs bring K-12 students and teachers to NRS sites to provide environmental education and to stimulate their interest in the natural world through hands-on field experience.

Over half of NRS reserves participate in some form of K-12 instructional activity. Many sponsor field trips and summer programs at reserves, providing unique opportunities for students to learn in the field about a variety of natural history topics, such as: introduction to the reserve's habitats, ecology, botany, birds, insects and other invertebrates, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, conifer identification, forest ecology, geology, soils, water quality, environmental creative writing, visual arts, movement and theatre, and Native American heritage.

Other NRS outreach programs bring the study of the natural environment to students at their school sites. Some reserves may offer K-12 teachers instruction in teaching natural history to their students. Teachers may receive rigorous field training at a reserve, as well as new materials and curricula to use in their classrooms. Great emphasis is placed on meeting California Department of Education standards for science, math, reading/writing, and arts. Many reserves have developed portable taxidermic specimen boxes, containing teaching skins and skeletal material that the teachers can bring to their classrooms for the students to touch and see. Classrooms can also monitor through the Internet daily wildlife activity at a growing number of reserves via live web cameras.

Students benefiting from these NRS outreach programs are often from underserved populations, generally from rural areas with little access to enrichment programs. Student and teacher evaluations indicate that these programs have had a significant positive impact on the students.

Public Access

Although public access to NRS reserves is generally restricted, various opportunities are afforded the general public to visit reserves in the NRS and learn of the teaching and research being conducted, to the extent that staff time and funds permit. For example, several reserves hold open houses, lectures, and other special events periodically throughout the year. Similarly, many reserves work with volunteers to provide docent-led tours for conservation organizations and other interested groups. NRS reserves may also assist partner agencies and organizations with their public outreach programs. For example, UC researchers working on Año Nuevo Island assist State Park personnel in developing interpretive displays and lectures on the marine mammal populations. Such opportunities generate goodwill for the University and assist in achieving cooperation in carrying out various management objectives.

Comparable Programs

The NRS works closely with state and federal agencies, land trusts, and private organizations such as the California Native Plant Society and The Nature Conservancy, in coordinating acquisition and management of natural reserves.

Other Educational Institutions

The ecosystems and facilities offered by each reserve are available to faculty and students from all University of California campuses, and to users from other institutions, public or private, throughout the world.