

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

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For Immediate Release

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Tulare County Office of Education Announces: Students, Teachers & Scientists Perform Research at Circle J-Norris Ranch in Springville

January 28 & 29, 2006 from 8:30 a.m. Saturday to 4:00 p.m. Sunday

The Circle J-Norris Ranch and SCICON will host a Field Science Weekend for over 60 area high school students who have identified an interest in field science and conservation careers.

Students, teachers and scientists will collaborate to complete a detailed study of pond ecology and range management. Sophomore, junior and senior students and their science teachers will roll up their sleeves to perform soil studies, wildlife surveys, plant diversity and grazing assessments, and water testing during this two-day event. Schools involved include Granite Hills and Monache in Porterville, Tulare Union, Orosi and Hanford West High Schools.

“The original impetus came from Jim Vidak, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools. His vision is that local universities and colleges utilize the Circle J-Norris Ranch campus for scientific field work,” says Nancy Bruce, Education Coordinator for Circle J-Norris Ranch.

Jorge Aguilar, director of the UC Merced Center for Educational Partnerships and Judy Patin, Events Assistant, provided valuable assistance in organizing and planning the event.

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“Our goal is to impress upon students the importance of staying on track with science and math courses necessary for success in higher education,” stated Ms. Patin, “and we expect that the weekend will be enjoyable as well as educational.”

The focus of the study is Heron Pond, located near the new Student Reception Center at Circle J-Norris Ranch. Currently, the pond is grazed year-round as part of a cattle operation leased to a local ranching family. Heron Pond also supports a wide variety of wetland species including ducks, hawks, frogs, toads, fishes, turtles and aquatic invertebrates. “We plan to continue the Field Science Weekend as an annual event that will monitor the success of our wetland and rangeland management efforts,” says Ms. Bruce.

Many scientists from universities, government agencies and local non-profit agencies have volunteered to lead the students in performing and interpreting the field studies. The studies include:

- 1) Grazing & Forage Assessment led by Mike White, Stewardship Technician, Sequoia Riverlands Trust; and Elizabeth Palmer, Natural Resources Conservation Service;
- 2) Plant Diversity Assessment led by Fletcher Linton, Forest Botanist, Sequoia National Forest;
- 3) Soil Characterization and Infiltration led by Dr. Sam Traina, Ph.D., Professor/Director, Sierra Nevada Research Center, UC Merced;
- 4) Wildlife Survey led by Robin Galloway, Wildlife Biologist, Sequoia National Forest; and Eric Johnson, E & M’s Reptile Family;

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- 5) Pond Microbe Assessment led by Dr. Rob Atwill, DVM of UC Davis Veterinary Medicine Teaching and Research Center; and
- 6) Water Quality Testing led by Mike Milanesi of Tulare City Schools

Students will be fed and housed at SCICON, the Clemmie Gill School for Science and Conservation, operated by Tulare County Office of Education. Evening activities include a campfire program and stargazing led by the Tule River Amateur Astronomers. “We appreciate the involvement of all of the professionals who have come together to make the Field Science Weekend possible,” says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. Their efforts will help students see, first hand, the many career opportunities in the field sciences and conservation.”

For more information please contact Robert Herman, Public Information Officer, at (559) 733-6606.

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