

**Rusk Ranch Nature Center**  
**SUN School Nature Explorers Camp**  
**June 26 - 30, 2023 8 am - 1 pm Daily**

Dear Families,

Welcome to the Nature Explorers Day Camp at Rusk Ranch Nature Center! We are excited to offer this program for local youth to build skills in observation of our local species, teach the importance of cooperation and community, and some basic wilderness preparation skills. I want to take a moment to introduce myself to you and provide a brief overview of what our week will look like, as well as share some important information regarding safety and comfort for our staff and campers.

**About Me:** My name is Chad Free and I am a Special Education Assistant at Evergreen Elementary School in Cave Junction, Oregon and one of the children's programs instructors with Rusk Ranch Nature Center. I am currently working to complete my degree in Elementary Education within the next two years. This will be my fourth year in the public school system. Previous to this I was a private first grade teacher at the Dome School here in Cave Junction. I have been working in the education field since the spring of 2014. My first six years were spent in the private school setting with my focus co-teaching a blended 1/2/3 grade cohort. I spent most of my time developing and implementing math and reading programs for the first grade group and supporting the full class in the theme and specials times. I briefly taught choral music before switching my focus to academics. I spent two years as a Title I Education Assistant at the Dome School prior to the COVID shutdowns. During this time I maintained my position teaching first grade. In the past few years, I have supported classrooms in various grades as well as teaching in small group settings in the public school setting. My preference in teaching is with upper elementary and special education students. Teaching is my calling and I enjoy developing new programs outside of the academic realm to teach youth about our natural environment and how to effectively work together to enjoy the great outdoors.

**Program Overview:** This program is designed and intended for children ages 9 to 11 years and in grades 4-6. Each camp day, we will meet and greet at the clubhouse. This time is important to ensure that everyone is feeling well and are prepared for the day. This time also allows us to accommodate late arrivals of campers and check in with families as needed. We start each day with a hands-on activity or learning wilderness skills. Then in the middle of the day, campers and staff will have snacks and socialize. The last part of the day involves hiking, observing, and creating journal entries. To close each day, we will hike to the river and conduct observations and swim.

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**Monday: Biodiversity**

- **Camper drop off, Camp enrollment documents signed**
- Campers meet and greet
- Create nature based nicknames
- Scavenger hunt
- Receive nature journals and personalize them.
- Compare biodiversity in different settings
- Soil Stories
- River trail hike and swimming

**Tuesday: Watershed/Introduction to Nature Journaling**

- Learn to identify local species using field guides
- Create watershed model to observe the path of water in the water cycle
- Introduction to Nature Journaling Methods
- Visit river to observe watershed
- River play

**Wednesday: Knots and Trees**

- Learn about the importance of cordage
- Simple binding knots
- Make a simple bracelet
- Utilize field guides to identify trees
- “My secret plant” Nature Journal challenge
- River hike and play

**Thursday: Birds and Wilderness Navigation**

- Learn the basics of the compass and how to use it to navigate in the wilderness
- Play navigation game
- Use field guide to identify local birds
- Nature Journaling (Birds)
- River hike and play

**Friday: Wildflowers, Pollinators and Basic WFA**

- Practice with field guides to identify wildflowers
- Observe pollinators in action
- Learn about basic health concerns in wilderness settings, approach to treatments, cooperation and community building skills.
- Learn about being a responsible explorer
- River hike and play

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**Snacks:** This year, we have decided that we will provide snacks for our campers, but we will not be doing our communal meals. We faced several challenges related to fire risks and resource management last year. In the outlook for this year, we find it is best to provide snacks of fresh produce, crackers, cheese, etc. Families are welcome to send their campers with lunch items and additional snacks. Families who are able are also encouraged to donate healthy snack items.

**What Campers Need:** This program is designed to immerse youth into the natural world. We do not need lots of gear or supplies to enjoy nature. However, I would like to share a few things that all campers need with them each day. First and foremost, campers need comfortable closed toed shoes for hiking with clean socks each day. An extra pair of socks is recommended. A pair of sandals or water shoes are highly encouraged for our river explorations and play. Each camper should bring a small backpack. The backpack should contain a refillable water bottle, an extra pair of socks, change of clothes if needed, a towel and swimsuit for the river. Our daily high temperatures are expected to be in the 90's. Water, sunscreen, and light comfortable clothing is important for the comfort of campers.

**In Case of Emergency:** In these times we always like to be prepared. Should there be an emergency, like a local fire, we will do our best to reach you. But if you are looking for your child and the center is closed, or you cannot reach us, we have a standing plan to meet behind Coffee Heaven near the Chevron Station in Cave Junction for child pick up.

**Final Thoughts, Reminders, and Contacts:** I am grateful and excited to be offering this program this year. I would remind families to ensure that your registration and tuition fees are paid to Rusk Ranch Nature Center as soon as possible. This ensures your spot in the program. Also, if you are able, please consider making a small donation toward the scholarship fund to assist other campers to attend the program. If you would like to donate healthy snack items, reusable water bottles, or any other supplies that would benefit our program, please reach out. We would be grateful. Finally, please feel free to reach out to me at any time with questions or concerns. As always, stay safe and enjoy the summer.

**Important Contacts:**

**Chad Free** Nature Explorers Lead Instructor (971) 208-3054  
**Patty Downing** Board President (541) 596-2543