



National Fire Plan

Refuge Summer Program Fires Up Local Students

A fire science course this summer was offered to high school students in Alaska's Tok area through Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge's Environmental Education program. Students learned about fire effects and behavior, fire suppression techniques, protecting dwellings from wildfire, and using fire as a management tool. The refuge offers the course every other year in partnership with Alaska Gateway School District's Correspondence program. Students earn up to one science credit for completing the class.

Mary Timm, the refuge's environmental education specialist, merged a variety of material for the course, including information on the Service's role in fire management in Alaska, the entire teacher's information manual that is produced by the Service, Introduction to Fire Behavior S-190, the Emergency Fire Fighters Handbook, numerous fire texts, and Florida State University's "Burning Issues" interactive CD and workbook. The written material was combined with guest speakers, videos, fieldwork and two multiple-day field trips to give students an informative and exciting learning experience.

As part of the course, refuge and state forestry employees presented FireWise programs to teach students and their families about wildfire prevention. The class, as a group, evaluated the wildfire risk of several homes on the Tetlin refuge and then challenged the students to rate their own homes. Many students were surprised at their fire risk and expressed eagerness to share what they learned with their parents.

Students were required to complete a final project, including an imaginary resume for a Hot Shot crew boss, a book report on "Fire on the Mountain," and creative fire cartooning.

Teachers learn to incorporate various fire curricula into their classrooms through workshops and in-services. Formal documents such as FireWise, Role of Fire in Alaska and FireWorks were the main curricula studied. Evening workshops for property owners stress what they can do to make their homes more "defensible" and provide an opportunity for locals to sign up for home assessments through the state forestry.

The refuge also organized a local carnival for families and tourists that focused on fire management and prevention themes. Cooperators in the event include the Bureau of Land Management, the state forestry office in Tok, the local Lions Club and the Alaska Public Lands Information Center in Tok.



High school students float to a former wildfire area in Alaska's Tok area to learn about fire ecology as part of a 2004 summer class offered through Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge's Environmental Education program. (USFWS)
