

NRCS Plant Materials Center Hosts “Marsh Madness Day”

by Reina O’Beck, PAS Outreach Team

Over 30 students from Van Buren Elementary School in Stockton visited the NRCS Plant Materials Center (PMC) for “Marsh Madness Day,” an event sponsored by the California Waterfowl Association (CWA).

On a brisk December day, students, with the help of CWA volunteers, participated in a variety of activities aimed at improving their wetlands and waterfowl knowledge. Curriculum included a walking safari, a native species planting, a history lesson on the San Joaquin River, waterfowl and game food sampling, and a mock wetlands restoration project.



A proud student holds up her native species planting.

The walking safari gave students a chance to watch and identify the different bird species and record their findings. During the planting exercise, students planted their own native plant to take to their home or school. NRCS donated about 40 plants to the students for this exercise. **Susie Douglas**, San Joaquin Program Coordinator, Center for Land-Based Learning, gave a brief history on the San Joaquin River and the wildlife and Native Americans that occupied it long ago. Even lunchtime offered students the opportunity to try samples of sautéed duck, venison and wild boar—some of the animals they learned about throughout the day. The event concluded with “Marsh Makers,” an activity that allowed students to play the role of various interest groups such as biologists, ranchers, farmers, anglers and birdwatchers that are normally involved in wetland restoration projects. Students worked together and learned that cooperation among interest groups can be frustrating, but also very rewarding in obtaining the necessary resources needed

to take care of our environment.

“I liked the native planting the best. I never really gardened before and now I can say that I have,” said student Aaliyah Hernandez about her favorite activity.

Kerry Lewis-Padilla, CWA Education Coordinator, enjoys bringing the classroom to the outdoors and believes the benefits extend into the future.

“The children are more likely to remember what they have seen and learned about on a field trip such as this one. It connects them with nature and the environment in such a way that they end up taking a personal investment in protecting our wetlands and waterfowl,” said Padilla.



Students assemble a “working wetland” in their roles as farmers, biologists, ranchers, anglers and birdwatchers.

The PMC was chosen as the site for “Marsh Madness Day” because of the habitat it provided for the walking safari, the native species available for plantings, and the incorporation of wildlife-friendly practices into farming.

For more information on Marsh Madness Day, please contact Kerry Lewis-Padilla at kerry_lewis@calwaterfowl.org.



Dave Dyer, PMC Manager/ Agronomist, provides an introduction about the PMC to the school children.



A sampling of duck was offered to students to taste some of the wildlife that is hunted on or near wetlands.