

Live the Miracles of Nature, 2007
Medicine Bow –Routt National Forests
and
Thunder Basin National Grassland

“Live the Miracles of Nature” is an educational program designed to provide youth the opportunity to experience nature in a quiet setting, where the emphasis is on learning, strengthening self-esteem, and fostering a sense of overall well-being. The program entails a series of field trips in remote/wilderness locations and is offered to youth between 10 and 15 years old and enrolled in Community Social Service Programs.



During the summer of 2007, five separate field trips were hosted by the Medicine Bow – Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland with approximately 10 students on each trip. Group hikes **do not** follow established trails, so students are first instructed on how to use supplied compasses, maps, and air photos, and how to understand/interpret local topography to arrive at their final destination. Participants are broken into separate small groups of two or three students with one adult leader. Adult leaders are Forest Service employees skilled at outdoor navigation and showing a special interest and ability in working with youth. The small groups navigate slowly through remote areas and stop frequently to identify plants, listen for various song birds, look for signs of wildlife, explore, and discover whatever unique

experiences the wilderness might hold for them. Students keep journals, take photos, ask questions, and collect small items. Safety and survival lessons are weaved in throughout the program instruction.

At mid-day, each small group convenes at a designated meeting location for lunch to form a larger discussion group. During this interaction, students and leaders sit in a large circle facing each other. Emphasis during this exercise is sharing aloud, and one at a time, any insight or special experiences that occurred. Often, part of the miracle of “Miracles of Nature” happens in this very moment, as participants discover that they also had many of the same unique experiences as their peers. A greater sense of belonging to the group develops, which fosters compassion and respect for each other as well as our public lands. It also allows youth the opportunity to learn from their peers and practice a form of public speaking among a friendly audience.



The field trip is completed in the afternoon when the group successfully navigates back to the starting point where transportation awaits. Behaviors on the ride home are noticeably different with kids excitedly comparing adventures of the day, laughing, or often taking a moment to catch a quick nap.

The primary elements of the program that differ from other school related outdoor education is that these programs are offered to at-risk youth who normally do not have opportunities to travel to the National Forest. The program is conducted by professional outdoorsmen (USFS personnel) in remote areas of public lands, and have a low student to teacher ratio (one adult instructor to three students/youth). These features of the “**Live the Miracles of Nature**” program provide hands-on experiences and an optimal environment for learning and exercise, which in turn may have lasting impacts on the participants’ self-esteem, respect for land ethics, and physical well being.

Partners in 2007 included the Psychology Clinic of Laramie, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Albany County Department of Family Services, the Colorado/Wyoming Southeast Chapter of the Society of American Foresters, and the Bureau of Land Management.