



Grand Teton National Park Fire Management: *Field Observation Studies*



Two groups of Jackson Elementary School second graders used the Blacktail Fire burn area as a location to conduct field observations last month, practicing their skills in prediction, comparing and contrasting, and critical thinking.

The Blacktail Fire began in Grand Teton National Park on August 10th when an active thunderstorm moved through the area. With sagebrush and grass as the primary fuel types, the fast-moving fire burned 2,650 acres before being contained three days later. As an introduction to their lesson, the second graders viewed photos taken during the event and learned the chronology and details of the fire. The students noted the affected vegetation and blackened soil where the fire had passed through. Following the slide presentation, the students wrote predictions in their field journals, anticipating what they would see in the same area two months after the fire.



*I think I will see a lot of ashes.
Maybe I will see a helicopter.
I think I will see ground that is black but not very black.
I will smell the burning.
I might see black ground and sticks and tracks from the fire trucks.
I will see a lot of birds and bugs and burned grass.
I think I will see black grow.*

The following day, the students boarded a bus and headed north to the Blacktail Butte area. They walked through an area adjacent to the Blacktail Fire to note the thickness and height of the sagebrush and envision what the area may have looked like before the fire. From there, they hiked onto a bench and into the burn area, using their observation skills to note what changes had occurred from the scenes they had viewed the previous day. The students also role-played how various mammals, reptiles, and birds may have left the area during the fire and subsequently returned to take advantage of the fresh new growth and nutrients. Once back in the classroom, the students discussed their observations and again wrote in their journals.

*I saw lupine. I climbed a big hill. I saw green too.
I heard the wind. Dust devils were chasing us.
I might have seen an antelope, but it was far away and
I'm not sure. Are they mostly brown?
I saw one of the holes that sink where a stump was.
I was surprised to find bones, but they were there before the fire.
It looked pretty good.*



"It was really fun," said one young budding naturalist before she departed for the day. "Maybe I'll grow up to be a scientist sometime."