

Plumas Unified School District: “Plumas to the Pacific” Watershed Education

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Sixth graders attending Plumas Unified School District recently completed the Feather River Watercourse, a literal and figurative watershed year that takes an in-depth look at the place we call home and what it is connected to through the medium of water.

The watershed year is divided into two parts, the front yard and the backyard. Students begin the school year with a residential out-door education camp, followed by monthly field trips that initiate the study of their “big backyard.” From the high peaks and ridges to the river bottoms, students got up close and personal with their studies to learn more than just temperature and turbidity. Finally, after eight months of local outings, including a river rafting trip, students completed their backyard studies and were able to turn their attention to their front yard and the question, “Where does the river go when it leaves us and what happens to it?”

Although most students could tell you that the Feather River flows to the ocean, not one student actually knew it from direct experience. As explorers and scientists it would be necessary to follow the river every step of the way to be sure about where it goes, what it does, and what is done to it. Over a period of a month, students took four- or five-day trips to learn the costs and benefits of the seven primary ways that the Feather River is used.

From morning until late afternoon each day, students explored the changing Feather River, even as it lost its name to the Sacramento.

Stops, activities and areas of emphasis along the way included:

- Rich Bar
- Pacific Gas & Electric’s Stairway of Power
- California State Water Project facilities at Lake Oroville Dam
- Feather River Fish Hatchery
- Thermalito Bays
- Skinner Fish Facility
- Banks Pumping Plant
- The California Aqueduct
- Grey Lodge Wildlife area
- Confluence of the Feather and Sacramento River at Verona
- Port of Sacramento, Sacramento Deep Water Ship Canal
- Valley farms and orchards
- The islands of the Sacramento River Delta
- Brannan Island
- San Francisco Bay Estuary via Amtrak and the Oakland Alameda Ferry
- Aquarium of the Bay
- USS Pampanito
- Walk across the Golden Gate Bridge
- The Bay Model
- Gaslight Charters sailing in the estuary
- Muir Woods and Tide Pooling at Duxbury Reef

At every point there were over 200 stories to tell, one for every student who participated in this program. And one day, before you know it, those students who completed the Feather River Watercourse, will be fellow voting citizens who see their world and their place in it just a little more clearly than the rest of us.