Salmon Watch: Bringing Your Classroom and Scientific Research Together Outdoors

For teachers looking to have a connection between their lessons on ecosystems, salmon, and the real world: look no further. Salmon Watch, a program provided through the non-profit organization World Salmon Council, gets students actively engaged in the world of salmon. The stations provided give ample experience time for all students with scientific equipment and experts in the field, from dam operators to previous teachers. Founded in 2002, the World Salmon Council’s mission statement is “to provide experiential education and encounters with Pacific wild salmon to connect students and adults with nature and empower community engagement” (World Salmon Council, 2013).

The program which Salmon Watch provides includes a variety of perks for the teacher, making this a program which your principal will want you to participate in as much as you will. The field trip itself costs $40. No more than 40 participants are allowed per field trip. Salmon Watch is also able to provide reimbursement funds for a substitute teacher to cover your classes and a bus for students attending the fieldtrip. There is a maximum reimbursement amount of $400 per field trip, enough to cover most of the cost of a single field trip. And if this isn’t enough to convince you the program is worth while, keep reading.

Teachers are expected to cover some form of ecosystems or interrelatedness between species regardless of what year students are in school. The program offered by Salmon Watch helps keep students engaged in topics related to their studies in class, allowing many difficult
concepts to become more attainable. Before coming on the field trip, each teacher is required to teach some of the Salmon Watch curriculum into their science curriculum in school.

During the field trip, students will have direct access to many qualified individuals who will teach them at four different stations. In the salmon biology station, students gain the opportunity to see a salmon carcass and learn about the anatomy and physiology of salmon which allows them to complete their journeys from spawning grounds to the ocean and back to spawn themselves. In the macroinvertebrate sampling and identification station, students learn about the smaller organisms who also inhabit the water at the spawning sites for salmon. Depending on the types and quantity of macroinvertebrates, students will be able to tell what quality the water is in and if this is a healthy site for salmon to spawn at.

For the final two sections of the stations, there are more connections beyond just biology and the life sciences. In the water quality monitoring station, various types of equipment will be used to test the water and determine its health and benefits or drawbacks for the salmon living there. This station has the most to do with water chemistry, showing students how changing the waters the salmon live in can cause them harm. Finally, the riparian zone studies the variety of geologic features which have helped create a hospitable environment for the salmon and how the salmon themselves are able to provide benefits to the plant species around them. The riparian zone station really allows students to show how connected chemistry, wildlife biology, botany and finally geology can be when studying just one small component.

If you are a teacher looking for a way to increase your students’ knowledge about a subject, then having them gain hands on experience through a great field trip is a good idea. As a previous outdoor education instructor who taught students about a variety of topics including geology, wildlife biology, botany and basic astronomy, I can attest to the fact that students learn
a great deal through hands on experiences, and this learning tends to stick with the students longer. For more information on the Salmon Watch program, or to contact someone regarding a trip for your class, you can visit this website: https://worldsalmoncouncil.org, or contact World Salmon Council. They have plenty of salmon related resources also available for you and your students which you can incorporate into your lesson plans both before and after your next field trip.